

# LIVING

# MARXISM

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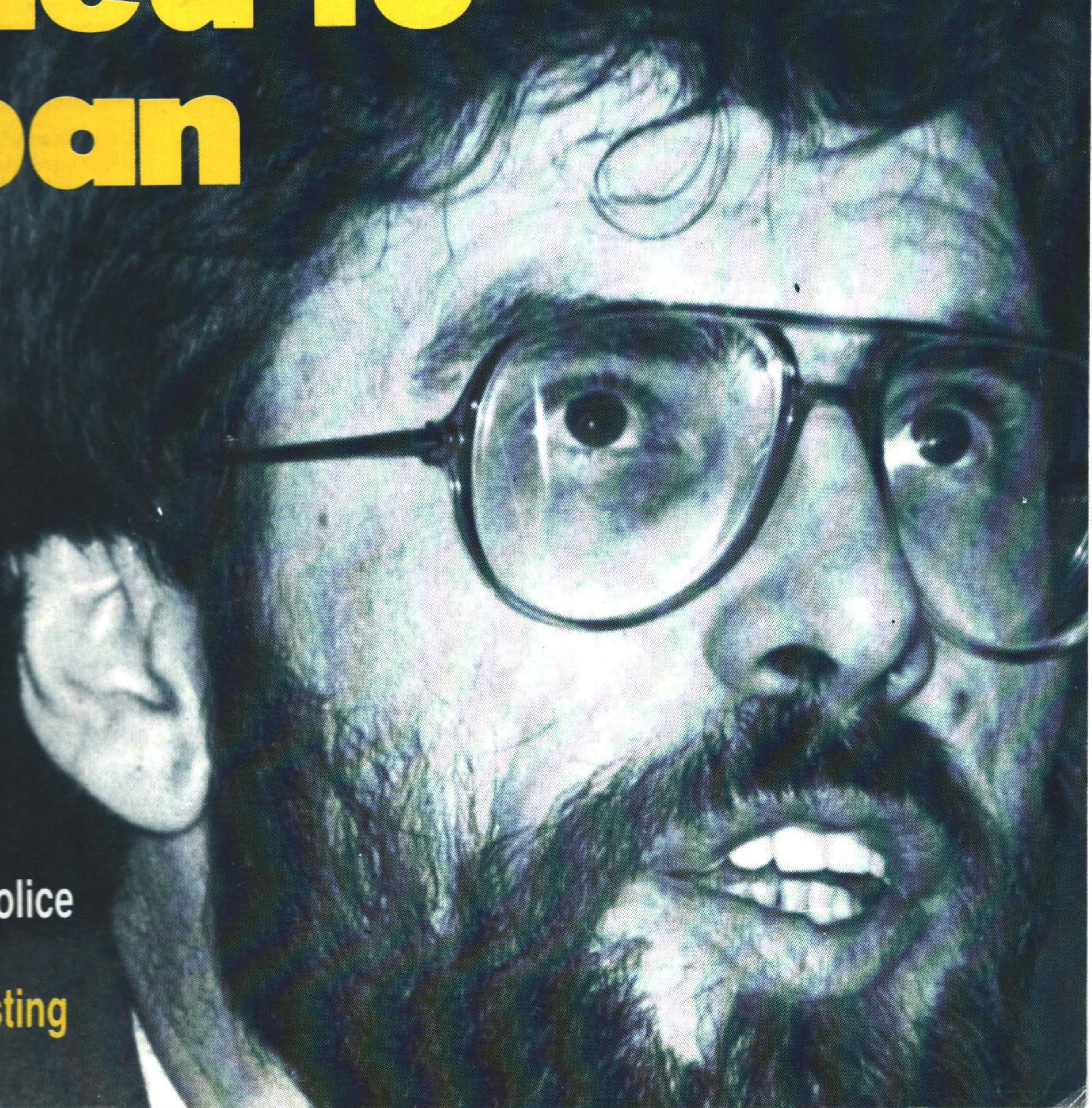
THE GERRY ADAMS INTERVIEW

# The man they tried to ban

Designer  
capitalism

Britain's  
political police

Union-busting



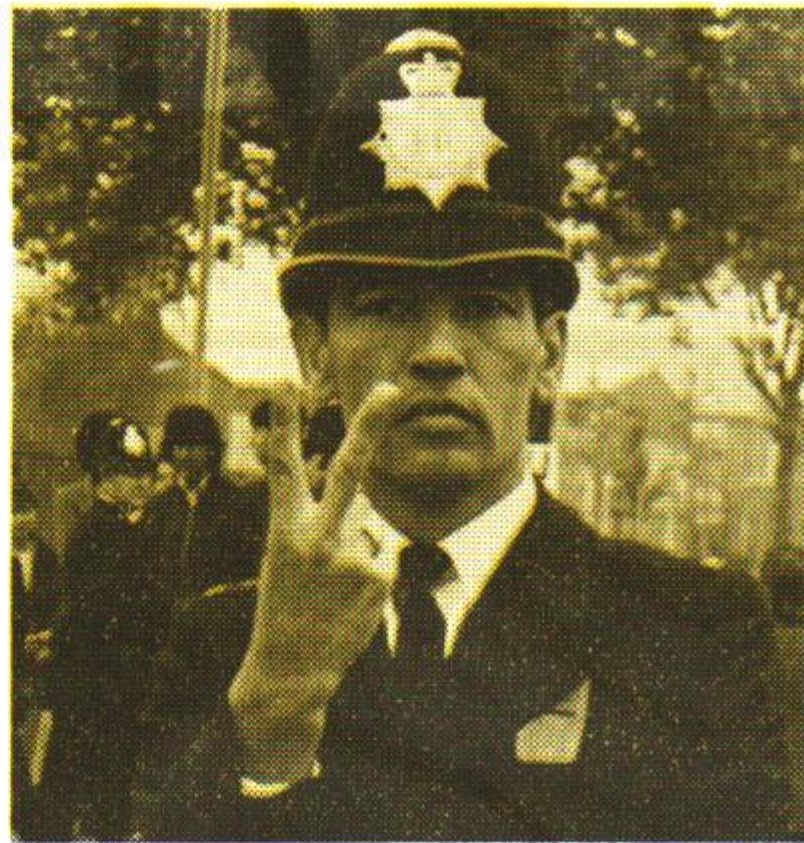


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David Rourke

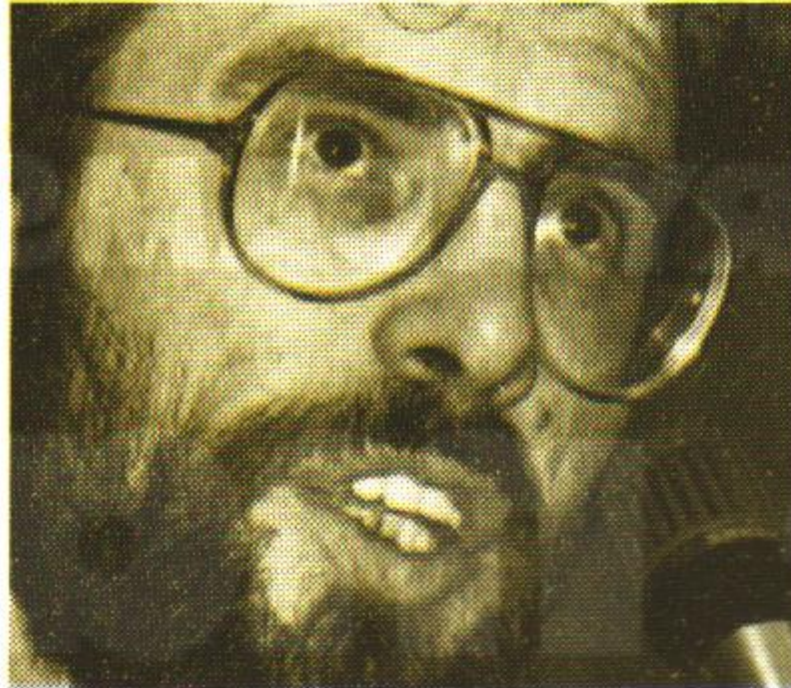


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## After Clapham Junction

# OUR LIVES ON THE LINE

British Rail executives claimed that last month's Clapham Junction crash was a one-off accident. It seems we've heard that somewhere before: from Occidental oil barons after the Piper Alpha explosion last July, from London Regional Transport chiefs after the King's Cross fire in November 1987, and from P&O directors after the Zeebrugge sinking in March of that year. On each occasion, the government backed *the company's story*.

These people must have a low opinion of the British public if they expect us to swallow such stories. In an era of corner-cutting and speed-ups, when the drive to maximise productivity and profits means deteriorating safety standards in almost every workplace, it doesn't take a conspiracy theorist to discern a pattern of employers putting lives at risk.

### Death traps

All the companies involved in the spate of disasters had been riding their luck for years: cutting staff, increasing overtime, imposing near-impossible production targets, and hoping that the system would hold together. It didn't. The failure in the 50-year old signal system that caused the Clapham Junction crash had happened before—and been hushed up. There was a previous explosion on the oilworkers' prison of Piper Alpha in 1984—and the government refused to publish the report into what caused it. There were at least 18 fires on filthy, understaffed tube stations before King's Cross. And Zeebrugge was far from the first time that dangerous roll-on, roll-off ferries left port in a hurry with their bow doors open.

After Clapham Junction, everybody was comparing it to the earthquake in Armenia, as if it was another 'natural disaster'. But a fault in the Earth's crust in the Soviet Union is not the same thing as a fault on the line in south London. The next thing they'll tell us is that the Almighty has ordered the Continental plates of the planet to ensure a further 25 per cent cut in subsidies by



1990; which is what the Tories have told BR to do, with obvious implications for safety. There's nothing natural about collisions, fires and explosions caused by government and corporate concern to get the maximum return on the minimum investment.

The Tories know this. That's why they insist high-handedly that nobody should score political points off such a tragedy, by blaming the government. The company bosses know it too. They have taken steps to ensure that nobody else finds out about it, by ordering their employees to be silent or face the sack. The Piper Alpha explosion brought to light the common practice on the rigs of workers who complain about safety being victimised. On the morning of the Clapham Junction crash, railworkers were outside another London station protesting about rising overcrowding on BR trains. They were dressed as sardines; partly to symbolise the experience of commuters in the rush-hour crush, and partly to avoid recognition, as BR

management has just introduced a draconian code under which any employee complaining about the corporation in public can be fired.

### Modern disasters

The spate of tragedies brings home how often people still have to risk their lives to make a living. The authorities are always telling us that capitalism is a civilised system these days, and that the modern office worker lives in a different world from the miners and mill-hands of yesteryear. There are obvious differences. Yet tragedies like King's Cross and Clapham Junction are the late twentieth-century equivalents of the pit disaster, caused by the same determination to cut costs which has long motivated the coal bosses to turn mines into mass graves. White-collar workers might face more danger on the way to work than when they get there; but it makes no difference to the bereaved families whether they gather outside a railway

station or a pithead to hear that their loved ones are dead.

Tory spokesmen assure us that we are free citizens with more choice in our lives than ever before; yet the aftermath of Clapham Junction confirmed how capital continues to control people. 'My wife didn't want me to come to work today', the nervous commuter told a TV crew as their train rattled towards Waterloo 24 hours after the crash: 'But what choice have I got? I have to work.' The same fear prompted hundreds of oilworkers to refuse to return to the rigs after Piper Alpha. But in the end, since we depend upon earning a wage from the employers, what choice has any of us got?

The employers' dominance over society comes across in the contempt with which they regard the lives of employees. The wife of one man who *didn't go to work the day after Clapham Junction* had to listen to a BR boss tell the media that her husband may have been to blame when the train he was driving crashed into another; but unfortunately BR would not be able to interrogate him, as he was dead. After the bloodshed, the sheer bloody arrogance.

Like each of the recent disasters, Clapham Junction was marked by the heroism of survivors and members of the emergency services, who risked their necks to rescue others. The media and politicians highlight these individual acts of bravery for their own cynical purposes, distracting attention from the wider social issues raised by the tragedy. But there is surely a different lesson for us here.

### Pulling together

People are not the single-mindedly self-seeking individuals described in Tory propaganda. They are prepared to fight for each other as well as for themselves. The firefighter who crawls beneath unstable, razor-sharp wreckage to pull the injured out of a train crash, and the man who allows his back to be used as a bridge across a dangerous gap by passengers fleeing a sinking ferry, are dramatic examples of the collective spirit of humanity. If we can bring people together to struggle as hard against the system that causes disasters as they will against the dreadful consequences, we will be closer to creating a society in which millions are not faced with a 'choice' between losing their livelihoods and risking their lives.

Linda Ryan

ABOVE:  
'Welcome to Clapham Junction, Britain's busiest railway station'



# LIVING MARXISM

No 3

January 1989

## DO WE NEED A NEW CONSTITUTION?

Britain's most authoritarian government in memory enters 1989 with a censorship order in one hand and a riot baton in the other. The parliamentary opposition, meanwhile, proves less effective than the egg industry in standing up to the Tories. This cannot be allowed to go on. So what is to be done?

Outside parliament, other voices are trying to come to terms with the changes in post-consensus Britain. One analysis of the situation is outlined in this issue of *Living Marxism*. Another emerged last month, with the launch of Charter 88 in the radical weekly *New Statesman and Society*, backed by many public figures opposed to the Thatcher government. Charter 88 is worth examining, because it encapsulates the defensive, even defeatist outlook which has helped the Conservatives to ride roughshod over their critics for a decade.

● The Charter is a protest against the Tory government's assault on traditional civil liberties. It looks back fondly to the days of 'post-war national consensus': 'Now this has broken down. So too have its conventions of compromise and tolerance: essential components of a free society.' Its advocates call themselves the 'new Chartists', and want to see such a tolerant consensus reconstructed; to that end they seek 'a new constitutional settlement' which could guarantee democracy and provide legal protection against the excesses of the Tory government.

The first problem is, how

do you create a consensus based on 'compromise and tolerance' in a society that has become increasingly polarised over the Thatcher years, when the authorities screech 'loony left' and 'enemy within' at any hint of political opposition, and mobilise the forces of reaction to do it down? The authors of the Charter, like other critics of Thatcher, have sought to sidestep this problem by appearing as moderate as possible. They present their Charter as the respectable opinion of responsible people, standing above party politics. Thus the initial list of signatories excluded active politicians in favour of peers, academics, writers, artists, actors and other celebrities, from Lord Scarman and Linton Kwesi Johnson to Rabbi Julia Neuberger and the Bishop of Birmingham.

To avoid upsetting a public opinion shaped by 10 years of right-wing rule, the Charter panders to the established prejudices of British politics. It is especially keen to prove its patriotic credentials. Thus the 'new Chartists' want to be associated with the intellectual dissidents of the Charter 77 movement in Czechoslovakia, while refuting in advance any allegation that they are comparing Thatcher's Britain to a Stalinist state: 'Conditions here are so much better than in Eastern Europe as to bear no comparison.' They claim to stand in a 'tradition of demands for constitutional rights in Britain', going back through the Magna Carta of 1215, the People's Charter launched in 1838, etc. Their Charter even throws in a gratuitous reference to the episode most celebrated by the Colonel Blimps of British politics, the 1940 Battle of

Britain, describing it as the highpoint of the state's 'past democratic achievements'.

This concern to look moderate and inoffensive finds reflection in the Charter's demands. Arguing that Thatcher has moved towards 'elective dictatorship' by exploiting the limitations of the 'unwritten constitution' which developed after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the Charter appeals for fresh safeguards:

'We call, therefore, for a new constitutional settlement which would:  
Enshrine, by means of a Bill of Rights, such civil liberties as the right to peaceful assembly, to freedom of association, to freedom from discrimination, to freedom from detention without trial, to trial by jury, to privacy and to freedom of expression;  
Subject executive powers and prerogatives, by whomsoever exercised, to the rule of law;  
Establish freedom of information and open government;  
Create a fair electoral system of proportional representation;  
Reform the upper house to establish a democratic, non-hereditary second chamber;  
Place the executive under the power of a democratically renewed parliament and all agencies of the state under the rule of law;  
Ensure the independence of a reformed judiciary;  
Provide legal remedies for all abuses of power by the state and the officials of central and local government;  
Guarantee an equitable distribution of power between local, regional and national government;  
Draw up a written constitution, anchored in the idea of universal citizenship, that incorporates these reforms.' (*New Statesman and Society*, 2 December 1988)

Introducing this Charter, *New Statesman* editor Stuart Weir declares that 'the signatories share the belief that only dramatic—no, revolutionary—changes in our political institutions can safeguard liberty today'. Yet the demands reprinted above add up to a curious

idea of a 'revolution' for the end of the 1980s. They look more like programmes for the bourgeois revolutions in France and America 200 years ago. And even then (or earlier in Britain), they would have been considered to be on the wishy-washy side of moderate.

There is, for example, the matter of the monarchy. Its place at the centre of Britain's constitution is not mentioned in Charter 88, so keen are the authors to avoid upsetting the royalist lobby. Yet the 1688 coup that ousted the dictatorial James II and put William of Orange on the throne, which the Charter refers to as 'a victory over royal tyranny', was also about preserving the monarchy as the symbol of state power in an emerging capitalist Britain, and pre-empting any more radical movement for democratic change. The monarchy may not play much of a role in politics today. But it remains in the wings, ready to play its part in preserving the status quo in times of crisis. Nobody can be taken seriously as an advocate of democratic progress who fails to demand the abolition of this most backward and feudal institution. In the middle of the seventeenth century, Oliver Cromwell warned that anybody who was not prepared to kill the king for their cause should not bother riding with him. At the end of the twentieth century, the authors of Charter 88 are desperate to ride with moderate opinion, and fearful that Cromwell's approach might be interpreted as communistic.

● There are other similarly symbolic omissions from the Charter. It can't bring itself to call outright for the abolition of the house of lords, talking instead of 'reform' and a 'non-hereditary second chamber' (does this mean that our rights are safe with non-hereditary life peers like Lord Young of the YTS scheme?). As for standing in the tradition of British movements for reform, Charter 88 does not go as far as the People's Charter, which demanded the election of *annual* parliaments. Nor does it mention a democratic



demand put forward by such movements as the Levellers of the seventeenth century and the more militant Chartists of the nineteenth; an end to British interference in Ireland. You can't expect to get the signatures of Sir Clement Freud or Lady Ewart-Biggs if you advocate anything that the Tories could brand as sympathetic to 'terrorism'.

● If it wasn't dealing with such a serious issue as the advance of state coercion, the Charter's call for a democratic revolution (and a conservative one at that) a couple of centuries too late might be considered quaint. Today we are faced with a government which is preparing for a struggle over the future of Britain. It has equipped itself with the twenty-first century technology of repression, and a battery of new legislation, to crush its opponents. The idea that we can counter this by dipping into the past and demanding bills of rights and a written constitution is dangerously naive. The authorities will abide by such paper rules when it suits their purposes. When it doesn't, they tear them up and take more direct measures. The Weimar Republic in Germany had a fine constitution; but since it could not resolve the problems of German capitalism, the ruling class called in the Nazis to drown the opposition in blood. Alternatively, the USA has always had a written constitution, upholding most rights called for in Charter 88. That has done nothing to restrain the brutality of America's rulers against blacks, left wingers and workers at home, or Vietnamese, Nicaraguans and Libyans abroad.

The thinking behind Charter 88 confuses the function of the democratic and repressive aspects of the state. What Thatcher has done is to expose the basic character of the state in capitalist society, as a body of armed men entrusted with defending the establishment's interests. The contempt with which the Tories treat parliament has made it clear that the democratic aspects of the system are essentially

window-dressing, designed to win popular consent for the exercise of class power. Yet the 'new Chartists' believe in the myth, and look to turn the empty shells of British democracy into genuine institutions of control.

'Our central concern is the law', states the Charter: 'No country can be considered free in which the government is above the law.' But the law is not an independent arbiter; it is a weapon in the authorities' armoury. Thatcher has politicised and reshaped the law, the police and the courts to suit the changed needs of the system (see page 12). Weir even goes so far as to suggest that the law could provide some protection for 'young blacks in Toxteth'. Yet it is the law which codifies their oppression, in the shape of the Public Order Act rubber-stamped by parliament, used by the police, and upheld in the courts. The legal and administrative arms of the state are an enemy, not a potential ally, of the fight for democratic rights.

Charter 88 is a document of despair. It makes no suggestion as to how its demands could be achieved, other than by people signing the Charter as the 'individual citizens' which Thatcher insists we are. There is no mention of a campaign or collective action to put pressure on the authorities. It represents a stunt rather than a strategy. As such, it fits in well with the thinking of much of the opposition today.

● In the past few months, a vogue has developed for substituting organisational manoeuvres for a political challenge to the Conservatives. Leading figures in and around the Labour Party and the Democrats have given up all hope of defeating the Tories in a straight contest between competing programmes; last month's opinion polls showed that, even as public confidence in the economy dips sharply downwards, the opposition's lack of credible policies is allowing the Tories to pull further ahead. The mood which this has engendered among opposition thinkers was summed up by Anthony

Barnett who, in recommending Charter 88 to *New Statesman* readers, observed that 'it is essential not just to hope for an eventual change of government (if not at this election then the next, or the one after that)'. As the dream of defeating Thatcher disappears further into the distance, the opposition starts to scout about for organisational short-cuts and alternatives, such as electoral deals between Labour and the Democrats, a voting system based on proportional representation, or the constitutional reforms proposed in Charter 88.

The proponents of these tactics are becoming the Bobby Robsons of British politics, trying to blame defeats on the referee, the pitch or the other team's tactics, rather than on their own side's poor performance in the tackle. In seeking to score by asking for the goalposts to be moved, they are ducking the task of taking on the Tories in a battle of political ideas.

● Some of the demands put forward, such as PR and a written constitution, could indeed be useful; Marxists support all measures of democratisation, however formal, since they help to show that the problem of inequality in capitalist society goes much deeper than the law or the electoral rules, to the exploitative nature of the economic system itself. But when proposed as an end in itself, the call for constitutional reform becomes a misleading diversion. For example, the growing bitterness which many Scottish people feel towards the political system was reflected in the Govan by-election last November, when the Scottish National Party won a safe Labour seat through a combination of abstentions and protest votes. This indicated the disquiet among Scots, and the potential for popularising a political alternative. Instead, the debate has been sidetracked into a banal discussion about Scotland's constitutional relationship with the UK. The effect can only be further to demoralise and demobilise those who want some action.

There is no short-cut to challenging the Tories. Nor is there any point in harking back to the consensus of the past, or in politely asking the authorities to alter the constitutional rules in our favour. We live in a post-consensus society. All of the old bets are off. The issue today is power, and who has enough of it to decide the destiny of British society. Thatcher has shown her determination to use all the power at her disposal to protect the privileged. Opponents who insist upon their moderation and unwillingness to respond in kind, whether they be health service union leaders or *New Statesman* Chartists, only encourage the Tories to take advantage of their weakness.

To deal with the threat from the Tories in 1989 and beyond will require an organised opposition which is prepared to match them blow for blow. If that is unacceptable to some of Charter 88's celebrity signatories, then we should discount them from our calculations rather than make damaging concessions. The important place to start is by bringing together the minority which is looking for a way to fight back, behind a clear political strategy that will challenge the dictates and the sham democratic traditions of capitalism. The militant Chartists of 150 years ago would surely have scoffed at the idea that a petition as concerned with winning support from lords as with demanding their abolition was an adequate defence of democratic rights. As we look down the barrel of a policeman's plastic bullet gun, while the commons and the courts hem us in with censorious laws, how much more justified is that feeling in 1989.

**Mick Hume**  
**EDITOR**

## JOIN THE DEBATE

*Living Marxism* forums are being organised around the country to discuss the issues raised in the review.

If you want to take part in the debate about the future of left-wing politics, ring (01) 729 0414 today for details of the forum taking place near you.



Conference

# WHEN THE WAR COMES HOME

The Irish War in British politics

**Saturday  
18 February  
10am-5pm  
Central  
London**



From media bans to legal clampdowns and political proscriptions, Britain is acquiring a reputation for state repression to rival that of South Africa. For 20 years nationalists in Northern Ireland have known nothing else. They have faced internment, censorship, shoot-to-kill squads, supergrass showtrials and more as a consequence of Britain's colonial occupation of their country.

Now people in Britain are getting a taste of the treatment previously reserved for Irish republicans. Many here have been shocked by the severity of the state offensive, and the speed with which a draconian new official secrets act follows on the heels of the removal of a suspect's right to silence.

As civil liberties which people in Britain have long taken for granted disappear overnight, there has never been a better time to discuss the impact and significance of the Irish War in British politics. The Irish Freedom Movement has organised this anti-repression conference because we believe that there is much to be learned from the Irish experience—and much to be gained from uniting resistance to state repression in Britain with a movement demanding an immediate withdrawal from Ireland.

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

### Speakers include:

Anthony Jennings, editor *Justice Under Fire: The Abuse of Civil Liberties in Northern Ireland*

Janet Clarke, Broadwater Farm

John Pilger

Holloway Road 30 Defence Campaign

Speaker from Sinn Fein also invited

**Morning Plenary:** State repression in Thatcher's Britain

### Workshops:

The Prevention of Terrorism Act

Britain's political prisoners

The law and the Irish War

Is Ireland a training ground?

The wall of silence

Kitson's counter-insurgency warfare

Political policing in the '80s

The Falklands Factor in British politics

**Afternoon Plenary:** Building a resistance movement

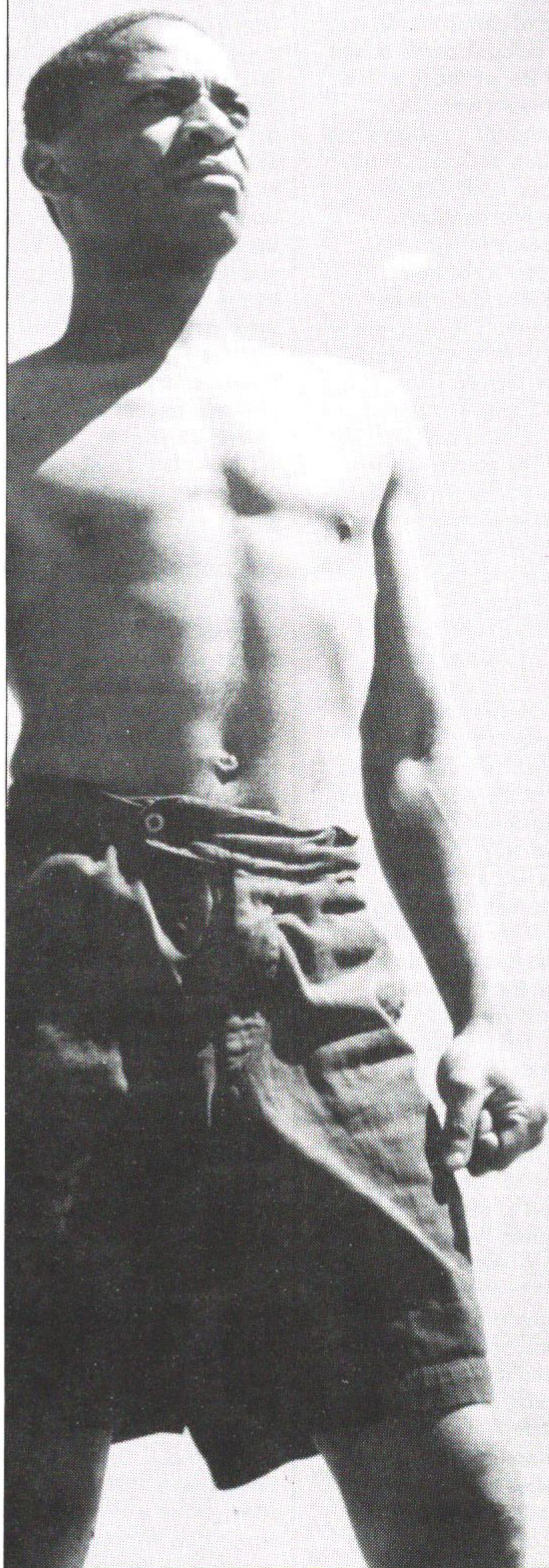
**Plus evening social**

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If you would like to come to the conference, ring the Irish Freedom Movement on (01) 729 0414, or write to:  
Irish Freedom Movement, BM IFM, London WC1N 3XX.

# Zerke

## THE SINGLE BIBLE BELT



SOME BIZZARRES



Politics in our time

# Off with the old

**Linda Ryan introduces the central theme of this month's *Living Marxism***

'The long and painful transition from the barricades to the boardroom has at length been accomplished, and today the TUC exerts its influence not so much through strikes and demonstrations, as through reasoned arguments before an independent arbitrator or an industrial court—or in the cabinet room.' (*Times*, 2 November 1946)

'There is a war on. It is an undeclared civil war instigated by Mr Scargill, his squads of pickets, and his political associates, against the rest of society. The enemy within dares insurrection

against legitimate authority. The challenge can be met in only one way...by enforcing the surrender of Mr Scargill and the national executive of the mineworkers' union.' (*Times*, 2 August 1984)

The shift in the *Times*' portrayal of trade unions, from responsible partners in government to 'the enemy within', reflects a crucial change in British politics. Until the Thatcher years, the establishment sought to manage society through the institutions and ideas of consensus. Over the past decade, the authorities

have adopted a new perspective; the politics of direct class domination. This distinction has been central to developing the arguments now associated with *Living Marxism*. First advanced in December 1979, our analysis has evolved to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding political developments in Britain (see 'Breaking new ground', *the next step*, No 1, December 1979).

Today it is difficult to recall that, less than a decade ago, the British ruling class went to great lengths to involve organised labour in running society. The years from 1945-79 were characterised by consensus. Instead of imposing its distinctive point of view, the employer class sought compromise and agreement. During the fifties, sixties and early seventies British politics were organised around a continuous dialogue between the state, the unions and the employers. These three parties were brought together in many institutions designed to establish joint responsibility for running the system.

Back in 1945, employers saw that without the agreement of the unions they could not realise their own objectives. The establishment made concessions to win the cooperation of labour. In return for supporting the broad objectives of the capitalist class, labour movement leaders received influence and status. The welfare state and the promise of full employment were presented as the rewards of collaboration.

The business class was willing to compromise, but only because this suited its profit-making purpose. It made concessions to win wider support for its own narrow class goals. The employers and government built up the unions into the 'official' labour movement, a virtual department of state. Union leaders mediated grassroots demands and took the pressure off the employers. A climate of class peace prevailed. There were few fundamental differences raised in parliament, while outside, class conflict was limited to the narrow terrain of wage negotiations.

