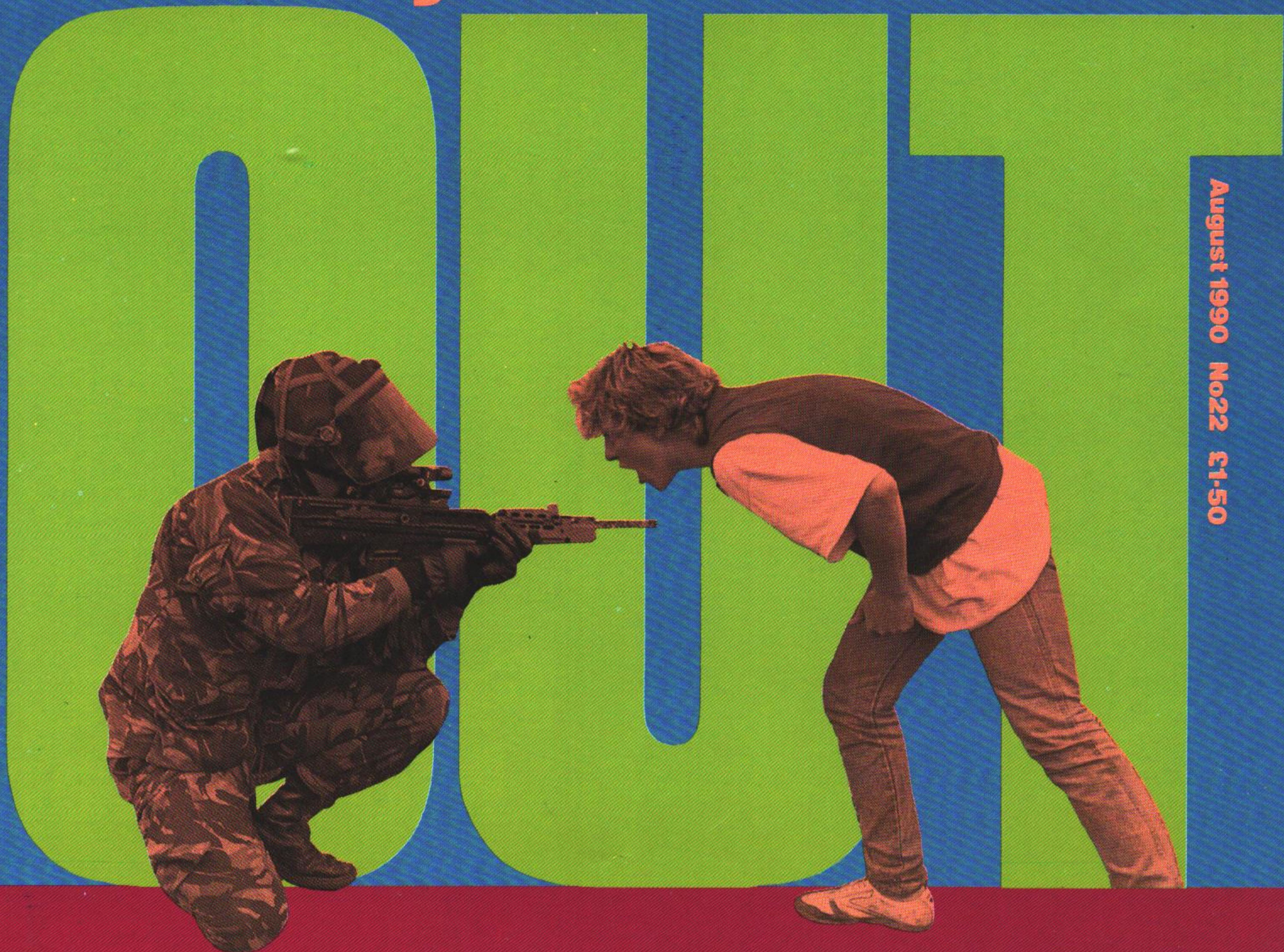
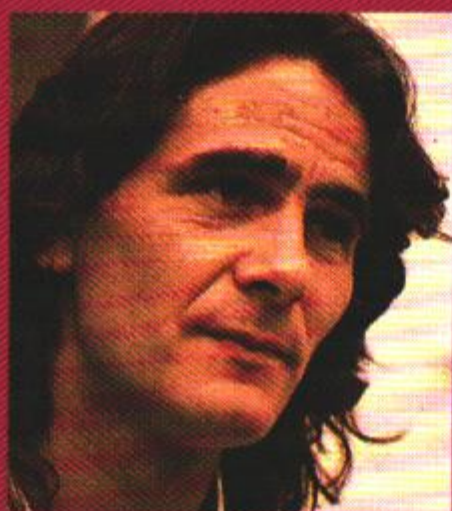


LIVING MARXISM

Another year of the Irish War



August 1990 No22 £1.50



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IRA bombs in Britain: who's to blame?

Irish books: special review section

The South: independent or still in chains?

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PHOTO: Hugh Mitchell



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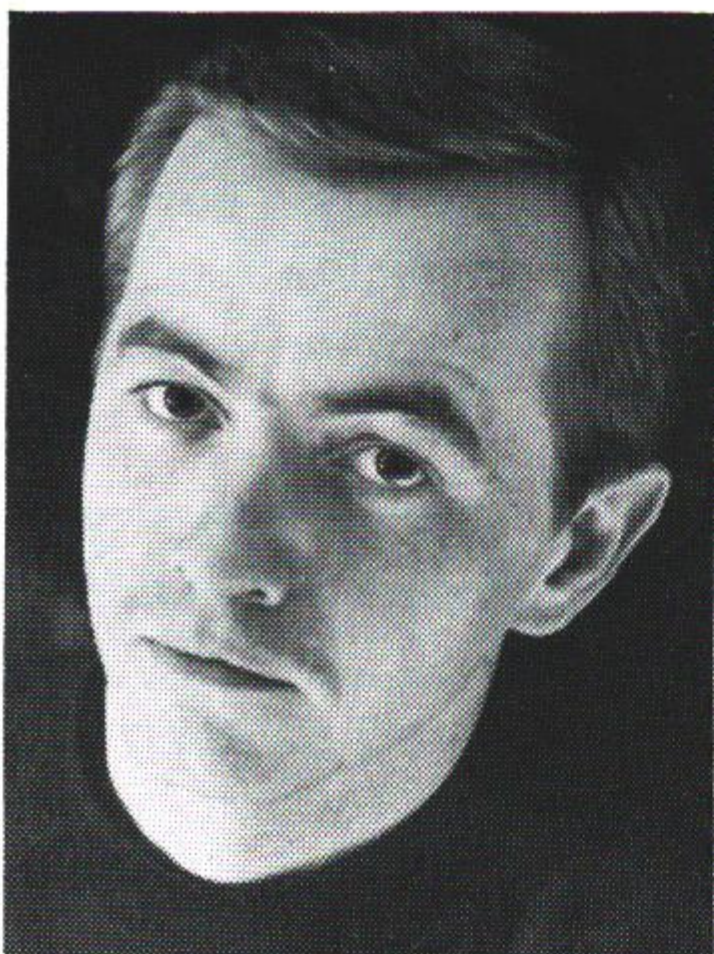
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**LIVING
MARXISM**

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editorial

Two-party politics in a one-party state



editor
mick hume

End of year report on British parliamentary politics: it now seems more likely that the Labour Party could possibly win a general election; but it also looks certain that Labour cannot win an argument with the Conservative Party.

Since Neil Kinnock's Labour Party burst ahead in the opinion polls late last year, we have been told that Britain is back in the traditional groove of two-party politics. The challenge of the centre parties is believed to have wilted, the Thatcherite monolith has cracked, and the tussle for governmental power is said to be returning to the familiar game of Labour-Tory ping-pong.

This reassessment of the state of things has brought sighs of relief from lovers of old-fashioned parliamentary politics, who had become panicky at all the talk of the Tories creating an 'elective dictatorship' over the past few years. But opinion polls are an unreliable guide to shifts in the political landscape. Back in the March 1989 edition of *Living Marxism*, we described Britain after 10 years of Thatcher as 'a one-party state'. Whatever Mori and Gallup might say, we stick to that assessment today.

To call Britain a one-party state is not to suggest that the Tories have created a dictatorship using jails and jackboots (although police batons and court orders have played an important part in some of the government's big victories). It is a one-party state in the sense that one party, the Tories, is able to dominate every major discussion and dictate which issues should top the public agenda.

Even though Labour has recovered in the polls, the Conservatives remain ringmasters of the parliamentary circus. Thatcher still towers over her opponents, and the most meaningful debates continue to take place within Tory ranks, while the opposition stands aside and supports one Conservative

Western world can boast that sort of record of consistent success.

Yet the Tories have never been a much-loved party, least of all under Thatcher. The key to their success has been their close relationship to the ruling class and the state, which has made them the premier party of British capitalism.

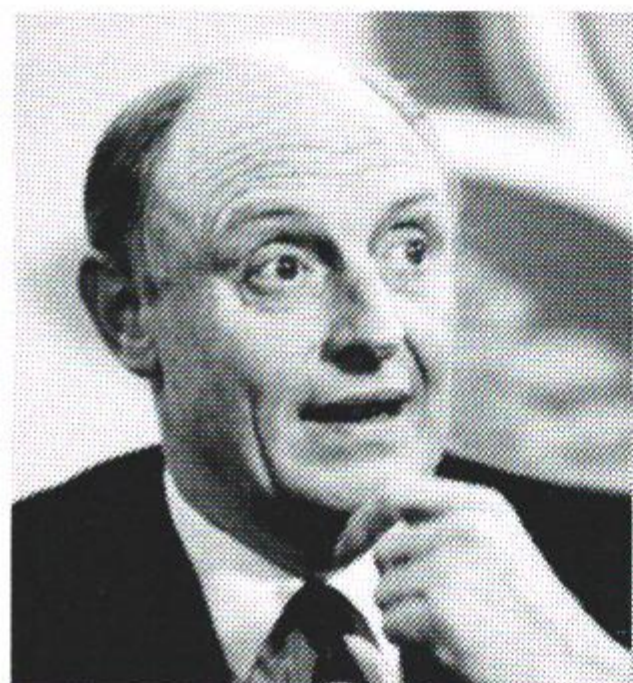
The Conservatives have a rock-solid core of support within the establishment itself and among its loyal middle class supporters. But, as the political machine of the capitalist class, they also benefit from the influence which capitalist ideas have over other sections of British society. This is what has enabled them to win considerable numbers of working class votes. In particular, the Tories' reputation as the party of the Empire and the flag has allowed them to exploit the popular strength of reactionary nationalist sentiments. Alf Garnett may be a caricature; however, the patriotic Queen Mother-loving Tory-voting worker does exist, not just in London's East End, but all over the country.

There has been a long and boring sociological debate about the secret of the Tories' success in winning workers' votes. The factor which is normally missed out of the calculations is the role which the

This capitalist culture helps to explain the long-term success of the Tories in establishing what amounts to a one-party system. And the centrality of the capitalist class in British politics also suggests what's behind many of the problems which the government has run into of late.

The Tories' recent troubles have not been caused by the Labour Party; Neil Kinnock's new plans for taxation reform have yet to set the nation alight. Instead, Thatcher's difficulties reflect the unfolding crisis of British capitalism. The economy is the underlying problem. The government seems unable to get a steady grip on any economic issue. Inflation, unemployment, the trade deficit and interest rates are too high; productivity is too low; and sterling's exchange rate is both too high and too low, depending on whom you listen to.

The rising pile of problems, and the government's evident lack of solutions, has created serious tensions and fissures within the establishment. These divisions are prompting the major political debates of the moment. The internal rows of the ruling class have assumed centre stage in parliamentary politics. It is now common to find that the leading protagonists on both sides of an issue



The Conservatives remain ringmasters of the parliamentary circus



faction against another. Labour has little of substance to say which has not already been said by somebody on the other side. Thus we are faced with the peculiar situation today of having two-party politics within a one-party state.

The fact that the Conservatives call the tune is not just a product of Thatcherism. Britain's traditional two-party system has always been a bit of an illusion. The Conservatives have been the dominant force through most of the twentieth century.

Since male suffrage was introduced in 1895, the Tories have held office (alone or in coalition) for around two-thirds of the time. They have established a solid base of support: over all the general elections of the twentieth century (excluding the messy affair of 1918) the party has won an average 42.1 per cent of the total votes cast. Which means that the voting figures which gave Thatcher the landslide general election victories of 1983 (42.4 per cent) and 1987 (42.3 per cent) were not extraordinary; they were just about average. No other political party in the

opposition parties have played in paving the way for the Conservatives.

Despite their differences over secondary matters, Labour and the rest of the parliamentary opposition have always accepted the basic pro-capitalist terms of British political debate as laid down by the Tories. Instead of challenging the politics of nationalism, for example, they have tried to appear as more patriotic than the party of Churchill. By thus agreeing to play the Tories on their home ground, Labour has handed them a telling advantage. When working class people have been offered a choice between true red, white and blue Toryism and the pink patriotism of the Labour Party, it is little wonder that a fair number should have consistently chosen to vote for the genuine article.

The opposition has long accepted many Tory principles (support for the flag, the monarchy, the police, the mixed economy, etc). So, whoever is in government, the capitalist class and its concerns have been at the centre of debates through the century.

are all members of the Conservative Party. 'In the one-party system', as we noted in March 1989, 'meaningful political debate is confined within one party'.

Take the current high-profile discussion about Britain's relationship with Europe and full entry into the European Monetary System. At root this is an argument about how best to preserve the international standing of British capitalism, about what place the former ruler of the old Empire can occupy in the pecking order of the new world. It is a disagreement among members of the ruling class about whether Britain can continue to pose as an independent power, and about when it will have to accept that it is now just one part of a Europe ruled by Germany and the deutschmark.

The discussion about Britain and Europe has become increasingly impassioned and prominent. Yet it is worthwhile taking two steps backwards, and asking ourselves what all the arguments about the EC, EMS, ERM, etc, have to do with us and our problems? The vast majority of people in Britain have not

suddenly become concerned with the pros and cons of floating exchange rates. The working class remains preoccupied with the far more immediate economic consequences of the crisis of British capitalism. But matters such as jobs, pay and the provision of services, matters which rule our lives, are swept aside as attention focuses on the intra-capitalist debate about Europe.

The Tories divide into factions, and the other political players scamper around lining up behind them. The European issue has taken this trend to the extreme, as Margaret Thatcher's little Englander rhetoric even manages to strike a chord with the traditional anti-European stance of some of her most bitter enemies on the old Labour left. Even an issue like the poll tax, widely viewed as the opposition's strong card, only confirms how the Tory Party and its supporters are dictating the terms of debate. As argued elsewhere in this month's *Living Marxism*, the poll tax became a major controversy not because it hammers the working class, but because it also hurts a section of the Conservatives' own constituency. Throughout the poll tax rows, and despite the claims by the left to be leading a radical mass campaign, the initiative in disputing the legislation has remained with disgruntled

enterprise culture of the past decade, Kinnock has cast Labour in the role of Thatcher's secret admirer, an impressionable adolescent lacking the strength of personality to strike out on its own.

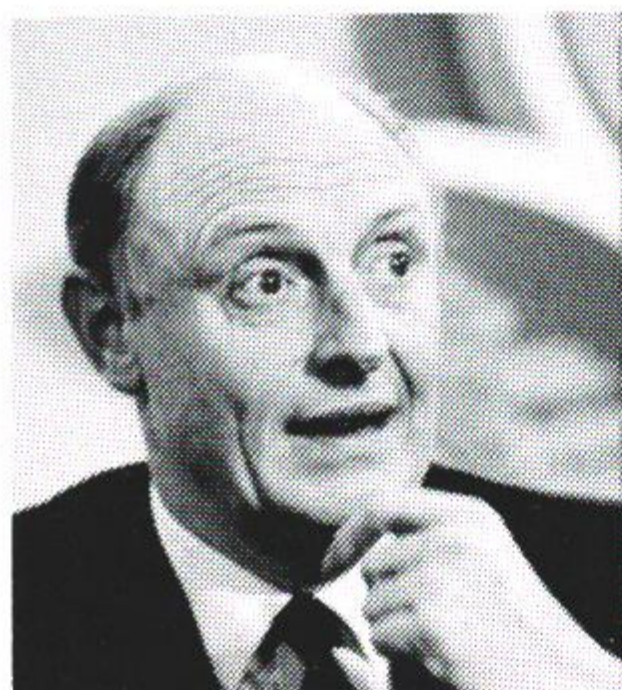
The weakness of the opposition ensures that the one-party state remains intact. Labour's lack of credibility meant that the Tories' position in the polls even showed improvement through the early summer months, despite the fact that the government was still suffering setback after scandal. This would suggest that, although the Tories still have a lot of ground to make up, and Labour remains better placed than it has been for several years, the result of the next general election is far from certain.

The historical strength of the Conservatives' position in British politics means that there has never been an automatic progression from a Tory government being in crisis to a Labour opposition winning the next election. For instance, the most traumatic experience which the British establishment endured in the post-war years was the Suez crisis of 1956, when the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt became a debacle which humiliated the once-mighty Empire in the eyes of the world.

influence over Labour and the SLD; but as her economic miracle has been exposed as a myth, Thatcherism has lost much of whatever potency it had among ordinary people. The relatively dynamic days which the Tories enjoyed in the mid-to-late eighties are gone, and the government is going to have to deal with a far more difficult public mood.

Nor can the Tory Party simply conjure up fresh solutions to its problems. Many pundits have noted that the government is planning only a 'lightweight' legislative programme for the next parliamentary year, beginning in the autumn. The general view is that this is a pre-election ploy, to give Thatcher maximum scope for calling a snap poll next year without losing too many important bills. In fact things are rather more serious than that. The lightweight programme is not just a Tory trick; it fairly accurately indicates how few decent ideas the government has left.

The original Thatcherite programme is exhausted and, as Kirsten Cale shows this month, the Tory think-tanks are hardly brimming over with brilliant policies to replace it in the next manifesto. Their radical ideas, such as making everybody except the very poor take out private insurance against



Kinnock has cast Labour in the role of Thatcher's secret admirer



Tory MPs, councillors and voters.

Despite the government's recent difficulties Britain is still a one-party state because the Labour Party has no alternative programme with which to challenge the Conservatives' authority, and has proved incapable of putting Thatcher under serious pressure. Indeed the irony is that, while the impact of the internal problems of the capitalist class has allowed Labour to pull ahead of the government in the polls, the Labour Party itself now poses less of a problem to the Tories than ever.

Neil Kinnock has steadily reduced the areas of difference between Labour and Tory policy. Labour has become an enthusiastic supporter of the capitalist market and, despite the ending of the Cold War, dropped any hint of anti-militarism. It has loosened its links with the dreaded trade unions. It has sought to become the blandest party of the centre, giving offence to nobody but the left and the oppressed. By adapting his party's ideas and image to fit in with the so-called

The Tories were in power then, and prime minister Anthony Eden felt obliged to resign. At the next general election, however, in 1959, the stricken Conservatives managed to double their parliamentary majority. If Suez could not guarantee a Labour win, it would appear unwise to wager much on the EMS argument doing so.

More importantly, in a one-party state the results of elections are never particularly noteworthy. After all, why should it matter much which party is elected to implement a slightly different version of the same conservative programme? So long as all sides accept that the concerns of the exploiters who run the capitalist economy must come first and foremost, the consequences for the rest of us will be just as harsh.

There is another side to all of this. Just because the Tories preside over a one-party state and dominate the official political arena, it does not mean that they are truly strong in the world outside of Westminster. Thatcher's ideas might now exert immense

unemployment, are likely to prove even less popular and effective than the poll tax. The British capitalist class has to face up to the approach of an historic crisis under the leadership of a political party which is weaker than it has been for a decade.

In these circumstances, the one-party state is far from invulnerable. But it will survive while opposition to it remains trapped within the world of official politics, where the Conservatives retain close ideological control over their opponents. The British one-party state was built above all by the dominance of capitalist ideas across the parliamentary spectrum. The attempt to pull it down has to begin by challenging that dominance, and instilling some anti-capitalist ideas among the minority of people ready to take up the challenge today. However small such a minority might be to begin with, it has to be worth more than an official opposition which is prepared to concede total defeat in the battle of ideas if only it can be allowed to win an election.

letters

We welcome readers' views and criticisms. Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor, Living Marxism, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX

Wrong on 'queer-bashers'

I was appalled with the dishonesty of Andrew Calcutt's piece on 'queer-bashers' ('The Ealing cottage murders', June) which discussed the dreadful murder in Hanwell. I do not doubt that the murderers have sick minds but I suggest that this may be an isolated mental health case rather than a more general social problem.

The article claims that 'clandestine sex remains a necessity', and presumably cottaging too, because there are no gay clubs in Ealing. Come off it. Of course there are wine bars with a largely gay clientele in Ealing. And why should it be an enormous deprivation to go a few miles away to meet possible sexual partners? What the hell do heterosexuals do in this country? The way Calcutt goes on about this encourages everyone to think that all gays keep their political instincts in their trousers.

What Calcutt does not understand is that some socialists object to cottaging—not because they are supporters of Mary Whitehouse—but because there is an element of sexual and economic exploitation by middle class men of working class youth. The same standards of course apply to heterosexual matters and I, for one, find the young boys and girls on sale at King's Cross a pretty distasteful aspect of Mrs Thatcher's Victorian values and inseparable from them.

The article also claims that the gay scene in Ealing is sedate because 'property values are high'. But this affects heterosexual couples too who, here in tree-lined Ealing, often tend, like your correspondent, to be somewhat staid. And why not? Must everyone's lifestyle approximate to that which Calcutt thinks proper?

The article represents a tendency toward lifestylism rather than the class war. If you cannot appeal to people outside the bohemian fringe you will simply become an entertaining square metre or two of life's rich tapestry. I thought that *Living Marxism* was a bit more serious than that.

Ted Ealing

Offside on the World Cup

Is Puskas better than Pele? Is Maradona (sic) better than Moore? Is *Living Marxism* better than *Shoot?* Alan Harding's article 'The World Cup war' (June) was a self-indulgent piece of writing that smacked of national stereotype and shallowness. Since there are plenty of things that could be said about football in general (apart from its tedium) and the World Cup in particular I was sick as a parrot to see the opportunity wasted.

During the World Cup the Italian authorities tested their anti-hooligan/terrorist measures on fans and isolated foreign holiday-makers on international flights. Scottish travel agencies passed on information to the

authorities on suspected troublemakers, and the English police set up a yobbo hotline. These measures mean the state is raising the stakes in its offensive against football fans in an attempt to bring back credibility to an increasingly distrusted police force. In the past, you've tackled the ideological offensive on football hooliganism well, but in the light of these overt repressive measures brought to bear by home and foreign governments now, the article missed an open goal.

I'm no philistine, since I agree with a lot of Alan Harding's romantic football remembrances, but what was the point? Come on Alan, stop dribbling and we'll all be over the moon.

Andy Wilson Cardiff

The German question

As a member of the German left I am strongly opposed to German reunification. This point of view may seem a hopeless struggle against *Realpolitik*. But I believe it is better to express a hopeless truth than optimistic illusions. Anyone who speaks about reunification should consider a few facts.

First, unification strengthens the most powerful capitalist state in Europe. Soon a huge powerless underclass will be created among workers in Poland, Hungary, the USSR and partly in East Germany. This has already happened in Berlin where the Polish people, seen as lazy, stupid and greedy, are at the bottom of the ladder. Together with the other foreign workers they are subject to discrimination from the West German working class, and the trade unions and Social Democrats ignore their plight.

Second, unification destroys the other answer to fascism: East Germany. The GDR may have been a faulty answer, with the lies and restrictions on individual freedom, but the creation of that state represented a far more conscious approach to the roots of fascism than the creation of the Federal Republic. The East German approach was more difficult to implement than the solution adopted by West Germany. There they just blamed a few individuals during the Nuremberg trials, while keeping the economic system that had caused fascism intact. Bertolt Brecht, writing about the different answers to fascism, said 'It is better, rather than to follow the good old tradition, to begin afresh despite failures'. But it is now the 'good old tradition' that has claimed complete victory.

Finally, over the years the German left has been totally opposed to a united Germany and accepted the GDR's right to exist independently. Now unification is imminent, hardly any leftist party abroad is opposed to it. Consequently, the weak German left is further split over reunification because it failed to gain international backing for its demands. One could even begin to think that the left abroad

supports the enemy because unification has always been the goal of the right. If one accepts the right of the people to self-determination one should also accept the right of the German left to oppose it.

Florian Foester Manchester

Abortion and disability

In response to Tim Clements (letters, July), it is true that Sara Hardy makes the point that 'having a child who is disabled is an ordeal'. But nowhere does her article support the perception or treatment of the disabled as 'sick, as subhuman organisms, menaces'. Under capitalism the reality is that women generally have to bear exclusive responsibility for bringing up children without decent childcare provisions. This is ordeal enough without the additional problems involved in bringing up a handicapped child. Is it really surprising that given a choice women would choose to give birth to a non-handicapped baby rather than a handicapped one?

I do not say that disabled people should be consigned to the margins of society or that disabled children should be drowned at birth. If scientific advances offer the ability to prevent people being born with genetic abilities this can only be a good thing. Disabled people are alive today and I have no desire to alter this fact. But I cannot believe that any rational disabled person would wish their disabilities on to a future member of society.

We must fight for the conditions where women are free to decide whether or not they want to go through with a pregnancy. If a woman chooses to have an abortion because she does not want to face the ordeal of bringing up a handicapped child then so be it.

Tony Sylvester Birmingham

Nietzsche was no Nazi

How often do critics of Marx lift quotations from his writings which detached from context are used to prove his thought invalid? In the article 'Out of the dark, into the light' (July), Frank Furedi commits the same error in relation to Nietzsche.

It has long been fashionable to dismiss Nietzsche as 'the philosopher of the Nazis'. How was this possible with a writer who was anti-state, anti-nationalist, anti-militarist and vehemently opposed to anti-Semitism? He abhorred the spiritual poverty and cultural stagnation of bourgeois society and the reduction of human beings into wage slaves. While Nietzsche had no qualms about straying beyond the bounds of rational thought, he was a pioneer of psychological analysis, an important influence on Freud, on the development of existentialism and on bourgeois aesthetics.

My point is not to defend Nietzsche (or anyone who has enough of a personality problem to declare themselves one of his followers), but to protest at the way an important bourgeois thinker is misrepresented and dismissed on the basis of a quotation removed from context and thus rendered unintelligible.

Mike Lester Nottingham

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Why women are still doing it for themselves

Ann Bradley on the problem of male pills and bombarding testes with ultrasound waves

It has become fashionable for agony aunts to lecture couples on the need to share the responsibility for family planning. Men, the argument goes, have been pushed to the outside in matters of contraception. Since the advent of the pill we women have taken firm hold of the reins and excluded our menfolk from this most personal aspect of our relationships. This has contributed to the alienation of modern man from his children. How can we expect men to be interested in the family when we don't involve him in planning for it? In Claire Rayner's eyes sharing the responsibility for contraception is part of sharing sex. This has always struck me as a bit of a joke.

There is little scope for 'equal partner involvement' in matters of contraception, as every sexually active person ought to know. Unless you choose to use a condom, the practical involvement of men in contraception is rather limited. Perhaps the caring man of the nineties can offer his partner a glass of water to wash down her pill, or apply the spermicide to her diaphragm, but other than that he's a bit out of it. A new book recommended by the Family Planning Association (FPA), *Contraception: The Facts*, sums up the choice: female methods of contraception—90 pages; male methods of contraception—11 pages. And none of the male methods are on the market yet.

For a couple of years the FPA has been running a 'Men too' campaign to try to get men to take contraception more seriously. But even it is forced to admit male involvement on a *practical* level means a condom. And however hard the manufacturers try to persuade us that condoms are fun, I suspect a large number of us refuse to believe it.

Soon, however, all this could change. Earlier this year drug companies and representatives of medical organisations met to discuss advances in contraceptive technology which focus on men. All kinds of wonderful things are in the pipeline.

The male contraceptive pill has grabbed the headlines of the popular press. Hormonal treatment to stop the production of sperm, or to paralyse it, may be available within the next decade. Drug companies are apparently racing to see who can get the male pill and hormone implants for men on to the market first. Don't hold your breath though. The research has run into a number of problems. It seems that many hormones suitable for knocking out sperm also knock out the man's interest in sex—which, although it would provide

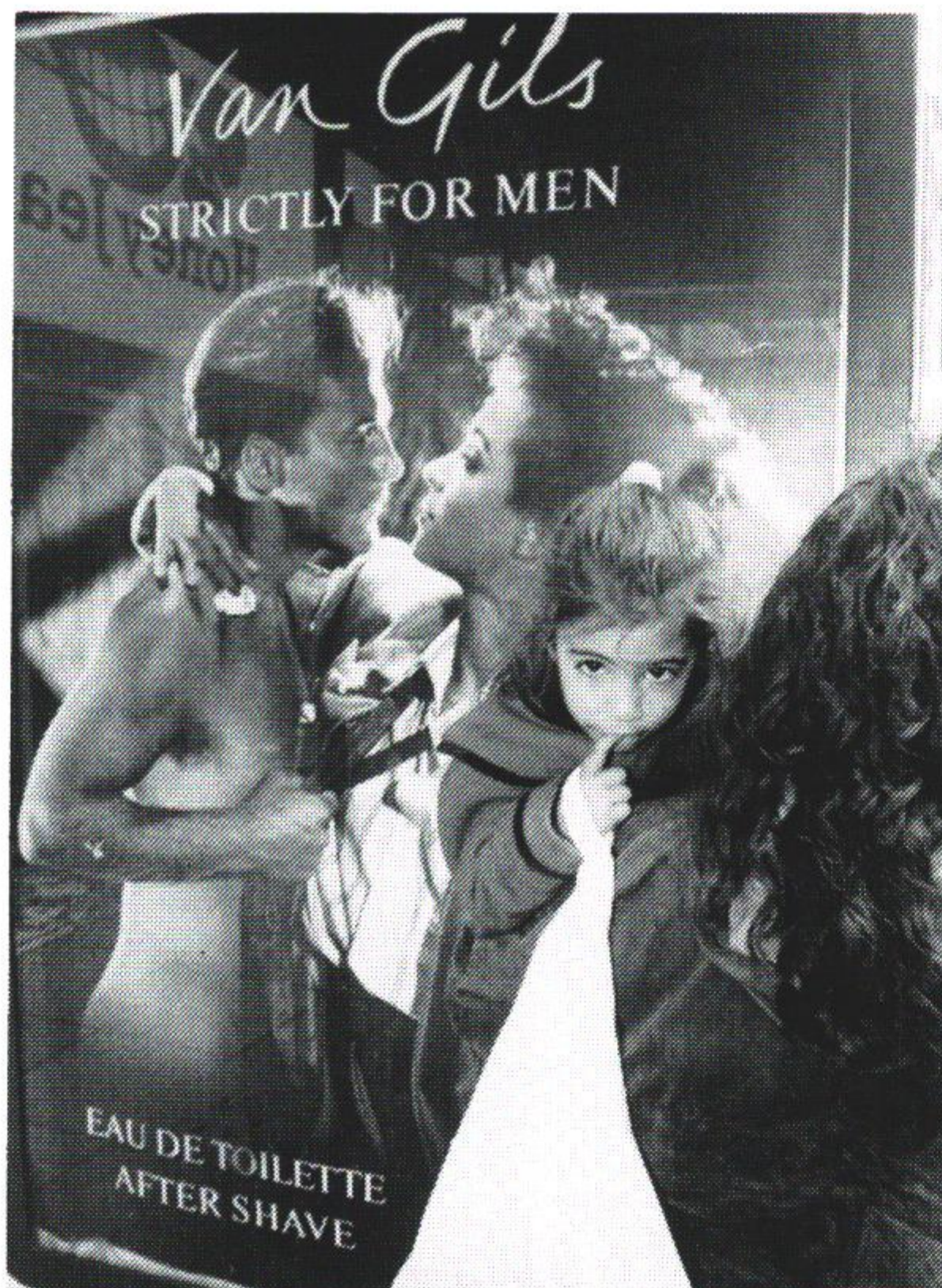


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

However New your Man might be, he won't be the one left holding the baby

contraception of a sort, rather defeats the object.

