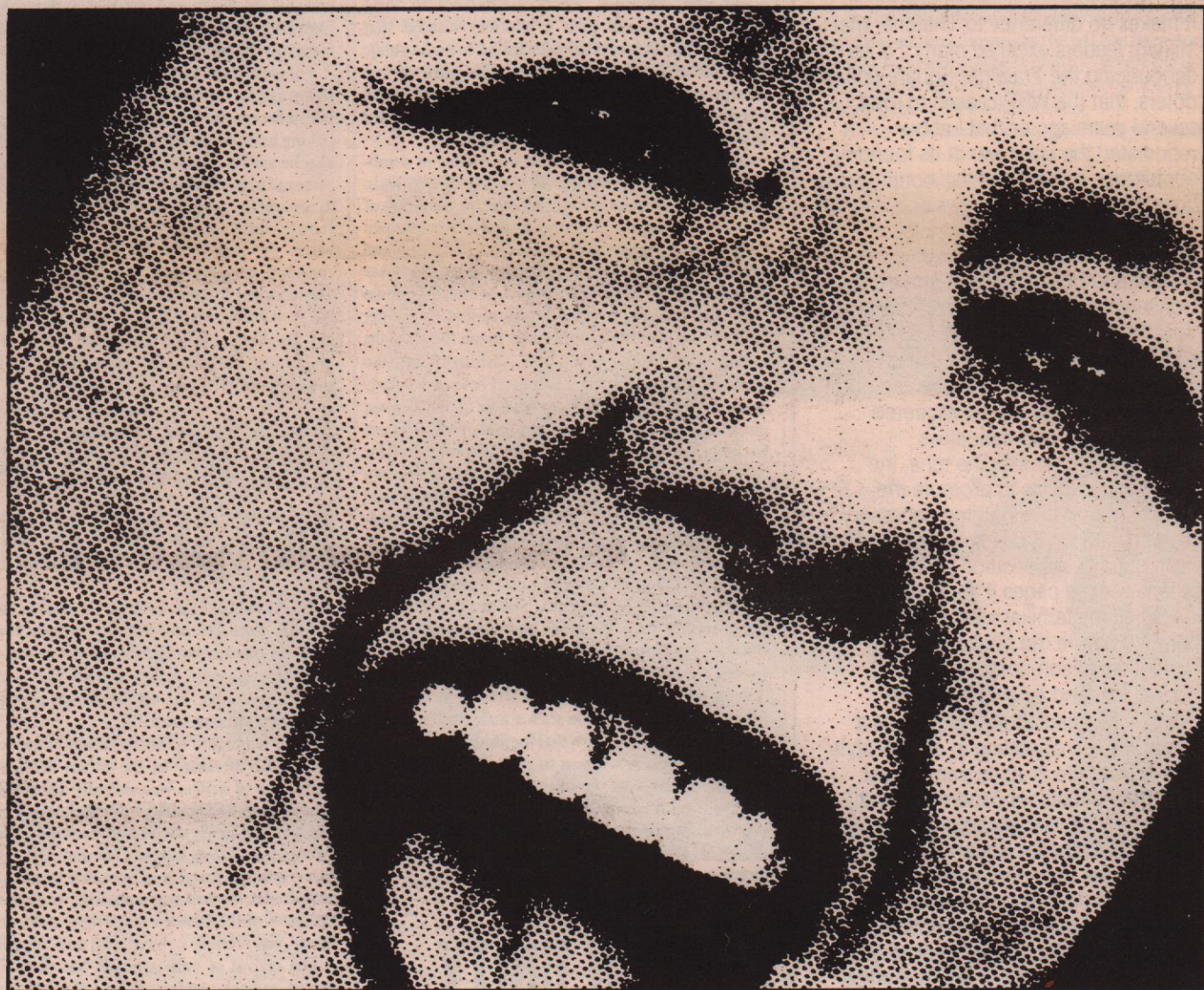


the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 18 May 1990 • No 16 • 40p

CORNERED THATCHER SHOWS HER TEETH

TORIES TURN VIOIOUS



Despite its reprieve in the local elections the Thatcher government is still in deep trouble. Inflation is heading into double figures, high interest rates are punishing homeowners and major firms like British Telecom are making thousands redundant. Every week brings new scandals like the Iraqi gun affair or the Rover/British Aerospace deal. Divisions rend the party. Michael Heseltine is still openly challenging the Tory leadership, while in Scotland squabbling between top Tory officials Malcolm Rifkind and Michael Forsyth erupted at last week's Scottish party conference.

The instinctive Thatcher response to all these problems is to go on the attack. The prime minister's speech to the party faithful in Scotland last Saturday (continued on page 2)

**WHY THE LEFT CLINGS
TO KINNOCK**
Page 3



**THE TRIVIALISATION
OF POLITICS**
Pages 4 and 5

**EUROPE-WHY THE FASCISTS
ARE ON THE MARCH**
Page 6

TORIES TURN VICIOUS

(continued from page 1)

identified some key targets for the Tories' pre-election offensive. She denounced the Labour Party as 'the party of high taxation, inflation and state planning'. In her defence of the poll tax she singled out Labour councils for their 'socialist profligacy'. In a remarkable rhetorical flourish at a later speech in Aberdeen, Thatcher brought together the demons threatening British civilisation and emphasised their common socialist identity:

'The names of those organisations on the left—Militant, the Workers Revolutionary Party, just the name of Labour itself—proclaim their commitment to the class war.'

It makes no difference to Thatcher that Militant leaders excelled many Tories in denouncing the Trafalgar Square poll tax rioters, that the WRP ceased to exist several years ago or that Labour repudiated the class war at its founding conference in 1900 and has continued to do so at every opportunity since. Any invention is justified in the cause of stirring up a climate of prejudice that can unite the forces of reaction around the Conservative Party. 'State planning', 'socialism', 'class war'—these are the buzzwords that stimulate a sense of patriotic conservative outrage and give common cause to the beleaguered middle classes and their allies.

While Thatcher sets the tone, the tabloid press helps to promote the climate of fear and loathing necessary to maintain the unity of the right and to keep potential opposition on the defensive (see pages 4 and 5). In recent weeks all the familiar villains have been paraded before the public—football hooligans, prison rioters, IRA 'terrorists'—and a new composite villain—the child abuser, posing as a social worker, operating in an IRA-style cell—has made its appearance. Last weekend the tabloid papers devoted pages to magnified photographs of individual Trafalgar Square poll tax rioters in the hope that public-spirited readers would telephone information in through specially provided hotlines. One alleged rioter has already been charged with 'attempted murder' and hundreds more are being processed through the courts; intensive press coverage is leading to more police raids, house searches and intimidation of anti-poll tax campaigners.

The propaganda of prejudice creates the perfect climate for renewed state repression. For the Revolutionary Communist Party repudiating the law and order hysteria of the establishment, and rejecting the spurious agenda of political debate dictated by the Tories and their friends in the media, is as important as resisting the direct consequences of the state clampdown. As British capitalism continues to decay and the conflicts in the ruling class intensify we can expect the long run-up to the next election to be both dirty and bloody.

Editorial

THE JOYS OF CAPITALISM?

AFTER DECADES of Stalinist stagnation and tyranny it is not surprising that the peoples of Eastern Europe have embraced Western capitalism in the hope that it would provide a positive alternative. Yet even within months of the collapse of the old system it is already becoming apparent that capitalism cannot satisfy popular aspirations in Eastern Europe.

A special European Commission report published this week—*Economic Transformation in Hungary and Poland*—enthusiastically welcomes measures introduced in Budapest and Warsaw to open up their economies to capitalist development. Yet the report emphasises that the inevitable consequences over the next few years are economic decline ('negative growth') and rapidly rising unemployment. The EC experts note that in Poland, where drastic market reforms have been introduced by the Solidarity government, there has been a very sharp drop in living standards. Launching the report, European commissioner for economic affairs Henning Christopherson observed that 'in 10 years' time these countries might be in a position to consider applying to join the EC.

