

# PANIC SENDS CITY CRASHING

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see pages 10 and 11

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly

23 October 1987

40p

## ACTION AGAINST APARTHEID

# SOLIDARITY NOT SANCTIONS

◆ SINCE the beginning of the current state of emergency in June 1986 the South African ruling class has attempted to crush the resistance of the black working class. Yet resistance against the apartheid regime still rages on.

Over the past 18 months more than 30 000 people have been subjected to detention and interrogation. In recent weeks the authorities have increased their arrests of ANC

guerrillas and stepped up the wave of vigilante assassinations of community activists. They have banned political

activity on college campuses and announced new measures of press censorship. The Botha regime plans to introduce a new labour Bill to enforce a compulsory cooling-off before workers can take strike action.

Yet the Pretoria government has failed to suppress the revolt of the black working class. In the first seven months of 1987

some 332 strikes took place, affecting virtually every industry from the gold mines to the post office. Up to the end of August the number of days lost through industrial action stood at a

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record of more than five million — the total for the whole of 1986 was 1.3 million.

The courage and militancy of the black workers of South Africa stand in marked contrast to the stagnation of the anti-apartheid movement in the West. For the past two years the sanctions campaign has reduced anti-apartheid activists to the role of lobbying governments and big businessmen. Others can only sit back and observe the process of international diplomacy. But experience has shown that the Western beneficiaries of apartheid will never take action against it.

For those not already convinced, last week's Commonwealth conference must have finally confirmed that the sanctions campaign is a dead end. Waiting for Thatcher and the rest to take action against their good friend PW Botha has demobilised and demoralised many people in Britain who are eager to take action in solidarity with the struggle in South Africa.

The only way that people in Britain can help the black workers of South Africa is by taking direct action against the backers of apartheid in Britain — the British state and the British capitalist class. The more we weaken the British bulwark of apartheid the easier it will be for the workers of South Africa to prevail in their struggle against the Botha regime.



## Josephine and Peter must stay!

JOSEPHINE YIRENKYI lives in West London with her son Peter. The home office wants to kick them out of Britain because they are black. But immigration police now face determined opposition from local people. Last week they lobbied Hounslow council and set up a series of campaigning meetings across West London. 'I am fighting for everyone threatened with deportation, and for the right of everyone to choose where they live and work,' says Josephine.

Hear Josephine speak at 7.30pm on 29 October at the Emerald Centre, 263 Hammersmith Road, London (Hammersmith tube)

## REAGAN STRIKES AGAINST IRAN

# GET OUT OF THE GULF!

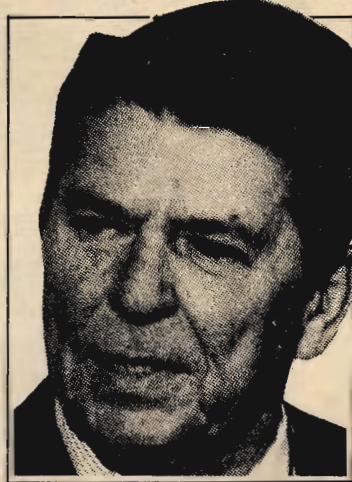


On Monday afternoon four US destroyers in the Gulf blasted an Iranian oil rig with 1000 shells, days after an Iranian attack on a Kuwaiti tanker flying the Stars and Stripes. This calculated act of American aggression is the latest in a series of provocations against Iranian targets in the Gulf.

Confirming the destruction of the oil rig from the office in the Pentagon, US defence secretary Caspar Weinberger stated that America was determined to show

that Iran would not get away with 'unprovoked attacks' on 'neutral shipping'. In fact the Iranian attack was anything but 'unprovoked'. It was a response to last week's assault by US helicopter gunships on three Iranian speedboats. And Weinberger's pompous declarations about defending the concept of neutrality are sheer hypocrisy: the USA has sent its mighty armada to the Gulf, not to honour the rules of neutrality, but to safeguard imperialist interests. There is nothing neutral about American gunboats protecting Iraqi shipping and turning a blind eye to Iraqi attacks on Iranian targets.

No doubt Western commentators will welcome this daring assault on a lethal Iranian oil rig as an act of great bravery. But so far Reagan has held back from mounting a major offensive against Iran for fear of unleashing a full-blooded backlash. Weinberger was careful to point out that US officials had given Iran repeated warnings of the impending attack on the oil rig, and that he was not seeking further retaliation. America's rulers are aware that Iran is different from their past pushovers. As US power has waned Reagan has tried to



boost his macho image by playing the big bully with easy pickings such as tiny Grenada. But Iran is a much wealthier and more populous adversary to contend with. A serious strike by US forces could trigger retaliation right across the Middle East.

As the West's warlords pile the pressure on Iran we should take sides with the peoples of the Middle East in demanding that the US warships, and their British, French and Italian backers, get out of the Gulf.

## Storm clouds over the City

It would have taken a miracle to stop the London stock market falling in sympathy with New York's Wall Street crash this week. As it turned out even the worst storm in 200 years could only delay the slump for 72 hours. After spending the weekend pulling trees off their porches, London's stockbrokers struggled into work on Monday and plunged into the chaos of falling share prices. Within hours more than 13 per cent was wiped off share prices. Panic spread among the big banking houses at the prospect of the five-year 'bull' market coming to an end.

Whether these fears are well-founded, or whether this is just a temporary setback along the road to new stock market highs, is not

the issue. The real significance of the wild movements in share prices in recent years is that they show there is precious little productive investment taking place. With profit levels too low to justify buying new machinery and plant, capitalists have poured their spare cash into all sorts of speculative and financial ventures. Stock markets around the world have been the main beneficiary. Companies' share prices have soared out of all relation to the real value of company assets.

Usually this does not worry the investors too much: they are interested in making a quick killing, relying on demand from other investors to push up the value of their share-holdings. But once confidence of further price

increases wanes — for whatever reason — panic-selling can quickly set in. The immediate cause of the loss of confidence on Wall Street was more bad news about the US economy: another poor set of trade figures. Renewed tension between America and West Germany over international currency levels added to the air of panic, and the markets began their plummet.

In this sense the panic reflects the real instability at the heart of the profit system. If a few more fat-cat speculators have had their fingers burned, all to the good. But it is up to us to build a movement that can bring their system down altogether.

Phil Murphy

## Immigration crackdown

THE Tories are out to brand immigrants as outlaws and boost public prejudice against blacks.

- Announcing his decision to appeal to the house of lords against last week's appeal court decision in favour of six asylum-seeking Tamils, home secretary Douglas Hurd claimed that 'very large numbers of footloose people are claiming refugee status as a way of getting round the immigration control.' He added that 'genuine fear of persecution' does not merit refugee status, and called for a tighter 'objective' definition.
- On the eve of the Turkey vs England football match played

at Wembley last week, more than 140 Turkish fans were detained at Heathrow on suspicion of being 'illegal immigrants'. Immigration police devised a soccer quiz to separate 'genuine fans' from those they claimed were trying to dodge Britain's immigration laws. Turkish visitors who failed the test found themselves on the next flight back to Istanbul.

- The home office unveiled a computerised passport last week. Scheduled for introduction in July 1988, the burgundy-coloured passports will be impregnated with a computer code which can be 'read' by immigration police, and checked against a

computerised blacklist of 'illegals'.

- A new report by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants shows that tighter immigration rules are taking effect. Since the introduction of the visa-only entry system for visitors from West Africa and the Indian subcontinent, the entry refusal rate has doubled. Ghanaians have been worst affected, followed by Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

The mounting propaganda offensive against blacks and immigrants underlines the urgency of building an anti-racist movement that can defend their rights.

## Tamils face waves of racism

Everyone rushed out of their cabins shouting "Why is the ferry moving? Are we on our way back to Sri Lanka?" The boat was heaving, packets of cornflakes were falling off the shelves, and we didn't know if we would live to tell the tale. Raju is one of 36 Tamil refugees who were on board the *Earl William* prison hulk early last Friday morning when hurricane-force winds hit the ship, broke its moorings in Harwich harbour, and blew the vessel out to sea.

The *Earl William* was cast adrift shortly after 3am. When it started moving the guards on board herded the refugees into the recreation lounge and told them to stay put. They were just as scared as the refugees, but at least they knew what was happening. The refugees had no idea what was going on until about 5am, when one of the guards announced that the *Earl William* had drifted about 500 yards before running aground on a sandbank.

On Friday afternoon, the head of immigration gave permission for the Tamil refugees to be taken off the *Earl William* into the care of the Tamil community. Members of the Tamil Action Committee hired a coach and drove through the night to Harwich. They were anxious to get the refugees off the ship before the home office changed its mind. At about 4.30am, the refugees were allowed to come ashore.

The waves of the North Sea forced home secretary Douglas Hurd to give the go-ahead to release the Tamils, only days after he had ignored an appeal court recommendation to free the prisoners. But Raju, who has been held in several detention centres including the *Earl William*, knows that the home office could call him back into custody at any time. 'I have suffered too much already,' he said, 'but cruel hands are never still.' In court next month the home office will seek to gain the law lords' permission for the mass deportation of refugees.

Andrew Calcutt

## Police cover up racist murder

JAMAICAN-BORN Thomas Lee died in a Hackney hospital last week, after four racists ambushed him and beat him up only yards from his home in Stoke Newington, North London.

Lee's attackers were in their teens and early twenties. They were chased off by passer-by Mehemet Maurice, but not before they had kicked the life out of Lee. Doctors put Lee on a life support system, but he never regained consciousness.

Hackney police did not want to admit it was a racist murder. 'You can draw what conclusions you like from the fact that he was black and his attackers were white,' said police chief Roger Stoodley. In Thatcher's Britain racist thugs can murder a 52-year-old black man in cold blood, and the police will call it a casual killing.



## ABORTION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

ACCORDING to a *Guardian* Marplan survey published last week nearly two thirds of women now favour some reduction in the time-limit for abortions along the lines proposed by David Alton's Bill. Most men also approve tighter restrictions and so do most supporters of all the major parties. Alton has made clear his willingness to accept some compromise on his 18-week limit on strictly medical grounds, such as in cases where it is clear that the pregnancy would result in a severely handicapped baby. It now seems likely that new legislative curbs on abortion rights will be in force within 12 months.

Everybody agrees that late abortions are unpleasant for everybody concerned, and particularly traumatic for women. Reducing the limit from 28 weeks to 18 would prevent three per cent of all abortions. An amendment to allow late abortion on grounds of fetal abnormality would remove the major objection to Alton's Bill. Why then are we so implacably opposed to Alton?

Control over pregnancy lies at the heart of the position of women in society. Women today not only bear children, but also the burden of the responsibility of caring for them from birth into adulthood. Women in the home combine the tasks of nursery worker, playgroup leader, nurse, teacher, cook, cleaner and housekeeper.

As a result of their family commitments women are forced to accept an inferior position in the world of work and in society generally. Despite the much-vaunted success of a few women in business and the professions, the vast majority of women are confined to poorly paid jobs, with little responsibility and little prospects. Britain's first woman prime minister has just won her third election victory, but there is no other woman in her cabinet and only one in the shadow cabinet. The fact that there are still only 41 women MPs out of a total of 650 reflects the marginal participation of women in British politics.

At our present level of science and technology women's role in childbearing is a biological necessity. But their inferiority in the family, the workplace and political life results not from nature but from the way that the capitalist system is organised. The system thrives on women's

unpaid work in the home and their low-paid work in industry and services. It benefits too by isolating women from the wider society in the home, and by atomising the working class into inward-looking family units.

Over the past decade women have fallen even further behind. Cuts in welfare services and the drive towards 'community care' for the elderly, the disabled, the sick, the mentally ill and mentally handicapped have increased the burden on women in the home. While more women are going out to work, nearly half work part-time — and their pay levels have stagnated while full-timers have won higher wages. A recent union survey calculates that job discrimination loses women workers a total of £15 billion a year.

Propaganda plays an important part in persuading women to accept their place as second class citizens. With their features on the family life of the Princess of Wales and their criticisms of the childlessness of the Duchess of York, the tabloid press celebrate women's role in childbearing. The media blame deficient motherhood for every social evil from football hooliganism to the Hungerford massacre. A central theme in moral panics about Aids and child abuse is the virtue of family life.

The campaign against abortion fits into the wider drive to promote conventional family values and to restrict women's rights accordingly. The fact that Alton has succeeded in winning widespread support for his Bill after so many earlier attempts have failed indicates how far the climate of opinion has shifted (see page 13). The fact that his support cuts across party and class divisions reveals the scope for this campaign to forge a new consensus around reactionary morality. Such a consensus would not only be bad news for women, it would deepen division and confusion in the working class as a whole.

We are opposed to Alton because we regard the right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy as vital to women. Abortion is an extension of contraceptive facilities to allow women to avoid or reduce the burden of childcare. This is essential to enable women to extend their involvement in work and politics and thus to strengthen their capacity to organise against the system

and fight against their oppression. The demand for free abortion is vital to extend the democratic rights of women and to advance the overall interests of the working class.

We do not go along with those who attempt to justify late abortions on the grounds that society needs to curb the fertility of women who are unable or unwilling to use contraceptives. In last week's *Observer*, for example, a feature opposing Alton opened with a detailed account of a pregnancy discovered at 20 weeks in a 12-year old girl, whose mother was 'working as a prostitute while her father was in prison'. The girl revealed that she 'had been raped by a 19 year old boy who she lived, by a man smelling of alcohol'. The complete child of the lumpenproletariat is used to appeal partly to liberal

sympathy, but also to middle class prejudice and concern about the social cost of allowing such pregnancies to proceed to full term.

Radical gynaecologist Wendy Savage endorses the *Observer's* approach, blending patronising liberalism with traditional neo-Malthusian justifications for birth control. She declares that 'it is always the most deprived women, usually with housing problems or of low intelligence, who are involved'. For us abortion is not a question of philanthropy towards the lowest of the lower orders or one of protecting respectable society from their alleged ignorance or irresponsibility. Abortion is a question of the rights of women and the working class and of our capacity to organise against our oppression.

Nor is abortion a question of individual choice. Liz Barker, a leading Liberal Party opponent of Alton's Bill, told a meeting at the recent party conference that she defended David Alton's right to choose, but in this circumstance his exercise of choice will cause misery to thousands of women. This tortuous argument brings out the absurdity of reducing a matter of democratic rights to one of individual choice. Women, especially working class women, need access to abortion because it is only by exercising control over pregnancy that we can begin to act together against the system that ties us to the family, exploits us at work and degrades us in every sphere of our existence.

