

# LIVING MARXISM

May 1989

Number 7

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**Cervical cancer: scaring women to death**

**Melvyn Bragg, Derek Jarman:  
art and censorship today**

# FASCISM

-a spectre  
haunting Europe?

**PLUS: After Rushdie: book-burners  
and racists in Bradford**

**Scotland: the Jim Sillars story**

**Safety in the Chunnel: a deathly silence**





**Birmingham Region** Saturday 29 April, 11am  
 New Imperial Hotel, Temple St (off New St)

**London Region** Sunday 7 May, 10am  
 University of London Union, Malet St, WC1

**Nottingham Region** Saturday 13 May, 10.30am  
 International Community Centre, Mansfield Rd

**South West Region** Sunday 14 May, 10.30am  
 Shepherds Hall, Old Market St, Bristol

**Newcastle Region** Saturday 20 May, 1pm  
 Tyneside Cinema, 10 Pilgrim St

**Northern Region** Saturday 27 May, 11am  
 Manchester Poly, Mandela Building,  
 Oxford Rd, Manchester



# COMMUNISM AFTER GLASNOST

Revolutionary Communist Party  
 Regional Dayschools

The Western media are gloating over recent developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The message behind *glasnost* seems to be 'bring back the market—communism does not work'.

We are organising discussions around the country to counter this celebration of capitalism. The aim is to provide a forum for a critical assessment of developments in the East, and their consequences for us in the West.

Discussions on: Marx and communism  
 Soviet Union ● Eastern Europe  
 Third world ● Is a  
 revolution possible today?

For further details ring (01) 375 1702

# MARCH

5 AUGUST 1989 ● NORTH LONDON

August 1989 marks the twentieth anniversary of the reappearance of British troops on the streets of Northern Ireland.

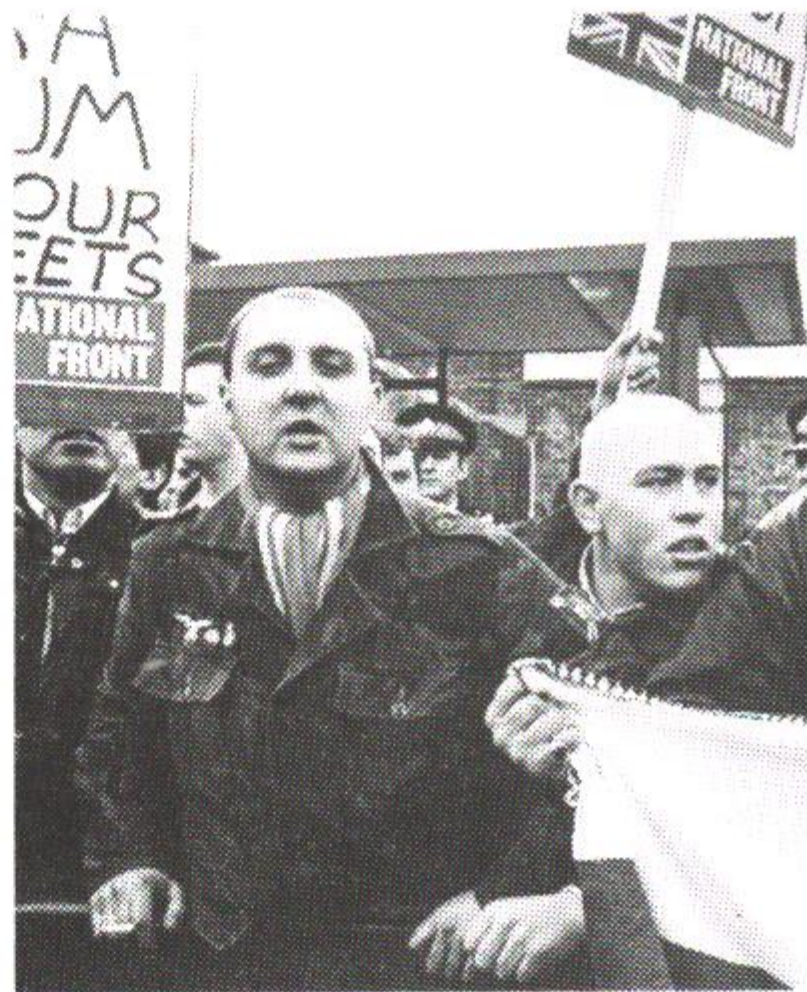
This year the annual anti-internment march, organised by the Irish Freedom Movement, will broaden its focus to take in this important event. The demand is for immediate withdrawal of British troops, as the only way to end the 20-year war.

For information on how you can help organise and build the march, and details of transport from around Britain, ring (01) 375 1702 or write to the Irish Freedom Movement, BM IFM(L7), London WC1N 3XX.