Meanwhile in Czechoslovakia, where unemployment is predicted to rise to more than a million (out of a workforce of 7.5m), racism—another feature of capitalist civilisation—has reached a new level of intensity. In the northern provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, attacks on Vietnamese immigrants and Gypsies have become commonplace. At least one person has been killed and hundreds injured in racially motivated assaults by gangs of young people variously labelled punks and skinheads. Police indifference to these attacks has become such a national scandal that president Vaclav Havel has been forced to make public criticisms of the interior minister. The spirit of free enterprise has unleashed a wave of murder, rape and burglary that has shaken the regime—and has even led to attacks on Western tourists in Prague.

In Romania, this week's first experience in democracy has more in common with US-rigged elections in Latin American banana republics than the traditions of Western European parliamentarianism. Romanian voters face an unenviable choice. On the one hand stands the National Salvation Front, the caretaker regime installed after the removal of the Ceausescu clan. The Front is largely led and staffed by former Stalinist bureaucrats. On the other hand, there are the major opposition parties, the National Christian Peasants Party and the Liberals. These are largely artificial creations, based on the residue of pre-Stalinist groupings, led by opportunists and bolstered by Western backing. While the National Salvation Front stands for Stalinist continuity, the opposition stands for Western reaction in its crudest form. Whatever the immediate outcome of the elections, the instability and backwardness of Romanian society, and Western interference in deciding its fate, are certain to continue.

As history appears to be going into reverse in Eastern Europe it is worth recalling that Stalinism only became established in these countries because it appeared to offer a way forward after their generally negative experience of capitalist development. In the early decades of this century capitalism brought impoverishment and barbarism on such a scale that Stalinism appeared progressive. Now that the illusion of Stalinism has been exposed, a return to capitalism appears the only alternative. But recent events in Eastern Europe confirm that it cannot be long before the peoples of these countries come to recognise that the struggle for prosperity and freedom will have to move in a different direction.

GERMAN UNITY

THE CONTINUING rows over the process of German reunification in the current two (West and East Germany) plus four (USA, Soviet Union, France and Britain) talks show that the reconstruction of the framework of alliances established after the Second World War is not going to be as straightforward as many observers first thought. As the Soviet Union becomes more and more unstable, Western pressures to accelerate the fusion of the two Germanies within the Nato alliance risk unleashing dangerous tensions both East and West.

The Soviet Union is in a tight corner. President Gorbachev was publicly embarrassed by demonstrators at Moscow's May Day parade. The incident revealed the internal dangers that result from the increased toleration of political protest by a regime whose economic policies have proved disastrous. As Estonia and Latvia move inexorably along the path taken by Lithuania, Moscow is forced into desperate diplomatic activity as well as discreet economic and military threats to contain the threat of Baltic nationalism to the integrity of the Soviet Union. Troop withdrawals from Eastern Europe are already creating

concern within the Soviet military establishment, not to mention unemployment and homelessness for demobilised soldiers. The prospect of the rapid incorporation of East Germany into Nato—and the fear that some of the more bullish advocates of a greater Germany will relish the early deployment of Western troops right up to the Polish border—raise real fears for the military security of the Soviet state itself.

Soviet insecurity explains the initiative from foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze to separate the discussion of the internal aspects of German unification from its external and military aspects. Moscow favours the emergence of a 'five power' Europe including a reunited Germany, non-aligned and nuclear-free, together with the four Second World War victors. The Soviet leaders recognise that in practice there is little they can do to prevent the realignment of a united Germany with the Nato powers. Their objective is to use the negotiations to enhance Moscow's status and to delay as long as possible the advance of Western forces towards its increasingly insecure borders.

Shevardnadze's initiative has received a sympathetic response from at least some in the West—notably from West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and his coalition partner Count Otto von Lamsdorff. They are concerned that forcing the pace of unification might further destabilise the Gorbachev leadership in the Soviet Union. They are also sensitive to the reservations of West German popular opinion about the likely cost of unification—reservations that were forcefully expressed in last weekend's *Länd* elections in which the ruling coalition lost its majority in the key Lower Saxony region.

However West German chancellor Helmut Kohl, with strong backing from US president George Bush, has taken an aggressive stand against Soviet attempts to slow down the unity process. Last week he repudiated Shevardnadze's two-tier approach, insisting that a reunited Germany could not be neutral but must be in Nato. Statements from Washington explicitly denounced a Soviet plot to create a neutral Germany and emasculate Nato and warned sympathisers with Shevardnadze in Bonn against any delay in a united Germany taking its full place in the Western Alliance.

For now Kohl and Bush have united in raising the stakes against Gorbachev. But the question that emerges is how far can they push the regime in Moscow without risking its disintegration? In an election year Kohl may also be asking whether the West German electorate is prepared to pay the price for his superpower diplomacy. 'If we lose in Lower Saxony we will lose in December' were the fateful words of a leading Christian Democrat before the polls closed on Friday. As the wrangles continue at talks over the nuclear weapons and conventional forces, as well as on the wider political issues, it is important to note that nothing substantial has yet been resolved about the terms of German unification. The triumphal celebrations of the breaching of the Berlin Wall may yet end in tears.

THE REVIVAL OF ANTI-SEMITISM

ANTI-SEMITISM is back on the political agenda in Europe. Until recently hostility against Jews was a relatively marginal prejudice in most European countries. But, together with a general rise in racism in Europe (see page 6), anti-Semitism appears set to return as a virulent force.

From Leningrad to north London attacks on Jews are on the increase. In the Soviet Union a recent conference of writers was violently disrupted by anti-Semitic thugs and hostility towards Jews is a prominent theme among newly established reactionary movements throughout Eastern Europe. The desecration of Jewish graveyards in a number of French towns last week has provoked a wave of angry protests. In East Germany the grave of the socialist playwright and poet Bertold Brecht was recently covered with anti-Semitic graffiti.

The revival of anti-Semitism has provoked widespread radical condemnations of right-wing racist organisations such as Pamyat in the Soviet Union, the Front National in France and the Republican Party in Germany. But anti-Semitism cannot be reduced to the activities of a few fringe fanatics. It has deep roots in the structure of Western capitalist society and an influence in Eastern Europe that has been strengthened rather than diminished by Stalinism.

A recent survey in France revealed that 24 per cent of respondents considered that there were too many Jews in the country. While the French establishment closed ranks to denounce last week's outrages, and there were large demonstrations in protest, much of French popular opinion remained unmoved; fascist organisations continued to sell their poisonous propaganda with impunity on the streets of Paris. Throughout Eastern Europe, an upsurge of anti-Semitism has followed the demise of the Stalinist regimes. Some 100 000 Soviet Jews are expected to leave for Israel this year.

The Revolutionary Communist Party unequivocally condemns the revival of anti-Semitism. The left should not hesitate to counter anti-Semitic prejudices and to defend Jews from physical attack. Anti-Semitism has long provided the establishment with a powerful

weapon for consolidating reaction and for dividing and weakening the working class. The history of the twentieth century provides a powerful warning of the dangers of neglecting the consequences of these prejudices.

In response to the current wave of attacks, many Jews have concluded that there is no place for them in Europe and that their only hope lies in emigrating to Israel. But this does not amount to a strategy for combating anti-Semitism. Indeed the re-emergence of anti-Semitism in Europe 40 years after the foundation of the state of Israel confirms that this is not a solution to the problem. There can be no escape from anti-Semitism for as long as capitalism exists. Recent events confirm the judgement of the great German Jew Karl Marx in 1843 that the emancipation of the Jews depends on the overthrow of the capitalist system.

FREEDOM NOT 'JUSTICE'

THE CASE of Winston Silcott, Engin Raghip and Mark Braithwaite is back in the news this week. The three were convicted in March 1987 of the murder of PC Blakelock who was killed during the Broadwater Farm riot in October 1985. All three were sentenced to life imprisonment.

The trial of the 'Tottenham Three' was one of a series of showtrials of young blacks in which the authorities took revenge for the hiding they received during the riot. Hundreds of black youth in and around Broadwater Farm were arrested in the months following the riot. Dozens were framed and sent down for long stretches.

Silcott was convicted on the strength of an alleged statement (which he never signed) in which he claimed that there *wasn't* any evidence to convict him: 'You ain't got enough evidence. Those kids won't give evidence in court. No one else will talk to you. You can't keep me away from them.' Raghip and Braithwaite were convicted on the strength of confessions made under duress in which they admitted to being in the area when Blakelock was killed; both denied murdering him. In the lynch-mob atmosphere generated in the wake of the riot this was sufficient to send them down for life.