## DEFEATING THE TORY POLL TAX LABOUR LEAVES IT TO TORY WETS...

At a press conference last week to publicise Labour's campaign against the poll tax, Donald Dewar, the party's Scottish spokesman, told Tory backbenchers it was up to them to stop it. 'We called this press conference because we saw it as the only way of giving the Tory voice against the poll tax. The "gagging" of anti-poll tax Tories was Dewar's starting point. He went on to suggest that a Labour-led campaign could give the backbenchers a voice, 'by getting them back on their feet where Tory backbenchers express their doubts openly'.



DONALD DEWAR

The Tory conference was supposed to stifle dissent. But Labour's Brighton bash was hardly a forum for open debate. When a Glasgow delegate went to the room to complain that the leadership's policy on the poll tax was being railroaded through conference, chair Syd Tierney called for a steward 'to take him off the platform'. The Tory hierarchy is determined to clamp down on dissent, the opponents of the poll tax. There is the voice which Labour wants to amplify. But the Labour leadership is equally determined to 'gag' the voice of working class anger.

Dewar said Labour was planning a campaign of 'responsible opposition' to the poll tax. This means making the most of every opportunity and taking up with respectable anti-poll tax figures

like CBI director John Birt. Labour hopes that by lining up with businessmen and backbenchers it can force the Tories to give way. Keeping the campaign 'respectable' also means stamping out working class anger to sabotage the scheme. Dewar said last week's media event to condemn non-cooperation with poll tax procedures as 'irresponsible' and 'subversive'.

Tory wets like Edward Heath and British bosses like John Birt might make Labour's opposition to the poll tax meet the criteria of middle class respectability. But a campaign which limits the support of such anti-establishment figures and which rules out direct action against the poll tax is one that people who will bear the brunt of the Tory tax.

## ...The real campaign starts here

Three principles guided the launch of the Smash the Poll Tax Campaign in Glasgow last Saturday.

### • Break the Tory law

The campaign must first and foremost its refusal to comply with the 'Tory law'. Neil, from the Glasgow branch of the Educational Institute of Scotland, summed up the sentiments of trade union and community delegates at the meeting when he pointed out that Labour councils in Scotland are leaving us in the lurch by complying with legal obligations to set up the machinery for collecting the poll tax. The meeting agreed that a commitment to break the Tory law must be the starting point for effective opposition to the poll tax.

### • A working class campaign

The meeting agreed on the necessity for working class action in opposition to a broad-based pressure group. This does not mean restricting ourselves to official labour movement channels. Indeed many shop stewards told the meeting of the difficulties they faced in organising effective action: one GMB steward said he was asked to step down by officials when they learned he was to attend

the meeting. Everybody agreed that we have to get the issue discussed in workplaces, but we also need to involve community groups, the unemployed, and housewives.

### • United action by council workers and the community

We need to build links between council workers who are being asked to implement the poll tax procedures and working class people who will be penalised by the tax. A campaign that wins support for both non-implementation and non-payment could resist threats of victimisation and would be in a powerful position to make the poll tax system inoperable.

The meeting decided to produce an action pack, which will include essential information on the poll tax, motions for trade unions, tenants associations and other groups, as well as listing the principles of the campaign. If you agree with these three principles and want to get involved, come to the next meeting of the Smash the Poll Tax Campaign at 2.30pm on Saturday 14 November in Room 1, Partick Hall, Burgh Hall Street, Glasgow 11.

Fran Donald

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The alleged shady dealings of Guinness boss Ernest Saunders are standard practice in London's Square Mile, argues  
**Tony Kennedy**

**'T**his is just the start' said Fraud Squad officer Richard Botwright last week after the arrests of Gerald Ronson, head of the Heron Group, and the merchant banker Roger Seelig over their part in the Guinness affair. The Tories say their Financial Services Act, which comes into operation in the City next year, aims to target the 'tiny minority of less than honest practitioners' such as Ronson and Seelig. But recent revelations of widespread corruption give the lie to the Tory myth about a few crooks spoiling the good name of Britain's honest brokers.

So far five people have been arrested in connection with the Guinness scandal. They are the former chairman Ernest Saunders, now in a Swiss clinic after being charged with 37 new offences last week; the 71-year old businessman Sir Jack Lyons; the stockbroker Tony Parnes, in jail in California pending extradition proceedings; and Ronson and Seelig. The Fraud Squad is now preparing to make further arrests. There are plans to interview Ivan Boesky, the Wall Street arbitrage expert convicted in New York of running an insider-trading ring, and Oliver Roux, Guinness's former financial director.

## CORRUPTION

The Guinness takeover of drinks giant Distillers in May 1987 has become the focus of a top-level investigation into City corruption. Half a dozen City institutions, as well as companies based in Switzerland, Austria, and the USA, were involved in Guinness' elaborately planned raid on Distillers. But the Guinness set are not the only ones who got their hands dirty on the stock market. In June Geoffrey Collier, employee of eminent merchant bankers Morgan Grenfell, was tried for insider dealing. Tory MP Keith Best was charged with making multiple share applications during

# SCANDAL IN THE CITY CLEAN UP CAN'T SAVE BRITISH CAPITALISM

the British Telecom sell-off. A week ago five former executives of the Alexander Howden group, a leading firm of City underwriters, were charged with fraud.

The Tories would like to dismiss the dodgy dealings in the City as the work of a handful of con men. But the truth is that they are now commonplace.

Stock market 'raiders' like Guinness, Burtons, Hanson Trust and the publishing empires of Murdoch and Maxwell now pass for British capitalist success stories. Leading capitalists can see little point in investing money in re-equipping Britain's clapped-out industries. Instead they have taken to 'empire building' through smash-and-grab bids for listed companies on the stock markets of London and Wall Street.

## UNDERHAND

Merchant banks such as Morgan Grenfell have specialised in laundering money from the raiders to potential allies in the markets. Former Guinness chairman Ernest Saunders diverted money from company coffers to Grenfell. This then found its way to clients who agreed to buy Guinness' own shares. The aim was to force up Guinness share prices and make the bid for Distillers more attractive than a rival bid from the Arrell group. Geoffrey Collier used inside information about Distillers' share price to buy shares in AE Engineering in the knowledge that prices would rise once Maxwell's planned takeover had become public.

The predatory character of the recent takeover boom has undermined the gentlemanly code of practice which helped conceal such dealings from public scrutiny in the past. Shopping rival sharks is now normal business practice as recriminations mount in the cut-throat atmosphere of the City. Nobody is shedding any tears over the fate of Collier or Seelig, who



GUINNESS BOSS ERNEST SAUNDERS (AND DAUGHTER) PROTESTS HIS INNOCENCE

are seen as separate players in the 'big game' of British capitalism.

A new prosecution with heavy on the part of Tory financials cannot, however, explain the recent boom of British capitalism. The Guinnessy set is, after all, close to Tory hearts. Paul Channon, the recently demoted former trade and industry secretary, is one of the most prominent. The revelation of illegal practices came to light nearly 12 months ago when Oliver Roux, a member of the Guinness 'war cabinet' in the Distillers sortie, fingered his colleagues to escape the law himself. Legal action was delayed because the Tories feared the consequences of a big City scandal for their election prospects.

The shame of criminal charges against leading British capitalists reflects deeper forces unleashed by Tory economic policies.

Disparaging of attempts to reform the collapse of industry, the Tories have staked everything on the City. Last year's Big Bang involved liberalising the rules governing financial practices to create a more permissive climate for profit-making. It aimed to encourage more foreign investment in the City to sustain its position as the world's number one financial centre.

A tour around the multi-million pound construction projects underway in and around the City testifies to its recent success. Financial conglomerates from

Japan, Germany and America are rushing to get a slice of the action in London. But British capitalists are being pushed out.

British merchant banks and securities firms, small fry by international standards, are rapidly becoming mere appendages of foreign conglomerates. Only six of the 26 market-makers in gilt-edged stock, the market in the trade of government bonds, are now making a profit. The imminent prospect of the British government handing out licences to allow the Japanese giants Nomura, Nikko and Daiwa to compete for trade in this arena means that British players will be edged out.

Even US banking giants such as Shearson Lehman and Saloman Brothers have cut staff levels. The dog-eat-dog conditions created by the 'globalisation' of the financial system have been even more traumatic for British capitalists. Britain is being relegated to the global third division.

## DELUSIONS

By setting themselves up as 'Corporate Raider' and 'Insider Dealer Incorporated', British capitalists have sought to preserve their delusions of grandeur at a time when their stronger rivals are setting the pace. Yet the increasingly corrupt image of British capitalism threatens to undermine the authority of its rulers. Tory policy makers have made much of the yuppie phenomenon in the City to back their boasts about a prosperous Britain. Yet they are keenly aware that the credit-backed boom cannot last.

The potential for a popular backlash when the next world recession exposes their empty boasts has spurred the Tories to go through the motions of cleaning up the City's image.

The Tories hope to use a few court cases to make a show of moderating some of the excesses in the City. But they will not push this matter far. Geoffrey Collier and Keith Best got off with slapped wrists. Even when the Fraud Squad was closing in on the Guinness clan last week, the government was retreating on a section of the Financial Services Act which would have enabled small investors to sue financial bodies for losses resulting from illegal practices. Having staked the future of British capitalism on making the City a free-for-all there can be no going back.

## UNION ACTION AGAINST RACISM

# Workers block Tory scheme

Jobcentre workers are taking action against the Tories' scheme to keep tabs on black claimants. **Claire Foster** reports

**L**AST week Jobcentre workers in London and Liverpool took a courageous stand against racism. They defied management threats of victimisation and overcame the inertia of their union leaders and refused to implement the Tories' latest scheme to check up on black claimants.

The government claims that its 'Ethnic Monitoring Traffic Survey', which is currently running at 111 selected Jobcentres, will benefit black people by monitoring the extent of discrimination in the jobs market. Their opponents in the Jobcentres reply that the level of racial discrimination is already well-documented, and that a government which has spent eight years hounding

blacks cannot be trusted with the information the survey will collect.

The Tories' scheme aims to create the framework for a two-tier benefit system with a built-in bias against black people. This was confirmed last week when the government revealed its intention of introducing new rules to check up on black people claiming state benefits. From next year DHSS workers will be required to carry out exhaustive tests on the immigration status of every black claimant.

Union activists have opposed every attempt by the Tories to turn them into part-time immigration snoopers. Last week they took the anti-racist arguments to other workers in

an effort to win wider solidarity. Fellow members of the CPSA in dole offices pledged assistance. Council workers in Lambeth and Lewisham offered their support. Unemployed campaigners from Camden, Greenwich and Tower Hamlets joined picket lines. There was a positive response to the campaign from claimants and community groups.

But rank and file workers got the cold shoulder from their union leaders. Despite its policy of opposition to 'ethnic monitoring', the CPSA leadership has done nothing to organise effective opposition to the latest scheme. 'It's been badly handled from the start' said one striker from South London. 'The union's main



ANTI-RACIST PROTEST LAST WEEK

argument is that the survey is a waste of time. It's clear that the government is putting the squeeze on black people, but the union hasn't even

mentioned the polling aspect of the scheme.'

Workers in Toxteth Jobcentre, the only office outside London to vote for strike action, have been kept in the dark about what's happening elsewhere. Pickets had to use placards left over from the pay dispute this summer because the union didn't bother to supply new material. Threats of victimisation and the fear of isolation have forced some activists to take 'sick leave' rather than admit to being on strike.

The determination of a minority of workers to take strike action in the face of these obstacles shows that it is possible to win support for action if we tackle the issue of racism head on. The fact that management has retreated from its threats of victimisation to avert an escalation of the dispute indicates that hard political arguments can only strengthen our position. The reluctance of the union officials to confront the central issue shows the urgency of building a new political leadership from the bottom up.



# FREE THE FRAMED!

A two-year campaign of state vengeance against black youth on Broadwater Farm has come to an end, but the fight to free the victims of repression goes on. **Joan Phillips reports**

Last Monday Douglas Williamson, a black youth from Tottenham, was sentenced to 30 months in prison for affray. He was the last of 69 victims of a racist conspiracy to be tried at the Old Bailey for offences connected with the anti-police violence on Broadwater Farm estate in October 1985. As the cell doors closed behind him, Williamson joined 37 others jailed — three for life — under a state-organised frame-up. The case closed a series of 62 trials, one of the longest and most publicised in British legal history. It also concluded a cruel chapter in the state's campaign to criminalise black youth.

'Douglas was "identified" from a police photo taken on the night of the riot' a friend of Williamson told *ins*. The person on the photograph was wearing a mask and was impossible to identify. But the fact that Douglas was wearing jeans and trainers on the day they picked him up was 'evidence' enough for the police. They could just as easily have picked up any youth in Tottenham. 'There's never been any evidence against him or any of the others. They just picked up youth randomly to terrorise the whole Farm.'

## TWISTED

The police arrested Williamson in February, five months after the Broadwater Farm riot. He walked into Tottenham police station in the middle of the night and ended up in a life support system. He was forced to take a drink at the station and was told 'We'll get your balls.' He went unconscious. Douglas was taken to a hospital bed handcuffed to a policeman. One of his testicles had been removed. They said that it had twisted 360 degrees, and had turned black.

When I heard the verdict I couldn't believe it. I've been really upset since. They have gotten away with labelling a friend I love as a 'riot thug'. They are out to criminalise a whole race of people. But people will never accept it. Everyone who went down has brothers and sisters and cousins. The authorities never had a hope of convincing the black community that their families and friends are criminals.

But their aim was to spread this message more widely by making examples of the people they put on trial.

Few people can now recall the incident that set in motion the chain of events which have blighted the lives of so many people in and around Broadwater Farm. On 5 October 1985 the police killed Cynthia Jarrett, a black mother of four, during a raid on her house. The next day they invaded Broadwater Farm in force to stamp on any protests against her death. They were met with bricks, bottles and petrol bombs. The police invasion led to the fiercest street-fighting ever seen in Britain, and the death of PC Keith Blakelock.

The cold-blooded killing of Cynthia Jarrett was soon forgotten as police, press and politicians vowed to avenge Blakelock's death. The police made only four arrests on the night that Blakelock died, but they made up for this in the weeks that followed. Backed by armoured cars and helicopters,



BEFORE AND AFTER: THE REAL WINSTON SILCOTT (LEFT) AND THE POLICE PORTRAIT (RIGHT)

they put the estate under siege and terrorised its inhabitants. In the week following the disturbance no less than 915 police officers ran riot through Broadwater Farm. Armed officers raided 211 households, smashed down doors with fire-bombers, and arrested 362 people. One in 36 residents were arrested, 75 per cent of them were Black.

