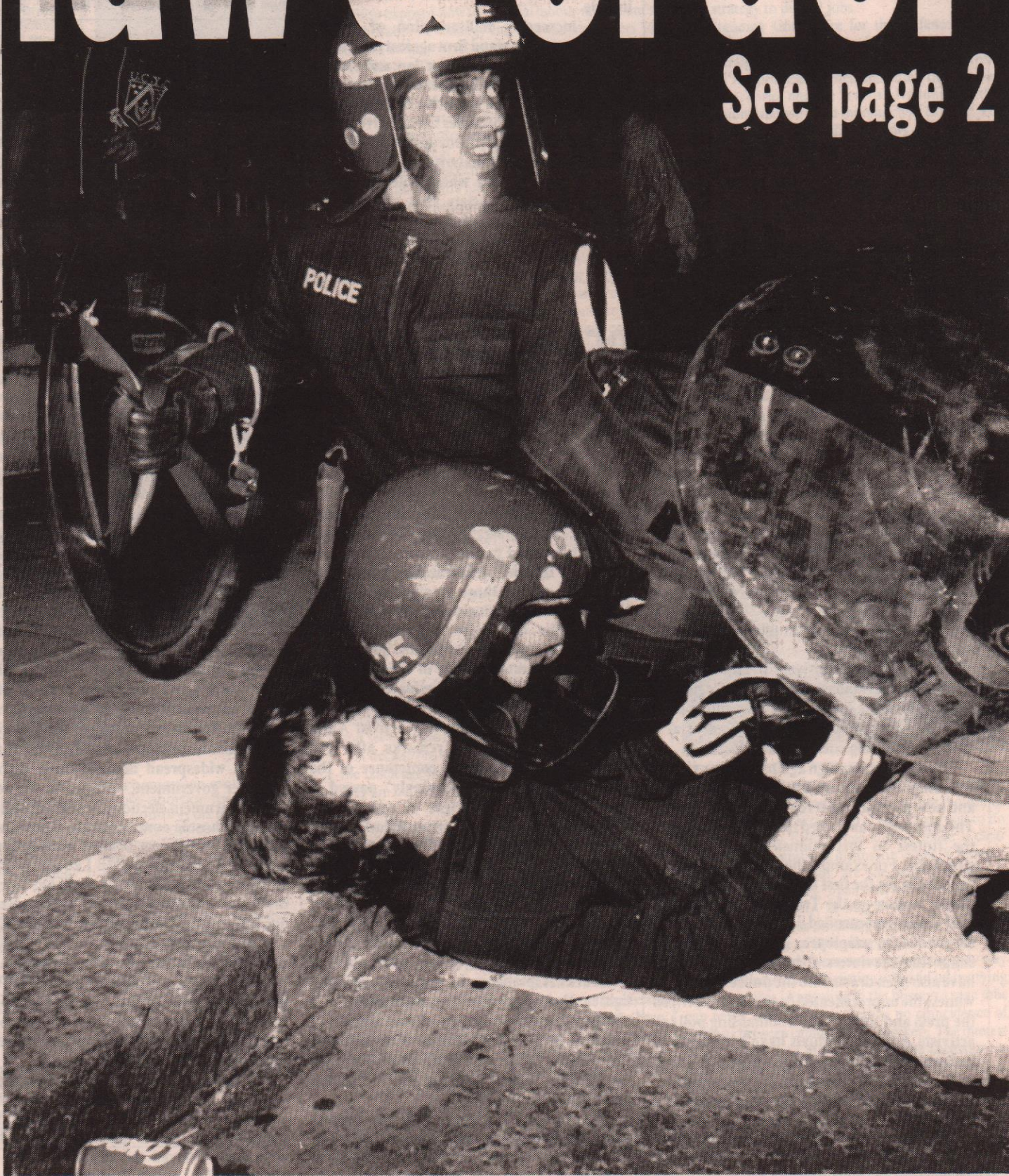


the next step

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THATCHER'S LAW AND ORDER

LAW AND ORDER is rapidly becoming one of the key issues in British politics. As the Tories increasingly lose their grip over society, repression is becoming the order of the day. The Tories are militarising every aspect of our lives. Over the past few weeks we have witnessed an extraordinary degree of cooperation between the government, the media and other state agencies in enforcing a crackdown on those sections of society considered to be a threat to law and order—poll tax rioters, football hooligans, acid house ravers, IRA bombers, drug pushers and 'illegal' immigrants, to name but a few.

The law and order drive provides two main benefits for the establishment. It helps legitimise state repression. And it allows the ruling class to create a degree of political consensus at a time of increasing social instability.

The official campaign against poll tax rioters shows how the Tories are legitimising repression—and how pervasive that repression has become. The authorities have used the campaign against the rioters to institutionalise new coercive structures. For example the crown prosecution service has for the first time set up a special unit simply to process the Trafalgar Square cases. And Labour-controlled Hackney council has suspended an employee, Andy Murphy, for supporting the rioters. Other sections of society have also been drawn into the police network—witness the unprecedented cooperation between the press and the state in criminalising poll tax activists. Even individuals have been made to feel responsible for enforcing repression—such as the mother who shopped her own daughter to the police after seeing her photograph in a newspaper.

Similarly with the football hooligan panic. The authorities have used their anti-hooligan drive to try out new policing methods. Again local authorities have been drawn into the process of coercion—Leeds council has threatened to sack any employee who was involved in the fracas between the police and Leeds United fans at Bournemouth during the May bank holiday weekend. And other sections of society have been enlisted in the campaign. Last week it was revealed that Scottish travel agents have passed on information to police about customers they suspect to be football fans who have booked flights to Italy this summer.

The law and order drive also affords a political advantage to the ruling class. Scapegoating hooligans and poll tax rioters provides a useful diversion from issues such as unemployment or falling living standards. More importantly it provides a means of creating a political consensus behind the ruling class. Whatever their political differences with the government, the Labour Party and the other opposition parties fall into line when they feel there is a threat to the authority of the British state. Thus by transforming a potentially divisive issue such as the poll tax into a question of a challenge to the authority of government, the Tories have managed to put their opponents on the defensive (see pages 4 and 5).

The creeping police state is the most immediate threat facing the working class as we enter the nineties. The publication last week of the Stevens report into security leaks from the Ulster Defence Regiment demonstrated the intimate relationship between the British authorities and the Loyalist death squads. It shows that where the authority of the British state is under real threat the ruling class will adopt the most barbaric methods necessary to enforce its rule.

The increasing militarisation of society shows the need to stand firm against the Tories' law and order drive. However, law and order is a double-edged issue for the ruling class. The more that the Tories politicise class relations, the more apparent becomes the coercive nature of the capitalist state. It opens up new possibilities to build a movement that owes no allegiance to the British state, and whose sole aim is the overthrow of the society that enforces the exploitation and oppression of workers through increasingly more brutal and coercive means.

REPRESSION AND THE LEFT

THE DECISION of the Labour leadership to proscribe the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation as a 'Militant front' came as no surprise. Ever since the Trafalgar Square riot the Labour leaders have tried to demonstrate their fitness to govern Britain by demanding harsh state repression against those involved in the riot. What is more surprising and more dangerous is the way the left invites the state to take repressive measures on its behalf. Two recent examples illustrate the scale of the problem.

A conference of the left-dominated Hackney Labour Party last week issued its response to the victimisation of Class War activist Andy Murphy because of his remarks after the Trafalgar Square riots. A conference of the borough party 'overwhelmingly' passed a motion endorsing the right of any council worker to be a member of any political organisation, provided it does not 'involve support for fascist ideas or organisations'. This motion was enthusiastically approved by council Nalco chief Ivan Beavis. But it is up to the workers, not the local state employers, to deal with fellow workers who uphold fascist views. Inviting the bosses to decide what political views are acceptable in the workplace can only tighten their grip over the workforce. It is obvious that they will soon define 'fascist' as widely as they need to suit their own purposes. The result can only be more employer/state interference, deeper division and confusion and more victimisations.