Union leaders were charged with containing the working class. Their political wing, the Labour Party, boasted that it was best-qualified to curb unreasonable union demands and involve workers in the institutions of British capitalism. The labour bureaucrats were well





rewarded for these services. They were knighted and sent to the house of lords. Every royal commission of inquiry included union leaders. Politicians of all parties were in regular contact with the unions—now commonly referred to as the fifth estate of the realm. The TUC rejoiced in its prestige, as transport workers' leader Arthur Deakin told congress in 1952:

'It is notable that both the prime minister, Mr Winston Churchill, and the leader of the Labour opposition, Mr C Attlee, testified publicly to the statesmanship shown by the leadership of the trade union movement, and the clear understanding by the congress as a whole of the real needs of the nation.' (TUC Report, 1952)

By its centenary in 1968, the TUC's chairman was a lord and the general secretary a privy counsellor. The TUC general council contained two lords, two knights, another privy counsellor and eight lesser notables. It was a far cry from the barely-concealed contempt in which the establishment holds today's TUC chiefs.

The close relationship between capital and labour was institutionalised through a complex system. The boards of nationalised industries, authorities administering social services, and hundreds of other bodies brought both sides together. Labour movement leaders spent far more time administering than representing their members. This was a cosy world of give and take where workers experienced capitalist rule indirectly, through the collaborative framework established by the state. It must have infuriated hard-nosed capitalists to spend hours entertaining labour leaders. But the inconvenience was a small price to pay for the benefits of class collaboration. Consensus politics were time-consuming and expensive, but they created the stability which allowed the employers to accumulate capital without having to look over their shoulders at the working class. And as long as the economy could deliver, the capitalist class could tolerate spending on welfare provision.

Since the late seventies this atmosphere of give and take has been replaced by the harsh climate of *take it or leave it*. Compromise is now a dirty word. Consultation, so central to the politics of consensus, is now considered a waste of time. Of course traces of the past remain. The Tories still promise that the NHS is safe and that they will protect the poor. But such gestures mean little when the government defines any measure of social assistance as an unhealthy dependence on the state.

Many observers attribute these changes to Margaret Thatcher's

personality. They see the market-oriented, right-wing Thatcher 'revolution' as only one possible option among many. In fact the Thatcher revolution is by no means a peculiar British phenomenon. The strident and ruthless pursuit of capitalist interests has been forced on all major Western governments by deteriorating economic conditions. The Thatcher experiment looks exceptionally striking only because it goes against the grain of post-war British politics. Other capitalist nations have not experienced the same level of institutionalised collaboration as Britain. Thus in the USA, for example, the shift towards more intense class domination does not seem such a dramatic departure.

### New order

By the late seventies the British establishment could no longer live with the politics of consensus. The intensification of the economic crisis demanded new and far-reaching solutions. The employer class could not afford to prop up unprofitable enterprises and maintain social services. Industry had to be shaken out and millions made unemployed. In these circumstances consensus politics made little sense. The labour bureaucrats, who thrived on their relations with the state, became an obstacle to those who wanted to 'roll back' state intervention in the economy. Negotiation and consultation were useless to employers in a hurry to get things done. In any case, the gravity of the capitalists' situation left no space for compromise. Where past governments emphasised consultation, Thatcher pursued rule by diktat. Her aim was to create a new political order where the interests of her class could be pursued with few obstacles.

Fortunately for Thatcher the conditions were favourable for her experiment. The 1974-79 Labour government had neutralised the working class through its social contract. This government-union agreement on holding down wages educated workers in capitalist economics, persuading many to accept the harsh realism of the market as common sense. Workers were demoralised and the unions softened up. Thatcher exploited this situation and used the failure of Labour's economic policies as an argument for her own. Even those who despised Thatcher instinctively understood that Labour had no credible alternative.

With the labour movement in disarray, Thatcher moved fast to consolidate her advantage. Millions of jobs were lost from 1979-82. Such a wholesale attack could not be agreed through consensus. So the Tories attacked every feature of the consensus era. Trade unions were now condemned as greedy wreckers. State services were branded as a decadent vice. Tory ministers broke the tradition of all-party support for full employment, and announced that nobody had an automatic right to a job.

In September 1979, just four months after Thatcher's election, the *Economist* observed that even right-wing union leaders were no longer welcome in the corridors of power: 'The government is sticking to non-intervention. There will be no beer and sandwiches at Downing Street for Mr Terry Duffy, president of the engineering union.' At that early stage, Thatcher moved carefully to pick off opponents one by one. The government claimed that it was not so much anti-union as opposed to special privileges.

There is no modern equivalent of the vision of a fully-employed, prosperous Britain providing social services, which prevailed in the era of consensus





Only in 1982, after the war with Argentina, did Thatcher feel strong enough to go for the kill, comparing union leaders to General Galtieri and vowing to treat them the same way. During the next three years the government abolished the conventions of consensus. Thatcher would tolerate union leaders only if they became her messenger boys. By 1984, she didn't even need messenger boys. Her aim was to dominate workers directly without intermediaries. Thatcher's triumph in the 1984-85 miners' strike seemed to confirm that this was the way to get things done.

### Upfront class war

The miners' strike heralded a new era in British politics. For decades, the British state pretended to be a neutral observer in the conflict between labour and capital. Governments would offer to mediate between the two sides in what were politely described as industrial disputes. In the miners' strike, almost for the first time, the state intervened directly to defeat workers. The police were given leave to make up the law, as they set about making it impossible to picket. The authorities even sought to deny social security to strikers' families. The capitalist courts, which had sought to maintain the pretence of neutrality, were pushed into the frontline. Judges ordered the sequestration of union funds, issued injunctions to prevent effective strike action, and imposed curfews and custodial sentences on pickets. This was class war without

the usual disguises. A new phase in the relationship between wage-labour and capital had arrived.

Since then, the Tories have criminalised any effective strike action. There is little consultation—coercion and repressive legislation are the norm. Police have gained new powers, and we have lost civil rights. The courts openly back employers against strikers. The right to exploit and make profit is enshrined in law, and collective resistance is forcefully discouraged.

The politics of direct class domination have become a state religion. Thatcher has articulated her intolerance of opposition in a way that would once have been considered outrageously provocative: 'I have always regarded part of my job as—and please do not think of it in an arrogant way—killing socialism in Britain.' (*Financial Times*, 14 November 1985) But coercion can only go so far. To succeed, Thatcher also had to win the arguments. The Tories' victory in the battle of ideas has been impressive. The opposition parties lack credibility and represent little threat. The Labour Party has conceded defeat by adopting many Thatcherite themes. Superficially, it seems that a new consensus has been established, dominated by the New Realism of the Conservatives. But the Tories' success is deceptive.

### Winning by default

Looking back over the past decade of Tory ideological triumphs it is apparent that there has been no contest. Labour was too rooted in the era of consensus to face the important changes taking place. The capitalist system did not need Labourist collaborators. It required a period of class war to establish a position of strength from which it could dictate terms. Labour's policies presupposed the viability of collaboration at a time when the British establishment needed to bring society under its direct domination. In the circumstances of the eighties Labour's policies seem old-fashioned and distinctly out of place.

The Conservatives could win the arguments because they have faced no serious alternatives. The weakness of their opponents is the secret of their success. Since 1985, the stabilisation of the economy has also helped to neutralise dissent. The lack of political pressure on the Tories means that, even if they lose control over the economy, it is unlikely that they will have much to fear from the parliamentary opposition.

Yet the Tories' electoral triumphs and success in winning arguments against Labour should not be confused with the creation of a new reactionary consensus in society. The Tory government has not managed to consolidate popular support for its beliefs. Social surveys show that there is no new constituency for right-wing

free market ideas. A passive acceptance of Tory dominance is not the same thing as active support for Thatcherite ideals.

Until now the Tory government has created a façade of purpose and direction by pursuing a series of ideological campaigns. Law and order, chauvinism and moral panics have been the enduring themes of the Thatcher era. The chauvinist hysteria around the war against Argentina, the periodic outbursts against 'terrorists' and orchestrated attacks on inner-city crime, football hooligans, lager louts, etc. are the essential ingredients of Thatcher's ideological offensive.

These initiatives have created a climate of insecurity and intolerance. They are mutually reinforcing and tend to foster conservatism in society. But they do not constitute a coherent perspective. They are one-off initiatives and the effect tends to be short-lived. They can divert attention from real social problems, but cannot inspire or enthuse. Thatcher's crusade is essentially negative: anti-union, anti-welfare state. It is hard to imagine such themes being transformed into a new consensus.

### Not so popular

Attempts to win positive support for a vision of a Thatcherite society, such as the 'popular capitalism' hype, have had little impact. Freedom of choice in education and health are non-starters for most people. There is no modern equivalent of the vision of a fully-employed, prosperous Britain providing more social services, which prevailed in the era of consensus. Thatcher's lack of coherent social and economic policies was exposed by the announcement of her legislative programme in November. Most of the 'new' policies were simply designed to strengthen the state's power to control. The high-point of the programme—the privatisation of water and electricity—is unlikely to have people dancing in the streets.

Having destroyed the institutions of collaboration, Thatcher must now construct a new consensus on the terms of her class. There are few signs of success here. The transformation of the politics of direct class domination into a popular regime requires either economic prosperity, or a war, or both. It is becoming clear that the credit-fuelled upturn in the British economy cannot provide the foundation for prosperity; it has only delayed the day of reckoning. Nor is a war, which could recreate the patriotic Blitz spirit, yet on the agenda. In the medium term, post-consensus Britain looks set to experience more repression, more moral panics and less civil liberties. That is, of course, if those who are committed to progressive change fail to come up with a viable alternative.

The Tories whipped up chauvinism around the South Atlantic War—then turned it against their opponents at home





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Police experiment on black youth

'NIGGER-HUNTING' IN LIVERPOOL 8

'What the police are doing', says Margaret Pinnington, 'is using the law as a form of internment'. Pinnington is coordinator of the Liverpool 8 Law Centre. The law she refers to is the 1986 Public Order Act. And the internees are the people of Granby, the heart of Liverpool's black community.

For a year, police have used Granby in a controlled experiment to test out the Public Order Act. More than 20 people now face trial on charges of 'violent disorder' under Section 3 of the act. In every case the scenario is the same: police raid the area and harass young blacks on the street (provocative high-speed car chases through Granby, with police vehicles mounting the pavement and scattering passers-by, are favoured), and then slap charges of 'violent disorder' on anybody who protests, or simply happens to be around.

Township policing

In December 1987, Leroy Thomas watched a police chase through Granby. He complained to a senior officer and was invited to report to the police station the next day to make an official complaint. When he turned up, the police charged him with 'violent disorder'. An all-white jury took 10 minutes to find him guilty. He was sent down for two years. Delroy Burris is a local community leader who faces two 'violent disorder' charges. The first arose from a complaint about a car chase in Granby Street. The second time he merely noted the registration number of a police van involved in a raid. 'Open your mouth', says Burris, 'and it's violent disorder'.

The police make little attempt to hide the fact that they are creating South African 'township' style policing in Liverpool 8. 'If the people in Granby Street want apartheid', inspector Dunne from Admiral Street police station warns, 'they can have it'. As the Public Order Act is used to pick up young blacks at whim, so the Operational Support Division (OSD) is deployed to put the fear of God into the whole community. The OSD is a paramilitary unit, specialising in what it politely calls 'nigger-hunting'.

Tommy Mende was driving home with two friends through Granby late one night in November when riot vans drew up on either side. An officer pulled open the car door and announced 'We are the OSD and we're nigger-hunting tonight'. The police pulled Mende out of the car and beat him. 'They were stamping on me, throttling me and one put his gloved fingers in my eyes. There was racial abuse all the time: "You're niggers, we're the OSD."'

By the time he arrived at Admiral Street police station, Mende had passed out. He was taken to casualty at the Royal Liverpool Hospital. The police waited for him to regain consciousness. 'I saw three officers at the end of the trolley. They rushed me, pushed me on my belly, handcuffed, with my head on the floor and jammed my legs in the metal sides of the bed. They drew the curtain and started punching me. I was on the floor for an hour and a half.' Mende has been charged with 'abusive and threatening behaviour' under Section 4 of the Public Order Act.

The OSD travel in numbers and sweep through Granby like a marauding army. They wear special uniforms, with no numbers on their jackets or on their vans. 'Scared?' asks a black youth who last month was acquitted at Liverpool Crown Court of a 'violent disorder' charge: 'Of course we're scared.'

Catch-all law

The Granby 'experiment' shows the growing sophistication of inner-city policing since the street disturbances of 1981. The authorities have tailored the law to suit their needs and have evolved an operational structure to take advantage of it. The Public Order Act was the product of a six-year home office review of lessons learnt from the street disturbances of 1979, 1981 and 1985, and industrial disputes including the miners' strike. The main feature of the act is its flexibility. 'Violent disorder' is defined as anything that would 'cause a person of reasonable firmness' to 'fear for his safety'. The police don't have to show that anybody was put in fear, merely that *had* a suit-

ably panicky person been there they would have been scared. Nor is it necessary for those accused to have done anything; the threat to do something which would cause somebody (not necessarily present) to fear for their safety is sufficient.

The police have reorganised to make full use of this

intelligence on the local community.

Lawyers and race relations professionals complain that the activities of OSD destroy the painstaking work of the Toxteth Section in building good links with the community. In fact there is very close cooperation between the two police sections. The canteen at Hope Street station contains a gallery of black faces who've been 'clocked' on the street. Beat officers and the OSD rendezvous at the corner of Princes Park before any operation. Almost all officers giving evidence at the current public order trials come from Hope Street.

The police have become more sophisticated in their

Andrew Calcutt



Delroy Burris: 'Open your mouth and it's violent disorder'

open-ended law and to minimise opposition. Merseyside police chief Kenneth Oxford set up the OSD shortly after the 1981 disturbances. Oxford is an advocate of 'positive policing'. During the riots he ordered police vans to charge crowds and officers to fire CS rounds at point-blank range. A young disabled man, David Moore, was crushed to death by a police landrover. Many were injured by the tear-gas canisters. 'It is the only way I can protect them from themselves', Oxford explained. The OSD carry on this fine altruistic tradition today.

To complement 'positive policing', Oxford also set up the 'Toxteth Section' based at Granby's Hope Street police station, to implement 'community policing'. Hope Street officers are selected and trained 'to be aware of the need for a carefully controlled and graded response to incidents'. They have established links with local groups, particularly through the Toxteth Activities Group and the Community Forums and have been invaluable in gathering

use of propaganda to legitimise their activities. Despite the fact that F Division (which includes Liverpool 8) is third from bottom in the local league for 'theft against the person', the 'black mugger' remains a powerful image. Even more important is the way the police have exploited the drugs panic. Until a year ago, the only drug in Granby was ganja. Now a small group of hard-drug dealers operate there. Locals say the police tolerate, and even encourage, their presence to win public backing for raids.

The local media only accept as fact events that have been authenticated by the police; if Oxford doesn't give the nod, the incident hasn't happened. This allows the police to throw a blanket of silence over Granby and to isolate the black community within the city. The police have not only contained opposition in Granby, but rendered their own activities largely invisible.

Andrew Calcutt and Kenan Malik



From Dock Green to Orgreave

# The rise of political policing

**Toby Banks examines how and why the 'thin blue line' keeps getting thicker**

'More people dispersed. Some ran but we told them, "Don't panic. They won't charge—this is Britain". The other vans moved forward, a gap appeared in the middle and horses emerged at high speed. With horses breathing down your necks and moving fast, what can you do? Panic!'

This civil engineering student's account of how mounted police charged a demonstration in November sums up the sense of shock among those who discovered on Westminster Bridge that the new-style British police aren't so wonderful. Students are far from the only ones to have felt the ever-hotter breath of the self-styled 'Force' on their necks in recent years.

Paramilitary policing tactics have been deployed against pickets in almost all major (and many minor) industrial disputes since the early eighties; in February 1988, police even attacked a nurses' march in central London. Riot police have batoned a convoy of 'festival people' across West Country beanfields each summer since 1985, evicted squatters, organised dawn raids on the homes of alleged hooligans, and become a

Feeling collars for future reference



standard feature of public events. This is on top of an increase in the established use of heavy-handed policing against black communities and political protests. Plastic bullets and long truncheons seem set to displace silly hats and bicycle clips as police trademarks.

The modern police have forced their way into many new areas of public and private life. They snoop in schools, they visit with social workers, they raid journalists' homes for censored material, they go door-to-door telling overdue ratepayers either to settle up on the spot or accompany them to the station. Displays of police arrogance and casual violence are now standard. The only unusual thing about the police who dragged a motorist from his car and beat him up in North Wales last September was that they were filmed by a passing TV cameraman. Police marksmen have formalised an SAS-style attitude of shooting first and not answering questions later.

## Political profile

The police have abandoned their policy of staying silent in the shadows, and assumed a high political profile. Police chiefs whose predecessors were rarely seen and never heard have become major spokesmen. Manchester chief constable James Anderton's anti-gay diatribes, and his calls for public flogging, jostle for space in the newspapers with Metropolitan Police chief Peter Imbert's criticisms of the left and advice to the home office.

The politicisation and militarisation of the police force is a key change of the Thatcher years. A quiet, apparently impartial symbol of British civilisation has been transformed into the sort of braggardly and aggressive right-wing force usually found in the third world. Such a major shift suggests that something is seriously wrong with the capitalist system in Britain. The advance of police power has surprised many; but acute Tory observers are well aware of the reasons for it.

Shortly after the 1987 election, arch-Tory pundit Peregrine Worsthorne noted that, if the Conservatives were to salvage the shaky British economy, they must go much further in cutting welfare spending, curbing wages and shaking

things up. In which case, he noted, the government would have to deal with more social unrest: 'It is just as well that the two institutions not disoriented by the Thatcherite revolution are the armed forces and the police.' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 21 July 1987) His message is understood by those in the corridors of power, who have reformed the Force to act as their primary weapon in the political struggles of post-consensus Britain.

What role the establishment assigns to the police depends upon the confidence and coherence of the capitalist order. In times of relative prosperity and political peace, the authorities could afford to grant civil liberties and shunt the police into the background. Today, as the system runs into more serious problems, the police are given the job of holding things together.

To many, modern policing seems a dramatic departure from the constabulary's reputed respectability. Yet we should recall how recently the police achieved an impartial image. The British police were born in Robert Peel's 1829 Metropolitan Police Act; laws of 1839 and 1856 brought regional constabularies into line with the London prototype. The Force was created to control the new working class, replacing the army whose actions (like the 1819 Peterloo Massacre in Manchester) were too provocative. Police were widely reviled as capitalist agents, as 24-year old Frederick Engels noted in 1845:

'Because the English bourgeois finds himself reproduced in his law, as he does in his God, the policeman's truncheon which...is his own club, has for him a wonderfully soothing power. But for the working man, quite otherwise!' (*The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1976 edition, p253)

Working men and women frequently rioted against 'Peel's Bloody Gang'. It is ironic that the phrase 'If you want to know the time, ask a policeman' came to epitomise the hospitable image of the police; it originally implied that policemen had a good supply of stolen watches. Police were subjected to abuse, assault and even 'culls'. Many working class districts were 'no-go' areas and bystanders often interfered to prevent arrests. From the Chartist agitation of the 1830s, to the unemployed workers'



No, its not *The Fly*, it's state-of-the-art police apparel, at a London exhibition last year



protests of the 1930s, police were used to break strikes and to put down political unrest. When it faced economic crises and militant opposition, there was little scope for the capitalist class to disguise the repressive function of the police force.

It took until the fifties for attitudes towards the police to alter significantly. A boom in the post-war economy, and the political defeats inflicted on the labour movement, ushered in an era of comparatively peaceful class relations—the years of consensus politics (see page 7). As police steered clear of the low-level struggles of the times, the state was better-able to foster a homely image of the British bobby helping elderly women across the road. This was personified by fictional PC George Dixon, shot in the 1950 film *The Blue Lamp*, but resurrected in 1955 for the BBC's *Dixon of Dock Green*. He said 'Evenin' all' on Saturday evenings for 21 years, taking the message of harmonious policing into Britain's living-rooms.

Of course, some tension still existed between the police and the working class. But by and large the decades after the war were the 'golden age' when *policing by consent* became a reality for the first time, and the idea that 'they won't charge—this is Britain' became instilled in the public mind. It is a long way from Dock Green to Orgreave in 1984. The gradual transformation of the police into the paramilitary force of today started with the practical and political measures which the authorities took to overcome new problems from the seventies.

### 'Into the abyss'

Under Edward Heath's 1970-74 Tory government, the establishment faced the start of a long-term economic recession, and the power of a confident labour movement. When Heath moved to control wages and impose anti-union laws, he was met by a wave of mass industrial action which helped bring him down. These struggles were symbolised by the 'Battle of Saltley Gates' during the miners' strike of 1972, when Arthur Scargill's flying pickets and local engineering workers closed a Birmingham coke depot, defying large numbers of police. Saltley invoked a sense of dread within the establishment, and a determination that it would not happen again, as a top Whitehall aide has recalled:

'Those in positions of influence looked into the abyss and saw only a few days away the possibility of the country being plunged into a state of chaos....It was the fear of that abyss which had an important effect on subsequent policy.' (Quoted in P Scraton, *The State of the Police*, 1984)

Tory home secretary Reginald Maudling insisted that the police could have closed the Saltley Gates, but chose not to; winning that battle would only have risked causing a wider backlash. The authorities needed an *ideological* strategy to alter the political climate and let them move towards more drastic *operational* policing, without starting a class war before they were ready. That strategy was summed up after Saltley by a Tory MP who coined the phrase 'winning by appearing to lose'.

The rationale was that, by appearing to lose the battle against pickets or protesters, the police could win the propaganda war. They could promote an image of hard-pressed officers holding the thin blue line against lawlessness, and win public sympathy for giving the police more 'protection'—that is, more power. At the time 'winning by appearing to lose' was making a virtue out of a necessity; the police would have had a job appearing to do much else. But in the years that followed, as the Force tooled up, the authorities popularised the image of a besieged police force close to breaking-point, defending civilisation against hooligans and extremists. These ideas helped to pave the way for Thatcher to reshape the police.

### Mugging panics

In 1972 the police and the press imported the term 'mugging' from America, and made it synonymous with the supposedly booming offence of street robbery by black youth. After racist policing provoked a riot at the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival, the press screamed about the poor policemen having to use dustbin lids as makeshift shields against gangs of black criminals. The police were quick to exploit this publicity, turning mugging into the pretext for the notorious Special Patrol Group (SPG) to launch systematic 'swamp' operations in black areas. An enthusiastic media portrayed this as a relief operation for the long-suffering boys in blue: 'The heavy mob were jubilant yesterday. They were sent to Brixton for a month and loved every minute of it....The mob, the SPG, backed by Yard detectives, were sent to support the local police.' (*Daily Express*, 6 December 1976)

In the mid-seventies police protected small National Front marches from left-wing counter-demonstrators. The two best-known showdowns were at Red Lion Square in 1974 (where student Kevin Gately was killed) and Lewisham in 1977. Portraying the SPG as hapless victims was a tall order, but Scotland Yard's PR office proved resourceful. Commissioner Robert Mark claimed to have deployed a horse at Red Lion Square which was trained to collapse on command and win sympathy. After Lewisham, the *Daily Mail* showed a middle-aged policeman



displaying confiscated weapons, beneath the headline 'WHO WILL DEFEND HIM?'. In fact the weapons were just as likely to have come from SPG lockers, which were revealed to contain an impressive illegal armoury. But the message was hammered home that the police were sitting ducks for an army of politically-motivated thugs.

From the early seventies the IRA brought its war to Britain. The return of the republican struggle to the heart of the state sent the authorities into a panic. Once again, however, they were able to play on reactionary sentiments to use the Irish issue as a justification for going in hard, as was observed at the time:

Met chief Sir Peter Imbert: more a General than a gentleman



'The IRA have given the British and Ulster police one bonus: the public have realised that the police have to be a force before they can be a service....It should help the police to ask for the right kind of public cooperation and to develop their role of community leadership.' (R Lewis, *A Force for the Future*, 1976, p270)

The police helped to keep the hysteria going by raiding Irish homes and clubs, and detaining hundreds of people without charge under the 1974 Prevention of Terrorism Act.

If the labour movement had been willing to take sides with striking workers, black youth, the Irish, and others against the state, the police would have found it far more difficult to present themselves as victims of anti-social minorities. Instead, the 1974-79 Labour government played a key role in backing the police. Labour ministers presided over police attacks on the left and black communities, and the mass assault on Grunwick pickets in 1977. Labour passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and prime minister James Callaghan was the first to brand strikers as 'picket line bully boys'. Labour started the panic which allowed the police to strengthen their arsenal and role in society.

In 1979 the police made an unprecedented intervention in a general election. When the SPG killed left winger Blair Peach outside an NF election meeting in Southall, Met chief David McNee issued not an apology, but a warning: 'If you keep off the streets and behave yourself, you won't have the SPG to worry about.' The Police Federation placed full-page newspaper adverts demanding more McNee-style action. Thatcher put the policing of dissent at the centre of her campaign, fusing themes from the Labour years to brand pickets as 'trade union muggers'. The balance had swung in the state's favour since Saltley. It had won some propaganda victories, and begun to back them up with action. Thatcher's election signalled the break from consensus, and the start of a serious offensive—with the police in the frontline.

### 'Call it social control'

The official view of post-consensus policing was put succinctly by one of its key architects, Kenneth Newman, on his appointment to run the Met in 1983: 'It would be better if we stopped talking about crime prevention and lifted the whole thing to a higher level of generality represented by the words "social control".' (*Financial Times*, 23 March 1983) Three years later Newman, who perfected political policing while in charge of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, announced that the police were no longer concerned with most petty crimes; they would concentrate on 'priorities'.

particularly 'public order'. Maintaining public order means protecting the political status quo. It has become the primary role of the Force. Today the police are too busy blocking Westminster Bridge to help anybody across a road.

The Force has been expanded, re-equipped and extended into every corner of British life to meet the more rigorous requirements of the ruling class. In 1950 there was one police officer for every 700 people in Britain; today the ratio is 1:400. The home office freely admits that the police have led a 'privileged existence' since 1979; in an era of public spending cuts the Tories have increased real spending on the police by 52 per cent, recruited more than 13 000 new officers, and employed 7300 more civilian paper-pushers, so freeing police for operational duties (*Independent*, 8 October 1988).

The militarisation of the police force is unmistakable. The orchestrated outcry about the plight of policemen cowering behind bin lids has been translated into modern riot gear. No PC now ventures near a crowd without having his helmet, visor, body armour, flameproof overalls, shield and riot baton at hand. The horses, plastic bullet and CS gas squads will be close behind. The Metropolitan Police are bringing 24 armoured cars into operation; they have returned the dozen borrowed from the army.

Police commanders have sought to imbue their officers with a militaristic attitude. In 1983 the Association of Chief Police Officers drew up a no-nonsense secret manual for public order operations, parts of which have since been leaked:

'When considering deployments of police personnel in a riot context it is sometimes necessary to think in a terminology which has more of a military connotation....Such words constitute an important part of the vocabulary of strategic and tactical planning, and for police officers, whose ordinary duties do not include such thought processes, it is necessary to make a conscious effort to tune in on this level.'

The manual outlines 200 'tactical options' for the tuned-in riot cop/soldier of today, up to and including the use of plastic and lead bullets. By 1986 10 per cent of London's police were practising their options on permanent public order duty, and the Greenwich and Hounslow riot training centres were busy teaching them the latest chokeholds and battlefield formations.

The police have professionalised their operations at the sharp end. When the loutish Special Patrol Group was widely discredited, Newman replaced it with Area Territorial Support Groups; these are better trained and armed rapid



response units, a paramilitary elite on Continental lines. After a series of wild shooting incidents in the mid-eighties led to demands for reform, the Force formed crack gun-squads which could shoot-to-kill with less fuss and more accuracy, capable of staging several Peterloos an hour. In the context of systematic militarisation, police reform can only mean an advance in repressive techniques.

Part of the scenery at modern public events



Alongside the 'hard' face of policing in the Thatcher years has gone an increase in what Newman termed 'multi-agency policing', the involvement of the Force with other institutions and organisations in a community. In the early eighties many on the left called this 'community policing' and believed that it could reduce tensions and make the police more accountable. Now it is clear that multi-agency policing is about extending the long arm of the law into new areas of society, increasing police interference and access to information. The 'watch' schemes (first Neighbourhood Watch, now Hospital, Cabbie and you-name-it Watch) are one example of this process. The police borrowing empty flats from Labour councils to spy on black communities, or linking up with social security snoopers to arrest dozens of alleged 'scroungers' in Oxford, is another.

The increase in police strength has been organised from Downing Street. The government has passed a battery of new laws, creating a legal framework in which the police can do as they think best. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984) gave police the power to detain suspects for four days without charge and incommunicado. The Public Order

Act (1986) is a catch-all law which gives the Force authority to arrest at will (see page 11). Once a suspect is inside for 96 hours, the removal of the right to silence makes it easier for police interrogators to cobble a case together; and the move to give police more power to vet juries makes it easier for that case to be upheld in court.

Police chiefs have more power, and are more ready to issue public threats to use it. In a bid to instil fear into any who might challenge authority, they have broken from the tradition of having quiet words behind the scenes, and taken to putting their cards—and hardware—on the table. After the unrest on Broadwater Farm in 1985, Newman went on TV to warn that next time he would use plastic bullets. 'There is a psychological hang-up in this country about the use of force by police', he said later: 'I have less hang-ups than most.' (*Express*, 20 March 1987) Another with no hang-ups about plastic bullets was West Midlands police chief Geoffrey Dear. 'I do not think', he said after the Handsworth riot of September 1985, 'that as a society we can survive without this sort of weapon being available as a last resort' (*the next step*, 23 May 1986).

### Making war on miners

When the British establishment believes that the survival of its system rests on its ability to pump lumps of plastic into the public at 160mph, it will not allow a little thing like 'the democratic process' to get in its way. A criminologist asked 39 of the 43 chief constables in England and Wales whether they would use plastic bullets if their local police authority had forbidden it: only one said he wouldn't. The rest admitted that, 'if it came to the crunch, they would act according to their professional understanding, irrespective of the police authority's position' (*Times*, 14 April 1988). The top cops' 'professional understanding' of the state's interests will always override any constitutional niceties.

The main targets of the militarised British police force have been organised workers and black youth. Two episodes which provided graphic evidence of what policing is now all about were the 1984-85 miners' strike, and the unrest on the Broadwater Farm estate in north London in 1985.