## The new right stuff

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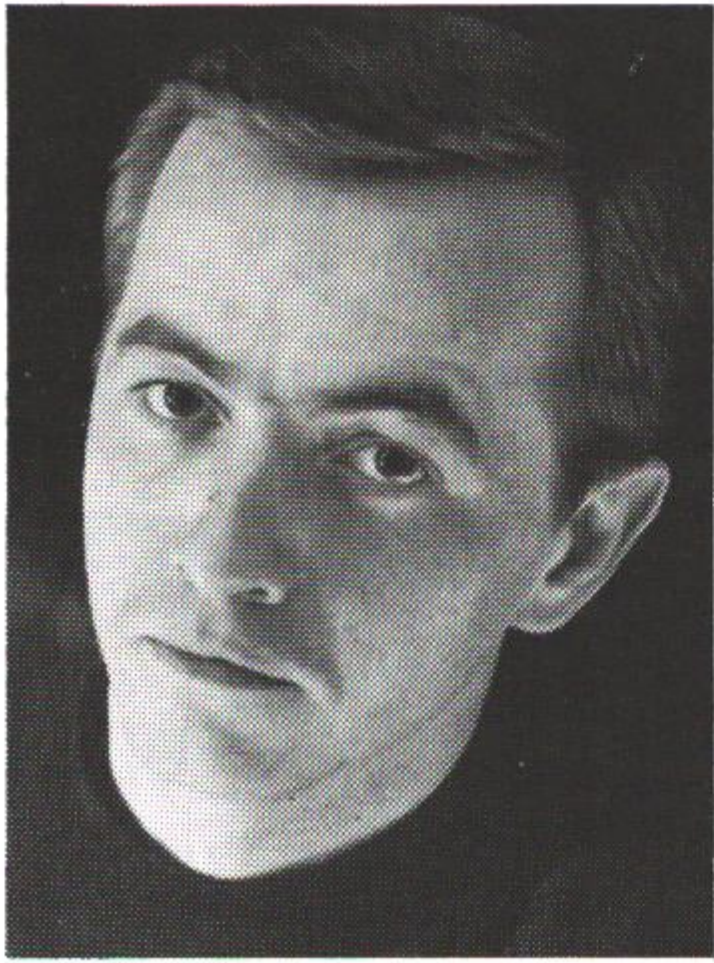
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## LIVING MARXISM

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MICK HUME: EDITOR

# GORBACHEV SHOULD GET A JOB ON THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

Word has it that Peregrine Worsthorne is soon to be 'retired' as editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*. If the proprietors of that house-journal of petit-bourgeois nastiness are still looking for a replacement for the grand old man of Toryism, may we suggest a suitable candidate: Mikhail Gorbachev, president of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The intellectuals whom Gorbachev's *glasnost* has coaxed out from the dusty corners of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe already act as unofficial editorial advisers to the *Telegraphs* (Sunday and Daily), the weekly *Spectator* and the other right-wing media. Those responsible for what Gorbachev calls 'the new political thinking' in the East are praising the market economy, lampooning Marxism, and generally providing some

much-needed inspiration for the old political thinkers of the Western right.

Today a reactionary British eccentric like Roger Scruton can proudly point out that the April edition of a Soviet literary review 'carries the second instalment of Orwell's *1984*, a defence of the capitalist economy, and a stunning vindication of Tory values'.

A top Thatcherite ideologue like Ferdinand Mount can identify a 'great difference' in post-Gorbachev politics: 'That socialism, as an organising principle of government, is intellectually exploded.'

The left is supposed to be embarrassed into silence by these smug, told-you-so remarks. Scruton, Mount, Worsthorne and the rest seem to think that if we hear the Soviets say socialism is passé, we will

surely pack up left-wing politics and come over all entrepreneurial.

But why should Marxists be swayed by the opinions of the ruling bureaucrats and the intelligentsia in the East, or by those of the controlling capitalists and their favourite columnists in the West?

● With what authority do Soviet officials and analysts write off Marxism as an inappropriate pipedream? With the authority, we are told, of those who have experienced a genuine socialist system. Who says the Soviet Union is a socialist system? They do.

By this criterion, we would also have to accept South Africa's claim that it is a democratic republic (in which five million whites dominate 26 million blacks, 'coloureds' and Indians), and Whitehall's insistence that we live in a 'United Kingdom' (within which a large community in the North of Ireland supports an armed insurrection against the state).

We cannot judge people by what they say about themselves or what they call their state. We should judge them by what they do. What the 'socialist' authorities in the Soviet Union did when Stalin gained control in the twenties was to usurp power from the workers who had made the 1917 Revolution. They have since created and defended a system run by bureaucratic diktat, and propped up by the secret police and the public lie.

For all of his professed openness, Gorbachev still fills the Stalinist boots which stamped to death every socialist impulse (and many thousands of

socialists) in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. His methods, from purging the politburo last year to stoving in the heads of Georgian demonstrators with army shovels last month, are those inherited from Stalin, along with the chronically inefficient 'command economy'.

The fact that desperate Soviet officials and thinkers now want to criticise Marx, Lenin and the revolution, to embrace Western values and encourage some sort of market economy, is indeed a damning indictment of Stalinism. It confirms that this corrupt brand of socialism is even less dynamic than a capitalist system which passed its peak about a century ago. But it says nothing against Marxism, since there has been no trace of that doctrine in Soviet policy for more than 60 years.

As for the Western leaders and leader-writers, they expect us to accept the Soviet experience as proof that only the capitalist system can deliver prosperity and democracy. Would that be the same capitalism which has condemned millions to starvation and many more to poverty and exploitation?