Virtually every male between the ages of 15 and 25 was picked up by the police in an effort to criminalise the entire black community. Well over half (195) of those arrested were released without charge.

The police subjected their captives to sustained abuse to get confessions. Even the biased and bigoted Old Bailey judges had to admit that the police went too far. They held young blacks for days, blackmailing and beating them into talking about others. They put three juveniles on trial for murder using these methods, but the judge had to dismiss their 'confessions' as 'fantasy'. One youth who 'confessed' was denied a solicitor, held incommunicado, and interviewed for hours wearing only paper underpants. Secret police files, which document the abuse to which he was subjected and the police conspiracy to frame him, were found on a dump in North London this week.

## DURESS

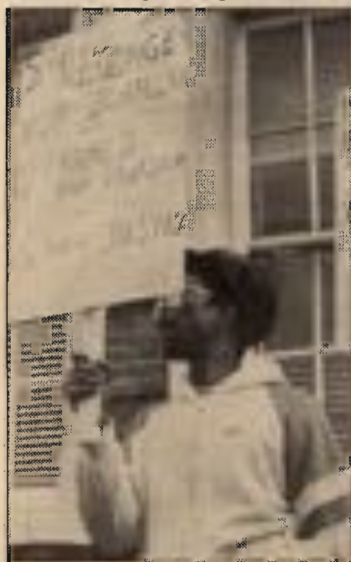
The showtrials began in July 1986, when Lester Sween, the first of 56 people charged with affray, was sentenced to five years, reduced on appeal to three and a half years. Simon MacMinn got seven years for allegedly throwing three stones and stealing two cans of coke, reduced on appeal to four and a half years. MacMinn said that he made his 'confession' under duress. There was no eye-witness or forensic evidence. Another youth who admitted identical offences received a £200 fine, after agreeing to appear as a police witness in future cases.

The judge told MacMinn he had to bear part of a 'collective responsibility' for the violence on the Farm.



Clifton Donaldson is behind prison bars for five years for throwing one stone in a defence. After police physically stopped him from protesting against the disturbances, Donaldson was struck by a stone thrown from behind police lines and threw the same stone back. He signed a 'confession' after police threatened to implicate him in the murder of Blakelock. Nicky Jacobs was sentenced to eight years for allegedly throwing bricks, after police produced blurred and out of focus photographs, and 'identified' their victim as having 'negroid features and woollen hair'. Paul Parker got seven years for affray, after being set up by a police witness, denied access to a solicitor and interviewed while drunk.

The police, the media and the courts saved their worst excesses for the 44-day Blakelock murder trial. Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip were sentenced to life in March for murder. 'They've crucified my son' said Silcott's father after the judge handed out a 30-year sentence. Silcott was said to have run through the night brandishing a machete. Yet the police produced no photographs to prove it because no photograph in the many thousands taken revealed a figure even resembling Silcott's distinctive frame. The police produced no



OLD BAILEY PROTESTER

witness to testify against him because nobody ever claimed to have seen Silcott on the estate that night. The police said that even if Silcott signed a confession because Silcott never admitted to anything.

## SCAPEGOAT

The police case rested on a single statement they claimed Silcott made when first accused of murder. 'You ain't got enough evidence. These kids won't give evidence in court. No one else will talk to you. You can't keep me away from them.' Silcott never signed the police notes of his supposed remarks, and he has always denied making such a statement. But on the strength of these 26 uncorroborated and unconvincing words, and these 26 words alone, Silcott was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment.

'Verbals' is the police expression for the type of incriminating oral admission that Silcott is said to have made. Verballing suspects — putting words they did not say into police notebooks — is a routine practice in British police stations. It was a practice condemned several times in the Old Bailey, when judges dismissed fantastical statements said to have been made by juveniles, but one which served the authorities' purposes in setting up Silcott as the scapegoat for Blakelock's death.

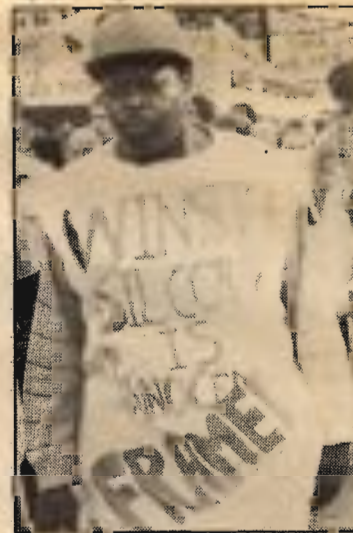
The 'evidence' against Braithwaite and Raghip was equally non-existent.

Both were denied access to solicitors; both were threatened and abused; both were denied food and sleep during their interrogations. Yet neither confessed to killing Blakelock. The police produced no witnesses, no photographs, no forensic evidence. Both men had alibis. Both got life sentences. 'It was a remarkable achievement of the police', said the *Daily Mail*, 'to have found the miscreants and to have provided adequate evidence to prove their guilt.' It certainly was remarkable that three men were jailed for life without the police producing a single shred of evidence.

It did not matter that the police had no evidence to prove their case

in court. The real trial took place on the pages of the gutter press which plumbed new depths of bigotry to justify the charade that was taking place in the court. Through 44 days of the trial the media bayed for blood. The papers printed grotesque stories about Blakelock's body being reduced to 'a rag doll' by rioters 'pecking like vultures' who supposedly wanted to 'parade his head on a pole'. Their reports of the showtrial created a climate of intense racism which gave the courts a free hand to do their worst.

The media image of Silcott that everybody remembers is the one where he stands like a caged animal before the camera, his arms half-outstretched, hanging down from his sides. This photograph, like everything else about the Broadwater Farm showtrial, was staged for effect by the police. They pulled the sleeping Silcott from the bed in his cell in Tottenham police station and pushed him against a wall with his arms fully outstretched. A camera flashed as Silcott's arms were released and the image was captured forever. The photograph was slipped secretly into the police station and was not released until a time. The photograph was used to accompany the trial in every newspaper, but it was carefully manipulated so that it did not show Silcott's face.



'THEY'VE CRUCIFIED MY SON'

The scapegoating of Silcott was designed to distract attention from the real cause of the conflict on the Farm that night: the coordinated campaign of state racism against the black community, which came to a head with the police killing of Cynthia Jarrett.

By crucifying Silcott the authorities hoped to make all black youth guilty by association and to win public support for more repression.

Broadwater Farm has faded from the public eye. Douglas Williamson's fate merited just one paragraph in one daily paper last week. But the families of those who are now paying for Blakelock's death in a prison cell are not about to forget or forgive the police, pressmen and politicians who put them there. Nor should we. As the Tories prepare for a new crack-down in the inner cities it is more important than ever that we confront their criminalisation tactics and build a movement that can put their oppressive system in the dock. And one day we will take our revenge on the people who maimed Douglas Williamson and crucified Winston Silcott.



# NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR SERVICES TO IMPERIALISM

Costa Rican president Oscar Arias has received the Nobel peace prize for his 'outstanding' efforts in Central American diplomacy. **Jackie Reynolds** reports

**O**scar Arias' Central American peace plan was signed in Guatemala City on 7 August. Since then the Sandinista government has not virtually ever requested that the plan impose on Nicaragua. It has granted press freedom and the right to assembly, held negotiations with all opposition parties apart from the right-wing Contras and may now be ready to open talks even with them. The only outstanding issue is free elections. Under the agreement the Sandinistas are obliged to set a date for elections by early November.

If this matter is settled, Arias' plan will have achieved everything for which the USA subjected Nicaragua to seven years of economic sabotage and Contra warfare.

It comes as no surprise that the Nobel peace prize, whose previous recipients include dubious champions of world harmony like Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Kissinger and Menachem Begin, should fall to Arias. While the outcome of his peace plan remains uncertain, its success to date already outshines the efforts of many of the capitalist wheeler-dealers who have pocketed the prize since its inception in 1901.

## TURMOIL

In 1979 Arias, son of a rich coffee-growing family, became leader of the governing Costa Rican National Liberation Party and personal protégé of the ageing



**COSTA RICA'S OSCAR ARIAS EMBRACES GUATEMALA'S VINICIO CEREZO TO CELEBRATE THE SIGNING OF HIS CENTRAL AMERICAN PEACE PLAN**

president Alberto Luis Monge. Last year he was elected to the presidency, having received 53 per cent of the vote. His peace platform appealed to widespread fear among Costa Ricans arising from the turmoil in neighbouring Nicaragua.

Costa Rica is often described as

the 'Switzerland of Latin America'. Both physically and politically it seems to bear more resemblance to the Alpine republic than to its arid and unstable neighbours. In 1948 José Figueres, who ran the country for most of the post-war era, abolished the army. Since then Costa Rica has been the most

tranquil state in Central America. Unlike neighbouring Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, it has been run by democratically elected governments and been free of coups and civil war.

But economic crisis and political strife in the region have become a grave threat to Costa Rican stability.

As a tiny country with one of the largest per capita debts in the world, Costa Rica depends on the goodwill of the USA. In the seventies, when even US president Carter denounced Nicaraguan dictator Somoza, Costa Rica offered sanctuary to Sandinista guerrillas who were fighting to overthrow him. But since the Sandinistas triumphed in 1981 and Reagan declared war against the new government, Costa Rica has been obliged to change course.

## LEAKED

Monge allowed the CIA to set up Contra bases in northern Costa Rica. In 1985 US advisers began training the country's 11 000-strong civil guard to draw them into the war against Nicaragua. A leaked State Department document observed that a militarised Costa Rica 'would help shift the political balance' on Nicaragua's southern front. The USA rewarded Monge by stepping up aid to \$300 million by 1985.

Arias' peace plan, and its endorsement by the Nobel committee in Oslo, are widely seen as a slap in the face for the US president. It stole the show on

Reagan's own diplomatic schemes and congressional support for further White House requests for Contra funds now seems unlikely. Reagan would no doubt prefer Arias not to interfere and to deal with the Sandinistas in his own Oliver North-style fashion. But, far from being a challenge to US objectives in Central America, the Arias plan has given Reagan most of what he wanted.

## SUPREMACY

When he accepted the Nobel prize Oscar Arias declared he did so 'for Central America, where 25 million human beings deserve to live in peace'. Not so long ago he used less flowery language. 'Nicaragua's arm must be twisted a little,' he stated in a speech last year. Arias backed US aid to the Contras as long as it was necessary to bring the Sandinistas to the conference table. Now that has been achieved, Arias hopes to take the reward for helping to bring Nicaragua to heel, by posturing as an international statesman.

Arias' peace plan is an attempt to patch up the mess that decades of US domination have created in Central America.

By forcing Nicaragua to surrender, Arias hopes to create a breathing space for his own regime and for the other puppet dictators who run Central America on behalf of US imperialism. This is why he is a suitable candidate for an award that should really be called the 'keep the world safe for the West' prize.

## FIJI AND THE COMMONWEALTH

# A dictatorship is born

Britain's response to the declaration of a republic in Fiji shows that the politics of the British ruling class are guided by a simple maxim: everything goes, as long as it's British. **Andy Clarkson** reports



**A TWO-WOMEN SHOW: MARGARET AND ELIZABETH KEEP THE BRITISH SHOW GOING IN VANCOUVER**

**L**ast week Fijian coup leader Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka committed the ultimate insult to the British Crown — he declared Fiji a republic. But within hours Thatcher was pleading with Commonwealth leaders at Vancouver to admit the insubordinate regime into their ranks. Thatcher appealed to the assembled heads of state 'not to abandon Fiji in its time of need'. What she meant was that they should not abandon Britain, which stands to lose a vital outpost in the Pacific, if Fiji is ejected from the Commonwealth.

The South Pacific islands of Fiji are Britain's military outpost in a region which has become one of

the most important for the future of world capitalism. Since the retreat from East of Suez in the sixties, the British ruling class has not been in a strong position to compete for power in the Pacific. It is therefore quite prepared to put up with Rabuka, so long as it can retain a foothold in the region. Thatcher was particularly concerned about rumours that France had already contacted Rabuka, offering to take over as the main foreign backer of the new republic of Fiji.

The manoeuvres over the Fiji crisis at last week's Commonwealth conference highlight the problems facing a declining capitalist power like

Britain. While Thatcher lectured the assembled leaders on the need to bend the rules so that Fiji could stay, the Queen had to approach the matter more tactfully, so as not to compromise her position as head of the Commonwealth.

Since India in particular took a dim view of the Fijian coup, which has disenfranchised the islands' Indian majority, the Queen confined herself to expressing 'sorrow' over the Fijian events. This division of labour, where Thatcher bats for Britain, while the monarch discreetly patches up the tensions in the Commonwealth department, helps to keep British imperialism going.

Given its economic weakness, Britain relies heavily in international affairs on the legacy of its imperial past. The Commonwealth is only a pale shadow of the former Empire. But British capitalism desperately needs to preserve an institution which, however symbolic, remains a useful asset.

## CONFLICT

The Vancouver conference has sparked an outburst of racist commentary in the British media. Former Labour MP and now ardent Thatcherite Brian Walden observed in the *Sunday Times* that the Commonwealth, where British leaders have to sit at one table with 'black and brown people', was an encumbrance of which Britain should rid itself. Walden prefers straightforward white supremacy to the egalitarian rhetoric of the Commonwealth, which the British ruling class was obliged to cultivate to maintain some influence among third world nations after its Empire collapsed.

The racist tirades against Commonwealth countries that have littered the press during the past fortnight show that the old anti-racist rhetoric is now out. That was part of the post-colonial order, that is now giving way to a new drive to redivide the world and to a return to the racist mentality of the coloniser.

## FLOWERY

In Vancouver Thatcher and foreign secretary Geoffrey Howe used the Fijian crisis to distract attention from the key issue at stake in the Commonwealth deliberations: South Africa. By focusing debate on the ethnic

conflict between Fijians and Indians, Britain sought to neutralise opposition to its backing for the apartheid regime.

Third world capitalism has always been maintained by dictators, many of whom have been and still are housetrained in Britain. Many of the ethnic conflicts in the world — from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to the Middle East and Central Africa — are products of British colonial rule.

Fiji is only one of many nations which still bear the burden of the divisions imposed upon them by Britain. Britain imported thousands of indentured Indian labourers to work on Fijian sugar plantations in the final quarter of the last century. Today Indians form a majority of the islands' population, and are by far the wealthiest section of the population. But to keep the islands under control, Britain also cultivated the ethnic Fijians, mainly by recruiting them into Fiji's British-run armed forces.