The 1984-85 miners' strike brought the most naked use to date of police power against the working class. The contrast with the localised push-and-shove of Saltley was dramatic. The police shelved the decentralised structures which are said to save Britain from becoming a police state, and set up a nationally-coordinated operation. A police army occupied the coalfields, beat pickets, arrested 10 000, rampaged through homes in pit villages, blocked motorways and,

at Orgreave in June 1984, used military manoeuvres against miners dressed in shorts.

Police action in the miners' strike demonstrated the true role of the state. When the authority of the capitalist class is on the line, the state will do what's necessary to uphold it, regardless of the will of parliament or public opinion. In the heat of the strike, the Force's house-journals published secrets which the state had tried to keep for three decades:

'Police authority, like the authority of the state from which it is derived, is *coercive*.... Where recourse to force is necessary, as it inevitably is during mass public disorder, the underlining and defining character of state power—the monopoly of legitimate force—becomes apparent.' (*Police*, September 1984)

The law of the land was suspended during the miners' strike, and police made up new rules as they went along. For example, the interests of the government and the coal board demanded that 292 Scottish miners on their way to picket the Ravenscraig steelworks be stopped: so police arrested them. Since the miners could not be charged with 'travelling in a coach', police announced that they had had to 'reassess tactics' in the light of 'pit violence'—that is, they had rewritten the law to suit the circumstances of a major class struggle (*the next step*, June 1984).

### Target black youth

Police violence against black youth reached new heights on Broadwater Farm. After yet another routine police raid on a black family home ended with the death of Cynthia Jarrett, 400 riot police invaded the estate using a year-old battle-plan. Fierce fighting broke out and PC Keith Blakelock was killed. The police launched a terror campaign to exact revenge. Between 10-14 October 1985, Broadwater Farm was besieged by 9165 officers. Police raided one in four homes and arrested 362 people—a tenth of the estate's population, and a huge proportion of all black youth on the Farm. They used helicopters to search for any who eluded them. They held black teenagers for days without parents or solicitors, blackmailing and beating them into talking. Eventually, in March 1987, the police were able to get three men convicted of Blakelock's murder—without confessions, eye-witnesses or any other evidence. It was politically-inspired persecution dressed up as a criminal investigation.

Although the state has saved its worst for those who present a direct challenge to its authority, the militarisation of British policing means that anybody who does not conform can fall foul of the riot

'Police authority, like the authority of the state from which it is derived, is *coercive*'—  
*Police*,  
September 1984



batons. The Stonehenge hippies and Westminster students, among many others, could attest to that.

The new policing has dealt with immediate threats to the establishment over the past decade. Yet this short-term display of strength is a sign of deeper weakness. The authorities would prefer to carry on in the post-war ways of consensus, presiding over a stable society and confining the police to an uncontroversial role. But the decline of British capitalism means that they can no longer afford to do so, and have to push the police into the political spotlight. This is a dangerous step. It risks undermining the convention of policing by consent. As more people see the police acting unambiguously as the agents of the ruling class, so the old antagonism towards the Force tends to resurface. Without consent, the police can only control things through more and more repression. That is a recipe for wider conflict which terrifies the authorities. The Tories and police have launched an ideological campaign to counter this danger.

### The propaganda war

The police, backed by the media, have sought to prolong the strategy of winning by appearing to lose. Each time the Force is involved in a major confrontation, the TV cameras shoot from behind police lines, ensuring that the pickets or black youth are portrayed as the aggressors. But the trick becomes harder to pull off as the police become more militaristic; after Orgreave, the TV news editors even had to broadcast the film out of sequence, to make it appear that the miners had attacked first.

Fewer people are willing to believe all of the police propaganda, as the incidents become more frequent and brutal. Thus the authorities have had to redefine the idea of consent. They have accepted that there is a body of opinion which cannot be persuaded that the police are always the good guys. Their concern in the Thatcher years has been to isolate and immobilise these people, by cohering a more reactionary consensus in favour of firmer policing among other sections of society. A pro-police academic put the case baldly during the debate about inner-city policing which followed the 1981 riots:

'The real failure in...public relations has not been in the inner cities, amongst alienated youth—little attention has been paid to their complaints in the past—but has been amongst the middle classes. What the police must do...is to win back the respect they previously commanded from those in positions of power and influence.' (*Police*, December 1982)

Exaggerating the problem of crime is the primary means by which the authorities have tried to win middle class support for the new, tougher policing.

The authorities have gone to great lengths to promote the impression that crime is a growing danger, to play on people's fears and legitimise a law and order drive. The message is that crime, rather than unemployment, housing or living standards, is the major social problem of our times. Away from the media gaze, however, the police concede that the officially-encouraged fear of crime is largely unjustified. 'Of course to the victim of crime the word has a real and often distressing meaning', wrote former Met chief Robert Mark: 'But seen against the background and problems of 50m people, it is not even amongst the more serious of our difficulties.' (*In the Office of Constable*, 1978, p241) Home office reports show violent crime to be 'exceptionally rare', with the typical victim a healthy young man rather than the popular image of a helpless child or pensioner.

Yet police propagandists have cynically hyped up the threat of violent crime, because they instinctively appreciate how useful the *fear* of it can be in achieving some acceptance of police hammer tactics. This is why they have made a particular point of affecting a new concern over offences which most touch people's emotions, as Police Federation chairman Leslie Curtis explains:

'Every time we see, or read of, one of those appalling cases in which an old person, living alone, is killed or assaulted, we know that the effect is to enhance feelings of fear amongst other people. When we hear of horrific sexual attacks on women and children the same consequences apply.' (*Police*, June 1987)

While the Force rearms, its friends in the media have done their best to ensure that people 'see or read of one of those appalling cases' on a daily basis.

The political use of crime scares and massaged statistics to justify repressive policing is best illustrated by the anti-mugging campaign, which has been stepped up since the seventies. In his final report before retiring as Metropolitan Police chief in 1987, Newman admitted that the fear of being mugged 'is unjustified' among most Londoners. Yet he still used the mugging issue to justify concentrating more police in 'multi-racial inner-city areas', and affirmed that combating it would remain a 'specified priority' for the Met. By contrast, Newman announced that autocrime would 'no longer feature as a specified priority', despite the fact that thefts of and from cars had

reached record levels. For the police, the difference between the two crimes is that the 'unjustified' mugging scare provides a better excuse for terrorising troublesome black youth in the inner cities.

The police have recently begun making trial runs in militarised policing against white working class youth. Here, too, they have sought to portray their action as a public service operation against crime. While the riot vans cruise county towns, press and politicians portray run-of-the-mill pub punch-ups as a rising menace of 'rural riots' and 'lager louts'. The authorities have homed in on the unpopular image of the football hooligan to justify fresh advances in methods of social control. Last spring, police arrested 150 'alleged football hooligans' in coordinated dawn swoops around the country. All had been fingered by undercover policemen who spent months living as full-time infiltrators (and fitted in easily with the background of violence and drinking). This was a cynical exercise in practising the fine arts of a police state—deep infiltration, provocation, entrapment and kicking in doors at dawn. But by passing it off as an attempt to protect the innocent against hooliganism, the police hope to keep public opinion on their side. The 'war on hooliganism' has provided the cover for introducing other police and legal powers, from ID cards to surveillance 'hoolivans'.

### Thatcher's public enemies

The authorities have not only inflated the threat of crime; they have also branded their political opponents as criminals. If the police are to be portrayed as public servants, it follows that anybody who comes into conflict with the Force must be a public enemy. The tactic of criminalising political enemies so as to discredit and isolate them was pioneered by the last Labour government, when it withdrew political status from Irish republicans in 1976. The Thatcher government has applied the same 'criminal' label to its opponents within Britain.

The miners' strike best showed how the authorities use the criminalisation ploy to combat the dangers involved in political policing. In the summer of 1984, Warwickshire chief constable Peter Joslin admitted officialdom's concern about the strike causing anti-police feeling:

'We do police this country by consent, and what the miners' dispute has highlighted is the difficulty for the police when a significant minority of the public withdraws that consent....I fear that assaults on police will become acceptable within the community, and that to protect our officers we will be forced to change our traditional style of policing.' (*Guardian*, 22 July 1984)



Consolidating the support of *Daily Mail* readers for the use of riot batons is a poor substitute for the consensus which broadly accepted the benign authority of George Dixon

Joslin instinctively understood the need to justify the change in police style against the miners in the eyes of others, by branding strikers as criminal thugs subverting democracy:

'What we are seeing in this dispute is a deliberate challenge to law and order in this country. The mass picketing and the intimidation of working miners are an attempt by the bully boys in society to impose their will on those wishing to exercise that most democratic right—the right to work.'

The transformation of miners fighting for their jobs into bully boys stopping scabs exercising their 'right to work', is typical of the twisted logic with which the Tories and police have turned militancy and protest into crime in the Thatcher years.

As the police have increased their repressive power, so the ideological side of the law and order campaign has become more high-pitched and hysterical. In their efforts to tough it out and unnerve their opponents, the authorities will brook no criticism of the police. The Tories now insist that the alternative to hardline policing is not just street crime and the odd riot, but murder and mayhem throughout society. They have had few recent chances to portray the increasingly aggressive police as victims; but they have exploited those few to the full.

### Society under siege

The killing of PC Blakelock on Broadwater Farm, and the shooting of WPC Yvonne Fletcher outside the Libyan embassy in April 1984, have been dragged up time and time again to support the state's case. At the end of the Blakelock trial, Newman declared himself well-pleased with the impact of blood-curdling reports on public opinion: 'Broadwater Farm has justified, in the minds of the majority, the necessity of the proper equipment to do the job.' (*Express*, 20 March 1987) As he spoke, his men were using their new 'proper equipment'—armoured vehicles—to roam the estate, after false press rumours of fresh rioting. The Hungerford massacre of 1987 was another one-off incident used as evidence of a general threat to society. The shooting dead of 10 people in a quiet country town by Michael Ryan shocked the public because it was *unique*; yet, in his report on the tragedy last July, the inspector of constabulary sought to use it to excuse a nationwide advance in police power. He recommended that each police force set up crack gun-squads, buy armoured cars and use more helicopters to deal with the many other Ryans he imagined running around.

The authorities have sought to evoke an atmosphere of a society under siege. They have created a

climate in which the police feel freer than ever to dismiss critics and demand support. In the middle of clashes between riot police and pickets outside Rupert Murdoch's Wapping print plant, Police Federation chairman Leslie Curtis devoted his conference speech to telling the labour movement to shut up and stay off the streets:

'And nor can there be any question, ever again, of the police doing what they were prepared to do until recently, stand there and take it, because it was felt that the image of the police would suffer if they were shown reacting too strongly.... The TUC, instead of parroting the usual demands for independent inquiries into police brutality, should say "Enough is enough, we cannot control the mob which latches on to union demonstrations, and therefore we should cease to provide the opportunities for them to behave in this fashion".' (*Police*, June 1986)

The appointment of Peter Imbert to succeed Newman as Britain's top cop in 1987 symbolised the switch to political policing. The tricks of the trade which Imbert learnt in the Special Branch and anti-terrorist squad are set to become general police practice. In September 1987, Imbert announced that the strategy of 'winning by appearing to lose' was a thing of the past; now the police would be getting their retaliation in first. That statement marked the end of the long haul from Saltley.

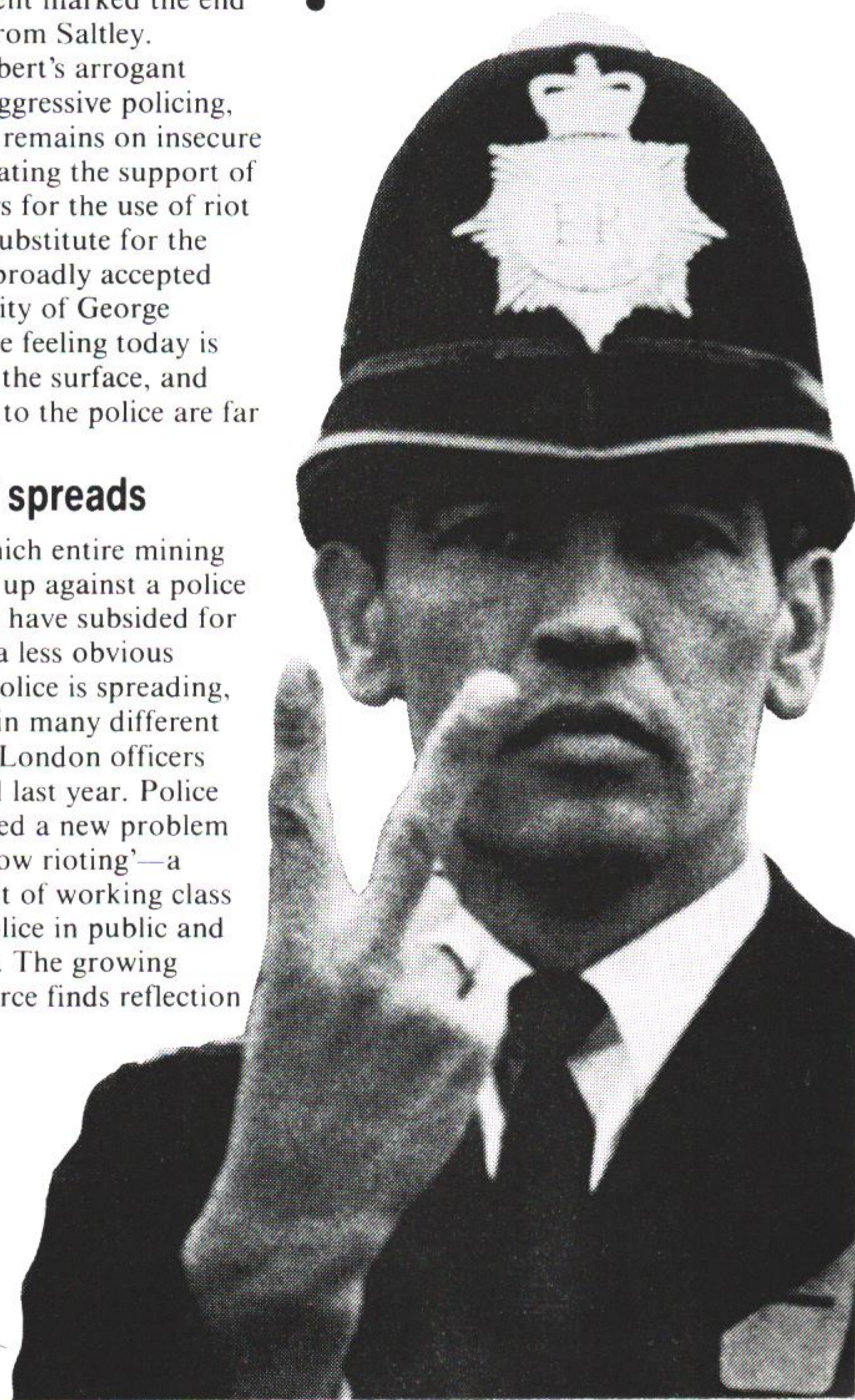
Yet, behind Imbert's arrogant championing of aggressive policing, the establishment remains on insecure ground. Consolidating the support of *Daily Mail* readers for the use of riot batons is a poor substitute for the consensus which broadly accepted the benign authority of George Dixon. Anti-police feeling today is never far beneath the surface, and popular reactions to the police are far less predictable.

### 'Slow rioting' spreads

The spirit with which entire mining communities rose up against a police army in 1984 may have subsided for the moment. But a less obvious antipathy to the police is spreading, manifesting itself in many different ways. Attacks on London officers were up by a third last year. Police chiefs have reported a new problem which they call 'slow rioting'—a revival of the habit of working class people abusing police in public and preventing arrests. The growing mistrust of the Force finds reflection

in the courtroom, where juries are more willing to believe that police witnesses are lying. The collapse of three showtrials of alleged football hooligans in quick succession last year typified this trend. Nor have the police supporters' clubs—Neighbourhood Watch schemes—spread far beyond the more middle class suburbs; a recent report in east London showed a widespread refusal to enlist as 'grasses' (*Sunday Times*, 16 October 1988).

The resurgence of disrespect for the police is a cause for concern to the Thatcher government. Yet there is no turning back. In the post-consensus era, the British capitalist class relies upon its politicised, militarised Force to uphold its authority and secure its future. The stage is set for further repressive policing, and more crime panics to keep middle class opinion—and the opposition parties—on the side of the police. The creeping police state is the most immediate threat facing the working class in the third Thatcher term. The Tories could never have got away with building up this *physical* Force unless they were confident of their *political* position. The acceptance of law and order as a legitimate concern is the ace card which has allowed the police to advance on all fronts. Challenging this view, and exposing the propaganda about crime as an excuse for tighter social control, is the precondition for turning anti-police feeling into a political factor.



David Rourke



## National unrest in the Soviet Union

## The Kremlin quakes

Andy Clarkson  
looks at the  
current Soviet  
disunion

When the heart-rending tragedy of an earthquake in Armenia fails to relieve the violent tensions with neighbouring Azerbaijan, we can be sure that national unrest in the Soviet republics is no passing phase.

For decades the Kremlin has assured 200m Soviet citizens that the national question is solved, and they are now a single 'Soviet people'. Any illusions that this was true have been rudely punctured by recent events. Mikhail Gorbachev may still be able to hold the Soviet Union together. But he cannot find a final resolution to the problem: instead, the bureaucratic regime which he represents is responsible for perpetuating it.

the German Wehrmacht was still fighting in the Caucasus, the Stalinists rehabilitated Islam and installed a Grand Mufti in Tashkent. After the war, the creation of a Muslim Soviet intelligentsia proceeded apace, as an analysis of 'the establishment' in Tajikistan confirmed:

'The key posts in the economy were still being filled by Europeans, although a native intelligentsia was expanding and would in due course be able to take over further sections; at the lower levels, a fully adequate supply of natives of the country existed.' (JA Newth, 'The establishment in Tajikistan', *Soviet Studies*, Glasgow 1963/4, p72)

The Kremlin has made strenuous efforts to stimulate an artificial identification between itself and the peoples of the Soviet republics. Yet it has been unable to avoid the current uproar.

## Long time no see

Moscow's strategy is continually undermined by the lack of a developmental dynamic in the Soviet economy. The economic system is 'planned' bureaucratically from the top down; the central authority has neither a capitalist market nor genuine workers' democracy to help it regulate relations between industries and regions. As a result, the Soviet bureaucracy lacks any real coherence. It has been fragmented into introverted local fiefdoms; until the current crisis, the Azerbaijani and Armenian party leaders had not met each other for 15 years, while the leaders of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have not met for twenty.

To counter this paralysing incoherence, the Kremlin has prioritised resources to those 'core' regions that are essential to maintain the stability of the state. Apart from the major republic of Russia, Stalin selected the Eastern Ukraine and, after the war, the Central Asian republics to be the basic foundations of the Soviet system. The oilfields of Muslim Azerbaijan gave it a vital role as the Soviet 'Middle East'. The Kremlin's strategy of cultivating national interests there paid dividends as recently as 1979, when it was able to mobilise the support of Islamic leaders for the war against the Western-backed Muslim

fundamentalists in neighbouring Afghanistan. Likewise in the core Ukrainian republic, there has been a notable absence of the nationalist agitation now gripping the Baltic republics.

Prioritising some regions meant forcing the more peripheral ones to more or less fend for themselves. The Baltic republics, the Caucasians and regions like Western Ukraine have never been fully integrated into the system. Moscow has dealt firmly with any anti-Soviet tendencies that developed, but has otherwise largely left these peripheral areas to get on with it. Rural backwaters like the Western Ukraine region were left to languish, but the Estonians and Georgians were allowed to pursue lucrative 'secondary market' activities.

## Some empire

A favourite Western theme is that the Soviet Union is an empire in which Russia exploits the national republics in classic colonial fashion. This myth is exposed by the fact that the peoples of the *least* sovietised republics—the 'colonies'—have generally been more prosperous than the Russians themselves. While the peripheral republics did relatively well, the Kremlin concentrated on economic reform at the core; there was no need for the central bureaucracy to interfere unduly elsewhere.

In recent years the long-term stagnation of the inefficient Soviet economy has resulted in a profound crisis. This has exacerbated the trend towards regional autarky in the Soviet Union. The same fragmentary forces which undermine the system's economic growth have reinforced parochial tendencies in Soviet society. Moscow's position has been undermined by the failure of economic reform to transform the prioritised core regions; meanwhile, the peripheral regions have become increasingly preoccupied with their own narrow interests. The Kremlin's grip over the more self-sufficient republics is steadily weakening.

The incapacity of Gorbachev's *perestroika* (economic reconstruction) to duplicate the success of the peripheral areas in the core regions explains much about the build-up of national tensions. The ruling bureaucracy has resorted to playing upon resentment at the



Armenian protesters  
face Moscow's troops

As Stalin's bureaucracy moved to consolidate its power in the thirties, it took steps to create a loyal layer within the national republics which make up the Soviet Union. Stalin sought to use nationalism to establish a link between the distant, dictatorial regime and the people. To this end, Moscow encouraged each ruling local bureaucracy to put on a 'national' face and appear more attuned to their republic's own traditions.

## Stalin and the Mufti

The Ukrainian Communist Party was initially dominated by Russian immigrants and Jews, but the Ukrainian proportion of its membership grew from 19 to 63 per cent between 1920 and 1940. In Central Asia, the absence of any working class tradition led the bureaucracy to fall back on Muslim institutions as its chosen vehicle during the Second World War. In October 1943, while



success of the minor republics, to divert attention from the failure of its system as a whole. With Armenians on hand to play the role of scapegoat, the Kremlin has a ready explanation as to why its system is not to blame for the falling living standards of Azerbaijanis.

The Soviet Union's economic decline has boosted the popularity of market relations among nationalist movements like the Baltic 'popular fronts'. More significantly, it has fuelled competition for scarcer central resources among the national republics. Local bureaucrats in the republics have lined up with nationalist movements, to secure the leverage necessary to obtain (or retain) resources from the centre. When the Estonian soviet voted controversially to adopt the right to veto all Moscow legislation last November, all but seven of the 158 Russian deputies there voted with the Estonians. In Armenia, the soviet has joined the campaign to retrieve Nagorno-Karabagh from Azerbaijan, to give Armenian state functionaries some popular protection against Gorbachev's 'anti-corruption' drive.

These developments send shudders through the Kremlin. Historically, the Soviet bureaucracy has relied upon diktats from the centre to hold its unwieldy machinery together, and to impose discipline upon the local components of the Communist Party.

But the increasingly uneasy character of the Kremlin's grip over the republics was exposed when its recent attempt to remove their right to secede from the Soviet Union proved abortive.

Nevertheless, the Kremlin's strategy of directing most resources at the core republics, and blaming the peripheral nationalists for any failures, has achieved a measure of political success. There is little evidence of rising nationalist dissent in the core republics of Eastern Ukraine and Central Asia. The need to keep the latter sweet partly explains why the Kremlin has sought to placate Muslim opinion by blocking any concessions to the Armenians on Nagorno-Karabagh. Moscow hopes to compensate for the reduction of its control at the edges of the Soviet Union by increasing its influence over the core.

As for the periphery, the Kremlin calculates that it can deal militarily with any serious opponents—so long as it can take them on one at a time. Thus when all the nationalist movements advanced at the same time in November, and even began to draw in new areas like Georgia, Gorbachev felt obliged to make some concessions. No doubt Moscow is now working out how it can provoke rivalry between the Baltic and the Caucasian regions. Apart from their traditional isolation from each other, the fact that all the peripheral

nationalist fronts are led by intellectuals committed to Gorbachev's *glasnost* programme is in the Kremlin's favour. These people are also scared to encourage an all-out mobilisation against Moscow, for fear of unleashing the aspirations of their own 'national' working class. When these factors are combined with the many ethnic divisions that persist in the republics, it becomes clear that the Kremlin has some room to manoeuvre and manipulate. So long as Gorbachev can regulate national tensions at the present level, he should be able to ride out the storm for some time to come.

But the resurgence of the national question is part of the long-term degeneration of the Soviet system. Gorbachev, as the guardian of this bureaucratic order, cannot resolve the national issues. That can only be done, and the rights of all peoples assured, in the process of transforming the nature of Soviet society. There may not be one 'Soviet people', but there is one Soviet proletariat, with a common interest in carrying out such a transformation—and the power to do so. The cause of progress lies in its hands, rather than with Gorbachev, the nationalist intellectuals, or the Western capitalists waiting to pick up the pieces if the Soviet Union comes apart.



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A new era in industrial relations

# Union-busting, British-style

**Jon Hann and Joe Hall argue that the Thatcher years mark the end of traditional trade union methods**

In a letter to a national newspaper in November, one nurse summed up the anger and bitterness which Tory policies have provoked among many workers in the health service and far beyond:

'For years I have been a dutiful, apolitical member of the Royal College of Nursing, never striking and always putting the patients first. This regrading exercise has done what all the propaganda of the left has failed to do—it has turned me into a political animal. I know that many who are disappointed and disillusioned voted Conservative in the last general election. I wonder how many would do so still and sincerely hope it would be very few.' (*Guardian*, 8 November)

Such sentiments ensured that industrial and protest actions of various sorts raged in the NHS throughout 1988.

Similar views were expressed in the other major disputes of the year—the conflict in the P&O ferry company at Dover and the national postal strike in September. The spirit of militancy was also evident in hundreds of strikes and walkouts in local councils, in the civil service and in the car factories and other areas of manufacturing. It was significant that many who were provoked into taking industrial action, were, like that nurse, unaccustomed to trade union militancy and unfamiliar with the ways of the official labour movement.

Those who came out on strike in 1988 immediately found themselves facing enormous difficulties in making their action effective. Since Margaret Thatcher's third election victory in June 1987, the employers and the government have adopted a much more combative attitude towards the unions in general and towards industrial action in particular. In response, after more than a decade of mass unemployment and industrial defeats, the trade union leaders have become much more cautious and defensive.

Instead of going all out to defeat the employers, union officials' main concern in disputes is to limit the damage to the union machine. As a result activists are often left to fight in isolation and the gulf between militants and the rest tends to widen. A familiar pattern then sets in:



**RIGHT: Striking P&O workers, Dover: sacked by their employer, abandoned by the unions, harassed by the police and courts**

Pandora Anderson



divisions deepen, action is rendered ineffective and demoralisation results. To understand the mood of defensiveness and defeat that has dominated trade unionism in the Thatcher years, it is worth looking more closely at the changing balance of forces between employers and workers.

'Our evidence suggests that in the 1980s, as compared with the previous decade, people are working harder, labour productivity is increasing faster, profits are up and strike activity is down.' Thus concludes a survey of productivity changes in British manufacturing, produced by David Metcalf of the London School of Economics last year. Its title—'Water notes dry up'—refers to the tickets issued to miners allowing them to cut short a shift when conditions are wet. Whereas 'water notes' were once commonly issued when conditions were 'as dry as the Sahara', such practices have now come to an end throughout British industry.

Metcalf reports on the use of an 'effort index' to study the intensification of labour in British industry over two decades. This index measures 'the changing intensity of human effort—muscle and mind—per hour', and is set at 100 for the first quarter of 1971. In the seventies the average value was 98.5. In the eighties the average has risen to 102.2; for the last four years it has stood above 103. ('Water notes dry up', Centre for Labour Economics, discussion paper No 314, July 1988). What has enabled employers to exploit workers more intensively?

### The 'fear factor'

Metcalf argues that 'the crucial factor in explaining the growth in labour productivity between 1980 and 1985 across industries was the employment reduction they experienced between 1980 and 1982'. Further, he identifies 'the fear factor' as the crucial mechanism in encouraging productivity growth: 'First, there was the fear of bankruptcy on the employers' side. This led to an assault on over-manning and a reduction in inefficiency. Second, employees were fearful for their jobs and prepared to work harder—recall that the effort index peaked in 1983.' The shake-out of jobs is undoubtedly a key factor in the Thatcherite 'productivity miracle'. But the new legislative framework introduced by the government since 1979, and the reorganisation of industrial relations in the workplace, have also played an important part in putting the employers on top.

The new employment bill introduced at Westminster in December is the latest phase in the offensive against the unions which the Tories have been stepping up since they first came to power. Earlier

legislation has undermined and restricted the closed shop, the right to picket and the right to strike, as well as interfering in the conduct of union affairs over matters such as elections, ballots and political funds. The main aim of the new bill is to deregulate the labour market still further, removing restrictions on women and young people working in unhealthy and dangerous conditions in shops, factories and mines. It seeks to make it even easier for employers to discipline and sack workers, by removing some of the existing protections against victimisation. The bill also aims to limit the duties for which a shop steward must be allowed paid time off for union business.

The new bill follows the announcement of even tighter restrictions on ballots for strike action. The code of practice issued by the government in November proposes that union leaders should not consider taking industrial action unless they receive a 'very substantial' majority, or a turnout in secret balloting of 70 per cent. The code includes stipulations that all disputes procedures must have been exhausted, that the official arbitration and conciliation service should have been involved, and that the employers must receive prior notice of any action. In other words, the code makes the conduct of effective industrial action within the law virtually impossible.

### Against the law

In Thatcher's third term employers are more ready to resort to the law in industrial disputes. In the 12 months up to July 1988 employers initiated legal proceedings against unions in 18 cases, compared with 10 the preceding year (*Labour Research*, September 1988). There is also a trend towards the greater use of the law to claim damages: Hereford and Worcester council sued the teachers' union NAS/UWT for £48 000, the estimated cost of a half-day strike. Overall, recourse to the courts is still uncommon; but the legal framework has strengthened every employer's position. The incessant public discussion about 'union power' and 'union democracy' which anti-union laws generate has transformed the climate of opinion to the disadvantage of militants.

On top of the government's legal offensive, employers have implemented changes in three major areas with immediate consequences for workplace trade unionism: in the structure of the workforce, in bargaining arrangements and in methods of dealing with union representatives.

'Flexibility' is the modern employers' buzzword. The goal of Thatcherite managerial strategy, detailed by the Institute of Manpower Studies at Sussex

University, is 'the flexible firm'. The Pirelli cable factory at Aberdare in South Wales illustrates this vision of the future. This plant incorporates one of the few advanced flexible manufacturing systems in the country. The shopfloor works with computer-controlled vehicles instead of forklift trucks, the office operates without paperwork. There are no distinctions between white and blue collar, skilled and unskilled, production, maintenance and clerical workers. All 140 employees are expected to fill in for each other. The company aims to 'motivate people and build a sense of common purpose, unity and teamworking', which effectively rules out industrial action by the one recognised union—the GMB.