● Any attempt to interfere with the free market economy, argue the Western Soviet-watchers today, will encroach on political freedom and lead to 'Soviet-style totalitarianism'. But the Soviets have no monopoly on oppression. Indeed they are pretty amateur, apprentice totalitarians compared to the capitalist powers. Through direct military interventions and indirect political and

economic influence, the Western imperialists have helped to ensure that rule by dictatorship and death squad is standard from Central America to southern Africa.

Look at the pride and joy of the free marketeers, a developing high-powered economy like South Korea. Here there is rapid capitalist growth; there is also massive state intervention in the economy. And, underpinning it all, there are miserable living standards for the masses, and state terror for those who protest. When an army of South Korean troops and paramilitary police smashed a shipyard strike last month, they demonstrated once more that the market economy is free only for those who own it.

● The advanced Western nations, too, are no strangers to dictatorial government. Nazi Germany boasted a flourishing capitalist economy. Thatcher's Britain boasts no such thing; as a consequence the government is using increasingly authoritarian methods to secure its hold over society.

It is ironic that Gorbachev's *glasnost* gestures, so loudly applauded over here, have helped to expose the repressive policies of the Tory government. For example, the Soviets have just published former leader Nikita Khrushchev's famous 'secret speech', in which he denounced the Stalin era at the twentieth Communist Party congress. About time too, said the British right wingers, we've had copies of it since 1956. That was

when the speech was smuggled out by a Soviet official—exactly the sort of leak which would earn an immediate and lengthy jail sentence in Britain under Thatcher's new Official Secrets Act.

The hypocrisy of British lectures about freedom and capitalism was summed up by the establishment figures who argued that the Queen should not accept Gorbachev's invitation to visit the Soviet Union because, after all, Lenin's Russian revolutionaries did kill her relative, the tsar, in 1918. The fact that an hereditary monarch is the national sovereign and international symbol of

This sort of thing still goes on. Gorbachev's arrival in London last month was greeted with an American announcement that he had sold bombers to Libya. As a threat to peace in the Middle East, you might think that selling six aircraft kits to Colonel Gaddafi hardly compares with the vast tonnage of military machinery which Britain and America have sent or sold to Israel and Saudi Arabia, let alone the fully assembled bombers which those same powers jointly despatched to flatten Tripoli and Benghazi. But no matter; it all helps to excuse the crimes of the great capitalist nations.

## 'The whipping boy from Moscow has suddenly become the Western teacher's pet'

modern 'democratic' Britain is incriminating enough. The idea that a barbarous, semi-feudal monarch like Tsar Nicholas should be remembered with respect is a still more telling indication of the West's true attitude to totalitarianism.

The Soviet Union has served a useful purpose for right-wing writers and governments over many years, as the worst advertisement for an alternative to capitalism. By casting stones at the Soviet state—about human rights or foreign invasions—Britain and America and their allies have cultivated the impression that they are without sin.

Today, however, we have a new twist to Western uses of the Soviet Union. The whipping boy from Moscow has suddenly become the teacher's pet. When Gorbachev tells Thatcher that the Soviet Union aspires to achieve what Britain has done, and Boris Yeltsin wins a Moscow election after himself voting for the Iron Lady in a woman of the year poll, it gives the authorities here a mighty boost in the battle to convince us that capitalists know best.

These developments are assuming a special importance today, as the world economy in general and the British and American economies in

particular head towards another recession. At a time when their system is set to expose its anarchic and crisis-ridden character once again, what is happening in the East becomes the Western nations' strongest argument for keeping capitalism intact. If the Communists say there is no alternative to the market then, unemployment and soaring inflation notwithstanding, Thatcher and her acolytes must be right, mustn't they?

● The ideological struggle between capitalism and Stalinism has long been like a fight between two ageing and punch-drunk boxers. Each has hardly been able to stand up. Now, however, the capitalists seem assured of victory, because their opponents have taken to hitting themselves in the face.

Marxism, by contrast, is for those who want to hit back. It has nothing to do with praising British entrepreneurs, dining with the Queen or doing deals with the Western powers to sell out independence in Nicaragua or Namibia. Marxism is the theory and practice of human liberation, through the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a system under the control of the majority of society—the working class.

In 1983, on the centenary of the death of Karl Marx, Peregrine Worsthorne said that Marx had taught him to fear the working class, because it could destroy all that he held dear. In the end, that fear is what the editor of the *Torygraph* and our suggested replacement have in common.

## Cervical cancer smear stories

# Scaring women to death

**Joyce Hennessy believes that the truth about cervical cancer is still buried beneath sexual stigma and scaremongering**

'Dear Miss Hennessy, You will be pleased to know that your recent cervical smear showed that there were no cancer cells present. However there were slight changes in the cells which we would like to discuss with you at the clinic.'

Two months after being summoned for a routine smear test, this standard letter arrived in the standard brown envelope, informing me that the result was positive. After a few days of niggling worries, I turned up for the appointment at my local health centre. I was not prepared for what I was about to be told.