Immunisation, currently being pioneered in the Netherlands, is proving to be a fruitful area of research. Apparently men who have had vasectomies produce antibodies to their own sperm which make it more difficult for them to get a woman pregnant if the vasectomy is reversed. Scientists are working on a vaccine which would achieve a similar result. At the moment there are doubts as to whether such a method would be reversible, but doctors are regarding it as an interesting possibility. Easily reversible vasectomies are also under investigation.

Areas of research which will no doubt have the lads queuing around the block are heat treatment and ultrasound. Doctors report that heating the testes to knock out sperm may hold out some hope for the future. Although, they hasten to add, it has not proved practicable yet. Neither has killing sperm by ultrasound, which involves a man sitting for two minutes with his testes dangling in a cup of water which is bombarded with sound waves.

Drug companies and organisations like the FPA seem to believe that the biggest problem with male contraceptives will be making them effective, and selling the idea to men. Although the FPA is running its 'Men too' campaign to make the idea of responsibility in birth control more acceptable to men, I suspect that the biggest difficulty will be selling the idea of 'invisible' male contraceptive techniques to women.

Would you trust a man who said he took the pill? Stupid question. Do you trust a man who gazes into your eyes and murmurs, 'You don't have to worry; I'm infertile', or the old chestnut 'I've had a vasectomy'? Personally, I demand to see the scars, or a doctor's note certifying his low sperm count. It's a matter of survival. I'm the one who chances pregnancy if he's lying.

This may be very untrusting, and un-nineties. New Men are supposed to be caring and trustworthy. The authors of *Contraception: The Facts*, Peter Bromwich and Tony Parsons, can't seem to understand my attitude at all. 'Why do people not trust men who say they will use a contraceptive method?', they implore. 'After all, you must trust someone at least partially to go to bed with them; you hope your partner will not give you HIV or something equally unpleasant....If you do trust them, then any contraceptive method a man uses should be acceptable.'

People like this need to be introduced to the real world. I don't know very many women who've picked up HIV from a boyfriend, but the number of women I know who have had surprise pregnancies suggests that the latter is a far greater risk.

Women do not take responsibility for contraception simply because they are surrounded by men with Neanderthal attitudes. They take responsibility for contraception because they suffer the consequences when things go wrong. A woman is motivated to take her pill every morning by the sheer terror of getting pregnant. She knows that however close and trustworthy her relationship with her partner, she ultimately bears responsibility for any pregnancy. The old saying of my grandmother's—'A man can always put his hat on, but a woman is left holding the baby'—is as true in 1990 as it was when she was a girl (except that the departing man might be more likely to put on hair gel than a hat).

However much we may think men 'ought' to be equally responsible for child-raising, the fact is that they are not. Mothers are held to account for their children. A woman's job is at the heart of her family, a man's job is to provide the wages. Even if a man wants to play an equal role in child-rearing it is frequently impossible.

Extended paternity leave may be an option if you are a teacher, but probably not if you work in a shop. A man may want to stay at home with the baby while his partner works, but as a man's wage is still significantly greater than a woman's he may not be able to. In Britain today, whether we like it or not, children are the responsibility of women. Society dumps that burden on our shoulders however much we wish it away. That is why women take responsibility for contraception and why they will probably continue to do so even when doctors perfect the irradiation of testes.

Research into the development of new contraceptives is always welcome. But the first consideration should be their effectiveness rather than their New Man appeal.

It has been suggested that to be accepted by women, a male contraceptive should stain the user's eyes green. Even then I'm not so sure...

• Peter Bromwich and Tony Parsons, *Contraception: The Facts*, Oxford University Press, £5.95

irish questions

Throughout this summer the Irish Republican Army has continued its most sustained campaign in Britain for several years—shooting soldiers on a Midlands railway station, bombing the prestigious Carlton Club in London, blowing up military vehicles and buildings in several parts of the country. Why are they doing it?

Those seeking an answer will find that wading through all the British media coverage is likely to leave them even more uncertain as to what is really going on. Here the IRA is denounced as Marxist, there it is condemned as fascist. One pundit says that Irish republicans are mindless thugs, the next insists that they are cunning master-criminals. The Reverend Ian Paisley attacks IRA men as 'papists', then Lord Hailsham announces that, actually, the IRA 'worship the devil'.

The one consistent feature of British media coverage of the Irish War is that it is designed to disguise and obscure, rather than reveal and explain. (Indeed, there are now moves afoot to impose more restrictions on what is reported concerning Northern Ireland.) The aim is to create confusion about the real causes of the conflict by burying them beneath emotive banner headlines—'terrorists', 'scum',

'bastards', etc. This is never more true than when the IRA explodes a bomb within Britain.

Each bombing is presented to us as a snapshot of tangled masonry and distraught people. Whether it is a full-colour photo in the tabloid press or an on-the-spot report from Kate Adie on the BBC news, the snapshot effect is the same. The reading and viewing public is shown an instant, dramatic image of violence against a background of official condemnations, and invited to express its horror. It is easy enough for people to comply with the request and be revolted. The snapshot of a bombing is a shocking image in itself; and the horror is greatly increased by the warnings from the police and politicians that it could have been you or your family beneath the rubble.

But while a snapshot of carnage can shock, it cannot explain the event it captures. Indeed the whole point of this method of news reporting is to *remove the bombing from its political context*. Thus it can be presented as 'random', 'indiscriminate' violence, the work of psychopaths, another example of that scourge of the late twentieth century, 'international terrorism'.

Such an approach suits the authorities, whose only interest after 21 years of conflict is in mobilising British public opinion against the IRA for another 21. But for those in Britain who think that the Irish War has been going on for 21 years too long, and who want to understand what's behind the conflict in order to help end it, the simplistic snapshot

analysis is worse than useless. They need to put the individual and dramatic bombings and shootings back into their proper context, by establishing what it is about Britain's relations with Ireland that makes Irishmen and women want to blow up British buildings, soldiers and statesmen.

In Britain we are always told that the Irish conflict is 'too complicated' for us to understand, with many historical, religious and cultural aspects which are beyond the comprehension of the ordinary citizen. Better, then, that we should leave the experts in the government, the security forces and the academic world to make sense of it. This is just an intellectual smokescreen. Certainly there is much to know about Ireland. But the issue at the heart of 'the troubles' is almost breathtakingly simple. It is the continuing colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland, which creates an irreconcilable conflict of interests between the British state and the nationalist community in Northern Ireland.

The oldest colony

Ireland is Britain's oldest colony. This is usually understood as a question of only historical interest. The standard version has it that colonialism is a thing of the past: today, the Republic of Ireland is an independent country with its own elected government, while Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom simply because the majority of its people wish it to be that way. So it's democracy all round, isn't it? Not quite.

Democracy does not just mean the right to cast a vote. Are Palestinians and black South Africans who can elect local mayors or councillors enjoying democracy under Israeli and

IRA bombs in Britain

Who's to blame?

The media say it's all down to
'murderin' Irish bastards'.
Linda Ryan thinks that the
people who are ultimately
responsible for the violence
are a lot closer to home

apartheid oppression? For a nation, democracy must mean the right to *national self-determination*. The Irish nation is denied the right to self-determination by partition and the British occupation of the North. Indeed it was precisely to deny Ireland this right that the British state imposed partition in 1921, after the vast majority of Irish people had voted for Sinn Fein and national independence.

Partition allowed the South of Ireland the appearance of independence, and today most people in the Republic consider themselves citizens of a free country. Yet, as Phil Murphy argues elsewhere in this issue of *Living Marxism*, through the denial of national self-determination

Britain is still able to exercise indirect influence over the affairs of the South. The North of Ireland, meanwhile, remains under direct British domination, a colonial police state in the middle of Western Europe.

Northern Ireland is an artificial British fortress on Irish soil, and its very existence is an affront to democracy. Maintaining that existence, and sustaining its democratic image, requires extraordinary measures.

For instance, Northern Ireland's boundaries have been carefully drawn so as to turn Ireland's minority Protestant community (the descendants of colonial settlers) into a permanent pro-British majority

within 'Ulster'. And these Protestants are kept loyal to the Crown through systematic sectarian discrimination, which grants them marginal but meaningful advantages over their Catholic neighbours in terms of employment, housing and political influence. Like British imperialism itself, this discrimination is not the ancient history which many believe it to be; for example, a recent report by the Fair Employment Agency confirmed that the council in Craigavon, a new town which was only built in the sixties, still practises systematic discrimination against Catholic workers (see *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 21 June).

Northern Ireland was built and survives as a sectarian institution, founded upon Loyalist privilege and the oppression of the Catholic community trapped within its borders. These people are oppressed not because of their Catholic religion as such, but because of what it symbolises in Northern Ireland—a political identity as an Irish nationalist and supporter of Irish unity.

The British authorities will insist that the Catholics cannot be oppressed, since they enjoy the benefits of Britain's democratic system. However, nationalists in Northern Ireland experience life under British democracy as the denial of their democratic right to decide how *Ireland* is governed. British democracy is imposed on the nationalist strongholds of the North by 30 000 troops and paramilitary policemen, by no-jury courts, and by all the hi-tech repressive paraphernalia of a modern police state. The IRA is the consequence.

The contradiction between Irish nationalism and British imperialism is an irreconcilable one, since it hinges on the fundamental issue of sovereignty, of who is to rule in Ireland. That is why the many attempts to find a negotiated solution to the conflict have come to nothing, and why the latest initiative launched by Northern Ireland secretary Peter Brooke will not end the war either. Indeed, despite these diplomatic efforts to keep up the appearance of a democratic process at work, the British establishment itself knows that it cannot negotiate away the aspiration for national self-determination. There can be no lasting compromise solution in Northern Ireland because, as one right-wing commentator recently noted, 'what genuine nationalist would be content with power-sharing inside another nation?' (Andrew Gimson, *Spectator*, 30 June).

Time and again, the British state has turned to violence to contain the

The Carlton Club, symbol of the British establishment, after the IRA called



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

irish questions

nationalist threat in Ireland. Time and again, the Irish have hit back, as the oppressed inevitably will. The latest cycle of repression and resistance began in the late sixties: Catholics took to the streets of Northern Ireland to demand civil rights and an end to discrimination, Loyalist police and mobs attacked them, and, in August 1969, the British Army arrived to put down the unrest and defend the sectarian state. The conflict quickly developed into open warfare between the British Army/Royal Ulster Constabulary and the IRA, which was reformed as the armed expression of nationalists' popular will to be free.

Twenty-one years after the troops arrived, the colonial war continues. The British government remains determined to hold on to its oldest colony. And the core section of the nationalist community remains right behind the republican struggle, as evidenced by events like the election and re-election of Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams as MP for West Belfast. This is the context in which an individual bombing in Britain must be placed if we are to make sense of the violence.

Most of the confusion about Ireland among British people arises from the attempts by the authorities to deny that they are engaged in a war at all. Those in power have good reason to hide the truth. For Northern Ireland is no ordinary colony. Instead of being on the other side of the globe, it is on Britain's doorstep; indeed, through partition, it is a colony inside the walls of the 'United Kingdom' itself.

At the heart

This makes the Irish War a far more direct threat to the power and authority of the British ruling class than any other colonial battle. It means that the British state cannot afford to lose in Ireland. Yet, as the last 21 years have shown, it cannot win, either. So the authorities devote immense resources to isolating the resistance within the nationalist areas of Northern Ireland, and preventing it from 'infecting' the British body politic. They have built an entire propaganda industry to lend legitimacy to their militarism in Ireland by keeping British and international opinion on the government's side. Their major success has been in presenting the colonial war against the IRA as an issue of crime and punishment.

The ongoing shoot-to-kill controversy which has become known as the Stalker affair demonstrates how what is presented as a law and order campaign is in fact a military occupation. In November and December 1982, six

republican suspects were shot dead in County Armagh; all were unarmed, and one was a teenager who had no connection with the republican movement. In line with the attempt to disguise the war, the killings were carried out not by British troops but by policemen—members of a special police squad trained by the SAS.

PR war

To maintain the illusion of impartial law and order, the authorities later felt obliged to prosecute the police gunmen and set up an inquiry under deputy chief constable John Stalker of the Manchester constabulary. But these public relations exercises could not be allowed to interfere with the waging of a war. Thus Stalker was smeared and suspended when he took his inquiry too seriously; and a Loyalist judge presiding over the trial of the police executioners in a no-jury court dismissed the case after praising the officers for bringing three unarmed republicans to 'the final court of justice' by shooting them dead.

Even from a distance, it is difficult to accept such a charade as 'normal' law and order. To many nationalists within Northern Ireland, it is clear evidence that the law and the courts are just weapons used against them in a war. They look to the IRA to defend them and deliver some justice of their own; thus a couple of years after the court case cited above, the judge who praised the police gunmen met his own 'final court of justice' via an IRA bomb.

IRA bombs in Britain are examples of the colonial war in Ireland spilling over into the imperial heartland. Indeed, these attacks have often been a response to a particular act of British brutality in Northern Ireland. For example, the first British bombing of the current phase of the Irish conflict took place at the parachute regiment barracks in Aldershot, shortly after the paras had shot dead 14 unarmed civil rights marchers on Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, in Derry.

Tragic casualties

These attacks in Britain should come as no surprise. It would be naive to imagine that a war could be contained within only one of the countries involved. When there are civilian casualties, it is tragic, just as it is when a schoolgirl is killed by a plastic bullet in Northern Ireland. Once again, however, the rational response of those who want to end the killing is not just to throw up their arms in horror, but to identify the underlying cause of the conflict in order to set about eliminating it.

Once you place the violence in its

proper political context, it ought to become clear that the British ruling class and its state are ultimately to blame. Through partition and the occupation of the North, these forces deny Ireland the right to national self-determination. So long as that oppression remains, there will be resistance to it.

The British state's military attempts to enforce its rule in Ireland created the modern IRA. This guerrilla force did not exist before the arrival of British troops in August 1969. It was spontaneously created in response to British and Loyalist repression. The British authorities should be held responsible for the consequences of their actions. They should be made to carry the blame for every act of violence connected to the Irish War; for it is a war which they caused and they still sustain.

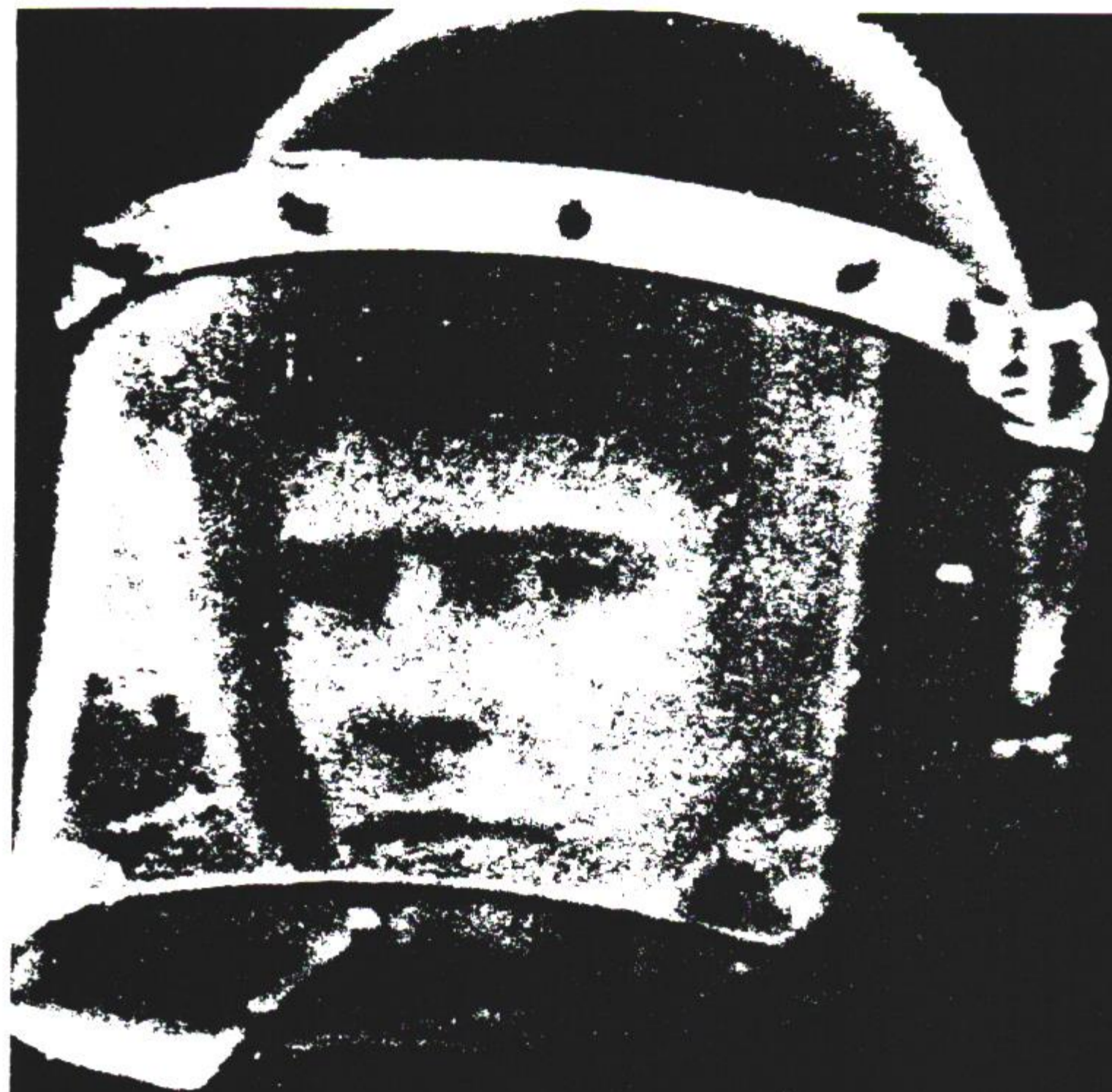
Of course the British establishment will not put its hand up and concede responsibility for the conflict. It seeks to deflect public anger away from itself and towards the Irish, by claiming that the threat to British imperialism is really a menace to every British citizen. This charade has become so routine that, even after the bomb at the Carlton Club, a highly selective attack on a bastion of the establishment, Tory and Labour Party leaders alike denounced 'indiscriminate' IRA violence!

Who benefits?

Those in Britain who are concerned to end the Irish War should resist joining in the knee-jerk condemnations, and think again before allowing ourselves a purely emotional response to the snapshots we are shown. Ask yourself, who benefits from such outbursts? Stoking the fires of anti-Irish prejudice can only give succour to the British authorities which are truly behind the conflict, and endorse the misconceptions and confusion among ordinary British people.

When a bomb goes off in Britain, the need is to break through the cheap condemnations and howling headlines, to clarify the causes and the issues at stake. Britain is to blame for the Irish War. The only way to end it is to withdraw all British forces immediately. The Irish nation has the right to self-determination. And so long as that right is denied, any Irishman or woman has the right to fight for it. When they see fit to bring that fight to Britain, let us be sure that popular anger is directed against the right 'men of violence'—the ones who organise a dirty colonial war from the comfort of Westminster and Whitehall.

The British authorities should be made to carry the blame for every act of violence connected to the Irish War; a war which they caused and still sustain



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irish questions

The issue of Irish unification and the creation of a 32-county republic is no longer of any significance to Irish politics and society, if it ever really was. At least, that is the dominant consensus among Southern Irish politicians and academics today.

The tendency to play down the importance of the partition of Ireland in 1921 has been gaining ground since the early seventies. Two books which proved influential in this respect were Garret FitzGerald's *Towards a New Ireland* and Conor Cruise O'Brien's *States of Ireland*. It is significant that they were both published in 1972—just a couple of years after the start of 'the troubles' in the North, and the year when the conflict was most violent.

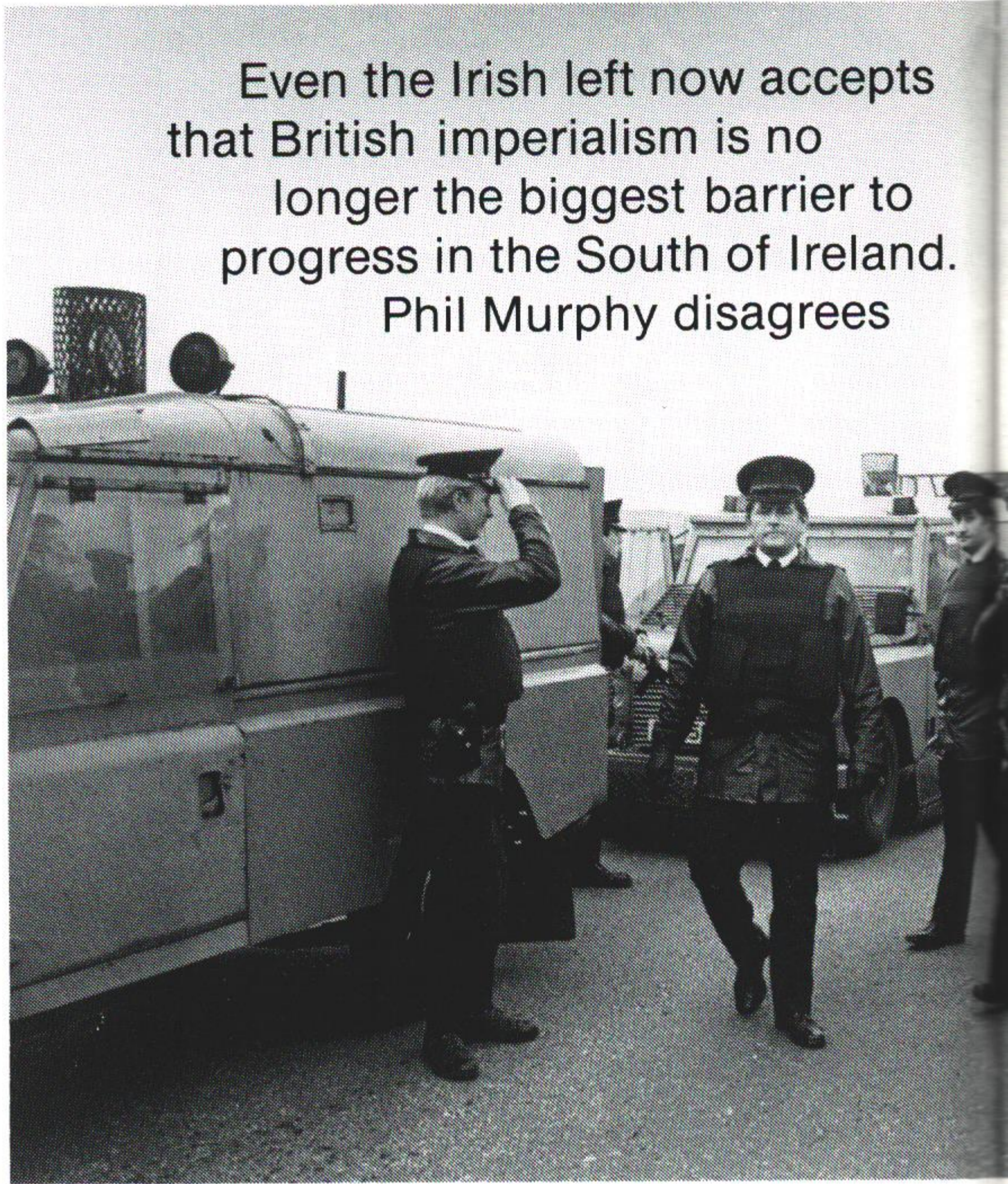
The revisionist school of Irish writing which FitzGerald and Cruise O'Brien helped to found serves a most practical political end in the context of the Irish War. It is designed to deny the modern republican movement any shred of legitimacy in its struggle for Irish unity. Members of this school now range from mainstream historians like Roy Foster to radicals like Henry Patterson. They have produced countless variations on the same theme over the past two decades; which should at least raise the question as to why, if the republican struggle is so lacking in legitimacy and importance, do all these academics and politicians feel the need to spend so much effort repeatedly saying so?

The Irish left has also adapted to the anti-republican consensus in the South. For example, the Workers Party (which represents the rump of the old 'Official' IRA) has joined the mainstream of parliamentary politics in Dublin after waging a long and

bitter campaign against the IRA's struggle for Irish unity. It is now set to renounce the relevance not just of the national question and British imperialism, but of the socialist project. Some on the far left in Ireland are more recent converts to the 'Britain is not the issue' position. They include Kieran Allen of the Socialist Workers Movement, who recently produced a pamphlet 'Is Southern Ireland a neo-colony?' (Bookmarks, 1990). Although the SWM itself lacks any influence, it is worth taking a critical view of Allen's argument as a left-wing version of what is now the dominant view in Ireland.

While expressing formal support for Irish unity, Allen seeks to show that the national question is in practice irrelevant to the needs of the working class in the South. His pamphlet suffers from a bad case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The logic of his case runs thus: Sinn Fein believes British domination matters in the South; Sinn Fein is not a Marxist organisation; therefore Sinn Fein must be wrong and British domination doesn't matter. Indeed he goes further, asserting that 'claims that sections of Irish capitalism are still oppressed by the allegedly neo-colonial structures of the Southern

Even the Irish left now accepts that British imperialism is no longer the biggest barrier to progress in the South of Ireland. Phil Murphy disagrees



Does Britain dominate the S

Cross-Border collaboration like this between the RUC and the Irish garda is effectively creating an all-Ireland force under British command

state represent a major block to the emergence of class politics in the South'.

It is slightly ironic that, for all his criticisms of Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein, and his correct assertion that they are not Marxists (an assertion which they would agree with), Allen shares much of their analysis of what constitutes imperialist domination. He does not challenge the view of neo-colonialism popularised by the American Monthly Review school and adopted by Adams, a view which Allen sums up as '*economic dependence translates into political dependence*'. The difference between Allen and Adams is simply over

whether, according to the criterion of economic dependence, Southern Ireland can still be considered a dominated neo-colony of Britain. For Allen 'this characterisation *did* fit the Southern economy at a particular stage', but no longer. He sees the cut-off point as the late fifties, when Britain's loss of economic power coincided with the opening up of the Southern economy to investment from other foreign capitalists.

This method of analysis fails to distinguish properly between the political and economic aspects of imperialism. As a consequence it misses the continuing importance of distinctive political factors, such as the denial of national self-determination through the partition of Ireland. This mistake leads Allen to attack republicanism at the one point where it has most in common with Marxism—its anti-imperialism. Despite their inability to offer a convincing analysis of how imperialism affects the South, republicans do have an instinctive recognition of the relevance of British oppression throughout Ireland.

To support his case, Allen sets up and knocks down a series of straw men. For example, he asserts that those who believe Britain still dominates the South cite 'the pattern of trade, the level of British investment in industry, and the dominance of British capital in the banking sector', or the role of 'the multinational corporations'. He then marshals enough statistical evidence to show that Britain's economic influence is not what it was and that multinationals don't dominate the Irish economy either.

Looser links

The core of the pamphlet is devoted to proving that Anglo-Irish economic links have loosened since the late fifties. We can agree with most of this; but why should it mean that the political relationship between London and Dublin has changed? True, British capitalism no longer controls the Southern Irish economy. But via partition and the occupation of the North, British imperialism remains the *political* guarantor of all capitalist interests in Ireland, be they Irish, British, American, Dutch, Japanese, German or whatever.

The problem with Allen's analysis stems from the flaw in his initial premise about the direct link between economic and political 'dependence'. Economic domination and political oppression are both features of imperialism; but they are not the same thing.

For Marxists, imperialism is the form which the international capitalist system has taken in the twentieth century. This imperialist

age is best understood as the era of capitalism in stagnation, when the advanced nations have to seek international solutions to economic problems which they can no longer resolve on the basis of their domestic economies. Thus the capitalist powers exploit systematically the third world and compete with each other for control of international trade and investment outlets and sources of raw materials. A central feature of imperialism is the division of the world between a handful of oppressor nations (usually called the West) and the rest (the third world).

National oppression is the denial of political independence to an economically backward nation by an imperialist power. There is a close connection between the politics of imperialism, with its inherent tendency towards such political oppression, and economic domination. Colonisation has often made economic exploitation easier, cheaper, and less troublesome for the imperialists.

Is Canada a colony?