Their case has returned to the public eye because a Scotland Yard disciplinary committee this week began an investigation into detective chief superintendent Melvin, the police officer who led the inquiry into the Blakelock killing. Scotland Yard was forced to conduct an investigation after it was revealed that Melvin had framed a 13-year old boy Jason Hill, another Broadwater Farm defendant. This week too the BBC documentary series *Inside Story* screened a programme on the Blakelock case which queried the convictions of the three.

The official investigation and the *Inside Story* documentary have given heart to the increasing numbers of campaigners who argue that Silcott, Raghip and Braithwaite suffered a gross miscarriage of justice and should be set free. As in the cases of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six, an increasing number of journalists, politicians and churchmen have joined the cause, arguing that it is outrageous that Silcott, Raghip and Braithwaite are locked up while the real killers are walking free.

In fact the Tottenham Three did not suffer a 'miscarriage' of justice. As far as the British judicial system is concerned all black people are guilty. The reason that Silcott was convicted despite the absence of a shred of evidence against him was that the only evidence the court required was that he was black and lived on Broadwater Farm.

The emphasis of liberal campaigners on appeals for 'justice' rather than fighting for black rights means ignoring the wider criminalisation of black people that is the central issue in the case of the Tottenham Three. Right-wing newspapers such as the *Sunday Times* and the *London Evening Standard* are already asking: if the three did not kill Blakelock, who did? They are turning the campaign to free the Tottenham Three into another witch-hunt against black people on the Farm. The focus on justice rather than black rights is leading to a new crackdown on the black community.

We demand the unconditional release of the Tottenham Three, not because there was a miscarriage of justice in this case, but because black people *never* receive justice from the British authorities. We give our unconditional support to all members of oppressed sections of society who fight back against police repression.

Publisher Revolutionary Communist Party, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX * c copyright
Printer Press Link International (UK) Ltd (TU).
Annual subscription rates (individuals) * Britain and Northern Ireland £26 * Europe and Irish Republic £34 * North Africa and Middle East (airmail) £34 * Americas, Asia, Central and Southern Africa (airmail) £37 * Australasia and Japan (airmail) £40 * Outside Europe—All destinations (surface mail) £44.
Circulation (071) 375 1485. Newsdesk (071) 375 1485.
Fax (071) 377 0346. Correspondence to The Editor, the next step, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX
ISSN 014 350 X 18 May 1990. Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office.

WRONG ON THE ELECTIONS...

I DISAGREED somewhat with the emphasis in the editorial 'The elections and the poll tax' (the next step, 11 May). It was argued that the electorate tended to blame the local council rather than the prime minister for a high poll tax and that in general people voted on narrow economic grounds on the tax.

In fact it would seem that there was a vote against the tax expressed as an anti-Tory vote. The point is that this was not strong enough to override the appeal of low-taxing Tory councils. As proof of this, it does not seem to be the case that people voted against high-taxing Labour councils. The boroughs cited in London (Ealing and Brent) would in fact seem to be the

Write to the next step
BM RCP,
London
WC1N 3XX,
or fax (071) 377 0346.

exception, due to factors other than the poll tax. In Scotland in particular there was not a vote against Labour as was claimed.

Labour's problems in Scotland are more to do with 'the limits of power'. As a party it dominates the field. Its vote of 46 per cent was 1.3 per cent down on 1986 admittedly, but the major feature of the elections was a swing from the Liberal Democrats to the Conservatives and the Scottish National Party. Yes,

the SNP ('no warrant sales') gained largely from the Democrats (Democrats down 6.5 per cent, SNP up 3.6 per cent, Tories up 2.5 per cent).

In the Labour-dominated urban areas of Strathclyde and Lothian, Labour in fact held its vote and gained seats. The SNP/Tories gained entirely from the Democrats. Some loss for Labour councils implementing the tax!
John Gibson
Glasgow

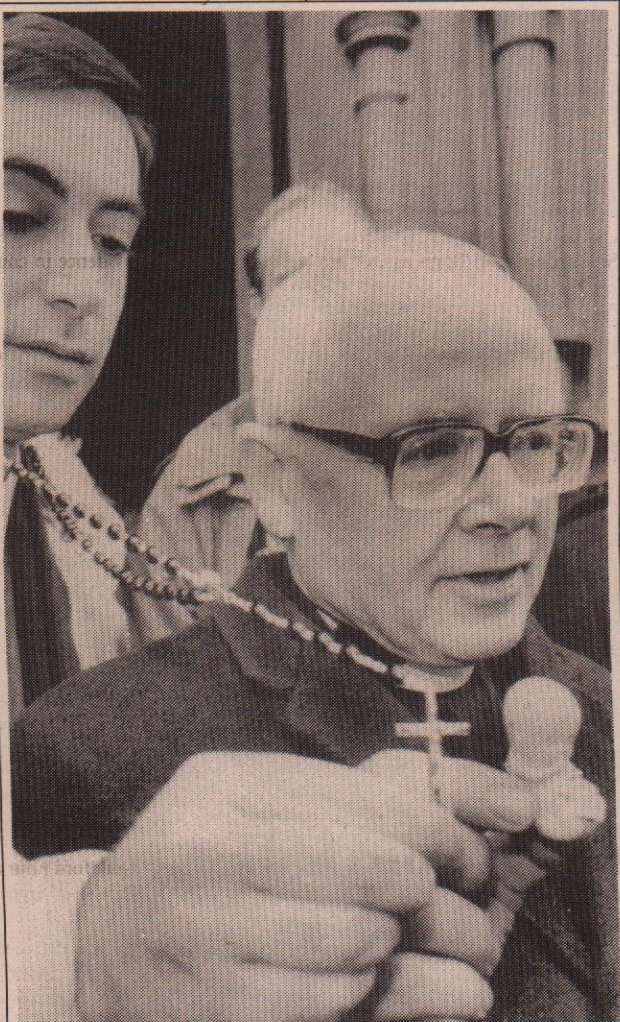
...AND THE EMBRYO BILL?

I DISAGREE with Sara Hardy's emphasis when, in assessing the recent changes in abortion legislation, she concludes that a status quo position has been achieved, with no negative practical consequences for women (the next step, 4 May). I actually see the changes as a defeat—certainly a setback—in the fight for abortion rights.

My mother and her friends—avid anti-abortionists—see the reduction in the time-limit to 24 weeks as a gain: 'We are chipping away.' The decision also confirms the prevailing prejudice (as stated in the 1967 legislation) that time-limits should be linked to fetal viability and makes it a matter of course that improvements in the care of premature babies will mean a reduction in time-limits.

Further, the decision cannot be taken out of the context of the Embryo Bill which, as the next step has consistently noted, gives legal protection to 15-day old embryos. More immediately, doctors and private agencies alike are conservative when viewing legal time-limits: the practical consequences of the change will undoubtedly be an even greater reluctance to perform abortions after 20 weeks for fear of overstepping the margin of error.

However the most important confusion surrounding the changes is the notion that the law has been liberalised—which Sara does not challenge, suggesting things are just



Have women been crucified by the anti-abortion lobby?

the same. She rightly identifies the medicalisation of the abortion issue and this is just the point. It is now legally codified that late abortions are acceptable for medical, not social, reasons. This may have been the practice before the changes—but now it is the law. This will lead to a guilty/innocent type distinction with regard to late abortions and strengthens the power of doctors over women. The reason so many people see the changes as being more liberal is precisely because

they have accepted the distinction between medical and social abortions (which I do not accept).

So let's be honest. Arguments have been lost, the 1967 legislation has been tightened up, practical access has been reduced with the time-limit and the BMA holds a tighter rein. The same as before? Status quo? No, a defeat. Let's say so.

Clare Foster
Women's officer
Polytechnic of North London
Students Union

SUPPORT FOCSA STRIKERS

WE ARE in the ninth week of our dispute with Focsa, the Spanish firm which took over street cleaning from Brighton council on 29 January. We came out on strike because Focsa refused to recognise our union GMBATU on 14 March. On 17 March Focsa sacked us.

Focsa told Brighton council they would abide by national terms and conditions before they were

given the contract. They haven't. Instead they have sacked 22 of us after a ballot of the workforce in which 86 per cent voted for union recognition.