I can't remember much about what was said, only the doctor saying at regular intervals, 'You haven't got cancer. You haven't got cancer. You haven't got cancer'. It didn't exactly reassure me. If there was nothing to worry about, why did she have to keep saying it, especially as I hadn't even asked if I had it?

I was told that the smear test had identified 'severe abnormalities in the cells'. This was a shock since the letter had mentioned only 'slight changes'. The doctor assured me that this was nothing to worry about, but to be on the safe side she was referring me to the colposcopy clinic at Bart's for further examination. The colposcopy would involve examining the cervix through a microscope on a stand. It could result in an all-clear, or it could establish the need for treatment.

## Hot and cold

'What sort of treatment?' I wished I hadn't asked: it could be laser treatment, cone biopsy, cold coagulation or hot wire cautery. By this point I was rigid in my seat, and made no further enquiries. The doctor gave me a letter to pass on to my GP and told me I'd probably get an appointment at the colposcopy clinic within a month. That was that.

When I got home I ripped open the letter to my GP, which said my smear test had revealed cell changes 'consistent with CIN III'. What was that? And why hadn't it been mentioned at the clinic? I discovered later that CIN was cervical intraepithelial neoplasia. It describes abnormal cell changes, and there is a scale of I to III which distinguishes various stages of change. CIN I

means that the top third of the cells on the surface of the cervix are affected. CIN II means that two thirds are affected. CIN III means that all the cells on the surface are affected. If left untreated, many cases of CIN I and II can return to normal, and even cases of CIN III have been known to change back.

Most women treated for these pre-cancerous conditions never develop cancer. I discovered this elementary information, and much more besides, in a useful new book by Susan Quillam, *Positive Smear*. After a month I was still waiting to hear from the colposcopy clinic. I contacted them myself, and finally found out that I had another month to wait for an appointment. I am still waiting and worrying.

Some 30 000 women will have an abnormal cervical smear this year, and most will think that they have cancer. After all, isn't that what the tests are for? These fears are fuelled by the confusing terminology.

Another way of describing CIN III is carcinoma in situ. Carcinoma means cancer. Yet carcinoma in situ is not cancer: that can only be diagnosed if it spreads beyond the surface cells to invade the body ('invasive carcinoma').

## The 'worried well'

Any woman who has a positive smear will experience great stress and anxiety as she awaits further investigation, which in some places can take months. Once you are told that your smear test revealed abnormalities, nobody can convince you that there is nothing to worry about. For most women all the heartache will be unnecessary: 95 per cent of abnormal smears are not cancerous, although you may require a colposcopy or biopsy to prove it.

Cancer of the cervix should not be a killer: it is almost always curable if detected. A properly done smear test detects changes before cancer develops, at a time when simple treatment can restore the cervix to normal. Yet despite the mass screening system, 2000 women die of cervical cancer every year in England and Wales. One problem is that smears as they are currently carried out detect only about 80 per cent of malignancies: a fifth of women who have cervical cancer and are screened

will be missed. But a far greater problem is that *nearly all* the women dying from the disease have never had a smear.

Of those women who do come forward for smears, very few fall into the high-risk category. The mortality rate for carcinoma of the cervix is more than 15 times greater for women over 45 than for those below. Yet the clinics are full of the young, informed, 'worried well', while the older working class women most at risk never come forward to be tested. Why?

It is not simply that the screening system is a shambles. It is not possible to establish an effective screening system in the climate of fear and prejudice which has been created around cervical cancer. Successive scare campaigns linking cervical cancer to sex and promiscuity have petrified thousands of women, helped prevent those most at risk from coming forward, and made a significant contribution to the death toll.

The focus of most of the discussion in the media has been an entirely speculative debate about the cause of cervical cancer. Invariably this has centred on the links between the contraceptive pill, the permissive society, sexual promiscuity, venereal disease and cervical cancer. 'Dr X blames permissiveness, promiscuity and the population explosion', declared the *Times*. 'I am aware that it might be rather futile advice', said the anonymous eminent gynaecologist, 'but if young women refrained from sex until they were in their twenties...'. (Quoted in *Positive Smear*) The implication is that women who have an active sex life from the age of 16 have only themselves to blame if they get cervical cancer.

Dr Peter Hendybiess, a member of the Board of Science, believes that the increase in cases of cervical cancer stems from the use of the pill in the sixties and the promiscuity it engendered: 'Cervical cancer is clearly a sexually transmitted disease. You cannot get it without having sex. The more partners a man or a woman has the greater is going to be the spread of the virus and the greater promiscuity of the 1960s revolution and the reduced use of barrier methods have allowed the

**RIGHT: Middle-aged women are most at risk—and least likely to have a smear test**



virus, if that is the cause, to be spread more widely.'

These prejudices have acquired the status of respectability in the conformist moral climate of the Thatcher years. Yet there is little scientific or medical basis for the sermonising about sex which has been a central feature of the discussion about the causes of cervical cancer. The tenuous links established by the media between promiscuous sex and cervical cancer continue to be the subject of heated controversy in the medical world.

There is some evidence to suggest a possible connection between sexual activity and cervical cancer. But there are also numerous doubts and questions which hardly ever get a mention. The observation that nuns don't get it and prostitutes do is a standard feature of the literature on the subject. This endorses the idea that cervical cancer is a disease of indiscriminate sexual activity. In fact, one American survey in the 1950s showed that some nuns do get cervical cancer. It is an accepted fact that many women attending colposcopy clinics for treatment have had only one or two partners, while many others who have had numerous sexual partners never have a positive smear.