Fiji's 1970 constitution, in which Fijian land rights were inscribed, was designed to foment tension between the ethnic Fijians and the Indians, to make sure that the former could act as Britain's local police force in the South Pacific. British-trained Rabuka is a man in Britain's image and the dictatorship he is set to impose on the islands is Britain's creation. Hence, however unpopular his activities may be among Commonwealth leaders, Britain will cling on to him. Another British island garrison is being built, and this time it is the people of the Pacific who will be its victims.





## ABORTION: A QUESTION OF MORALS

**DAVID ALTON'S** Bill should be opposed by all socialists and feminists. But I'm not happy with Kate Marshall's oversimplification of the question of late abortion in last week's *tns*. Abortion is a moral issue, especially for the woman who have to have them. If we refuse to take a moral stand, we leave the debate in the hands of the pro-life groups, especially when it comes to near-viable fetuses.

Feminists have their own morality. It is rooted in human relationships and in the concerns of everyday life, rather than the abstract principles that male theorists of the right and left seem happier with. The question of whether to have a late abortion must lie with the woman, who has to

make her own decisions about the lesser of two evils. Abortion is never 'right' in itself. It is just sometimes a better agony than having a child that cannot be 'let in' at this moment. We accept that we are ending a life, and we grieve over our loss. When we feel bad we are being rational — not suffering from 'mystification'. We know that a baby is there because it is kicking and growing and making us swell up.

In terms of how it feels for us, abortion at 12 weeks is not the same as at 24. Late abortion involves a different and difficult moral question for the woman involved. I think you could at least have recognised this.

**Alison Blake  
Kennington**



FORMER HARINGEY COUNCIL LEADER STEVE KING

## HANGING ON IN HARINGEY

**YOUR** article 'The Haringey Factor' (*tns*, 16 October) shows how out of touch you are with the real life in the borough. It is not that the anti-cropping campaign did not involve the whole community; it did, yes, with the aid of funding from the Council. But it was the

right tactic. But there are Labour councillors in Haringey, such as the disposed Labour group leader Steve King, who have refused to vote for a crop ban. As a former councillor, I would not have been as possible. It makes no sense to have a crop ban if the councillors do not support it. We will not get the right to have a crop ban if the councillors do not support it. If the councillors do not support it, the law would be further weakened.

We know that in a massive campaign in Haringey, we have to start from scratch, and build up. To do this, we need all the resources we can muster. In this context, Council seats held by Labour councillors are a valuable platform where the needs of the community can be voiced.

**Phil Fox  
Wood Green**

## SEX: DO WE HAVE A CHOICE?

**AFTER** reading Kate Marshall's review 'Women in bondage' (*tns*, 2 October) I had some of her comments on female masochism (readers' letters) described as 'masochism as an appropriate sexual preference in a society which men wish that we should mate to enrich our lives people in an open and cooperative way'. And further on she says 'Women's rape fantasies and their enjoyment of physical pain are based upon their social inequality.'

The theory that we cannot help acting sexually in a way which reflects our social position is dangerous, leading to unacceptable conclusions about personal responsibility. It gives credence for justifications for real rape: 'The rapist couldn't help it, he was just following the dictates of his social position as a man.'

Also, to reduce sexual behaviour to a kind of pathology takes us back to the pathological view of sexual behaviour. It's like saying 'I'm a lesbian because my father assaulted me as a child.' The whole 'something nasty in the woodshed' approach to an explanation of sexual behaviour denies the importance of choice.

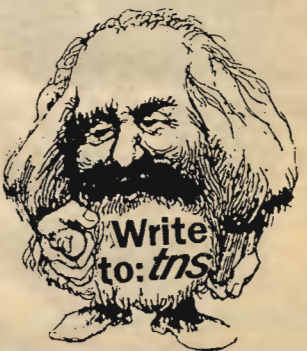
With the growth of the pro-censorship lobby and moves by the government to tighten existing laws, it is now more important than ever that the difference between fantasy and reality is asserted. We must present concepts like choice and consent, especially in sexual behaviour, as positive, valuable and indeed indispensable.

**Jasper  
Brighton**

## BLACKS: WALKING TARGETS

**A FRIEND** of mine, a black man in his early thirties, recently got a job as a security guard in a firm in the West End of London. A couple of weeks ago, he was on duty outside the company's headquarters. He wasn't wearing his uniform cap, but he left it in the back of his car. A police car stopped in front of him. He was arrested and taken back to the station, where he was questioned along the lines of 'what were you doing standing outside that building?' They wouldn't believe him when he said he was working there. He was held for four hours before they released him. It goes to show that being black in the West End is like walking round with a target on your back.

**Abba  
Hackney**



**RCP, BM RCP,  
London  
WC1N 3XX**

# IRISH SOLIDARITY DEBATE

**JOHN HANN'S** excellent review (*tns*, 2 September) of Ken Livingstone's autobiography, entitled 'A charlatan in a safari suit', was a much needed contribution.

I was unhappy with Cathal MacCormack's review of your publication *The Irish War: An Phoblacht/Republican News*, and I was pleased to see your article in *tns*, 2 October.

There are many supporters of the Irish struggle against British imperialism, who view with dismay the association of Sinn Féin with the British Labour Party. People like Ken Livingstone are in a far better position than most British politicians to deceive and nullify the very struggle against British domination of Ireland which they purport to support.

**G Langton  
London**

recognised as the sole legitimate power within Ireland, and that the aim of the Irish War is to free Ireland from British imperialism and not to herald the British revolution. However, in pursuing their liberation war, they are, through their actions, helping the revolution in Britain.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that the British state can be forced from Ireland through an armed struggle and, irrespective of the domestic situation, this will lead to a crisis for the British state, can we in Britain restrict ourselves to vocally supporting those who fight for freedom in Ireland, or should we pursue a more active role in this struggle? We would not only be fighting for freedom in Ireland but also for freedom in Britain.

**Kevin Vaughan  
HMP Long Lartin**



LIVINGSTONE

**MICK KENNEDY** argues (*tns*, 2 October) that the entire British left tries to 'kick people into the street' and 'embarrass the British state out of Ireland'. He goes on to say that the main arguments British socialists have used are about wasting taxpayers' money and 'our boys' getting killed. This is not accurate.

It is true that sections of the left have stooped to blatantly chauvinist appeals. For example, the Trotskyist Movement once reprinted a *Daily Mirror* article about boys

'back home' headlined 'an attempt to end a popular support for violence'. But it is not true that all British socialists do this. The left have sponsored many varied campaigns, ranging from highlighting the moral aspects of British imperialism to the anti-apartheid struggle, and also, reaching to calls for free speech in Ireland, to campaigns against Irish jails.

In fact, in all these approaches is the implicit belief that the British state can play a progressive role in Ireland. Even the Socialist Workers Party, with its radical sounding formula of 'unconditional but conditional support for the republican movement, in effect puts the onus on Irish people to change their method of struggle before British socialists can take up the issue, and therefore accepts British rule for the foreseeable future. But this doesn't mean that the left on / try to 'trick' and 'embarrass' Britain out.

I think the Irish Freedom Movement was right to reply to the *An Phoblacht/Republican News* review, and particularly to concentrate upon its defence of the sordid record of the British left on the question of Ireland. But I do think the article carried some inaccurate generalisations, and could have drawn out better that chauvinism is the logical consequence of the left's various approaches, rather than simply stating that they all rely on 'Thatcher-like complaints'.

**Macer Hinton  
Oxford**

**THE** comments of Cathal MacCormack in his review of *The Irish War in An Phoblacht/Republican News* are to be welcomed. Both MacCormack's review, and the Irish Freedom Movement's response, should be included in any further edition of *The Irish War*, as I feel your position was never fully elaborated until now.

Kennedy does not effectively tackle the point that the Irish Freedom

Movement seems to base winning potential activists to the 'republican movement' solely on the basis of 'unconditional support for the armed struggle'. Many nationalists and republicans are not too concerned about what basis the British left put on Ireland, but I feel the majority of them would argue that solidarity solely on the basis of support for the armed struggle is a negative, if not a narrow, basis of support.

There are many reasons why the struggle in Ireland, O'Connell courts, public houses, and other places, are not the same as the struggle in Birmingham Six and Guildford Four trials, the MacBride principles and the issue of industrial apartheid, and the current interest by several bodies, including Derry city council, in the ongoing Bill of Rights campaign. If progress is to be made on any or all of these issues, to firstly demand total support for 'the armed struggle' is to cut off one's tactical nose to spite the face of the British left.

The issue of the armed struggle is but one that could be raised within a solidarity movement after it has built a broad base. It is rather simplistic to argue that people should first meet this criterion, before they are accepted into the IFM. It would be more logical to enlist support on a broad range of issues, and through internal education on the history of struggles in Ireland, place the armed struggle on the agenda of debate.

I understand the reasons for ideological purity, and have no illusions about certain 'Irish-minded' individuals in the British Labour Party. But these latter elements would see the IFM as much more dangerous (having greater potential and influence) if its current prerequisite was not so central to its political strategy.

**Fionnbarra O'Dochartaigh  
Derry**

**I HAVE** read with interest the recent articles in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* and *tns* (2 October) on the Irish Freedom Movement's handbook *The Irish War*. I would like to raise the following point for discussion.

The IFM handbook argues that there can be no British solution for Ireland. However, as British revolutionaries, are not waiting for the reverse — ie, an Irish solution to the British revolution?

If we accept that the British state is not divisible into separate parts and, therefore, that the collapse of the British state in Ireland is the key to the British revolution, are we not falling down on our responsibilities to the extent of being opportunistic, by relying on the Provisional IRA and Inla to fight the armed

state for us?

In asking this question, I realise that the Irish people must be



# South Africa

# SOLIDARITY NOT SANCTIONS

**T**his week the British Anti-Apartheid Movement holds its annual demonstration in solidarity with the liberation struggle in South Africa. Like most previous protests against the apartheid regime over the past 25 years, Saturday's march will again appeal to the British government to impose sanctions against South Africa. Yet after a quarter of a century of campaigns for government action against the apartheid state, the ties between the West and South Africa are as close as ever.

The sanctions campaign has failed to make an impact — either on the British government, or on the South African regime. President P.W. Botha remains an intransigent against the demand for black equality as was his predecessor Verwoerd who supervised the massacre of black protesters at Sharpeville in March 1960 — the event that prompted the launch of the sanctions movement in Britain.

It is time for British activists who want to help the struggle against apartheid to abandon a strategy that has so far failed, and to work out one that can really undermine the regime in Pretoria.

Two years ago the upsurge of black resistance in the South African townships evoked widespread sympathy in Europe and North America. Western anti-apartheid campaigns, which had languished after the defeat of the Soweto uprising in 1976, revived as thousands of new people joined processions and demonstrations to show their support for the black struggle. Today it is evident that

the anger and enthusiasm of 1985 have been dissipated and that the anti-apartheid movement has lost momentum.

In 1985 we argued that the campaign for sanctions could not provide effective solidarity for those fighting apartheid in South Africa. We insisted that Western governments and employers could not be expected to act as a progressive force in South Africa. The strategy of relying on the very people whose interests are bound up with the survival of apartheid capitalism could only confuse and discredit the anti-apartheid movement. We predicted that because this approach handed the initiative to the ruling class it would inevitably diminish popular resistance against apartheid.

Events over the past two years have fully vindicated our analysis. The sanctions campaign turned anti-apartheid activists into

passive spectators of Western diplomacy as they sat back to watch the progress of the endless round of sanctions debates in parliament, the United Nations, the EEC and the Commonwealth. Last week's Commonwealth conference in Vancouver drew out the inevitable consequences of this approach.

Far from bringing pressure to bear against the apartheid regime, the British government has done everything to intensify Botha's against external hostility. At Vancouver Thatcher stamped contemptuously on demands from black African leaders for further sanctions against South Africa. Thatcher felt free to ridicule Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, saying he was ill-placed to talk about sanctions since millions of workers from countries like Zambia go to work in South Africa. Thatcher's high-handed

conduct shows just how ineffective the sanctions campaign has been.

The Tory government can dismiss the demands of the anti-apartheid movement because it has been immobilised by a strategy which assumes that unless like Thatcher can act in the interests of the South African regime.

Britain, the USA, West Germany, Japan and France are the countries which have the most important trade links with South Africa. If they chose to impose sanctions the effect on the South African economy would be dramatic. But, as the British Anti-Apartheid Movement recently observed, they have 'moved steadily in the opposite direction' (*Manifesto for Sanctions, 1987*). This is not surprising, for close are the ties which depend most on their investments in apartheid.

Britain is formally committed to five agreements on measures against South Africa: the Glenageary arms embargo (June 1977), the UN security council mandatory arms embargo (November 1977), an EEC agreement on restricted trade sanctions (September 1985), the Nassau Accord (October 1985), and another EEC accord on selective sanctions. These measures have proved to be ineffective. Indeed they are merely token gestures, designed to mollify opponents of

apartheid and to help Britain to maintain its links with black African leaders, not to put real pressure on the racist South African regime.

The pro-Soviet South African Communist Party offers support of the sanctions campaign, recently pinpointing the spurious character of official Western measures against apartheid. The party journal *Isirobenzi* recently commented that 'Britain and America forbid their people to buy gold coins from South Africa but will allow their banks to buy gold bars worth thousands of times as much'. All sanctions that have been agreed by Western governments are either ignored and circumvented, or they are merely to cause much damage in the first place.

The arms boycott is the biggest sanctions joke.

Despite the longstanding UN embargo, South Africa has managed to obtain all the military technology it needs and is now one of the world's leading arms exporters. The boycott of South African fruit — long a key plank of the sanctions campaign — has been similarly ineffective. Most large British supermarkets still sell Cape fruit, often labelled as 'product of Newland' or some other South African satellite.

The only sphere in which the boycott has proved effective — sport — is largely symbolic.







THE WEST HAS BILLIONS INVESTED IN BOTHA'S SYSTEM

Revealing off sporting links with South Africa costs Western countries little. But a black boycott of the West, provoked by continuing contacts with South Africa, would disrupt the Olympics and every other international sporting event. Hence sport has proved a particularly convenient field for anti-apartheid posturing.

It is now a quarter of a century since the United Nations first adopted a resolution in favour of sanctions against South Africa. After 25 years of token gestures and sanctions-busting it is time to abandon the fantasy that the capitalist nations of the West can act against apartheid.