Focsa have threatened the other workers who have not come out on strike with dismissal if they talk to us on the picket line. Before the strike, and since, Focsa has sacked workers for petty reasons. Three have been sacked this week.

We need your help to continue the dispute. You can help by sending a donation and/or message of support to: Focsa dispute, GMBATU, 23 Beaconsfield Road, Brighton (cheques payable to GMBATU). Or visit the picket line at Freshfield Place, Brighton between 6am and 1pm Monday to Friday.
Focsa strikers
Brighton

The left

LABOUR'S LITTLE HELPERS

UNDER NEIL'S THUMB

James Heartfield reviews the response of the left to the Labour Party revival

'We're on the road to victory', says Steve Nally of the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation. 'Barring complete disaster, the next government will be a Labour one', boasts *Militant*, counting itself among the 'millions of people' who are 'desperate to see a Labour government' (4 May).

Nobody is more excited about the prospect of Neil Kinnock entering Number 10 than is the radical left. 'A massive vote for Labour', claimed hard-left Birmingham council candidates John Wilton and Guy Daly before the local government election, 'will maintain the pressure on the Tory government built up by the anti-poll tax movement' (*Labour Briefing*, 25 April). The election results, however, dampened some of the left's optimism about a Labour victory. 'What went wrong in London?' asked *Socialist Worker*. Boasts about an impending Labour victory have turned into pleas not to 'let the Tories off the hook'.

It seems however far Neil Kinnock goes in ditching socialism, moving the Labour Party to the right and hounding radicals in the party, the left will continue to show slavish support for Labour. The left has become so much part of the Labour machine that it cannot imagine a life elsewhere.

To justify its continued support for Labour, the left has come up with some disingenuous explanations of Labour's latest revival.

According to the left, Labour's advance is in spite of Kinnock's changes, not because of them. Labour's

support for radical policies on South Africa, the poll tax and the National Health Service. Support for the left is 'larger, firmer and even growing faster than support for Labour' (25 April).

The left's arguments about Labour's revival are simply an exercise in self-delusion. Labour's success is based on the defeat, not the ascendancy, of the left. Kinnock has been so successful in transforming Labour into a pro-capitalist party that virtually for the first time in the party's history, its advance is *not* based on a leftward shift within the working class.

Kinnock has restored Labour Party fortunes by ditching left-wing policies, distancing himself from the unions, cutting the party's links with the working class and emasculating the left.

The local elections gave the clearest example of how the left has been marginalised. Not a single Labour manifesto contained a commitment to stop the poll tax. Rather than lead a campaign against the tax, Walworth Road disciplined local Labour parties such as Tower Hamlets, which dared to suggest that defaulters should not be prosecuted.

Far from expressing a leftward shift among the electorate, Labour's vote tended to confirm support for Kinnock's strategy. This was particularly evident in the so-called 'loony left' councils in London. In virtually all these boroughs the left has been purged and the right has won back control. Where the voters were unconvinced by the change, as in Ealing and Brent, Labour took a hammering.

However, where the party establishment has been



...but the left still hides behind Kinnock's banner

local election successes, and its lead in the opinion polls, is put down to the strength of the anti-poll tax campaign and to the depth of popular resistance to Tory policies.

Thus the Socialist Workers Party points to Labour Party successes in places like Lambeth as evidence that militancy wins votes:

'The Labour vote in Lambeth, south London, remained solid despite the council's reputation as the last bastion of the "loony left". The council has taken a more principled stand than any other over the poll tax and is seen as offering local workers a shield against the Tories.' (*Socialist Worker*, 12 May)

If only Kinnock had followed Lambeth's example, runs the argument, and been more active in organising resistance to the Tories, Labour would have done even better:

'The vote for Labour would have been far greater across the country if its candidates had led campaigns against the tax and promised they wouldn't prosecute non-payers.' (*Socialist Worker*, 12 May)

Some sections of the left have gone even further and claim that Labour's rise is the consequence of a new radicalisation within the working class. 'Socialists have a wider and more interested audience than for many years', claims *Labour Briefing*, perceiving a

successful in publicly humiliating the left, Labour won support. In Haringey the last of the hard-left councillors who ran the borough four years ago were deselected before the election, in favour of right wingers like 79-year old Vic Butler and George Meehan, whom the left ousted in 1985. As the *Tottenham and Wood Green Journal* put it, the elections showed that 'the days of wild rhetoric about defying Thatcher by "illegality" or spending into bankruptcy are over in Haringey' (10 May).

The left might have delusions in councils like Lambeth acting as a 'shield' but Labour councillors know better. 'The quantity of cuts in Lambeth was actually greater than in Haringey or Brent', admitted former Lambeth council leader Linda Bellos in an interview last year (*Living Marxism*, July 1989). She went on to argue that while 'we don't like the fact that we're being compelled to implement the poll tax', nevertheless the council had to be 'realistic'. The return of a Labour council in Lambeth is not the result of popular backing for a non-existent policy of defiance, but because there was no credible alternative.

The left's continued support for the Labour Party has got nothing to do with a leftward shift in the party or the electorate; it is simply the result of the left's incapacity, and its fear, of building a revolutionary alternative. Labour's transformation into an openly pro-capitalist organisation, and the left's continued attachment to it, clear the way to establish a new working class tradition in Britain.

MAD DOGS AND HOOLIGANS

Alan Harding investigates the nightmare world conjured up by Tory politicians and the tabloid press

It's a macabre world in the mean yellow pages of the nation's newspapers. The reader of the tabloid press finds himself thrust into a nightmare vision of mad cats and devil dogs, satanists and baby snatchers, hooligans and bogus social workers. It's a wonder that any reader of the *Sun* or the *Mirror* has the strength of mind to get out of bed in the morning and brave the outside world.

Two weeks ago scientists in Bristol discovered the first cat to have died from bovine spongiform encephalopathy or 'mad cow disease'. Ever since, the tabloids have been gripped by a particularly virulent form of the 'mad moggy' syndrome.

Mad cats are in fact only the latest of the marauding pets to harass our embattled reader. For months now rottweilers have snarled their way through acres of tabloid pages. But a beast even more fearful than the devil dog is about to be let loose in the gutter press. The mating of a male pit bull terrier with a female neapolitan mastiff ('the female mastiff has to be used or the puppies would be too big to be born') has produced the bandog. 'The bandog is the most frightening dog you can imagine', an RSPCA inspector told the *Independent*. 'We are living on borrowed time.' (11 May 1990)

But pets are the least of our worries. Human beings are even more likely to leap out of the gutter press and grab the reader by the tabloids. Last week we were introduced to the menacing world of (among others) baby snatchers, bogus social workers, child sex rings and satanists ('they're like IRA cells in their security').

Comic-strip

While the tabloid press pursues its own nightmare world, Tory politicians have been busy putting forward more traditional fears and prejudices. Two weeks ago we saw the return of the hooligan panic when the authorities orchestrated a national witch-hunt against Leeds United fans after a carefully prepared police riot in Bournemouth.

Last week Tory Party chairman Kenneth Baker picked up on another favourite establishment panic—single mothers. In a speech to a conference in London on the 'culture of crime' organised by the centre for policy studies and the Manhattan Institute, Baker blamed crime and unemployment in inner cities on single-parent families:

'Boys need a father as their main role model, to teach and guide them about

acceptable standards of behaviour, about the evils of bullying, about attitudes to the opposite sex.' (*Daily Telegraph*, 10 May 1990)

No doubt before long some enterprising sociologist will discover that single mothers breed Leeds United fans.

The list of panics and scares revealed by the press and politicians seems never-ending and increasingly more trivial and bizarre. The comic-strip picture of a nightmare world which we find in the pages of the tabloids and the imaginations of Tory ministers has little bearing on reality. Why, then, do the media and the establishment promote such a vision of society?

The promotion of panics and the trivialisation of the news has a number of benefits for the authorities. First, it diverts attention away from the real problems which we face. It helps transform social problems into individual ones. It enables the authorities to cohere a fragmented society rent by conflict around the prejudices and interests of the ruling class. It legitimises state interference in every area of our lives. And finally it allows the authorities to put their opponents on the defensive. Let us consider these in turn.