It has been suggested that the pill can reduce the body's natural immunity, leave women open to catching a sexually transmitted virus which some doctors believe is a factor in cervical cancer, and even that the pill itself is responsible for creating cervical conditions which allow cancer to develop. The only conclusive evidence to emerge from all the surveys is that the pill is still the most reliable form of contraception on the market. Many women might argue that the risk they run by not taking the pill (unwanted pregnancies) is greater than any risks from taking it. The discovery that the pill may protect women against cancer of the ovaries, which kills twice as many women each year as cervical cancer, never figures in this debate.

There are many theories too about possible 'cancer triggers' that are sexually transmitted, perhaps through sperm. Some argue that the herpes virus can create vulnerable conditions in the cervix. In the past few years there has been a lot of publicity about the wart virus: 'HPV-16 almost certainly causes cervical cancer' shrieked one headline. This theory has more critics than supporters (see the *Lancet*, 28 March 1987).

Any survey of the medical discussion of the possible causes of cervical cancer will show that there are more doubts than certainties. But the prejudice which informs the discussion means that scepticism is

thrown to the wind and unsubstantiated theories are paraded as scientific truths. The facts about the disease are of no concern to the influential modern puritans. They play on fears about disease and death to preach the strait-laced, reactionary values which have received official sanction in Thatcher's Britain: the pill encourages promiscuity, and promiscuity causes cervical cancer. Like herpes and Aids, cervical cancer is God's punishment for the wicked.

It is hardly surprising that women are reluctant to be screened for cervical cancer, given the stigma in which it is steeped and the air of panic which surrounds the tests. On the little evidence available it is apparent that four out of five women at risk from cervical cancer are not coming forward for screening. The screening rate is even worse among older women.

A recent survey showed that half of those who were traced after failing to respond to a call for cervical screening did not attend through fear. A lot of women, especially older women, find it too uncomfortable and embarrassing even to consider having a cold metal speculum (which resembles two shoe-horns stuck together) stuck up them while they are lying half naked in an ungainly position on an examination table.

### Taunts and gossip

Consultant cytologist Dr Elizabeth Mackenzie is convinced that a major factor in stopping older women having a smear is the fear of being stigmatised: 'Women over the age of 45 are loath to come forward and have a smear which would outwardly label them as being sexually promiscuous.' Many women caught up in the screening system are questioned about when they first had intercourse, the number of their sexual partners, any sexually transmitted diseases they have suffered, if they have had abortions, etc. And the thought of having to endure whispered taunts and gossip by friends, workmates and relatives is enough to put many more off even having a smear.

One woman interviewed by Susan Quillam worried that 'people will point a finger at me' because they'd heard that having cervical cancer means you sleep around. Some women had been confronted by friends and relatives. 'My husband's mother rang me one evening to say that she'd heard you only get it if you're promiscuous', reported one woman. 'I said to her "I've only slept with one man and that's your son".'

If the prejudice that surrounds cervical cancer militates against women volunteering for screening, the screening system itself compounds the problem. The system

seems to have been singularly ineffective in reaching women most at risk, and the lack of research into the results makes it impossible to evaluate the worth of mass screening.

Under the government's national screening programme which came into operation in March 1988, every health district is supposed to operate a call and recall system for smears. Although upwards of three million smears are done each year, the department of health does not collect statistics on what percentage of women are screened. Without a commitment to monitor their effectiveness, there is no way of judging these schemes.

A national screening programme is a cheap gimmick coming from a government which refuses to allocate the funding necessary to make the system work efficiently. The £30m spent annually on mass screening is a drop in the ocean of national health funding. The authorities will not make the resources available to make it function effectively. There have been many complaints about the inadequacy of the system, especially after scandals such as that in Liverpool in 1987 when 911 women were wrongly diagnosed.

While the consensus now seems to be that women should be screened every three years, in practice the strain on overstretched resources means that every five years is the norm. Lack of funds also means that the facilities are not available to interpret the results, leading to long delays and waiting lists for smear results, colposcopy and treatment. When it comes to treatment, expense is always a consideration. The ease and speed of laser treatment have made it popular. But cryocautery, when liquid nitrogen is applied to destroy the cells, or cold coagulation, treatment in which the abnormal cells are burnt away, are cheaper and therefore more common.

### Only guessing

The manifest failures of the system have led more doctors to question the value of mass screening. Professor Walter Holland maintains that screening should be offered only to women over 45 years of age: '[Cervical screening] is a classic example of a screening technique which, although undertaken, may not be justified in terms of reduced mortality.' The argument is that mass screening might be justified if it meant that more women were being prevented from dying, but the little evidence available would seem to suggest that it doesn't.

Since cervical screening was introduced in 1964 the mortality rate for carcinoma of the cervix has fallen by one per cent each year. But it had been falling at exactly the same rate for several decades previously. Of

course screening may have masked the effects of an underlying increase in the incidence of the disease and could well have saved many lives. The inefficiencies of the underfunded system mean we can only guess.