However, such direct political oppression need not follow automatically from economic domination. It is quite possible for the imperialist powers to exploit a backward capitalist country and supervise its affairs without colonising it. The denial of national self-determination is now quite rare, confined to such nations as Palestine and Ireland. In the post-war era of decolonisation, the imperialists have tended to exercise their political influence more indirectly, by applying financial and diplomatic pressure on third world nations. Today the trend is back towards more direct political and military interventions—as in Lebanon, the Gulf, Grenada, Libya, Panama, etc—but these remain sporadic. More often the imperialist powers still use local surrogates and stooges to dominate the third world on their behalf.

Allen's crude assertion that 'economic dependence translates into political dependence' misunderstands the distinctiveness of direct political oppression. Indeed, by applying his formula, you could argue that *all* nations are politically dominated.

The development of imperialism has created a unified international market in which every country experiences 'economic dependence' on the world economy. No nation, from the weakest to the mightiest, can operate independently of the imperialist economic system. Canada, for example, is economically dependent on the world economy in general, and on the USA in particular. If we took Allen's approach seriously, we would surely



PHOTO: Pacemaker

ain still South?

irish questions

have to say that, therefore, Canada is also politically enslaved. Yet in reality, Canada is an independent imperialist power in its own right. And what of the mighty USA itself, which in recent years has become increasingly economically dependent on international finance, especially from Japan and West Germany? Would Allen pursue the logic of his theory of economic and political dependence, and conclude that America, the most powerful nation on Earth, is becoming a Japanese neo-colony?

Political oppression cannot be simply equated with economic dependence. It is a specific, and the most direct, form of imperialist domination. And where direct oppression still exists, as in the denial of Irish self-determination, it must remain the most important political issue facing the working class of that nation. This is not only a question of the physical threat which imperialism poses to the working class, but also of the political confusions which oppression creates, hampering the development of class politics.

Indivisible right

The partition of Ireland in 1921 remains the mechanism through which Britain dominates Ireland politically today. Ireland is one nation, and its right to self-determination is not divisible. Partition may have reduced the number of Irish counties under direct British control from 32 to six, but through it British imperialism continued to exercise indirect domination over the weak and artificial Southern state. Thus only the form of Britain's political control changed. National oppression will continue for as long as the Border does. This is not some historical legacy which the passing of time can erode; the presence of British imperialism remains the guarantor of capitalism throughout Ireland, and the political confusions caused by partition continue to dog the Irish working class.

The formal independence granted to the South has appeared to most Irish people to represent real national freedom. This view was not accepted overnight with partition, but became more widespread as the Southern state consolidated itself through its civil war against hardline republicans in the twenties, its populist anti-British economic policies in the thirties, and its official neutrality during the Second World War. This paved the way for the formal declaration of an Irish Republic in 1949.

To many people in the South the national question only appears directly relevant to the nationalist

community in the Six Counties, from whom they feel increasingly remote. Partition has successfully divorced the concerns of the working class in the South from those of workers in the North. This poses an immense problem since, in reality, the economic and social concerns of workers in the South are intimately connected to the issue of imperialist domination. National oppression is the primary barrier to any sort of progress in Ireland. It has distorted and held back the development not only of the North but of the South, which imperialism has turned into the nearest thing to a third world country in Western Europe.

Successful illusion

The Irish republican and radical traditions have always tended to underestimate the significance of the partition arrangement imposed by the British. Today the most popular radical view is that however important partition may have been back then, 70 years is a long, long time. Allen shares the attitude of trivialising partition. But its importance to Irish (and indeed British) politics is almost impossible to overestimate.

Through partition Britain retained ultimate authority in Ireland while delegating day-to-day government to parliaments in Belfast and Dublin. Probably the greatest success of this arrangement has been the creation of an illusion of independence in the South. This has allowed the Dublin regime to establish a degree of credibility with Irish people which the Belfast Unionists could never gain among Northern nationalists.

The success of the illusion of independence is confirmed by the way in which a left winger like Allen can argue that British imperialism is no longer the major barrier to the liberation of the Irish working class. Allen, like many others, has fallen victim to the 'confusion of ideas' which Irish revolutionary James Connolly warned in 1914 would be the result of partition: 'Such a scheme would destroy the labour movement by disrupting it....In short it would make division more intense and confusion of ideas and parties more confounded.' (*Selected Writings*, P Berresford Ellis (ed), 1974, p276)

To substantiate his case Allen asserts that if a local ruling class operates under a form of independence then foreign imperialism is not a major political problem. But the appearance of local rule is one of the crucial manifestations of British oppression in Ireland. For most of the half-century from 1920 to 1968 the British government didn't intervene in Northern Ireland either. There was

even a convention that the Westminster parliament would not discuss the internal aspects of Six Counties' affairs. This lasted until Northern Ireland erupted again with the civil rights movement taking to the streets from 1968. Allen wouldn't use this as an argument that the Six Counties were ever free from British rule. But by the same methodological fetish with political forms that he applies to the South, Allen should be telling us that Britain didn't matter in the North either. He might recall that others—from the Workers Party to the SDLP—have already gone down this path with less restraint and to dangerous effect.

Allen's pamphlet sets up one positive objective: not to 'let the Southern state off the hook'. Given the tradition among Irish republicans and radicals of failing effectively to challenge petit-bourgeois Southern governments, this is a worthy aspiration. The irony is that, by ruling out a reactionary role for British imperialism as the dominant, if indirect, political force in the South, Allen himself tends to foster illusions in the legitimacy of the Dublin regime. These illusions are exactly what Britain sought from partition, to help stabilise Southern society.

Allen accepts the formal independence of the Republic of Ireland as the real independence of an Irish republic. As evidence he offers the myth that prime minister Charles Haughey 'broke with the common EEC stance when he refused to back Britain's war effort' against Argentina in 1982.

Not so neutral

Since the Second World War Dublin governments have used neutrality as the symbol of Irish sovereignty—and as a substitute for seeking an end to partition. Haughey reinforced the impression of neutrality over the Falklands War; but, just as Eamon de Valera's government did during the Second World War, he bowed to British interests when it mattered. Straight after Argentina repossessed the islands, Ireland voted for the UN security council resolution condemning Argentine aggression and demanding the immediate withdrawal of Argentine troops. A week later Ireland backed the EEC decision to express 'full solidarity with Britain' and joined in with economic sanctions against Argentina.

It was only *six weeks later*, when the military balance had swung firmly in Britain's favour, that the Fianna Fail government started to talk about Irish neutrality. Ireland's decision to opt out of European

The working class in the South is vital to the successful resolution of the freedom struggle in Ireland

economic sanctions (alongside Italy) just happened to coincide with a vital by-election for Fianna Fail in Dublin West. Even this crude electoral appeal to anti-British sentiment was qualified by Haughey so as not to cause too much offence to Britain:

'We have not acted out of any animosity toward our nearest neighbour but rather in a desire to help.' (*Times*, 19 May 1982)
Haughey's ploy was so successful that Allen, as well as the voters of Dublin West, was taken in. By repeating the neutrality myth Allen's writings do nothing to combat the confusions of partition, which hold back the class struggle in Ireland by creating illusions in reactionaries like Haughey. Today, while Allen endorses the idea that Haughey 'refused to back Britain's war effort' in the South Atlantic, Haughey's current government demonstrates its real relationship to Whitehall through its increasingly open support for Britain's war in Northern Ireland.

In his conclusion Allen comes close to describing the meaning of partition to both the Southern state and British imperialism:

'Fundamentally, the ruling classes of both Southern Ireland and Britain have a direct interest in the

maintenance of partition—and that means the maintenance of political stability...a struggle that led to the defeat of the British Army would cause such political instability that the Southern state would be deeply affected.'

It would be more than deeply affected; without the Border the Southern state would collapse. Its legitimacy rests on the 'independence' of the Twenty-six Counties, and its ability to rule rests on the presence of British power in the North. Once again Allen recoils from facing up to the full importance of partition. To go all the way would be to admit, at least implicitly, that there is another force waiting to restore stability in the South in these circumstances—British imperialism.

Regardless of which foreign power holds most investments in Ireland today, the British-imposed Border remains 'fundamental' to the stability of capitalism in the South. There can be no better focus for the anti-capitalist struggle of workers in the South than against partition and the twin forces which sustain it—the local Dublin government and the imperialists in Westminster and Whitehall. To win Southern workers to this point of view will require both

a convincing analysis of how imperialist domination cripples Irish society, and a forthright challenge to the anti-IRA prejudices whipped up on both sides of the Irish Sea. Allen seems unwilling or unable to provide either.

The working class in the South is vital to the successful resolution of the freedom struggle in Ireland. For as long as the war is contained within the republican strongholds of the North British imperialism cannot be defeated, even if it cannot win. Marxists in Ireland have a responsibility to try to win the working class over to the anti-imperialist cause by making clear who is the real enemy—the British state and its junior partner in Dublin. To do so they will need to develop a critique of the politics of republicanism, which have failed to make the national question relevant to the Southern working class; but they will also need to confront the consensus which denies the legitimacy of the republican struggle for self-determination. Instead, as exemplified by Allen's pamphlet, the Irish left has developed a bad habit of accommodating to the very illusions which need to be broken.

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It seems that the next general election campaign has begun already, and the Tory think-tanks are busy writing the draft manifesto for Thatcher's bid to win a fourth term. During the eighties, intellectual groups like the Centre for Policy Studies, the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Adam Smith Institute and the Social Affairs Unit were at the cutting edge of the Thatcher revolution. But do they have the big ideas for the nineties?

On economic policy the *laissez faire*, if-it-costs-privatise-it philosophy of the Adam Smith Institute and Institute of Economic Affairs is taking Thatcher's free market ethic to the extreme. Over the past year or so the Adam Smith Institute (named after the classical economist) has proposed the privatisation of the Post Office (competing private operators), the prisons (get prisoners to work for their upkeep), the fire service (use part-timers), roads (get residents to block them off) and urban transport (luxury minibuses for those who can pay). The Social Affairs Unit suggests privatising weather forecasting: that means cheapskate forecasting for us ('rain next winter') and cashcard-only weather projections for cherry farmers and fishermen ('rain tomorrow'). But all this is small beer: eventually they hope to privatise government. And to ensure this process is carried out efficiently and profitably, they want to privatise privatisation as well.

The think-tanks claim that these ideas can get the Thatcher government back on the right track. That might sound all right, until you recall that the government got into its present difficulties by pursuing policies like...privatisation. The humiliating collapse of the attempt to privatise nuclear power, the scandal over sweeteners given to British Aerospace to get it to buy Rover from the government, and the embarrassing refusal to put state money into the Chunnel rail link are just some examples of Thatcher's all-power-to-the-private-sector policies backfiring.

The specific privatisation proposals put forward by the think-tanks today indicate that the government is running out of decent assets to sell off. Privatised corporations like British Aerospace and Telecom were extremely valuable; the prisons and the weathermen are hardly in the same league. Even if the authorities were to do what the Adam Smith Institute wants and privatise the lot,



ILLUSTRATION: NAT

Tory think-tanks today

Running on empty

Kirsten Cale looks at what the Thatcherite intellectuals would like to see in the next Tory election manifesto

how would it help them to revive the British economy?

Since the early eighties the Tories have privatised 21 industries. This has not prevented the economy taking a nosedive. In the nineties, pay-as-you-enter roads will not turn around Britain's huge trade deficit, coin-in-the-slot weather forecasts cannot cut inflation and work-your-way-out jail sentences are unlikely to stabilise the pound in the money markets. The fact that the government has put privatisation at

the centre of its programme shows the exhaustion of its substantial economic policies. Yet the think-tanks can only propose more of the same.

The emptiness of the think-tanks reflects the enormity of the economic problems facing the government. British capitalism is suffering an historic decline which is not susceptible to intellectual solutions. There is no 'big idea' that can somehow reverse the downward trend of the past century. As a

consequence, think-tanks with names like the Institute of Economic Affairs or the Adam Smith Institute are left with little meaningful to say about the economy. They are thus concentrating more on moral and social issues, making proposals on everything from crime prevention to arts funding.

The think-tanks are now pushing more and more wild-eyed ideas about individual liberties and cuts in welfare provision. But there is a rational undercurrent to their barmy-sounding proposals; an instinctive recognition of the government's need to make the working class pay for the problems of the system. However off the wall the ideas may sound, they do connect with the Tories' drive to cut welfare spending and erode living standards. Whether their practical proposals are adopted or not, the think-tanks may help to provide an ideological framework within which the Tories can more aggressively promote a 'two nations' Britain, divided between the responsible citizenry and the feckless underclass.

The Adam Smith Institute has pioneered plans to dismantle the welfare state. First in its line of attack are unemployment benefits. Its pamphlet 'Needs reform' argues that dole offices should be replaced by private welfare agencies competing to distribute funds efficiently. Perhaps the company which submits the lowest tender for benefits gets the contract. The institute says these companies could offer unique new facilities to the unemployed—such as claiming benefits through bank cash machines.

Old-age pensioners are not safe either. The institute suggests replacing free care with schemes which give 'more incentives for the elderly to make savings'. Presumably this would involve giving pensioners more incentive to save on heat and food by giving them less money to pay their bills. Pensioners and the unemployed can also forget about alleviating the cold or the boredom by visiting the library. The institute's report 'Ex libris' argues that libraries supply nothing but 'free pulp fiction for those who could well afford to pay for it', and are full of tramps and drunks. Their solution? Pay-as-you-borrow libraries, of course.

Over at the Institute of Economic Affairs, John Gray argues in a recent paper that 'government in Britain must relinquish a paternal role in the economy', but advises that 'government has a duty to emancipate the poor and the underclass from the culture of dependency and thereby enable them to act as full participants in civil society' ('Limited government: a positive agenda', pp15-16). And what

does emancipation from dependency culture mean? Ban the dole, pensions, and all but the most basic healthcare provision. 'The welfare state as we know it...does not relieve poverty but institutionalises it. It does not emancipate the underclass but instead imprisons it in ghettos of dependency.'

It is true that £30 dole a week does not 'relieve poverty' or 'emancipate' anybody. But Gray's argument that people should be free to starve on nothing turns reality on its head. People are poor because the system can't provide them with properly paid jobs, and because welfare benefits are so miserly, not because they are dependent on some over-protective nanny state. The same topsy-turvy logic is echoed in other quarters: the Social Affairs Unit, for example, attributes poverty to the collapse of the family unit, unmarried mothers and divorcées. In the weird, subterranean world of the Tory think-tanks, any symptom of social deprivation can be blamed for causing it.

The think-tanks are not advocating a withdrawal of government from all areas of activity. Digby Anderson of the Social Affairs Unit argues that the government should be more authoritarian and interfere further in people's private lives:

'Mrs Thatcher's government is accused by some of "social authoritarianism"...In fact what is odd is just how little the government has supported values and institutions which conservatives of all parties hold dear. It has mounted expensive campaigns to discourage smoking and drinking but no similar campaign to discourage promiscuity and infidelity....Indeed its campaign on Aids was about how to get away with promiscuity.' ('Why social policy cannot be morally neutral', Social Affairs Unit, 1989, p1)

Blow the intellectual froth off the right's 'new' ideas, and their real meaning is clear. They want the next Thatcher government to go to more and more extreme lengths in promoting their notion of freedom: free enterprise, free market, freedom from the dole, freedom from state healthcare, freedom from pensions, etc. And these freedoms must be protected by more powerful policing agencies which can enforce conservative morality and behaviour.

The sort of ideas now being produced by the Tory think-tanks have been around for a long time. But until the eighties, they were regarded as the fantasies of a few right-wing cranks. The Institute of Economic Affairs, for example, spent many forlorn years trying to

popularise the ideas of American monetarists Milton Friedman and Friedrich Von Hayek before being brought in from the cold during the Thatcher decade.

Even in the eighties, however, the contribution of the think-tanks was not as great as they like to think. More often than not their work simply provided some philosophical packaging to wrap around policies which the Tories pursued for far more pragmatic reasons. The think-tanks' favourite theme, privatisation, is a case in point. It did not even appear in the Tory manifesto for Thatcher's first election in 1979. Early privatisations were low-key affairs to raise cash for the government. Only after the popular success of the larger British Telecom sale in November 1984 did the Tories realise the political potential of promoting privatisation and share-ownership. Then the think-tankers were called in to develop the ideas of 'the enterprise culture' and 'popular capitalism'.

The think-tanks became influential in the eighties because their ideas connected with the changed needs of British capitalism. Their proposals to attack the trade unions and introduce harsh economic policies under the banners of 'freedom' offered some intellectual legitimacy for measures which the Tories needed to stabilise British capitalism. Today, however, the Tories have exhausted this strategy, and the think-tanks have no dynamic new proposals which can address the government's major problems. Indeed many of the right's current ideas appear at best irrelevant and at worst irrational.

It remains to be seen which ideas the government will contemplate adopting in the future. Some think-tank issues seem too outlandish for even Tory ministers to consider. On the other hand, the Thatcherites have already implemented many policies which would have seemed impossible a decade ago. And in today's more desperate circumstances, a policy does not have to be rational for the government to take it up. In the absence of a coherent strategy for dealing with the economy, the Tories may consider themes which, though bizarre, can at least create the impression of dynamism and a sense of mission.

The Tory ideologues retain the ability to provide Thatcher's government with a distinct identity (which at least gives it an advantage over the studied blandness of the opposition parties). But if you believe the think-tanks can provide any fresh answers to the major problems facing British capitalism, think again.

'Marseilles for the Marseillaises'

The FN

PHOTO: Collectif



Community policing
CRS-style in the
Arab ghetto

An outsider arriving in Marseilles might expect to bump into Popeye Doyle (Gene Hackman to the rest of you). Most people's image of the city comes straight off the set of *The French Connection*, a film which left a lasting impression of a seedy, menacing, big, bad city full of protection rackets, drug-runners, pimps and other assorted gangsters.

We didn't find Gene Hackman (he was playing the ringside hero in Paris, defending fans of black British boxer Derek Williams from attack by Gypsy followers of French fighter Jean-Maurice Chanet). Nor did we bump into any local gangsters with bulges in their suits, although they must have been around somewhere because there had been a flurry of gangland shootings a few months earlier.

In fact, Marseilles didn't live up to its underworld image at all. But it certainly lived up to its reputation as the capital of French racism. The locals were clearly disturbed about crime. Before we even stepped off the train, we had been warned to watch our bags. And drugs is the number one issue on the front pages of the local papers. But the criminal fraternity the locals blame for taking over the city do not wear blazers and hang out on yachts in the Vieux Port; they have dark skins and live in the immigrant ghettos of the quartiers nords. 'Les Arabes' get the blame for everything bad that happens in Marseilles.

'There are more foreigners in Marseilles than French', bellowed

Stefanie Boston and Joan Phillips report from Marseilles, the capital city of French racism and the heartland of Le Pen's Front National

connection

corpulent restaurateur Monsieur Metayer. 'The borders are open to everyone. There's a lot of illegal immigrants and the government does nothing. They end up selling drugs and stealing.' His sentiments were echoed by two young women, Marianne and Odile: 'It's us who are in the minority. There are more blacks in the streets than us.' Madame Pellier agreed: 'Marseilles doesn't belong to the Marseilles people anymore. There are far too many immigrants.'

If Marseilles has been taken over by immigrants, the authorities have done a good job concealing the fact. The estimated 200 000 North African immigrants in the city are forced to live a life apart from the locals, just like the shadowy underworld fraternity. They are kept out of sight in high-rise HLM (council) apartment blocks in the rundown neighbourhoods of the quartiers nords.

'Les Zonards'

The words quartiers nords no longer necessarily designate a geographical location: they are just another way of describing the ghetto areas in which immigrants are forced to live in any large town in France. The mayor of Marseilles Robert Vigouroux has even talked about renaming the quartier Belsunce in the centre of the city as 'la zone Nord' so that its Arab inhabitants will be known as 'les Zonards'.

There is an apartheid housing policy in Marseilles. Some 76 per cent of foreigners are concentrated in just five *arrondissements*, in the poorest areas of the city. Immigrants are refused accommodation in the better HLMs. Of all the overcrowded

dwellings in the city, some 55 per cent are occupied by foreigners; immigrants make up a disproportionately high percentage of those households lacking a toilet or shower.

Sitting in his sumptuous front room in the swish la Panouse area of Marseilles, Socialist Party treasurer François Seveau suggested that immigrants liked living in ghettos: 'Ghettos are a natural process. If you look at any town, immigrants always congregate in the north of the city, in the quartiers nords.'

There is nothing natural about the slums of les cités de Bassens, de la Paternelle or du Petit Séminaire, which are dumping grounds for Gypsies and Maghrebins. We took the metro to the terminus at Bougainville and caught a number 38 bus all the way out to la cité de Bassens. Standing off the dual carriageway across from a cement factory and adjacent to a railway line, it was not a pretty sight. A massive rubbish tip sprawled next to the estate. The courtyards, entrances and corridors of the blocks of flats were covered in graffiti and refuse. The flats were modernised in 1963, but looked like they should have been destroyed instead.

On the 'right' side of the railway track is a secluded estate of private houses with gardens occupied exclusively by whites. A wall has been built around the slums of Bassens, apparently to stop kids being killed running on to the railway line. But it also imprisons the immigrant residents within the boundaries of their squalid estate. A young Arab resented being treated like an outcast: 'The French people who live higher up in the quartier

have built a wall between the Arab area and themselves. So when they speak about us, they say "the Arabs down there". In Berlin, they have destroyed the wall whereas here as soon as there is a breach they are desperate to plug the gap. We are cut off from the world.'

Reconquer the kasbah

In the city centre, the quartier Belsunce resembles a kasbah. Walking through the narrow, sunless streets only a stone's throw north of the bustling la Canebière, it is rare to see a white face. This is the heart of the North African community. And much to the disgust of the Marseillaises, it is also the commercial centre of the city. The shops are stocked with speciality Tunisian sweets, flat oily bread which is crisp on the edges and soggy in the middle and leaves your chin swimming in grease, spices, saris, copies of the Koran and other commodities which set them apart from the smart boutiques in the shopping malls on the other side of la Canebière.

'Les Arabes' are accused of turning the city centre streets into slums. Locals complain that Marseilles will never become a tourist centre as long as Belsunce is occupied by immigrants with their souks, bazaars and street markets. A campaign to drive them out to the ghettos is in full swing, spearheaded by the local paper *le Méridional*, which used to be edited by the Front National (FN) deputy Gabriel Domenech. Locals talk about 'reconquering the city centre'. Socialist François Seveau was all for reclaiming the *centreville*: 'Marseilles has become a slum. The refurbishing of the centre of town is

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positive. The projects are to make good healthy businesses and replace the rotten ones that are there.' In other words, immigrants are no good for business, says the Socialist Party.

Islamicisation is seriously considered to be a threat by public, press and politicians. And fear of Islam is not just confined to the older generation, which is still obsessed with defeat in Algeria. At the enormous Lycée Saint-Exupéry in the quartier nord, young French girls spoke passionately about their hatred for Islam. 'I'm really not a racist', began 18-year old Isabelle. 'I respect other religions. But Islam is dangerous. Look at all those Islamic fundamentalist demonstrations going on in Algeria. It gives me the creeps.' The success of the fundamentalists in the recent elections in Algeria will no doubt have added fuel to the racist backlash against Islam in France.

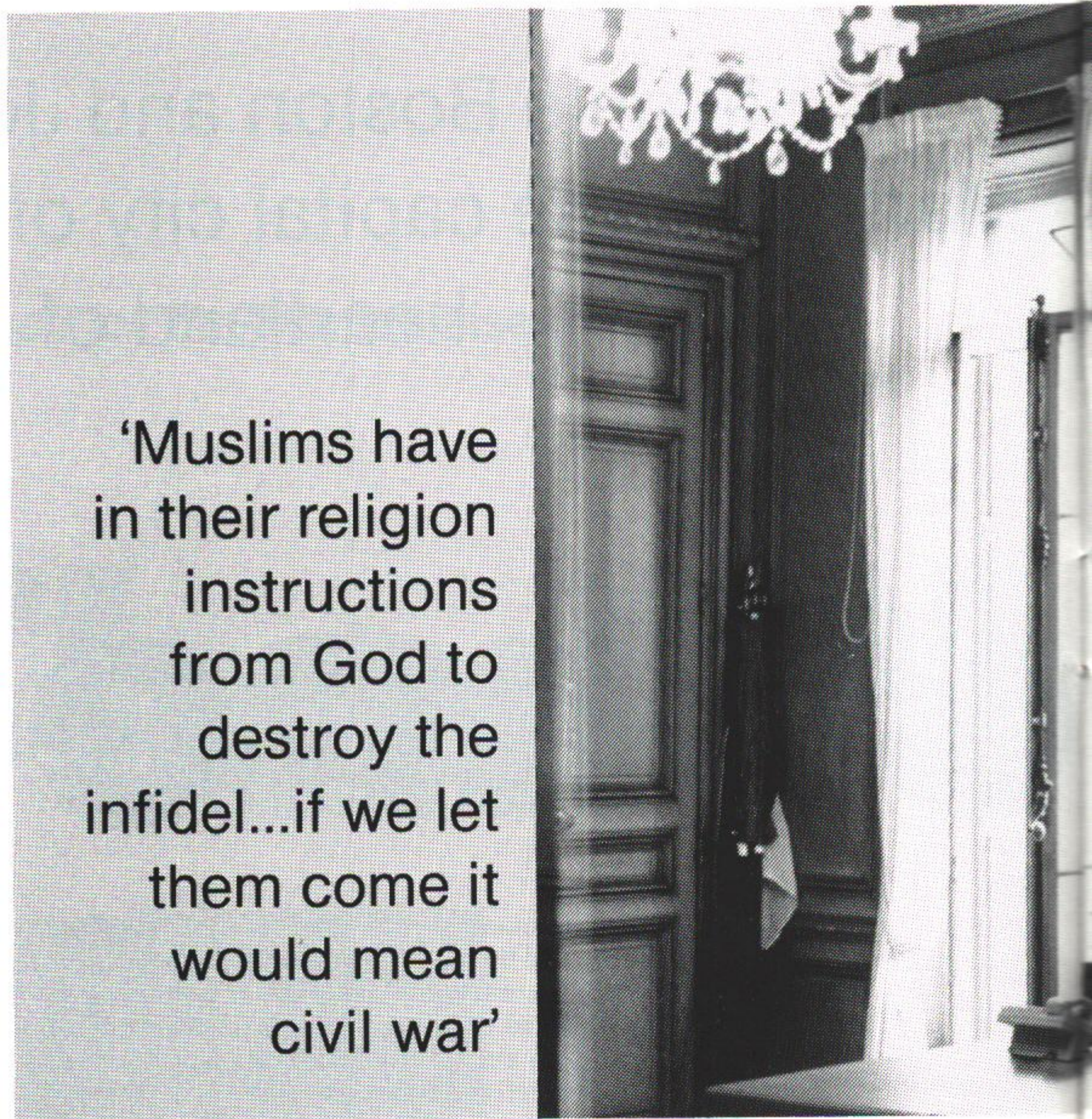
Islam and racism

Opposition to Islam in itself is not the hallmark of a racist. After all, any anti-racist committed to the cause of emancipation would object to Islam's regressive attitude towards women's rights. But when Islam becomes a term of abuse to hurl at immigrants just because they are foreign, it inevitably acquires racist connotations. 'There are too many Islamic fundamentalists here', said 17-year old Christianne. 'They go to our schools. They should live like us if they are here. I accept people who live here if they live like us. But they are more racist than we are. They say they don't like France!' Isabelle and Christianne weren't avowed racists. But their attitude towards Islam was typical of a reaction to the immigrant community which often takes a more virulent form.

Maurice Gros is the party secretary for the Front National in the Bouches-du-Rhône region which covers Marseilles. He was sitting at his desk underneath a poster of his leader Jean-Marie Le Pen at the Front's offices in Place Sadi-Carnot. It is a splendid old building with stone courtyards and sweeping staircases. But the Front's office is seedy and down at heel, as is Monsieur Gros.

'Civil war'

He has strong views on Islam. 'Immigration is one problem; Arabs are another. Muslims have in their religion instructions from God to destroy the infidel. They won't be able to destroy the infidel until they are in a position of strength when there are more of them than us! It's obvious that their religion makes them incompatible with us. One Muslim woman has four children to a French woman's 1.2. One Muslim



'Muslims have in their religion instructions from God to destroy the infidel...if we let them come it would mean civil war'

man brings six wives. That means if we let them come there would soon be as many Muslims as us and that would mean civil war!'

Islam has become a national talking point since the infamous *l'affaire des foulards Islamiques*, when several Muslim girls were sent home from the Gabriel-Havez school in Creil for wearing headscarves last November. The subsequent row polarised political opinion and became the focus of a racist campaign against Muslims. Since the controversy, the French papers have been full of articles asking questions such as 'Should we let Islam colonise our schools?'

Meanwhile, Marseilles was experiencing its own equivalent of *l'affaire des foulards*. A furore erupted over a proposal to build a large mosque in the city. Of about 50 places of worship for Muslims in Marseilles, all but one are converted social centres, garages, backrooms in shops or frontrooms in council flats. Muslims decided to build their own mosque to service the entire community. The reaction was ferocious. 'One mosque is enough!' screamed the leaflets. 'Two is too many!'

The mosque became a major issue in a by-election in the city in November. The Front National poster linked the local controversy to the national furore over the headscarves: 'Mosque—headscarf—

PHOTO: Stefanie Boston

enough!' The FN candidate Madame Marie-Claude Roussel, wife of local FN leader Jean Roussel, polled an impressive 47.4 per cent and was only just beaten by Jean-François Mattei for the Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF). He won 52.6 per cent of the vote, after making clear his opposition to the mosque 'lest Marseilles become a place of Islamic pilgrimage'. God forbid! The Socialist Party's Madame Michele Poucet-Ramade was humiliated. The party quickly learned its lesson. François Seveau told us that 'we have to take into account what people are saying. In the case of the mosque, we can't go against the opposition to it. It was stronger than the pro-mosque lobby'.