Trivia

The most immediate effect of the trivialisation of the news is to divert attention away from the real problems which we face. The more that mad cats and hooligans hog the headlines, the less column inches there will be for unemployment and inflation. Take the past fortnight, for example. The Tories suffered major losses in the local elections; inflation nearly reached double figures; more evidence of Tory cover-ups on the sale of the Rover group came to light; on the international stage Britain was elbowed out of second place in the International Monetary Fund pecking order by Japan; and there were new divisions within the Tory Party as Michael Heseltine continued his leadership challenge and Scottish secretary Malcolm Rifkind came under pressure to step down.

Yet the sheer weight of media trivia and moral panics—hooligans, mad cats, bogus social workers, single mothers—helped lessen the impact of one of the worst-ever periods for the Tories since they came to power in 1979. Indeed the 'battle of Bournemouth', in which the police were ready and prepared for the Leeds fans, looked suspiciously like a set-up, just three days after the local elections.

The second effect of media panics is to reinforce the preoccupation with the individual. One of the key features of the Thatcher years has been the atomisation of society. 'There is no such thing as society', the prime minister has claimed. 'There are individual men and women, and there are families.' (*Woman's Own*, 31 October 1987)

Over the past decade the Tories have constantly stressed the importance of the individual and of individual responsibility, and have ridiculed the notion of taking collective responsibility for our problems.

The government has waged an ideological battle against what it has called the 'dependency culture'—the supposed propensity of people to 'sponge' off the state as the easy solution to their problems. The Tory attack on single mothers, for example, has been justified on the grounds that they are a burden on society, and particularly that it is the responsibility of the father, not of the state, to provide maintenance.

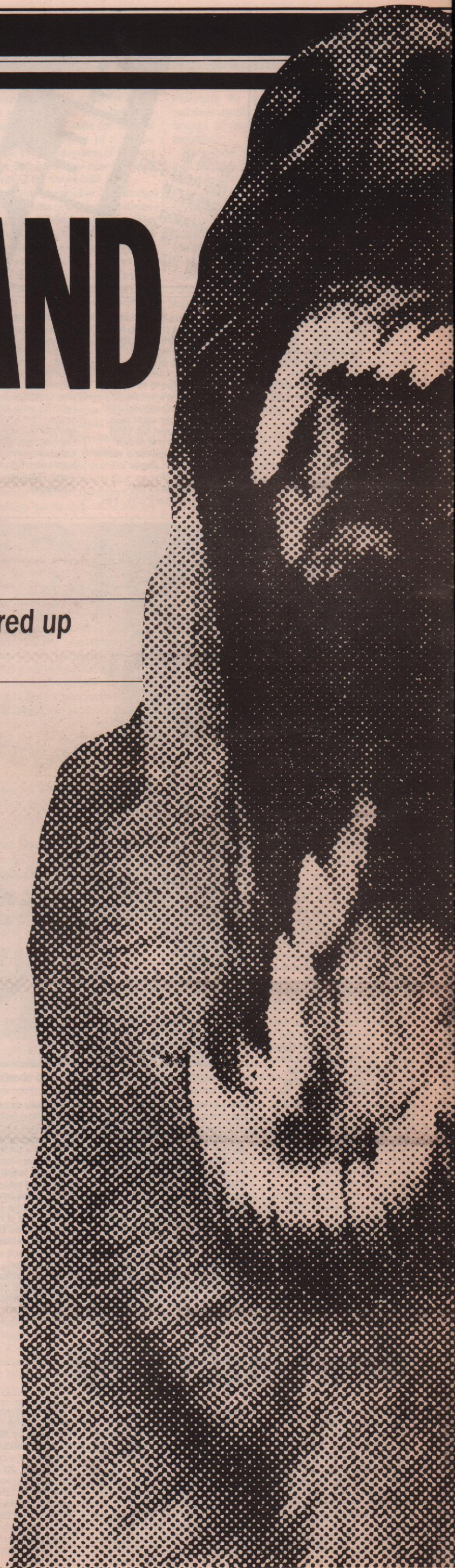
Atomised

Through its defeat of trade union militancy, the government has discredited in the eyes of most people the possibility of collective solutions to the problems we face. For the majority of people in Britain today, the idea of getting together with other people in a union or community organisation and fighting to resolve problems like low living standards or poor housing seems unrealistic. Instead individuals have been forced to sort things out for themselves and their families.

The Tories have also aggressively promoted the cult of the individual through their policies of privatisation, increased share and home ownership and by placing a stress on the family. The result has been a more fragmented and atomised society.

Panics are both a product of this atomisation and a means of reinforcing it. The more that people think and act only as isolated individuals the more they come to believe that problems exist at the level of the individual, not at the level of society. Isolated from the rest of society, people come to see themselves as being at the mercy of forces beyond their control.

In such a situation people become preoccupied with individual concerns and individual insecurities. Such insecurities provide the breeding ground for irrational fears about the mundane routine of everyday life, from dogs and cats to baby snatchers and social workers. Thus there has only ever been a single baby snatched from St Thomas' hospital in London. Yet





that has been enough to create widespread fears among mothers who give birth in the hospital that their baby too will be snatched. The decision by the hospital to spend £26 000 on a baby tagging and alarm system will simply confirm those fears.

The trivialisation of politics is the spontaneous product of a society which is frightened of enquiring too deeply into the real problems it faces and in which people have lost faith in collective change. Once such trivial concerns have acquired a public focus, the authorities will popularise and promote them. Such moral panics provide a means of reinforcing the atomisation of society and of winning acceptance for the establishment's own prejudices and interests.

Panics ensure that the problems that we face appear as external, natural problems to which there is no social solution; we can only deal with them by trying to survive as individuals. By transforming social problems into individual ones, the capitalist system is absolved of any blame for the problems of society. There can be no collective solutions to the problems of mad cats or social workers. The only answer is to change your brand of pet food and not to open your front door to strangers.

Scared

Panics not only reinforce the atomisation of society and promote the backward and irrational prejudices of the ruling class. They also pave the way for greater state interference and repression in our lives.

By making other individuals the source of our problems, panics legitimise the idea that the state must step in and limit others' freedom.

The authorities have used the hooligan panic over the past few years, for example, to criminalise football fans and win acceptance for a police crackdown. After the furore over the violence in Bournemouth over the bank holiday weekend, Dorset police chief Les Burns warned Leeds United fans that they 'should be scared' because they could expect 'a knock on the door'. Leeds Labour council has threatened to sack any employee who was involved in any incidents in Bournemouth.

Similarly, the Tories are using the moral panic about single mothers to increase their control over our lives. The government has insisted that the Inland Revenue must pass over to the department of social security information about the whereabouts of *fathers* who have defaulted on maintenance payments.

Even when the government has no intention of introducing more legislation, the public debate around a panic can reinforce the arguments for greater state interference. Take the issue of devil dogs. The government is unlikely to want to pass unenforceable laws on registration or breed banning; but by stirring up the debate the *right* of the government to interfere in such cases becomes more established. Indeed, by refusing to do anything about a panic, the authorities can ensure an even stronger public demand for legislation than had the government responded in the first place.

Weakness

Finally, panics are very useful for the Tories in putting their opponents on the defensive. Traditional panics, such as those over immigration and crime, have always forced the Labour Party to declare its support for a greater clampdown. Thus in the recent Hongkong debate the Labour Party tried to outflank the Tories from the right, calling for more restrictive legislation.

The Tories can use virtually any scare to create panic among its opponents. Thus when Kenneth Baker raised the issue of single mothers, even liberals like the *Guardian* columnist Melanie Phillips were forced to concede to his arguments. On the issue of football hooliganism, Labour MPs and councillors have argued for even stronger repressive measures than the Tories have applied. The government recognises that it only has to whip up popular prejudices to drive its opponents into a corner.

Panics allow the authorities to win widespread support for their rule by playing on popular fears and insecurities. They provide a means of weakening collective identity and reinforcing the

fragmentation of society; of promoting the interests and prejudices of the establishment; of legitimising greater state interference in our lives; and of putting opponents on the defensive.

Having said all this, however, it is important to recognise that panics are a product of the weakness of the establishment, not of its strength.

Panics become important when the traditional institutions through which the ruling class enforces its rule break down. The Tories' increasing loss of authority today mean that over the next period the government will need every diversion from computer hackers in Milton Keynes to soccer hooligans in Sardinia. Hence we can prepare ourselves for a long, hot, irritating summer of silly panics. But the very proliferation of scares reduces their impact and makes it harder for the Tories to use them in the old way.