### PROFITS

The sanctions campaign assumes that countries like Britain have an interest in ending the oppression of black people in South Africa. But why should Western governments or businessmen wish to undermine a system which provides one of the highest rates of return on capital investment in the world? Britain still has more investments in South Africa than all the other capitalist countries, apart from the USA, put together. More than 1200 British companies invest in the apartheid system, and the largest 137 alone employ some 300 000 workers — around six per cent of the South African workforce.

The first priority for the British ruling class at a time of global recession is how to preserve this vital source of profits. It is also concerned about maintaining stability in a country which has become a haven of the imperialist order throughout the African continent.

The economic links between Britain and South Africa are paralleled by close political cooperation.

Even after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, which resulted in South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth, Britain maintained intimate diplomatic relations with the South African regime. Britain continued to supply the bulk of South Africa's military infrastructure — despite the official ban on arms exports.

Throughout the sixties Britain, together with the USA, shielded South Africa against calls for tougher sanctions. Britain and the USA cultivated South Africa as a proxy for Western interests in the region. In the seventies, when liberation movements in Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe brought down the old colonial regimes in southern Africa, one by one, South Africa became the key strategic power in the region.

South Africa's regular attacks on Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe are also a source of embarrassment to the Western powers, since they expose the brutal measures on which the survival of South African capitalism

depends. The authorities in London and Washington like to distance themselves from the military excesses of the apartheid regime. But, behind the scenes, they have equipped the South African forces so they can act as a regional police force for imperialism.

The ambivalence that the British and other Western governments display towards South Africa has been widely misinterpreted as a sign that they could play a positive role against apartheid. The fact that some sanctions, however ineffective, have been applied is seen as confirmation of the belief that the West is committed to promoting progress in South Africa.

In reality there is nothing progressive behind the West's ambivalence towards the apartheid regime.

Countries like Britain and the USA occasionally indulge in anti-apartheid posturing. But these do not indicate any concern for the black masses or for democracy. Rather, they reflect a recognition that the particularly barbaric form of capitalist rule in South Africa tends to provoke resistance which could become a threat to the survival of the system.

Referring to the EEC's 'code of conduct' for investors in South Africa, the South African Congress of Trade Unions observed in 1979 that such measures were simply intended to put pressure on the white minority regime 'to grant limited reforms to the oppressed people in order to stem the tide of revolution' and to 'preserve South Africa as a haven for capitalist investment'. This remains an accurate assessment of the motives behind Western anti-apartheid posturing.

### SUBJECTION

The duplicity and posturing which are characteristic of Western diplomacy in South Africa reflect the particular problem of preserving stability in an inherently unstable region. The Western powers rely on South Africa to keep black people in a state of subjection. But, at the same time, they would like to encourage the apartheid regime to modify the system where possible, to create a more stable political environment. This twin-track approach in no way contradicts the outlook of South Africa's white rulers. In fact it dovetails with the survival strategy of the Botha regime, which has tried to contain the black freedom struggle through a combination of repression and offers of reform.

By taking the anti-apartheid rhetoric of the Western establishment at face value, supporters of the campaign for sanctions have encouraged illusions in the progressive potential of British or American government initiatives over South Africa. This approach has disarmed the movement

against apartheid. As a result the left's campaign for solidarity with the black liberation struggle have become little more than an appendage of establishment diplomacy.

Today the failure of the sanctions campaign is universally acknowledged even among its strongest advocates.

But, despite all the evidence to the contrary, many on the British left stubbornly insist that the way to bring down apartheid is to call for government and employer sanctions. This approach, based on the false notion that the British ruling class can be an ally in the struggle to end oppression, has had a debilitating effect on campaigns against apartheid in Britain.

### CONSULTANT

The reactionary implications of the sanctions campaign have been drawn out most starkly in anti-apartheid pamphlets recently published by British trade unions. In *Africa: A Bad Risk for Investment* the TUC has warned British employers to get out of South Africa since the long-term and global interests of all British companies would best be served by complete disinvestment, whatever the short-term costs. At its recent annual congress the TUC opted for the promotion of 'non-conflictual' trade unionism to secure its future in the harsh climate of Thatcher's third term. It has extended this approach to the conflict in South Africa, offering its services as business consultant to British employers in South Africa.

But even the left-wing miners' union has adopted an approach to solidarity work which can only be

described as an insult — both to the black struggle in South Africa and to British miners. In *NUM against Apartheid* British miners' leaders attempted to win support for a boycott of South African coal by arguing that 'the British miner knows that our industry is under threat because of the cheap coal produced by sweating black labour under the apartheid system.' Instead of appealing to British miners' own proud record of class struggle to build militant solidarity action, the NUM promotes its boycott campaign by appealing to miners on the narrowest possible grounds of economic self-interest and concern about 'our' industry.

### PERVERTED

The trade union approach to the struggle against apartheid extends the subversive outlook of the sanctions campaign into the workplace. It shows how the sanctions campaign has perverted the whole meaning of international solidarity. Instead of drawing inspiration from the heroism of the South African working class, official anti-apartheid politics has become a force for conservatism on the British left. The left has abandoned its internationalist responsibility to fight, irrespective of the difficulties, to assist workers facing oppression abroad. Instead it puts its faith in bureaucratic conservatives and in the progressive potential of the British ruling class.

To build an effective solidarity movement we need to adopt a radically different approach.

The Revolutionary Communist Party has consistently argued that workers should take the struggle to break Britain's links with South Africa into their own hands. We

have fought for this strategy because it is the only way to build effective solidarity with the liberation struggle in South Africa.

The scale of Britain's involvement in South Africa offers enormous scope for building a genuine internationalist solidarity movement in this country. Such a movement can be built if anti-apartheid activists stop appealing to the government and the employers. We must appeal instead to the interest of the British working class in bringing down the British-sponsored order in South Africa, and in assisting the liberation of the black working class.

Every action we can take to weaken Britain's links with South Africa will not only benefit the struggle against apartheid — it will also strengthen British workers in the struggle against the employers and the Tory government at home. This was the starting point of Action Against Apartheid, the campaign we launched two years ago to promote the need for workers' action to cut Britain's economic lifeline to the apartheid regime.

Action Against Apartheid compiled a detailed study of British firms which invest in and trade with South Africa. We also started a campaign in a number of workplaces to build a network of anti-apartheid activists, that could be the basis for effective solidarity action. This approach may be more arduous than giving up Cape apples or joining a one-day demonstration through London. But it is the only way to build a movement that can help end British-sponsored terror in South Africa.

## BARCLAYS WITHDRAWAL

# The exception that proves the rule

Last year's decision by Barclays Bank to pull out of South Africa is widely seen as proof that the sanctions strategy works. But Barclays' withdrawal and the sale of its assets to the giant Anglo-American Corporation has not had any noticeable impact, either on the South African government or on the balance sheet of Britain's biggest bank. Both the Botha regime and Barclays are said to have been 'quietly delighted' at the move.

The campaign against Barclays has been the only success in the 20 year-long struggle for sanctions. It began in 1969 at a time when Barclays was the biggest bank in South Africa engaged in funding both Ian Smith's racist regime in Rhodesia and the construction of the Cabora Bassa dam in colonial Mozambique.

### NEW LABELS

The fact that the Barclays boycott campaign gained wide support among British students was undoubtedly a factor which contributed to the bank's eventual decision to withdraw. After a state of emergency was declared in South Africa in 1985, Barclays share of student accounts fell from 25 to 17 per cent in two years. The boycott campaign helped embarrass Barclays into restructuring its international operations. This move has since been followed by other big corporations such as the US giant Coca Cola, which depends heavily on sales to black people at home and abroad.

But it has yet to be explained how embarrassing big companies into running their South African operations under new labels is supposed to undermine apartheid.

Barclays began to distance itself from the apartheid regime in the wake of the Soweto uprising in 1976. When Barclays local chief executive Bob Aldworth bought £15 million worth of South African government defence shares, black African states responded with outrage. In 1978 the government of Nigeria, where Barclays ran a profitable chain of branches, withdrew its deposits.

### 'REPUGNANT'

By the early eighties it had become clear that Barclays' association with apartheid caused more embarrassment than it was worth. The bank's new chairman Timothy Bevan resolved to reduce its involvement to a minimum. By 1986 Barclays' official transactions in South Africa accounted for only two per cent of the bank's global income.

Barclays also began to improve its relations with black South African and frontline state leaders. In October 1985 the bank's British directors met African National Congress leader Oliver Tambo in London. The parent company's interest in the South African operation was cut from 50 to 40 per cent, and chairman Timothy Bevan went on record describing apartheid as 'repugnant, wrong, un-Christian and unworkable'. Barclays' share prices shot up shortly afterwards. In

March 1986 Barclays refused to grant further credit to the South African government, and by November it announced the sell-off of its remaining 40 per cent stake in the South African operation.

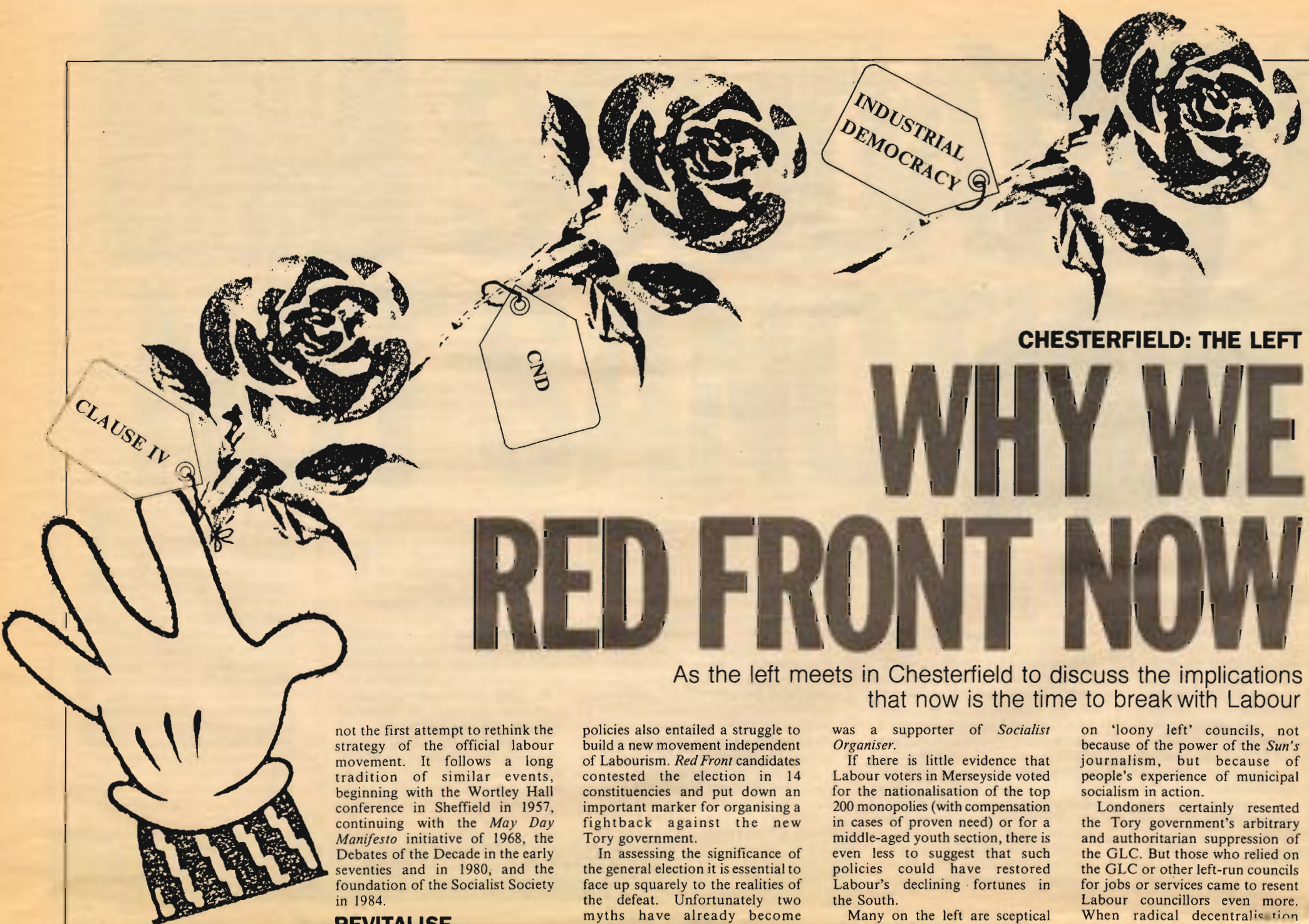
Now Barclays South Africa, renamed 'First National Bank', is controlled by the giant Anglo-American Corporation, which in turn controls 80 per cent of shares traded on the Johannesburg stock exchange. For the black working class nothing has changed. If anything, the transfer has strengthened the biggest and most ruthless exploiter of black labour.

### DESPAIR

Anti-apartheid activists in Britain regard Barclays' withdrawal as a major vindication of their sanctions strategy. But in fact the main thing the boycott campaign achieved in Britain was to legitimise the politics of despair. It reduced solidarity to the pathetic gesture of atomised consumers, who save their consciences by avoiding contagion with apartheid.

The example of militant consumer boycotts in South Africa shows that boycotts can be an effective instrument against governments and employers — if they are conducted in the context of a genuine struggle to end oppression. But a strategy that assumes that the British capitalist class and its institutions can end oppression on our behalf inevitably turns all such tactics into futile gestures.





CHESTERFIELD: THE LEFT

# WHY WE RED FRONT NOW

As the left meets in Chesterfield to discuss the implications that now is the time to break with Labour

**T**he conference organised in Chesterfield this weekend by the Campaign Group of Labour MPs, the Socialist Society and the Conference of Socialist Economists is a timely and welcome initiative. After the Tories' third successive election victory, nobody on the left could disagree that there is an urgent need for rethinking strategy and for open discussion and debate.

Given the necessity for questioning all the policies and modes of organisation that have led the labour movement to its present predicament, it is unfortunate that the organisers of the Chesterfield conference have decided to exclude one crucial question from the agenda. 'It is certainly not our intention', writes Tony Benn, 'to set up a new socialist party.' For, Benn and for many other left wingers, it goes without saying that any attempt to work out and pursue new alternatives must take place within the framework of the Labour Party.

## PRETENCE

The election campaign and its outcome revealed that the Labour Party has no legitimate claim to the allegiance of the working class. The problem is not merely that Labour has lost three elections in a row. In its attempt to win favour with the middle classes, Labour in opposition has given up any pretence of defending working class interests. The election results showed that while Labour has abandoned the working class, more and more workers have repudiated Labour. For us, the key question of British politics, a question pushed to the fore by the election, is not — how can Labour be revived? — but — how can it be replaced?