Last week too, activists from the British-based anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* lobbied US congressmen and immigration officials in an attempt to prevent a two-week US tour by John Tyndall, the well-known British fascist and head of the British National Party. It would be interesting to hear the views of Ivan Beavis, a prominent member of the British Communist Party, on this tactic. For years such measures were systematically used to prevent known communists from entering the USA. Yet now the British left is appealing to the state functionaries who enforce the rule of one of the most racist countries in the world to take action against a junior league racist

from Britain.

Actions like those of Hackney Labour Party and *Searchlight* serve to legitimise the view that the state is a benign force in society that can be pressed to take a progressive stand. In reality the state is the agency that enforces the rule of the capitalist class; it actively promotes racism, and history confirms that it will not hesitate to adopt more repressive or even fascist forms if the system is in jeopardy. The iron law of history is that under capitalism all forms of state repression are ultimately directed against the only force that is a real threat to the capitalist system—the working class. Hence left-wing invitations to the state to adopt repressive measures can only be an invitation to disaster.

WHO NEEDS THE LABOUR PARTY?

IT IS SURPRISING that it has taken the Labour leadership so long to complete its new policy document, because it is evident that the drafting team followed a very simple method. They sat down with the newspaper cuttings on Labour's last three unsuccessful general election campaigns and set about removing from the party programme every policy for which it had come under attack from the Tories or the media. The idea is that the Kinnock team can now enter the next election with a manifesto which has already closed off every potential avenue of attack.

Every distinctive Labour policy has now been abandoned. This applies not only to the radical policies of the seventies, such as withdrawal from the EC and unilateral nuclear disarmament. Labour has now given up its allegiance to nationalisation, welfare spending and the rights of trade unionists, causes which have been crucial to the identity of the party ever since its foundation. Under Neil Kinnock Labour now puts forward the slogan 'business where possible, government where necessary', which is a description of the way capitalist society has always operated, not an alternative policy proposal. It simply reflects Labour's unconditional surrender to the British establishment. Taken together with the organisational changes in the party and its increased distance from the unions, Labour's new manifesto confirms the institutional transformation of British Labourism. Labour is now a middle class centre party, no longer a party of the labour bureaucracy and the working class.

Yet the British establishment and the middle classes remain unimpressed by Labour. Though there is widespread dissatisfaction with the Thatcher government, reflected in the recent local government elections as well as in opinion polls and hostile commentaries, there is as yet little sign of the sort of high-level defections from the Tories that helped Labour to victory in 1964 or 1974. While the press has fixed on the taxation consequences of Labour's plans to put Kinnock on the defensive, Michael Heseltine and Kenneth Baker have tried to outdo one another in anti-Labour rhetoric about 'Scargill's thugs' and socialist bogeys said to be hiding in the small print of the new manifesto. Kinnock will never learn that the more you bend over backwards, the more you encourage your opponents to walk all over you.

The most pathetic response to the new manifesto came from the old left. Tony Benn accused the leadership of adopting an 'anti-socialist, anti-labour position'. Though he apparently delayed the adoption of the new document by Labour's national executive for three hours by making speeches about the Chartists and the Suffragettes, he seems ill-acquainted with the history of his own party and out of touch with the direction of recent developments. The Labour Party adopted an 'anti-socialist' policy at its founding conference in 1900, when it explicitly repudiated a left-wing proposal to give the party a distinctively socialist identity. This basic approach has been reaffirmed in every party programme since. The content of Labour policy has also been

consistently 'anti-labour' in the sense of being 'anti-working class'—this has been particularly clear when Labour governments have imposed austerity measures and coerced striking workers. The significant change that has taken place over the past decade is that the Labour Party is now no longer even *formally* pro-labour: Kinnock's sole concern is to win the approval of middle class public opinion.

When Benn assembled the fragments of the left in Sheffield at the weekend they resolved, yet again, to rebuild their shattered forces inside the Labour Party. But if Labour is now, by their own judgement, guided by an 'anti-socialist, anti-labour' programme, then this must surely be a futile exercise. For those who still needed it, the Kinnock manifesto provides conclusive proof that the struggle to build an anti-capitalist working class party must now take place outside and against the Labour Party.

WHERE'S THE BEEF?

IN LAST WEEK'S feature article in the next step Alan Harding included the public pre-occupation with mad cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) with a wider range of moral panics and media diversions. He argued that there was a tendency towards the trivialisation of news which distracted public attention from the real problems of modern capitalist society, as well as encouraging irrational fears and prejudices and legitimising state repression in various ways.

Over the past week concern about mad cow disease has gathered momentum. Local education authorities and other institutions have banned beef, scientists and doctors have engaged in learned debates, farmers and butchers have protested, politicians have wrangled bitterly in parliament. Given the intensity of these debates, some readers have questioned Harding's judgement. Some argue that there is a real issue of contaminated food chains here that cannot be lightly dismissed. Others point out that if this is a bogus issue, then it is one that has rebounded against the establishment, and is likely to cost heavily in subsidies to farmers.

It is worth making two points in response. The first is that in every media panic there is always an element of rationality. If this were not the case, then it would be impossible to generate public concern. There is undoubtedly a disease called BSE and it may be transmissible. But it is important to get this in proportion. So far the victims of BSE outside the society of cows amount to one cat; the cases of two other cats and one human remain unconfirmed. Six people have been killed digging the Channel Tunnel, and hundreds more will die this year from industrial injuries and diseases, but there is no panic about these problems. The panic about mad cow disease encourages irrational fears and reinforces a sense of vulnerability and impotence in society. If eating a hamburger can rot your brain, then what point is there in trying to change the world?

The second point is that, whatever the mad cow panic finally costs the government, it will be cheap at the price. The Tories would gladly subsidise British beef producers from now until the next election if the fear of BSE keeps the minds of the voters off rising unemployment, inflation, interest rates and all the other problems of declining British capitalism. As Alan Harding says, 'where's the beef?'

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LABOUR PAINS

DAVE suggests that we should 'play along with the current system and cast a vote, if only to express our disgust with the present government' (letters, 11 May). However it is the current system of capitalist production itself that disgusts me, not simply the members or economic policies of our present government. Labour might redistribute the profits (when there are any) in favour of the working class, it might spend more money on the NHS, but in a recession when profit comes into direct conflict with human needs then Labour will be forced to act in the interests of capitalism at the expense of the working class. Nor can Labour act against the forces which repress women or promote racial tension. These problems will not be solved until production is organised for need and not profit, and capitalism is abolished. To build a working class movement we must destroy any belief that Labour is a socialist party. How are we to expose this myth if we tell people to vote for them at election time? This would only serve to confuse the argument, and give credence to the system.

We must not 'play along with' but challenge the existing order. Don't vote! Tonia Korson North London

IN RESPONSE to Dave's letter arguing that we should all vote Labour: Plato was right. Anyone who isn't interested in politics is an idiot, just as anyone who votes Labour is one too. The RCP argues against voting Labour not so that people can take even less of a role in political involvement, but so they can see that fighting for an independent alternative is essential.

In one sense, Labour is far worse than the Tories. It moves rightwards in order to appeal to the electorate and to prove its credentials to the establishment whilst insisting that it will make a

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difference to working class people. The Labour Party couldn't change things even if Neil Kinnock had a brain. The current state of British capitalism means that there is little room to manoeuvre in terms of giving even concessions to workers. The Labour Party doesn't take sides against the British state and thus will continue to attack the working class with harsh austerity measures in the interests of British capitalism.

Success for Labour doesn't indicate that society is moving towards the left because the party neither leads nor supports any leftwards move in society today. Votes for Labour reflect dissatisfaction with Thatcher and nothing more. If we follow Dave's logic of 'the lesser of two evils' argument then we might as well support Heseltine because he's more likely to oust Thatcher than is Labour.