### Expanding periphery

The flexible firm relies on a 'core' workforce of multi-skilled, well-trained, securely-employed and well-paid workers. It also relies on a 'periphery' of unskilled, untrained, insecure and poorly-paid workers (often subcontracted, part-time or temporary), to perform 'peripheral' tasks like cleaning, catering, and transport services. However, the Pirelli plant remains exceptional; totally flexible working arrangements are largely confined to 'greenfield' sites, at which mainly Japanese and US companies open new plants and impose the new methods.

While the flexible firm remains the employers' elusive goal, important elements of the flexible approach have been introduced more widely. Taking the labour market as a whole it is difficult to identify a substantial 'core' labour force—British industry is in no position to guarantee steadily rising wages, expanding opportunities and a job for life. However, it is certainly possible to identify a peripheral workforce.

Today the periphery includes 2.5m self-employed (mostly building workers on the lump and others paying their own national insurance, rather than small businessmen), 4.3m part-timers (the large majority women), 400 000 'trainees' (mainly young people conscripted into make-work schemes), around 500 000 unregistered unemployed (mainly women with dependent children)—a total of 7.7m. Add the registered unemployed, and the total comes to 10.2m. The TUC estimated, on the basis of 1985 figures and excluding the unemployed, that the periphery amounted to 34 per cent of the workforce—up by 16 per cent since 1981.

The shift towards flexible working conditions has had other important effects. A recent survey of a sample of manufacturing firms found that 34 per cent had induced craftsmen to do work usually performed by other skilled workers, and 25 per cent had relaxed demarcations among manual,







History confirms that the structure of the workforce and the nature of working methods are not the crucial factors in determining militancy

technical and clerical workers ('Labour flexibility in Britain', Acas, 1988).

The second area of managerial initiative is decentralising wage bargaining, and trying to link pay awards more closely to performance and local labour market factors. The break-up of national pay bargaining arrangements has been a feature of the past decade. In the private sector big firms like Cadbury, Chubb, Berger and Pilkington have withdrawn from multi-employer collective bargaining committees to pursue their negotiations at company or plant level. Several multi-employer associations—in banking, food retailing, dairying, provincial newspapers and independent television—have all but collapsed over the past year. The Post Office has moved to decentralise bargaining, British Coal has introduced performance criteria and British Rail has short-circuited established procedures. Since the abolition of the Burnham committee after the school strikes of 1987, the government effectively imposes pay deals on teachers.

### Ugly trends

Many employers have pursued a pragmatic policy towards the unions. They will tolerate the continuation of trade unionism—so long as the unions accept their new terms. When the unions have been pushed by rank

and file pressure into backing militant action, the employers have responded ruthlessly.

In the P&O dispute, the company withdrew recognition from the union, sacked all the workers and brought in scabs. In coalmining, British Coal has imposed wage deals and non-negotiable packages of 'reforms'. It has accelerated closures, rewarded the Notts-based scab Union of Democratic Mineworkers with negotiating rights at the new super-pit in Leicester, and opened talks with the UDM about representing miners at the proposed pit at Margam, South Wales. In the civil service and the Post Office, management has threatened to withdraw facilities for deducting union dues from wages and paying them directly to the union. Similar union-busting tactics have made de-recognition, the imposition of deals, and the withdrawal of 'facility time' for union officials familiar in the banking and finance sector.

The victimisation of militants and the blacklisting of union activists are ugly trends which have gathered momentum in the Thatcher years. Last November a shop steward at Jaguar's Coventry works was sacked for photocopying a Labour Party newsletter about stress-related deaths in the company. Two veteran union activists at Ford's Dagenham plant were sacked when it was alleged that they had concealed academic

qualifications (read 'subversive tendencies') in their job applications. Employers' extensive use of the Economic League's lengthy computerised blacklist of alleged troublemakers has even prompted investigation by a TV consumer affairs programme.

### Conformist climate

In general, however, employers have not gone all out to smash union organisation at company or workplace level. They have carefully made an example of those few unions which had the temerity to resist managerial prerogatives, with a view to encouraging the rest to conform quietly. In most cases managers have preferred to take advantage of the new climate to press the unions to accept their terms.

A recent major survey of both manufacturing and services, conducted by the Warwick Industrial Relations Research Unit, suggests that workplace union organisation has been remarkably resilient over the past decade. The authors say that 'the evidence at plant level points to the absence of any massive attempts to remove the unions or to reduce their role':

'The overwhelming impression was one of no change; where there was change it was more likely to involve an increase than a decrease in the role granted to unions....On the range

ABOVE: Nurses have acted as angry workers, not as 'angels'





of issues negotiated with unions, the absence of any dramatic attack on union activities was even more notable.' (P Marginson et al, 'Beyond the workplace: Managing industrial relations in the multi-establishment enterprise', 1988)

However, they also point out that 'there has plainly been a massive shift in the overall climate of industrial relations since 1980' and conclude that 'unions seem to have retained a place, but this does not mean that their role and influence have been unaffected'.

Trade union organisation still exists, but in forms which are much more dependent on management patronage and much less an expression of rank and file initiative. This is the distinctive British style of union-busting. For example, the Warwick survey reports a much higher incidence of 'combine committees' which bring together shop stewards from different establishments within the same company than had been noted in earlier surveys. In different circumstances, this would be a very healthy development, suggesting a trend towards some form of unity across sectional lines. However, the authors note that today there is 'a widespread degree of managerial acceptance of combine committees' and a correspondence between the level at which pay bargaining takes place and that at which shop stewards are brought together. This indicates that the shop stewards are being 'combined', not through pressure from workers trying to concert forces against the company, but by managers looking for a convenient way to impose pay deals. Employers are pulling the stewards together with the aim of using the committees as a single channel to communicate tough new company orders to the workforce.

## Personnel management

Through such developments, trade unions are increasingly used as a department of personnel management rather than acting as organisations defending wages and working conditions. In many workplaces union officials are actively engaged in managerial schemes designed to encourage a spirit of commitment towards corporate goals. More than four million workers are now involved in quality circles, briefing groups and works councils in firms as diverse as British Aerospace, Plessey, Vickers and WH Smith.

What has been the effect of the restructuring of employment and workplace trade unionism? Just as the existence of mass unemployment dampens the morale and militancy of those in work, so the expansion of the periphery intensifies pressure on those with a decent job. Peripheral

employment itself forces people into a continual struggle for survival which is more likely to encourage the values of the street hustler or petty crook than the spirit of collective solidarity.

Yet there is little sign that flexible working has significantly transformed the British working class. Carworkers at Jaguar, Ford and Vauxhall, the core of British manufacturing industry, showed that they were ready to take industrial action in 1988. Many of the workers who have fought fiercely against privatisation in the health service in recent years have been part-time, poorly-paid women working in cleaning, catering and other ancillary services in hospitals. Given the parlous state of British capitalism, the employers will have no alternative but to press ahead with their offensive against their workers, who will have no alternative but to fight back.

## Still fighting

History confirms that the structure of the workforce and the nature of working methods are not the crucial factors in determining militancy. Unskilled, unorganised and impoverished dockers provided the impetus for the wave of 'New Unionism' in Britain after the great dock strike which celebrates its centenary this year. Skilled, highly-organised and relatively well-paid engineering workers were in the vanguard of the trade union upsurge during the First World War and beyond. It will take more than harmonised overalls and quality circles to tame the working class in Britain. One worker at the consumer electronics firm Hewlett Packard told a visiting journalist that every time she read *The HP Way*, the firm's briefing magazine for employees, she felt like reaching for a sick bag (*Financial Times*, 21 November).

Many workers are sick of management's arrogance; yet they must have similar feelings about the attitude of the TUC today. Over the past decade, the leaders of the official labour movement have been exposed as useless to those whom they claim to represent.

The response of TUC chief Norman Willis to the government's new code on strike ballots summed up the defeatist posture of the leadership of the official labour movement:

'This insulting and malign code burns a further scar of bitterness into me and should offend all those in Britain who want to see effective trade unions playing a constructive and respected part in the development of British society.' (*Guardian*, 5 November)

Willis resents the exclusion of the union leaders from their former positions of influence in the British

system, and pleads for their status to be restored. This is not merely a pathetic posture by the leader of the TUC, it is one with dangerous consequences for those who still look to the unions to provide some protection against the employers' offensive.

There are three themes in the union leaders' response which are, unfortunately, well-illustrated in the NHS dispute.

**'Militancy doesn't pay':** Every time nurses or hospital workers take industrial action, union officials rush in to reduce it to token gestures. Instead of organising effective industrial action which could embarrass the authorities, while ensuring adequate emergency cover, the unions have allowed nurses' anger and energy to be dissipated in a series of disorganised days, half-days, even lunchtimes, of 'action'. They have redefined picket lines as 'protest lines', aiming to win public approval rather than put pressure on the government. These tactics had little appeal to nurses who are unfamiliar with the quaint ways of the union bureaucracy.

In the autumn, when anger erupted over the regrading of nurses' pay, the unions backed the tactic of 'working to grade' and appealing through official procedures. While nurses who benefited from regrading carried on work as normal, those who did not accepted only duties consistent with their allocated grade. This inevitably reinforced the division, confusion and fragmentation produced by the regrading exercise, without having the slightest effect on management. The unions' main concern was always to allow activists to let off steam, without provoking the government further and risking adverse publicity.

**'We must get public opinion on our side':** For the union leaders, the key to success in the NHS dispute was to redefine the object of the action. Thus they emphasised that health workers were not demanding better pay and working conditions, but requesting more resources for the NHS. By depicting nurses as caring angels deserving of charity, they hoped to carry public opinion and persuade the Tories to take pity on the health service. Hence the first phase of the campaign, last spring, was directed towards the March budget. The unions' attempt to portray angry, hard-up nurses as harmless Florence Nightingale figures won public sympathy, but made no impression on chancellor Lawson; he gave tax cuts to the better-off, but no more money to the NHS. The early wave of industrial action collapsed in demoralisation.

Triumphant, the government announced what it claimed was a substantial pay award to the nurses and a new regrading scheme to be



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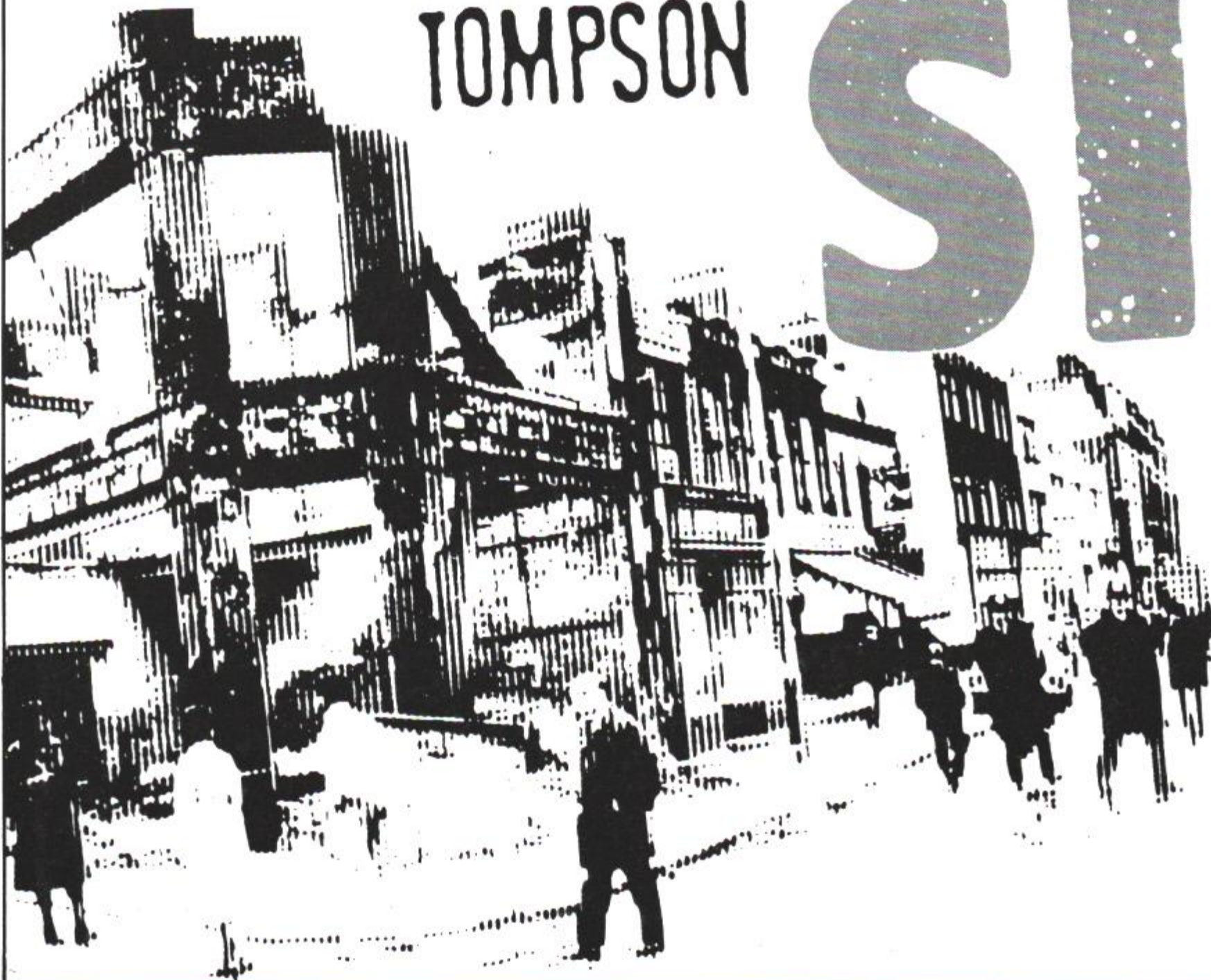
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## We have reached the end of a cycle of trade union organisation

worked out over the summer. The results, which became clear in the autumn, favoured some nurses in high-profile intensive care units, while penalising auxiliary and student nurses and a good many qualified nurses and midwives in between. Meanwhile hospital ancillary workers, some of the worst-paid workers in the country, received rises of five or six per cent; in December health service managers complained that ancillary wages were so low as to be an 'embarrassment' (*Guardian*, 2 December).

The government took advantage of the unions' commitment to the health service to foment divisions in their ranks. While those health workers deemed to care the most got paid the most, the result was mounting bitterness and despondency among the rest. Public sympathy, for the most part, remained with the nurses throughout, but public sympathy cannot win an industrial dispute. Indeed the unions' preoccupation with respectability prevented the kind of militant action necessary to win such a conflict.

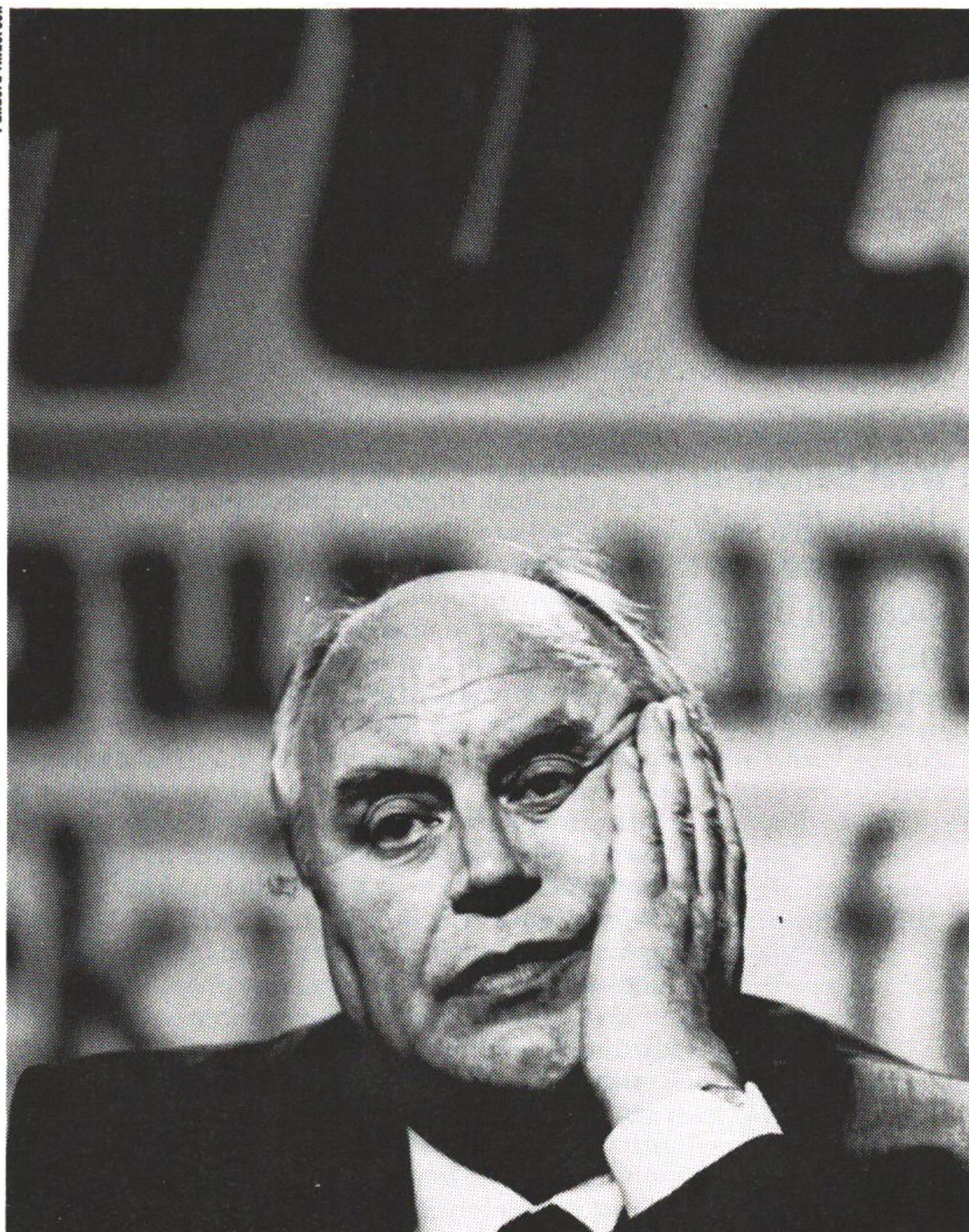
**'Let's get back around the table':** Throughout the dispute the union leaders have pleaded with the government to reopen negotiations. When anger at the regrading system sparked renewed militancy in the autumn, union leaders renewed requests for talks. Tory minister David Mellor's response was unequivocal: 'The time for action has arrived. The time for talking is over.' (*Independent*, 12 October) He proceeded to impose the new system without further ado and encouraged health authorities to sue nurses working to grade.

Unable to take the hint, union leaders appealed to NHS managers, Tory ministers and Acas. 'I am amazed that the minister should pick a fight with dedicated ward sisters' exclaimed Cohse chief Hector McKenzie. The minister contemptuously dismissed the unions at Acas and 'mislaid' two written requests from McKenzie for a meeting—they were apparently diverted to a secretary dealing with letters from the public! (*Guardian*, 26 November).

### A vicious circle

A similar sequence of events is discernible in every major dispute in Thatcher's third term. After putting up with deteriorating pay and conditions, workers are finally provoked into taking action. Given the high stakes involved in industrial action today, and the now strongly-established prejudice against militancy, often only a minority are willing to stick their necks out. Because of their isolation and vulnerability, activists tend to look to their union leaders for support. Their officials, however, turn out to be

Pandora Anderson



more concerned for their own survival than with fighting for union members. The union thus recommends a defensive strategy to activists, which can only render their action ineffectual. This reinforces their isolation (because it cannot inspire wider support from other workers) and intensifies their vulnerability (by provoking a management backlash which the union leaders are not willing or able to match).

The NHS dispute shows that the methods of the old organisations of the labour movement do not meet the challenge of our times. Some nurses may have left the non-striking Royal College of Nursing to join Nupe and Cohse in the militant days of last spring; but by the autumn 5000 a month were allegedly returning (*Sunday Times*, 4 December).

It should be clear by now that Thatcher's third term marks a new phase in the relationship between employers and workers. The inability of the official labour movement to offer any meaningful resistance to the Tory-led offensive raises doubts about what role it can play for workers in post-consensus Britain. We have reached the end of a cycle of trade union organisation. To alter the climate in industrial relations, it will surely be necessary to work out a new approach. Just as the mass New Unionism replaced aristocratic craft unionism a century

ago, so there is a need now to develop a modern movement that can handle the changed conditions of the 1990s.

The Thatcher years contain important lessons which should be assimilated if workers' organisations are to recover lost ground. Episodes such as the NHS dispute illustrate an iron law of industrial relations; the more trade unions plead that they are moderate bodies which only want to negotiate a peaceful compromise, the more confident the government and employers feel about twisting the knife. Those who curtail action, so as to court favour in public opinion polls, cannot put pressure on a hard-headed government like the Thatcher regime.

A movement for our times must set aside these defeatist ideas, to find ways and means to match the new ruthlessness of the other side. Like the nurse we began with, many people will have no choice but to react against the intensifying assault on their living standards and working conditions. Their anger and energy is the guarantee that the Tory government will have no easy victory. Whether Thatcher and her allies can be defeated, however, depends upon the ability of working class activists to catch up with the post-consensus outlook of a Tory like Mellor: 'The time for action has arrived. The time for talking is over.'

ABOVE: The depressing face of trade unionism today: TUC chief Norman Willis



Read what they won't let you hear

# 'The hawks have won'

**Mick Hume went to West Belfast, to talk to the only MP who can't speak on the air and won't speak in the commons**

**Mick Hume:** The ban on broadcasting interviews with Sinn Fein is a direct attack on democratic rights, and as such it has shocked liberal-minded people in Britain. But from an Irish republican point of view, it's surely a measure you could have expected at any time over the years. So why now? How do you see the ban fitting into British strategy towards Ireland today?

**Gerry Adams:** No, it hasn't come as a surprise. I think the main target of the broadcasting ban is actually the British public. The British government is preparing the ground for whatever other measures arose from that so-called security review, and we've seen some of them in recent days. The British are intent on stepping up their repression, and as part of the preparation, are cutting off the methods for the British public to get back information about what's happening here.

There are certain tendencies, as with any organisation, within the British military-political apparatus. They'd argue different views, and at one time as in any other organisation

one tendency would be in the ascendancy. It appears that the hawks have won, that the push from the Unionists, from right-wing Tories, from the generals, from the heads of the RUC, for the repression of any popular expression, with other measures like ending the right to silence, that they have won out the argument.

I think that a crucial factor in the whole thing was last June's election. I think that they expected the Sinn Fein vote to go down to five or four per cent. The Sinn Fein vote stayed at 11.4 per cent. And there was an increase in military activity by the IRA. So from the British point of view three years after Hillsborough the IRA hadn't gone away, the Sinn Fein support hadn't gone away, so why bother with all the niceties, let's get stuck in. And I date from there the British being more cavalier towards Dublin's sensitivities, from there you start to see the Stalker/Sampson report being set to one side, the Birmingham Six, Gibraltar, an increase in harassment—they're raiding hundreds of houses up the road here at the moment—all that started.

**Mick Hume:** On that point about the IRA offensive; the British government argues that these measures are in response to an upturn in IRA activity in the summer. Margaret Thatcher has said that, faced with this sort of 'terrorist' threat, you have to sacrifice civil liberties. That's also an argument that you hear from the Labour Party in Britain, that ultimately the IRA is to blame because if there was no IRA there would be no need to suppress civil liberties. How do you answer that accusation?

**Gerry Adams:** I think that stands logic on its head. To suggest that the IRA is responsible for what the British government does is to accuse a rape victim of having invited the rape. This is Ireland; this is not Britain. The armed terrorists on our streets do not represent anyone in this country. The Tom Kings and the Margaret Thatchers do not represent anyone in this country. They were faced by a very peaceful civil rights campaign, for the right to equality of voting and for an end to discrimination. When the state was put to the test it failed the test, it was

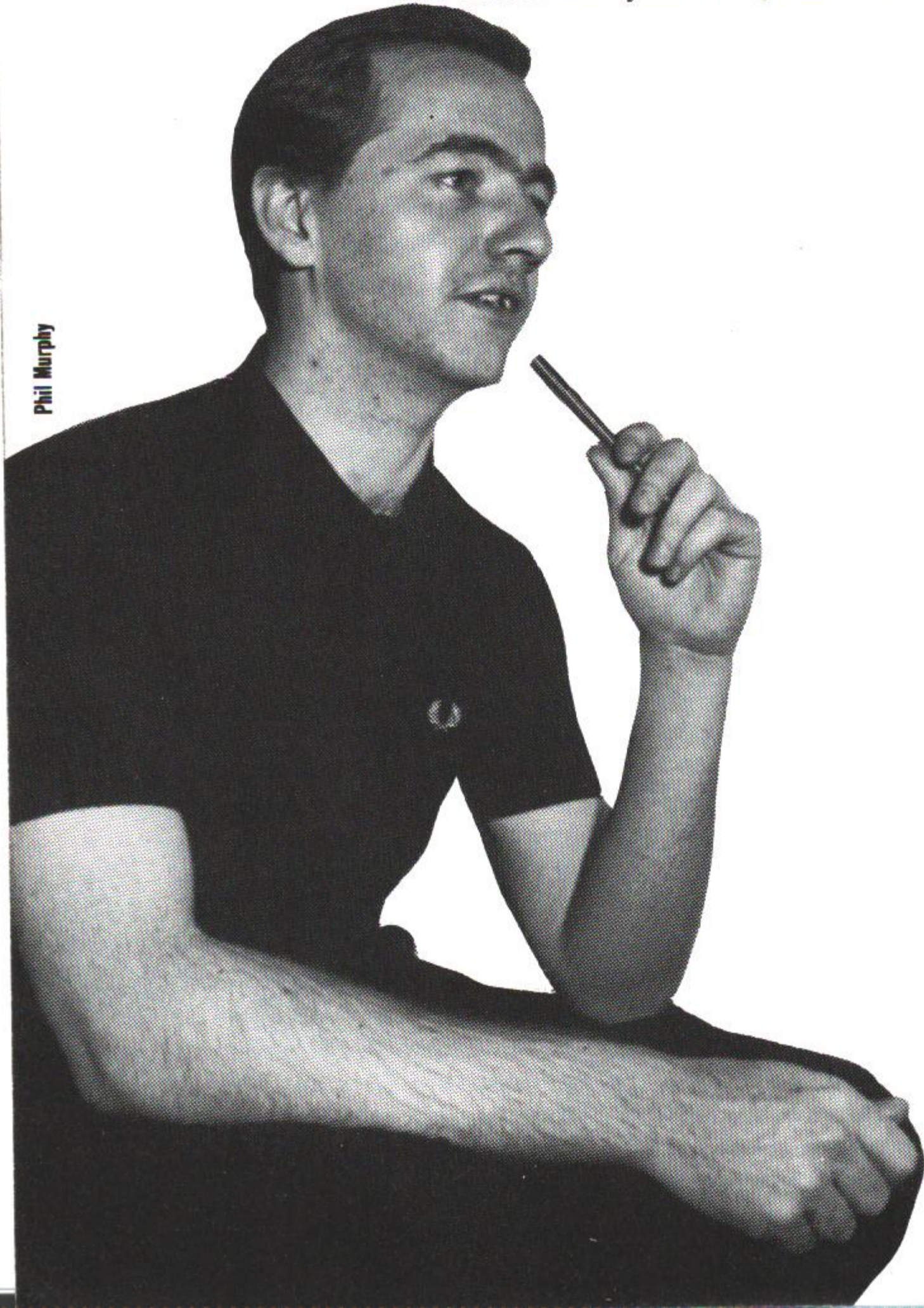
crumbling and the British Army was rushed in to bolster it up. The British Army has been here ever since then, as a life-support unit. And the response to that presence, the pursuit of justice, has taken many forms, including the IRA, but other forms of popular struggle. And then to say to the victims it's their fault is absolutely farcical.

This issue is about national self-determination. That's the core issue behind the broadcasting ban and all the rest, that the British government has taken upon itself the right to govern here. Because the Irish people, or a sizeable section of them, contest that right, the British are forced into all of these measures to hold on to their claim. Take away censorship, take away the armed soldiers, where would the British presence be?

It's one of the contradictions of the Labour Party leadership, which I find most enthralling, that the British Labour Party surely can't find any common ground with the Tory Party on economic issues, on the attempts to dismantle the welfare state, in the way it's savaging the British working class, and yet can find common ground with it on the question of Ireland.

There's an offensive argument about repression put by people who profess to be socialists and democrats, that 'We shouldn't be doing this because this is what the terrorists want, this is what Sinn Fein wants'. It's a perversion to suggest republicans are all masochists, that our goal in this world is to be repressed, to do something so that we get picked up, so that we get sent to jail, so that our homes will be raided. It's an absolute fallacy. People should be opposed to what's happening here because it's wrong. If one supports the Palestinians' quest for a homeland, or supports majority rule in South Africa, or one's opposed to British aggression in Latin America or one supports Nicaragua, one can't have a benign imperialist attitude towards Ireland. One has to have a consistent internationalist position, a consistent democratic position. The opposition to what's happening here should be on the basis of solidarity against aggression, against interference in another nation's affairs.

**Mick Hume:** You mentioned some of the other measures that are going



Phil Murphy



'I think that the banning of Sinn Fein has been on the cards for some considerable time'

alongside the broadcasting ban—the withdrawal of a suspect's right to silence, the 'oath of non-violence' for local election candidates, the cut in prisoners' remission and so on. It's obviously a cumulative legal crackdown. Do you think you are facing a serious possibility of Sinn Fein itself being banned?

**Gerry Adams:** I think it is correct to view these measures not individually but as a collection. You now have the most advanced police state in Western Europe, and I don't know of one elsewhere with as much legislation as we have here. I think we've always been facing the threat. There has been a state of emergency here since this state was established. Sinn Fein was banned until the seventies, our newspaper was illegal until very recently.

There is a need now for the British to be slightly more sophisticated, and while I think that the banning of Sinn Fein has been on the cards for some considerable time, I think the British will try and bring about other situations which would have the same effect. For example, if the cumulative effect of those measures is to dissuade people from voting for Sinn Fein, then Sinn Fein won't be banned. But if the cumulative effect is no effect, if the British are faced with the prospect that these measures didn't work, well then they will go through with it.

It's a domino thing. Bobby Sands was elected, they then introduced legislation which stopped another Bobby Sands ever getting elected. Then Owen Carron was elected, then people like myself, Martin McGuinness, Danny Morrison, so they brought out restrictions on people's right to vote and so on. As they weren't seen to work, we come to what now is being introduced. So if they don't work, if they don't have the effect the British want, they will surely be undertaking, from their point of view, more effective measures. None of this is dealing with the problem.