The left's unquestioning acceptance of the Labour Party's claim to represent the working class has long undermined its capacity to generate an alternative to Labourism.

The Chesterfield conference is

not the first attempt to rethink the strategy of the official labour movement. It follows a long tradition of similar events, beginning with the Wortley Hall conference in Sheffield in 1957, continuing with the *May Day Manifesto* initiative of 1968, the Debates of the Decade in the early seventies and in 1980, and the foundation of the Socialist Society in 1984.

## REVITALISE

On each of these occasions large assemblies gathered to listen to the leading left MPs of the day, to the outstanding radical journalists and to the familiar pink professors. The left's intellectuals outlined new agendas and new perspectives which the activists were supposed to take out to revitalise the movement. While some bold spirits occasionally ventured to suggest that it might be necessary to build an alternative party to Labour, they invariably stopped short of proposing any serious organisational initiative. Launched on a surge of enthusiasm, the campaigns which emerged from the great conclaves of the left either rapidly collapsed or, like the Socialist Society, survived to carry on at a very low level of activity.

Tony Benn appears to relish the inconsequential character of the Chesterfield conference:

'We are not proposing a decision-making conference. Perhaps the word "forum" would have been better, because after a forum nothing happens except that they plan another one.' (*Socialist Action*, 25 September)

The reluctance of the British left to draw out the organisational and political consequences of its ideas has condemned it to play the role of passive critic of the failures of successive Labour leaderships.

Just as the leadership is destined to betray, the left is destined to suffer defeat and disillusionment.

In Thatcher's third term we can have no time for the self-indulgence of debate without consequences. The urgent need now is to rally resistance to the renewed Tory offensive. Earlier this year the Revolutionary Communist Party sought to provide a focus for such resistance by launching a campaign to build a *Red Front* of left-wing groups and individuals around a platform of basic demands that could defend the working class. Through *The Red Front* the RCP emphasised that the fight for anti-capitalist

policies also entailed a struggle to build a new movement independent of Labourism. *Red Front* candidates contested the election in 14 constituencies and put down an important marker for organising a fightback against the new Tory government.

In assessing the significance of the general election it is essential to face up squarely to the realities of the defeat. Unfortunately two myths have already become prevalent on the left.

The first is the view put forward by *Left Politics*, supporters of Militant and others that the above average swings to Labour on Merseyside and in Bradford and Coventry reflected the electoral appeal of a full-blooded socialist programme. 'This was the way to win' argued Heffer in *Labour Briefing* (24 June-July 7), insisting that 'we fought on a working class, socialist basis' and implying that if Kinnock and his team had pursued a similar strategy the national result could have been different.

## ASSIDUOUS

In Birkenhead Frank Field, a veteran right winger and fierce opponent of Militant, won a swing almost identical to that of Heffer. In Coventry Militant-supporter David Nellist won a slightly larger swing than his two right-wing fellow MPs in the city, but in Bradford Kinnock-loyalist Max Madden won a slightly larger swing than Militant Pat Wall. The figures suggest that the good votes for Labour in these constituencies were largely the result of the general strength of anti-Tory sentiment in Northern and inner-city areas, particularly on Merseyside. The combination of well-known candidates, often assiduous constituency MPs or established activists, and good local organisation no doubt also played a part.

Did Labour voters in Liverpool and elsewhere vote for hard-left socialism? All the evidence suggests that they voted for the party of Neil Kinnock and Bryan Gould as advertised in the national media throughout the campaign. The fact that the hard left only claimed local campaigns as its own after the election raises suspicions whether on the ground they were much different from those of other Labour candidates. It must have come as a surprise to many Labour voters in Bermondsey that they had voted for a Militant candidate or to those in Wallasey that theirs

was a supporter of *Socialist Organiser*.

If there is little evidence that Labour voters in Merseyside voted for the nationalisation of the top 200 monopolies (with compensation in cases of proven need) or for a middle-aged youth section, there is even less to suggest that such policies could have restored Labour's declining fortunes in the South.

Many on the left are sceptical about Militant's grandiose electoral claims. In response to the election defeat they have put forward a different myth: the notion that the radical left that has emerged since the early eighties in local government and in diverse single-issue campaigns constitutes a viable alternative to traditional Labourism.

Hilary Wainwright, one of the organisers of the Chesterfield conference, is a leading proponent of this view. She argues that a new left has emerged which 'has no single umbrella but rather coalesces around symbolic individuals and events: Tony Benn, the GLC, the miners' strike, CND (see *A Tale of Two Parties*, reviewed on page 9). For Wainwright, and for Benn and Ken Livingstone, the now extinct Greater London Council offers a model for the national Labour Party.

Labour's disastrous performance in London in the election shows that the much-vaunted popularity of the new style municipal socialism and its associated causes is illusory.

Labour's failure in London cannot be blamed simply on a hostile media. There was a resonance for gutter press attacks

on 'loony left' councils, not because of the power of the *Sun's* journalism, but because of people's experience of municipal socialism in action.

Londoners certainly resented the Tory government's arbitrary and authoritarian suppression of the GLC. But those who relied on the GLC or other left-run councils for jobs or services came to resent Labour councillors even more. When radical decentralisation schemes were revealed as a cover for cuts and equal opportunities programme as device for sharing out the misery more equitably, the result was cynicism and demoralisation.

When radical councillors failed to carry popular support for their rate-capping stunts in 1985 they redefined municipal socialism, first as creative accountancy fiddles, and more recently as caring cuts. The pioneers of modern local socialism — notably Ken Livingstone, David Blunkett and Bernie Grant — moved on to parliament. Beneficiaries of the patronage extended to radical activists by left-wing Labour councils retired to write books celebrating their achievements. Meanwhile workers registered their verdict on deteriorating jobs, housing and other services by voting for the Tories or the Alliance last June.

## INADEQUATE

Another 'symbolic event' for the new radical left was Arthur Scargill's leadership of the 1984-85 miners' strike. But the miners' defeat exposed the inadequacy of the left's alternative just as forcefully as the fiasco of the left councils. It was all very well for Tony Benn to claim repeatedly that the miners' strike represented a victory for socialism. Most of the 80 000 miners who have left the industry since the end of the strike no doubt see it differently. So too do those who are still working in the pits confronting an aggressive management, now equipped with a punitive disciplinary code. The conclusion drawn from the strike by most workers outside the coalmining industry was that militancy does not pay.

The failure of the left even to address the strategic problems of the miners' dispute simply confirmed the view that 'socialism' is a set of obsolete dogmas of no practical use in the day-to-day struggles of the working class. Far from offering an alternative to the



STARGAZING?: LIVINGSTONE





AFTER THE ELECTION

# NEED THE MORE THAN EVER

of Labour's third election defeat, **Mike Freeman** argues and build a real opposition to the Tories

mainstream Labour Party, the Benn/Tsingone/Scargill model appears to need people to be even more outlandish and irrelevant than the rhetoric of Neil Kinnock.

The popularity of the post-election rights reform, the unwillingness of the left to face harsh realities. The fact that the left has no greater appeal to the electorate than the right. Indeed the left's self-imposed silence for the past few years has been a major factor in its electoral failure.

Since the election the right has made all the running in the Labour Party.

The fact that the left is holding its discussion four weeks after the election party conference in Brighton reveals the left's lack of confidence in its capacity to influence the direction of the party in the post-election period. Apart from the Heller/Militant line of transferring the eternal verities of Clause IV, two more or less distinct perspectives have been advanced on the left, by Eric Hobsbawm and by Tony Benn.

## SCORN

Hobsbawm's thesis, expounded in the current edition of *Marxism Today*, follows the logic of his earlier approval for coalition government and his call for tactical voting for the Alliance. He scorns any attempt to mobilise resistance against the Tories (a theme that also runs through the current issue of the Labour Coordinating Committee paper *Chartist*) and emphasises Labour's need to build a new 'social coalition' of electoral support. He recommends a programme of national reconstruction, through an economic policy based on technological innovation, economic policy and 'a combination of public control and planning with markets'. He also proposes a drive to 'rebuild the country's infrastructure' and measures to produce 'an educated workforce'.

The most striking feature of Hobsbawm's programme is not so much its openly pro-capitalist character as its familiarity. Even the terms seem to have been derived directly from Harold Wilson's speeches of the early sixties, whereas then they sounded revolutionary radical, now they appear merely hackneyed and reactionary.

In a recent article in *Socialist Action* Benn outlined the themes of the three 'mini-conferences' taking place within the umbrella of the

Chesterfield conference:

'The first will be on peace and non-alignment and the direction of American power in the Gulf and Central America....

'The second will be about the shape of the economy, the changes in technology, the centralisation of power, the shifts in the nature of the workforce and about how the unions organise....

'The third conference is on the question of state power, civil liberties, democracy and discrimination....

The striking thing about Benn's agenda is its vagueness and generality at a time when the working class faces very specific challenges — the poll tax, the current Tory attacks on left-wing Labour councils, the Alton Bill to restrict abortion, the Tamil deportations, the Aids panic, the proposed cuts in housing benefit and the introduction of 'workfare' schemes for the unemployed, the war in Ireland. The left's penchant for discussions and restatements of basic socialist principles amounts in practice to avoiding commitments to action on immediate threats to the working class movement.

## SYNTHESIS

Like Hobsbawm's programme, Benn's too has a familiar ring. He appears to have taken elements from some of the left's old campaigns — from CND, the Alternative Economic Strategy, and the National Council for Civil Liberties — and attempted to blend them into a new synthesis.



ROMANTICISING: BENN

Some of his more internationally inclined followers may add the demands of the Anti-Apartheid Movement or the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. Those with a more trade union bent will throw in aspects of the old Broad Left platforms in the unions.

But the sum is somewhat less than the total of the parts. All of these campaigns have passed their peaks in terms of popular support or media potential.

The left's preoccupation with acting as an agency for coordinating the activities of other movements which are themselves launching both reflects and exacerbates the left's own lack of dynamism. When it reaches out to incorporate movements such as the Greens whose supporters are strongly influenced by mystical and anti-working class prejudices, the potential for further instability and incoherence increases.

## UNITY

While rival currents on the Labour left differ on different aspects of the post-election analysis and their perspectives for the future, they share much in common. All can unite to congratulate the leadership on its professional election campaign — a campaign that exclusively promoted Labour's most right-wing policies and made Kinnock's commitment to humiliating the left a central feature of his appeal to middle class public opinion.

The left's acquiescence to the Kinnock leadership, before, during and since the election reflects its acceptance of the limitations that follow from working inside the Labour Party at a time when the very survival of the party is in question. The left's acceptance of Kinnock's terms means that it is condemned to reshuffle the policies and programmes of the past and to put them forward as a perspective for the future. The problem is that these policies and these programmes have already failed. The experience of Wilson's policies in the sixties and seventies and of Benn's alternative strategies in the seventies and eighties — both in government and in opposition — is the main factor that has alienated the working class from the Labour Party today.

Many on the left admit more or less openly that the Labour Party cannot be regarded as a socialist organisation. 'A lot of people', wrote Eric Heffer last week, 'have

not understood how far the party has moved and how far we have gone from basic socialist ideas.' (*Socialist Organiser*, 15 October) Too true. An editorial in the same issue admitted that Labour was 'a long way from being a serious force for socialism in Britain'.

Does this mean that socialists should therefore get out of the Labour Party and set about building socialism? 'No it does not', it cannot because the Labour Party remains the mass political party of the British working class movement. The assertion of this dogma closes the argument and *Socialist Organiser* passes on with relief to discuss less troublesome questions.

## MANTRA

For the left the statement that 'Labour is the mass party of the British working class' is something to be endlessly repeated, like a mantra, for reassurance. But repetition does not make it true. Labour has never been a mass party of the British working class, though millions of workers are affiliated to it through the bureaucratic device of the political levy paid by their union. Less than 300 000 people are individual members of the Labour Party today, and by general agreement, most of these are middle class constituency activists.

Ever since the twenties Labour has commanded the mass of working class votes, but since 1983 most working class people have voted for some party other than Labour.

The Labour Party is the party of the labour bureaucracy, and its programme has always reflected the pressures of the British establishment more than the aspirations of the working class. The direct influence of the ruling class has never been so apparent as in the years since Kinnock took over the leadership and set about adapting Labour's policies to the climate of Thatcherism.

'Labour today falls very far short of the working class party we need', concludes *Socialist Organiser*, 'but in Thatcher's Britain Labour is quite a long way to the left.' Labour may not be socialist but the fact that it is to the left of the Tories is some consolation to today's left. The doctrine of the lesser evil thus ensures that the left drags along behind Kinnock as he rushes to adjust to Thatcher's rightwards course.

As Labour moves right the conflict between the policies of the leader-

ship and the measures required to defend the working class becomes increasingly apparent. The leadership document 'Moving Ahead' that was endorsed at Brighton emphasises that Labour's programme 'must be for the nation as a whole' rather than being concerned with the particular interests of the working class. In local government for example, it insists that Labour must show that it is 'responsible, caring and efficient'. The message is that to display their 'responsibility', Labour councils are expected to pass on Tory cuts in a 'caring' and 'efficient' manner.

## FATALISTIC

Workers fighting to preserve jobs or services or to stop the poll tax can expect short shrift from the Labour leadership. Left wingers who engage in activities around these or any other issues which are deemed an embarrassment to the party's electoral image will face sharp disciplinary action. As 'Moving Ahead' concludes, 'We cannot afford the self-indulgence of those who want to use our party for their own factional ends.'

Every move that Kinnock has made since the election confirms our view that to pursue the policies that are required to mobilise working class resistance to the Tories it is necessary to make a break from the Labour Party. We launched *The Red Front* before the election to promote this objective. The refusal of the left to abandon its fatalistic embrace with Labour before the election undermined the potential impact of *The Red Front* in the campaign. Four months into Thatcher's third term, the left has yet to draw the inescapable conclusion of Labour's defeat — that no real alternative can be developed within the Labour machine. We need *The Red Front* now more than ever.



TAMILS UNDER SIEGE IN SRI LANKA

# A FIGHT TO THE FINISH

Why has the Indian 'peace-keeping force' in Sri Lanka launched an all-out war against Tamil militants?

**Kenan Malik** looks behind the latest round of fighting

**'W'**hen you make no deal to resolve this peacefully,' an Indian spokesman warned last week, as 15,000 Indian troops moved in to crush the Tamil Tigers, the guerrilla force fighting for an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka.