French but foreign

There is more than a touch of irony in the notion of invading hordes of Islamic fundamentalists. Most second generation North Africans are more interested in reggae or rap than religion. They were born in France, will stay in France and think of themselves as French. Yet they are not accepted as French. 'We think we are French', said 26-year old Nabil. 'My wife's been here since she was three. She's never been back to North Africa. But the French think we are foreign. My father's been here 35 years, but he still isn't allowed to vote. If you're an immigrant you are seen as a lower



Seedy office, seedy officer: Maurice Gros, local secretary of the FN, with portrait of his gross party leader

being. Nobody treats you with respect.' Mehuab, a 22-year old from la cité de Bassens agreed: 'I'm French. I was born here. But I'm not treated like a Frenchman. I'm not even treated like a human being.'

Discrimination is institutionalised, from housing and schools to jobs and bars. Immigrants are not simply segregated in their ghetto areas; their children are segregated in the classroom. At secondary schools, children are more likely to be streamed according to the colour of their skin. The head of the Lycée Saint-Exupéry Jean Desant told us that kids of Algerian origin ended up doing technical studies while French children dominated the sciences. Whereas French pupils did their baccalauréat (A-levels) in three years, Algerians did it in four. Most black school-leavers have no hope of finding work.

26.3 per cent

Unemployment is a big problem. According to a report published in April this year, 26.3 per cent of the immigrant population is unemployed while average unemployment is 12.9 per cent (*Commission D'Enquête Sur le Racisme et la Xenophobie*). This is probably an underestimate. 'It's difficult to get work', Mohammed told us. 'An immigrant can have the same qualifications as a French person, but he won't get the job.' Rachid, who is 20 and works as a

boilermaker, says he is one of the few with a job from la cité de Bassens: 'When it comes to jobs in the industrial zones, the French don't trust us. They think we are dishonest. There's lots of unemployment in the quartiers nords. Perhaps only three out of 10 work.'

Young Arabs end up doing *le stage*. This is the French equivalent of government youth training schemes. But even on these cheap-labour scams, employers are loath to take on blacks. Saïd Talaouanou is a youth worker who comes face to face with racism every day: 'I try to get young blacks on to *le stage*. But when I phone the employer to get them on a placement, they don't mince their words. They ask if he's an Arab and won't take him if he is. If it's a bar, the boss will say "I'm not racist but my customers won't come if an Arab is serving".'

Ugly society

Integration is an impossibility in the climate of racism that prevails today in France. François Seveau insisted that 'integration is happening': 'There are a lot of attractive young Algerian women who marry Frenchmen and get on with no problems.' Contrary to these complacent claims, a pretty face is no passport to a job if you are black. 'Even if you've got a work permit you can't get work', said beautiful 20-year old Nadira. 'As soon as they see your North African face, that's it.'

Those without work permits risk arrest and deportation if they are caught by the *agents de l'inspection du travail*. These snoopers are paid to do spot-checks on workplaces, usually in collaboration with the police. Their original role was to protect the rights of workers; now their sole task seems to be to catch clandestine immigrant workers.

Young blacks are bitter about the treatment they receive. Most don't bother trying to mix with French people and stay out of the town centre. 'In the town there are bars and clubs where they don't let you in if you are an Arab', commented Faunzi. 'They say "it's a private club, you can't come in". They don't say it's because you are an Arab, but it is. They take one look at your face and they won't let you in.' Assis used to get a lot of abuse when he went into town: 'They'd say "Go back home, Arab"—that sort of thing. I don't go out much to the town any more. It's dangerous to go out alone. But if Arabs go out in a group, French people think we are a bunch of thugs. If you get on a bus, you should see the women clutch their bags!' Teenager Fouzia lives in Campagne L'évêque in the quartier nord: 'There's racism, but in the quartier

there isn't much. This is our corner and we stay here. There are some French people who call us "dirty Arabs", but we don't have anything to do with them.'

The isolation of the black community is enforced by the police. Arabs are depicted as criminals as a matter of course. Drugs has become a codeword for blacks. *Le Méridional* makes a point of blaming blacks for almost every crime that is committed in Marseilles. By always making references to '*ces gens là*', the paper sets out to implicate all blacks in criminal activity.

The police have used the drugs issue as a pretext for criminalising and harassing the black community. 'The papers say that Bassens is a dangerous place', Abdellah told us. 'They say it's full of robbers and drugs. But there's nothing here—no drugs, no violence, just Arabs.' No doubt some Arabs are involved in the drugs trade, but they are just street hustlers, not the men with the connections in Giorgio Armani suits. Yet smearing all blacks as drug pushers provides a convenient excuse for repressive policing in the ghettos. In the evenings, the menacing figures of the black-clad, baton-wielding, gun-toting paramilitary police of the CRS are out in force in the quartier Belsunce.

'Sale bougnole'

Black youth suffer perpetual insults and humiliation at the hands of the police. 'The police always stop Arabs and ask for their papers', protested Amar. 'They always ask you what you are doing if you live here because they think we are all criminals in the quartiers nords.' Even women are stopped and put up against a wall: 'I've been stopped and asked for my papers', said Nadira. 'The police always do that to Arabs. I was put in a police cell once for 24 hours, just because they wanted my papers. I'm always getting called *sale bougnoule* [dirty Arab] by the police.'

Police raids on the ghettos are commonplace. On 20 March 2000 police swarmed into the quartier Belsunce. They arrested close to 100 people; only a handful were convicted. They broke down doors, rampaged through houses and fired CS gas in the streets. Examples of police brutality against blacks are plentiful in Marseilles. On 6 March, police shot dead 30-year old Saad Saoudi as they transported him to prison. Apparently he tried to 'attack them', even though his hands were handcuffed behind his back. They have not been charged with any offence.

Blacks are blamed for drugs, crime and murder. In reality, they are the

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victims of racist crimes, official and unofficial. Racist violence is a way of life for the immigrant community. Aïcha Benchenni told us how her brother Hamida was murdered. 'It was the last week of February. My brother had been away all week training. He was doing a government training scheme. He was driving back about 11.30pm with a friend, also Algerian. At the exit of the Aix motorway, a 32-year old Frenchman shot him, once in the head and once in the throat.

'When the police came they accused my brother's friend of shooting him and kept him in a cell all night. That was Thursday night. We were worried. I know my brother. He's 39, he has a family and responsibilities. If he is going to be late he always phones. I reported the fact that he hadn't come home to the police. They brushed it off and said he was probably out with a woman. I said my brother's not a dog, he's a human and they should start looking for him. The next day at 1am the police phoned my sister-in-law to say her husband had been involved in a car accident and was in hospital. They knew which hospital it was but wouldn't tell us which one. We spent the night phoning all the hospitals. Eventually we found him. He died there. We found him just in time.

'The police eventually arrested the man who shot my brother. But they are saying that the guy is mad, he wasn't conscious of what he was doing and just shot at random. He is pleading insanity. But he has a full-time job and has never had psychiatric treatment in his life. That's not mad. In Marseilles, racist crimes are allowed. But they are camouflaged: the law turns a blind eye. It says the murderer was mad, so the file is closed. There's no justice if you are an Arab. There's a licence to kill.'

These days it is hard to distinguish between a traditional right-wing politician like Jacques Chirac and a visceral fascist like Le Pen

Not just Le Pen

Why and how has racism reached such an intensity in France? People we spoke to tended to blame the Front National. Christian Pellicani, the ebullient secretary of the Communist Party in the city's seventh *arrondissement*, was quick to point the finger. 'Le Pen is to blame for the rise of racism. He awakens fears about immigrants, about being swamped by a foreign culture.'

The FN is undoubtedly a force to be reckoned with in Marseilles. But simply to blame the far right for the strength of racism explains nothing: the question is why have the extremists been able to establish themselves as the voice of respectable opinion on the issue of immigration? When we asked people on the street what they thought of Le Pen, they

did not want to identify with him completely. Yet most said that they agreed with him on immigration if nothing else. 'Le Pen? He's too racist and over the top', began a typical response. 'But I agree with him that there are too many immigrants.'

Maurice Gros put his finger on the source of the Front National's appeal when he located the party firmly within the tradition of French nationalism:

'We are for putting France first (*la préférence nationale*), we are against immigration. We are a nation consisting of men and women, a history, a religion, a patrimony, all the things we hand down to our children. That's a national identity, the most important issue for us. If you let in tens of thousands of Muslims, what can your children ever claim? We are not racist, we are just for the defence of France. A racist is someone who says one race is superior to another. We don't say that. The French are not superior to the English or to the Muslims or to the Jews. But we say that the English should keep their own national culture, the Jews should keep theirs, the French theirs, etc. We are a nationalist party.'

There is nothing here that could not have been said by any of the mainstream parties from the right or left. The respectability of nationalism is the key to the success of the far right.

Espousing *la préférence nationale* is not something peculiar to the Front National. Nationalism is celebrated by all political parties in France. The corollary of this outlook is hostility towards foreigners. This explains why there is an all-party consensus on the question of immigration. These days it is hard to distinguish between traditional right-wing politicians like Jacques Chirac and a visceral fascist like Le Pen. Even Socialist Party president François Mitterrand is now arguing that 'we are not facing a human tide, but there are too many of them'. It is but a small step from this to saying, 'send them back'.

Socialist case

Local Socialist François Seveau put his party's case for strong immigration controls: 'Excuse me, but one cannot receive every person who wants to come here. It is right to control borders: thousands arrive every day. We have to worry about those who are here.' Christian Pellicani also tried to cast his party's support for immigration controls in the most sympathetic light: 'We are for stopping new immigration. We are for full equality for those here,

but at the same time there should be no more. This isn't for racist reasons but because of the work situation. The more unemployment there is the more destabilising the situation becomes. Le Pen can benefit from this. Look at Marseilles: no work, slums and lots of immigrants. The situation is explosive.' In reality, Le Pen can benefit because all parties agree on the need to keep immigrants out.

This also explains why the far right has had such success influencing politics more generally. Over the past few years, the Front National has forced the issue of racism on to the political agenda. All the traditional parties have felt obliged to respond by making concessions to the far right.

On the right of the *Rassemblement pour la République*, Charles Pasqua has urged a move into Le Pen territory with a more racist and authoritarian approach. But Jacques Chirac is already accelerating in this direction. After the recent round-table talks on immigration initiated by prime minister Michel Rocard, Chirac called for an even tougher response than that being proposed by the Socialists: 'The government has to tackle the problem of immigration practically. It must confront the problem of cohabitation too: French people living together with an excessive number of immigrants.' The UDF is not averse to courting the far-right constituency either. In Marseilles, its leader Jean Gaudin suggested a temporary pact with the far right which might well have won him the city if it had been agreed in recent elections.

Break the connection

The Socialist Party has also given ground to the Front National. Not only has the government adopted a harder attitude towards immigration, it has also reneged on its commitment to give immigrants the vote in local elections. 'You have to take into account that we are elected', wheedled François Seveau. 'And if 80 per cent of the people say no to the right of immigrants to vote, we have to listen. Anyway, many Algerians are integrated into French society, even if they don't have the vote.' How anybody can talk about integration when immigrants are denied fundamental democratic rights is a mystery.

At the moment, the far right is making all the running on the race issue. Only a movement which gets to the source of the problem by challenging the poison of nationalism and racism can begin to break the FN connection in Marseilles.

the personal column

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In this month's Personal Column...

At least the *Sunday Sport* is honest dirt

Paula Roberts sides with the gutter press against the *Guardian*

At 4am one morning in 1986 I arrived on my first picket line, outside Rupert Murdoch's Wapping plant. It was exciting, everything seemed possible, the printworkers were fighting the police, and they were striking a blow against the filth in Murdoch's papers as well. No more page three, no more racist editorials on dirty Arabs, no more calls to hang Irish republicans. I thought the tide was turning against the gutter press.

Five years later I still hate the media. But in the light of recent events I'm prepared to side with the tabloids against the rest of the hypocrites. First the Calcutt report threatened new legal constraints on press intrusion into private lives unless the papers impose some self-restraint. Then the *Guardian* lambasted the *Sun* over a story on Mandy Smith which they claim contravenes the 'right to individual privacy' and will encourage the enforcement of Calcutt's recommendations. Meanwhile the *Sunday Correspondent* heralded the Calcutt report as a stand against 'the abandonment of restraint for fear of the competitive consequences' and for the right to individual privacy.

This high-minded talk of the right to privacy is all very well for well-paid journos but what does it mean to me? For the rich and powerful, it means being able to conduct shady deals behind closed doors. But if you've ever claimed benefits or been visited by a social security snooper or failed to pay the poll tax you'll know what the invasion of privacy is really about. And those quality papers are quite choosy about whose privacy they defend.

They don't like the paparazzi harassing royals or a rock star's wife, but they haven't objected to all the underhand delving into the private affairs of Arthur Scargill.

Having a go at the Mandy Smith story, *Guardian* journalist Georgina Henry complained that 'the tabloids' ruling ethos is still not taste but selling papers'. So, Georgina, are the 'quality' papers produced to safeguard taste, truth and objectivity? They are printed to make money. Why else would they splash their circulation figures on the front page, *Sun*-style, when they outsell their rivals, and clog up the advertising hoardings with pretentious self-promotion campaigns?

A couple of months back the monopolies and mergers commission prevented *Sunday Sport* publisher, 'porn king' David Sullivan, from buying 25 per cent of the *Bristol Evening Post*. Everyone from Bristol's Tory MP Jonathan Sayeed to the advertising standards authority to Tony Benn celebrated the decision. The media establishment saw Sullivan's defeat as a reminder that there is a world of difference between the media good-guys, who aspire to truth, objectivity and fair play (and get their information from government press officers), and the villains like Sullivan who fabricate stories all by themselves.

Sullivan is no angel: he spent a few months in prison in 1982 convicted of living off the immoral earnings of a massage parlour. But the media men object to him because he is not part of their club and doesn't respect the rules of the game. *Sunday Sport's* revelations that Elvis is alive and working

in Spud-U-Like, or that aliens turned a child into an olive, stick in their craw because Sullivan takes fantasy and fabrication too far. In their view, Sullivan's crime is that he degrades the 'news'. After all, his disregard for 'the truth' calls into question the stories produced by the marginally less blatant liars and fabricators in the media mainstream.

Don't get me wrong, the *Sunday Sport* is not my idea of a good read. It sells itself on the basis that it has more 'colour tits' than any other paper on the market. But the other media's real objections to a paper like the *Sport* is not that it degrades women. The press hate it because it calls into question the public dignity of their profession. The *Sport* serves as a nasty reminder of the opportunism and cynicism that has accompanied every step of their careers. The liberal press patronise us by worrying that we need protection because we might believe what we read in the tabloids. Well, I don't believe what I read in the *Guardian* so I have no reason to believe what I read in the *Sunday Sport* either.

Sometimes I think the *Sunday Sport* comes closer to reality than all the serious papers. That's why I'll take Sullivan's side against the *Guardian* and the rest of them. Not that I'm shedding any tears for him over his knockback. I'm sure Sullivan will eventually end up where he really belongs, in the media club. A man who sells sexy tabloids among the hacks who sell themselves. A pimp among prostitutes—what better place for him!

then and now



PHOTOS: David King Collection

A magnificent failure

The legacy of Leon Trotsky

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anti-Stalinist me



Trotsky, commander of the victorious Red Army, takes the salute in Red Square, September 1921

Fifty years ago, in August 1940, Leon Trotsky was murdered by Stalin. Frank Richards assesses Trotsky, the Russian revolutionary and the enemy of the Marxists today

Leon Trotsky fought hard and at times magnificently but in the end he was defeated. History almost always imposes a heavy penalty on the loser and seldom offers a second chance. Vilified and hounded from one country to the next, Trotsky faced what was probably the most extensive campaign of slander organised against any single individual.

The Stalinist movement transformed itself into a lynch-mob to hunt Trotsky down. Before they finally succeeded in murdering Trotsky, Stalin, his agents and fellow travellers spread the most poisonous stories about the man they so feared. Trotsky was accused of acting as the agent of Hitler and of other imperialist powers. The showtrials conducted in Moscow during the thirties frequently emphasised images of Trotsky the spy and the enemy of communism.

The intense hatred provoked by Trotsky is not merely of historical interest. In Britain 'Trot' is still a term of abuse in the labour movement. Anyone who questions the fundamentals of British capitalism and the craven begging-bowl tradition of Labourism can expect to be dismissed as a 'Trot' by the bureaucrats from Walworth Road.

To this day Trotsky personifies extremism and an irreconcilable attitude to capitalism. While the most depraved slanders emanate from the Stalinist camp others attempt to discredit Trotsky in more subtle ways. Capitalist writers portray Trotsky as a tragic figure who was devoured by the revolution that he led. It is fashionable to depict Trotsky as a muddle-headed extremist, even a dreamer, who inevitably failed at everything. According to this view, after the October Revolution of 1917 Trotsky represented revolutionary romanticism while Stalin was the embodiment of practical politics.

In reality Trotsky was not an incurable romantic made prone to extremism by a volatile temperament. He was a revolutionary who practised what he preached. He fought for and helped bring about the overthrow of the old order in Russia in October 1917. He thus became one of those unique individuals who have made history. But his revolution was ultimately defeated. Once Stalin gained the upper hand and the new Soviet bureaucracy succeeded in usurping the power of the working class, Trotsky's days were numbered. The defeat of the Russian Revolution also meant the demise of those individuals

who fought for a new society in 1917. It is one of Trotsky's great merits that he would not allow himself to be crushed by this defeat. He continued to practise his revolutionary profession and never gave up the fight.

Fifty years after Trotsky's death, those responsible for his murder are drawing their last breath. The Stalinist bureaucracy is in disarray. The Soviet Union is falling apart. The most savage prejudices—from intense racism to backward-looking mysticism—have risen to the surface in what was once a revolutionary state. Trotsky for one would not have been surprised by the current moral collapse of Stalinism. More than half a century ago he explained that Stalinism necessarily implied the consolidation of passions which are even more backward than is normal under capitalism. Why? Because the Stalinist regime was created through a reaction to the reality of revolution. To defeat the revolution, the Stalinist bureaucracy had systematically to foster reaction:

'Every reaction regenerates, nourishes and strengthens those elements of the historic past which the revolution struck but which it could not vanquish. The methods of Stalinism bring to the highest tension, to a culmination and at the same time to an absurdity, all those methods of untruth, brutality and baseness that constitute the mechanics of control in every class society, including also that of democracy. Stalinism is a single clot of all the monstrosities of the historical state, its most malicious caricature and disgusting grimace.' (*Their Morals and Ours*, 1973 edition)

Trotsky understood that Stalinism grew and developed in proportion to the weakening of working class power internationally. The revolutionary challenge to capitalism had not succeeded and consequently a new era in history opened up—that of working class defeat.

Seize the moment

The experience of defeat is a singularly powerful one. The period which followed the revolutionary upsurge of 1916-21 was one in which proletarian confidence gave way to fascist ascendancy and a long era of reaction. In such a period the space open to a practising revolutionary is necessarily limited.

The fact that things were stabilised after the revolution of 1917 does not mean that the revolutionary transformation of society is implausible. It only underlines the importance of seizing the opportunity when it is offered by history. It should provide a warning against failing to make the most of the

situation. After he had been expelled from the Soviet Union and spent a few years in isolation, Trotsky came to understand that it would take some time before revolution could be put back on the agenda of history:

'Periods when the movement of the oppressed class rises to the level of the general tasks of the revolution represent the rarest exceptions in history. Far more frequent than the victories are the defeats of the oppressed. Following each defeat comes a long period of reaction which throws the revolutionists back into a state of cruel isolation.' (*Their Morals and Ours*)

According to Trotsky, the relevance of the Marxist revolutionary is tested not just by the moments of working class upsurge but also by the long periods of stability. He dismissed as 'pseudo-revolutionaries' and 'knights for an hour' those who gave up the fight during a period of reaction. After his exile from the Soviet Union, Trotsky devoted the rest of his life to trying to develop a revolutionary movement which could survive the period of defeat.

The experience of defeat has a major impact on the balance of class

forces. Defeat undermines the belief that liberation is possible. It fuels a mood of conservatism. Consequently the working class becomes more passive while the employers and the state feel a renewed confidence in their system. The very act of defeat gradually lowers the horizons of the working class and narrows the political basis of the class struggle. In this situation, old prejudices appear vindicated and the point of view of revolution seems eccentric, even absurd.

The human touch

Trotsky understood that history does not move forward simply of its own accord. Revolution does not happen inevitably. It requires the intervention of the human agent. It demands prior preparation and work. In a sense the revolutionary movement establishes the foundation for the mass struggles of the future in circumstances where far-reaching change is not a viable option. For example, in Russia the lean years between 1905 and 1915, when the Bolshevik Party learnt its trade, truly tested the new movement. Without the experience gained in this period there could have been no Bolshevik Party capable of intervening

decisively in October 1917. Similarly, Trotsky could not go into hibernation after the rise of reaction and simply wait until the next upsurge in the class struggle. The question was, however, what had to be done in this period of defeat?

The experience of defeat is above all one of political isolation. It means that the everyday habits and routine of the working class provide very few opportunities for political experimentation and revolt. Those who advocate liberation find that their message tends to have little meaning to the masses, who are concerned with more immediate problems of survival and security. Of course workers are always forced by the circumstances of exploitation to struggle. But in a situation of reaction, such struggles will be for elementary objectives, since even the exploited may feel concerned about rocking the boat. And even these struggles, important as they are, will be influenced by prejudices and opinions which reflect the influence of the ruling class over society.

It is important to recall that, with a few important exceptions, the last 60 years have been a time of working class defeats. During this period the revolutionary movement has become

Trotsky's testament

'For 43 years of my conscious life I have remained a revolutionist; for 42 of them I have fought under the banner of Marxism. If I had to begin all over again I would of course try to avoid this or that mistake, but the main course of my life would remain unchanged. I shall die a proletarian revolutionist, a Marxist, a dialectical materialist, and consequently an irreconcilable atheist. My faith in the communist future of mankind is not less ardent, indeed it is firmer today than it was in the days of my youth.

'Natasha has just come up to the window from the courtyard and opened it wider so that the air may enter more freely into my room. I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall, and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression and violence and enjoy it to the full.'

L Trotsky, Coyoacan, 27 February 1940



progressively weaker. This is not the place to consider whether these defeats were inevitable. The immediate question is this: is it worth attempting to promote the project of revolution in circumstances where there seems little prospect of success?

The issue which faced Trotsky after the defeat of the working class and his own exile was what to do next. Crudely put, there were two alternatives available to those who still professed a belief in the necessity of working class revolution. Most of the remnants of the revolutionary movement felt that the main problem they had to solve was their isolation from the working class. From this perspective it made little sense to reiterate the fundamentals of Marxism if there was no audience to listen. Consequently, many revolutionaries readily modified their views in order to be near the masses.

A small minority drew the opposite conclusion. They insisted that their principles were not open to negotiation and that regardless of the circumstances they would continue to assert their views. Without this approach, they argued, revolutionaries would become indistinguishable from the rest of society. In practice it was unlikely that the choice between these two approaches would be made as crudely as above. In most instances it was a question of emphasis. However, before long an emphasis became a routine and finally a system of political work.

Marxism lives

Trotsky faced tremendous pressures from conflicting quarters after his exile. Some expected him to lead another revolution straightaway. Others sought to convince Trotsky not to organise a new movement on the grounds that the time was not right for such an initiative. Trotsky chose to confront this point of view. He recognised that the period was not propitious for revolutionary action. At the same time he believed that, at the very least, those who organised had a chance to influence history. Moreover, only if such principles were upheld and actively fought for could the tradition of Marxism remain a viable alternative for the future.

It is very difficult to be absolutely certain as to just what Trotsky hoped to achieve during his life in exile. He continually sought to organise an international Marxist alternative to Stalinism. Trotsky's movement, the Fourth International, claimed to constitute, at least potentially, the world leadership of the proletariat. However, burdened by the experience of defeat, this movement remained
(continued on page 31)

A lifelong struggle

● **Leon Trotsky** was born Lev Davidovich Bronstein on 26 October 1879 in the Southern Ukraine, youngest son of a well-to-do Jewish farmer. As a teenager he got involved in clandestine anti-Tsarist activity, for which he was imprisoned and later exiled to Siberia. He escaped and when an underground group gave him a fake passport he signed it with the name of a former jailer—Trotsky.

● In 1902 Trotsky joined Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in London to work on *Iskra*, paper of the fledgling Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. The following year the party split into the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks over Lenin's insistence that it organise on a democratic centralist model. Trotsky briefly joined the Mensheviks, and until 1917 conducted an often bitter debate with Lenin over questions of revolutionary leadership and political strategy.

● In 1905 Trotsky, aged only 26, returned to Russia to play a pivotal role in the St Petersburg soviet during the abortive revolution of that year. Once more he was banished to Siberia, and once more he escaped to exile in west Europe.

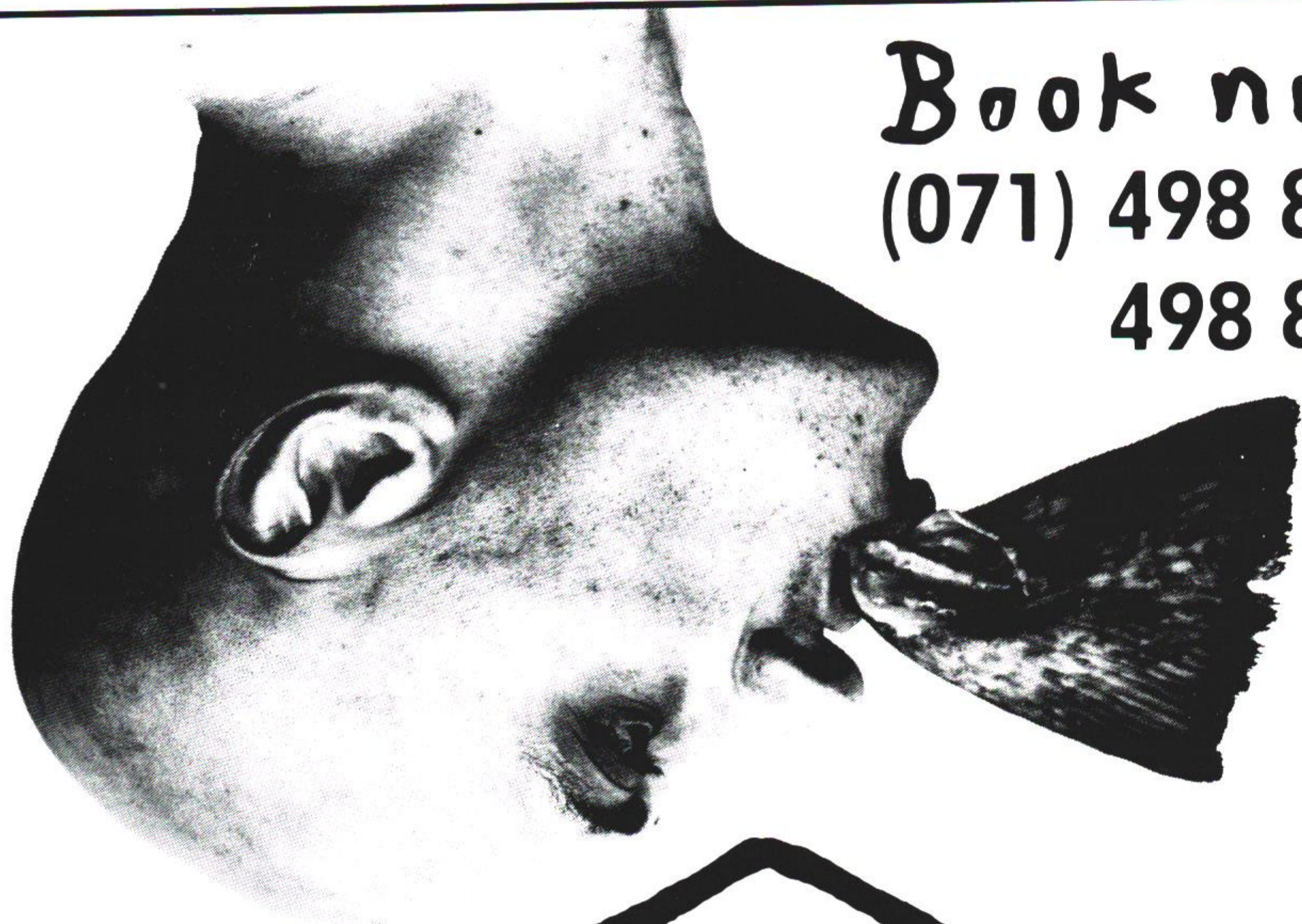
● In 1917, on the eve of the revolution, Trotsky returned to Russia and, finally abandoning his differences with Lenin, joined the Bolshevik Party. Lenin coopted Trotsky into the party leadership as his lieutenant. In 1918 Trotsky was appointed commissioner of war and president of the supreme war council, entrusted with organising the Red Army against the counter-revolutionary White armies and the Western forces invading the new workers' state. Trotsky spent the next two and a half years on an armoured train travelling a war front with a circumference of 5000 miles. By 1921 the Red Army, under Trotsky's political leadership,

was finally victorious against all the odds.

● After Lenin's death in 1924, Trotsky was forced into conflict with the emerging bureaucracy under Stalin which was taking control of the party. In 1925 Trotsky resigned from the commissariat of war, and in 1926-27 formed the Left Opposition. These belated measures could not weaken Stalin's grip on the party apparatus. Trotsky sought to uphold the Bolshevik tradition of internationalism against the Stalinist school of socialism in one country, but was expelled from the party in late 1927 and exiled to the Sino-Soviet border. Two years later he was deported to Prinkipo Island off Turkey; ironically, his exile meant that he survived the showtrials of the thirties to become the leading critic of the Stalinist regime.

● Trotsky spent years being shunted between the few West European states that offered temporary asylum. In 1933, after the Nazis' rise to power had been facilitated by the strategy of the Moscow-controlled German Communist Party, Trotsky finally concluded that the official communist movement was irreformable and called for a new movement. In 1938 he wrote the *Transitional Programme* as a founding document of the Fourth International.

● In 1936 Trotsky found refuge. But even in a suburban villa on the outskirts of Mexico City he was seen as a dangerous symbol of the Bolshevik Revolution. On 20 August 1940 a Stalinist agent who had tricked his way into Trotsky's home drove an ice-pick into the back of Trotsky's skull. He died the following day, aged 60. As he lay dying his last recorded words to his secretary Joseph Hansen were: 'Please say to our friends...I am sure...of victory...of Fourth International...go forward.'