Otherwise we could concentrate on building something new that fights for our interests. True, the RCP is relatively insignificant. However, if radicals weren't drawn to the Labour Party by fellow radicals arguing its redundant case, then I am sure we'd get a lot further, a lot quicker. Rebecca York North London

PANDORA ANDERSON



Kinnock: a lesser evil?

EMBRYO VOTE WAS A DEFEAT

SARA HARDY'S interpretation of the recent parliamentary vote on abortion is slightly one-sided (the next step, 4 May). While it is probably true to say that the opinions of the medical establishment won the day it doesn't necessarily follow that the outcome of the debate indicates 'a relatively liberal consensus' on abortion. The anti-abortionists may have lost the vote, but they have nonetheless succeeded in setting the terms of the debate and completely marginalising the pro-abortionists. Women's rights campaigners have been thrown into confusion by this bill, some arguing to support an amendment

limiting abortion to 24 weeks, others diverting their attention to arguing for equal access to infertility treatment for lesbians. With the opposition in disarray, and the debate taking place between two sets of reactionaries (medics and moralists), MPs were able to take advantage of a very neat division of labour whereby they could pose as moderate, commonsense liberals while the real bigots get on with the business of creating an anti-abortion consensus. It isn't that the state is reluctant to interfere, it doesn't need to. To compare the British experience with events in the USA is somewhat misleading. There has been

no comparable mobilisation of pro-abortion forces in this country; on the contrary, opposition to the Embryo Bill has been almost non-existent, with such pathetic events as a North-West regional demo of about 75 people, and Stac groups disappearing within a matter of weeks. Abortion isn't an issue in Britain unless the reactionaries raise it.

In this situation it makes no sense to label medics as liberals and moralists as reactionaries, since they have a common aim of denying women the right to abortion. Lynn Kelly Liverpool

WOULD WE BAN PORNOGRAPHY?

WHEN WE sell the next step and argue with feminist friends we have found the issues of censorship and pornography present a few problems. On many occasions we have heard arguments for the 'Off-the-shelves' campaign to remove all pornographic

magazines and literature degrading to women. We are against this as we realise that censorship of any kind would give the ruling class the upper hand at the expense of the working class movement. Given this, how should Marxists approach the

degrading nature of pornography under the dictatorship of the proletariat? Would it be considered moralistic to ban literature of a sexually explicit nature? Jason Pembroke and Ismael Isaacs Haringey

The working class

REDUNDANCIES AT RAVENS CRAIG

THE PRICE OF COLLABORATION

The threatened closure of Ravenscraig steel mill in Scotland shows the need for a new approach to defending jobs, argues Willie MacDonald

That's the decision, tough. That was the response of Bob Scholey, chairman of British Steel, to protests by Scottish secretary Malcolm Rifkind at British Steel's plans to shed at least 770 jobs at its Ravenscraig steel plant. Scholey was equally dismissive of union protests.

The threatened closure of Ravenscraig has deepened divisions within the Tory Party and exposed the government's boasts about an 'economic miracle'. It has also exposed how the official labour movement's collaborationist strategy has allowed employers to axe jobs at will.

British Steel's plans to move strip steel production from the Ravenscraig plant to Port Talbot in South Wales will sound the death knell for steel production in Scotland. It is widely seen as the first step in winding up steel production altogether, a view borne out by the threat to a further 1000 jobs in the Clydesdale tube works this Saturday. Male unemployment in Lanarkshire already stands at 16.7 per cent. The effect of the closure on related industries is estimated to bring job losses to a total of 20 000.

For a government whose political fortunes have already reached an all-time low in Scotland, such a scale of job losses represents a major blow. For Malcolm Rifkind, the beleaguered Scottish secretary, his own future is at stake. His anger about the threat to Ravenscraig reflects not so much his concern about steel workers' jobs, but his worry that his own job may be on the line.

The Ravenscraig closure has reopened the debate within the Tory Party about the government's strategy for British capitalism. While Rifkind condemned the job losses, Nicholas Ridley, the strongly non-interventionist minister for trade and industry, refused to put his name to a government motion calling on British Steel to 'do everything possible' to prevent closure. The dispute is more than simply a personality clash between ministers. It reflects the Tories' lack of answers to the problems facing British industry.

Monumental failure

Ten years ago the new Thatcher regime began its campaign to resurrect British industry by pushing through a major programme of closures in the steel industry. Tens of thousands of jobs were lost in preparation for the eventual privatisation of the British Steel Corporation. The steel workers' strike of 1980 was the first attack by the Tory government on one of the big battalions of the labour movement and set the tone for the rest of the eighties.

A decade on, the Tories have successfully seen off the challenge from the trade union movement. But they are no nearer to solving the problems of British industry.

Ten years after the shakeout of the steel industry during the 1980-81 recession the plant closures continue and the economy faces a new recession.

Ravenscraig itself is a monument to the so-called British economic miracle trumpeted by successive Tory chancellors. Built in 1960, the plant was intended to supply a car industry that never happened; the vehicle plants of Linwood and Bathgate, supposedly built to fill the gap left by the closure of the Clyde shipyards, are themselves names in Scotland's industrial graveyard. Minimal investment has meant that productivity increases at Ravenscraig have been entirely the result of more intensive work practices. Ravenscraig has achieved some of the most impressive productivity increases in British industry. Ravenscraig steel is produced at 2.3 man hours per tonne against an industrial average of 4.7. But as management has long planned to move strip steel to Port Talbot, this has been achieved through speed-ups not new plant.

The Ravenscraig job losses are symbolic of the problems the Tories face. The widely predicted slump has begun to bite into jobs. April's employment figures published last week show a seasonally adjusted rise for the first time in 44 months. Recent redundancies include 4000 at British Telecom, 2800 at Ford's Halewood plant in Merseyside, 2000 at Next and 900 at British Home Stores. Up to 30 000 miners may lose their jobs under British Coal's plans to shut down 'high sulphur' pits in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire. The Confederation of British Industry has warned that on top of the 12 000 jobs shed last month, another 54 000 could disappear over the next three. Significantly, most of the new redundancies

will be in the Midlands and the South, the supposedly booming areas in Thatcher's Britain. The last recession shook out the North and Scotland; the Ravenscraig closure is in fact the last gasp of the old recession. The new recession will devastate the heartland of Thatcher's country.

The closure of Ravenscraig not only exposes the failure of the Tories' economic policies. It also demonstrates the bankruptcy of the labour movement strategy to defend jobs.

A Standing Committee for the Defence of the Scottish Steel Industry has been set up to save Ravenscraig. The committee includes representatives from all the political parties, including the Labour Party, the Tories and the Scottish Nationalists, the trade unions, industry and the churches. In effect it is led by Malcolm Rifkind. The only proposal the committee has so far made is to adopt Rifkind's idea of a Scottish buy-out to save the plant. It is a striking demonstration of the demise of the trade union movement that it should now take its political lead from a Tory minister long reviled for devastating jobs in Scotland.

The collaborationist strategy adopted by the unions at Ravenscraig is not new. Back in 1980, the ISTC (Iron and Steel Trades Confederation) appealed to British bosses not to decimate the industry. 'Steelworkers and their industry have made a giant contribution to the national wealth. Will the Tories recognise it by standing up for steel and allowing us to compete on equal terms?', pleaded the union in its strike bulletin. But the Tories are not interested in the contribution workers may have made to British industry in the past. They are solely interested in the contribution they can make now to restoring profitability. And that means making workers redundant, and forcing those who remain to work



harder for less money. In 1980 the government responded to the union's pleas by putting thousands of workers on the scrapheap. They are certain to do the same again. Rifkind has already made it clear that saving Ravenscraig means job losses. 'Commercial grounds', he said, 'are the only grounds for keeping any factory open anywhere in Britain' (Scotland on Sunday, 20 May 1990).

The unions' stress on saving the industry can only be at the expense of defending jobs.