There has been a debate about whether mass screening affects cervical cancer rates even in countries where efficient screening systems have been introduced. In Iceland, where a striking fall in deaths has been reported, research found that the decline occurred as much in older women who had not been screened as in the screened group. In Sweden, also said to have benefited from intensive screening, the decline in the death rate has been no greater than in countries such as Japan, France and Italy which do not operate national screening programmes.

### The big problem

Assessing the value of any system is virtually impossible given the present lack of knowledge of the natural history of cervical malignancy. Until recently it was assumed that all pre-malignant cervical lesions would eventually become invasive. It now looks as if well over 90 per cent of them rarely progress. A unique New Zealand study, which followed almost 1000 patients diagnosed as having the most severe form of pre-cancerous condition for up to 28 years, found that most remained well regardless of what was or was not done to them.

In a situation where the medical profession is unconvinced of the benefits of mass screening, many are asking whether it is justified to subject millions of women to the inconvenience and anxiety of being told that they have an abnormal smear, when 95 per cent of them won't develop into cancer.

It seems to me that the true problems have been overlooked in this debate. The paramount problem is that the issue of cervical cancer has been manipulated by the exponents of a reactionary morality to such an extent that it has become impossible to institute an effective screening system in the present climate. The second problem is that for years the authorities have been encouraging the wrong women to attend screening tests without devoting the research and resources necessary to interpret the results and determine whether any of it has done any good.

The effect has been to terrorise millions of women into avoiding the system for fear of being branded promiscuous, and to scare millions more into thinking that they have cancer.

Susan Quillam, *Positive Smear*, Penguin, £3.99



'Bonking Mo' and the bomb squad

# MARKET TOWN MILITARISM

Keith Tompson on 'IRA terrorists' in a Farnham guest-house

A strange mystery hangs over the Surrey town of Farnham. It began on Monday 3 April, when police were called to a small guest-house on West Street, Farnham's main thoroughfare. By 6.30am the police had the guest-house surrounded by a large number of armed officers wearing military fatigues. By 8.30am they had burst in and made three arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The national media reported the raid immediately. Early morning TV viewers and radio listeners were treated to stories of an armed siege involving suspected IRA terrorists. By Tuesday the morning papers had picked it up. 'Police release PTA suspects' announced the *Guardian*, reporting that 'the area was sealed off for several hours yesterday while army explosives experts and sniffer dogs made a search after police warned they had found two suspicious suitcases'.

## Not the Sport!

In Farnham itself, the story naturally took top billing. 'Surrey's oldest newspaper', the *Surrey & Hants News*, went to press at noon on the day of the raid. It redesigned the front page by 10am to report 'IRA pair in West Street? Police set road blocks, watch guest-house'. The *Farnham Herald* went to press on the following Wednesday and led with the story: 'Police surveillance after "terrorist" alert. Tracker dogs and bomb squad in West Street.'

Those who restricted their news intake to the quality press, local papers, radio and TV would have drawn the only conclusion possible: a suspected IRA squad, holed up in Farnham, near to major army bases, had been rounded up in a daring police swoop. It was left to the *Sport*, not normally known for the accuracy of its journalism, to suggest an entirely different story in its Wednesday edition.

The *Sport* report appeared under the headline 'Mo's bonk went like a bomb! Love tiff sparked terror alert'. Could this be the same story? It could indeed:

'Sexy Maureen Edwards' love session went like a bomb...and sparked off an amazing terrorist



Armed police saved these Farnham citizens from being terrorised by a man who talks loudly

alert. For Mo and her ex-army boyfriend had an explosive row after bonking in their love nest. As they punched and slapped each other, Mo screamed at her lover: "Get back to Northern Ireland and the bombs!" An alarmed neighbour who heard the uproar immediately called police. And that brought a full-scale anti-IRA operation to the door of their room.'

'Sexy Mo' explained how she confronted armed police in her silk kimono and was marched off in handcuffs while they tore up the floorboards. The *Sport* story was written by Suzy Birkdale. She doesn't exist. The *Sport* got the story from an agency which also sold it to *Today*.

Intrigued by the smell of a cover-up, we did a little investigating of our own. This is what we discovered.

The Meads Guest-House in Farnham was described to me as a 'place of low repute'. Maureen Edwards, 43, who seems well-known in the town, was there together with Paul, an ex-soldier, and his 17-year old son. What went on between the three of them that night remains unclear, but it is certain that an argument started at around 5.30am. The word 'bomb'

was apparently used twice. Firstly by Paul, who complained loudly about money and said that the meal he had bought the previous evening had already 'cost a bomb'; and then by Maureen, as described in the *Sport*.

The police were called by a neighbour who overheard the shouting. West Street was flooded with armed officers. At about 8.30am, Paul left the guest-house. He left his son behind. Confronted by police, Paul ran the length of the street until he was caught outside a local clothier. He was clearly lucky not to be shot; remember Gibraltar. He, of course, did not know this. He thought that the police were there because of his row with Maureen Edwards, not because he was a suspected IRA man.