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isolated and politically marginal. Trotsky appeared to be aware of the limited influence that his movement could hope to exert. Nevertheless, he continued to act as if everything was up for grabs. In so doing, he at least ensured that a Marxist tradition associated with the Bolshevik Revolution would survive the Stalinist counter-revolution.

The survival of the Bolshevik tradition is Trotsky's major contribution. Stalin's victory within the official communist movement also meant the triumph of the point of view he represented. Thus for most people, Marxism became equated with Stalinism. To this day the old Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe are viewed as examples of Marxist societies. Amid such confusion about the most elementary aspects of Marxism, it was historically vital simply to restate the case for revolutionary communism.

Trotsky argued that the reassertion of Marxist principles constituted the intellectual precondition for realising the potential of the working class to liberate humanity. The question of *working class independence* is a central concept in Trotsky's system of politics:

'A revolutionary Marxist cannot begin to approach his historical mission without having broken morally from bourgeois public opinion and its agencies in the proletariat. For this, moral courage of a different calibre is required from that of opening wide one's mouth at meetings and yelling, "Down with Hitler!", "Down with Franco!".' (*Their Morals and Ours*)

In other words, Trotsky projected a perspective which would challenge the influence of the ruling class on all issues facing society. It is easy to denounce the ruling class in those spheres where it is weak, such as 'Save the NHS!', 'Don't pay the poll tax!' or 'Maggie out!', without in any way breaking from 'bourgeois public opinion'. Revolutionary politics involve confronting and challenging bourgeois morality and politics in *precisely those areas where they enjoy popular support*. Otherwise the working class movement cannot have any pretensions to act as an independent force.

Of course, in a period of working class defeat, revolutionaries are unlikely to have much popular appeal. They can easily acquire the image of ineffective critics who are relegated to the sidelines, as Trotsky noted: 'Under present conditions in France the Marxist appears to be a "sectarian"; the inertia of history, including the inertia of the working class organisations, is against him.'

(*Diary in Exile-1935*) By going against the mainstream and the present movement of society, the Marxist activist necessarily acquires the image of a sectarian who is above all negative.

It is difficult for the political activist to cope with isolation. That is why so many groups have given up political activity altogether and become static sects. Alternatively, activists have fled their isolation by abandoning any views which kept them at a distance from the rest of society.

Trotsky's dilemma was this. He was aware that any assertion of independent class politics was bound to appear sectarian, yet he understood that any other brand of politics was not worth having. He attempted to resolve this dilemma by developing a movement which would not make a virtue of its isolation but would seek to establish points of contact with the masses.

Trotsky also sought to link the limited role available to Marxists in a period of defeat to the wider possibilities of mass struggle at a later stage. He noted that 'in general it is impossible for people to come out of the woods on to the main road of history without the conscious participation of the "sectarians", ie, the Marxist minority which today is pushed aside'. And he bluntly warned that, 'either the masses will take the path of Marxist politics before it is too late, or the proletariat will be smashed' (*Diary in Exile-1935*).

Out of defeat

Trotsky's warning was prophetic. The failure of Marxism to make an impact on the masses meant that the period of working class defeats was extended from the twenties to this day. Trotskyism thus became a movement of defeated Marxism. It was squeezed between the restoration of capitalist stability after the Second World War and the consolidation of Stalinism.

Looking back over the past 50 years it is evident that Trotsky underestimated the durability of the period of working class defeat. This misassessment is quite understandable, since there was no way that he could have foreseen just how damaging Stalinism would prove to the cause of the working class.

The ability of the Stalinist bureaucracy to promote itself as the progressive defender of the exploited and the oppressed had the effect of disorienting militants around the globe. The Stalinist interpretation of the world came to enjoy a near monopoly of influence in the working class and anti-imperialist movement. New generations of class fighters

were drawn towards this movement and were lost to the cause of revolution. Stalinism thus actively prevented the politicisation of new generations of activists. It became responsible for the intellectual paralysis of the working class. Stalinism not only confused people; it also repelled them from left-wing politics. Millions associated East European societies with Marxism and reacted against both. By so overwhelmingly discrediting Marxism, Stalinism became one of the most important props of capitalist stability.

Trotskyism could not remain immune from the influences of the past 50 years. Overwhelmed by the influence of Stalinism Trotsky's followers crumbled one by one. Those few who refused to give in became even more isolated and most dropped out of active politics.

So how will history judge Trotsky and his movement? He represented a noble cause that was defeated. Stalinism triumphed over Trotsky and thereby underwrote the subsequent victory of imperialism. However, there is no shame in losing the fight for a noble cause. It is those who refuse to fight that deserve the condemnation of history.

In the very act of fighting, Trotsky helped preserve a tradition which represents the future of humanity. Without Trotsky and his colleagues the task of retrieving the traditions of revolutionary Marxism would be immeasurably more difficult. Today his executioners in the Kremlin are facing the end of their society. They will certainly not have the last laugh. After Stalinism has collapsed, the ideas upheld and retrieved by Trotsky will still be there, ready to inspire a new generation of revolutionaries. Learning from the experience of defeat to prepare for the struggles ahead is the best way to pay our respects on the fiftieth anniversary of the murder of Leon Trotsky.

Recommended reading

Trotsky produced a great wealth of written material. These are some of his best works, spanning the period from the era of revolution to the years in exile. *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (two volumes), Pathfinder Press, 1977, £7.95 each
Trotsky on Britain, Pathfinder Press, 1973, £7.95
The Third International after Lenin, Pathfinder Press, 1970, £7.95
Their Morals and Ours, Pathfinder Press, 1973, £4.95

Poland: 'the new nomenklatura'

Solidarnosc no longer

Solidarity, the pioneer of change in Eastern Europe, now stands accused of acting like the old Stalinist regime. Meanwhile, the impact of the market economy is pulling the movement apart. Russell Osborne and Julian Laslo report from Poland

Months after forming Poland's first non-Stalinist government since the war, Solidarity is splitting. Its figurehead Lech Walesa has declared a 'permanent war of everyone with everyone', and is making personal war on leading opponents such as Adam Michnik, editor of the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki. After Michnik and 62 other senior figures quit Solidarity's political wing during a June conference, in protest at Walesa's attempt to bulldoze his way to the state presidency, the Polish press published obituaries to the movement. 'What has ended', said the influential paper *Zycie Warszawy*, 'is the idea of Solidarity as a united movement fighting against evil. At the conference they just signed the death certificate'.

The splits in Solidarity reflect the enormous tensions created by Poland's sudden plunge into the marketplace. Solidarity, which rose to prominence as a trade union formed to protect living standards, now presides over booming unemployment and inflation. Its popularity rating is dropping fast, and the infighting among its panicky

leaders is rising accordingly.

Silesia, Poland's industrial heartland, shows the dramatic changes experienced under the Solidarity-led coalition government. When we were last in the Silesian capital of Katowice nine months earlier, Mazowiecki had just taken office and Solidarity was largely untested. Poles were sceptical but quietly optimistic.

We returned to a very different Silesia. Instead of the new prosperity which some had hoped for, the new Poland is a sleazy flea market of hucksters and street pedlars. Successful entrepreneurs are thin on the ground. The removal of government subsidies has meant closures and redundancies on a mass scale. All the pretence and most of the hope has gone. The market has



come to town and for most people life is even more difficult and insecure. There is no Polish economic miracle. Passive support for Solidarity has turned to bitter resignation.

'They're all a bunch of thieves', said a building worker. 'The nomenklatura is still in place and stealing money from ordinary people. They should all be thrown out: the old and the new nomenklatura!' He was about to lose his job along with 500 others as government subsidies were withdrawn from their state company. His angry description of Solidarity as 'the new nomenklatura', as another corrupt bureaucracy like the Stalinists, seemed a common sentiment among those who face redundancy and escalating prices and are unable to make a fast buck in the brash new Polish marketplace. 'I have been working for 20 years but I have nothing—no apartment, no car', he told us angrily. 'People who don't do any work drive fancy cars and live in big apartments. I'll have to live on *Kuronowka* ["Kuron soup" served at soup kitchens and named after labour minister Jacek Kuron].'

'People feel deceived', said

Przemek, our translator, as we talked to those queuing at Katowice's busy bus station. 'I can't speak for the nation, but personally I won't be able to stand it much longer', one middle-aged woman told us. 'I have worked for 23 years in the same enterprise and now I am going to lose my job because it is being sold off. People who have worked honestly and hard all their lives have nothing to show for it. Others are going into private business and making money.'

A man carrying a colour TV told us of his fears that a second nomenklatura would arise out of Solidarnosc. 'Parliament isn't interested in defending workers. The union does nothing to defend us. It is only small groups who are ready to fight in factories and coalmines.' Confidence in collective organisation and struggle built Solidarity into a movement of over eight million a decade ago. Today economic privation under a Solidarity government encourages a depressingly desperate individualism. 'Nobody is confronting the problem of unemployment', said the TV man. 'Everyone has to help himself and find a job to feed his family.'

A disabled miner told of being pensioned off due to lung problems—a typical story in this environmental disaster area. His 600 000 zloty (£40) pension is not enough to feed his family; rent alone takes up half of it. 'I can't go back to the mines and there is nowhere else to work in Silesia. I have looked into West German companies which are supposed to be setting up here but there's nothing. My wife works but she earns very little. People don't like Solidarity, there is a feeling that they are to blame.'

No mass movement

Ordinary Poles have little enthusiasm for Solidarity now. The mass movement of 1980-81 never fully recovered from the bleak years of martial law and repression. By the time it agreed to participate in a coalition with the Stalinists last year Solidarity had fewer than two million members. Now resentment is growing to the point where, we were told, there are periodic but barely reported riots as young people attack the police.

Today, to its embarrassment, Solidarity still has fewer paid-up members than the old Stalinist OPZZ union. The rigours and privations of the last nine months of transition to the market have hardly encouraged people to join a union linked to the government. Walesa himself is now best known for publicity stunts like his recent appearance in an advert for Marlboro cigarettes.

Solidarity's Silesian leader, Alojzy

Pietrzyk was once regarded as an activist with real roots in the working class. Last time we met he occupied a humble office among grim high-rise housing estates in the mining town of Jastrzebie. But today the union is ensconced in an upmarket block on Red Army Boulevard in the centre of Katowice and Pietrzyk has an air-conditioned office. The decor remains strongly religious and nationalistic, a carved crucifix hanging alongside a portrait of Poland's pre-war dictator Marshal Pilsudski. Now, however, a collection of American trade union caps lends the place a slightly more cosmopolitan air, and there is bottled mineral water for foreign guests.

Pietrzyk personifies the conflicting pressures on Solidarity. 'People expect Solidarity to protect workers' rights', he told us, 'but there are fears that if we go too far it may paralyse economic reform'. So workers' militancy must be moderated while the harsh economic programme is pushed through. Pietrzyk went so far as to claim that rising unemployment is largely a 'psychological' question: 'People are used to the fact that work was guaranteed for everyone. They cannot understand a different perspective. Unemployment is a problem—but not for today.'

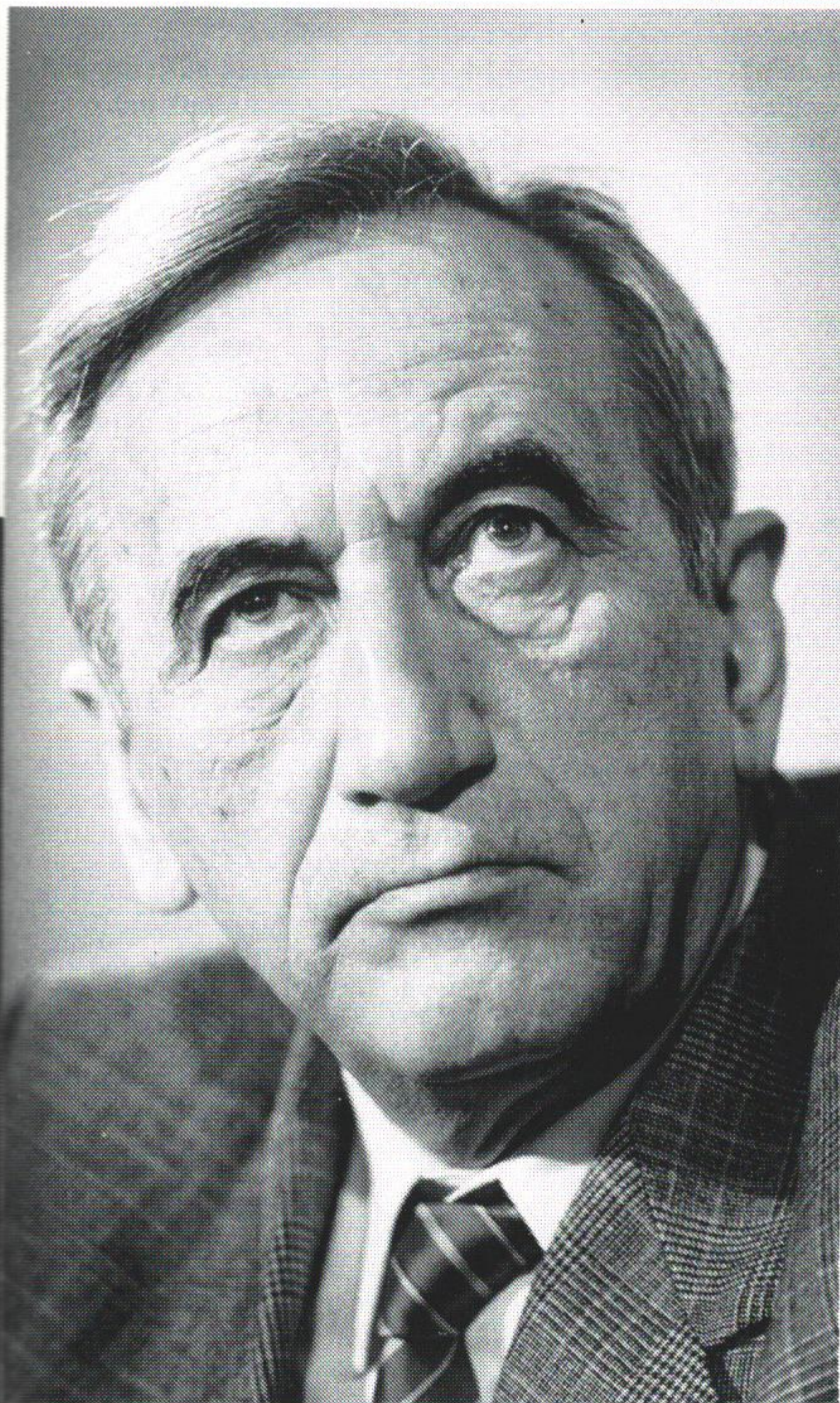
However, Pietrzyk also understands the need to maintain some support among Solidarity's old grassroots. Like other activists, he favours separating the Solidarity union from its parliamentary section in order to rebuild his base among the rank and file: 'If Solidarity doesn't act effectively as a union, people will create their own movement independent of both Solidarity and the OPZZ.' Pietrzyk insists he will 'always defend those who are persecuted'—but he will have a hard job keeping up his balancing act as both a trade union militant and an unofficial spokesman for the government which is attacking living standards.

It is now common to hear Solidarity referred to as 'the new nomenklatura' and its officials admit that many see them as little different from the old Stalinist bureaucracy. It is not just the fancy new offices which encourage this idea. The Solidarity leadership has deliberately discouraged popular involvement in the union. To many workers preoccupied with the daily struggle to survive, Solidarity seems like a clique of distant bureaucrats. Embarrassed Solidarity officials told us that they could not find enough candidates to stand in the recent local elections. Just 44 per cent of the electorate bothered turning out to vote.

One criticism levelled at Solidarity is that it has failed to deal with the old Stalinist officials, many of whom

Lech Walesa (left) and Tadeusz Mazowiecki: at war with each other and with the working class

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



east and west

It begins to look more likely that Poland could fall prey to the authoritarian politics which characterised capitalism in Eastern Europe in the past

are doing well out of the switch to the market. Pressure is growing for a face-saving purge; in July, Mazowiecki sacked his Stalinist ministers. 'People say that we don't want to attack the nomenklatura because we are the same now' said Pietrzyk. 'Polish people with an empty stomach don't understand everything.' He is, however, in favour of a purge: 'We should judge those who were in power for many years and acquired a lot of property. People are afraid that those who came into possession of goods and money in this way are now able to buy shares and invest in the economy. I think [president] Jaruzelski should be the first to lose his property.'

Pietrzyk assured us that workers still have confidence in Solidarity. To prove it, he sent us out to the nearby Andaluzja coalmine with his number two, former miner Gienek Polmanski. Andaluzja employs 6000 miners: 1800 are in Solidarity, 1800 in the OPZZ, the rest are non-union.

We were introduced to some miners who were clearly Solidarity loyalists. Yet they were quite critical of the government and none too optimistic about the future. They complained of discrimination against Silesia by the central government and demanded the right to market their own coal. According to Polmanski, 'the current outlook at the mine is rather revolutionary. If there are no changes within a reasonable time then the miners will go on strike. Miners have already abolished one government [strikes here led to the talks which first brought Solidarity into office] and it is possible for them to destroy this one as well'.

Miners and Mr Fix-it

In front of his members, Polmanski was the militant leader. Asked how Solidarity would deal with a strike, he feigned indignation: 'We will not deal with it. We will organise it—and for more pay!' However, like his boss Pietrzyk he is clearly unwilling to damage the government's pro-market policies: 'We will go for reforms rather than higher wages: for example, better health and safety regulations, better working conditions.'

Such reforms won't cut much ice among miners who have already lost their position as the best-paid workers in Poland. Overtime and weekend working have been abolished, taking a big chunk out of the wages of the angry group of ordinary miners we met at the pit gate. Yet these men considered strike action 'useless' at present, and were prepared to give the government a breathing space, although they had little faith in the marketisation

programme and were critical of the union's close links with the regime. 'The union should not merge with the government—it is too close now. It should defend us and fight to protect our rights—then we might have more confidence in the union.'

Back at the Solidarity offices we met a representative of the other end of the Solidarity spectrum, an ebullient individual in a loud suit who turned out to be an adviser to Solidarnosc and a self-styled expert in joint ventures with Western companies: 'I deal with private investment from abroad, that's my private business.' He gave us a copy of his brochure on how to prepare a presentation to foreign investors. It seemed hardly surprising that Solidarity was coming apart; this aspiring entrepreneur could not remain in the same organisation as the miners for long.

'A big disaster'

This Mr Fix-it was very critical of the government. While most Poles are dismayed at the effects of rapid change, he feared that the marketisation process was moving too slowly, and wanted to sell off all state enterprises immediately. But, we asked him, who will buy enterprises which are obsolete and uncompetitive? He admitted that nothing had been achieved in attracting investment for new industry, and that the government's cuts and closures could be 'the beginning of a big disaster—a catastrophe'.

Out on the streets the scale of that disaster is already becoming clear. Poles have had to become a nation of spivs and street hustlers as people try their hands at almost anything in the struggle to scratch a living. Meanwhile, Solidarity's leaders bicker and jockey for position.

Walesa has long been the front-man for Solidarity, and the government of prime minister Mazowiecki has called him in to cool off dangerous situations. But Walesa's credibility with the rank and file is wearing thin; he recently had a lot of trouble talking striking railway workers back to work. His attacks on Mazowiecki and veteran activist Adam Michnik suggest that Walesa is now trying to distance himself from the unpopular government, and establish an independent base as he bids for the presidency.

One of Walesa's major criticisms of his opponents is that they are too left wing: which in Poland today is a shorthand way of saying that they are too close to the Stalinists who retain wealth and influence behind the scenes. Walesa, who himself set up the compromise deal with the old regime, now attacks the government

for its slowness in purging Stalinists: 'I could have saved half of Poland from those who have been stealing while the system is being changed.' Solidarity's problems are often blamed on sabotage by old Stalinists hiding in the state apparatus.

It would be wrong, however, to interpret the splits in Solidarity at face value as a left versus right fight. All the factions support the switch to market economics in principle. The 'left-wing' Michnik, for instance, is far from radical these days. His recent sojourn in the cabinet room seems to have turned him into an admirer of German Christian Democracy, as he now talks of Solidarity's need to 'learn more about how the German Republic and German affluence were created' (*Gazeta International*, 17 May 1990).

While Solidarity leaders manoeuvre for position in the corridors of power, the impact of the market is sending Polish society into turmoil and creating scope for all manner of reactionary ideas to get a hearing. There is already a strong movement to ban abortion among the Catholic wing of Solidarnosc, and the old scourge of anti-Semitism is raising its head again as some blame the government's failures on the influence of Jews.

In the atmosphere of austerity and instability, it begins to look more likely that democratic Poland could once more fall prey to the authoritarian politics which characterised capitalism in Eastern Europe in the past. 'Today', Lech Walesa has said, 'as we change our system, we need a president with a decisive and sharp axe who leaves the democratic process in place but is ready to step in whenever flaws appear'. There seems little doubt who Walesa has in mind for the job of wielding the axe. And there are plenty of other would-be axemen in the Solidarity leadership.

Yet the cracks appearing in Solidarity are not entirely negative. Despite the apparently petty character of many power struggles today, they are the next step along the road to class politics in Poland. The era when Solidarity could pose as the embodiment of 'people power', representing the interests of all Poles, is over. The one common aim which held it together was the overthrow of Stalinism. Today, the arrival of the market and capitalist exploitation has made it clear that different sections of 'the people' have very different interests. The new Polish capitalists are finding their political voice already. Now the working class needs to hurry up and find a voice of its own.

stalinism today- and yesterday



PHOTO: Andrew Calcutt

1956 and all that

Andrew Calcutt witnessed the Communist Party of Great Britain's latest attempt to rewrite its own history

Can I sit by you, George?" "Yes, but let me sit on the end of the row so I can slip out when the need arises." Weak bladders and the occasional hacking cough were in evidence among the hundred or so participants at the 'Communist Party and 1956' conference at the Polytechnic of Central London earlier this summer. These were the senior citizens of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), and a few of them slept peacefully through the afternoon sessions. Yet most of the veteran troopers sat bolt upright the whole day long. For 1956 was the most important year of their political lives, and the events under discussion commanded their rapt attention.

In 1956 Nikita Khrushchev made a 'secret' speech condemning the crimes of his predecessor Stalin. The discrediting of Uncle Joe unnerved all the communist parties which had stayed loyal to him, including the CPGB. Then, in October 1956, it became clear that Stalinism was still alive when Soviet troops invaded Hungary. Their mission was to crush the workers' revolution and reinstate a bureaucratic regime loyal to Moscow.

All over the world, the left was divided between those who backed the Kremlin and those who sided with Hungarian workers. The CPGB did not hesitate to support Khrushchev's army. Thirty-four years later, the '1956' conference was billed as a forum for constructive self-criticism in the spirit of glasnost. But the organisers couldn't afford to let the glasnost get out of hand. After all, many of the veterans in the conference hall had been right behind Khrushchev and the Kremlin.

The first discussion centred on the question, 'did the British party leadership know what was going on?' in the labour camps and showtrials of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This was a coded way of saying 'did we know what was going on?'. The consensus was that 'we did and we didn't'.

'We have to define what we mean by the word "know"', began Dennis Ogden. 'I was in Moscow in 1955 and I knew that half the people in my circle had just come back from labour camps. But I did not know it was a huge pattern.' Ogden's case seemed to be that, just because half of your acquaintances disappear, that's no reason to start wondering whether half of everybody else's friends might be in the same boat.

Eric Hobsbawm's line of argument was equally contorted: 'The point where I stopped believing was when they said Basil Davidson was a British spy, which he was.' Hobsbawm wanted the conference to 'distinguish between superficial knowledge and genuine knowledge'. Alison McLeod was less keen on the doublespeak. She recalled that the leadership was well aware of the labour camps and of the British party members imprisoned in them: '[general secretary Harry] Pollitt made 50 visits to the Soviet Union and he only learnt to say "da" and "niet". But he knew...[theoretical guru Rajani Palme] Dutt was more easily led than a small child, but he had a good idea. Younger members came to recognise the cynicism of the leadership.' McLeod did not attempt to explain, however, why younger members like herself had been cynical enough to stay in an organisation led by proven liars.

Standing in their own excrement

At the time, there were plenty who couldn't stomach it. Between 1956 and 1959, the CPGB lost 32 per cent of its membership. In two years, membership of the Young Communist League dropped from 26 000 to 13 000. Those who questioned the leadership line received short shrift: 'When we heard of so-called counter-revolutionaries with their fingernails pulled out and made to stand in their own excrement', explained one old stalwart from Harold Hill in Essex, 'I raised the question of communist morality. I was told...you must be off

your chump'. Although I sympathised with his stand, I couldn't help thinking that he must indeed have been off his chump if he expected moral consistency from a party which could stand in its own excrement and call it communism.

Professor Eric Hobsbawm now enjoys a considerable reputation as a mellow Eurocommunist who has long dared to disagree with Moscow and think for himself. This is the role he carved out for himself at the start of the round-table discussion at the '1956' conference. 'I was an occasional inter-venor, more or less in the middle', said Hobsbawm of that year. 'I remember thinking, if we don't take this chance to make a major change, this will be the end of the party.' He was making a reasonable job of shoring up his own credibility until Peter Fryer spoke.

Fryer had been in Budapest, working for the CPGB's *Daily Worker*, during the Hungarian Revolution. He opposed the invasion and resigned. He told the conference about how Hobsbawm had written a letter to the paper declaring that 'with heavy heart we should support Khrushchev'. It seems that even such an eminent historian as Hobsbawm can find his memory failing him where these matters are concerned.

Bert Ramelson was a part of the machinery which expelled thousands of dissenters from the CPGB. He explained that expelling people for publishing their views about Stalinist showtrials was not the same as expelling them for merely holding such views. In other words, you could oppose the Kremlin's counter-revolution as much as you liked in the privacy of your own home, so long as you kept your mouth shut. In an exceptionally long-winded contribution, Ramelson insisted that, of course, nowadays he wouldn't expel anybody, he merely wanted to describe how and why it happened back then. Former *Daily Worker* correspondent Malcolm MacEwen was not impressed: 'After 34 years I don't think Bert has got the message. I was expelled. If I had been in one of the people's democracies [Eastern Europe], I would have been sent to the gallows.'

Monty Johnstone doesn't like to be reminded of the obsequious obituary of Stalin he wrote in 1953. In the final speech of the day, he bemoaned the fact that the CPGB took 20 years to outgrow the stifling influence of the Soviet bureaucracy. But by 1976, he claimed, the party was independent enough to publish articles in *Marxism Today* about 'problems in the concept of socialist democracy'. Twenty years after the butchery in Budapest, the CPGB could admit that the mass murder of Hungarian workers might not have been a good thing. How brave! Even then the CPGB didn't have the guts to look general secretary Leonid Brezhnev in the eye. When copies of *Marxism Today* were shipped to the Soviet Union, the 'problem' pages were removed.

Like Hobsbawm, Johnstone stressed that he himself had been a far-sighted independent thinker. Hobsbawm and Johnstone were joined by lesser has-beens claiming that 'Stalinism was not a recognised term, although it was by me'. But if so many party members were far-sighted independent thinkers, how was it that the CPGB slavishly followed the Moscow line for so long?

'It's good that we still hate capitalism. But it doesn't necessarily mean that the alternatives to which we have devoted our lives are any better.' Hobsbawm's final contribution was a telling confession of the failure of Stalinism. Today, in the name of glasnost, the veterans who remain in and around the Communist Party of Great Britain are falling over themselves to reject not only Stalinism, but much of the revolutionary tradition of Marx and Lenin as well. Meanwhile the party leadership is discussing changing its name. The irony is that, as the '1956' conference demonstrated, despite all the talk about owning up to past failings, the Stalinist school of falsification lives on.

Mick Hume puts our attitude to the anti-poll tax campaign in the context of British politics today

F

or some months now the Revolutionary Communist Party has argued that opposing the poll tax should not be a priority for Marxists today. It is a position which has caused confusion among our critics.

Most left-wing groups insist that the poll tax is the issue of the moment. They point to the unpopularity of the tax as proof that it can do the Tory government serious damage. At the very least these left-wing factions claim that, because the poll tax affects working class people disproportionately, we have an obligation to concentrate our fire on it. They have sought to embarrass the RCP by accusing us of abstaining from the mass campaign against the poll tax. We do not blush so easily.

Our refusal to commit scarce resources to an anti-poll tax campaign does not mean that we disagree with the basic case against the tax. The left is quite right to identify it as an attack on the living standards of large sections of the working class. Indeed, in the early stages of the implementation of the poll tax, the RCP was to the fore in campaigning against it.

For example, in Scotland we set up the Smash the Poll Tax Campaign (SPTC) way back in the autumn of 1987, when our left-wing critics were tail-ending the Labour Party's Stop It! campaign, which pledged to obey the law and sought to suppress militant protests. In west London we supported an independent anti-poll tax candidate in Hammersmith in a local election in May 1989, while local left wingers backed a Labour candidate committed to implementing the Tory tax.

The reason why we won't devote ourselves to an anti-poll tax campaign today has little to do with the nature of the legislation itself; after all, the poll tax is just as obnoxious now as it was when we sponsored the SPTC two and a half years ago. What has shifted is our assessment of where the poll tax fits into the broader climate of British politics at the start of the nineties, and our role in the present period.

Eleven years of Thatcher have taken a heavy toll on the traditions of working class politics in Britain. The old official labour movement has been defeated and discredited under pressure from the Tory government and employers. Once-powerful trade union bureaucracies have been reduced to rubble, while the Labour Party has been transformed into an openly pro-capitalist centre party.

One result of the right's success over the past decade has been an accelerating process of depoliticisation, as a result of which working class people take less and less part in political life. For almost the first time this century in Britain, there is no distinctive layer of activists or militants seeking to cohere collective action within the working class. The organised left has been marginalised; scarcely a month now seems to go by without another left-wing publication closing down. This trend has been exacerbated by the fall-out from the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe. Within Britain, traditions such as expressing solidarity with other workers have, at least temporarily, lost their meaning. As a consequence, even when a group of workers becomes involved in an industrial dispute, their action tends to be hesitant, fragmented and isolated.

What mass campaign?