As far as the employers are concerned the only way to save an industry is by cutting jobs and intensifying work practices. Appealing to the bosses to save jobs can never work because there is no coincidence of interests between capitalists and workers. The interest of employers is to make a profit. The necessity for workers is to earn a living wage. Since employers can only restore profitability at the expense of workers' living standards, it follows that a collaborationist strategy is doomed to failure.

The only way to fight job cuts is by taking direct action to ensure that every worker has a job at a living wage, irrespective of whether a particular industry is profitable or not. That means appealing for support not from the bosses but from other workers, who share our class interests. But the union bureaucrats have already ruled out the possibility of strike action to defend Ravenscraig jobs. 'Industrial action does not save plants', claimed ISTC convenor Tommy Brennan (Glasgow Herald, 18 May 1990).

The trade union movement in its present form cannot defend the interests of its members. At a time when Britain is sliding into a new recession, and unemployment is set to rocket, only a movement that puts the interests of workers first can defend our jobs and living standards.

WHY THE POLL TAX WON'T BRING DOWN THE TORIES

The events which have followed the Trafalgar Square revolt have vindicated the Revolutionary Communist Party's assessment that the poll tax cannot topple the Tories, argues Alan Harding

SIMON NORFOLK



So long as the left ignores the question of state repression, the Tories will always have the upper hand

From the start of the campaign against the poll tax the Revolutionary Communist Party has argued that it was not an issue that could bring down the Tories. The poll tax has generated widespread opposition throughout the country. But the very fact that it has united people across class lines indicates that the issue of the poll tax cannot clarify class interests and help build a movement to overthrow the Tory government.

Power

The events following the Trafalgar Square revolt have vindicated this stance. Over the past two months the Tories have transformed the issue from one of opposition to an unfair tax to a question of a challenge to the authority of the state. 'Thugs and hoodlums are always on the

look-out for a suitable cover under which to indulge their criminal tendencies', the political commentator Alexander Chancellor argued, summing up the establishment viewpoint, 'and the poll tax is conveniently providing it' (*Independent Magazine*, 7 May 1990).

The Tories know that the balance of forces in the class struggle is determined not on issues such as taxation but on the key question of the legitimacy of state power. That is why they have turned the issue of the poll tax into one of a challenge to the authority of the state. The question the Tories are posing now is: whose side are you on? Are you on the side of the authorities implementing the tax or on the side of the thousands who fought back against the police?

The government has used its law and order drive to win backing from a public

disaffected by the issue of the poll tax.

The failure of the left to challenge the criminalisation of the poll tax activists shows its inability to take sides decisively against the forces of the state. It also shows why the issue of the poll tax could never bring the Tories down in the first place.

The criminalisation of the opposition to the poll tax confirms the RCP's analysis about the weakness of the official campaign against the tax. From the start we have argued that the crucial question to answer is: who will fight the poll tax? We pointed out that the anti-poll tax campaign could not defeat the Tories precisely because it was so broad and diffuse. The fact that everyone from Tory shire councillors to unemployed inner-city youth voiced their opposition to the tax was a sign of the campaign's weakness,

not of its strength. From the beginning we insisted that when it came to the crunch the anti-poll tax alliance would crumble because most of those opposed to the tax would not translate their dislike of higher taxation into a determination to stand up to state repression.

Trailing

We have also argued that the inchoate and often contradictory economic grievances that have characterised the opposition to the poll tax have served to hide its broader implications. The poll tax shifts the burden of financing local services from the wealthy to the less well off. It allows state officials to intrude into homes and to intensify official surveillance of our lives. It discourages people from registering for the vote. Focusing on the anti-democratic aspects of the poll tax

would not have been popular in the home counties or in Walworth Road, but it would have been the only way to give the opposition real bite.

The left has taken a very different approach to the anti-poll tax campaign. From the start left-wing groups have welcomed the fact that the opposition to the tax was so broad and diffuse. For organisations which have been increasingly isolated in British politics, the sight of thousands of people from Penzance to Perth backing a cause dear to the heart of most radicals seemed to indicate that left-wing ideas were finally receiving a hearing in society. In fact the anti-poll tax campaign has demonstrated the opposite. Even on an issue like the poll tax the left could not set the agenda. Instead it has found itself trailing behind middle class campaigners.

Those on the left who imagine that the poll tax might bring down the government need to be reminded about a few home truths.

After three years of anti-poll tax campaigning the Tories came under real pressure for the first time in March when a group of Conservative councillors in Mid-Oxfordshire resigned the party whip. They were joined by Tory dissidents in Taunton and Colchester. Before long Michael Heseltine discovered that he too had opposed the poll tax all along. Every Tory dissident with an eye on the Thatcher succession began jumping on the anti-poll tax bandwagon.

Today, mainstream Tories too have taken up the cause. The three main house journals of Tory thinking—the *Economist*, the *Times* and the *Financial Times*—are all opposed to the tax. Even the Police Federation and the Engineering Employers Federation want the tax changed.

None of these august groups or newspapers is opposed to Thatcher's strategy for rescuing British capital. All accept that the working class must pay the price necessary to restore British industry's profitability, through public expenditure cuts and lower living standards. They simply believe that the poll tax is irrelevant and counter-productive in pursuing such a project.

Unease

The *Economist* even invoked that doyen of Tory free marketeers Adam Smith to damn the tax. The poll tax, it claims, breaks all three of his cardinal rules for taxation: 'It is not levied according to ability to pay; it is arbitrary rather than certain; and it exposes the people to the frequent visits and odious examinations of the tax-gatherers'. In other words it gets people's backs up without any guarantee of getting the money. The *Economist* suggested instead a tax on satellite dishes since the owners must have a bit of money and they should pay for the unsightly things anyway!

The poll tax has been politically significant because it has provided a focus for Tory dissatisfaction about the general malaise of government strategy.

At a time when many Tory supporters were already worried about high interest rates, declining property values and a bleak economic outlook, the campaign against the poll tax became a vehicle through which to articulate their unease. But whatever their quibbles about the nature of the tax, none of these middle class opponents has much disagreement with the general outline of Thatcher's attack on working class living standards. There was never any chance that Tory anti-poll tax protesters would pursue their campaign to the point of overthrowing the government.

The left's anti-poll tax strategy draws out further a trend that has become stronger and stronger in the eighties. It is the accepted wisdom on the left today that it is impossible to win struggles through direct confrontation with our opponents. Rather, left wingers argue, we need to win the broadest possible support by playing for public sympathy. Public opinion not class struggle, runs the argument, is the decisive factor in settling the major conflicts in our society.

The view that militancy doesn't pay is the product of the success of the Tories in destroying trade union struggles over the past decade. The defeat of the miners' strike of 1984-85 was particularly crucial in lending credence to the view that confrontation is counter-productive.

Constrained

The lesson that most trade unionists drew from that defeat was not that we need to be equally ruthless as the Tories in defence of our class interests, but that militancy does not pay. Since the miners' strike, most disputes have emphasised the need to woo public opinion at the expense of organising working class action. The recent ambulance workers' dispute was a stark example of this trend. The ambulance unions, led by Nupe, refused to countenance any action that might alienate public support. The result was that, while the ambulance crews retained the overwhelming sympathy of the public to the end of the strike, they could not translate this support into real pressure on the Tories. The government was able to sit out the dispute and eventually win six

months force the ambulance workers back to work on its terms.

The campaign against the poll tax has continued the disastrous strategy of winning maximum public support at the expense of taking any action that might be effective.

The left has never attempted to organise a campaign of collective defiance; in particular it has refused to organise among council workers to ensure that the tax could never be implemented. Such a campaign would not have had the support of Tory councillors or many angry ratepayers. It would have had the distinction of standing a chance of winning.