Shortly after Paul's arrest, armed police demanded of Maureen and his son: 'Come out with your hands up.' Sensibly, they did so. All three were held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act for almost 12 hours. At 9.30am police sealed off West Street and evacuated adjoining buildings. Army bomb experts were called in and the guest-house was searched for suspicious articles.

A few days later Paul burst into

the offices of the local newspapers threatening to sue them for implying that he, an ex-squaddie who had served the Queen in Ireland, was an IRA member. Neither paper has taken the opportunity to tell the real story, although many people in the town seem well-acquainted with the facts of the matter.

'No terrorists in West St' the next issue of the *Surrey & Hants News* meekly reported on page three. The obviously disappointed writer simply noted that 'although three people were detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, they were later released'. Sergeant David Crossley, the officer in charge on the day, managed to salvage something from the raid: 'Although it was a false alarm eventually it was a good exercise', he told the paper. He was 'pleased with the way the operation went'. None of the national media have corrected their versions of events, which presumably came from the police.

## Farnham feels safer

The Farnham raid may look like a farce, but there are some important lessons to be drawn from this sordid affair.

First, it takes little more than an anonymous tip-off concerning talk of Ireland and strong language to bring armed police and military personnel on to the streets of Britain. Second, like almost all PTA arrests, these had nothing to do with the IRA; they were simply designed to terrorise people and create a public climate of fear—'a good exercise'. And lastly, the press will oblige in a police cover-up when Ireland is involved. The fact that it was left to a grubby little comic like the *Sport* to expose any facts is a graphic illustration of how the media kowtows to the authorities. Thus an everyday situation quickly becomes a full-scale 'terror alert'. This is all part of the wall of silence surrounding the Irish War.

Evidence that the police and press achieved their aim came in a letter to a later *Surrey & Hants News*, headlined 'Top cops': 'We now know that the alert was a false alarm. I think praise is due, however, to Farnham police for the way that the incident was handled. It makes me feel much safer, now, living halfway between Bordon and Aldershot, to know that our local bobbies are so well-organised when danger threatens.'

The only real danger on that fateful Monday was that a frightened man would be shot as he ran from a minor disagreement in a guest-house. The final irony is that, during his army days, he might well have been the one doing the shooting.

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

The murky world of bomb scares

# Designer terrorism

**Linda Ryan suggests a link between gelignite left on a Jumbo and Semtex found near Scarborough**

The three youths who penetrated security at Heathrow and boarded a British Airways 747 became big news in March. It didn't much matter to the headline-writers that others had already performed the same feat. Earlier in the year, reporters posing as cleaners also managed to get into an aircraft. That too was big news. It seems that so long as there is some terrorist angle, any non-story can be transformed into a major media event.

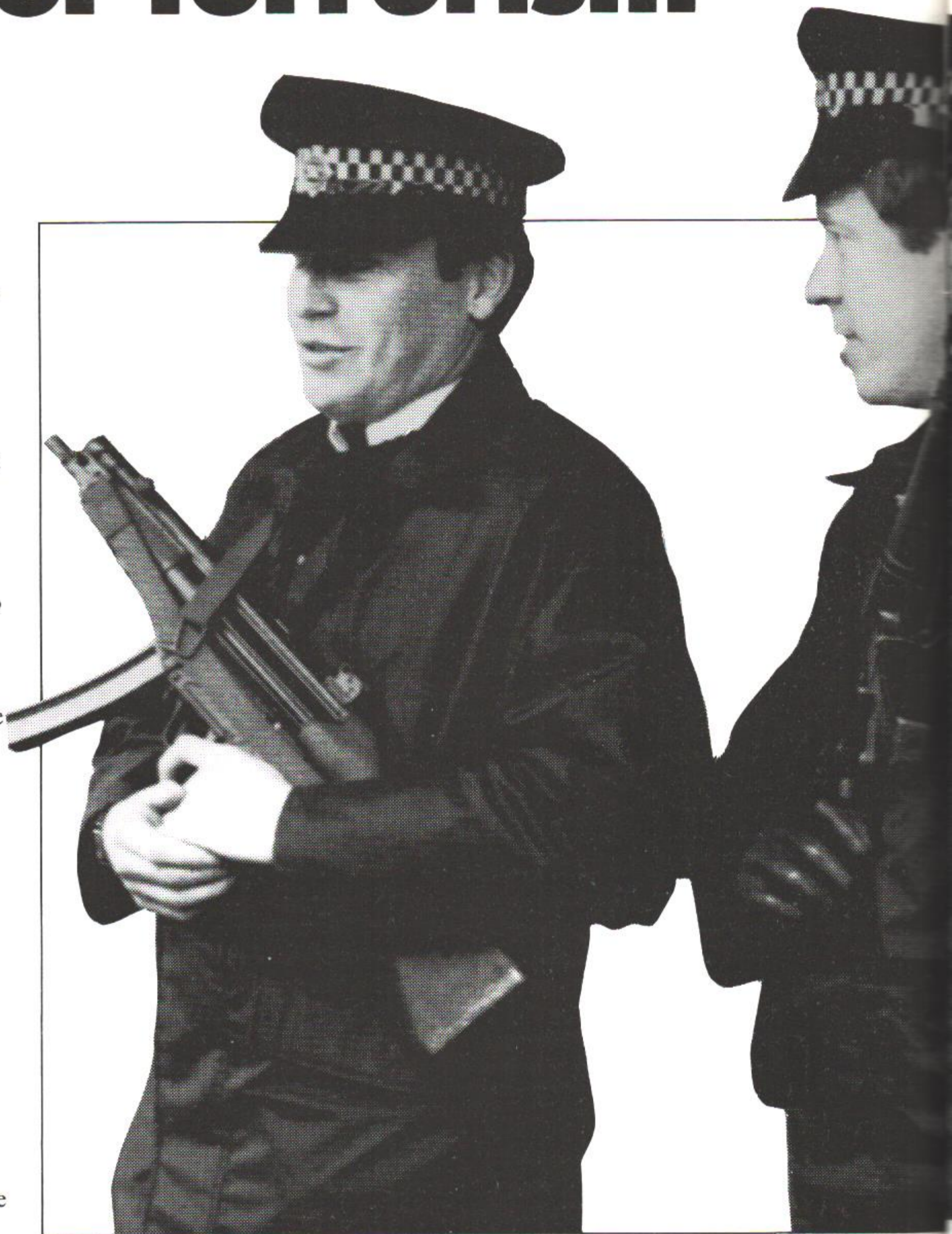
Terrorism: the very word is sure to capture attention. It preys on our fears and provokes the deepest of passions. The terrorist threat does not really have to exist for it to make an impact. Like children who do as they are told when threatened with the bogey man, grown-ups can be paralysed by the menace of unseen international terrorists. This is what makes the terrorism issue so attractive to the authorities.