In these depoliticised circumstances, we conclude, it is not possible to create and sustain the sort of mass working class campaign against the poll tax which the left claims to have mobilised. Indeed, the irony is that the national campaign from which we are accused of abstaining does not even exist.

Left-wing groups which talk about a mass campaign (notably the Socialist Workers Party and Militant, sponsors of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation), like to back up their claims by quoting the high percentages of people in many parts of the country who have yet to pay any poll tax. The figures are impressive. But what do they signify? Simply that many people do not have the money, and that the

incompetence and disorganisation of the local councils' poll tax-collecting machinery has allowed them some breathing space.

Hard-up people are taking pragmatic decisions to ignore their bills for as long as possible. This has nothing to do with politics. To claim that they are part of a mass campaign against the poll tax is like describing those in arrears with their mortgage payments as organised protesters making a stand against the government's high interest rates policy.

By contrast with the large numbers of non-payers, the left's public political campaign against the poll tax has been anything but 'mass'. This year the only anti-poll tax events to attract a constituency outside of the left's own ranks were the town hall demonstrations held as councils set their local charge, and the subsequent march through London which ended in a riot on 31 March (most of these protests being attended by 'abstentionist' RCP supporters). Since the poll tax came into force in England and Wales, on 1 April, there have been no large-scale initiatives. Local bill-burning protests have been tiny affairs, and demonstrations like the one through north London a fortnight ago have not been much bigger.

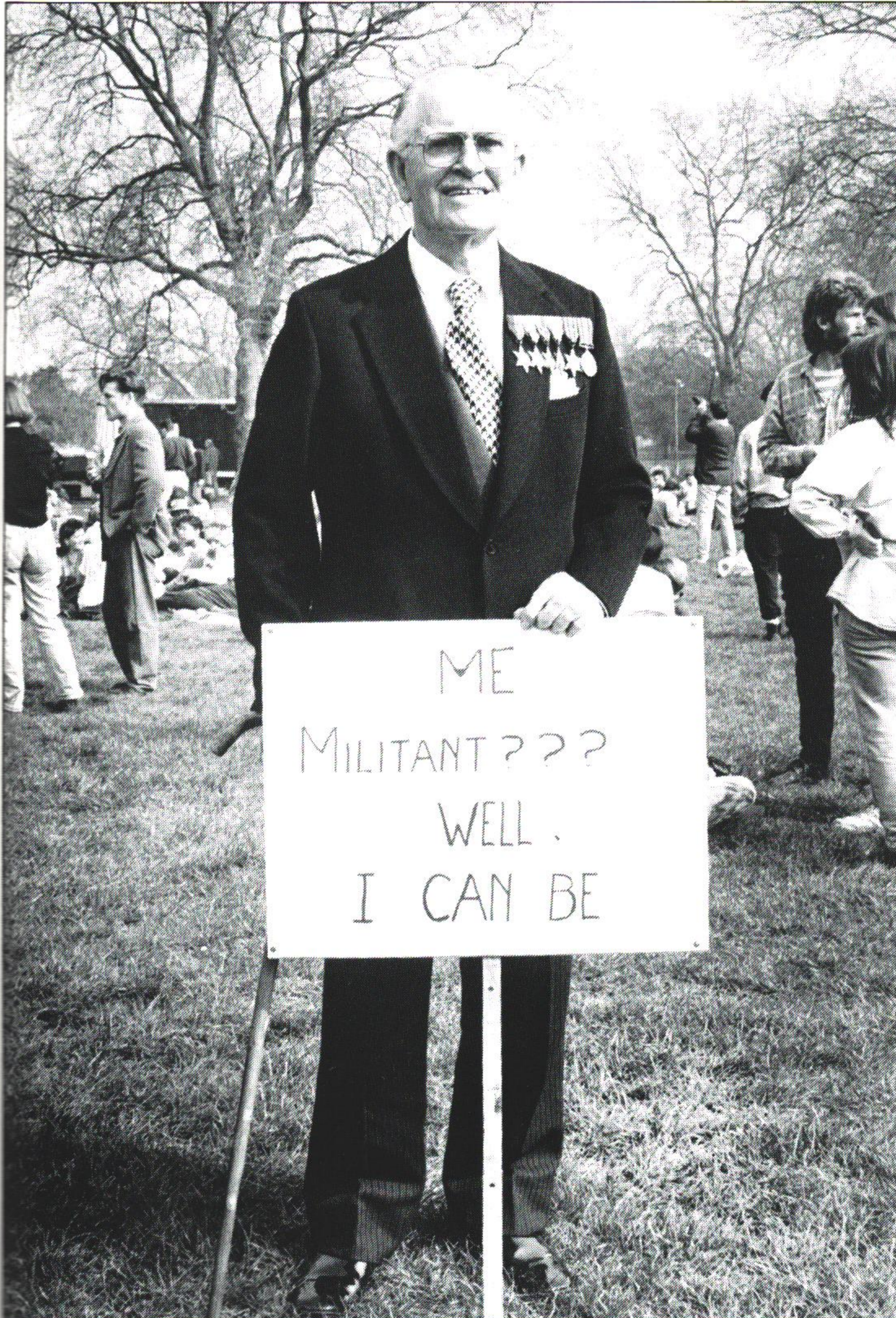
The experience of the poll tax campaign seems to confirm that, however unpopular such a measure might be, there is little scope for sustaining active working class protests against it in the current conservative political climate. Why, then, has much of the left become so obsessed with the issue?

A peculiar quality of the poll tax is that it is an anti-working class measure which has also managed to upset a lot of middle class people—those who have not reaped the expected benefits from the abolition of household rates. It has attracted criticism not only from the TUC and Labour Party, but from Conservative councils and top Tories such as Michael Heseltine. This has made the issue uniquely attractive to the left today. At a time when calling yourself a socialist is widely

RIGHT:
The anti-poll tax
campaign briefly
allowed isolated and
unpopular left
wingers to rub
shoulders with
respectable citizens

the poll tax a 'class issue'

PHOTO: Pandora Anderson



considered to be a sign of lunacy, left wingers have seized upon the opportunity to side with respectable sections of British society in opposing the poll tax.

It is not surprising that the left should find such a situation seductive. A group like Militant, for example, has suffered a lengthy period of intense isolation and sustained attack from the Labour Party leadership. The campaign against the poll tax offered Militant a shield of legitimacy, allowing it to take cover behind disgruntled Tory voters and others who were signing its petitions for the first time ever. Overjoyed at finding itself in tune with the majority of public opinion for the first time in years, the left has promoted its anti-poll tax line at the expense of other, less popular, issues.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with going after moderate or middle class support; in a struggle you need all the allies you can get. The question is, however, on whose terms is that support being sought? If an active campaign to defend working class interests has the power to set the terms and pull other interested sections of society behind it, all well and good. But as we have already established, no such campaign exists today, nor are the conditions conducive to its creation. Instead, the left has had to adapt to the standards of the more moderate audience which it is courting. The most telling example of this came with the Trafalgar Square riot.

When violence between youth and police erupted in the West End of London at the end of the anti-poll tax march on 31 March, it drew the battlelines through British politics. The place for anybody who considered themselves a Marxist or revolutionary was firmly on the side of the young working class people, whose fury and frustration at life in Thatcher's Britain had inspired them to take on the riot cops. Instead, many on the left equivocated and some—such as Militant spokesmen and the old Communist Party—immediately condemned the violence of the youth, blaming anarchists and other 'extremists' for the conflict.

left and right

From the point of view of Marxism, such a concession to the right was disgraceful. But from the point of view of the left's anti-poll tax orientation, it was an understandable disgrace. Both *Militant* and *Marxism Today* complained that the biggest problem with the violence was that it would scare off moderate support. This was a panic reaction to the fear of losing touch with the more middle class critics of the poll tax. It was the political price they felt obliged to pay for those thousands of signatures which the left-wing petitioners have collected in the suburbs of Britain, and for the appearance of some Tory voters on that one Militant-led march through London.

The action of these left groups showed up some of the flaws in their strategy of elevating the poll tax into the primary issue of 1990. First, their desperation to sustain the appearance of leading a broad-based campaign in today's conditions led them to distance themselves from the angry young people in Trafalgar Square—people who, so far as the wider Marxist project of transforming society is concerned, are far more important than any disaffected Tory shopkeeper.

Buckled under

Second, the fact that the left felt the need to accommodate to middle class concerns demonstrates that its anti-poll tax campaign cannot beat the Tories today. Time and again in recent years we have seen the lack of an effective working class movement allow the middle classes to influence anti-government campaigns. All have failed, as the doctors, teachers, lawyers and others buckle under to pressure from the Tories. The middle classes are always quickest to give up opposing the government when a more pointed political issue such as law and order is introduced into the debate. Thus the West End riot and the hysteria which followed it ended their fleeting involvement in anti-poll tax protests. The left has been left carrying the banners of an empty campaign while the Tories proceed with imposing the poll tax and criminalising the Trafalgar Square demonstrators.

It is important to re-emphasise that it is the prevailing political climate which makes the poll tax an uninspiring issue for revolutionaries. There is no principle involved in our refusal to prioritise it. In different conditions, where an active working class movement already existed, such an issue could well provide a useful focus for a fight.

Indeed, even today there are aspects and offshoots of the poll tax affair which are important to take

up. Examples of this include local government job cuts and the prosecution of protesters. The point about these issues is that, unlike the poll tax campaign itself, they highlight concerns which separate the interests of the working class from those of other classes—such as defending our right to work and opposing state repression. Seeking out issues which help to unearth the independent interests of the working class must be our primary concern in these depoliticised times.

Class lines

Like other left-wing groups, our attention is focused on *class issues*. But unlike them, we do not define a class issue simply as one which hits the working class harder than other sections of society. If that were so we would be obliged to spread our efforts very thinly indeed, over campaigns against everything from eye-test charges to dirty drinking water. The most important feature of a class issue today is that it should sharply demarcate different class interests, and show the need for the working class to take a politically independent stand against the system.

At a time when the very notion of class politics is widely considered to be redundant, it is more important than ever carefully to select the issues which can best bring out the class contradictions in British society. Almost by definition, these will not be popular issues. They will often involve confronting the strongest prejudices of capitalist society, such as support for the flag or the police. This may make some on the left shy away from them. We tend to take the opposite view; it is only by challenging the prevailing conservatism on its home ground that we can hope to challenge the ideological dominance of the right.

The riot

As mentioned above, a good recent example of such a class issue has been not the poll tax, but the riot at the anti-poll tax march and the legal crackdown which followed it. This has cut clear political lines between the majority who support the police and courts in upholding public order against 'the mob', and the minority who will side with working class youth against the forces of state repression. Whatever their view on the poll tax, every parliamentary party, newspaper and opinion-maker backed the police. This made it vital to give a voice to the resistance. The riot and the subsequent police and press witch-hunt have thus featured prominently in our publications and public work. RCP supporters also took a leading role in the campaign to defend a worker who was

suspended by Hackney Labour council for voicing the anti-police views of a small anarchist grouping.

Where the political struggle over the riot clarifies the different interests of different classes, the left's anti-poll tax campaign only serves to blur them further. At a time when moderation holds sway over society, the left's attempt to associate itself with a majority of public opinion must involve concessions which leave the initiative with the middle classes. The working class stays on the political sidelines.

Everybody wants to be popular. But it is counter-productive today for anybody on the left to pretend that they are part of a radical mass movement. It is now impossible to sustain large-scale support for any left-wing goal, and socialists who claim to have done so can only be sheltering behind far more moderate forces. There are no short-cuts to solving the problem of political isolation.

Instead of ignoring the realities of the current political climate, Marxists need to set about altering them. Instead of blowing hot air about imaginary mass campaigns, we need to start from where we are. That means recognising that we have limited resources and influence, which must be deployed as effectively as possible.

First step

The first step is to identify and cohere the vital minority of people who are open to a wide-ranging revolutionary perspective. This we can best do by focusing on the issues which draw the clearest class lines. By arming such a minority with Marxist politics, we can at least begin to challenge the prevailing climate. Unless we can engage in such a battle of ideas, however modestly to begin with, then any idea of mobilising the working class will remain wishful thinking. This is why the RCP gives such emphasis to promoting our magazine, *Living Marxism*, as the best tool with which to politicise our audience. The success of *Living Marxism* suggests that we are on the right track.

Our perspective may not sound as exciting as all the talk of leading mass campaigns against the poll tax today. But the attempt to develop Marxist ideas which can change the shape of our times is surely far more positive and fulfilling than kidding yourself that you are living in another time altogether.

Reprinted from *the next step*,
29 June 1990

It is now impossible to sustain large-scale support for any left-wing goal, and socialists who claim to have done so can only be sheltering behind more moderate forces

The snobs and the mobs

While I was traipsing along on this year's Gay Pride march I realised something about most of the marchers that had always escaped my attention. They were vulgar. I mean *really* vulgar. Drinking from beer cans in the street, smoking, wearing gaudy tops, tight pants, long shorts and far too much make-up. In other circumstances they might be erudite and tasteful, but lumped together like that, in a promiscuous jumble, the marchers were simply a mob. Ululating without cause. Screaming, not slogans, but screams of delight.

A kind of crowd psychology was at work. Drag tableaux and prodigious amounts of leather, plastic, rubber, sequins and tinsel were deployed to get the marchers even more het up. Most people appeared to be daring each other to go that little bit further, to be just that little bit more offensive. A desire to flout good manners and defy authority reigned supreme. Evidently, the sharply focused ideological statement, the calculated outrage, the politically motivated drag of yesteryear, has given way to a formless determination to have a good time.

This sort of thing is not restricted to the Gay Pride march. It seems to be part of a general malaise. It can crop up anywhere unannounced. When England beat Cameroon in the World Cup hundreds of young people drove through various county towns trailing huge flags from poles poking out of their car windows. All lights were flashing, horns blaring and whistles blowing. It was a thoroughly foreign sort of fiesta. Definitely not the right thing for Northampton, Cheshunt or Burgess Hill. The police in these places thought it was a riot. They started fighting the jubilant crowds, denouncing them as a 'mindless mob' that was 'rampaging through the town'. A large number of arrests followed.

Once again, everybody was drunk, excitable and overwrought. And of course, that ineffable vulgarity which scars British life permeated the entire proceedings. The bellies bloated with beer, the t-shirts and hi-tech trainers. The bad diction and the effing and blinding. The tattoos and the hard-case hair-dos. You know, the kind of crowd that was such a disappointment to the *Guardian's* man at Italia '90, Matthew Engel.

When they 'snarl' their way around the 'lovely arcades of old Bologna' they embarrass Matthew.

They make him ashamed of being British and have discredited the practice of wearing Union Jack shorts. Not only do 'our lads' not know how to behave. They don't know the lingo and they don't like the food. It's no wonder Colin Moynihan hankers for the days when yobs could only afford a day-trip to Margate; better still, the days when they had to put up with mum and dad in digs in Blackpool.

But that is a vanished age. Now, 'the mutable, rank-scented many', think that the world owes them a living. Sporting baseball caps with giant turned-up peaks and comfy tracksuit bottoms, the riff-raff dominate the streets. They expect cheap flights, clean hotels and decent pools. Dazzling us with their lurid zipper jackets designed for the crews of spaceships they appear to be peculiarly suited to perpetuate oafishness; a modern version of rolling up your trousers, paddling in the ebb tide and wearing a knotted handkerchief on your head.

● The belief that working class people are all hooligans and misfits has been assiduously cultivated in recent years. It is now popular, almost respectable, to believe that declining moral and educational standards have created an underclass of disorganised impoverished people alongside a class of ruthlessly prosperous 'I'm all right Jacks'. The football hooligan bridges the gaps between these two sections; he has become a metaphor for all that is loutish and unpleasant in the life of ordinary people.

Recently, the most unnerving development has been the discovery of the mob in Eastern Europe. It was comforting when it was a straight fight in the East, with dissident intellectuals ranged against Stalinist bureaucrats. Now, of course, we have discovered that Eastern intellectuals have their own mob to put up with. As usual, the rough materialistic people are making life difficult for the sensitive spiritual people. Caterwauling about their rights and demanding decent cars, fridge-freezers and foreign holidays, the Eastern mob is making some exceedingly familiar noises.

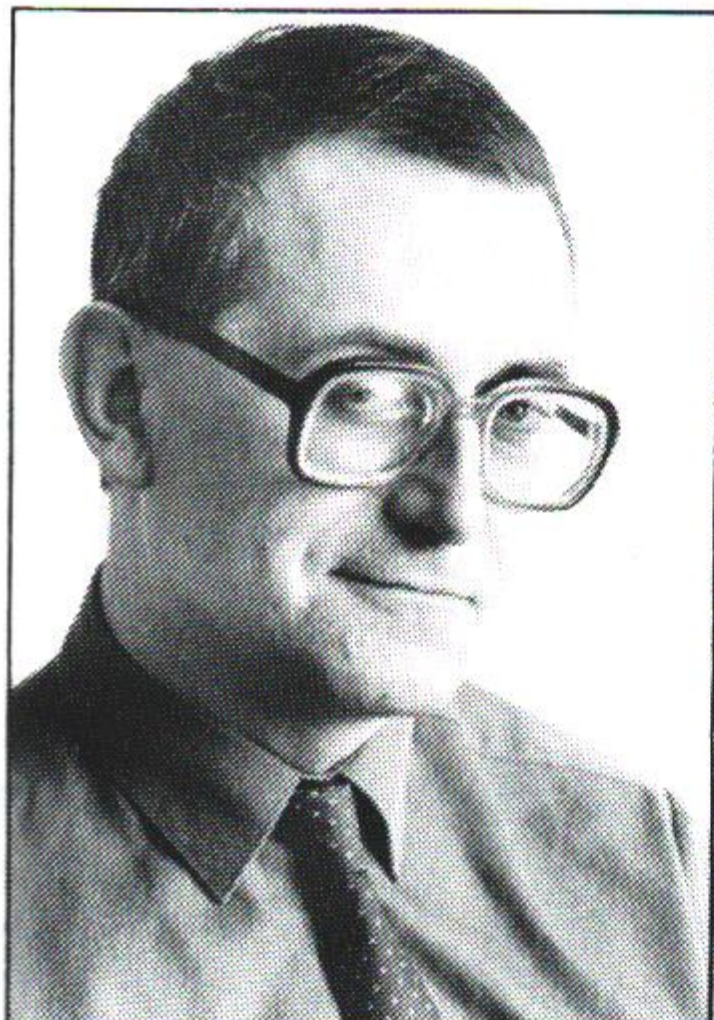
From Sofia to Warsaw crowds of badly educated, unreliable, lazy, drunken, vulgar people are keeping the intellectuals and politicians on their toes. Motivated purely by greed and the desire for 'the

good life', the mob has disgraced the spiritual values advocated by students, teachers and, multi-party politicians. Simply by existing the mob threatens to bring down chaos on everybody's head. This is why, a month ago, president Ion Iliescu of the National Salvation Front mobilised the Romanian miners to defend his regime. He knew that several thousand swaggering miners armed with staves and cudgels would strike terror into the hearts of the Peasants Party and their student allies. The terror did not stop there. Just the idea of miners ruling the streets outraged conservative and liberal opinion alike from Bucharest to Barnsley.

Here was yet another example of noisy, prejudiced, beefy, uncouth men with ample paunches ruining life for those of us who are a bit more subtle and a bit more refined. The splendid thing about this kind of snobbery is that you can use it and feel radical as well. One isn't hating ordinary working class people. Oh, dear me, no! One hates them because they are such racists! They are such nationalists! They are such male chauvinists! They are expressing such primitive appetites. One does not enjoy feeling more sensitive and refined. It's just a cross one just has to bear.

● Of course the radical snobs know about rigger buggers at Oxford. They know that Colin Moynihan led the pitch invasion at the Seoul Olympics when Britain won the hockey. And, they know that nobody would dream of imposing an alcohol ban at such debauched affairs as Royal Ascot or the Henley Regatta. But that is not the point. What is important for the snob is ensuring that the middle class holds the middle ground between the intemperate behaviour of the filthy rich and the 'crudeness' and 'lack of sophistication' of the working class.

The new wave of snobbery has been encouraged by the discovery that any enthusiasm for sport, music or even for political action by the mass of ordinary people represents a big threat to middle class status. However, the determination to have a good time appears to be very deeply rooted among the population at large. So deeply rooted, in fact, that we can be sure that attempts to weed out the hedonism will surely fail.



'The Romanian miners were another example of noisy, beefy, uncouth men with ample paunches ruining life for those of us who are a bit more refined'

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Life after

Living

It's akin to asking the mafia to investigate organised crime.' Paul Hill was in combative mood as he described Sir John May's judicial inquiry into the cases of the Guildford Four and the Maguire Seven. We were in the garden of Errol and Theresa Smalley's home in north London, now also home to their outspoken nephew. We had just had some familiar banter between Hill and his uncle about the progress of their teams, Ireland and England respectively, in the World Cup. It was over eight months since Hill's release after 15 years in prison, but you couldn't miss the special pleasure which both men took in simply being able to argue over the football.

Neither country was in the last World Cup which Hill could have watched as a free man—the 1974 tournament in Germany. In November of that year, his long nightmare began when he was arrested in connection with the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings. The following year Hill, Gerry Conlon, Patrick Armstrong and Carole Richardson were convicted on the basis of false confessions terrorised out of them by the Surrey police. In a connected explosives case Anne Maguire, five members of her family and a friend were also framed and jailed; one of them, Gerry Conlon's father Guiseppe, died in prison. Last October the Guildford Four finally walked free from the court of appeal, and the May inquiry into the cases was set up.

Apart from the prisoners the real heroes of the Guildford Four saga are Errol and Theresa Smalley, who started and kept the campaign going for years when nobody would listen. 'It's marvellous to have Paul and the others out', says his uncle, 'to have him here drinking tea at home is something we just dreamt about. But there's still unfinished business'.

Errol was slower than Theresa to accept that Paul had been framed; she came from West Belfast, and was no stranger to British injustice. But once he was sure 'something was very wrong', Errol did not waver. 'It was a tremendous thing for me to take on board. My father was a superintendent in the colonial police, later a bodyguard for the

Queen. I believed in the system of justice I was brought up in. It was very difficult for me.' The police paid a 'chilling' visit to his Greater London Council workplace, and told him 'Just remember, you are one of us'.

The most immediate unfinished business concerns the Guildford phase of the inquiry, which is due to open soon. And in September, Hill has to return to the court of appeal in Belfast to get a date for the hearing of his appeal against a separate conviction for the killing of a soldier in Belfast in 1974. Errol Smalley is indignant that the prosecution has not dropped it. After all, Hill was forced to confess to the Belfast case on the same evening at Guildford police station that he was forced to confess to the Guildford and Woolwich bombings, and again there was no corroborating evidence. If the Surrey police can't now be trusted at the Old Bailey, how can they be trusted in Belfast? 'It is unforgivable', says Smalley, 'Paul is still in limbo. It's impossible for him to get his life together'.

A law unto themselves

The Northern Ireland office and the director of public prosecutions there are apparently a law unto themselves, and may try to sustain the conviction, even pushing for a hearing before the May inquiry brings out still more evidence helpful to the defence. If they try that on, Hill knows what to do: 'If I see that they're going through with a charade, I will refuse to participate. I've been through it before and I'm not going to Belfast crown court to sit there, for want of a better word, like a dickhead. I'm a different person from when I first went into prison. I'm not lending any credibility to it whatsoever. But if I see they're going through the motions to quash it, I'll participate.'

Hill wants the Belfast case dropped immediately, otherwise he wants it heard *after* May reports. He feels further details might come out, but expects nothing from May himself. 'Does anybody seriously believe that the government has instigated an investigation into itself? This started with politicians. The Prevention of Terrorism Act was a political decision. It was implemented by politi-

cians and enforced by judges. The police and the courts were used as an extension of the state. I've got no hopes whatsoever of May. They are engaged in an exercise of damage limitation.'

The inquiry is on course to blame a handful of junior officers for the conspiracy which really went right to the top of the British state. Lord Donaldson has refused to give evidence, so too has the 18-year old forensic scientist who detected the explosives on Anne Maguire's hands and later destroyed the evidence. Is Smalley disappointed that Anne Maguire and the others have not been more outspoken? 'I would have hoped that they would have been, but clearly they have chosen not to do that.'

Like Gerry Conlon, Hill has been busy writing his own account of the nightmare which engulfed them. They have both produced excellent books. Shocking and moving, they should be compulsory reading for anybody with lingering illusions in the police, courts, prisons, press or politicians of Britain. These two extracts give some flavour of the works.

Conlon: 'I went back down to the prison workshop and said goodbye to all the friends I'd made, played football with, played backgammon with, had the crack with. I said goodbye to the Londoners, the blacks, the Brummies, and they all wished me well....The West Indians were giving me hand slaps and I was being slapped on the back. I felt very bewildered, not knowing what it meant, but knowing I might not see Gartree again, or not for a long time....All the Irish prisoners in the jail had come round to see. It was very emotional, they were hugging me. We all had tears in our eyes. And Paddy [Hill of the Birmingham Six], whose own appeal had been lost nine months earlier, just put his arms around me and hugged me tight and said, "Be lucky, Gerry".'

And for the first time in 15 years Gerry Conlon got lucky. The Guildford Four did not get 'knocked back' again. The judges agreed with crown prosecutor Roy Amlot QC that it would be better to free the Four immediately than to have all the embarrassing evidence of the frame-up exposed in a retrial. Here is Hill's account of the casual

Paul Hill is out; and so is his book, the story of the years he spent as one of the Guildford Four.

End of story? Far from it. In an outspoken interview, Hill and his uncle told John Fitzpatrick about their 'unfinished business'

Guildford

brutality of the hearing: 'Amlot sat down. He had just perpetrated a last injustice, the kind that is the special preserve of his profession. His speech had been cool, mechanical even; a summary of...what? Did I hear a word, a phrase, a sentence about the lives destroyed by "the material I have analysed with your lordships"? Where was the shame and rage?...No one had made even the slightest acknowledgement of our sufferings and the sufferings of our families. No one mentioned the 60 years stolen from us. The judges referred only to "this unhappy matter".'

Hill and Conlon can take grim consolation from the fact that they have learned a great deal from their ordeal. They have grown enormously from the naive and feckless youths who were easy meat for the police thugs. Talking on a sunny summer afternoon in 1990, Hill sounds not so much bitter, as determined that the lessons shall be learned. He seems in great form.

'From day one they knew we were absolutely innocent people. This is a kind of militarism. You read Frank Kitson's book on low-intensity operations. What they do is they attack the community from which the resistance comes, and they terrorise that community so that community will then push out from it the people that are resisting. The best way to do that is to take innocent people. A week after we were arrested the whole of the Irish community knew we were totally innocent. That was the message they wanted the Irish community to get.'

In prison Hill got to know the direct prisoners of the Irish War. 'I came to see the republican prisoners as pretty determined people. I was moved 50 times, so I saw basically every republican in prison in England and I never met one republican who was, for want of a better phrase, a broken man. They have got this incredible fortitude. Irrespective of what you think of their actions or their aims, you have to give them that bit of moral fabric and personal integrity.' They also looked after Hill. 'When we first went to prison republicans made it abundantly clear to the rest of the prison population that we were totally innocent and that if anyone attempted to harm the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six then they would have to deal with them.'

So what did he think of their aims? 'I think they have a just cause. I would not have been to prison had there not been an artificial border imposed on my country. Anybody who wants to remove that, I could only support. I may be opposed to their methods, I would like to think considering what I have endured that I was a pacifist, because I know violence gets nowhere. But I also know the reality of the situation is thus: armed struggle leads from civil disobedience, and civil disobedience did not work in Ireland; they were beaten from the streets.'

'It's going to be a political decision which stops the agony of Ireland, not a military decision. People say "Well, if you understand it's going to be a political decision why are the IRA still engaged in what they're engaged in?". I would have thought it's pretty obvious. I can equate that with what happened in Beirut, when the Israelis purged the fighters from Beirut. Immediately the Christian Falangists knew there were no armed people in those camps, they attacked and killed those people. That's the exact same thing which is happening in Ireland. The military are there to disarm one section of the community, so that they will incapacitate the people who will resist when a Loyalist and sectarian police force invades those areas.'

Hill is said to be the first person arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. He sees further frame-ups unless it is removed. 'They can do it, the mechanism is still there. Especially now when there are bombings still happening around London.' Himself a victim of such an anti-Irish backlash, Hill remains unhappy about the reaction to the recent bombings. 'People want to deal with the

symptoms and not the cause. Intellectually aware people who want to deal with the symptoms are as guilty of prolonging the agony of Ireland as the people carrying out these acts.'