**Mick Hume:** Have you considered your options if Sinn Fein got banned, whether it would be just to reappear under another name, go underground or what?

**Gerry Adams:** The Ard Comhairle (national executive) of Sinn Fein was given authority by our Ard Fheis (party conference) to take whatever measures are deemed necessary to deal with all these contingencies. We'd have to hold on until the detail emerged. Sinn Fein was banned before and it didn't go away and banning us no more than these other measures would have that effect. They will only compound the problem and perpetuate the struggle.

**Mick Hume:** As for countering the broadcasting ban, there's been all sorts of press rumours about the possibility of a Radio Free West Belfast or whatever; what measures are you considering?

**Gerry Adams:** Well I read all of those things with interest myself. It would be very useful if it was possible to set up an alternative broadcasting medium, but at this moment that doesn't appear to be possible. But even if it was possible to have a Radio Free West Belfast, the people in West Belfast aren't the problem, they know what the score is, that still isn't going to tell the people in west London what's happening.

**Mick Hume:** So what about countering the ban in Britain?

**Gerry Adams:** Part of this ban is to depict people as crypto-republicans, it's McCarthyism. I don't expect journalists to risk their careers. Or does someone risk the ludicrous position of the Pogues, having their record banned, but if a radio presenter cared to speak the words, that would be alright, so long as you don't have Shane McGowan singing. I don't know whether that's a protest at Shane's singing or what.

I think that it's up to people in Britain to see that what is a grievous insult to us is in fact more grievous to them. Because we don't expect anything else. It's been done in the name of democracy in Britain, we know it's being done in the interests of imperialism in Ireland, but it's done in the name of democracy in Britain. It is most difficult to get over such a blanket ban without people there bringing about pressure to have it changed. We can continue the dialogue with people in Britain, we can send over delegations. But if you're talking about the broad sweep of the public, that can only be countered by people across there.

**Mick Hume:** One of the many rumours you must have read with interest yourself was that you were going to Westminster to take your seat and protest against the ban.

**Gerry Adams:** There wasn't any truth in that at all. I know that for interested people in Britain it would probably be very intriguing, the prospect of the likes of me going into the Palace of Westminster. But what has to be understood is that the people here in West Belfast elected

me not to. It would be a one-day propaganda victory, against the background of people here feeling fairly firm on the issue, that it's from that parliament that plastic bullet deaths, arrests, etc here are legislated for. It doesn't leave much room for Sinn Fein to take a pragmatic position on the issue because there's a question of sovereignty involved.

**Mick Hume:** So no matter how far this offensive went, you wouldn't consider that to be an option for protest?

**Gerry Adams:** No, I don't think that within the terms of a Sinn Fein public representative that there is room for one to drop abstentionism. I mean there may be room to go and do a press conference there, but I think to actually take the oath would be a major problem which couldn't be overcome.

**Mick Hume:** While we're talking about taking oaths, the first major test of the impact of the ban, both on your political work and on nationalist opinion, is going to be the May local government elections. Alongside these problems, now you've got the oath of non-violence for candidates. What impact is that going to have on your campaign?

**Gerry Adams:** We'll have to look at the detail of it, the exact wording [the interview was conducted a day before the bill was published]. But I am opposed to terrorism, I am opposed to violence. I don't have any problem with that at all. We don't send

Phil Murphy



'The IRA has the right to use armed struggle. But we're opposed to terrorism'

hundreds of young men to their deaths in the Malvinas, we don't organise for Britain to be used as an aircraft carrier for US attacks on Tripoli, we don't support the Contras or the Israelis, we don't have occupation forces abroad. The Sinn Fein position is quite simple; we accept, in the particular circumstances which exist in this part of Ireland, that the IRA has the right to use armed struggle. But we're opposed to terrorism.

**Mick Hume:** If the precondition for standing is that candidates have to make statements which will be publicly interpreted as a distancing from the IRA, would that be acceptable to you?

**Gerry Adams:** I can say that our intention would be to be pragmatic in regard to it. The IRA I think have said some months ago that they were quite confident that Sinn Fein could take up whatever stance it took, and that they would understand that Sinn Fein's role was to represent its supporters, and not be disenfranchised.

**Mick Hume:** Do you think that your core electorate would take a similarly understanding attitude, those who associate closely with the IRA as well as with Sinn Fein?

**Gerry Adams:** I think so. The British started to leak this issue some time ago, so that when it came in everybody shrugged their shoulders and said so what, we'd heard so much about it. But that also had an effect upon the broad republican electorate, because perhaps when it was first hinted they were saying, oh nobody could take that, take a pledge, you couldn't do it. But then as it was argued out and the British ministers defending it were saying 'We just want to stop these people taking their seats', then our people started to take a more fluid position. Sinn Fein has several options open, but within reason, within reason, I think that the electorate see this as an obstruction which must be got over, under or around, and that we can't just allow our opponents to set up obstructions and we say, that's it, the struggle's over and we can all go back home.

**Mick Hume:** So you think that the experience of working in local councils has been beneficial enough to be worth sustaining, even if it means making pragmatic decisions?

**Gerry Adams:** Yes I think that it has been, at all levels. In Belfast City Council it has exposed absolutely the almost fascist nature of Unionism. It also raises questions about what the Social Democratic and Labour Party were doing for all these years. The councils here are very limited, and

I'm not hung-up with that form of government and Sinn Fein isn't hung up with that form of local government, but there has been some success in making the councils more accountable to local people.

It is also an interesting barometer of hardline support. Before this you see the British could just dismiss it; 'It's a minority, they're intimidating people, they're gangsters, they're criminals' and so on. And then when you find a wide range of people, in both rural and urban areas, against all the odds—I mean the bishop here said it was a mortal sin for people to vote for Sinn Fein—against the harassment of voters, against the media propaganda, against the fact that the SDLP, our major rivals, are always given a leg-up like Hillsborough, despite all of that, the fact that 11.4 per cent of voters in the Six Counties still vote for Sinn Fein, shows that there is a bedrock of support there.

**Mick Hume:** How optimistic are you about the coming council elections in this climate of bans and oaths?

**Gerry Adams:** I think it's going to be difficult. Maybe you should come across in the course of the elections because the harassment is fairly intense, and I don't just mean in the visible sense of getting stopped all the time, but also quiet harassment, posters arriving two or three days late, that type of impediment.

Our aim is to hold our vote, and I'd be confident our vote would hold. We have never had the ability, in my view, to match our potential. We have had major logistical problems, and this isn't a whinge, since we started to develop in 1978. You do get shot if you're a Sinn Fein councillor, you do get harassed, you do get the victimisation of your family. There are areas in which we could be picking up votes which would amount to one or two per cent more on the overall total, where we can't stand a candidate, where we can't get an organisation in, where we have one or two activists and a passive support which would manifest itself in votes, but we just can't get it out.

**Mick Hume:** When the Hillsborough accord came in promising reforms, it boosted the SDLP in a couple of elections. There was a feeling among republicans I talked to at the time that this would be short-lived, because as the reforms failed to appear, as the repression continued, things would swing back. How do you assess the Hillsborough factor in nationalist opinion today?

**Gerry Adams:** It's generally acknowledged that there's major disillusionment among those who were led to believe that Hillsborough would mean a breakthrough. The



Joe Boatman

RUC was to be reformed; instead we got the suppression of the Stalker report. The penal system was to be improved; yesterday we got the remission decrease. The judicial system was to be improved; the British rejected outright the suggestion that there was anything wrong with it. Plastic bullets were to be stopped; in June there were 300 fired in one day in the Springfield estate here. So there's a whole range of stuff which hasn't materialised.

Now, that has a number of very interesting effects. First of all it can have an effect on a base of nationalist opinion; 'Well that's it, if we can't even get *that*, we can get *nothing*'. It has an effect of depressing those people; if Dublin and the SDLP between them can't get a simple thing like a legal status for the Irish language, that tends to depress. The other effect is that people can come through an educational process of saying well, now this doesn't work, so the only position is the republican one of having separation from Britain, and we'll work out our own democracy, shape our own society.

It's impossible to quantify these two effects, there's so much propaganda and hype flying about the place. And elections are very poor barometers of the successes or failures of initiatives or offensives, because one could have the SDLP vote standing up, and have media opinion saying 'This proves that there's still support for Hillsborough'.





'Fianna Fail at times is still the nearest thing to anti-imperialism in a relevant part of Ireland'

when in fact it may mean simply that logistically Sinn Fein has been unable to mount a counter, or that people who may be dissatisfied with Hillsborough won't make the psychological leap into the Sinn Fein camp. Or it may be simply that faced with choice between an SDLP or a Unionist, that they would vote out the Unionist.

So if you did a vox pop, the general nationalist opinion is that Hillsborough has failed to deliver. Where it hasn't failed of course, is in what Britain was trying to do. Britain's been fairly honest in this regard, all these promises were made by so-called nationalist supporters of the accord in Ireland to sell it. Britain never made any of those promises; they merely said they would look at some of those issues. What Britain has got is an international treaty, which allows it to ward off international criticism by saying 'Well, we have the agreement of Dublin in how we conduct the affairs of the Six Counties'.

Britain has repression in harmonised form, of an unprecedented nature, what's called cross-Border security. You have a line of gun-posts, 40 feet up in the air, right along the South Armagh Border; locals call it the Hillsborough wall. You have extradition. I've called Hillsborough the jewel in the crown of British counter-insurgency strategy. The Unionists were always the first pillar to protect British

interests. They made a bit of a mess of it over the last 20 years; Britain takes a pragmatic decision and moves Dublin in as a second pillar, hopeful that the Unionists will cop on that this is really in all their class interests. And while they haven't persuaded the Unionists of that, while they haven't persuaded nationalist opinion of their good intentions, what they have done is to create an apparatus which allows the repression which we're now seeing to go on the statute book with the minimum of protest from Dublin.

**Mick Hume:** Talking about the Fianna Fail government's collaboration with Britain and the SDLP's support for Hillsborough brings me to your relations with the constitutional nationalists. The broadcasting ban fits into a British strategy designed to re-isolate the republican movement, since you emerged into the centre of Northern politics after the 1981 hunger-strikes. You have taken various tacks to try to break out of that isolation. Recently you've emphasised the appeal to constitutional nationalists to join a 'national consensus' and campaign against injustices; I notice Danny Morrison made the point at a rally here that the two people who could do most to stop extradition were SDLP leader John Hume and Fianna Fail premier Charlie Haughey. Is appealing to Hume and Haughey a tactic designed to expose their complicity with Britain, because you know they won't respond, or is there some genuine belief on your part that they could move in a progressive direction?

**Gerry Adams:** One has to understand first of all that Fianna Fail, despite its conservatism, despite its repressive nature at different times in regard to republicanism, despite the anti-working class nature of its policies, that Fianna Fail at times is still the nearest thing to anti-imperialism in a relevant part of Ireland. And it's this merely because it gets support from working class people—working farmers, urban, unemployed, and people with a republican instinct.

We have to first of all try and show those people that the leaderships which they have and the parties which they support are merely involved in posturing and in verbalised republicanism. And we have to do so in such a way as these people will realise the truth of what we're saying. If in the course of doing that we create a situation where those party leaderships are forced to take up progressive positions, against their better interests, but because the grassroots says 'You made an election promise' then that again is in the interests of the broader struggle.

So one can take two positions. One can take a position of simply lambasting John Hume or Haughey,

which by extension is telling everybody who votes for them that they're cut of the same cloth, that we're the only smart people, you're so stupid voting for John Hume or Charlie Haughey. Or one can simply take the promises, the verbal positions of these parties, and then look at the living contradiction of the practice of those parties. And that's what that process is about, of trying to move the situation on by, one, creating a climate in which those party leaderships will be forced to take up positions, because of grassroots feeling, or two, with their failure to take up positions where the grassroots will conclude that they're supporting the wrong people.

The Sinn Fein/SDLP talks were slightly different, although those factors came into it as well. The talks were a genuine attempt by Sinn Fein to examine the possibility of the development of a strategy, not a pan-nationalist strategy or a joint SDLP-Sinn Fein strategy but just a strategy, an unarmed strategy by which justice and peace could be pushed onwards, that was the invitation we got and that was what we pursued.

**Mick Hume:** An 'unarmed strategy'?

**Gerry Adams:** What we were invited to do, by a third party, was to examine and explore the possibilities of a strategy for justice and peace. Our view is that armed struggle in these current conditions is legitimate. It's up to those who don't believe it's legitimate to come up with alternatives, not to restrict themselves merely to meaningless denunciations. We went there to look, to listen, to be persuaded that there was some other alternative, and the conclusions showed we weren't persuaded.

**Mick Hume:** We've been talking about the political measures you're attempting to take to deal with the British strategy of isolation. These can re-raise old fears among some of your supporters; the fear that when the republican movement puts an emphasis on politics, it necessarily takes place at the expense of the armed struggle against British imperialism, and has a general moderating influence on the movement. Critics could point today to the involvement in local councils, and the possibility of candidates dissociating themselves from the IRA, to the SDLP talks with the rumours of ceasefires flying around, and suggest that we're seeing a repeat of what happened during the sixties [when the old republican movement effectively abandoned the national question in favour of seeking reforms] or mid-seventies [when the IRA agreed a ceasefire which had disastrous consequences for the republican movement]. What makes you confident that the past will not be re-run?





**Gerry Adams:** Not only do I not think it's a real danger but neither do I think that the same resistance is there that might have been five or six years ago. I think that the activists, and what I call the active base, understand strategy, they're part of the struggle. It isn't as if there's a small clique in some lofty position who look down and say this is the word. People broadly agree with objectives and with main strategy, so that it becomes a matter of deciding which tactics fit which situation. Of course there may be some begrudgery about the place, but generally speaking the broad republican base knows what's what.

In terms of being fairly confident, armed struggle is but an option, there's no such thing as the primacy of armed struggle, it's the primacy of politics that's important. Armed struggle as an option of course is a very, very relevant option given the military occupation. But armed struggle which excludes other forms of struggle, is what happened more by default than anything else for periods in the seventies. When that happened and then there was a ceasefire, when the only form of struggle had been armed struggle and then the IRA made its private arrangement with the British and stopped for a period, it meant there was no struggle. People have come to realise that when there's a broad political struggle, of which armed struggle is but one aspect, when there's cultural struggle, there's economic struggle, there's struggle by women on women's issues, there's struggle on a range of social issues, through electoralism, street protests, propaganda, then you strengthen the overall struggle.

The other thing is that unfortunately, it's the British that dictate. The British have militarised the situation. You have that militarisation of the situation, and you have a tradition in Ireland over many decades of guerrilla warfare. To use the words of a former British General Officer Commanding, while the British Army are here there's going to be an IRA. We just deal with the logic of that and then try to develop the struggle, not in an exclusive way but in an inclusive way.

**Mick Hume:** The logic of that is that, even while your struggle takes place on a broader basis, that the armed struggle is not suspendable, a ceasefire is not an option.

**Gerry Adams:** No. I think that the IRA has made quite clear its terms for a cessation, and what we want is a permanent cessation, a permanent demilitarisation, not just of the IRA but of all the forces, a secure society in which there could be the basis for durable peace, for justice. Those who say 'The IRA should stop', what I

would say to them is, well there's two ways to get them to stop. One is to bring about an end to the cause of the conflict, the quicker you do that the quicker the IRA is going to stop. And two, which isn't exclusive, to develop alternatives.

One thing we put to the SDLP repeatedly was 'You disagree with the IRA, that's fair enough. But you say you want to see Irish unity. Well let's see you getting the Irish unity, let's see you saying so to the British government'. The SDLP never said to the British government, 'By the way, would you ever fancy going home?'. Never! It's quite surprising to me that they never, even if it was just for the crack, they never said 'Well what would you think about leaving?'. Never in all those meetings and conferences and dialogue. And yet they go out in the election and they profess to be a nationalist party.

**Mick Hume:** Finally, we're surrounded by anniversaries marking 20 years of the struggle. The broadcasting ban has been interpreted as an attempt to turn the clock back 20 years, to the days when there was no reporting on what's happening in Northern Ireland, where it's out of sight, out of mind. What would you say were the British government's prospects of bottling it up again?

**Gerry Adams:** I think if you look at the record of the media, the prospects are fairly good. The British public continuously gets shocked by Ireland, shocked by major tragedies like Enniskillen, like Bloody Sunday, like Stalker, by Sinn Fein getting some support, by Bobby Sands. And the reason it gets shocked is because it doesn't know, and the reason it doesn't know is because there's a fairly good job been done to build a paper wall around the country. This act will make it easier for broadcasters to support the government's position and to censor. And the only way it can be opposed is by those who would stand against those injustices and have exactly the same attitude to Ireland as they may have to Nicaragua or South Africa.

# RALLY

**NO MORE BLOODY SUNDAYS!**  
**Friday 27 January 7pm**  
**Caxton House, St John's Way,**  
**London N19**

**Speakers: John Mitchell, sacked general secretary of the Irish Distributive and Allied Trades Union, and an Irish Freedom Movement speaker.**



## New magazines for men

MARKETING  
MASCULINITY

*Vogue* publishers Condé Nast have produced *Vogue Hommes* in France and *L'Uomo Vogue* in Italy for some time, and have published *Gentleman's Quarterly* in the USA for 30 years. Now they have brought *GQ* to Britain: 160 pages of ads, 108 of features and clothes. Boucheron cufflinks, Gucci timepieces, shoes from Polo Ralph Lauren and jackets from Hugo Boss. Chatter from John Lloyd: 'The masses were once defined by work, the elite by leisure: now it is arguably the reverse.' Grub Smith on boxing and William Leith on pit-bull terriers.

*GQ's* editorial, fashion and advertising mix is unexceptional among glam-mags. More remarkable is that it and *Arena* (born 1986) are the only mainstream magazines for men launched in Britain in 20 years. General-interest magazines for heterosexual men seem unable to sustain a mass audience.

## Woman's world

Further down-market, there are no general-interest magazines for men. Here the consumer and leisure market is dominated by home-interest and women's publications. *Bella* sells 1.4m copies a week, the 12 leading women's monthlies often sell 4.1m, the seven biggest home-interest glossies sell a million copies 10-12 times a year. *Arena's* circulation of 66 000 and *GQ's* quarterly target of 50 000 look decidedly modest.

Paradoxically, male readers do keep hundreds of magazine titles going. Consumer and leisure titles published for mainly male readers outnumber those produced for women six-to-one. Add financial, scientific, technical and management magazines, and the volume of male sales easily rivals the women's market. But they do not appeal to gender consciousness. The *Economist*, *What Micro?* or *Angling Times* are absent-mindedly masculine, for chaps interested in a particular thing. Of course there are magazines explicitly aimed at men, but these are also about *doing* rather than *being*. *Mayfair* and *Men Only* are for men who want to

do things to women; they do not tell men how to groom themselves or be an emotional tower of strength. The women's magazine has no male parallel.

In trying to rectify this situation *GQ* faces a practical problem. Where does the newsagent put it? With the 'girlie mags', the women's mags or the motorbike, sailing, or body-building mags? They settled on the business section beside *Newsweek* and *Investor's Chronicle*. *GQ's* launch cover, a full-page of Michael Heseltine, added to the confusion, as one media-watcher noted: 'The man who picks this up because of Michael Heseltine will be put off by the high content of fashion advertising and editorial. Alternatively, Heseltine would deter the younger, more fashion-conscious reader.'

## Better-heeled

At first sight *GQ's* only rival is *Arena*. But *Arena*, from Nick Logan's Wagadon stable, is more *Blitzy* than gentlemanly. Carrying ads for Young Persons' Railcards and offering students the *Times* for 15p, *Arena's* promotions people understand that they are dealing as much with their readers' aspirations as with celebrating their

success. *GQ* is aiming at a slightly older, much better-heeled crowd.

*GQ's* real place is not beside other magazines with man appeal, but up there with *Tatler* and *Harpers & Queen*. These magazines for women do not carry knitting patterns or encourage culinary adventure. Like *GQ* they are above homecraft, romance and sexual advice. *Harpers* has advised on preparing a 'winter picnic' with marinated pork and mulled wine, but its serious household hints are in the ads for butlers, maids and caterers. *GQ* disdains to include such feminine concerns. But it does share the glam-mags' penchant for publishing page after page of handsome people modelling exquisitely made clothes. Except to the filthy rich, these magazines offer only a tantalising chance to gaze at an elegant fable. Yet it is an engaging offer of images from another world. Fashion magazines are luxuries about luxuries.

However, fashion magazines for men have a problem that does not trouble *Prima*: sexual orientation. The US *GQ* is renowned for its beefcake (or is it cheesecake?) ads flaunting the kind of narcissism usually associated with homosexuality. The British version has tried to overcome this with a piece entitled 'What is the strange allure of women in their baths?'. It may be more tasteful than *Arena's* 'Page 303 girls—raising a toast to thinking man's crumpet', but despite attempts to mask homo-erotic undertones *GQ's* advertisers have failed to present their models in entirely wholesome fashion.

This difficulty with decorous images of masculinity

helps to explain the failure of fashion magazines for men to win a mass audience. Masculinity assumes many different guises, but it is always about *not* being an object or doormat, about acting upon the world rather than being used or even adored. As the promoters of Rudolf Valentino, Montgomery Clift, James Dean and Michael Jackson discovered, masculinity is not effectively expressed by presenting men as objects. The defining characteristic of masculinity is possession of the power to manage and command.

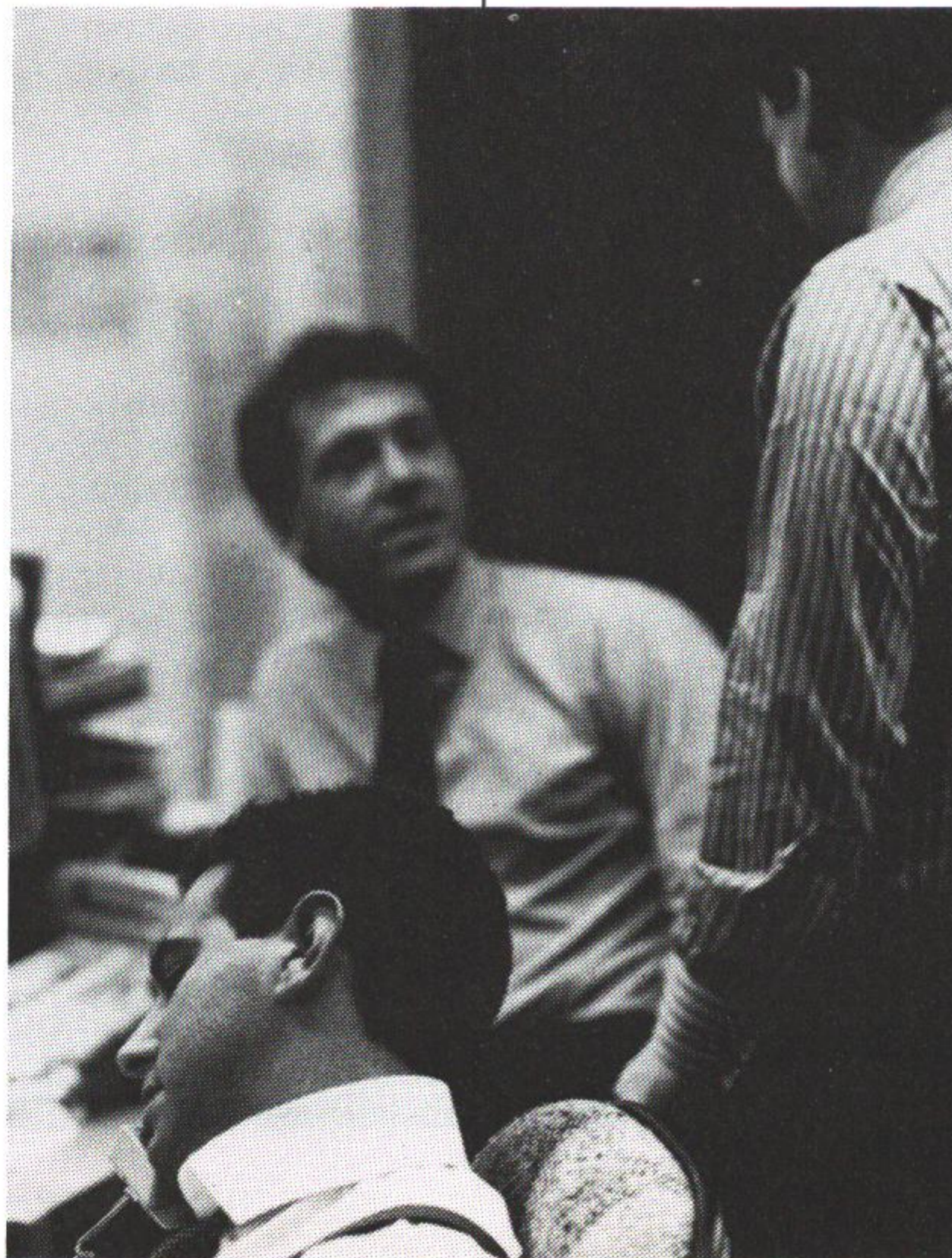
The commanding and resourceful man is quintessentially masculine. *GQ* has got this right; its target audience is the 720 000 men in the UK with incomes of over £18 000. The masculinity of less powerful men is always unstable, and a direct appeal to it cannot be made with any confidence. It must be made through some definite, recognisable quality or accomplishment. That's why publishers of magazines for men tend to appeal to one interest and activity, and rarely to men in general.

## Risking ridicule

The predicament of *Arena* and *GQ* with their tiny market share reveals the limits of clever marketing and lifestyle targeting. Promotions departments and admen cannot overcome the reality that most men are not powerful. The ordinary man cannot triumphantly assert his masculinity without risking the ridicule of the women in his life. Men depend on women for the domestic work and the second income as much as they need women for emotional shelter and sexual companionship. The appearance of society as 'a man's world' is belied by the failure of most men to 'command' or to determine the outcome of anything much. Their masculinity is insecure and has to be approached with subtlety. Joe Blow's manliness is defined only by the even more subordinate position of the women in his household.

This is no problem for women's magazines. They are not required to be subtle. They can appeal to the preoccupations of women directly: how to be a good mum, run a decent home, be sensibly marriageable and nourish the need for romance within the daily grind. It is impossible to approach men in this frank fashion without demolishing the myth that 'it's a man's world'. No wonder *GQ* ignores the reality of most men's lives. They can have no general appeal—particularly not to men.

Don Milligan





Free enterprise in the third world

# Death squad economics

**Frank Richards questions the West's insistence on the benefits of private enterprise in the third world**

Market economics and monetarism are back in fashion in the third world. Agencies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank never tire of boasting that the third world has converted to private enterprise and free competition. According to established wisdom, the third world has suffered from its reliance on state-oriented economic policies. Now that the market has been rediscovered, say the IMF sages, less developed nations can reap the benefits of economic growth.

Ronald Reagan used the annual meeting of the IMF in 1986 to push for an even more thorough-going free market approach. He called upon the IMF 'to put even more emphasis on market-oriented structural reforms'—and to cut off aid to third world states which refused to play ball:

'The World Bank also has a critical role to play in promoting growth in less developed nations.... We welcome an increase in the practice of lending contingent on countries' turning to more market-oriented policies.' (*IMF Survey*, 20 October 1986)

'Bring in the market or else' was Reagan's message. Predictably, Britain has followed suit. As Chris Patten, Tory minister for overseas development informed the house of commons, only those third world countries which accept pro-market policies can expect assistance. Of course, this Western ultimatum to the third world is always presented as a matter of choice, as Patten remarked:

'It is interesting to observe how many aid-recipient countries have turned their backs on fake socialist solutions and chosen to take a more balanced course with greater emphasis on market forces.' (*Guardian*, 19 March 1987)

Patten did not bother to mention that these countries had no alternative but to choose the policies that Western agencies had devised for them. Any attempt to reject market-oriented reforms inevitably invites a Western economic boycott.

At first sight the Reagan/Patten thesis, about the miraculous effects of the shift from state intervention to market economics, appears to be confirmed by experience. Everybody agrees that third world economies



which have adopted 'socialist' policies, such as Guinea, Tanzania, Burma, Ethiopia or Vietnam, are unmitigated disasters. In contrast, the high-flying Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs), such as South Korea and Taiwan, are used to advertise the success of free enterprise. Even the Soviet Union accepts this contrast between stagnant 'Marxist' regimes and dynamic capitalist ones. The Kremlin now counsels third world states to resist the temptation to adopt socialist measures prematurely and to make do with capitalist ones.

The rehabilitation of capitalism in the third world has been nothing short of breathtaking. Until the mid-seventies even right-wing economists were disturbed by the failure of capitalism to boost economic growth in the third world. The general literature on the subject assumed that the capitalist market was at best an irrelevance, or at worst, the problem itself. It became fashionable to denounce international corporations and to celebrate state control over third world economies. Today the boot is on the other foot.

Left-wing academics are now

praising the dynamism of third world capitalism, while socialism is treated as an outdated dogma. A new school of *post-imperialism* argues that imperialism no longer exists and that capitalism is the obvious road ahead. One British academic who claims that he is using 'at various key points' a 'basically Marxist approach' in studying Africa, is concerned with championing the entrepreneur. He is 'interested in business proprietors who are both willing and able to display a capitalist orientation' (P Kennedy, *African Capitalism: The Struggle for Ascendancy*, 1988, p8). A recent influential article by an author from the post-imperialist school puts it straight:

'Three decades of African independence have all but disqualified textbook socialism as an economic strategy for Africa. The economic success stories of South Korea, Brazil, Cote d'Ivoire and, potentially, Kenya, are associated with the repudiation of socialism.' (RL Sklar, 'Beyond capitalism and socialism in Africa', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 26, No 1, 1988)

**ABOVE:** Despite the promises of 'People's Power', right-wing goons terrorise the Philippines



## The Western colonial powers first promoted state intervention in Africa and Asia

Textbook socialism is dead, declare the radical writers—long live the free market!

The obituaries for third world Marxism seem somewhat premature. Most authors use the term 'Marxist' in a cavalier fashion. In a recent article in the *Sunday Telegraph*, any third world regime that depends on state enterprise earns this label (see 'Kings and commissars', 16 October 1988). Of course many third world regimes from Burma to Ethiopia have from time to time called themselves Marxist or socialist, often as a way of winning support from the impoverished masses. But these are just labels, stuck on to a capitalist economy managed by the state. The critics of these regimes are calling into question not Marxism, but state-managed capitalism.