The Indian forces, backed up by artillery, helicopter gunships, tanks and a naval armada, are engaged in a full-scale assault on the 300-strong guerrilla force of the Tigers. The Indians have imposed a news blackout on the war, but there has been leaking of the story of the fighting.

The Indians are directing their fire against the civilian population, and one eye-witness who got out of the northern Tamil stronghold of Jaffna last week told me there have been numerous reports of Indian atrocities, including rape and indiscriminate killings. In one incident Indian gunships were given orders to fire on a house in Jaffna town. They were later rescued by a tank. As they left they thanked their hosts by shooting when members of the family, Jai a Hospital, now without electricity or medical supplies, is overflowing with civilian casualties. The dead are simply piling up in the streets.

## EMBARRASSED

The Tigers have retaliated in kind. Taking their lead from the war people in South Africa deal with tanks, guerrillas 'work'ed' five Indian prisoners last week. The Indian army has found it extremely difficult to take the Tigers' stronghold of Jaffna, getting bogged down in fierce house-to-house fighting. One manoeuvre turned into a fiasco when paratroopers dropped into the centre of the town were cut down by the Tigers more than 30 were killed. Nearly 200 Indian soldiers and 400 guerrillas have already lost their lives.

The sudden eruption of war has left many people both in Sri Lanka and in Britain shocked and confused.

Just two months ago the Tamil community welcomed Indian troops into Jaffna as liberators and saviours. Indian officials were garlanded and cheered by a crowd of 100,000 during a ceremony to celebrate the ceasefire between Sinhalese forces and Tamil militants. Earlier this month Sri Lanka president Junius Jayawardene complained bitterly that the Indian forces were cooperating with the Tigers. There were even tales of Indian troops joining the Tigers in their attacks on Sinhalese settlements in the Eastern province. So what has changed?

Many Western commentators blame the Tigers for the latest round of violence. According to the *Independent* the Tamil fighting is out in Jaffna poses a death

wish. 'How else', it asked, 'do you explain why a band of armed youths who were set to become the political leaders of northern and possibly eastern Sri Lanka should turn on its main protector?' Others have pointed an accusing finger at the Tamil leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran, who apparently models himself on Clint Eastwood. According to an incisive piece of analysis in *The Times*, Eastwood on screen 'kills a lot and talks very little'.

The war in Sri Lanka has little to do with either the psychology of Tamil fighters or the screen persona of an ageing Hollywood star. Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi sent his troops into Sri Lanka because he wanted to end a war which was creating instability within India. In doing so, he was trying to crush the Tigers because they threatened to continue their struggle for liberation.

The present war in Sri Lanka is the result of communal divisions established throughout the Indian subcontinent during the period of British colonial rule.

Gandhi presides over a country that is constantly threatening to split asunder. From Kashmir to Tamil Nadu secessionist movements are tearing at the fabric of Indian unity. These communal divisions are not the result of any inherent bloodlust among Indians: they are the legacy of British rule. From the time the East India Company first set up shop in the eighteenth century, to the carnage of partition nearly 200 years later, British rulers manipulated old religious and social divisions and created new ones to maintain imperial control.

## FRAGMENTATION

In the 40 years since independence, Gandhi's Congress (I) Party has played up these divisions. Stirring up communal rivalries has helped it to hegemonise Indian politics. As the only party able to organise throughout the length and breadth of India, it has won support from a people seeking some sense of unity. Congress has kept on top, not by healing communal divisions, but by fomenting local conflicts to strengthen its own position. This has simply increased the tendencies towards fragmentation within Indian society.

Over the past decade the Congress strategy has backfired on India's rulers as local secessionist movements have gained support at the expense of the government party. Under Gandhi disunity within India has greatly increased. A series of shattering defeats in state elections have shown the increasing inability of Congress to hold together its diverse peoples.

Gandhi has lost every state election since he took office. His most humiliating defeat came in the state of Haryana earlier this year. Haryana is in the Hindu heartland of India and is usually a bastion of support for the Congress (I) Party. This time Congress was not simply swept from power — it was politically destroyed. Even the communists gained more seats than Gandhi's party.

The two major challenges Gandhi has faced during his three years in office — the movement for a Sikh homeland in the Punjab and the war in Sri Lanka — have both fuelled unrest in India.

Gandhi came to power in October 1984 after his mother, Indira, was assassinated by Sikh extremists fighting for Khalistan — an independent Sikh homeland. His attempt to establish a peace accord in the province has failed disastrously. Akali Dal, the principal Sikh party, split. For the past two years the militants have waged a terror campaign against Hindus, moderate Sikhs and the Indian security forces. Thousands of Hindus and Sikhs have suffered gruesome deaths in the communal fighting. Gandhi has managed to contain the Punjab problem only by turning the state into an armed camp and summarily executing Sikh militants.



**BOGGED DOWN: GANDHI**

The conflict in Sri Lanka has proved to be an more intractable problem for Gandhi. On the one hand, there is widespread sympathy in India for the struggle for Tamil rights, particularly in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where over 50 million Tamils live. This has forced Gandhi to express sympathy for the Tamils' plight. On the other hand, the Tamils' success in sustaining their struggle for independence has given encouragement to secessionist movements inside India. Separatists in Tamil Nadu in particular have taken heart from the liberation war in Sri Lanka and have grown increasingly militant. Gandhi



could not impose a 'Punjab solution' in Sri Lanka, however, without intervening directly in the struggle.

For two years Gandhi has tried to find a solution that would end the war in Sri Lanka without granting Tamils the right to self-determination. The intransigence of the Sinhalese regime in refusing to give the Tamils even a limited measure of autonomy, and the refusal of Tamil militants to accept anything less than total independence, have dashed Gandhi's hopes of achieving a peaceful settlement.

The upsurge in the war since summer, and the possibility of the Tamil guerrillas making a real breakthrough, spurred Gandhi into action.

He imposed the July peace accord on both the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Gandhi threatened the Sinhalese with military intervention if they did not sign the accord. He warned the Tamils that he would close down their bases in India if they refused to observe the ceasefire.

Gandhi sent his troops to Sri Lanka to bring an end to the fighting and restore order on the island — and to remove any possibility of an independent homeland for the Tamils. But the Tamils took up arms in the first place to win independence. Since Gandhi's sole intention was to deny them that right, it was inevitable that the Indian troops would come into conflict with the Tamil militants.

Gandhi sent his troops into Sri Lanka in July to police the peace accord, but renewed fighting earlier this month between Tamils and Sinhalese prompted him to despatch a bigger invasion force. Worried that the war would flare up again, Gandhi decided to move in first and crush the Tigers. He has found himself drawn into the communal strife of Sri Lanka.

The situation in Sri Lanka is far more explosive than even the

conflict in the Punjab. In the Punjab, the Indian forces are faced with a small-scale rebellion, ill-equipped and badly supported. In Sri Lanka, the Indian troops are fighting in a hostile foreign country, against one of the best organised, disciplined and equipped guerrilla armies in the world, with mass support in the population.

## LIBERATION

It is likely that the full might of the third largest army in the world will eventually defeat the Tigers. But however large his army, Gandhi cannot crush the Tamil struggle for liberation.

So long as the Tamil people are denied their rights, there will be war in Sri Lanka.

At the same time the war in Sri Lanka has major implications for India. Indian Tamils will not simply sit back and wait while their people are destroyed in the water. The longer the Indian troops are tied down in Sri Lanka, the greater is the likelihood of an explosion at home. It is ironic that having sent his troops to Sri Lanka to stem the secessionist revolt in India, Gandhi finds himself embroiled in a conflict that can only increase his problems at home.

Western commentators have praised the Indian onslaught. They have expressed the hope that Gandhi will have sufficient 'courage' and 'statesmanship' to see the fight through to the finish. It comes as little surprise that the British officials who created the divisions in the first place are now backing Gandhi's campaign of genocide against the Tamil minority.

The Tamils have learned the hard way that they can expect no help from either the Western powers or their local stooges. There will be no peace until the system that created the conflict in the first place is overthrown.



**THESE ARE NO PEACE-KEEPERS: INDIAN TROOPS ARE OUT TO CRUSH THE TAMIL FIGHTERS**



## TWENTY YEARS OF THE 1967 ABORTION ACT

# WHY WOMEN NEED FREE ABORTION ON DEMAND

Twenty years after David Steel's Abortion Act became law, his Liberal Party colleague David Alton is campaigning to restrict access to abortion. As pro-life campaigners step up their attack on abortion rights, **Kate Marshall** asks — is the 1967 Act worth defending?

**T**he 1967 Act allows abortion only under certain circumstances. The 'green form' specifies that abortion is permissible when a woman can satisfy two doctors that the pregnancy puts her own life in danger, threatens the welfare of her existing children, or that there is a substantial risk of the baby being seriously handicapped. An additional clause allows abortion on the grounds that 'the continuation of the pregnancy would involve risk of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman greater than if the pregnancy were terminated.' This is the tenuous basis on which the vast majority of women gain permission from doctors and the state to have an unwanted pregnancy terminated.

Earlier legislation outlawing abortion after 28 weeks remained in force. The 1967 Act did not legalise abortion: it remained illegal except under stringent conditions. So why was it passed?



DAVID ALTON

The main pressure for the 1967 Act was the establishment's concern to curb the fertility of women whom the state considered feckless or irresponsible in the use of contraceptives. In the fifties and sixties a growing range of social problems — 'unmarried mothers', 'juvenile delinquents', 'latchkey kids', 'problem families' — became a focus of public concern. Large families came to be associated with poverty, and poverty with crime. Part of the solution to what came to be known as the 'cycle of deprivation' — the reproduction of social problems within working class families — was stricter control over reproduction. The state encouraged the Family Planning Association to hand out condoms, coils and pills. Abortion came to be regarded as necessary for those who neglected to make use of these facilities.

A new law was necessary to regulate the availability of abortions. Existing legislation was inadequate to prevent the large number of backstreet abortions or to stamp out illegal operations by



PRO-LIFE PROTESTERS HAVE PROMOTED ANTI-ABORTION PREJUDICE

members of the medical profession. In 1949 one study by Dr Eugene Cheeser estimated that there were 250 000 abortions annually. The practice of importing medical abortionists as 'D&Cs' (scraped uterine curettage) to perform abortions was also widespread. Although there were many abortions, prosecutions were rare. Probably one in every thousand came to light because the woman died.

The 1967 Abortion Act also aimed to address the problem of children born with physical and mental disabilities. A series of Rubella outbreaks in the early sixties (leading to babies being born deaf and blind) and the terrible effects of the Thalidomide drug, which also became apparent at the time as well as the prevalence of Down's Syndrome and spina bifida, prompted intensive research into the early detection of congenital and genetic abnormalities. Doctors wanted the right to terminate pregnancy when there was a high risk of abnormality.



DAVID STEEL

Before 1967 abortion on these grounds was illegal and a woman had to convince three doctors, one of them a psychiatrist, that the thought of having an abnormal child was gravely affecting her mental health.

The new abortion legislation also reflected the general liberalisation in attitudes to sex in the fifties.

The relaxation of laws on divorce, homosexuality, remarriage and abortion made the status of the doctor the centre of the 'liberal society'. But there was no liberating impulse behind the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act. The new legislation was motivated by the need for the state to step in to regulate practices which were already widespread. The 1967 Act aimed to remove abortion from the black market and bring it firmly under state control. This was the significance of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which removed penalties from homosexual relations between men over the age of 21 in private. The Act mainly sanctioned existing homosexual relations, but on a restricted and discriminatory basis.

### HUMILIATING

The limitations of the 1967 Act were apparent from the start. As its creator David Steel has insisted in recent weeks, 'I never intended that we should have abortion on demand.' Although the clause in the Act awarded the right to abortion on social grounds has been interpreted liberally by some gynaecologists and by certain hospital authorities, it never amounted to granting women free abortion on demand. Under the terms of the legislation women are forced to produce humiliating justifications for having a termination. Even liberal doctors are obliged to provide 'social' justifications before giving the go-ahead for an abortion.

The power and prejudices of the medical establishment have been a formidable barrier to regulation for many women seeking abortions. The whole procedure is controlled by the medical profession and the state. The 1967 Act provided a clause allowing any doctor to impose 'his or her own prejudices on helpless women.' The so-called 'conscience clause' states that 'No person shall be under any duty save in an emergency where a woman would die without an abortion to participate in any treatment authorised by this Act to which he has a conscientious objection.' This intent clause

accounts for the huge regional variations in the number of NHS abortions. In a bastion of Catholic reaction such as the West Midlands it is more or less impossible to get an NHS abortion.

The 1967 Act made provision for women to get a legal abortion on the NHS, but the authorities never provided adequate resources to meet the demand.

After 1967 the number of abortions carried out on the NHS increased, but inadequate facilities ensured that the private sector, where abortions are carried out for a substantial fee, flourished. In recent years abortion facilities have become the first casualty of spending cuts. As every health authority cuts back on abortion facilities, more and more women are being forced to pay out of their own pockets for a private abortion. The decline of NHS facilities has led to a boom in private sector abortions.

The Tories have worked hard to

turn public opinion against women seeking abortions. A Marplan poll published in the *Guardian* last week, showing widespread support for restrictions on the legal time limit for abortions, indicates that they have largely succeeded. They have been helped along by strident anti-abortion groups such as the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child and Life. A series of anti-abortion Bills introduced in parliament and given high-profile publicity have added to the anti-abortion climate (see box). This sustained propaganda offensive against women's rights to abortion, combined with real cuts in resources and facilities, has resulted in abortion being virtually outlawed on the NHS. It is almost impossible today to get an NHS abortion after 12 weeks, and in many places it is impossible to get an abortion at all.

### IRRELEVANT

Alton's Bill to amend the 1967 Act by reducing the legal limit at which abortions can be performed from 28 to 18 weeks is the latest assault on women's rights. It has re-opened a controversial debate about the moment when life begins and prompted heated discussion about the point at which a fetus achieves viability. But these issues have no relevance for women needing an abortion. For us the question of the moment is how can women get an abortion after 12 weeks? For a pregnant woman who cannot afford to sacrifice her job to have a child, having free access to an abortion is a question of necessity, not of ethics or justice. The Alton Bill and the debate it has provoked express the inadequacy of the existing legislation and underline the urgency of fighting for free abortion on demand and the resources to make this possible.

## The legal offensive

**A REARGUARD** action by an assortment of reactionaries to restrict abortion rights began almost as soon as the 1967 Act became law.