The left has been constrained by its fear of upsetting middle class opinion, and most especially by its horror of embarrassing Neil Kinnock's rising hopes of replacing Margaret Thatcher as prime minister. It has refused to overstep the line marked out by Walworth Road and countenance the sort of mass defiance necessary to defeat the tax. Any effective action to stop the tax has been ruled illegitimate by the left. Thus in Scotland the official anti-poll tax campaign condemned attacks on the scabs compiling poll tax registers. It refused to countenance a campaign among council workers not to implement the tax. Instead the left has backed a strategy of non-payment—leaving it up to individuals to make up their minds about the tax. This might go down well in Chichester or Cambridge but it's hardly a strategy to make the Tories tremble.

Cowardice

The reliance of the left on middle class support, and its failure to challenge the repressive aspects of the poll tax, have allowed the Tories to go on the offensive against anti-poll tax activists. The government has used the Trafalgar Square revolt to put its opponents on the defensive. Home secretary David Waddington turned the screw on the Labour Party, insisting that the declaration by 30 Labour MPs that they would break the law and not pay the tax was an invitation to riot:

'Do they really expect those they seek to influence to draw neat distinctions between one sort of law-breaking and another? Do they really expect people they seek to influence to stop just trying to break the tax and do not encourage them to break policemen's heads.' (*Times*, 3 April 1990)

Labour spokesman Roy Hattersley responded in characteristic fashion by calling for even harsher measures against the rioters than Waddington himself had proposed.

Perhaps more unexpected was the response of the left to the Tory challenge.

Far from seeing the explosion of anger in Trafalgar Square as an opportunity to build a real campaign against the Tories and the poll tax, left-wing organisers of the official anti-poll tax campaign have made the rioters the scapegoats for their abject political cowardice. To keep the support of Tory councillors and angry ratepayers the left has encouraged a further round of government attacks on democratic rights and further state surveillance and interference.

Informers

Labour MP and Militant supporter Dave Nellist asked the home secretary 'to accept from him, and on behalf of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, that they unreservedly and utterly condemned arson and looting, and the provocations and violence of the anarchist elements' (*Times*, 3 April 1990). Not content with parliamentary boot-licking, leading Militant supporters who organise the Anti-Poll Tax Federation queued up to join the witch-hunt. Federation chair Tommy Sheridan had 'no qualms' about 'informing the police' of any rioters it could identify. An editorial in *Militant* attacked the 'unprovoked attacks on the police' in Trafalgar Square. Former student radical Tariq Ali called the rioters 'a bunch of nutters who go berserk'.

The capitulation of the left has allowed the authorities to go on the offensive against anti-poll tax activists. Six weeks after the riot, there are still 134 officers working on the Scotland Yard investigations while the crown prosecution

service has set up a special unit to deal with the rioters. The courts have forced all photographers to give up all unpublished film or photographs taken at the scene which might help the police. The authorities now have over 2500 photographs; almost 500 people have been arrested, more than 100 since the riot. One has been charged with attempted murder, others with riot and affray. People are being jailed for the most trivial of offences—one man was sent down for 28 days for stealing two bottles of perfume.

The state's campaign of surveillance and intimidation has gone into homes and into workplaces. The experience of Islington anti-poll tax activist Steve Cook is typical. He was woken up by a dawn raid. The police turned his flat over looking for clothing similar to that worn by an alleged rioter and 'any correspondence which may relate to the organising of violent disorder'. *Class War* activist Andy Murphy was victimised by Labour-controlled Hackney council for defending the rioters.

Repression

The police have attacked poll tax meetings and banned marches. Activists attending any demonstration are now liable to be arrested for poll tax offences. Photographs taken on the poll tax demonstration were distributed to officers policing an animal rights demonstration at the end of April. According to the police, if you attended both you had to be a troublemaker.

The price of the left's capitulation to the Tory law and order drive is the criminalisation of all protest.

The Revolutionary Communist Party has from the start challenged the dominant left-wing strategy over the poll tax. We have argued that the poll tax was not an issue around which we could build a revolutionary opposition to the Tories. The very fact that almost everyone opposed the tax meant that it couldn't clarify class interests. We also argued that any campaign against the poll tax must focus on its anti-democratic aspects. Only by tackling the issue of state repression could we organise working class resistance to the poll tax and to the Tories.

While the left has been willing to accept the limits on the anti-poll tax campaign imposed by Neil Kinnock and Michael Heseltine, the RCP has fought to mobilise working class opposition to the tax. In Scotland we established the Smash the Poll Tax Campaign in opposition to the official all-class 'Stop It!' campaign organised by the Labour Party and Scottish TUC. We made an issue of the attack on democratic rights, argued with council workers for non-implementation of the tax and backed working class communities which ran poll tax scabs off their streets. The only thing the Labour-sponsored campaign tried to stop was mass resistance to the tax.

Defiance

In England, we supported Hammett Smith trades council when it stood an anti-poll tax candidate in a local by-election in west London. While the left backed the Labour candidate who had made it clear that she would implement the tax, RCP supporters helped take the arguments for collective defiance on to the streets, housing estates and workplaces of Hammersmith. Since the Trafalgar Square riot we have organised across the country against the state clampdown. In Hackney RCP supporters have led the fight to reinstate Andy Murphy.

The failure of the official campaign against the poll tax reveals the need for a new political movement in Britain; a movement that is not constrained by its loyalty to the Labour Party but which puts the interests of the working class first. Most of all we need a movement that takes an uncompromising stand against state repression and the increasing attacks on democratic rights.

The Revolutionary Communist Party has set out to build such a movement. Our campaigns around the poll tax, but more especially around issues such as the struggle for black rights and the fight for Irish freedom, show that such a movement is both possible and necessary. Those who have had enough of the evasions of the traditional left should join us in building the leadership necessary to face up to the political battles of the nineties.

NEW READERS START HERE



The working class in Britain and internationally has experienced a series of setbacks in recent years. The collapse of Stalinist regimes throughout the world has helped to undermine working class politics further because of the widely held false impression that these societies were ruled by the proletariat. Consequently the working class movement is going through a momentous upheaval. At present it lacks a clear political identity.

The Revolutionary Communist Party believes that the problems facing the working class are the product of the political traditions that dominated left-wing thinking for most of this century. The influence of Stalinism internationally, and of Labourism in Britain, have ensured that the working class lacks the political independence it requires to fulfil its mission as the agent of human liberation. The exhaustion of these conservative traditions should not be confused with the future potential of the working class. As long as the old traditions remained dominant it was not possible for working class politics to make serious gains. Now, as we approach the end of the twentieth century, Marxism can regain its relevance for the project of creating a new society.

The RCP believes that the capitalist system is inherently regressive and acts as a brake on human progress. It exploits millions of workers, and oppresses millions of others, to create the conditions under which the employer class can produce and retain its profits. Only the working class has the power and the interest to overthrow capitalism and create a new society where exploitation will be abolished.

The RCP is committed to the development of a working class viewpoint on all the key issues facing society. At present Marxist ideas and even left-wing views seem irrelevant to most people. The growth of conservatism, irrationalism and intellectual pessimism is the consequence of the fact that for most people there does not appear to exist an agent of change, without which forward-looking views appear as unrealistic and utopian. The RCP has undertaken the task of rebuilding the conviction that the proletariat is the agent of social change. At the same time we are determined to confront the backward-looking ideology of capitalism and to uphold the banner of progress, science and human liberation.

The RCP recognises the need for a new working class movement free of the traditions of the past decades and which is based on contemporary experience. The development of Marxist politics appropriate to the present situation is inseparable from the struggle to build an independent working class movement. Only a movement which recognises that the interests of the workers are irreconcilably opposed to those of the employers can be successful in forging an anti-capitalist alternative. For the RCP, working class politics cannot be reduced to trade union consciousness or the affairs of the workplace. The fatal flaw of British Labourism is that it restricts workers' horizons to economic matters, while it allows the employer class to monopolise the political debate. Workers must define every problem from our point of view and fight for the rights of every section of society if we are to constitute an effective force for change.