Cheese

In the past media-fostered panics were restricted to the issues of race and law and order. Campaigns against 'illegal immigrants', 'black muggers', and 'Arab terrorists' used to be sufficient to establish a climate of fear and to justify more official repression.

Over the past five years the old-fashioned crime and race scares have been supplemented by a variety of moral panics focusing on the issues of sex and the family. Official campaigns around issues such as rape, pornography, child abuse and Aids show how the government has extended the scope of panics. Unlike earlier panics, which targeted easily identifiable groups in society, the moral panics around sex and the family affect everyone. Today crime and moral panics have been reinforced by scares on virtually every subject from cheese to cats. But the wider the scope of the scares, the less impact they have.

In the past the Tories could win support for such panics because they were founded on a rational concern, a legitimate fear or a popular prejudice. Thus while scares about 'black muggers' may have no basis in reality, nevertheless the insecurities of inner-city life ensured widespread resonance for such fears. The very irrationality of today's panics makes it less easy to win public acceptance. It is very difficult to create a national panic around the death of a single cat in Bristol.

Evil

At the same time the weakening of the authority of the establishment has itself lessened the impact of the scares. People are more willing to question the government and to challenge its ideas. The recent spate of police corruption cases has made the public more open to disbelieving the police. Cases such as the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six and the Broadwater Farm jailings, which hit the headlines again this week, have brought into question the nature of the British judicial system.

In such conditions, it is more difficult for the authorities to win widespread backing for panics, especially if they have little bearing on reality.

The proliferation of moral panics demonstrates a ruling class unsure of its authority over society. It also shows a society fearful of questioning or investigating itself. Instead of a critical examination of issues, superstition and irrationality become the preferred forms of intellectual discourse. A striking example of the irrationality of establishment thinking was the belief of the governor of Strangeways prison, Brendan O'Friel, that last month's riot was a 'manifestation of evil'.

It is important that we challenge the assumptions behind each panic and raise the real issues that concern us—such as unemployment, racism and women's oppression. We need to show that we do indeed live in a nightmare world, but a very different one from that found in the tabloids. It is a world in which the ruling class cannot provide even the most basic needs of most people, and one where poverty and conflict are the norm. We need to show that we live in a world in which our problems are rooted in social, not natural, causes. Most of all we need to show that it is only through collective action that we can break free from this world of exploitation and oppression and create a society of our own making.

THE RISE OF REACTION

RACISM MADE RESPECTABLE

Andy Clarkson and Stefanie Boston explain why the far right is gaining ground in Western Europe

Euroracism is rapidly becoming respectable. In March, after racist thugs had launched a series of vicious attacks on African immigrants in the city of Florence, the local authorities followed up by sending in 500 police to make a thorough job of 'bashing the blacks'. But Giorgio Morales, the socialist mayor of Florence, naturally has to be a very highly cultured man. He excused his actions on the grounds that the immigrants were 'incompatible with the artistic heritage of the city' (*Prospettiva Socialista*, 16 March). The government in Rome then stepped in. After a spate of similar racist assaults across the country in April, it ordered the armed forces to defend Italy's frontiers and coastlines from the hordes of foreigners supposedly waiting to flood in.

In France it has been a similar story. In the town of Roanne, near Lyons, a Moroccan-born student was mowed down by a car in March. The driver then returned and repeatedly rode back and forth across the body. According to witnesses, the driver had earlier shouted, 'How dare you stroke my dog, you dirty Arab!', when the youth had touched his pet. Within weeks Jacques Medecin, the conservative mayor of nearby Nice, had given Jean-Marie Le Pen's extreme right-wing Front National a major boost; he invited the Front to hold its congress in Nice and called on its councillors to join his administration.

Bankrupt centre

Questioned on his views on repatriation of foreigners, Medecin replied, 'Monsieur Le Pen put them to music with his exceptional talent'. When former conservative president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing called for a national referendum on immigration in April, Le Pen gleefully claimed, 'He has the same values [as us] and no doubt the same preoccupations'.

From Britain in the west to Italy in the east, the Western democracies of Europe are becoming engulfed in a racist tide.

Drowned immigrants are literally being swept in by the tide on Spanish coasts. The far right is making most progress in those countries where the mainstream parties of the left and right have lost direction and are losing their appeal for the propertied classes. The disintegration of post-war European society is breeding reaction once again. It is the political bankruptcy of the parties of the centre that is making racism respectable. They are now reduced to making one concession after another to satisfy their racist clientele. As the Paris correspondent of the *Times* recently put it, 'The question of racism appears to be one of the only subjects in France these days that can arouse real parliamentary and press interest' (4 May).

As for the European left, it is in an even more pathetic condition than are the centre parties. Even before the collapse of the Stalinist bloc it had all but accepted arguments for the superiority of the market economy. The events in Eastern Europe have served to deprive even the most hard-nosed Stalinist of faith in the possibility of a viable alternative to capitalism.

Consequently, while the left's national leaderships fret and worry at the rise of racism, their local lieutenants compete with the fascists for the racist vote. André Dechamps, the communist mayor of Clichy-sous-Bois, an industrial suburb east of Paris, has chosen to fend off the FN challenge by prohibiting anyone of North African origin from renting accommodation or owning shops in his town centre. In a council by-election this March, he told immigrants to stop harassing old women and 'pull their socks up'. Dechamps' actions have encouraged the racists; this week Clichy was the site for the latest in a spate of attacks on Jewish graves.

'Send them back'

It has long been a comfort to the left to imagine that the far right is some alien excrescence on the body politic. Indeed they have frequently accused the fascists of being unpatriotic. The reality is that the far right can only find support where the ground for its racist views has been laid long beforehand by the parties of the political mainstream.

Fascism is only a more extreme form of the patriotism enthusiastically championed by the moderates.

For years, all the moderate parties of the European centre and left have supported immigration controls, which target foreigners, not capitalism, as the chief threat to people's jobs and housing. Before the Florentine attack, the Italian parliament passed a law with Communist Party support fixing a ceiling on immigration depending 'on the needs of the national labour market' (*Financial Times*, 2 March). Last December, France's Socialist administration tightened restrictions on immigration after president François Mitterrand declared, 'We are not facing a human tide, but there are too many of them' (*Independent*, 11 December 1989).

The far right merely has to draw out the logic of this approach. 'There are too many of them' say the parties of the political mainstream. 'Send them back' ripostes the far right. The fascists have not been slow to point out the political opportunism behind the mainstream parties' desire to integrate the foreigners already living in Europe. The ruling Italian Christian Democrats were accused of 'wooing the immigrant

vote' after offering an amnesty for all immigrants who had registered with the authorities by the end of this April. In France, a desperate Mitterrand has called for guestworkers to be given the vote. As the parties of the establishment, either left or centre, fail to deliver the goods, the far right is now in a position to claim that they are failing because they are not consistently racist.

In Europe, racism has been placed on the political agenda by the parties of the political mainstream and the far right has been reaping the electoral benefits. In France the Front National already controls 30 town councils. After having lost the single seat it won in the 1988 general election, the FN won the seat of Dreux—the town where Le Pen first made an electoral breakthrough in the 1983 municipal elections—with 60 per cent of the vote following the 'Muslim scarves' affair last December. It just failed to win another parliamentary by-election in Marseilles by 48 per cent to 52 per cent. Opinion polls show that 12 per cent of French voters back all the FN's policies, but that figure rises to 75 per cent on the issue of immigration. Le Pen's objective is for the FN to be the biggest party on the French right within the next two years.

When the right-wing Lega Lombarda swept into second place in the northern Italian region of Lombardy in this month's local elections, every political commentator was startled. Centred on Milan, Lombardy is the wealthiest part of Italy and the Lega Lombarda won 20 per cent of the vote by directing racist attacks against southern Italians, whom it accuses of holding back Lombardy's advance, and against parasitic bureaucrats in Rome. The LL also calls for the expulsion of foreigners without jobs. The success of the League's attacks on the less prosperous parts of the country illustrates the fragility of the Italian state.

Counter-productive card

The reason for the success of the far right in France and Italy is the instability of the ordinary political institutions in those countries, rather than the strength of racism. It is their evident disintegration that has allowed racism to become respectable.