- 1969** Tory MP Norman St John Stevas introduces 10-minute rule Bill stipulating that one of the two doctors required to sign the abortion order is an NHS consultant, and is narrowly defeated by 11 votes.
- 1970** Another Tory, Bryant Godman Irvine, tries to introduce a similar measure, but his Bill is talked out of time.
- 1974** The Medical Service (Referral) Bills brought by John Hunt and Michael Grylls target private sector abuses and the growing number of foreign women receiving abortions in Britain — both fall with the demise of the Heath government.
- 1975** Labour MP James White withdraws his private member's Bill, which aims to cut the number of abortions by half, after the Labour government agrees to appoint a select committee to examine his proposals.
- 1977** Spac activist and MP William Benyon's private member's Bill to impose even more restrictions on women seeking abortions receives its second reading but runs out of time.
- 1978** Sir Bernard Braine introduces a 10-minute Bill proposing a 20-week limit but runs out of time.
- 1979** Tory John Corrie introduces yet another Bill aimed at halving abortions, but fails to get a majority on its second reading.
- 1985** Ernoch Powell's Unborn Child (Protection) Bill, seeking to ban embryo experiments, reaches its second reading, but runs out of time.
- 1986** The Bishop of Birmingham Hugh Montefiore attempts to reduce the time limit on abortion to 20 weeks. His Bill is still making its way through the house of lords.
- 1987** Liberal MP David Alton kicks off new the parliament by introducing his private member's Bill calling for a ban on abortion after 18 weeks.

The barrage of Bills to restrict abortion rights have so far failed to alter the substance of the 1967 Act. But they have succeeded in creating an anti-abortion climate which makes it likely that some version of Alton's Bill will reach the statute books.



THE LEFT

# In Labour's shadow

**Hilary Wainwright, Labour: A Tale of Two Parties, Corgi & Wadsworth, £5.95**

Hilary Wainwright started out as a Young Labourer, became a radical student, graduated to membership of the International Marxist Group, blossomed as a feminist and alternative economic strategist, moved at the time of popular planning and is now a member of the Labour Party. Her career seems to represent the ups and downs of the British left, facing any political or ideological independence from Labourism, the left has found itself increasingly drawn to the swampy ground around Walworth Road. It is one of the stories of the left that so many of those who championed *Engel and the Fragment*, the feminist critique of the traditional, authoritarian left (which she co-wrote with Sheila Rowbotham and Linda Sagar in 1976), have ended quietly with that well-known force for women's liberation and participatory democracy — the Labour Party.

Even before Thatcher had picked up her third election victory it had dawned on the most

optimistic hearts that the Labour Party was failing to deliver, not only at the polls, but also as a vehicle for socialism. Wainwright's way of coming to grips with this unpalatable reality is to discover the existence of two Labour parties: an old and new version. By old she means bourgeois, male, middle-aged, grey, and right-wing; and by new she means feminist, young, rainbow-coloured, imaginative and left-wing. Her hope for the Labour Party now is that one day the new will triumph over the old.

The old version, which she calls 'Labourism', is a post-war nationalisation, bureaucratic collectivism, statist trade unionism and wage restraint. The new 'radical socialism' boasts responsiveness, decentralisation and popular democratic participation. This is the new 'transformative tradition' which is being built on the experiences of local government at the GLC and in Sheffield, Manchester and Scotland, and on the increasing involvement of women and black people.

But if socialism today evokes an increasingly negative reaction in the



**LIBERAL TURNED LABOURIST HILARY WAINWRIGHT**

public mind, then the new left is as much to blame as the old right. Memories of the last Labour government die hard, and that includes Tony Benn staying in the cabinet and gaining the NUM's acquiescence to divisive productivity deals and pit closures, while his party held down wages and reorganised industry as the recession began to bite. The record of the new left in local government is equally depressing.

Like others who were on the payroll, Wainwright recycles the familiar hype about the GLC; but Londoners beyond the buffer layer of professionals and community activists felt the bottom line. When Livingstone's administration came in it promised that a new

enterprise board (Gleb) would help create 10 000 jobs by 1985. By abolition day in 1986 less than 3000 jobs had been created or preserved. Worse still, Gleb had been used to educate workers in the reality of the capitalist's bank balance. Events at Walter Howard Design, a furniture company in North London, followed a standard pattern. The firm received £500 000 from Gleb, but when orders failed to pick up Gleb got tough and forced through 20 redundancies. By July 1985 the firm was bankrupt and another 100 workers were on the dole.

It is a pity that Wainwright did not have the opportunity to update her discussion of the 'transformative tradition' in Sheffield. The new council leader, Clive Betts,

in the cause of 'service delivery', has just declared war on the unions and their 'restrictive practices'. The chair of the education committee, Joan Barton, has just told the nursery nurses on £70 a week that there is 'no money' to fund their pay claim.

'Let's not talk about personal betrayal' the new left will say, but this has nothing to do with 'personal betrayal'. It has to do with the fact that when it comes to what Wainwright calls 'reorganising the economy and transforming the state' there is next to no difference between her two parties. At times she seems to realise this herself, as when she reflects on how ill-prepared the Bennite left was in 1981: 'The radicalism of their demands far outstripped the political organisation and strategy they had fashioned to promote them.'

But she suppresses such worrying insights and is soon merrily planning 'to break the concentrated power of the British establishment' with the same old organisation and strategy — the Labour Party passing constitutional reforms in parliament. She says, quite rightly, of Neil Kinnock, 'As if transfixed by the hostile glare of Thatcherite forces, he dare not move except in their shadow.' Wainwright herself, like most of the British left, is transfixed by the Labour Party, and dare not move except in its shadow.

The very subject and structure of this book gives the lie to any claim for independence. In both the introduction and conclusion Wainwright talks about the need to build 'struggles and movements seeking change of a more fundamental kind'. In between she devotes 300 pages to the electoral machine itself, in all its organisational and institutional complexity. For all the interviews and background knowledge, the focus is unrelentingly inwards; for all the talk of practical resistance to Thatcherism, it is the reselection of MPs, the make-up of the NEC, the link with the unions which command her attention.

The truth is that Wainwright has no strategy outside of electoral politics — no strategy, no tactics, no organisation. Of course if you believe that the state can be 'transformed' and the establishment broken by a parliamentary Bill, you don't really need another strategy. Her touching faith, despite all her disclaimers, in the power of Westminster is really what Labourism, right and left, is all about. This book would have us believe that the crucial question is whether or not the new left will succeed in taking over the Labour Party. The real question is whether left wingers who do want to fight will finally realise that they must break with Labour if we are to get anywhere at all.

**Jon Hann**

## TEENAGERS IN AMERICA

# That hollow feeling

**River's Edge, Tim Hunter (Director)**

The opening sequence sets the tone. The camera follows a car and a few lone muddy teenagers past the nondescript outskirts of a town. Pausing shortly with a child on a cycle, it moves to a fat, scruffy youth, hunched over the handlebars and then proceeds to examine the back of his head. The white tube of the naked reclining corpse rests a strong pallid glow through the overcast gloom. There is no obvious sign of injury, until the camera moves on to the purple bruise. There is something horrifying.

The tone is low-key. The camera is detached, almost documentary in its survey of the scene. The scene itself is completely unremarkable and shocking — later it is a corpse and a stranger. The tone remains very steady, the camera reluctant from rolling back when a foot of the corpse first appears in a corner of the screen. This does Tim Hunter introduce the atmosphere of a film which provides the film, and which is so



**YOUNG AMERICANS: 'NO COMMON PURPOSE'**

crucial in conveying its central theme — the inability of a group of schoolchildren to feel for or deal with the murder of one of their friends. In fact, one of the first things any of them says is 'unreal, completely unreal'. John (Daniel Roebuck) has not only strangled his hapless girlfriend (because she was taking shit) but he then conducts guided tours of the corpse for his curious classmates. None of them can get really excited about it, apart from Layne (Crispin Glover) who immediately takes it upon himself to plan a cover up

to protect John from adult retribution. Layne is motivated primarily by a desire to import the emotions and values of television fantasy into the incident rather than by any genuine regard for John: 'It's like a movie, we can bet our loyalty against all odds.' He cites his role models as Chuck Norris and Starsky and Hutch. One of the girls wistfully bemoans the fact that she cannot summon up the grief she has felt for departed TV characters: 'You figure we'd be able to cry for someone we hung around with.'

Hunter depicts a culture of appalling poverty, even though the lower middle or upper working class milieu is not poor in the material sense. The children wander and mope (generally sucking on joints) through what looks like the northern California suburban version of a shanty town, little impressed by the tacky, shabby consumer durables around them. The adults who loom into our adolescent's eye-view are distinctly unimpressive. A feckless mother ('I'm giving up this

mother bullshit'), a violent stepfather, an uncomprehending bully of a policeman and a ridiculous ex-civil rights movement teacher, who boasts desperately to his contemptuously indifferent pupils, 'We took to the streets and it did make a difference. We stopped a war.' Significantly perhaps, 'radical' is a word they use to register vague approval, as in 'heavy' or 'bad'.

The one adult the boys can speak to is Feck (Dennis Hopper), a reclusive, one-legged ex-biker who lives with an inflatable sex doll and supplies them with dope. He too has killed a woman in the past, but the memory of it haunts him. 'Are you psycho?' John rather presumptuously asks him. 'No I'm normal' Feck replies, and compared with John this could be true. Feck, like

Browning's Porphyria's lover, was obsessively in love with the woman he killed and thinks he has found a kindred spirit in John: 'Did you love her too?' he pants. 'She was OK' is John's appalling reply.

Despite the grimness of the story, the film is not without humour, albeit of the black variety. The flatness of Hunter's delivery, however, ensures that no sentimental or farcical note enters the proceedings. The sober tone is maintained too by the utterly convincing performances of the young actors. Hopper is, needless to say, magnificent again as the grizzled loon, but this time he is upstaged. Crispin Glover as Layne gives us a mesmerising figure in the thoroughly unpleasant self-appointed leader, high as a kite on speed, affecting the most baroque mannerisms as he propels himself deeper into his fantasies.

In an interview in the *New Musical Express* last week, Hunter says of the kids: 'There is no common purpose. Everything has devolved into media and merchandising. You get a situation where kids feel hollow. They really don't see how they might be possibly part of a larger society, they have no sense of any larger society at all.' In *River's Edge* he has unfolded this bleak view with quiet power. The best film I've seen this year.

**Pat Ford**



**WOULD YOU ASK THIS MAN 'ARE YOU PSYCHO'?**



EVERY summer the Revolutionary Communist Party holds its *Preparing for Power* conference in London. It's a week of discussion and debate, and an opportunity for activists to get together to share experiences. For the party it's an opportunity to test people's responses to the politics in *tns*, and to identify problems with the way our readers perceive our strategy and tactics. This year's *Preparing for Power* was particularly successful. Many of the people who came have since become supporters and have been lobbying for an early repeat.

Much as we'd like to, we can't stretch to another week-long conference. But we are holding a special weekend conference — **Breaking New Ground** — to discuss the important political issues facing the working class today.

Now that the party conference season has come to an end, and we know what to expect from both the Tories (massive attacks) and the Labour Party (no defence against them), this is an ideal time to take stock and work out how we should respond. And as conflicts come to a head in the Gulf, Sri Lanka, Fiji, etc, it is vital that we keep abreast of international developments.

**Breaking New Ground** will avoid a preoccupation with the past, and concentrate on analysing future trends. The sessions will cover the current showdown in the Middle East, Gorbachev's *glasnost*, the new morality, and the economics of contemporary capitalism.

The conference is open to all those people who came to *Preparing for Power* and who want to go one step further in applying Marxism to the world today. We also want to get together all the people who have just started reading *tns* and who want to find out more about our politics and the

# Breaking New Ground

way our party works.

The discussions will be serious and detailed, but we can guarantee that anyone interested in politics will find them stimulating and exciting. But don't come expecting us to do all the thinking and talking: we want to hear your ideas too.

Can you think of a better way to spend the seventieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution than discussing what it means for the world today? If the answer is no, send for your ticket now by filling in the form below.

**Breaking New Ground** is on Saturday 7 and Sunday 8 November at Caxton House, 129 St Johns Way, London N19. Transport and accommodation can be provided for people from outside London. Registration costs just £5. Contact **Anne Burton** on (01) 729 0414 for details.

## AGENDA

### Saturday

9.30am Registration

10.00am Plenary: *The Marxist challenge - 70 years after the Russian Revolution*

12 noon Lunch

1.30pm Workshops

- Marxism and the new morality
- Lessons of the Russian Revolution
- Where is Britain going?

3pm Tea break

3.30pm Workshops

- Showdown in the Middle East
- The economics of contemporary capitalism
- The working class — can it still make a revolution?

Evening disco

### Sunday

10.30am Workshops

- Marxism and the problem of culture
- War or peace? — the arms race
- Gorbachev's *glasnost* — what does it mean?

12 noon Lunch

2pm Plenary: *Towards the nineties: problems of theory and practice*



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# Revolutionary Communist Party



# WOMEN NEED

# ABORTION

**PHONE**  
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# RIGHTS

# Stop the Alton Bill

Our response to the Alton Bill is to demand that every woman who wants an abortion can get it — as early as possible or as late as necessary.

The Alton Bill underlines the urgency of stepping up the fight for women's rights to abortion and contraception. We demand

- **Free and safe contraception without any age restriction:**

Anybody old enough to have sex is old enough to have access to the facilities to cope with the consequences;

- **Free pregnancy testing:**

Currently used tests involve delays and expense — the most efficient tests should be made available for the earliest possible detection of pregnancy;

- **A unified contraception and abortion service:**

The fact that contraceptive failure is the most common reason for abortion is a strong argument for integrating the services, which should be separate from maternity wards, and which should provide access to all women who need to prevent or terminate pregnancy;

- **Free abortion on demand:**

Every woman should be able to demand abortion without seeking permission from a doctor without legislative restriction.

**Alton's Bill is an attack on women's rights. It must be stopped!**

**LIBERAL** MP David Alton is pushing a Bill through parliament to reduce the legal time-limit on abortion from 28 to 18 weeks. It comes up for its first reading on 28 October.

For Catholic priests and Liberal politicians the spiritual and legal distinctions between a fetus of 12 weeks and one of 24 weeks are matters of great significance. For doctors and scientists the differences between a fetus of 24 weeks and one of 28 weeks are subjects of intensive research and investigation.

For women the abortion debates are academic. The only difference that really matters to women is the difference between a wanted and an unwanted pregnancy.