While the RCP supports the fight for real reform or improvements in the lives of the working class, we believe that no durable gains can be won within capitalism. The RCP argues that the overthrow of capitalism provides the necessary

precondition for the liberation of the working class and of society as a whole.

To achieve its objectives the working class cannot use the existing institutions of society but must rely only on its own capacity to struggle. The state is a machine for enforcing the right to exploit and therefore constitutes a major obstacle to the march of progress. The elimination of the state and other capitalist institutions are preconditions for the exercise of working class power.

The RCP believes that workers have no nation. British workers share the same interests as the exploited in other countries. British workers have no common interests with the employers and must resist the appeals of patriotism and chauvinism. As internationalists we recognise that the enemy is at home. Since Britain remains an imperialist power around the world the only international role it can play is that of the oppressor.

The class struggle is inextricably linked to the struggle against imperialism. The RCP opposes all forms of British militarism and supports all anti-imperialist struggles. Workers who live in the imperialist heartland have a special duty to back those fighting against the British oppressor. Thus we fight for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and for Irish self-determination. We opposed Britain's colonial war in the South Atlantic, and support the return of the Malvinas islands to Argentina. We oppose British and Western interference in the Middle East. We support the destruction of the Zionist state in Palestine and of the apartheid regime in South Africa. We uphold the same principles in every struggle against imperialism.

The RCP believes that the fight against oppression is central to the construction of an independent working class movement. Hence the RCP is wholeheartedly committed to the fight against racism and for the emancipation of women. We unreservedly oppose any form of discrimination against lesbians and gays and call for the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Workers must take a stand on these issues, not out of altruism, but because it is in our class interests to fight for the fullest extension of democratic rights.

Workers need combat organisations capable of defending our interests. The existing organisations of the labour movement are singularly unsuited to this task. The Labour Party is a bosses' organisation; despite its working class constituency it has always followed the dictates of the capitalists. The RCP is against giving any electoral support to Labour. Workers need a party that is 100 per cent our own and only responsive to proletarian interests.

The existing trade unions are heavily bureaucratised and incapable of representing the aspirations of their members. The RCP argues that rank and file trade unionists should fight to take control of the movement. Trade unionists should organise across the workplace and industry and demand that we run our own affairs.

The RCP's aim is social revolution in Britain and internationally. This revolution will be carried out by the working class regardless of the abilities of communists. But whether the revolution can succeed depends upon the presence of organised communists able to give conscious direction to events. The aim of the RCP is to create a revolutionary party which can endow the class struggle with conscious direction.

SOVIET UNION

STILL FROZEN OUT

Underlying Soviet unease over the pace of German reunification, argues Rob Knight, is its fear of being left out in the cold in the new world order

The Soviet Union has become increasingly nervous about the momentous changes taking place in the world order. In particular Moscow is worried that the reorganisation of the balance of power in Europe around a united Germany will leave the Soviet Union in an isolated and weakened position. These fears have led the Kremlin to drag its feet over the question of a united Germany's membership of Nato. Moscow does not object in principle to Germany joining Nato; it is worried, however, that once this issue is settled the Soviet Union will effectively be excluded from the new arrangements.

Soviet insecurity has led to an unprecedented degree of public intervention by the military at home. The military has organised a high-profile campaign to slow down the pace of arms reductions and concessions to the West. Some Western commentators have even claimed that the Soviet army threatened a mutiny earlier this year. While there is no hard evidence to support this, it is certainly true that the military has become increasingly critical of the Soviet leadership.

The Soviet armed forces have suffered a major loss of status as a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's reform programme. A key part of the economic reform programme has been the transfer of resources from the military to the consumer goods sector. Gorbachev plans to cut defence spending by eight per cent, demobilise large numbers of soldiers and replace the conscript army with a volunteer army.

The explosion of ethnic conflicts in the Soviet Union has also destabilised an army which is drawn from all the republics.

However, the climate of doubt and fear which characterises current Soviet thinking goes well beyond simply the unease of the military. Foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze's recent appeal to the West to allay Soviet fears about the consequences of German reunification showed that the whole of the Soviet bureaucracy shares these worries.

Instability

To understand the fears of the Stalinist leadership we need to look at the central objectives of Soviet foreign policy over the eighties—and why they have failed. Ever since Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the Kremlin leadership has sought to transform the Soviet Union's relationship with the West in order to gain international support for the domestic reform process. Soviet policy-makers hoped that an end to the Cold War would persuade the West to provide the aid and investment needed to see through the market-oriented reforms. In an attempt to realise this objective Gorbachev has announced a series of arms reduction initiatives, withdrawn the Red Army from Afghanistan, loosened its grip on Eastern Europe and abandoned even token support for anti-Western liberation movements in the third world.

By making concessions abroad and introducing the market at home, Moscow hoped that the Soviet Union would find a place in the leading circles of world power. In particular the Soviet Union hoped that it would be included in international political and financial arrangements such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the Inter-

national Monetary Fund. Some Soviet leaders even talked about joining Nato.

The bureaucrats' strategy, however, has run into trouble. The domestic reform programme has got bogged down and is running far behind that of other East European countries. It is increasingly clear that reform has accelerated the fragmentation of the Soviet Union.

The future of the Soviet Union depends more than ever on the West. The Western powers want to see a transition to capitalism in the Soviet Union. However, Gorbachev's attempts to court Western favour have failed to turn into hard cash. Even in East European countries such as Poland which have gone much

further than the Soviet Union in introducing the market, Western businessmen are not rushing in to provide investment. In the Soviet Union, Western capitalists are on the whole unimpressed by the economic reforms introduced so far and remain wary of the instability that they might entail. A recent comment from the Institute of International Finance that 'private investors are not in the business of conducting foreign policy', suggests that foreign capitalists are more interested in evidence of economic stability than in Gorbachev's moves towards warmer relations with the West.

At the same time differences among Western powers are proving to be a barrier to a coherent Western policy towards the Soviet Union.