As the recent controversy over the Hongkong immigrants showed, Britain is not immune to racism.

Indeed, by any objective criterion, it is the most racist country in Western Europe. Yet the organised far right is electorally insignificant here. Norman Tebbit was even howled down by his own party for demanding tougher curbs on immigration. The marginalisation of the far right is the product of the stability of state institutions. Indeed, at the moment, openly playing the racist card could be counter-productive for the establishment, because it could well unleash considerable instability on to the British political stage.

British institutions are not as fragile as Continental ones, which were established only comparatively recently. No Continental political institution survived the Second World War intact and, unlike in Britain, opposition frequently tends to be interpreted as opposition to the state. In a situation where every other vehicle for retaining the support of the masses has become drab and uninspiring, racism is the chief channel the European establishment has left to fend off widening discontent.

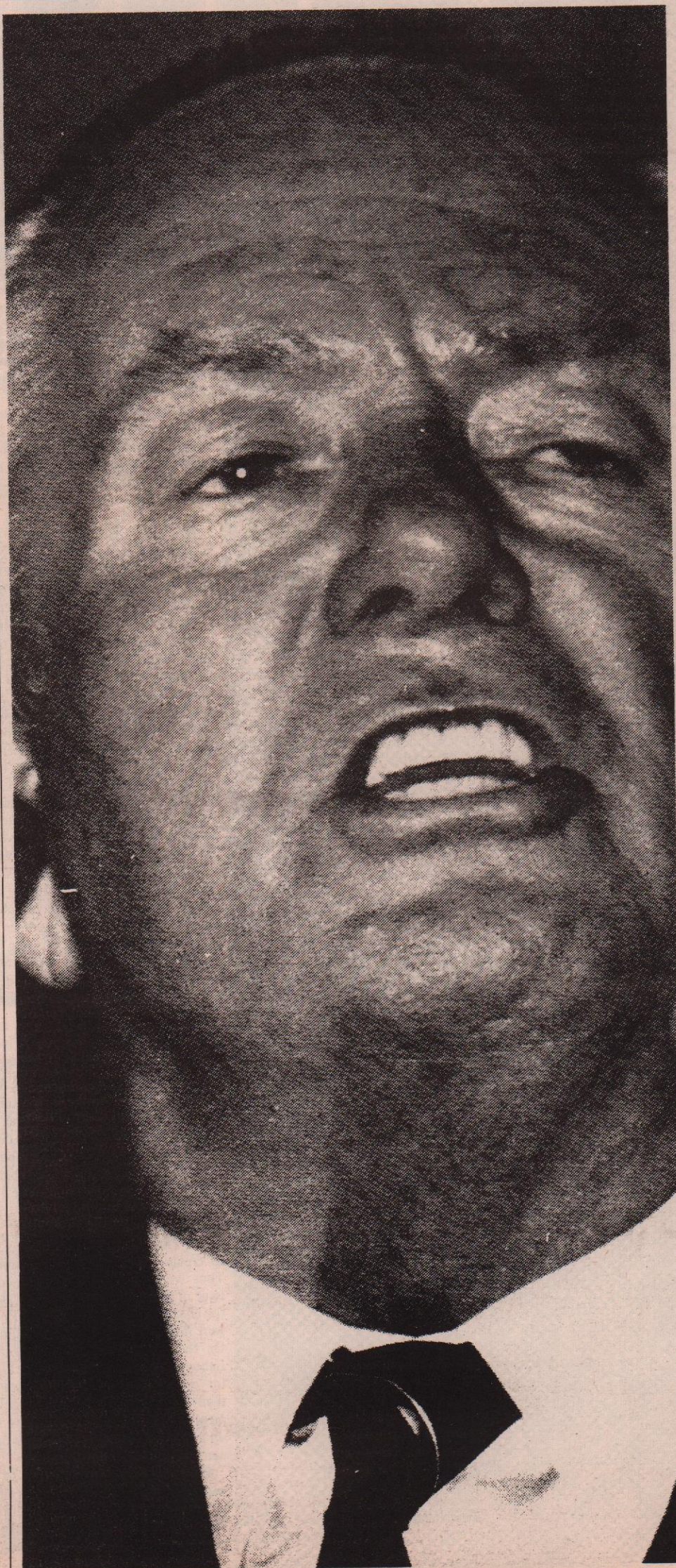
Explicit racism provides a political coherence the centre parties and the left can no longer deliver to the capitalist classes of Europe. Fascism is on the rise in democratic France, while Italy appears to be degenerating into its condition before the *risorgimento* of the 1860s.

Squeezed out

Despite the widely held view that the German people are 'inherently' attracted to fascism, Germany seems to be the least likely Continental country to see the growth of a strong far-right party. Up until late last year, the growth of the neo-Nazi Republican Party of ex-Waffen SS member Franz Schönhuber seemed assured. Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats seemed to be plumbing the depths of unpopularity and the Republican Party won two million votes in the June 1989 European election.

But that was only up until 9 November 1989. With the smashing of the Berlin Wall and German unification on the horizon, the fortunes of the mainstream parties have revived and no more has been heard of Herr Schönhuber. In last week's *Länd* elections in North Rhine Westphalia and Lower Saxony, the Republican Party's vote fell below one per cent. Although Kohl's CDU itself suffered setbacks in the elections, the successes of the Social Democrats showed that both the main parties can reap electoral benefits from the national question. The decline of the far right is not the product of racism becoming any less intensive; the Republicans have been squeezed out by the relative strength of Germany's mainstream parties.

The recent wave of attacks on immigrants in France and Italy is not likely to be the last. The growth of the extreme right in these countries shows that reactionaries are on the march and intend to make it respectable to assault minorities. In these circumstances it is all the more urgent to challenge the prejudices of any form of nationalism.



Le Pen: The unacceptable face of racism is becoming more respectable as racism turns mainstream

The party page

IRISH FREEDOM MOVEMENT DELEGATION

A REPORT FROM THE WAR-ZONE

Last week Irish Freedom Movement supporters visited Britain's war-zone; Fiona Foster describes what they found



From the start we knew our visit to Britain's occupied territory would be no normal bank holiday weekend. For Kevin it was a return visit to his native Ballymurphy. He was singled out by the Special Branch at Holyhead before we even got on the ferry. 'You are free to go at any time' the officers holding him said, but there was no handle on the door of the interrogation room. 'And we are free to detain you under the Prevention of Terrorism Act', they added.

After driving up through the South we were welcomed by councillor Dodie McGuinness and John Nellis of Derry Sinn Fein at the Pilot's Row community centre. Hawks and Dutchy, two young Sinn Fein activists, had a talk prepared for us. As the day was sweltering they took us over the Border to the ancient fort of Greenough in Donegal where we could speak freely in the open. Just days earlier they had been stopped by RUC men holding pump-action shotguns to their heads. 'The Brits are targeting republicans to try and isolate us from the community', they told us. 'We knew when we joined the republican movement that the repression would come by the day if not the hour, but there's too many died for us to back down.' Dutchy's father was among the 14 shot dead on Bloody Sunday when the Army escalated the latest phase of the war in 1972.

On the Saturday Sinn Fein trade union activist Robin Percival explained the economic discrimination behind Britain's presence. Eighty per cent of nationalist Derry is unemployed and the only jobs on offer are 'Ace jobs' under the European Community Social Fund. These jobs offer no security and at £60 a week are barely enough to keep you. To add insult to injury most Ace jobs at the moment are part of the three hundredth anniversary celebrations of the lifting of the siege of Derry by Protestants.