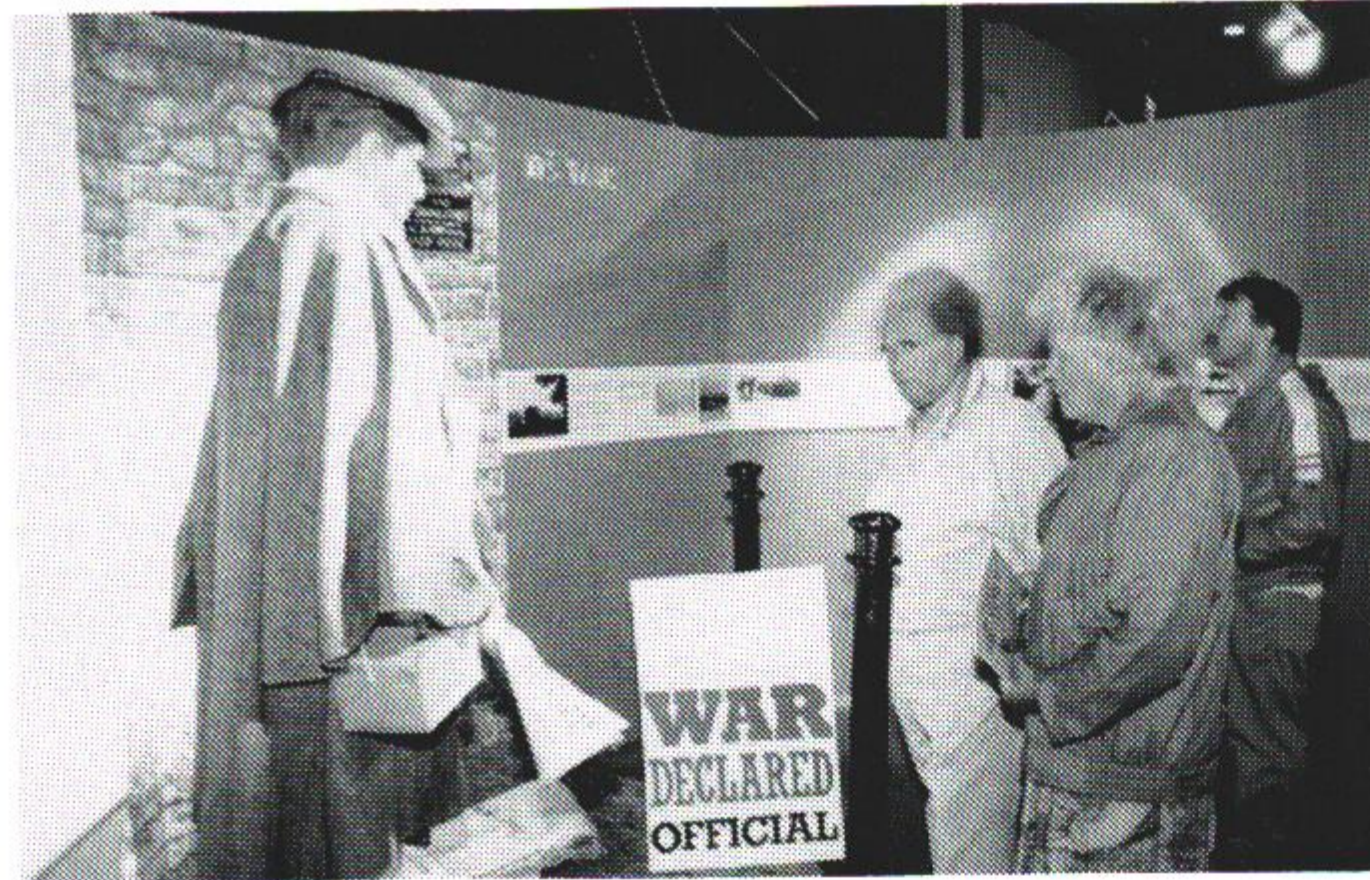
Hill is not sanguine about the prospects for his friends in jail. 'I'm not in the least bit optimistic about the release of the Birmingham Six. I think it is inevitable, but it is not imminent. The British establishment are now trying to portray what happened in Guildford as an isolated incident, and they can't sustain that position if they release the Six.'

He thinks however that the first thing a new Labour government would do is release the Six, because it would be 'politically hip' to do so. 'Labour can't attack the Tories now on this, because the Birmingham Six went to prison under a Labour government, the PTA was passed by a Labour government, the troops were sent into Northern Ireland under a Labour government.' Smalley recalls that Neil Kinnock, cornered at a conference, agreed to meet him to discuss the case. That was three years ago and the meeting has yet to take place. Hill is scathing too about the con-

tribution of Amnesty International: 'Amnesty International did nothing for the Guildford Four. Amnesty International did nothing for the Birmingham Six. If we could have annexed Ireland and towed it to Central America or off the coast of South Africa, we would have been world news.'

What are Hill's plans for the future? 'I can't possibly say I'm going to do anything until the Birmingham Six get released. I just couldn't. I have been touring about everywhere for them, and this is my reward. I say "Don't shake my hand or pat me on the back. Do something for the Birmingham Six". Previously Irish people speaking about injustice spoke about it as an abstract thing. It's tangible now. Eventually I'm going to live in Southern Ireland or America. I couldn't stay here.'

- Gerry Conlon, *Proved Innocent: The Story of Gerry Conlon of the Guildford Four*, Hamish Hamilton, £12.99 hbk
- Paul Hill with Ronan Bennett, *Stolen Years: Before and After Guildford*, Doubleday, £12.99 hbk



It's hell

1940 and all that

Summer of war

Joe Boatman smells jingoism in the air

This summer's big trap for the unwary tourist is one of those happenings which recall Britain's 'finest hour', ie, the Second World War or tastefully edited highlights of it. While participating in the British way of having to wait too long for tube trains, it is hard to miss those intriguing posters about the Imperial War Museum which promise 'broken glass under foot, collapsed ceilings, exposed wiring...and rubble everywhere'. This is the 'Blitz Experience', which invites us to 'feel, hear and even smell what it was like to live in London in those terrifying times'.

Any foreigner who does happen to share the simulated situations on offer is more likely to sense the lingering odour of British chauvinism that pervades these rather pathetic attempts to bolster national pride. These reminders of how 'we' rallied around to rout 'the Krauts' are in fact strictly for domestic consumption.

The Blitz Experience is being promoted as 'part of your family's history'. Well, for many Londoners that's probably true, so the 'empathy' method of teaching (so abhorred by Margaret Thatcher when used to encourage the nation's youth to identify with previous generations of workers) recommends

itself. But the most vivid sense of déjà vu which is summoned up here is that 'we wuz robbed' feeling. Having paid £3.50 to get into the Imperial War Museum and found your way to the World War Two department, the Blitz Experience (£1 extra) is like a cross between some wartime wide-boy's scam and the kind of hustle perpetrated on naive tourists in a Soho strip joint, 'For an extra quid you can go into a small dark room and see the *really* dirty bits'.

The first stop is a small dark (and yes quite smelly) room equipped with benches on each side (rather like the tube train). But you know this is a 'shelter' because of the taped chat from an 'air raid warden' and the chorus of 'Roll out the barrel'. All in the unmistakable accents of those plummy actors who used to play the lower orders in wartime films—philosophical but chirpy.

Next is a brief tour of a very confined space orchestrated by the stunning device of switching lights on and off over small heaps of rubble. The 'experience' is rounded off nicely with the illumination of a mock-up tea stall as we listen to a working class woman, whose home has been bombed, become increasingly irate with the persistent offers of a 'nice cup of tea' from a middle class

do-gooder. The warden then explains, delivering the crucial essence of that wartime spirit, 'But it was the lady from the Women's Voluntary Service who sorted us out in the end'. Gawd luv 'er. The thought of all the bulldog breed pulling together in adversity makes you grateful not only for being British, but also for the fact that you live in good old London. As the tube ad says, 'Maybe when you've an idea of what it was like to have lived here then, you'll appreciate even more what it's like to live here now'.

All over England, from the Museum of Army Flying at RAF Middle Wallop, Hampshire, to the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight at RAF Coningsby, Lincolnshire, you can relive the Second World War. Worst of the lot is the cabinet war rooms—the basement under Whitehall to which Churchill, his cabinet and chiefs of staff retired to mastermind the war effort or, as the adverts now claim, to 'bring the German army to its knees and drive Hitler to suicide'. The poky basement rooms were restored 10 years ago, but a recent advertising boost is doubling the number of visitors. The intrinsic historical interest of the emergency headquarters of a government at war has been totally subordinated to the effort to crank up Churchill even further as a national hero.

Churchill's chamber pot

'Step back into the dark days of the war' says the 'personal sound guide'. Churchill memorabilia are everywhere, even his chamber-pot and his private collection of weapons (a Colt automatic pistol, a Fabrique Nationale automatic rifle, a Sterling Lanchester submachine gun and assorted pieces with bayonets attached). His voice (or is it Larry the Lamb, the actor who is said to have stood in for him?) booms out everywhere, intoning on and on about 'Nazi tyranny' and 'this famous island race', and so on.

It's the one big family theme again, with Churchill as big daddy and all those nasty rows about class forgotten. The 'personal sound guide' picks out for special mention the Labour leaders who sat around the war cabinet table with Churchill: Ernest Bevin, Clement Attlee, Arthur Greenwood and Herbert Morrison. One of the last extracts from Churchill's speeches features the promise 'when this war is over' of 'a state of society where advantages and privileges hitherto available only to a few will be more widely shared by the many'.

The most offensive aspect of the exhibition is the final room which has nothing to do with the war cabinet. Like so much of the fiftieth anniversary celebrations, it is a blatant attempt to whip up anti-German feeling at a time when Germany is seen to be getting above itself again. The room is dedicated to the Munich agreement reached in 1938 between Hitler and Chamberlain. It is about the need to deal firmly with Germany. There are a dozen screens each emblazoned with a preying eagle circled by the words: 'Munich, the paper peace'. The title of each board rams home the message about weakness in the face of German expansionism: 'The road to Munich', 'The scrap of paper', 'The politics of appeasement', 'Germany awakens', 'Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist'. The final words I heard were those of Chamberlain in 1939: 'This country is now at war with Germany.'

The death of millions in the Second World War is no joke, but these sordid attempts to exploit the war further would be laughable if they weren't so distasteful. Nobody is expecting a war with Germany tomorrow, and there is no conspiracy among the museums to prepare us for battle. But it is a sign of the times that so much effort can be expended to cohere 'the nation' within by conjuring up a familiar enemy without, and by reliving the days when Britain was a major player among the great powers.



Club 18-30: taking Margate to Marbella, and the lads done magnificent

Home and away

What we do on our hols

Alan Harding on Brits at play from Brighton to Benidorm

The British holiday is a national institution. In fact it is two institutions—the domestic and the foreign, although the British like to make the latter as much like the former as possible.

The home variety is the stuff of nostalgia. Windswept promenades, dripping packamacs and packed sandwiches with the corners turned up and the tinned meat exhausted after its struggle with life. The seaside landlady in the bed and breakfast presiding over a 15-minute breakfast period and a curfew inherited from the Blitz. Saucy postcards of men with red noses dressed to kill in braces, rolled trousers and the regulation handkerchief knotted in four corners and placed on the head.

I for one can testify that it was all true and probably still is (with the donkey rides and leaving the beach at strategic intervals to avoid paying the deckchair attendant thrown in for good measure). Each summer is cluttered up with candy floss. The mantelpiece remains the repository of the chipped plaster Alsatians proudly carried off from the shooting gallery. On the sideboard are the goldfishes liberated from their plastic bags and now in the ocean of a large bowl. Somewhere in the house there is a 'Kiss me quick' hat.

Abroad it's not much different. The cast is the same, but the location has changed with the discovery of the Costa del Sols, Bravas and Blancas from the late 1950s. Of course the weather is different. Instead of a chill and a runny nose you get sunstroke. The lobster-pot complexions and the most garish Bermuda shorts have replaced the rolled trousers as the instantly recognisable uniform of the holidaying Brit. The generations of plaster dogs are now joined by large donkeys: stuffed rather

than saved from the cruel Spaniard and taken to a better life in Blackpool.

When you finally get there (after the now compulsory wait in the departure lounge), the landlady has been replaced by a concrete barracks. You were so desperate to get away that you agreed to go four to a room with shared facilities. You are less keen about doubling up when you have to start negotiating to get the room to yourself should the need arise. All this for £300 plus spending money.

What have you escaped to? Watney's Red Barrel; a disco doing a passable imitation of a bad Saturday night in Pontefract; and a monosyllabic attempt to get off with a partner who probably comes from the same part of Essex as you do. If the charm doesn't work there is always chicken and chips, a bucketful of overpriced, oversugared sangria and two fingers down the throat.

The point is to make it as much like Barnsley, Basildon or Bathgate as possible. And why not? It has to be familiar in order to know how to enjoy yourself. The aim, however, is to make it as much like home as possible and then do things that you would never do at home.

My own experience at home and abroad runs along these lines. I have strong memories of long walks on rainy days because you were not allowed back into the boarding house until one hour before the evening meal. The holiday had started before dawn with the journey to the coach depot, interrupted by a 40-minute wait in a queue at a pre-motorway transport café. This was of course the only time it was hot on the holiday. More often it was day-trips to Margate. This meant a long, long wait in the children's room of the pub with a fizzy orange and plain crisps wondering why there was always one

skittle missing. Then, on the coach back home, an amazing rendition of 'She'll be coming round the mountain', verse after verse of which broke the laws of physiology.

Going abroad was a more educative experience. I learned to conjugate new Italian verbs: I am drunk, you are drunk, he, she and it are all drunk. The Lido di Jesolo was different in one respect from Margate. It was full of GIs. This is significant since they were very interested in all the receptionists from Ilford who were happy to introduce us all as younger brothers. Pizzas and wine for the boys was part of getting to know Ilford better.

I don't really want to knock the British working class holiday. It is the butt of the supercilious condescension of middle class prattlers who run a mile from the vulgarity of saying what you want and then going out to get it. Their idea of leisure is a sanitised version of someone else's 'culture'. How wonderful the simple peasant life is! How appreciative of its virtues they are! By contrast, after a year of drudgery in factory and office the working class just wants to have a good time.

Why should you not have your familiar creature comforts? After a year battling with the bus timetable and the works canteen all day 'English breakfast' with waiter service comes like manna from heaven. Of course, there is the widespread belief that English is spoken everywhere and you can make yourself understood by saying the same phrase louder and slower. But at least these holidaymakers generally have the good grace to leave the local population alone.

Only members of the middle class cultural inspection group do what a friend witnessed while hitching in rural Spain. The driver saw a peasant with a donkey and a primitive plough in the fields. The driver stopped and insisted that the hitchhiker take a photograph of the driver posed with the relics of feudal economy. How authentic (and how ignorant of the brutal demands of this form of physical labour).

Despite their pretensions to imbibe the local culture, the middle classes take their way of life with them. Hotels from Hongkong to Singapore testify to this, as does the reproduction of the delights of Brighton and Scarborough in Biarritz, Monte and the Venetian Lido.

The holiday for the working masses is a modern phenomenon. Not for them the extended education in life of the aristocratic grand tour. Leisure for the masses is a form of forgetfulness, an extension of the feast day when you take time off from life. It thus reproduces the narrow outlook which binds us in capitalist society. It also mimics the attitudes of the establishment. Just as a whippet is the working class version of the 'sport of kings', the package tour is a bit of foreign soil which is forever British.

Mass transit took the working class feast day further afield, but it often retained its original character like the traditional day out on the Epsom Downs for the Derby. If you couldn't do this you did what my father still does: go and sit in the municipal park for the day. But it should not be a solitary experience. There has to be one person who is sick, one person who gets left behind, etc.

The essential spirit of the working class holiday is to do something familiar together with familiar people. Despite recession, and bad weather notwithstanding, as long as there is capitalism there will be coachloads of young people from Blackpool to Benidorm doing what they do in Dudley and Darlington, only more often and more loudly. But that could just be the partition walls.

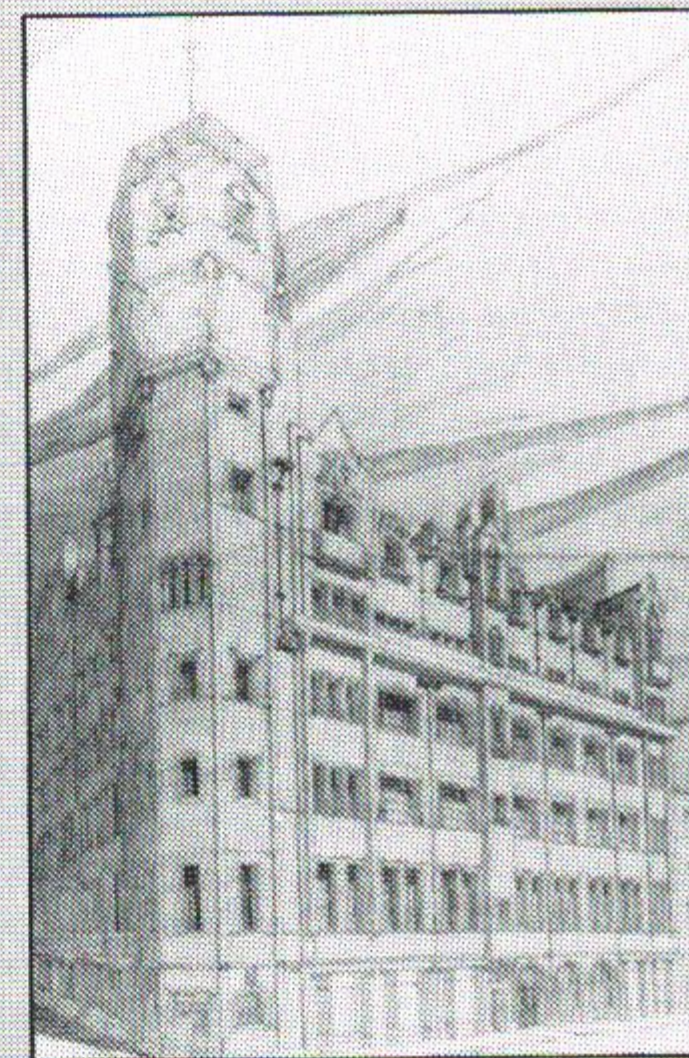
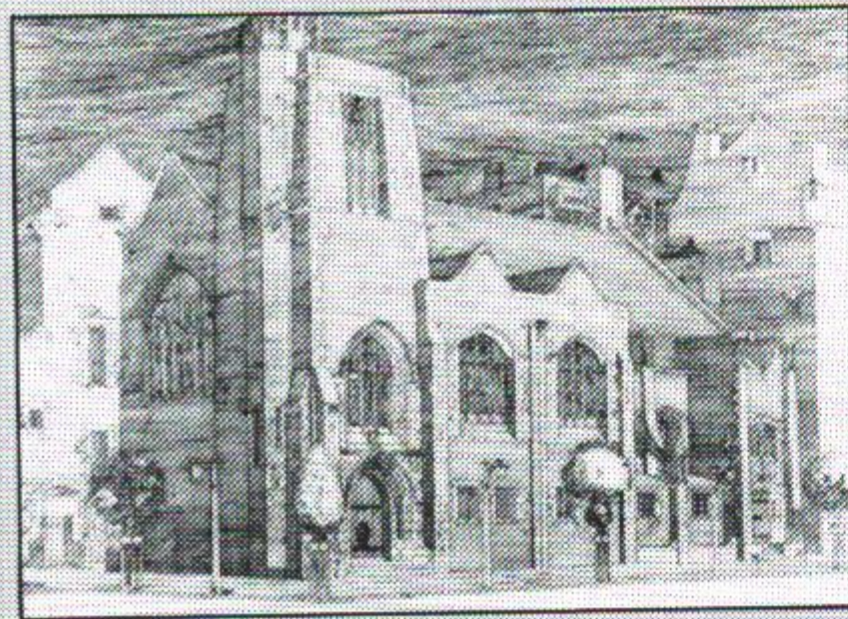


PHOTO: Hunterian Art Gallery

Charles Rennie Mackintosh

Pioneer of modernism

Gareth Rhys enters the architecture debate with a look at the work of a Scottish designer which is being exhibited this summer

Charles Rennie Mackintosh is recognised today as one of the most important British contributors to the development of the modern movement in architecture. An exhibition of Mackintosh's work is now showing at the Hunterian Art Gallery at the University of Glasgow. In his day, however, Mackintosh was rejected by most of his British contemporaries and appreciated only by members of the Continental avant-garde. His work marks a transition between the historicism that dominated nineteenth-century architecture and the development of the modern movement at the start of the twentieth.

Mackintosh is probably best known for the distinctive decorative style which he developed in collaboration with three fellow pupils from the Glasgow School of Art; Herbert McNair and the sisters Frances and Margaret McDonald. They looked to natural forms for inspiration and were influenced by oriental and celtic art and symbolism. Their technique, which used stylised animal and vegetable forms drawn in flowing vertical lines, had striking similarities with the art nouveau style sweeping the Continent in the 1890s.

When Mackintosh began his career as a designer towards the end of the nineteenth century, British architecture was going through a period of flux which seemed to hold tremendous promise for the future. The 'battle of the styles' between gothic and classicist architects which had dominated the mid-1890s had been vanquished by technological progress. The development of industry and new materials created new possibilities and new needs that could not be accommodated by the strict adherence to either gothic or classicist styles.

In the course of adapting traditional styles to new needs, architects began to borrow from varied sources producing an eclectic architecture that defied strict classification. It was in this environment that Mackintosh began to develop his style. He did not consciously set out to be a pioneer of modernity. He wanted to produce architecture that was appropriate for his time, but he was also committed to a continuity with past traditions. Like many of his contemporaries, he saw the way forward in adapting traditional Scottish vernacular architecture to perform new functions.

Mackintosh's buildings were constructed from traditional materials. He showed little interest in exploiting the potential of steel, glass or reinforced concrete. What made him exceptional was his commitment to the principle that the form of a building should be a clear expression of its internal organisation and its method of construction. This principle, first promoted by Pugin, the gothic

revival architect in the mid-nineteenth century, was later codified in the doctrine of 'functionalism' by the propagandists of the modern movement. Mackintosh combined this rationalist approach to architecture with a flair for original decorative design to produce buildings which seemed remarkably modern.

Mackintosh's reputation is based on a small number of completed buildings executed between 1896 and 1906. The most famous of these is his design for the Glasgow School of Art. From a simple plan he produced a building devoid of historical references. Rather than a façade composed in the traditional manner, the front of the art school was dominated by large windows providing north light to the studios. The peculiar art nouveau metal brackets fixed to these windows are a typical example of Mackintosh's approach to design. They are not merely decorative objects; they were intended to support window cleaner's planks. Mackintosh's genius in transforming mundane fittings into beautiful objects is evident throughout the building.

Although his work was highly regarded on the Continent, Mackintosh's puritanical contemporaries in the arts and crafts movement regarded him as a superficial aesthete and would have nothing to do with him. He also suffered from the economic constraints that were beginning to dominate the building industry. Mackintosh considered himself to be an artist and relied on constant refinement of his initial designs to achieve the final result. He could not cope with the limitations of strict financial budgets. Frustrated, he turned to drink. After the completion of the school of art in 1909, he designed no more buildings of significance.

At a time when the work of Britain's best architects is the subject of abuse at home and admiration abroad, and the revival of historical styles is the flavour of the moment, it seems appropriate to recall Mackintosh's warning to those who relied on the 'prop' of imitation: 'You will never learn to walk so long as there are props. The props of art are on the one hand the slavish imitation of old work—no matter what date or from what country—and on the other hand the absurd and false idea that there can be a living emotion expressed in work scientifically proportioned according to ancient principles, but clothed in the thin fantasy of the author's own fancy.'

• CR Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings Exhibition, 7 July-28 October; Mackintosh: Genius of Design, 7 July-30 September. At the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Monday-Saturday 9.30-5pm, Sunday 2-5pm

Fat Harold, thirtysomething and the freedom of the airwaves

Frank Cottrell-Boyce

It's hard to believe if you live in the West, but Thatcher is actually a very popular figure in the East. It's hard to believe if you live in the East, but Gorby is actually a very popular figure in the West. You'll never believe this if you live anywhere but Japan, but the Bay City Rollers have just had a massive revival in Japan. *Take the High Road* is the most popular television programme in Thailand. The lead singer of Aquarium, one of the most wildly avant-garde and madly creative of the new Russian bands, said the main influences on modern Soviet music were Bob Dylan and...Smokie. In fact according to my sister-in-law (who should know because she does their accounts) Smokie is one of the most popular bands in Scandinavia.

Someone else big in Scandinavia is me—at least I think so. They've shown *Damon and Debbie* (by me) four times, *True Romance* (by me) twice and they've just bought *Eddy English* (by me). I know because I get paid. I've never actually been to Finland and now I'll never go. I cherish this dream of Finnish undergraduates fiddling with the semantics of Damon Grant's Dick Turpin outfit, and of Moomin wannabees cultivating phoney diabetes in honour of Debbie. To go over and discover that the reason they repeat my stuff so often is that they use it as a schools programme or that they've given it some wacky dub (the way Eric Thompson did to Serge Danot's *Magic Roundabout*), well, it would all be too much.

The thing about living in the electronic village is that you never know how next door are going to interpret your transmissions. The images of prosperous modern Italy which framed the World Cup coverage all over the globe were meant to attract investment. In fact they have accelerated the first ever mass wave of immigration into Italy (which

has been a net exporter of people since the war). Most of the new arrivals are from North Africa. They can get RAI on their tellys and of course they had a big stake in the Mondiale.

At least the pictures of posh stadiums and well-dressed people had *some* connection with reality. When I was in Hungary I got the impression that *Dallas*—seen in the West as the highest camp—was regarded as socio-realism. Indeed, there are those who argue that the foundations of last year's events in Europe were laid by Ewing Oil and Southfork Beef. Back in 1988 a party official said to Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Satellites will bring *Dallas* to Tashkent. The isolation of the Russian people will be over. The Americans can sit back and wait'. The idea that *Dallas* by satellite has succeeded where Radio Free Europe failed is what lies behind the latest initiative of the loony right in the USA—TV Marti.

TV Marti is transmitted from a large barrage balloon stationed over Miami. It floods the Cuban airwaves with American lifestyle programmes and with images of the Berlin Wall collapsing. The barrage balloon is called 'Fat Harold'. The station is called Marti after José Martí, the celebrated poet and denouncer of US imperialism. This is an inspired bit of bull-baiting. As Fidel Castro roared, it's like naming a brothel after George Washington. TV Marti is totally illegal according to the statutes of the International Frequency Registration Board, because it uses a frequency reserved for internal broadcasting. It is also totally redundant in that about 30 per cent of Cuban programming is imported from the States, including the CNN news every Friday night.

In any case foreign stations are not jammed in Cuba, though Cuban programmes are banned in the States to the extent that when the Pan American

games were held in Havana, there was no coverage on US television. TV Marti is financed by those colourful Cuban émigrés in Miami, the people who brought you cocaine and the Contras. And what are they broadcasting? *thirtysomething*.

Well, Radio Free Europe was one thing, *thirtysomething* is another. Castro had to fight back. He recently arranged for some foreign journalists to be shown around his transmitters. He has got two massive 500 kilowatt facilities—a last gift from the Soviet Union. If he used them, Cuban television could bomb out local programming as far into the States as Tennessee. The idea of Gloria Estefan turning on her Sony and being confronted with Castro himself in full flood for two hours of prime time is too delicious to contemplate.

When you think about what happened to Smokie, you simply have to consider the possibility that Castro might catch on. There is in fact a Libyan channel that beams the thoughts of Gadaffi into Europe in a kind of Ceefax format with background music. I picked it up one night in Naples. The music was 'Living next door to Alice' by Smokie.

It is no doubt with all this in mind that the US Networks Association is lobbying congress to bring Fat Harold back down to Earth. The prospect of Castro's transmitters jamming out their programmes is bad enough. The prospect of a perverse and unpredictable viewing public choosing Fidel over Melissa is too much. Happily they are having no luck at the moment. The cocaine and Contras lobby is too powerful an opponent for weedy critters like 'the American way', so it looks like the TV war may go ahead. If it does Cuba is going to need plenty of cheap quality programming. So there's another dream to cherish—that *Damon and Debbie* will be used by Castro to bomb out Hope and Michael. I'll let you know.



'There are those who argue that the foundations of last year's events in Eastern Europe were laid by Ewing Oil and Southfork Beef'

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the marxist review of books

Andy Clarkson reviews

Austen Morgan, *James Connolly: A Political Biography*, Manchester University Press, £9.95 pbk

WILL THE REAL JAMES CONNOLLY STAND UP?

Austen Morgan's *James Connolly* has given new life to an old debate on the left about the legacy of Ireland's most famous revolutionary. The theme of Morgan's book is that Connolly degenerated from being a revolutionary socialist before the First World War, into a revolutionary nationalist who led the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916.

According to Morgan, Connolly abandoned socialism because he was demoralised by the defeats suffered by the working class at home and abroad: the crushing of the Dublin lock-out of 1913 and the collapse of the international socialist movement at the outbreak of war in 1914. Morgan's thesis has since been rubbished as too simplistic by other radical writers on Connolly. But it is instructive that they too have accepted the essential argument put forward by Morgan: that Connolly's role in the Easter Rising represented an abandonment of the struggle for working class revolution and a capitulation to middle class nationalism.

Connolly may not have been a Marxist, but his greatest contribution to the proletarian movement was precisely that which the left takes issue with. That was his elucidation of the organic connection between the fight for national liberation and social revolution:

'The subjection of one nation to another, as of Ireland to the authority of the British Crown, is a barrier to the free political and economic development of the subjected nation, and can only serve the interests of the exploiting classes of both nations.... Therefore, the national and economic freedom of the Irish people must be sought in the same direction, viz, the establishment of an Irish socialist republic.'

In an oppressed country like Ireland, the struggle for social revolution is inextricably bound up with the fight against imperialism. The working class must, therefore, address both questions and take the lead in both struggles. Connolly's Irish Socialist Republican Party was the first ever attempt to establish the leading role of the working class in the Irish liberation struggle.

The Irish bourgeoisie and intelligentsia were certainly not interested in the struggle for socialism. But they were interested in gaining a measure of independence in order to develop capitalism in Ireland. As a result, their views tended to dominate all discussion of the national question. Connolly's dictum, 'The cause of Ireland is the cause of labour, the cause of labour is the cause of Ireland', represented a major insight because it challenged the hold of the middle classes over the national question and put the interests of the working class to the fore.

Although the rising failed, it does not necessarily follow that it should never have been attempted. Every initiative in the class struggle is a calculated gamble, and Connolly was gambling on the opportunities which arose from the social crisis unleashed by war. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were able to take advantage of similar opportunities little more than a year later. A few days after war broke out, Connolly wrote in the *Glasgow Forward*: 'Even an unsuccessful attempt at social revolution by force of arms, following the paralysis of the economic life of militarism, would be less disastrous to the socialist cause than the act of socialists allowing themselves to be used in the slaughter of their brothers in the cause.' (15 August 1914)

In January 1916 the British imposed conscription in England, Scotland and Wales. Connolly immediately secured the agreement of republicans like Patrick Pearse in the Irish Volunteers to initiate an insurrection that Easter. For Connolly, the rising was to be a signal to the international working class to join it in rebelling against their own warmongering bosses. At the same time, Connolly was aware that the aims of his republican allies were more circumscribed than his own. He warned the Irish Citizen Army that 'in the event of victory, hold on to your rifles, as those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached. We are out for economic as well as political liberty'. These were not the words of a man inspired by narrow nationalism.

Connolly's overriding concern was to put a working class stamp on every political issue. To abandon the national question would not have made it go away. On the contrary, it would have handed the middle class nationalists a monopoly on the issue of the day. Unfortunately, after Connolly's execution this is what happened. The leaders of the labour movement abdicated the struggle against imperialism and left the nationalists in the leadership of the movement which shaped Irish society. To this day, the working class remains in thrall to the petit-bourgeois nationalists of Fianna Fail.