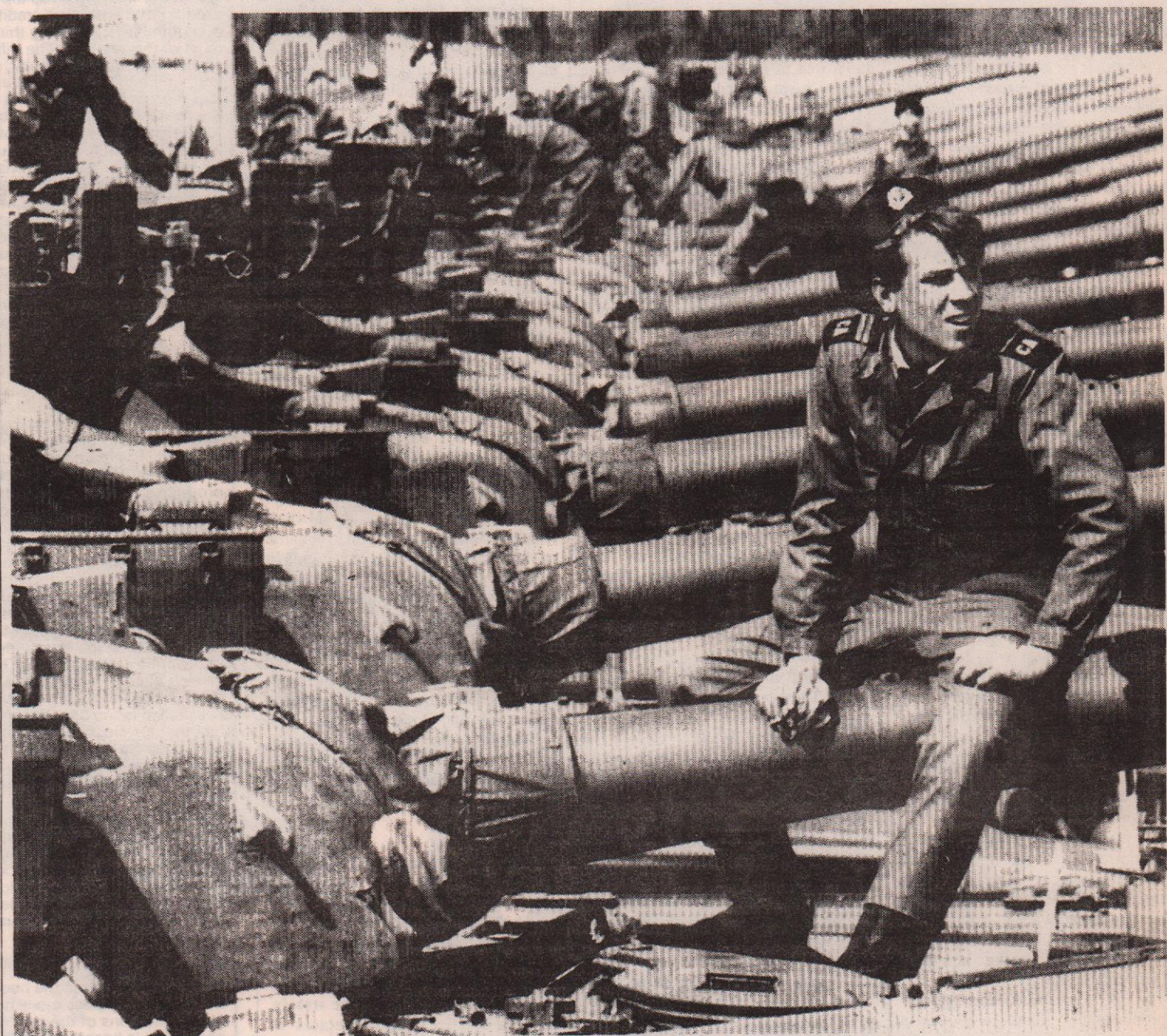
The reconstruction of the world order is having a differential impact on the imperialist powers. Germany has the most to gain from rapid change, the USA the least. At the moment most of the diplomatic manoeuvring among Western powers is focused upon trying to avoid any major dislocation of power relations as a result of German reunification. The future of Nato, the question of arms reduction and the status of Germany are the issues preoccupying the policy-makers. The US government has been making strenuous efforts to establish a new special relationship with Germany in the hope of maintaining the essential features of the post-war order established by America. This has meant that so far Washington

has reluctantly gone along with the fast pace of change. But if things do get out of control, then we cannot rule out the possibility of a rupture between Washington and Bonn.

For the moment neither Washington nor Bonn seems prepared to heed Moscow's appeal to slow down moves towards German reunification. However there is a real fear in the West that instability in the Soviet Union could get out of hand. The Western powers are caught between a recognition of the dangers facing the Soviet Union and a desire to push ahead with the changes regardless. The recent disagreements between West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who seemed willing to compromise on the question of delaying German membership of Nato, and West German president Helmut Kohl, who was not, were an expression of this conflict in Western thinking.

The chances of the Soviet Union achieving a successful transition to a capitalist economy and emerging as a leading player on the international scene look increasingly fraught.

A more likely prospect is that of a Russian state shorn of its peripheral republics, starved of Western investment and pushed to the edge of a new German-dominated Europe. The bleak future facing the Soviet Union as it moves towards a market economy exposes the myth that capitalism is a vehicle for progress.



Facing an uncertain future: the Soviet tanks have come home, but the Soviet Union is still out in the cold

EUROPEAN MONETARY SYSTEM

A MECHANISM FOR ELECTORAL SUCCESS?

Unemployment is rising, investment is falling, inflation is reaching double figures and chaos reigns in the housing and retail sectors. Yet according to the Tories a life-saving initiative is at hand. It is known as the exchange rate mechanism (ERM) of the European Monetary System.

Rumours abound as to when the government intends to place the pound inside the mechanism. It might be 1 July; or November; or maybe sometime early next year. No one knows. But chancellor John Major, in an attempt to play up the significance of such a move, told the *Wall Street Journal* that 'anybody who thinks we're playing with this as a gesture is wrong'. His comment seemed to impress. The stock market jumped more than 60 points and the pound rose in the currency markets, as financial circles became convinced that the Tories were about

to firm up the anti-inflationary policy. The *Financial Times* paid a further tribute to the power of the ERM, stating that the 'timing of entry is just as important a political event as a financial one, and will probably determine whether the current UK government can win re-election' (21 May).

Can a commitment to fixing the value of the pound against a basket of other European currencies provide a basis for dragging the British economy out of crisis and win the Tories the next election? Entry into the ERM is not designed to resolve any of the real problems of the British economy such as low investment, low productivity or an outdated industrial base. It is simply aimed at bolstering the impression that the government is in control and able to get to grips with the problems. The economic rationale behind entry into the ERM is to convince

the financial markets that the government is firmly committed to maintaining a strong pound as a bulwark against inflation. The assumption is that if the markets are reassured they are less likely to test the government's resolve by abandoning the pound. The government would therefore face less pressure to protect the pound through high interest rates.

The *London Evening Standard* provided an insight into how entry into the ERM might be of help to the government: 'It means that European central bankers will move in to keep sterling stable.' In other words entry into the ERM is not a genuine sign of the Tories' ability to get to grips with the economic crisis; it may merely persuade other Europeans of the need to help out the British in order to ensure the stability of the entire exchange rate system.

The potential political advantages of joining the

ERM are more real. The Conservatives have been under pressure for some time from British capitalists to join the ERM. Entry into the exchange rate mechanism would resolve some of the tensions within establishment circles and thus ease the path to the next election.

The euphoria around the indications that Britain will join the ERM is largely founded on the belief that it will give the Tories some scope to bring interest rates down a few points, thereby giving themselves a fighting chance at the next election. It has nothing to do with their ability to provide solutions to the fundamental economic problems.

Tony Kennedy

AFTER THE IRA BOMBS

WINNING THE PROPAGANDA WAR

The success of the latest IRA military campaign in Britain has provided the cue for a new propaganda war against the Irish liberation struggle. The response of the media to the successful bombings of a military educational institute in Eltham and an army recruitment centre in Wembley has been to portray the IRA as a bunch of psychopathic criminals who resort to attacking 'soft' targets.

According to the media every one of us is a potential target for the bombers. 'Crawl under your car for a bomb check' was the advice from the *Sun*. The arrest of a man in Tottenham on Tuesday morning, after what was described as a 'high speed car chase', and the discovery of weapons in his car, was milked for all its propaganda value. Police spokesmen have orchestrated a witch-hunt against the Irish community, announcing a nationwide search for a 'red cat'—seen apparently both in Eltham and in Tottenham—and asking the public to report any suspicious movements, especially of Irish people.

Criminalisation

The media campaign is aimed at maintaining the isolation of the liberation struggle from popular opinion in Britain and at keeping intact the consensus behind Britain's occupation of Ireland that has existed in this country throughout the past 20 years. The targeting of the Irish community shows the need for British revolutionaries to stand up for the rights of Irish people. It also shows the importance of mobilising for the Irish Freedom Movement's anti-internment commemoration march in August. Through building for the demonstration we can begin to crack the propaganda wall that the authorities have built to isolate the struggle for Irish freedom.

Every time the IRA scores a military success, particularly in Britain, the authorities wheel out their propaganda machine. The aim is to portray Irish freedom fighters as hoodlums and psychopaths and the liberation struggle as a criminal conspiracy. In fact the IRA is waging a war of national liberation against the forces of the British state which divided the Irish nation and has denied its people the right to self-determination. Far from seeking out 'soft' targets, the IRA has sustained that struggle in the most difficult of circumstances and against the greatest of odds.

For 20 years the British state has required the presence of more than 30 000 heavily armed troops and local paramilitary police to enforce its occupation of the Six Counties of Ireland against the few hundred volunteers of the Irish Republican Army.