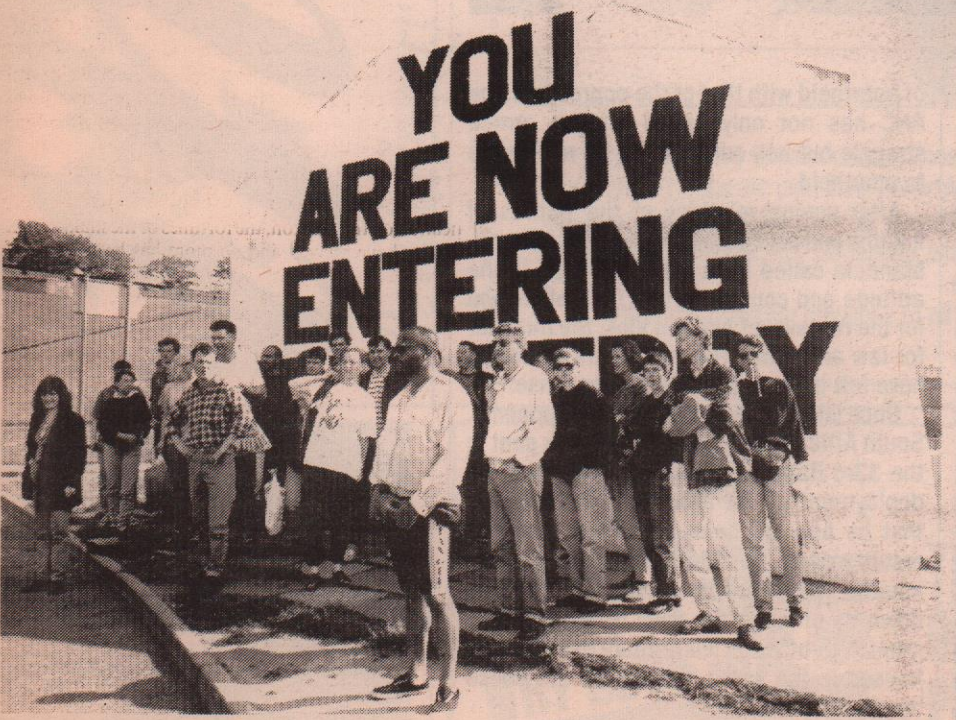
The next day we drove up to Belfast to join the commemoration march for the 10 hunger-strikers who died in 1981 fighting for political status in Britain's H-Block concentration camps. Thousands marched in memory of the men who died to put the lie to British propaganda that republican prisoners are common criminals. Veteran civil rights campaigner and republican Bernadette McAliskey caught the mood of the day when she regaled the RUC men who surrounded the rally: 'Look at those flat caps with their macho braces like something out of the sixties. They think they've got us screwed, but our day will come.'

On Monday Sinn Fein's Jim McAllister took us to Crossmaglen which the spirit of resistance has made a 'no-go' area for British troops. Just days before we arrived the Army had dug in to try and show a presence. They were soon found out and surrounded by the IRA. The Army admitted to one fatality, but local people saw four stretchers leave the area.

An Army unit of 12 men emerged slowly from their bunker walking backwards in a spiral, each watching the other's back. There was no pretence of normalisation here. They knew they were at war and so did we. When they stopped our coach, the more experienced officers were visibly relieved. Ironically they were safer with us than they were on their own. One young Cockney soldier was shaking with rage at their previous defeat. 'I'd like to fucking blow you out', he raged, waving a gun at Jim McAllister.

Forty-two of us from all over Britain took part in the delegation. Some of us were sponsored by trade union branches or other organisations. We were welcomed by a community fighting for its freedom and harassed by the British Army and the RUC. We returned clearer than ever as to whose side we are on.

HUGH MITCHELL



LIVING MARXISM dayschools

Sessions include: Marxism in our time

Imperialism after the Cold War

marxism after the death of socialism The new racism in Europe
British politics into the nineties

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

Phone (071) 375 1702

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

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

Summer school organised by the Revolutionary Communist Party

preparing for power '90

Friday 20 to Friday 27 July
Central London

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

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

troops out now

Irish Freedom Movement

saturday 11 august

Join us and march with republican flute bands demanding 'Troops out of Ireland! Prisoners out of jail! If you want more information about the march, or details of cheap transport from all over Britain, either write to IFM, BM IFM, London WC1N 3XX or phone (071) 375 1702

assemble 1pm at Islington Town Hall (rear), Upper Street, London N1

anti-internment march

Irish Freedom Movement Video Showing

Behind the Mask

Tuesday 22 May
7.30pm
Lewisham Labour Club
Limes Grove
SE13

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 18 May 1990 • No 16 • 40p

SOUTH AFRICA

APARTHEID AT WAR

The Pretoria regime is stepping up its attack on the liberation struggle, writes **Barry Crawford**

ANNA ZIEMINSKI



Black workers know that so long as oppression exists there can be no peace in South Africa

'AS FROM now we should place ourselves on a war footing. We must now declare ourselves to be at war with these developments which wish to threaten us and the people who lead it.'

With these words Chief Buthelezi addressed the regional chiefs of his KwaZulu 'homeland'. Six days later Buthelezi organised an invasion of two black areas—Edendale, outside Pietermaritzburg, and Mpumalanga, near Durban.

Two thousand Inkatha thugs entered Edendale in trucks and taxis on Tuesday 29 March. By the end of the month there were 12 000 Inkatha vigilantes in the Pietermaritzburg region alone. Whereas previous attacks had been more selective, this time entire communities were subject to slaughter. With the full backing of the police, the 'impis' went on the rampage, killing hundreds and burning and looting houses. Entire areas have been wiped out, leaving 40 000 people homeless.

A lawyer in Caluza township reported that when 500 Inkatha members invaded his area the residents rallied to defend themselves. At that point the police intervened and opened fire on the residents, forcing them to flee.

While Pretoria has given Inkatha the backing necessary to eliminate its political opponents, the African National Congress has condemned the violence of its supporters. Shortly after his release from prison, ANC leader Nelson Mandela called on young blacks to 'throw your knives and pangas into the sea'.

Two weeks ago the ANC announced that it had reached broad agreement with the Pretoria regime on conditions for full-scale negotiations on ending the political conflict in South Africa. The joint communiqué contained a commitment to 'a resolution of the existing climate of violence and intimidation from whatever quarter'. This represents a fundamental blow to the liberation movement. By equating the violence of the victims

of apartheid with that of the oppressors, the ANC has not only called off the armed struggle but has criminalised *all* resistance to apartheid.

After seeing relations of the victims of Inkatha and police killings in Imbali township, Mandela called for a drastic change in the attitude and composition of the police, and for the removal of Adriaan Vlok, the minister for law and order. His supporters could not have felt too reassured by his response.

Once Inkatha had driven out its opponents, South African president FW De Klerk sent in the 33rd Battalion. Mandela welcomed the deployment of the army, complaining only that he had not been consulted first. The result was to give Buthelezi the initiative. Inkatha supporters forced the ANC to close down its office in the town of Stanger. The main ANC office in Pietermaritzburg is now housed in the same building as the police headquarters.

Faced with the prospect of falling political

support in Natal townships, Inkatha has gone on the offensive. Buthelezi has made clear that if political support cannot guarantee him a place at the negotiating table, then he will use his physical control of the Natal townships to book himself a seat. Moreover, it appears as if Buthelezi and De Klerk are about to formalise their relationship. The government and Inkatha have held talks with a view to forming an alliance for the forthcoming negotiations, and the constitutional process that would flow from them.

For the apartheid regime the violence in Natal provides a means of undermining the ANC's bargaining position. Pretoria is opposed to the call by black militants for a unitary South African state. De Klerk recognises that the best way to preserve the advantages of apartheid in the 'post-apartheid' state would be through creating a federal South Africa. Such a solution would give the government a mechanism to divide the black working class into urban 'insiders' and rural 'outsiders', and maintain black oppression. At a time when all but two of the homeland leaders have established links with the ANC, Pretoria recognises that the support of Buthelezi will be an important counterweight to the call for a unitary state.

Black workers in Natal are seeing many of their hard-won gains slipping away. Union organisation has been paralysed. Prominent leaders and activists live in constant fear of death.

But while in the short-term the prospects appear bleak, the situation remains fluid. Inkatha cannot indefinitely maintain its control through coercion. Political opposition to it is already escalating, even in rural backwaters. A May Day rally in the Natal south coast region organised by the United Democratic Front drew 15 000 people. Attacks on Inkatha warlords continue. In the refugee camps the youth still talk of fighting: 'We will avenge ourselves. Our parents cannot live here like orphans. We have to take our homes back.' Black militants might be increasingly isolated, but so long as oppression exists the resistance will continue.

OUT NOW!

Revolutionary
Communist
Party



Jenny
Graham

the end of apartheid?

£2 plus 50p p&p. Make cheques payable to
Junius Publications Ltd and send to
BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX.
or phone (071) 375 1485.