The celebration of the market in the third world is a new phenomenon. Until recently the state's dominant role in third world economies was not seriously questioned. Indeed, the Western colonial powers themselves first promoted state intervention in Africa and Asia. The Western colonial regimes rigidly adhered to the principle of statism. British and French colonial regimes left little to chance and established an institutional framework for regulating the minutiae of economic life.

In a typical colony, the state controlled trade and the distribution of resources. Finance, credit and commerce were closely supervised by a colonial bureaucracy. In many cases the state forced peasants to grow a particular cash crop and prohibited the cultivation of others. Foreign trade was even more closely regulated. Britain insisted that

colonies like India import goods from the Empire and banned the purchase of cheaper goods from North America.

Post-colonial societies did not have to introduce state-managed policies. The infrastructure of administrative control was already at hand, and the new governments simply carried on the practices of their former Western masters. This made sense in any case, since the capitalist class in the third world was generally too weak to operate on its own. It was widely recognised that state control was indispensable to sustain the capitalist system. All third world regimes, left and right-wing alike, adopted a statist approach.

In many third world countries state intervention was justified in the name of socialism. Even some of the most right-wing regimes declared their belief in socialism. Take Kenya, the Thatcher government's favourite African country. The Kenyan government's white paper, *African Socialism*, was adopted in May 1965 as the codification of the state's principles. Yet *African Socialism* was a defence of private property within a framework of state regulation of economic life.

During the fifties and sixties orthodox pro-capitalist economists accepted the centrality of state domination over economic life in the third world. The leading economists of the period all advocated state intervention. The debate was not about whether such an approach was desirable, but about what kind of policy the third world state ought to pursue.

This attitude reflected a rational assessment of the necessary conditions for capitalism in the third world. No third world economy has

been able to survive by relying on the free market. The capitalist class has lacked the resources to go it alone. To compensate for the weakness of the business class, the state has been forced to set the pace. The NICs are no exception. The free market is conspicuous by its absence in South Korea or Brazil. Those who praise South Korea as the model of the free enterprise economy have very short memories. Not so long ago, the voice of British business described South Korea as 'one of the free world's most tightly supervised economies, with the government initiating almost every major investment by the private sector' (*Financial Times*, 1 April 1979).

South Korea may be a capitalist success story but its progress is not the reward of free enterprise. It is no less dependent on state intervention than the so-called Marxist regimes of Ethiopia or Burma. So what makes countries like South Korea and Kenya such favourites with Western capitalists?

### Go West young NICs

During the seventies these regimes adopted policies which brought them closer to the Western economies. The policy of export-led growth looked to Western finance to promote industrialisation. The objective of these policies was to achieve economic development through the stimulus of trade and foreign finance and investment. In practice most of these NICs could not go very far in liberating their trade policies. But their orientation towards Western business assured them of a positive response from international agencies.

For the IMF and Western business today, the NICs provide a stick with which to beat the rest of the third world. Credit and finance are made conditional on the acceptance of IMF policies. These policies usually have the twin objectives of reducing the consumption of the working masses through implementing austerity measures, and opening up the country to imperialist interests.

The new counterposition of free-market NICs to statist Marxist regimes is entirely ideological. Neither group is any less or any more statist in its economic orientation. The qualified success of the NICs is not the product of private enterprise but of the availability of capital, invested under state supervision.

The economic progress made by countries like Brazil, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea only throws into relief the weakness of their capitalist classes. Recent events show that, despite economic growth, capitalists in the NICs are too weak to free themselves from dependence on state institutions. In particular, they require state repression to defend their 'free' economies against the unfree masses.

The peculiar form of economic

Squalor in the capital of 'free' El Salvador





growth in the third world has been enforced by political repression. By using state coercion against popular organisations, it has been possible to restrict living standards and wages. The systematic application of force has allowed the governments of the NICs to implement their policies without yielding to the aspirations of the masses. As a result the regimes that rule the NICs face an irresolvable dilemma. To sustain further economic growth they need to maintain the conditions of repression. Yet unmediated repression only stores up problems for the future. Unrepresentative free enterprise regimes risk provoking an explosion of popular anger on an even bigger scale than that recently experienced in South Korea and Brazil. A modern industrial society cannot survive through repression alone. A degree of consensus is essential to the future of the NICs.

The NIC regimes have tried to transform themselves into a more representative political system; and they have failed. State bureaucracies in the NICs have tried to evolve new forms of political domination to create the appearance of democracy. Brazil, South Korea and Taiwan have all taken steps in this direction. Even the right-wing regime of Augusto Pinochet in Chile promises a return to civilian rule. The record so far has been an unequivocal failure. In almost every case, the capitalist class has been forced to hide behind the military at the critical moment. The fear of a popular upsurge generally outweighs the desire to rationalise the political system.

### Political time bombs

The profound political instability of the NICs is a consequence of the weakness of the entrepreneur class. Even the most successful NICs such as South Korea and Taiwan require repression for their survival. A recent study of the South-east Asian 'miracle' states by an American expert warned of the 'acute danger of political and military insecurity in East Asia'. It concluded that 'none of the East Asian nations, including Japan, is a functioning two-party democracy; and many of them are openly authoritarian regimes led by aged autocrats or presidents-for-life' (C Johnson, 'Pacific regional development: reality and myth', *Asian Pacific Review*, No 7, Summer 1987).

The problem of 'openly authoritarian regimes' and of 'aged autocrats' is of major concern to the West. After the fall of important Western agents like the Shah of Iran and president Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, the question is 'who's next?'. This problem cannot be solved by replacing one unpopular autocrat with another. Nor is the policy of democratisation a viable

option. The capitalist class is too weak to allow the luxury of formal institutions of representation and participation. Elections can be held, as in Pakistan, Chile and Brazil, but only if the military retains the right of veto. Ironically, the 'free enterprise' third world regimes are becoming not less but more repressive. Every step taken towards democratisation is swiftly followed by repression.

The NICs in South-east Asia are the models for third world capitalism. South Korea, the most successful post-war third world economy, faces a permanent political crisis. Despite attempts to integrate the opposition the regime lacks legitimacy. In Singapore, another successful South-east Asian NIC, the situation is worse still. The prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, has turned his regime into a

family affair. Political discussion is focused on speculation about which of his sons takes over when Lee retires. Meanwhile, Lee is busy tightening the screw on any dissent. In recent months moderate bodies like the press, the Law Society and churches have all experienced state attacks.

In the less affluent Asian NICs the increase in repression is yet more evident. The Malaysian prime minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamed, has sought to consolidate his position by cracking down on any opposition. Since April 1987 he has sacked three supreme court judges not to his liking. The media have been muzzled and censorship extended. Mahathir has brought in tough new laws which extend the definition of official secrets. And he has used the Internal



**RIGHT: British colonial governor Sir Charles Arden-Clarke shows Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah how to run the state**



Security Act to jail his opponents.

Many businessmen and middle class professionals find the antics of Mahathir and Lee offensive. As individuals they are far from happy with the petty restrictions that govern their lives. They would doubtless prefer a government run by professionals and businessmen. But whatever their personal preference, they recognise that they lack the weight to live without the generals. In the end they fear the rising expectations of the masses more than the dictates of petty autocrats.

Elections and political liberalisation in third world free enterprise regimes are desperate gambles to pre-empt a mass revolt. In South Korea, the Philippines and Brazil even the middle class took to the streets to demand political reform. However the new regimes that emerged meant only cosmetic changes. The military remains in the background, ready to take command if the new politicians annoy it.

### Tanks and guns

The example of Brazil shows that there are real limits to political reforms in the NICs. For more than a decade the military has sought to establish a stable political front of elected civilians. Their main frontman is president José Sarney. In April 1988, economic problems and allegations of corruption led a majority of assembly members to call for Sarney's removal. Before the vote of no confidence was held the army intervened. General Pires Goncalves warned that 'given the extent of the political and economic crisis, elections this year would not be in the country's best interest'. The *Journal de Brazil's* headline—'The constituent assembly voted under the fear of the coup'—gave a flavour of the atmosphere. Not surprisingly Sarney remained president (see *Latin American Newsletter*, Brazil Regional Report, 28 April 1988). In November the tanks were back on the streets to confront protesting workers.

The forces of law and order don't just pick and choose presidents, they also deal with the opposition. The fear of popular unrest makes the middle classes half-hearted about political reform. It requires a mass upsurge like the one that faced Marcos in the Philippines for major political change to occur. Even then, the changes are more apparent than real. Despite all the hype about 'People's Power' in the Philippines, Corazon Aquino's regime remains subservient to the military. As long as a mass movement constituted a threat, Aquino espoused progressive causes. Since the demobilisation of the masses, Aquino has carried on where Marcos left off, and the military has been given carte blanche to do what it knows best.

The experience of People's Power in the Philippines symbolises the

failure of the NICs to respond to popular pressure. A recent report from the World Bank noted that with 30m living in absolute poverty there are 'more poor people in the Philippines today than at any time in recent history' (quoted in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 August 1988). The number of landless peasants is rising and the promise of land reform has been broken. The military and landlords' private armies terrorise the countryside, attacking those who agitate for land.

The Filipino military is waging internal warfare. During the summer of 1988 it murdered five human rights lawyers, and dozens of trade unionists have been killed in recent months. The growth of right-wing death squads has taken a more ominous turn since last summer. The Aquino regime has set up Special Operations Teams, which carry out 'social investigations' of villages. Communities found to be anti-government are bombed. Crispin Rettran, a leading trade unionist, has called it 'an undeclared state of martial law with a liberal façade' (*Philippine Support Group Newsletter*, September 1988).

Events in the Philippines show the limits to political liberalisation in the NICs. Aquino's death squads, like those of Pinochet or Sarney, are the guarantors of the free market. The necessity for these squads and for the involvement of the military in political affairs show that these societies are no more free than the market that is supposed to have brought economic growth. The state must intervene in every aspect of society to keep the third world safe for capitalism. Reagan and Thatcher's smug comments about the revival of free enterprise in the third world are a celebration of the jackboot and the death squad. These are the policies which Reaganomics and Thatcherism prescribe for the third world.

### Western vultures

The fashionable denunciation of third world Marxism is an ideological justification for Western domination. The question of Marxism is not at issue, since the regimes singled out for vilification run capitalist economies under state supervision. In this respect these regimes are no different from the NICs upheld as models in London and Washington.

The Western powers promote the market and liberal economic policy to strengthen their influence over the third world. This is vital if the West is to limit the potential dangers posed by third world debt. Liberal economic programmes aim to force third world governments to meet their obligations to Western bankers. The call for third world states to relax their role in the economy is an order that governments must make

the repayment of loans their first priority.

The central role of the state makes it impossible for many third world countries to implement the IMF's market-oriented policies. Governments accept the rhetoric, then carry on as before. Acceptance of IMF ultimatums should not be confused with conversion to the free market. The IMF itself recently pointed to the gap between what third world governments promise, and what they are really able to do:

'The intermittent nature of domestic policy implementation and the continued exceptional financing requirements of many of the heavily indebted countries have done nothing to enhance the group's creditworthiness.' (*IMF World Economic Outlook*, October 1988)

At the first opportunity third world governments tear up the market-oriented policies forced down their throats by the IMF.

So, what of the so-called Marxist regimes? As Marxists we have no wish to imply that these regimes are progressive or that they represent a positive way forward. They are distinguished from the NICs not by economic policy, but by the fact that they are less subservient to imperialism than a Taiwan or a Chile.

### Free market fallacy

Those who criticise these regimes for their economic problems are hypocrites. Famine and poverty did not begin with the so-called Marxist regime of Ethiopia—they were only too prevalent under the monarchy of Western stooge Haile Selassie. The economic devastation of Nicaragua is not the fault of dogmatic Marxists sitting in Managua; it has 'Made in the USA' stamped on it. In Mozambique, 'freedom fighters' sponsored by South Africa are responsible for destroying the economy. As for Washington's favourite red-baiting story, that of Kampuchea, it is worth recalling that, during the Vietnam War, the US airforce dropped more bombs on Kampuchea than were exploded throughout the Second World War. Is it surprising that after this barbaric devastation a barbaric regime like that of Pol Pot came into being? No more surprising than that the freedom-loving Reagan regime has ended up financing the very same Pol Pot, to destabilise Vietnam.

The myth of the resurgent free market in the third world is about as plausible as the triumph of popular capitalism and a share-owning democracy in Britain. In theory the celebrated free market sounds like a good idea. The trouble is that it does not work.

●

The fashionable  
denunciation of  
third world  
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ideological  
justification for  
Western  
domination



**HUE AND CRY.  
REMOTE**



**RAGGIONIA**

*Sforza*



*Uccina*



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January 1919

# BRITAIN ON THE BRINK OF REVOLUTION

In 1919 the British establishment faced the most coherent challenge to the rule of capital of any time before or since.

The First World War had provided the ruling class with a breathing-space to reorganise its forces after the radical upheavals of the pre-war years. Yet no sooner had the war ended than the establishment was thrown into disarray once again by a major upsurge of working class unrest.

An editorial in the *Times* at the start of the year betrayed

George began to have nightmares about the spread of Bolshevism. To add to the panic, mutinies in the police and armed forces left the establishment desperately short of reliable troops to deal with the raging unrest. The ruling class could save its neck only with the help of the official labour leaders, who often proved incapable of restraining rank and file militancy.

Industrial militancy spread like wildfire. Miners demanded a 30-hour week, abolition of piecework, a 30 per cent

On 13 January the *Glasgow Herald* decried the mutiny of sailors on *HMS Kilbride* under the headline 'British Sailors Hoist Red Flag'. The *Workers Dreadnought* reported how soldiers in Maryhill and Hamilton refused to take part in displays of armed force against strikers on the Clyde. Police strikes against the government's ban on union organisation sent shudders through the state.

Most worrying of all for the ruling class was the powerlessness of the official union leaders. 'The strikes in Belfast, Glasgow and London, as well as smaller strikes elsewhere, have one factor in common', commented the *Times* with dismay. 'They are in every case unauthorised by the governing bodies of the trade unions whose members are involved. This fact cannot be too plainly stated.' (28 January 1919) The government went out of its way to bolster the position of the official labour leaders by offering concessions to enhance their standing among their members.

## Postponed

The ruling class avoided making a show of strength from a position of obvious weakness. It postponed the showdown until the odds were in its favour. Tory leader Bonar Law recognised the essentially conservative role of the union leaders, arguing that 'trade union organisation was the only thing between us and anarchy'. With the help of union chiefs the government was able to play for time, persuading them to suspend strike action among the miners for example. When unemployment rose and a climate of economic insecurity forced workers on to the defensive, the employers launched an all-out offensive. By the end of 1921 the ruling class was back in the driving seat.

The defeats of the period from 1918-21 cannot be blamed on the power of the capitalist class. The British state was not at all confident about the outcome of a confrontation between itself and the working class. Yet while the establishment experienced a profound political

crisis, it won through because the working class lacked a leadership which could mount a decisive challenge to the power of the state. The rank and file movement became a victim of its narrow brand of militant trade unionism.

The outlook of the trade union militants was far too limited. They saw the class struggle primarily in terms of industrial disputes, and were unconscious of the necessity to forge an independent proletarian position on every issue. Class conflict in industry often coincided with class harmony on matters of foreign policy, Empire and foreign competition. The prevailing sentiment of British nationalism was never challenged.

The revolutionary groups which grew in this period reflected the narrow obsession of the labour movement with trade union matters. The left was so preoccupied with industry that it failed to champion the cause of women's suffrage or the fight for Irish freedom. It made no real effort to influence the mutinous forces to build a revolutionary movement. Under these circumstances defeat for the working class was only a question of time. The working class lost because it was fighting a limited battle on industrial issues at a time when the class war was about every issue affecting British society.

## Oblivious

The central problem facing the working class movement in 1919 was its indifference to the question of state power. The ruling class took the threat of working class action seriously and organised its forces to deal with every eventuality. While the state geared up for war against the working class, trade union militants remained oblivious of the need to fight the state machinery. This casual attitude to the issue of state power coexisted with an underestimation of the need for a revolutionary party. The various left-wing groups continued with the old perspective of trade union militancy, while declaring a meaningless faith in revolution.

The success of revolution can never be guaranteed. But if a revolutionary alternative is entirely absent the working class will not even be in with a chance. The failure of revolution in 1919 had nothing to do with the British climate, culture or character, as many would have us believe. It was above all a consequence of the failure of revolutionary leadership.

Lesley Banham



Glasgow's 'Bloody Friday', when strikers fought police in George Square

the sense of panic on the part of a capitalist class which was well and truly overstretched:

'The past two months have not been unlike the first month or two after the declaration of war in the sense that they have been a period of uncertainty tinged with foreboding. Nobody could say definitely what was going to happen next in any workshop, works or industry...the most uncertain factor of all is the attitude and temper of the workers.' (14 January 1919)

The establishment had good cause for uncertainty.

Across the country discontent was growing fast, as a confident working class fought hard to consolidate its position. The Russian Revolution had a positive impact on the class struggle in Britain, and the coalition government under Liberal leader Lloyd

wage increase and control of the industry. On the Clyde tens of thousands of engineering and shipyard workers under the leadership of the Clyde Workers Committee launched the 40-hours strike. The headlines splashed across the front page of the *Times* on 31 January—'Discontent Among Railwaymen', 'Paralysis of Belfast', 'Lawlessness in Lanarkshire', 'Strikers' Terrorism', 'Gangs of Revolutionaries'—testified to the escalating strife. The strike wave engulfed nearly every industry and service, affecting railwaymen, transport workers, textile operatives, boilermakers, barbers, cooks and waiters.

## Mutiny

In January there were regular reports of demonstrations by soldiers demanding demobilisation; 10 000 soldiers mutinied in Folkestone, refusing to return to France.



The Next big thing

# Designer capitalism

**Are the current claims for design justified? Gemma Forest thinks not**

In Hammersmith, west London, stands 'the most famous nightspot in the world', the gaudy, gigantic Palais; *Le Palais*, as the fascia puts it, in hand-written purple neon. Of late, a hedge and bushes have been planted on the pavement outside, brightly-lit by spotlights. Like Margaret Thatcher, the Palais has gone green.

In using design to attempt the leap from dingy dancehall to naturalistically-styled brasserie, the Palais is but one example of the impact that design has had on British society in the eighties. George Davies' chain of glossy Next stores and Sir Ralph Halpern's carefully consumer-segmented Burton group have led a transformation in the high street. In the City of London and the Docklands, sites like Broadgate and Canary Wharf have given architects multi-million pound contracts to design giant offices and leisure facilities. Now Britain's mounting trade deficit in manufactures has refocused attention on the design excellence of Continental cars,

domestic appliances and furniture, and of Japanese consumer electronics. From the ecologically-sound disco to the National Economic Development Office, everybody has something to say about the importance of design.

The claims now made for design, especially British design, are the greatest yet: Tory trade and industry minister Eric Forth recently told a conference in Singapore that industry should see design 'as an investment, not a cost' (*Design Week*, 22 October 1988). Good design is said to bring businessmen more custom in retail and leisure outlets, higher productivity in the workplace, and wider markets for products.

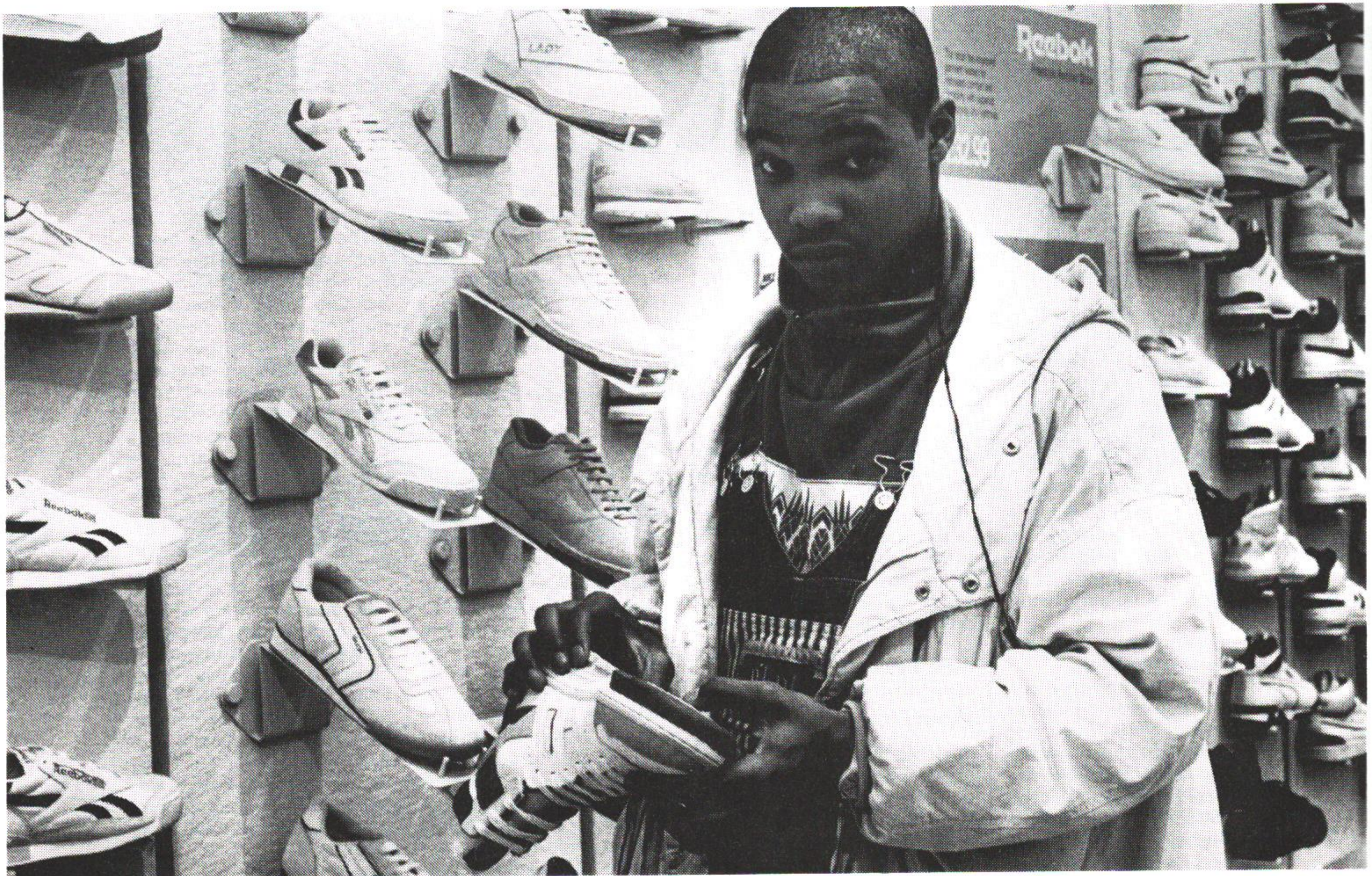
Through the Design Council, the Tories have pumped about £100m into exhibitions, prizes, PR campaigns and consultancy around design. Indeed design consultancy is now a small 'industry' in its own right: including architecture, the world market for it is worth £6 billion. Top British design

consultancies employ 500 people each, have their share prices quoted on the stock market and, increasingly, are international corporations. A breathless management consultant has summed up the explosion of turnover among Britain's independent design agencies:

'In other business sectors the market leader might achieve 50 per cent growth—for the top 100 firms in the sector to achieve this is incredible. Truly the design business boomed in 1986-7.' (*Financial Times*, 6 July 1988)

'Prospects', concur blue-blooded stockbrokers James Capel, 'are equally as good for the future' (*The Design Consultancy Marketplace*, May 1988). It's the same story in the USA, where *Business Week* argues that, 'after relegating design to the backseat in the seventies, US manufacturers are once again discovering that it is key to industrial competitiveness'.

For most of us, the price label is still the one that matters





Ever since 1977, when Charles Jencks published *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, critics more 'cultural' than *Business Week* have joined in the new enthusiasm for design. Jencks, the popular American commentator Tom Wolfe (*From Bauhaus to Our House*) and others celebrate design that overturns the earnest, plain-and-simple slogans of modernist design—'less is more', 'truth to materials', 'form follows function'—in favour of a wittier, more decorative, pluralistic approach. For them the design of environments (architectural and interior design), products (industrial design), and images for print or screen (graphic design) should be ornamental, full of ironic references to design history, or redolent of Empire. They hope that uniform office blocks, high-rise flats and Braun toasters have given way to an era of 'post-modern' design, in which designers can freely experiment with the technology and aesthetics of consumption.

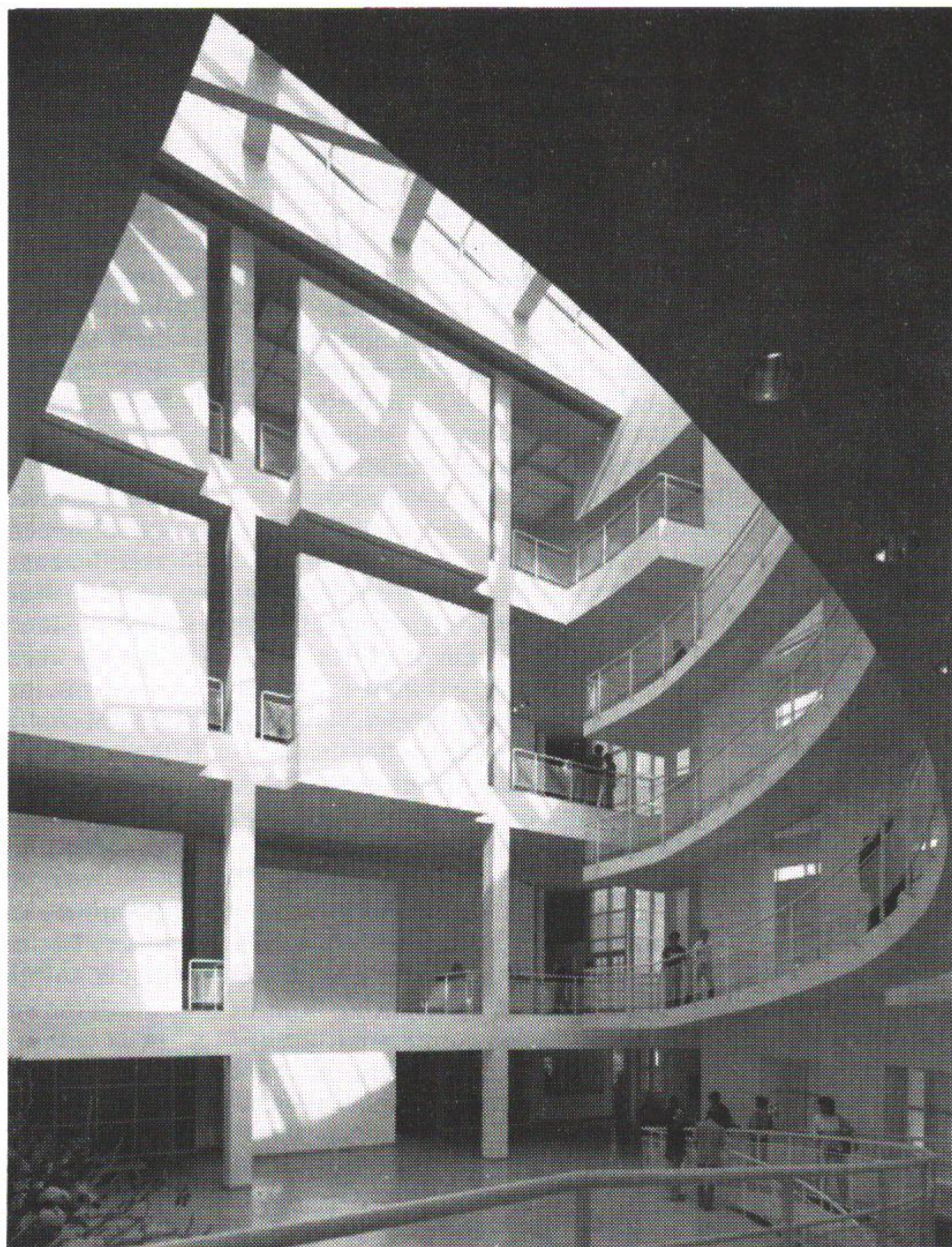
But is design really so powerful? Does it deserve the praise heaped upon it as a motor for economic growth in Britain? And what is the significance of the vogue for bells, whistles and everything post-modern in design?

### Driven to distraction

The fad for design signals economic desperation, not dynamism. British business is keen to play up the quality, special features and symbolism of commodities, to distract from how much they cost to make and buy. In inflationary Britain, where decades of industrial decay have made productivity a taboo topic, bourgeois society would rather discuss aesthetics than prices. The more the British economy lurches towards crisis, the more expensive and far-fetched grow tastes for design. The craze for design is an attempt to hang some flimsy finery around the unattractive remains of British 'enterprise'. Worse, much more is promised of design than the system can deliver.

Design is, for example, still a poor relation of advertising. While the market for British design consultancy is worth £1 billion, that for advertising, promotion, market research and public relations is worth about £12 billion. Why? Because it's a lot easier to broadcast hype about products than it is to improve them through design. Anyway, the biggest growth market for British design consultancy in the eighties has not been in design for manufactured products at all. It has been in the more transient, more ephemeral world of retail design.

The rise of design in Britain is intimately bound up with a broader collapse away from manufacturing and into services like retailing. Design groups like Conran, David



Davies Associates and McColl have boomed in the rush to refurbish BHS, Woolworths, Rumbelows and the rest. But even British retailers spend, at most, £200m on design each year—not much, given that they took £120 billion through the tills last year.

UK retailers have been able to throw some crumbs to designers because financiers have moved out of unprofitable manufacturing and primed the retail sector, among others, with credit. Retailers have turned to design, not to transform shopping into an art-form, but as a panic measure to increase sales by any means. There are already signs of a disappointed reaction against design. Faced with overcapacity in retail space, a rash of mergers and acquisitions, the rise of foreign rivals (Benetton, Ikea, Elder), burgeoning consumer debt and spiralling interest rates, many British chain managers feel that twinkly low-voltage lights and exotic maple floors cannot rescue their companies from sluggish sales performance and depressed share prices. A slump in projected profits wiped £80m off Next shares last month alone.

Apart from the retail sector, the British craze for design is heavily based on the City. The deregulation of financial services and the Big Bang of 1986 prompted a boom in furniture and office design for the

Square Mile and its surroundings. Pillars of the City like Midland Bank and the Prudential have spent vast sums on retail and graphic design to drum up consumer business. Today no new stock market launch or takeover announcement is complete without the connivance not only of a City bank and a public relations house, but also of a graphic design team to take charge of corporate identity, literature, exhibitions and so on.