Morgan pays lip-service to Marxism. But it is a strange notion of Marxism. While he declares Connolly's Irish Citizen Army to be 'without any significant proletarian consciousness' (Lenin called it 'Europe's first Red Army'), Morgan maintains that involvement in the bureaucratic world of the modern Irish Transport and General Workers Union and Irish Labour Party are 'touchstones of an independent proletarian position'. The legacy of James Connolly has certainly been misunderstood. Unfortunately, neither this book nor those which have followed it do anything to clear up the confusion.

Andrew Calcutt reviews

Emmet O'Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland 1917-23*, Cork University Press, £21 hbk

SYNDICALISTS OR NATIONALISTS?

Militant action erupted in Ireland in the years from 1917-23. Workers in agriculture, textiles, clothing, building and transport took part in the unrest. Hotel and restaurant workers threw down

their aprons and got involved alongside white-collar staff and other groups who had never been unionised before. In rural districts, labourers took the law and the land into their own hands. Sabotage,

mass picketing, arson and riot were regular occurrences. Flying pickets toured farms calling out scabs and beating them up. There were pitched battles with police. The Russian Revolution was a source of inspiration. Soviets were declared in Maynooth, Bagenalstown, Limerick creameries and Cork harbour. The fate of Ireland hung in the balance.

These exciting times are the subject of a new study by Emmet O'Connor, lecturer at Ulster University's Magee College. O'Connor documents the meteoric rise and decline of working class unrest in town and country. The crisis years of 1917-23, O'Connor concludes, can best be understood as an Irish version of European and American syndicalism, epitomised by the agitational strategy of the sympathetic strike and the idea of 'one big union'.

Yet this was also the period of the Tan War between the IRA and the British Army, which ended in the partition of Ireland in December 1921, and the ensuing Civil War between pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty factions of the republican movement. How do these momentous events fit into O'Connor's syndicalist scenario?

O'Connor is far from ignorant of Britain's colonial role in Ireland. But he believes that the attention paid to the national question has obscured the significance of Irish labour acting on its own behalf. He seeks to 'disentangle labour from the all-pervasive story of nationalism'.

For O'Connor, Irish syndicalism gained its momentum from the 'European dynamic' of 'war, boom and slump', and its tactics and ideas from a European-American tradition which emerged in response to the failure of 'Marxist determinism'. O'Connor emphasises the trade union aspects of Irish workers' struggles, to the exclusion of national oppression and its effect on the Irish working class.

In the period under discussion, the debate about Irish independence came to be dominated by the rising party of the middle classes, Sinn Fein. Gaining the freedom to develop as Irish capitalists was its main concern. It is legitimate, therefore, to point out that Irish workers were not fighting for the same goals as the Sinn Fein leadership. But O'Connor's thesis is woefully unbalanced: he implies that Irish workers who were unimpressed by Sinn Fein's brand of nationalism must have had little or no interest in the struggle against Britain. By trying to 'disentangle' labour from nationalism, O'Connor repeats the mistake made by the Irish labour leaders of the time. They sought to confine workers' action to the trade union sphere and refused to stand in political elections, thereby allowing middle class Sinn Fein to emerge by default as the

only significant anti-British organisation. Workers, however, continued to take an interest in the national question, as several struggles during these years confirm.

The militancy of 1917-23 arose in response to three main issues: British Army butchery after the defeat of the Easter Rising in April 1916; food shortages and inflation as a result of Britain's war economy, and widespread indignation against wartime profiteering; and the threat of conscription into the British Army. It was this combination of economic and political factors which resulted in the town and country uprisings.

Strikes over political issues took place alongside 'bread and butter' struggles. The Irish conscription strike in April 1918 was the first anti-war general strike in Europe. Within two weeks the British authorities conceded that the draft would not be imposed in Ireland. The Limerick general strike in 1919 was a response to the Crown's attempts to make Limerick a special military zone. The Automobile Union struck against the issue of motor permits, a tactic designed to expose IRA drivers. By August 1920, 1500 transport workers had been sacked for refusing to unload British Army munitions.

Political and economic strikes were interconnected. Yet there was no political organisation which could make sense of that connection and thus provide a strategy for the development of Irish proletarian politics of the kind which James Connolly had fought and died for in Easter 1916. Through partition, Britain re-established capitalist domination over the whole of Ireland. In the North, the Unionists lorded over the nationalists. In the South, the Free State army which declared martial law in Wexford in 1923 was paid for by the British treasury. Most sections of the anti-Treaty IRA were also pro-capitalist, enforcing the return of the land to the landowners.

Irish militants experienced middle class nationalism from the wrong end of a gun barrel. But O'Connor is wrong to argue that trade union concerns blotted out their interest in the national question. When Sinn Fein and then Fianna Fail emerged as the representatives of Irish nationalism (the latter becoming an independent party in 1926 after Eamon De Valera had split from Sinn Fein), they did so by default; not because Irish workers had consciously embraced syndicalism and rejected nationalism, but because they lacked a coherent national strategy of their own. Rectifying this state of affairs was the urgent task of the period O'Connor is writing about. It remains so to this day.

Eve Anderson reviews

Paul Bew, Ellen Hazelcorn, Henry Patterson, *The Dynamics of Irish Politics*, Lawrence and Wishart, £8.50 pbk

IRELAND ISN'T SWEDEN

Academics Bew, Hazelcorn and Patterson insist that Ireland must be studied in its own right without reference to external forces. In particular, they reject 'speculative attempts to define [the internal balance of political and economic forces] by their supposed relationship to "imperialism"'. Instead they concentrate on an analysis of political parties and their relationship to the state on the one hand and the working class on the other.

Having stipulated that Ireland must be treated as an independent subject, however, the authors go on to compare its political make-up to that of any West European country:

'Our approach will stress the autonomy and central importance of...internal factors and of the [Irish] state in particular.... We will be particularly concerned with what seems to many commentators a defining characteristic of Irish politics—the absence for much of its history of a serious class alignment in ideology and politics.'

The absence of a serious class alignment here means the absence of a social democratic party of any standing. In Ireland, the party of the establishment has occupied a position in relation to the working class that would normally be associated with a social democratic party. Fianna Fail, not the marginal Irish Labour Party, negotiated the Programme for National Recovery with the unions in the 1980s.

This is a matter of regret to the authors. They mull over 'the present impasse of social democracy' and look forward to the day when they will witness 'the working class embrace the socialist agenda'. Every sign that this might happen is scrutinised with great anticipation. In their conclusion, Bew et al suggest that the 1989 election results prove that the mould has been broken. Apparently,

the fact that the Labour Party increased its share of the vote from 7.1 per cent to 9.5 per cent (and lost one of its four seats in the Dail), and the Workers Party increased its share of the vote from 7.5 per cent to 11.4 per cent (and gained three seats in the Dail), is evidence of the dawn of a bright new age for social democracy. Things might be changing in Ireland, but the 1989 election results do not suggest that it is about to join the club of Western social democracies.

Instead of analysing the real dynamics of Irish politics, the authors indulge in wishful thinking. They impose an ideal model of a social democratic party at the centre of the relationship between the working class and the state and find Irish politics wanting. Their inability to account for the actual development of Irish politics stems from their false methodological premise—that Ireland is not dominated by imperialism.

Ironically, what is special about Ireland is its relationship with Britain. Ireland's domination by British imperialism accounts not only for its peculiar economic development but also for the political patterns of which the authors despair. In so far as they acknowledge the existence of imperialism, they conclude that it exercises a benign influence. It has nothing to do with 'a series of bad things done to "Ireland" by "England"'. It is 'a set of material limitations on what any Irish government can achieve', but it 'also creates possibilities for development'.

In fact, Britain's domination of Ireland explains the failure of the organised working class movement to evolve its own distinct identity. Partition divided the working class and sentenced the South to decades of economic backwardness. Before partition the working class had the initiative. The rapid expansion of union organisation was followed by a decisive intervention on the national

question. James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army put the working class at the centre of the struggle for Irish freedom. The defeat of that movement in 1916 reduced the working class to a pressure group. Once Connolly's strategy of putting the working class in the leadership of the national struggle had been abandoned, Irish workers became easy prey to the petit-bourgeois politics of Fianna Fail. Over the past three decades, the working class has become a formidable social force, but it lacks an independent political voice.

The negative tradition of pressure-group politics which has brought the unions cap in hand to Fianna Fail is that coveted by Bew, Hazelkorn and Patterson. Their aspiration towards a ruling social democratic party masks the more consistent goal of a place in

a new programme of national recovery. This explains their continual emphasis on the relationship between the working class and the state. As supporters of the Workers Party, the authors aspire to play a role in Irish political life through a social contract that will place their party of trade union officials at the centre of things.

The consequences of their methodological approach should be exposed. The authors end up with the worst of both worlds. Where they should refer to British imperialism, they deny its influence. Where they should refer to Irish society specifically, they impose continually the model of Western social democracy on to a country which is totally different because it is oppressed.

Joe Watson reviews

Henry Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion: Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland*, Hutchinson Radius, £7.95 pbk

ILLUSIONS IN IMPERIALISM

Henry Patterson sets out to go beyond the usual superficial commentary that passes for serious analysis of the republican movement and its history. He scorns the 'unproductive labelling' of Irish and British politicians who have at different times described Sinn Fein as both 'fascist' and 'Marxist'. Drawing from a wide range of source material (including interviews with Gerry Adams, Jimmy Drumm, Anthony Coughlan, Cathal Goulding, Tomas MacGiolla), Patterson looks at the various incarnations of republicanism from the period just before partition to the present day. In particular, he focuses on attempts by the republican movement to key into broader social and economic issues.

For Patterson, the core of republican ideology contains two elements. On the one hand, there is what he describes as 'certain moral-existential characteristics of the republican personality', which on the other hand derive from 'the complex relation between the legacy of the incomplete Irish national revolution of 1918-21 and a range of social, economic and communal grievances which republicanism can, more or less successfully, exploit'. According to Patterson, the republican movement is itself a hangover from the past: 'trapped in a prisonhouse of assumptions', it feeds off the legacy of partition which left the national question unresolved.

Patterson will have none of this 'irredentist deep history'. He sees partition and the division of the Irish nation as a necessary settlement that reflected the existence of distinct traditions. For him, the subsequent strife is not the result of continued British domination of Ireland, but the responsibility of an underclass which is trapped in the past.

Denying the existence of the national question, Patterson ends up twisting reality. He states that the republican movement gives a 'bitter and disfigured expression to real needs'. And what are these needs? 'These are of the Catholic working class for economic, social and political inclusion in a state which, because of a complex, dense and overlapping history, will remain "British" but with an increasing "Irish dimension" in its Northern Ireland extension. Only when these needs are seriously addressed will their repressed and pathological forms of expression be dissipated and the social republican tradition finally be consigned to the history books.'

Patterson accepts British rule in perpetuity, and hopes the government will introduce enough reforms to pacify the nationalist community. He would rather forget that the republican movement is still fighting, and that, despite the government's best efforts to undermine it, the IRA still retains a strong base of support in the nationalist ghettos. Patterson would like to see the development of reformist politics in which a straight left/right divide could exist. Then he could safely occupy the middle ground.

This wishful thinking is the reactionary consequence of the

author's antipathy towards the national liberation struggle. Patterson's deference to the British state is bad enough, but there is worse to come. Discussing the development of a relationship between republicanism and socialism at key moments in the past, Patterson regards as positive any 'leftist' influence that has steered the republican movement away from the national struggle against imperialism.

Patterson is right to point out that 'social republicanism' has always been a response to defeat. Attempts by sections of the republican movement to address social and economic issues have always been a reaction to adversity. Liam Mellows' call to widen the narrowing base of support for the anti-Treaty forces of republicanism after partition was an attempt to reinvigorate a demoralised movement by galvanising the 'men of no property'. Peadar O'Donnell's attempt to link up with the land annuities campaign in the late 1920s was a last-gasp attempt to stem the loss of IRA activists to the newly formed Fianna Fail. In the 1960s, the 'politicisation' of the republican movement was a direct response to the dismal failure of the Border campaign of 1956-62. Today, the republican leadership is encouraging involvement in social issues in an attempt to widen its narrow base of support.

Whenever it has been isolated and most vulnerable to pressure from imperialism, the republican movement has had to contend with opportunist elements on the left. Contrary to the argument put forward by Patterson, the problem is not that the republican movement has failed to sustain a left-wing tradition; the problem is that the left has always tried to persuade the republican movement to abandon the anti-imperialist struggle.

Patterson shares the left's distaste for the struggle against Britain. He reserves his praise for the anti-republican Workers Party. His account of the party's history is glowing with admiration for the break it made with 'narrow defenderism' and for its policies of 'demilitarisation and gradualism'. Starting off as the Official IRA, Patterson's heroes gave up the armed struggle at a time when the nationalist community was under sustained attack; they saved their weapons to murder members of the Provisional IRA; and eventually moved South to become the bureaucratised pro-partition Workers Party, which is now near to splitting again.

This book deserves to be read. It is a neat codification of the school which hopes that the 'sea of ghetto support' for the IRA will dry up. This really is the politics of illusion. The republican movement is sustained not by its past, but by people who continue to experience the barbarism of British rule in the present. This experience sustains the resistance that Patterson describes as 'pathological'. The 'sea of ghetto support' can resist such pollutants as *The Politics of Illusion*.

Sean Thomas reviews

Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War*, Hutchinson, £16.95 hbk

DEATH SQUAD DEMOCRACY

At 7.45pm on Wednesday 7 March 1990, republican activist Sam Marshall was walking away from Lisburn Royal Ulster Constabulary barracks after signing on in accordance with bail conditions. One hundred yards from the barracks two hooded gunmen jumped out of a car and shot him in the head. Two of his

colleagues narrowly escaped death. Hours later the Ulster Volunteer Force, a Loyalist sectarian gang, claimed responsibility for the killing. It was another example of Britain's dirty colonial war in Ireland.

It is inconceivable that a republican could be murdered 100 yards

away from an RUC barracks without official collusion. In *The Dirty War*, Martin Dillon brings to light much more evidence of the sordid deeds of the security forces in the Six Counties (Dillon's book *The Shankill Butchers* was reviewed in the November 1989 issue of *Living Marxism*).

It is a dirty war which the authorities have gone to great lengths to cover up. A few weeks after Sam Marshall was killed, deputy chief constable of Cambridgeshire John Stevens was putting the finishing touches to his whitewash of extensive collusion between the British forces and Loyalist paramilitaries. Last autumn, countless examples emerged of the police handing intelligence files to Loyalist paramilitaries. In August 1989, a Loyalist gang acting on information leaked to them by the security forces had shot dead nationalist Laughlin Maginn at his home in Rathfriland, County Down. The Stevens inquiry was launched to deflect any serious questioning of the role of the Crown forces in assassination jobs such as this.

Over 2600 documents containing intelligence information were recovered from Loyalist groups during the inquiry; over 100 arrests were made; 59 people reported or charged; and 83 recommendations were made to tighten up security. Yet the Stevens report concluded that 'it is clear from the evidence...that the passing of information to paramilitaries by members of the security forces is restricted to a small number of individuals and is neither widespread nor institutionalised' (*Irish Times*, 18 May 1990). Stevens did not spare the whitewash.

Collusion between the security forces and the sectarian murder gangs cannot be confined to a few months in the autumn of 1989. As Dillon points out, the Ulster Defence Regiment is 'littered with the names of members who have been engaged in terrorism'. Dual membership of the UDR and the Ulster Defence Association is commonplace. Despite the reluctance of the courts to prosecute members of the Crown forces, more than 100 members of the

regiment have been convicted of an assortment of crimes ranging from attempted murder and murder to handling explosive substances and causing explosions.

Britain's dirty war games are not restricted to the UDR. According to one Loyalist killer quoted by Dillon, the RUC was fully implicated in the rash of sectarian killings in the early part of the war. In a transcript of an interview, Albert Walker Baker claims: 'Half the assassinations in Northern Ireland in the early seventies wouldn't have been committed if there hadn't been RUC backing.... The RUC knew who were the assassination teams. Every single one of them.'

Dillon's account of the macabre 'pitchfork killings' highlights the murderous activities of the British Army. In October 1972, members of the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders stabbed two nationalists to death with pitchforks and dumped their mutilated bodies in a pile of shit.

Dillon goes to extraordinary lengths to evade the conclusions suggested by his material. One example is his attitude to the killing of SAS officer Robert Nairac in South Armagh in 1977. Nairac's main assignment had been to set up republican targets for shoot-to-kill squads. But, according to Dillon, this 'brave', 'determined' soldier was killed by nationalists with 'deep-seated inadequacies'. This bias runs through the book: the violence of the British oppressors is 'brave' and 'understandable', while the violence of the oppressed nationalists is 'grisly' and 'brutal'.

Anyone interested in learning about the heroic, brave and often impudent resistance of the nationalist community will find some of the information in this book invaluable. Despite the vein of prejudice running through it, *The Dirty War* is well worth consulting if you want to find out about what really goes on in the Irish War.

Bernadette Walsh reviews

Louise DeSalvo, Kathleen Walsh D'Arcy, Katherine Hogan (eds),
Territories of the Voice: Contemporary Stories By Irish Women
Writers, Virago, £5.99 pbk

WOMEN'S TROUBLES

For anyone who enjoys a good short story, *Territories of the Voice* contains 27 gems. Enthusiasts will know that the Irish are past masters of the genre (Brendan Behan, John McGahern, Sean O'Faolain, Mary Lavin). The Virago collection assembles some of the most entertaining, thought-provoking and often nerve-shattering snatches of Irish life.

Add to the quality of the writing the impact of a collection which highlights the grim reality of Irish women's lives, and you have a rare and valuable book indeed. Almost all the stories were written after 1960, and if the dawning of the women's movement in Britain and America had little impact on Irish women's lives, at least it contributed to an outburst of talent which the editors take as the starting point of Irish women's literature. The stories evoke the hardship caused by the outlawing of abortion, the poverty and isolation of women's lives and the brutal consequences of Britain's domination of Ireland.

Anne Devlin's 'Naming the names' and Brenda Murphy's 'A curse' deal directly with the experience of nationalist women in the war zones of Ireland. 'Naming the names' takes you back with a jolt to the early days of the civil rights movement in Belfast, where a young woman's life is transformed by the arrival of the British Army in the Falls Road. She becomes an active participant in the struggle against British rule. On her way to meet a well-known member of the IRA, she witnesses him being shot in the back by the British Army as he runs towards her. The title of the short story refers to her interrogation when she is interned. She tells them: 'You already know his name....His father was the man who carried my grandmother out of Conway Street. He used to own a bacon shop.' The only names she will give them are the street names of West Belfast.

Other stories, such as Eilis Ni Dhuibhne's 'Midwife to the fairies', illuminate the tragedy of women who are persecuted and criminalised for getting pregnant outside marriage. Faced with the limited availability of contraception and the ban on abortion, Irish women are fighting a losing battle against unwanted pregnancies. Some are driven to despair and even death by the prospect of social ostracism which can await an unmarried mother. Indeed, 'Midwife to the fairies' is reminiscent of the real-life tragedy of the Kerry Babies affair. It intersperses cleverly the first-person colloquial

narrative of a Dublin nurse, called out in the dead of night to deliver a baby in 'the back of beyond', with a chilling, other-worldly fable from Irish mythology. The implication is that Irish women face the same feudal prejudices today as they did in medieval times. The baby's death goes unreported until it is found dead in a shoebox and the press and courts crucify the young mother.

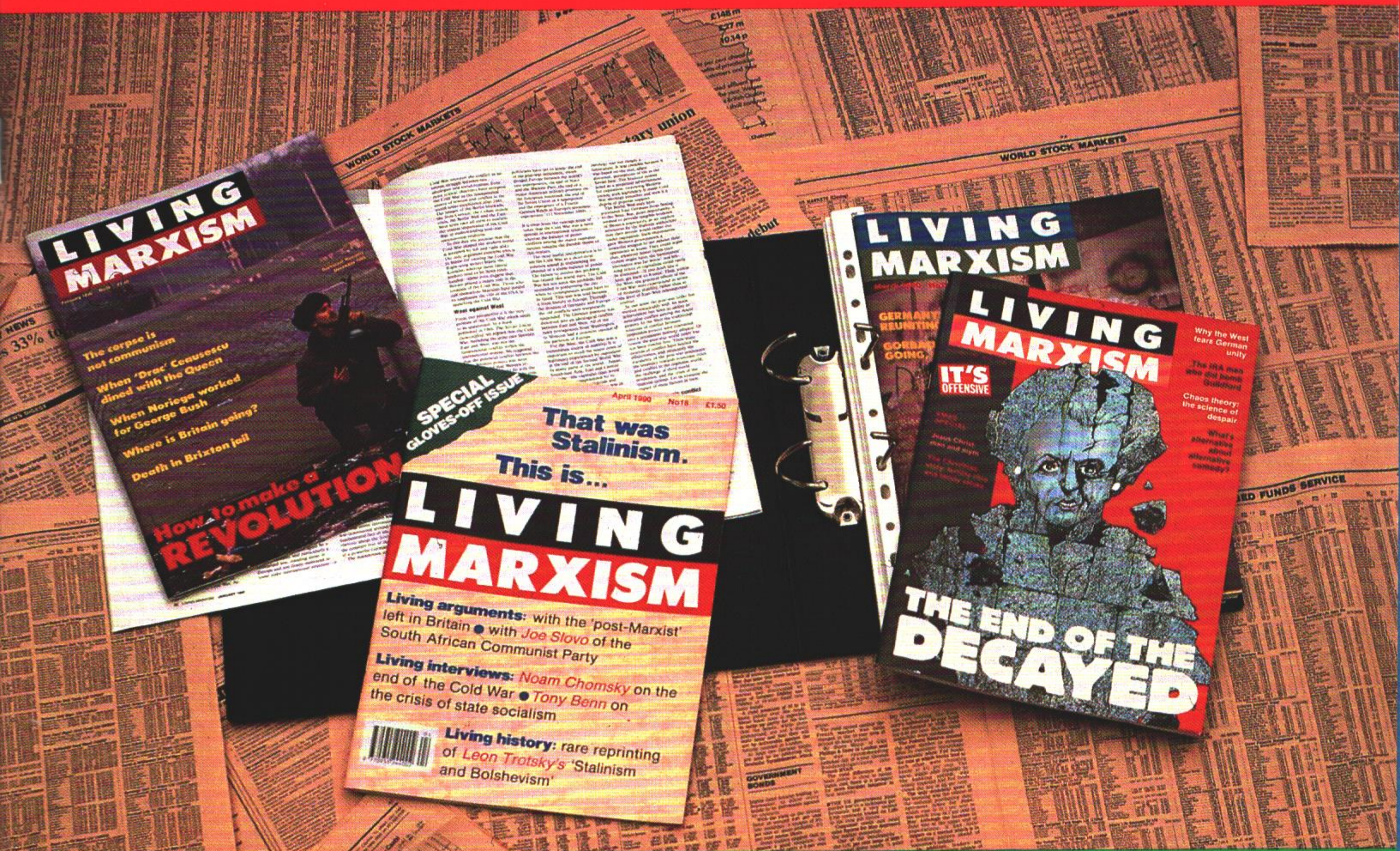
But it's not all doom and gloom. In the face of seemingly impossible domestic burdens, there are dreams of escape and liberal doses of humour. The opening paragraph of Julia O'Faolain's 'Melancholy baby' is a treat:

' "God help us!" Mrs Kelly sometimes greased gossip with pity. "Aunt Adie has no womb!" Neighbours thrilled. "You're not serious!" "Had it cut out before her marriage and never told her husband!.... The poor man is praying for children to this day and has herself going down making the Nine Fridays for the same Intention! And down my lady goes." "Gnawing the altar rails with the best!" "Ha! She can have the fruits of my womb for the asking!" Mrs Kelly slapped her protuberant belly. "To them that have more shall be given! I do have to laugh!" '

The men in the stories appear as shadowy, one-dimensional creatures. Most of the stories are written from the viewpoint of the women characters, with the exception of Jennifer Johnston's 'Trio'. The stultifying effects of incarceration in the convent school or in the home turn relationships into battlefields. The helpless drunken father in Helen Lucy Burke's 'All fall down' becomes the object of his embarrassed daughter's hatred. The only source of satisfaction for the Fat Woman of Newtown in Anne Le Marquand Hartigan's 'Pure invention' is complaining to her husband, the Long Man of Newtown.

As a taste of the harsh reality of Irish women's lives, all the more poignant for its humour and romance as well as its brutal honesty, this collection of stories has much to offer. Its range of styles, from sharp hilarious satire to lyrical, elegiac prose, was put together well by the editors.

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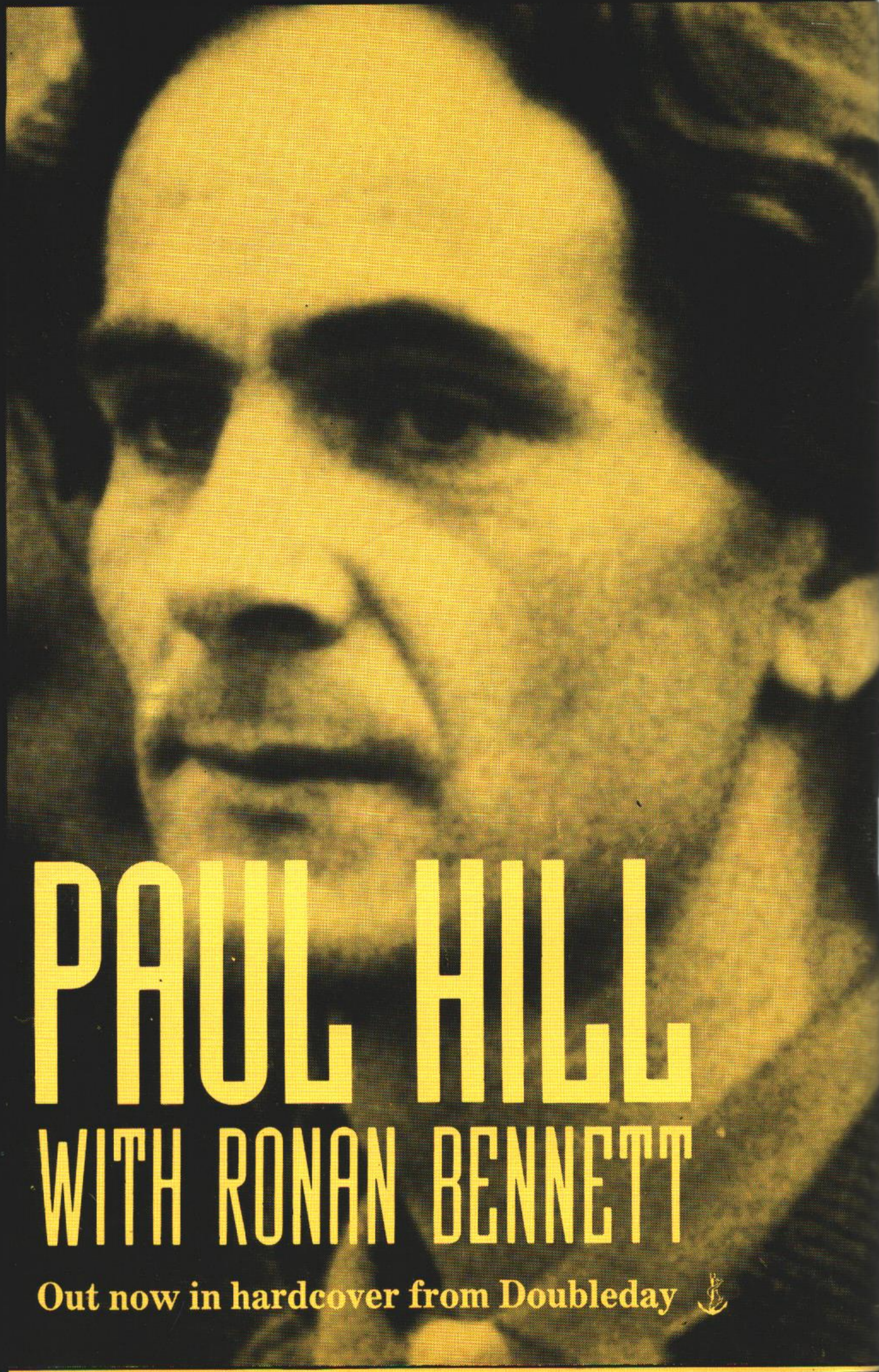
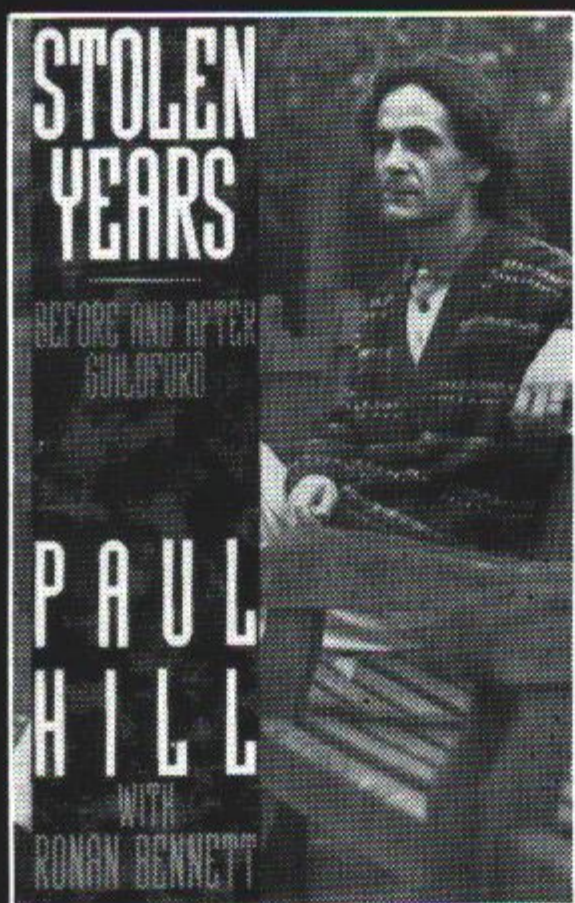
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