In areas such as South Armagh the British Army dares only move by helicopter for fear of attack. The vast military machine of the British state cannot defeat the republican struggle because the IRA enjoys the support of the nationalist community. For

Irish nationalists, the IRA is the legitimate representative of their aspirations for freedom. Nationalist experience of colonial oppression means they will never consent to having British soldiers walk their streets. It means too that so long as British troops remain in Ireland, the Irish people will continue the struggle for freedom.

Not only does the IRA engage the British forces of occupation in Ireland, it has also taken the war to Britain itself. The bombings in Eltham and Wembley were a legitimate part of that struggle. Far from it being a cowardly attack it took great courage and determination to bring the war to the heart of the oppressor nation. There is no such thing as a 'soft' military target. For a start every member of the IRA active service units has to survive the most intense surveillance and security operations mounted by the British authorities. Ports and airports are under round-the-clock scrutiny. The Irish community is under constant surveillance. Irish people face continual harassment and arrest. All military establishments are guarded day and night. It is a testament to the courage and determination of the liberation struggle that the IRA still manages to carry out its attacks on British targets.

While the British state has signally failed to defeat the liberation struggle it has scored one notable success—it has won the propaganda war at home.

Whereas in Ireland no one is in any doubt that they live in a war zone, in this country the authorities have managed to hide the truth about Britain's colonial war. The government has isolated the liberation struggle and managed to prevent the creation of an effective solidarity movement in Britain.

At the heart of the propaganda war at home is the strategy of criminalisation. The Prevention of Terrorism Act—rushed through parliament in the wake of the Birmingham pub bombings in November 1974—targets every Irish person in this country as a potential terrorist. The PTA has been the cutting edge of the criminalisation strategy and the government's main weapon in prosecuting the Irish War in Britain. The cases of the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and the Maguire family, whose convictions for the possession of explosives are now the subject of a judicial inquiry, show how any Irish person in this country is liable to be arrested, framed and imprisoned.

The establishment has got away with criminalising the Irish community because the left in Britain has never challenged the lie that the liberation struggle is really a criminal conspiracy.

Throughout the war the British left has failed to provide solidarity with the Irish struggle. Every time the IRA has launched a bombing campaign in Britain, leaders of the labour movement and left-

wing organisations have queued up to condemn the attacks as barbaric and criminal. The latest such condemnation has come from Paul Boateng, the Labour MP for Brent South and a former member of black sections. According to Boateng, the IRA bombings were an attack on 'our community'.

The Irish Freedom Movement aims to break the wall of silence that surrounds Britain's colonial war in Ireland. We recognise that it is in the interest of British workers to take sides with the Irish people. The British state which oppresses the Irish people is the same state which exploits British workers and imposes cuts, redundancies and austerity measures at home. The struggle for Irish freedom, on the other hand, by posing the gravest threat to the British state, is our greatest ally in our struggle to better our own lives. British workers should wholeheartedly support the Irish people's aspirations for freedom.

The Irish Freedom Movement's demonstration in August is the centrepiece of the IFM's annual calendar. It commemorates the introduction of internment without trial in Ireland in August 1971. Over the years it has become the most important event in the Irish solidarity calendar and a key weapon in our fight to demolish the British state's propaganda wall.

Last year more than 2000 people marched through the streets of north London behind a republican flute band to spread the message of Irish freedom. This year we want to make sure that the August demonstration is even bigger and better. To do that we need your support. We need sponsorship from trade union branches and community organisations, money to finance the march and help with organising it. If you want to help win the propaganda war in Britain, phone the IFM on (071) 375 1485, or write to IFM, BM IFM, London WC1N 3XX.



Thousands marched for Irish freedom on last year's anti-internment demonstration

troops out now
Irish Freedom Movement
now
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

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

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

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

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the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 25 May 1990 • No 17 • 50p

The murder last Sunday of seven Palestinian workers by an Israeli gunman dressed in army fatigues has set Palestine ablaze. Ami Popper fired his Galil assault rifle at point-blank range at a group of workers just outside the town of Rishon LeZion near Tel Aviv. Within hours Palestinian anger exploded on the streets of Gaza and the West Bank. Armed with only stones and bottles Palestinian youth defied a curfew and took on the military might of the Israeli army.

The protests were not confined to the Gaza Strip or the West Bank. Riots broke out in the normally quiet town of Nazareth, which lies within the pre-1967 borders of Israel; thousands of young Palestinians took to the streets to show their solidarity with those in Gaza and on the West Bank. Throughout the region Palestinians began a three-day general strike.

Israeli leaders were quick to condemn the murders and to dismiss Popper as a 'deranged killer'. Popper may well have been mad, but his actions were the product of a society in which the murder, torture and harassment of Palestinians is a way of life. Since the killings on Sunday morning, Israeli soldiers have shot dead at least 12 Palestinians. More than 800 have been killed, and tens of thousands injured, during the course of the *intifada*, or uprising, against the Israeli occupying forces which began in December 1987. Palestinians are routinely beaten and tortured, and face mass arrests and curfews. The Israeli army regularly demolishes Palestinian houses as punishment for taking part in the *intifada*.

The very existence of the state of Israel depends on the systematic oppression of the Palestinian people. The Zionist state was established in 1948 through the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homeland, scattering them throughout the Arab world and beyond. The Israeli authorities institutionalised the oppression of the Palestinians who remained within its borders, systematically restricting the right even to own land.

The survival of the Zionist state has meant not just the oppression of the Palestinian people but conflict and war throughout the region. The territories of Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights were captured by Israeli troops during the course of the Six Day War in 1967. Since the late sixties Israel has consistently intervened militarily in Lebanon helping to unleash the brutal civil war that today racks the country.

The Palestinian people have shown enormous courage and determination in resisting the Zionist state. For two and half years the *intifada* has challenged the might of an Israeli army equipped with machine guns, tanks and helicopters. The spread of the uprising to towns such as Nazareth would be a tremendous blow to the Israeli authorities.

But while the Palestinian people have shown great courage and heroism, the established Palestinian leadership has been craven in its response to Israeli oppression. After the killings on Sunday, Yassir Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, called on the United Nations to send a 'peace force' to the West Bank and Gaza. Faisal Husseini, the PLO's de facto representative on the West Bank, and 50 other notables went on hunger-strike to demand UN intervention.

VICTORY TO THE PALESTINIANS!

Many people have attributed the murder of seven Palestinians in Israel last Sunday to the actions of a mad gunman; in fact it was the product of a society built on the oppression of the Palestinian people



Israeli oppression breeds Palestinian resistance

The call for UN intervention is consistent with PLO policy over the last few years. But the UN is responsible for maintaining the oppression of the Palestinians. It is not a force for their liberation.

The PLO has increasingly looked to the West to constrain Israeli actions and to further Palestinian rights. To win Western favour, the PLO has recognised the legitimacy of the state of Israel. Rather than calling for the destruction of Israel and the creation of a Palestinian state, the PLO now accepts that there should be two states—one for Zionists and the other a mini Palestinian

state. The PLO has downplayed resistance and relied instead on Western diplomacy to advance the Palestinian cause.

This approach is both misguided and dangerous. The Western powers are not a force to bring about the liberation of Palestine. The imperialists were responsible for creating the state of Israel in the first place. For over 40 years the West, and in particular the USA, has backed the Zionist state with financial and military aid. Israel plays an invaluable role for the West in policing the region on behalf of the imperialists. The intervention of the UN 'peace-keeping' force in Lebanon

served simply as a cover for Israeli and Western interference.

The Palestinian people will never be free so long as the state of Israel remains. As the events of the past week have shown the very existence of the Zionist state is predicated on the oppression of the Palestinian people. No amount of Western diplomacy or appeals for UN intervention will further the cause of the Palestinians. The only way the Palestinian people can achieve their legitimate aspirations for freedom is by taking matters into their own hands and destroying the Zionist state that is responsible for their oppression.