All this reveals design not as cause of entrepreneurial virility, but as symptom of economic parasitism. The fortunes of British design now depend on how much of a killing the financial services sector can make. Thus when the City profits from shake-downs around the world or from shake-outs, privatisations and foreign acquisitions in British industry, design prospers. But this is about all. There are no grounds for celebrating design as a magical accelerator of indigenous economic growth.

A look at the role of design in manufacturing dispels many myths about its role in revitalising the economy. Where it is not dominated by defence, much of British manufacturing consists of firms in food and drink like Allied-Lyons, Imperial Group and Grand Metropolitan. A big market for graphic and packaging design exists

It's a lot easier  
to broadcast  
advertising  
hype about  
products than it  
is to improve  
them through  
design

ABOVE: Modernism's last stand?: Richard Meier's High Museum of Atlanta



here. Yet in food and drink, design is used not just to inveigle consumers into buying Mars bars and Guinness, but to reinforce the client's stock market value. After Eight packs, Newcastle Brown bottles and the consumer brand loyalty they encourage have helped make both Rowntree and Scottish & Newcastle attractive to foreign bidders. Thus even in 'fast-moving consumer goods', as the ad-men call it, design again acts as servant to the City. Far from galvanising British business into world leadership, it makes the remaining morsels of British manufacturing look tastier to foreign predators.

Once we reach consumer durables and machinery, it is clear that British design is only skin deep. The latest Design Council exhibition, 'Drawn in Britain', is full of products conceived by British designers—but made abroad. British manufacturers aren't profitable enough to spend money on design: compare, for example, a BMW with an Austin Rover Maestro. The myopia of British manufacturers towards design runs so deep that the Design Council has recently given up financing firms in need of design consultancy. Itself subject to swingeing cuts, the council has now turned to supporting not factories but...design studios.

### Designer sweatshops

The fact that the design boom is concentrated in the economic sectors on which Britain now depends has important implications. As Tony Kennedy has argued in *Living Marxism*, financial services are unproductive of value and surplus-value, and thus form a burden on capitalist profits (see 'Lawson's luck is running out', November 1988). The same is true of retail services: they help manufacturers to turn over a high mass of commodities, but add no new value to them. The prospects for British design are bound up with these two sectors. Yet if both live off value produced elsewhere, and both are subject to the swings and roundabouts of credit and speculation, it follows that Britain's design consultancies, parasites on the backs of these parasites, are far from secure.

Much has already changed since the last spate of redundancies in UK design, which occurred in September 1986. Since then, according to *Design Week* ('Global gladiators,' 1 July 1988), 10 British design firms—including design subsidiaries of giant ad agencies Saatchi & Saatchi, WCRS and WPP—have come to dominate the world. They do business in Europe, America and the Western Pacific because the British market for design is too weak and competitive. They have set up studios not only across the Channel and the Atlantic, but in third world Singapore.

The outlook for British design employers, like that for the British capitalist class as a whole, is dependent on movements in the world economy. As a result, the top UK design firms have already become sweatshops, in which intercontinental fax machines impose long hours and impossible deadlines. Particularly through retailer clients harassed by chancellor Lawson's credit crackdown, the squeeze is being put on every design consultant. The glamour is about to go out of design.

Rave reviews for design from establishment spokesmen bear no relation either to the role it plays in the British economy or to its future destiny. But the liberal left has design equally wrong. It sees in contemporary developments in design confirmation that capitalism has entered a newly-dynamic, post-modern age. Let us highlight some of the trends which are presented as proof of this.

**'Shops are stages'/'I shop therefore I am':** For many cultural critics the 'social theatre of consumption' to which the individual goes to have his or her act of consuming watched, has supplanted capitalist production as the pivot of contemporary society. As a result of their new preoccupation with consumer culture, the left critics endlessly debate audacity versus conservatism in high street design, generally favouring the frills of Next to the melamine of MacDonald's.

**'You are what you own':** Critics contend that all talk of the working



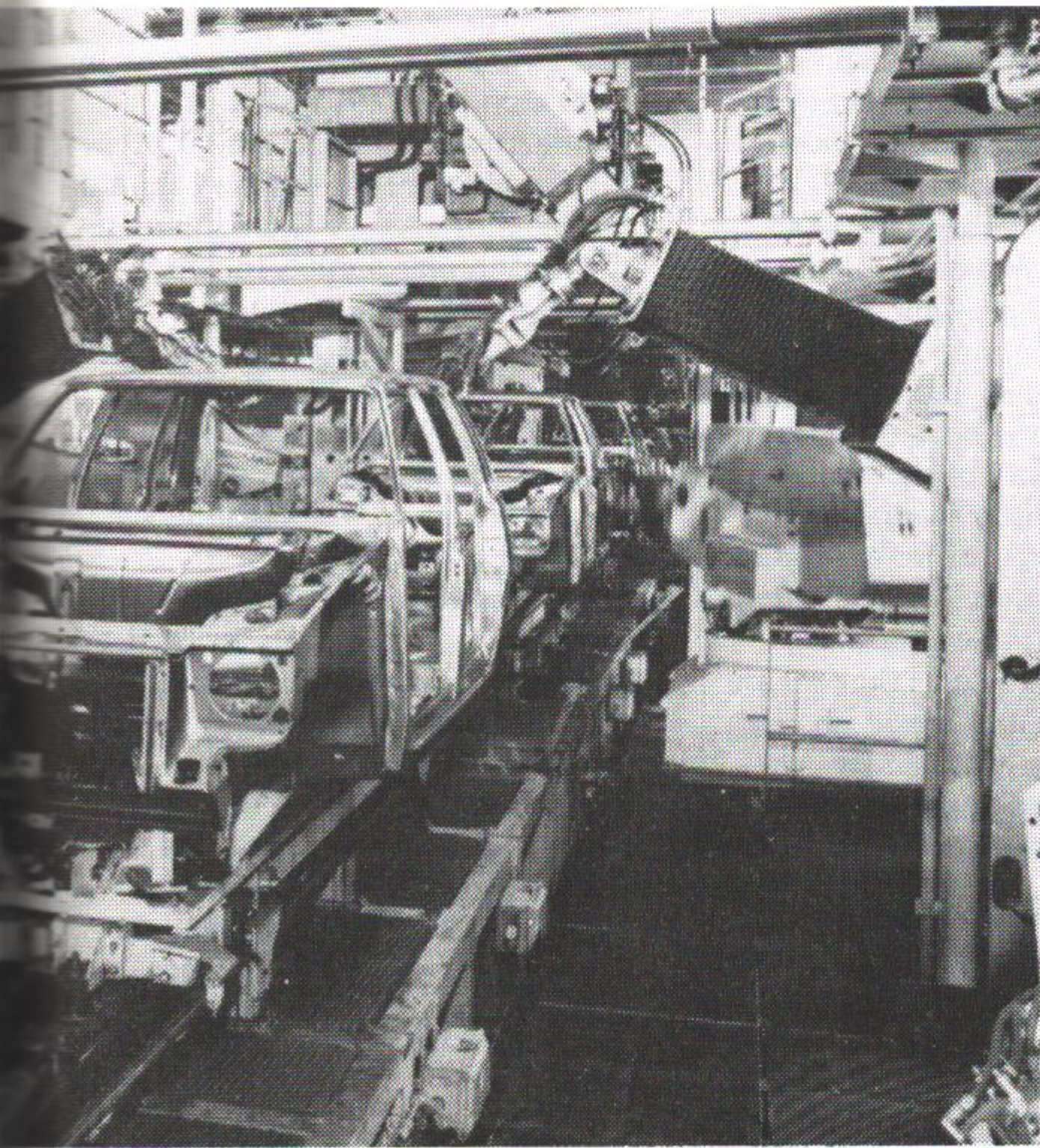
class is now hopelessly outdated. For them we are a mass of highly-variegated individuals, each expressing identity through homes and other possessions. 'Lifestyles', 'aspirations' and brightly-coloured Nike trainers: these are what count now, not wages, working conditions and drab uniforms. We are supposed to have entered a world of self-fulfilment through consumer decisions, in which we can be liberated by the compasslike personal selection of goods conceived by 'name' designers.

Pandora Anderson



RIGHT: The latest Next thing on Oxford Street





Robotic welding at Fiat's Mirafiori plant

**'Flexible manufacturing systems (FMS) have inaugurated a new era':** According to the radicals, FMS have turned Japan into a 'perpetual innovation economy' (T Morris-Suzuki, 'Robots and capitalism', *New Left Review* 147, 1984). As a result of the programmability of today's assembly lines, we learn, a shift from mass, uniform production to rolling out short runs of customised products now makes commercial sense. If a motorist wants extra-thick rubber bumpers, go-faster stripes, even furry dice, a company like Toyota will soon oblige him: indeed, he may one day be able to key in instructions for this himself. For design cultists, anything is possible with technologies like FMS. As one observer puts it, they 'offer staggering opportunities to the makers of nearly all engineered products' (J Thackara (ed), introduction to *Design after Modernism*, 1988, p27).

Individualism expressed through the act of purchase and the pleasure of owning beautiful consumer durables; hi-tech crafts; boundless options in design—the post-modern champions provide quite a vision. Yet it is one which reflects the collective amnesia of the visionaries. The left now touts consumer 'choice' and design as a means of orienting yourself in life, as a road to freedom. But it was not so long ago that the left had a very moralistic distaste for the trappings of consumer society.

In 1960, for example, Vance Packard presented the first exposé of the outrageous habit of building 'planned obsolescence' into products. His sensational best-seller *The Wastemakers* was then picked up by Herbert Marcuse, whose famous manifesto *One-Dimensional Man* inveighed against America's \$1000 luxury fall-out shelters, complete

with carpeting, Scrabble and TV. In patronising style, the left of the post-war boom highmindedly bemoaned the 'materialism' of an allegedly affluent American working class, which it viewed as dispiritingly subordinate to finned limousines and gleaming fridges. As late as 1971, when Victor Papanek wrote his international best-seller *Design for the Real World*, Western design was indicted for its meretriciousness, its presumption and its unsuitability for the third world.

No longer. Today's radical design critics are convinced of the benefits of individual consumption, and obsessed with the shape and style of what we sit in, wear or inhabit. They have adapted their views to suit the mood of the Thatcherite times. To repeat: time was when the left used to attack capitalism for making things which stimulated and responded to needs which it considered base and artificial—electric cocktail stirrers, blister-pack food containers and so on. Now, by contrast, the designer left has few strictures about what capitalism churns out. It is content to revel in the flowering of a thousand design styles.

In upholding post-modern design, these critics applaud the reactionary appeal to individualism that has characterised the Thatcher years. They miss entirely the sense in which the embroidering of environments, products and graphics has more to do with companies' desperation in the face of impending economic crisis than with unfettered creativity on the part of designer geniuses, or with leisurely discrimination on the part of freewheeling consumers. They miss, too, the exploitative production process behind the shop-fronts and style waves.

### What's in it for them?

There is nothing new or mysterious about design's role for capitalism. As early as the eighteenth century, architect Robert Adam designed furniture for his clients and had it made elsewhere (P Sparke, *Consultant Design: The History and Practice of the Designer in Industry*, 1983, p6). By the 1830s the shift from simple manufacture to the steam-powered mass production of machines by machines made design a matter of national significance to Britain. Prime minister Robert Peel had it debated in the house of commons. And more than 150 years before Prince Charles complained of 'monstrous carbuncles', Prince Albert impelled the state to set up schools in design.

Design grew in importance for two reasons. First, any interruption to new automatic processes meant idle machinery, unexploited workers and lower profits. Here engineering design—a discipline much ignored by today's design faddists—became critical. Second, any interruption to

the purchase of products meant that surplus-value already accumulated in the factory could not be realised. This tended to put good product design at a premium, for a well-designed product could guarantee its producer a market more reliably than a poorly-designed one.

Designers, then, gained strength not because of capital's progress, but because their skills were needed to offset the already relentless pressure on profitability. Design was summoned to avoid a crisis: it didn't found any boom. Note, however, that—contrary to the views of Packard and Marcuse—design was never just a manipulative plot to con gullible workers into buying things, to overcome 'underconsumption' in society. By far the most vital 'consumers' of design were capitalists in need of machines. Even today, big orange JCB excavators and yellow Lancer-Boss forklift trucks tend to dominate the awards given out by the Design Council.

### Fancy wrappers

From the first, design was a device used by capitalists to offset recessionary pressures. Every capitalist, noted Karl Marx, 'searches for means...to give his wares new charms' (*Grundrisse*, 1973, p287). Design was just one of those means and Marx would willingly have added persuasive advertising, magnetic shops and interest-free credit to his list.

Yet while capital in general falls back on design to smooth the production and realisation of profit, in the mind of the individual capitalist all is reversed: a mythology of design grows up. If an engineering designer can rationalise the labour-process or cut the number of parts needed, this allows the capitalist to undercut his rivals and so increase his market share at their expense. If a designer can improve an article's functional features or aesthetics, the employer can sell a greater use-value—and up his market share. In the first case, technical ingenuity in design appears to the capitalist as the source of his extra profit; in the second, creativity does the same trick. In both, the exploitation of workers in the process of production, leave aside the exploitation of the designer, is obscured. What is really a redistribution, between capitalists, of already-produced surplus-value, appears to the individual capitalist as a magical increase in profit through design. Today's radical critics have effectively adopted this subjective and misleading view of the independent role of design.

The exploitation of labour is the source of profit; design can only improve 'competitive edge', and allow one company to grab a piece of somebody else's profits for a while. The only reason design has come to the fore is that the recession has





'Designer' is now a label used to dress up another round of unremarkable, volume-produced goods

intensified the competitive struggle between capitalists. Today's design is superficial in the sense that it is primarily used as a cheap smash-and-grab alternative to capital investment. Thus when America's foremost management guru, Tom Peters, follows a diagnosis of US economic decline with the bold-type command 'Add at least 10 value-increasing "differentiators" to each product or service every 90 days', it is clear that design in general and bells-and-whistles post-modernism in particular are signs of entrepreneurial despair, not fortitude (see *Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution*, 1987).

So what of the theorists who say 'I shop, therefore I am' and 'You are what you own'? Their glorying in individual consumption ignores the continuing collective experience of exploitation endured by the working class. They entirely overlook the millions in British society who are

forced by economic circumstances to restrict their shopping to such 'stages' as the Co-op and Oxfam. They also grossly exaggerate what designer capitalism offers those people with a little more money to spend.

These days 'designer' is a label used to dress up another round of unremarkable, volume-produced goods. Presented as a return to the specialised artisan shops of old, the chains at the centre of the high street 'revolution' are little more than spruced-up outlets for mass-produced tat. The constant cycle of designing and redesigning these shops is supposed to convince us that we are entering a brave new world of consumer choice, when in fact we wind up spending our hard-earned wages on the same boring old goods.

### Design in perspective

Flexible manufacturing systems driven from living-room keyboards are a mirage. There are just 280 FMS

installations in the West. The Western market for robots *shrank* by 25 per cent from 1985-87. FMS manufacturers often go bankrupt today, and attention has now shifted from making factory-floor robots to building simpler models for the service and consumer sector. 'Humans expect too much from robots', pronounces the *Economist* (15 October 1988). Capitalism turns humans into robots with ease; it will never be able to develop robots as intelligent as humans.

Is all design bad? Not at all. Design is, more than art, dictated by the state of capital accumulation—but it can still display integrity, whether modernist or post-modernist. We should not object to design, but to those Utopians who imagine that its expansion is a mark of social progress. Green hedges outside the Palais might obscure an eyesore; but they can't hide the degeneration of an entire economic system.

## Modernist vs post-modernist design

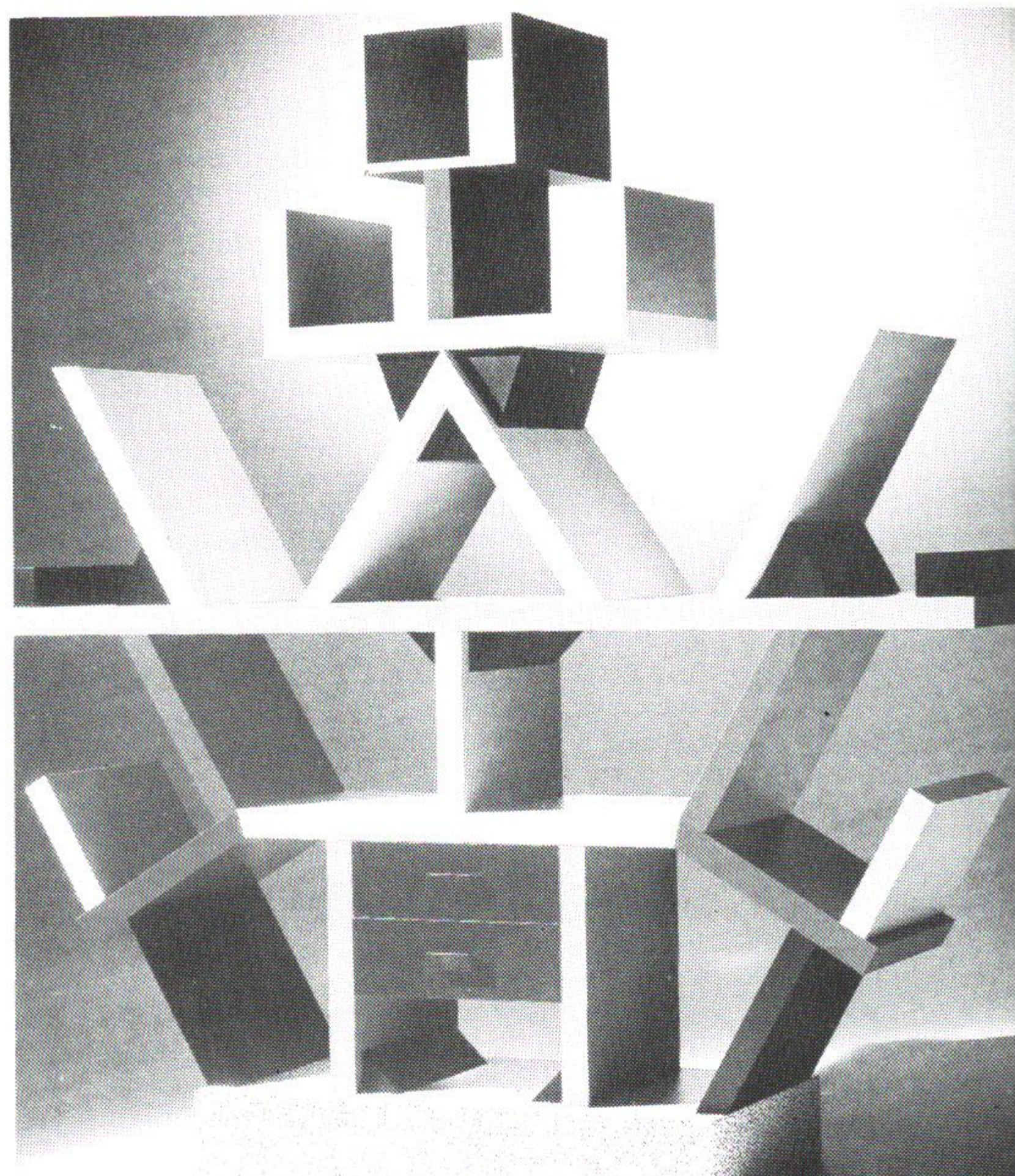
The Bauhaus—a school in design opened by architectural theorist Walter Gropius in Germany in 1919—is generally agreed to be the founding place of the modern movement. Yet the principles of inter-war modernism had precedents way back, in the skyscrapers which American architect Louis Sullivan executed in the 1890s. Sullivan's stripped-back steel and glass department stores and offices were built according to his slogans 'less is more' and 'form follows function'. Other early modernists in architecture and furniture included America's Frank Lloyd Wright and Scotland's Charles Rennie Mackintosh. They were followed by inter-war modernists like the French architect Le Corbusier ('a house is a machine for living in') as well as Germany's Mies van der Rohe.

The modernists' rational, no-frills, pro-standardisation approach to design, and their commitment to technology as a metaphor for the way things should look, had much to recommend it. Yet even in the post-war boom, when resources were available to turn modernism from academic doctrine to mass commercial reality, the artefacts of modernism were built on less-is-more budgets, reflecting the dictates of the profit system. Crumbling high-rise flats in Britain and America are notorious monuments to modernist design within the constraints of capitalism.

Today, with the exception of architects such as Richard Meier (author of the all-white High

Museum of Atlanta), modernism is weak and post-modernism much stronger. Philip Johnson's Chippendale-spoof skyscraper for AT&T in New York, as well as the provocatively-coloured, densely-patterned furniture of Milan's Ettore

Sottsass, are examples of post-modern architecture and design. Post-modern designers share with post-Keynesian economists a belief that individualism is more important than 'planning' in the world of production.



RIGHT: Should every home have one?: post-modernist book case



# reviews

## Guestworkers in Germany

### HOW LOW CAN YOU GET?

Günter Wallraff, *Lowest of the Low*, Methuen, £4.99

You may have seen the award-winning film on TV; now we have the book which has sold two and a half million copies in Europe. *Lowest of the Low* is about racism in West Germany,

He took the dirty jobs which no German would do, at least not at such low rates. He shovelled fishmeal, cleaned toilets, worked on building sites. At McDonald's in Hamburg, he worked for eight hours without a break despite the blisters from hot fat and the racial taunts from customers. He drew the line at subjecting himself to radiation in a nuclear plant. A former power station worker warned him 'When there are breakdowns, then usually the Turks are sent in. They are sent into the contaminated, hot area to stop the gap, and have to stay there until they've been



Chancellor Kohl's government embraces Germans from the East, while kicking non-Europeans out into the cold

about the daily reality for millions of immigrant workers—low pay, racial abuse and dangerous and humiliating working conditions.

Günter Wallraff is an investigative journalist of rare quality. His motto: 'One must disguise oneself in order to unmask society.' So for two years from 1983 he became Turkish Gastarbeiter (guestworker) Levent (Ali) Sinirlioglu ('that's not a name, it's an illness' a German tells him). It was not easy for a middle-aged balding German who speaks the Cologne dialect, but assisted by dark contact lenses and a hairpiece, 'Ali' even fooled chancellor Kohl's security men.

exposed to doses of 5000 milliremes. That may take hours, but in some cases it's only minutes or even seconds. The workers call it "burning up" .

In passages that recall Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Wallraff describes life at Thyssen, a giant steel plant in Duisburg, which has laid off 17 000 workers since 1974 but, through a chain of unscrupulous subcontractors, brings in cheap, foreign and often 'illegal' labour as required. He gets up at 3am and often works for 16 hours. He shovels dust 'so thick that I can hardly stand it any more....You don't just breathe the dust in, you swallow it and eat it'. A fellow worker

Mehmet, splinters his right shoulder, then dislocates his left one, then tears a ligament in his leg. Each time he struggles back to work (around molten iron), driven by the lack of sick pay or pension rights, and by chargehands who will sack him if he won't work consecutive shifts. He is sacked anyway when he fails to bring back a Turkish carpet from his holidays as a present for his foreman.

Wallraff observes wryly that 'German workers' heads are obviously more valuable and more in need of protection than those of immigrants', because if a German worker needs a helmet he just takes the one from Ali's head. When once Ali protests, 'Wait, I bought, belongs to me', he is told 'Nothing belongs to you here, except maybe some wet shit'. He encounters more genteel racism when he tries to get baptised into the Catholic Church or enlist with the Bhagwan. 'Who on earth sent you here?' says the priest; 'We just don't fit together' says the Bhagwan disciple. Outside the back-breaking toil and open hostility at work, this is the 'cold contempt' which he generally receives, and 'It hurts if in a crowded bus the seat next to you always remains empty'.

#### Who's to blame?

Wallraff provides a valuable and compelling exposé of the detail and the depths of everyday racism. But beyond indicating that he believes a 'system of boundless exploitation' is to blame, he does not try to explain the development of racism in German society. Nevertheless, his reminder of just how bad things are is timely—because they are about to get worse. Last year harsh new legislation was proposed, which seeks to force many more guestworkers to return home. At the same time the government is encouraging Germans and those of German descent from Eastern Europe to 'resettle' in West Germany.

These are the sort of measures through which the German state lays the basis for the oppression of non-Europeans. By reinforcing the second class status of immigrants the state legitimises discrimination against them in Germany, and sanctions the sort of routine bigotry described by Wallraff. A regulation which instructs officials on the implementation of the *Ausländergesetz* (Foreigners Law) of 1965 explains the position rather

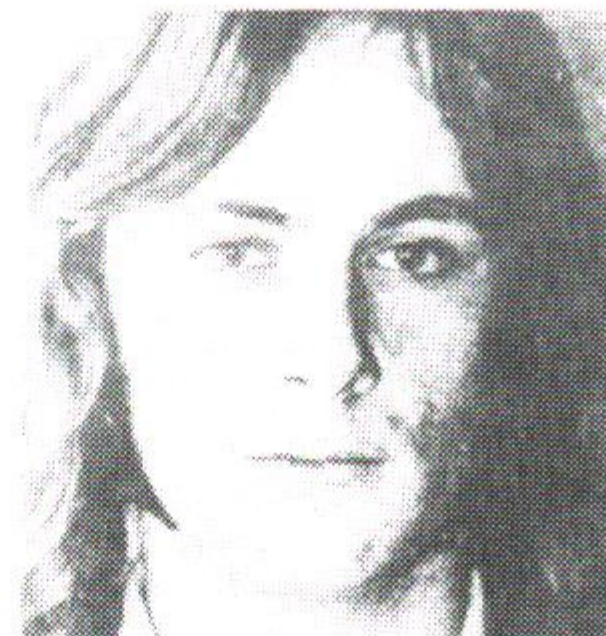
well: 'Foreigners enjoy all basic rights, except the basic rights of freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of movement and free choice of occupation, place of work and place of education and protection from extradition abroad.' Apart from that, Mr Ali, how did you enjoy your stay?  
Fenna King

## The Guildford Four

### 'NEVER TO BE RELEASED'

Grant McKee and Ros Franey, *Time Bomb: Irish Bombers, English Justice and the Guildford Four*, Bloomsbury, £4.99

Fourteen years ago four people were imprisoned because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Paul Hill, Gerry Conlon, Patrick Armstrong and Carole Richardson were convicted of the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings, on the basis of false confessions terrorised out of them by the Surrey police. The atmosphere at the time was heavy with panic and revenge. The bombs had claimed seven lives, and two weeks later, on 21 November 1974, the Birmingham bombs killed 21 more. On 27 November the Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced.



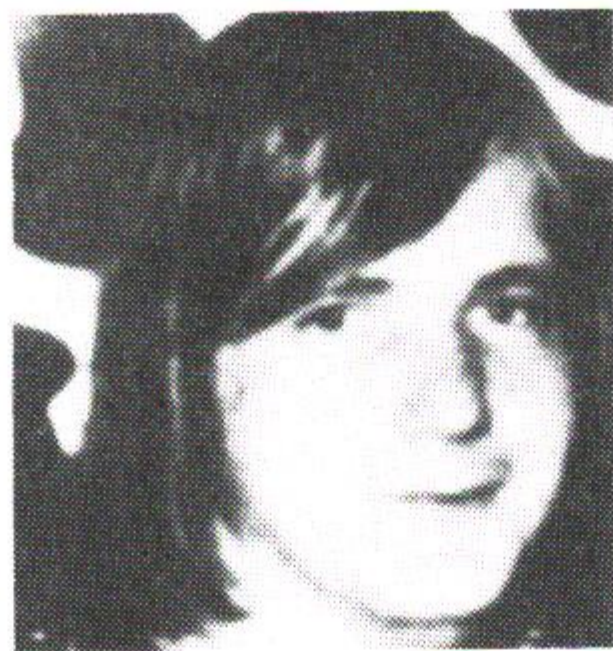
The British establishment needed a result, and the hapless four fitted the frame. Three nomadic Belfast youths, one of whom had been involved with the IRA in the past, and an English girl of 17 were squatting in Kilburn. Their lifestyle of dole and drugs, bookies and booze did not exactly equip them to withstand interrogation and suggestion. The police didn't spend long calling Conlon 'a



fucking, murdering Irish bastard', squeezing his testicles, hitting him in the kidneys and slapping his face. 'I fell apart' said Conlon. During her interrogation, Richardson was suffering from withdrawal symptoms, and it is revealed here, for the first time, that she was injected with a further drug, Pethidine, before her confession was taken by a doctor.



Concern about the convictions now extends into the establishment itself. Lords Devlin and Scarman are unhappy, so too are Archbishop Ramsay, Cardinal Hume, Lord Fitt and Merlyn Rees. Two years ago Robert Kee wrote *Trial and Error*, exposing the obvious injustice in both this and the associated Maguire trial, in which seven people were framed. Grant McKee and Ros Franey, who worked on the Yorkshire Television documentary on the Guildford case, have done a thorough job (over 500 pages) in assembling and presenting the evidence of this wicked affair.



There was *no* evidence to corroborate the confessions, which between them boasted 153 inconsistencies. Their alibi witnesses were assaulted and intimidated by the police. The bias of Mr Justice Donaldson's summing up was only surpassed by that of Lord Justice Roskill at the appeal. Most damning of all was the fact that a professional IRA active service unit eventually captured in Balcombe Street claimed (with full detail) the Guildford/Woolwich bombings as their own work, and knew nothing of the Guildford Four.

In pleading for the good name of British justice to be restored, McKee and Franey go out of their way to denounce those fighting for Irish freedom as 'terrorists'. They talk of a young country carpenter, Harry Duggan (captured in Balcombe Street), becoming 'a cold-blooded psychopath'. 'Such a transition is enigmatic to a British mentality' they say, and speculate that he 'found an escape from rural privation and an exciting identity'. Harry Duggan, writing from prison to *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, has just delivered a reply to this familiar mixture of ignorance and prejudice: 'The 30 000 British forces occupying my country and murdering and torturing and terrorising my people had nothing to do with it I suppose?'



How can the police and judges get away with a frame-up which is so blatant that even establishment liberals fear it will weaken that powerful ideological prop, respect for the law? Their hard-nosed peers in the political world know they cannot afford to give any quarter on the Irish issue—and they are under no genuine pressure to do so. At all times they must be seen to be on top; so what does it matter if they've got the wrong people, as long as they're Irish? And why are they under no pressure? Why is there no public outcry? Because they have won the basic argument with McKee and Franey and many others about the 'terrorism' and psychopathy of Irish republicans. For as long as that argument is conceded, the population at large, if not the more conscientious civil libertarians, will accept the measures taken in the name of 'anti-terrorism'.

In other areas mistakes can sometimes be admitted—as in the Maxwell Confait affair, the Luton Post Office murder or even the Carl Bridgewater case. Giving way on the Maguire, Birmingham or Guildford cases would however undermine the credibility of

the criminalisation policy, which is at the heart of the British state's strategy for winning the Irish War on the home front. I hope this latest book will lead to an early release, but I have a sinking feeling that in the absence of a real movement against them the government will brazen it out again. Richardson has a minimum of six years to serve, Conlon has 16. Armstrong has 21; Hill's file is marked 'Never to be released'.

In January 1980, over five years after he had been locked up, Gerry Conlon wrote a letter to his sister after his father, Guiseppe Conlon (framed with the rest of the Maguire household) had just died in prison: 'Ann, it makes you sick the way these hypocrites in this country talk about human rights in the likes of Russia and Chile when they are doing worse here in their own back garden. How can they explain or justify what they have done to us, innocent men and women in prison for no crime at all.'

John Fitzpatrick

## Celebrating a bloodbath

# SAS FANZINE

James Adams, Robin Morgan and Anthony Bambridge, *Ambush: The War Between the SAS and the IRA*, Pan Books, £3.99

In 1972 the *Sunday Times* Insight team wrote *Ulster*, a well-informed account of the drift from civil rights protest to open warfare. Twenty years of that war have hardened many of the arteries of British journalism, and it is a measure of the particularly sharp deterioration in the condition of the *Sunday Times* that three of its senior writers, including a former editor of Insight, could turn out this tawdry little SAS fanzine.

The absence of political scruple and journalistic self-respect is heralded by their opening question: 'Is fair play a luxury...the British public must learn to dispense with it if it wishes to win the war against the IRA?' The rest of the book is an attempt to teach the public that the answer is 'yes'. 'Fair play', in case you're

wondering, is apparently the attitude which has too generously informed past SAS dealings with the IRA.

The book is a thinly-veiled celebration of the blood spilt in the Loughgall, Gibraltar and Drumnakilly ambushes from 1987-88, in which the SAS killed a total of 14 republicans on active service. The authors garnish these grisly climaxes with a breathless account of both organisations, and some of the people involved. The calibre of their commentary may be judged by this nasty (and unsubstantiated) jibe about Mairead Farrell: 'Farrell liked to claim that it was the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1972 that turned her head to republicanism at the age of 15 but it was in fact an adolescent crush.' Or take this on Robert Nairac, a blundering British soldier killed by the IRA 10 years ago: 'Nairac was a popular hero for a war that badly needed one.' Now I've heard Nairac called many things—'arrogant', 'a fool'—and no doubt his colleagues miss him. But the nearest he came to being a 'popular hero' was in the biting irony of Cormac's 'Captain Nervewreck' cartoon series published in *Republican News* 10 years ago.

The book is crammed with details, facts and figures. No doubt much of the information, dictated by the security services, is accurate. For the same reason much of it will be misinformation; and you can never be sure which is which, or where fantasy takes over altogether. Their coverage, or cover-up, of the Gibraltar killings reads like a government press release; and they even join in attacking the Thames documentary *Death on the Rock* for broadcasting Kenneth Asquez's damning eye-witness account of how the SAS shot the republicans in cold blood. This only does further damage to their journalistic credibility, as revelations since the inquest have indicated that Asquez perjured himself in retracting his account. It has also transpired that the sloppy Insight team itself published, long before the inquest, the gist of Asquez's much-maligned allegations.

There is one thing the authors claim no inside information on nor insight into—how and why the nationalists of the Six Counties have sustained a little army which for 20 years has held at bay everything Britain has thrown at it, including the SAS.

Mick Kennedy



# Letters

**We welcome readers' views and criticisms of *Living Marxism*. Unfortunately, all of the letters we publish this month have had to be shortened for reasons of space. The more quickly you get to the point, the more chance you have of getting into print. Write to *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX.**

## MARX AND THE FREE BMW

Mike Freeman exhibits various quotations to demonstrate that Marx was averse to freedom and individuality ('Whose freedom?', *Living Marxism*, December 1988). The same quotations suggest to me the opposite conclusion: that Marx supported the most radical—quite probably Utopian—kinds of freedom and individuality.

One of Freeman's first citations from Marx reads: 'Gentlemen! Do not allow yourselves to be deluded by the abstract word *freedom*. Whose freedom? It is not the freedom of one individual in relation to another, but the freedom of capital to crush the worker.' The obvious interpretation is that capital abuses its freedom by crushing the worker. This abuse is contrasted with 'the freedom of one individual in relation to another'. Presumably *this* freedom is the superior kind of freedom and individuality which communism is able to achieve.

This view is reinforced by a quote Freeman gives from the *German Ideology*. Here the contrast between the social force and the powerless individual is not only that of capital against the worker; it is the 'illusory community' or 'the substitute community, in the state, etc' which is contrasted with the true community or 'association'

of free individuals. False community is characterised by the priority of the social over the individual, true community (presumably the goal of the workers' movement) by the priority of the individual over the social.

In real community everything starts from individuals, who enter relations with each other only when they wish to, for purposes that they determine. No one works because they have to; no one obeys because they are forced to. The material conditions of life—especially the infinite productivity of the economy—take away historical compulsions and enable everyone in principle to sit on their backsides doing nothing in splendid isolation. Power has returned to where it belongs, distributed among individuals rather than vested in social institutions. When anyone stirs off their behind, it must be because they want to.

Consider in this light the most famous of Freeman's quotes:

'After the productive forces...have increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." ' (Deleting sexist pronouns)

Wonderful, but what does this inscription mean in practice? Imagine, provocatively, the following BMW society. Someone gets up in the morning with a range of options of the kind Engels outlined in Freeman's page 11 quote. They say to themselves: 'I don't think I'll be a critical critic today, I'll go and make a BMW.' They meet a bunch of people with the same idea, so the group spends the day throwing BMWs together. Meanwhile,

someone else wakes up and says: 'I don't fancy fishing today; I'll go and get a BMW and drive it around.' This person strolls down to the BMW warehouse and takes a motor from the shelf: no problems and no questions asked. So many BMWs are being made by people according to ability that everyone can have a BMW according to need.

One might say, bringing to ear the jaundiced frame of reference learnt from capitalism, that it is a bit hard on some people making BMWs when other people are getting all the pleasure from driving BMWs. From the labour-time accounts, it looks as if the consumers of public good are exploiting the producers in classic capitalist style. But Marx says this frame of reference is inappropriate, because the BMW society is beyond 'the narrow horizon of bourgeois right'. And under the technological and social conditions he assumes, Marx is correct.

First, the hours spent making BMWs do not count as a burden; no one is forced to make a BMW, so that producers only produce as a free expression of their individual creativity. Indeed we can expect the design of BMWs to improve dramatically; each working group will develop a style expressing its free-willed collective design sense. Second, the benefit I derive from driving my BMW is equally available to you. There is inequality in this society; some are producers and some consumers, some work hard and some are lazy, but there is no injustice because there is no compulsion. Everything proceeds from unfettered tastes and choices, so that inequalities express individual differences.

It is difficult to conceive a vision of the future more individualistic than this vision held by Marx of a communist society. Marx was probably the last, and certainly the greatest, of the unreconstructed Enlightenment thinkers. He adhered to the values of liberty, equality and community. His greatness consisted in his sense of how much these values were betrayed under existing social arrangements. He sought to show and achieve the social conditions under which he thought the values might be realised. I don't believe that Marxism has to contrive these liberal connections, but it does need to recognise them.

*Alan Carling  
Bradford*

## 'NEW TIMES' OR OLD?

'Old ideas for New Times' (*Living Marxism*, November 1988) was a stimulating read if one ignored the glib denunciations of the Communist Party of Great Britain. I wish to comment on the assertion that 'New Times' are nothing new.

The drive to create value and surplus-value is the central driving force behind capitalism; no one would argue with that. What needs examination is the argument that the social relations of exploitation carry on regardless of 'changes in the labour process, technology design, company structure, etc'. The phrase 'changes in the labour process' covers a multitude of massive changes in employment patterns. You say these changes don't matter as 'workers' subordinate relationship to capital does not alter'. Leaving aside the issue of what sort of capital you are talking about, this approach does not exactly leave room for formulating a political opposition based on workers' demands, given that bank clerks unlike miners do not take their life in their hands every time they go to work ('The class struggle is a political struggle'—Marx).

The class struggle is also a cultural struggle. Everyone wants to belong, and they express this wish primarily through their pattern of consumption—it's called 'alienation'. However since the RCP has nothing to say about consumption other than 'we've seen it all before', a fuller debate will have to wait.

Regarding 'post-Fordism' I respect what Freeman and Forest argue. But surely *Marxism Today* would also argue that Fordism and post-Fordism have been around for a long time. To say that 'one authority has estimated that assembly-line technique only absorbed a maximum of seven per cent of America's workforce this century' is a non-sequitur, and doesn't answer the question of whether Fordism was the dominant mode of production. The Russian working class was somewhat less than seven per cent of the working population but that doesn't stop you rightly supporting its right to make a socialist revolution as the revolutionary class. It seems fair to assume that the most class-conscious sections of the working class sprang



from Fordism and from the heavy industries which underlay it. In Britain these industries are declining and the organised labour movement along with them. Freeman and Forest acknowledge this but seem simply not to bother with any political problems it may cause for the labour movement—a complacency shared by Messrs Todd, Scargill and Benn.

The assertion that New Times ignores the general crises of capitalism is a matter of semantics; it is clear that capitalism has constantly to revolutionise itself, compete for markets and exhibit a tendency to monopoly, but these are the causes not the effect of New Times. It is hard to see why Freeman and Forest have such a political axe to grind that they use this basic tenet in their argument against *Marxism Today* when it is clear that the concept of New Times proceeds from this assumption.

Dan Rubinstein

## JUDGING GORBACHEV

I found the Gorbachev article thoughtful and undogmatic (Frank Richards, 'Revolutions don't come from above', *Living Marxism*, November 1988). Yet I disagreed with its conclusions.

Any bureaucratised ruling communist party, even the Soviet Communist Party or those in Eastern Europe, will retain within it some level of commitment to the creation of a more genuine socialist society, and people within it with the will and ideas to attempt this transformation. Perhaps it's misleading even to talk of a dichotomy between self-interested bureaucrats and communist idealists; the two strands run through most party members in varying strengths. I believe that in some parties, eg Cuba, the communist strand has always remained dominant, in others like China it was for a very long time but is no longer, whilst in Russia 'Gorbachevism' is a genuine attempt at destalinisation whose outcome remains in the balance.

Bureaucratised workers' states can be reformed but not solely from above. Your article is quite right to expose the inevitable contradictions of a reform from above, and to assert that in the last analysis the development of a socialist society can only be achieved

by the working class. In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, part of the process will be a coming together of pressure for change from above and below, and both trends will be manifested within the Communist Party. I imagine that if a revolutionary organisation was in Russia now it would be working within the spaces opened up by Gorbachev, supporting some of his proposals, and not others, working at the base with workers (but quite possibly within the Communist Party) to make sure that the destalinisation goes all the way and leads towards socialism as opposed to capitalism, but well aware that after decades of 'Communist' oppression the loosening of bonds can easily lead to a strong pro-capitalist opposition.

To some extent I'm sure this hypothetical organisation and the working class would/will come into conflict with the reforms from above; how much depends on one's assessment of the motives and wisdom of Gorbachev's strategy. I'm more inclined to be charitable about his motives than your article, but with serious reservations about his strategy in the economic field.

It is no accident that the first old Bolshevik to be rehabilitated has been Bukharin. In economics Gorbachev is a modern-day Bukharinist with his emphasis on bringing in elements of the capitalist system, but combined with an appeal to workers' socialist responsibility. Trotsky saw Bukharin's ideas leading to capitalist restoration. Lenin, however, whilst recognising the dangers if they were taken too far, saw some level of individual financial incentives as an inevitable (temporary?) compromise on the long road to constructing socialism.

I see great dangers in Gorbachev's *perestroika*, but I believe it is too glib to believe that any individual socialist society can administratively write capitalism and its methods out of existence. The desire of individuals for economic advancement will contain individualistic as well as collectivistic impulses for many decades to come, particularly whilst capitalism remains the dominant world order. I conclude that, on an economic level too, Gorbachev's initiatives have to be judged case by case.

John Waller  
Nottingham

## COMPUTER SOCIALISM

The launch of *Living Marxism* comes at a time when Marxist ideology is facing an unprecedented attack. You acknowledge this in your choice of leading articles (November 1988) on *glasnost* and the 'New Times' thesis. These are both manifestations of a new international wave of right-wing revisionism. Gemma Forest's critique of New Times is pertinent and timely. I find Frank Richards' article on *glasnost* weaker.

He fails to highlight the theses of the Soviet apologists for market socialism and thus does not really refute them. The theoretical advocates of market socialism echo some bourgeois critiques of socialist economic theory, but with the added authority of people who can claim to have tried the Marxist alternative and found it wanting. These theoretical attacks raise far more serious problems than do matters of judgement about the likely outcome of *glasnost* in the USSR.

Marxism's enemies broadly argue: that Marx's theory of value is of no practical use in a socialist economy because it takes no account of demand; that it would be impossible to base an economy on labour values because of the practical difficulty in calculating them; that without some system of valuation economic decisions arrived at by planners will be arbitrary and wasteful; that comprehensive planning in physical terms is impossible due to the sheer number of goods and the complex interdependence between industries; that without competition there is no incentive for factories to be efficient or to innovate.

It is not enough to reply as Richards does, with an invocation of the virtues of workers' democracy. Democracy is a political question concerning who controls state power. Marxists advocate workers' democracy because we believe it to be the best means for the proletariat to retain political power. It is not an economic mechanism. None of the criticisms that the market socialists level at the planned economy would be answered by increasing the level of democracy, however desirable for political reasons.

Allin Cottrel and I have tried in our contribution to the debate ('Labour values and socialist economic calculation', *Economy and Society*, January 1989) to demonstrate that Marx's theory of value is relevant to a socialist economy and that rational economic calculation is possible in a planned economy on the basis of the labour theory of value. The essence of our argument is that it is both desirable and practical for a socialist economy to use labour-time rather than roubles as its basic unit of account. Prices of consumer goods would be expressed in labour money and workers paid in labour money. If you worked for 40 hours a week you would be electronically credited with 40 hours at the end of it. Obviously people would have to pay taxes to support community services, but the basic principle should be that if you work an extra hour, you get back goods that took an hour to produce.

We envisage a planning process in which all goods are produced by publicly-owned industries subject to a detailed physical plan. We recognise that it will be necessary to allow the selling price of consumer goods to fluctuate about their true values if demand changes. These deviations can be used by the planning mechanism to adjust the targets for different commodities.

Such an economic mechanism depends upon the administrative and computational ability of the workers' state to carry out detailed physical planning and to work out the labour content of all goods. In the past this has been impossibly complex. The Soviet economy produces millions of distinct products. In principle the planners would have to solve a system of millions of simultaneous equations to work out how much labour went into each product and how labour and means of production ought to be distributed. But the invention of parallel microprocessors has enabled a several hundredfold increase in computer power. I calculate that it would take 10 minutes to an hour for the best Western multiprocessors to balance a plan for the USSR. At present the Soviets do not have this sort of computer power. In a few years they will.

Paul Cockshott  
Glasgow



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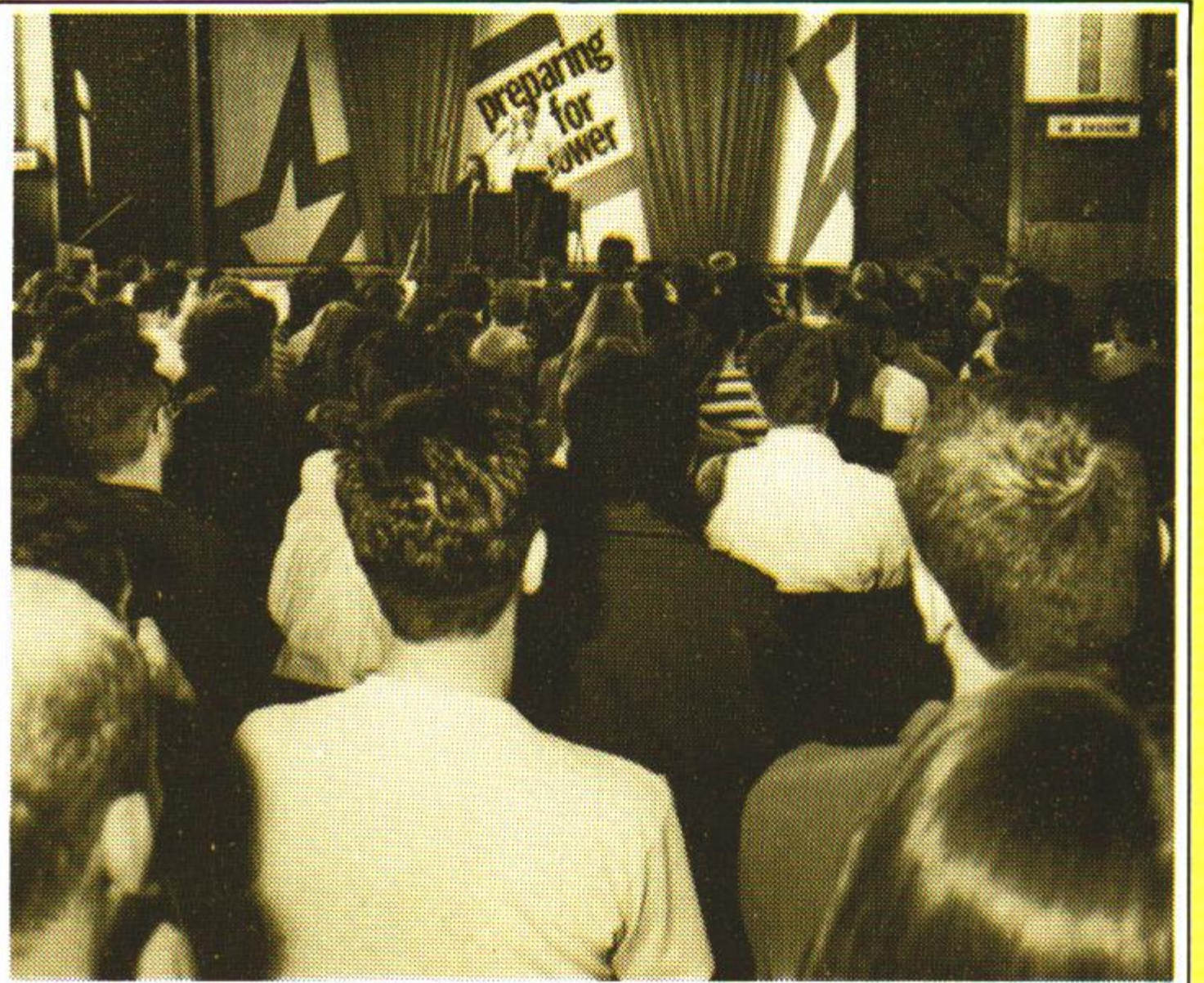
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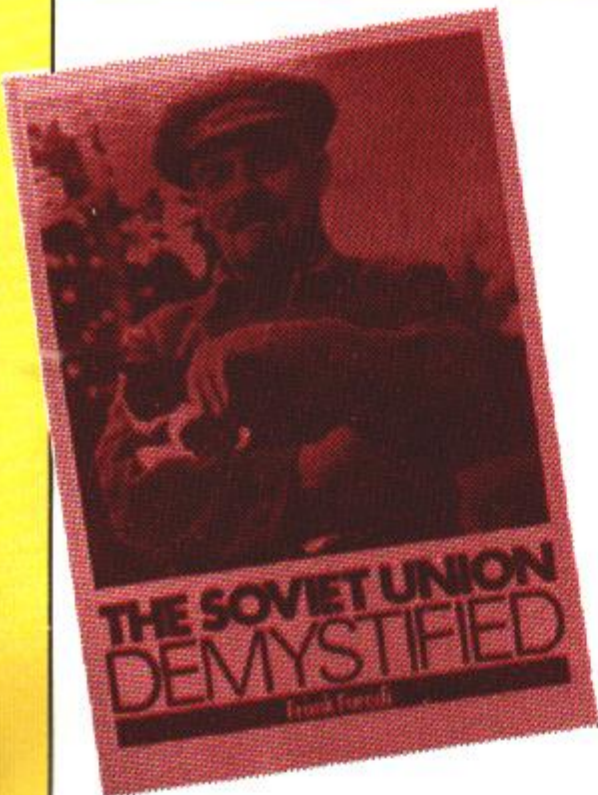
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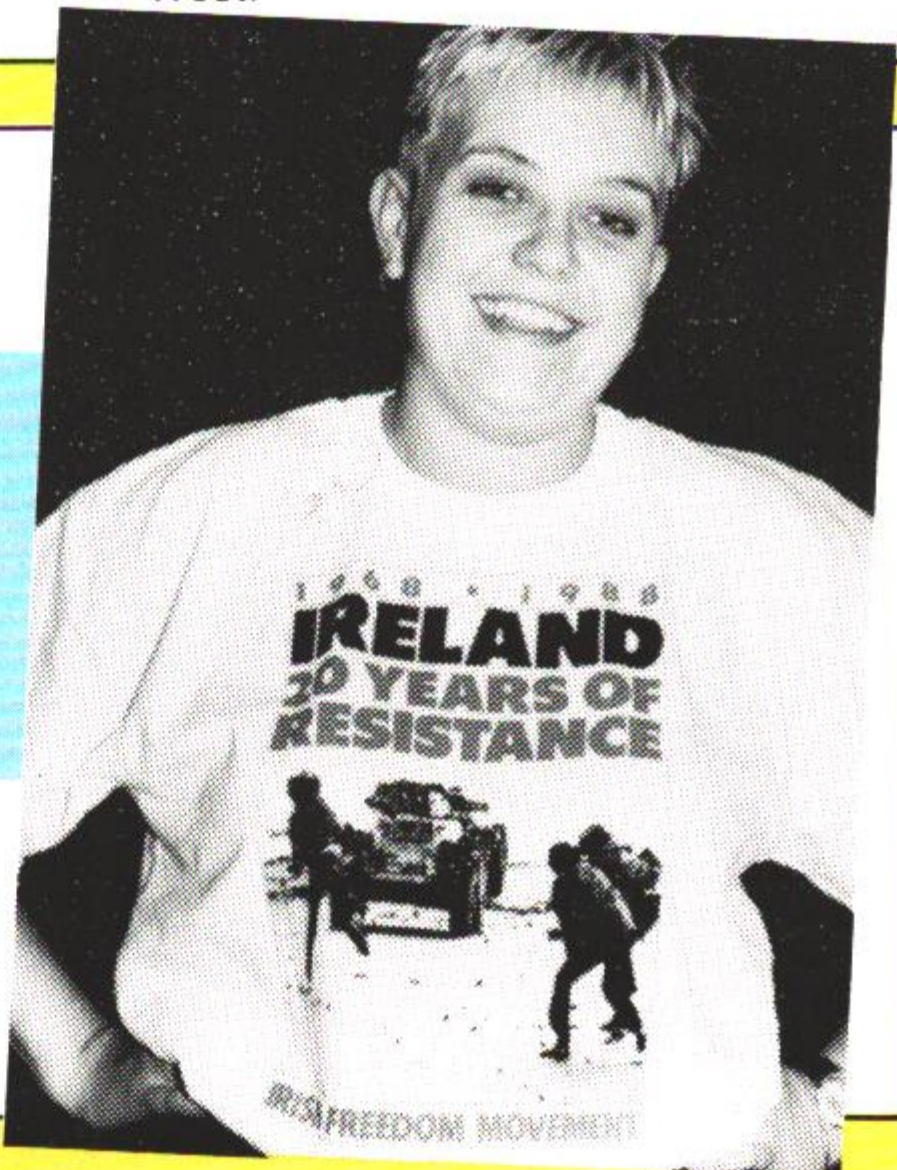
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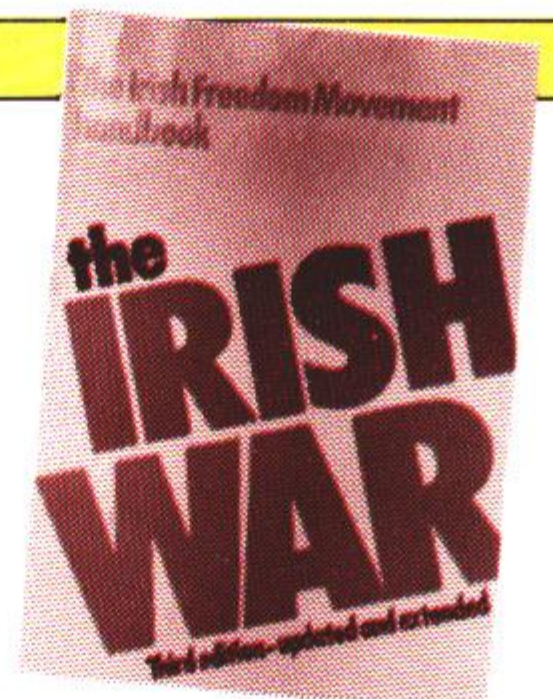


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## The perils of popular capitalism

# WHERE'S SID NOW?

If you see Sid, he will have long since sold his British Gas shares, and been too over-stretched paying his soaring mortgage to apply for a slice of British Steel; which is just as well, given steel shares' miserable performance after privatisation.

What little cash Sid made on dabbling in Gas and Telecom shares might already have gone on champagne and yachts—not for him, but for crooked financier Peter Clowes, now charged with defrauding 16 000 Sids of their savings. Millions of other erstwhile Sids are less interested in buying shares in the water industry than they are worried about what will come out of their taps when the government sells off the system to entrepreneurs. 'Popular capitalism' has a rather unpopular ring about it today.

● Since the stock market Crash of October 1987, and the disastrous BP sell-off which had to be rescued by Sid the Kuwaiti oil sheikh, the government's claim to be creating a share-owning democracy looks as empty as Morgan Grenfell's bankrupted share-dealing room. Small investors have bailed out of the market en masse. Tory trade minister Lord Young admitted that he was aiming the Steel sell-off at 'Sydney rather than Sid'. There looks like being even less enthusiasm for future privatisations; top pollster Ivor Crewe reports that 72 per cent oppose the proposed sell-offs of water and electricity.

Popular capitalism always had much more to do with style than substance. The high-profile publicity campaign was clever political packaging, wrapped around a piecemeal government policy designed to raise funds fast and to hand over valuable assets to the capitalist class at knock-down prices.

The Tory manifesto for the June 1987 general election spoke of widening share ownership as a fundamental principle of Conservatism: 'Owning a direct share in industry not only enhances personal independence; it

also gives a heightened sense of involvement and pride in British business.' Yet this idea had only very recently been carved into the Tory Party's tablets of stone. The word 'privatisation' did not appear in the manifesto on which Thatcher won the 1979 election. Only National

Only after this response did Tory ideologues realise the *political* potential of promoting privatisation as proof of an 'enterprise culture'. As share prices continued to rise, the popular capitalism campaign picked up speed with the 'Tell Sid' sell-off of British Gas in



Freight was mentioned as a candidate for being returned to the private sector. And there was hardly an energetic effort to rush through that return; it took three years and two secretaries of state to sell it for the princely sum of £5m.

● Other early privatisations, from Cable & Wireless to Sealink, brought the treasury average receipts of £400m a year. None of these, however, was the subject of glossy prospectuses or expensive TV advertising aimed at Sid. Popular capitalism was a phrase which had not been coined. The initial quiet privatisations were a pragmatic move to raise some money from big financiers, and so cover up the government's failure to hold down public spending. That was also the main motivation behind the sale of British Telecom in November 1984. But because of the scale of this sell-off—£3.7 billion—the Tories decided to cast the net a bit wider, and try to get the public interested. Their luck was in. The Telecom privatisation coincided with the take-off of a credit-financed boom in stock market prices, and many ordinary people went for the shares.

December 1986 and the privatisation of British Airways two months later. Thousands of people became convinced that buying shares in privatised concerns was a sure-fire way to make some money. The Crash convinced most of them otherwise. In between times, during the last election campaign, the Tories were able to depict privatisation as the realisation of high-minded principles, rather than as a pragmatic policy made possible by fortuitous developments in the City.

● That all seems a long time ago. Now the true, and truly grubby, motives behind the privatisation drive are obvious. The sharpest exec at Saatchi & Saatchi would find it near impossible to sell the idea that privatising water or electricity is about increasing consumer choice and improving services by giving enterprise its head. Which ordinary consumer is going to be able to dig up miles of cable and re-route the supply of electricity to their home, to choose the most competitive supplier? The major impact of these privatisations on Sid will be to add a few noughts to the end of his bills. The government's desperation to

press on with privatisation is clearly a matter of putting some short-term cash in the treasury's coffers.

The other motive behind privatisation has been to hand over state concerns to capitalist corporations at cut-price. The people who have reaped big benefits are not the Sids on the shopfloor, but the Sirs in the boardroom. Some privatised concerns have been highly profitable, and all have been seriously undervalued in the share prices set by the government. Despite the Tories' insistence that privatisation proves the dynamism of private enterprise, only high levels of state support have made an industry like steel viable. British Steel now registers lower costs per tonne than its competitors because it has been more heavily subsidised by the state: the Tories have written off its debts, provided interest-free investment resources, and allowed it substantial tax advantages. The sluggish trade in British Steel shares since privatisation shows that the markets remain sceptical about its ability to stand on its own feet in the outside world, especially as the British economy heads for recession.

● On top of subsidies and cheap shares, the Tories have thrown some very sugary sweeteners into privatisation deals, such as the half a billion pounds worth of land sold to British Aerospace for £3.5m as part of the sell-off of Royal Ordnance. And it's not just the new owners who have grown rich on privatisation windfalls. The City dealers, banks, PR men and others who ease the deals through have already made hundreds of millions in commission and fees from privatisation. If the £20 billion sell-off of electricity is successful, they expect to pocket a further £1 billion. These are the capitalists among whom Tory policy has been really popular over the past few years.

Despite the popular capitalism drive, Sid now accounts for a smaller percentage of overall share ownership than in the early eighties. The ownership and control of capital is more centralised than ever. The government's latest plan to loosen controls on takeovers and mergers reflects its acceptance of the trend towards greater monopolisation. Meanwhile Sid, who was promised that he too could be a capitalist, is left to rely on the one thing he does own—his ability to sell his labour-power to the capitalists who control the lot.

Tony Kennedy

RIGHT: A few shares in the latest privatised concerns won't see anybody through a rainy day