## Dogs of war

The rulers of Britain (and indeed the rest of the Western world) promote the terrorism issue at every turn. The international terrorist is the perfect external threat with which they can distract attention from their unpopular policies and win support for more repression. The problems of everyday life pale into insignificance compared to the danger posed by foreign hitmen prowling the land. Popularising the fear of alien terrorists helps to override conflicts within British society, and to cement support for the authorities against the shadowy gunmen and bombers.

From the point of view of the British establishment the beauty of the terrorism issue is that a little of it goes a long way. The merest hint of a terrorism link is enough to remind us that we all face mortal danger. In the murky world of terrorism and counter-terrorism there is no line between truth and fiction.

Take the case of the stick of gelignite, discovered on a BA Jumbo jet three months after security forces left it behind when they finished a training exercise. A simple case of police incompetence? Well, yes and no. The media's word association game quickly brought in wider issues. Just mention the word 'gelignite' and before you know it we



are on to terrorism and the whole problem of national security. The sniffer dogs have let Britain down. By inference, this failure of security must prove that the terrorists are winning the war. The slip-up by a sloppy British bobby has become further proof that we must all be on our guard against foreigners with bulging pockets.

As the gelignite row reached panic level, the most ludicrous propositions were soon accepted as profound insights. 'We are now the laughing-stock of the world, when we used to be the best' declared Labour's transport spokesman John Prescott. The best at what, John? Can the failure to train skilled sniffer dogs provide an adequate explanation of Britain's decline? And is your proposal to make air passengers pay a £2 security levy designed to bring back the days of imperial glory? None of this had anything to do with the matter in

hand, but it all helped to keep the hysteria going. This is now a familiar pattern.

On the night of 21 December 1988 the police raided a block of flats in south London and discovered what they claimed to be an IRA hide-out. The *Sunday Times* dubbed the discovery 'the most formidable bomb factory yet established by the IRA in mainland Britain'. Soon the popular press was full of stories about the 'Clapham bomb factory' or, as the *Sun* had it, the 'Battersea bomb factory'. This flexible attitude towards south London's geography was to typify press treatment of the whole story. Soon drawings of a face resembling a mathematics lecturer were flashing across our TV screens. A master terrorist was born.

It is worth examining the unfolding story of the Clapham/Battersea bomb factory. First of all there is the very label 'bomb factory', creating images of a



Heathrow: terrorism scares provide the pretext for extending state power

formidable set-up. Is it an assembly line working on a round-the-clock shift system? Or maybe a sophisticated laboratory full of test tubes and other scientific paraphernalia? We cannot be sure, but perhaps at a time when small enterprise is encouraged by the government a suitcase constitutes a factory.

Like all good thrillers, the plot of the bomb factory saga gets increasingly complex. It appears that during the first raid the police failed to find some vital clues. A month later the owner of the flat lifted the carpet and found a passport. Some time later the owner found more secret documents jammed in an air vent. There is now talk of the owner setting up an enterprise scheme to organise treasure hunts for more terrorist clues.

These belated discoveries in the Clapham/Battersea bomb factory allowed the authorities to weave new threads into the tangled web of terrorism. It turned out that a copy of *Who's Who* had been found in the flat. The media immediately called this a 'death list' of politicians and public figures. It is not clear why they chose to label *Who's Who* as the death list, rather than the London telephone directory—which was also found on the premises. Nevertheless, it was now possible for the authorities to announce that a murder campaign against Britain's finest was in full swing, and to warn right-wing MPs not to do TV interviews on the lawn outside the house of commons. This, apparently, is a favourite haunt of IRA snipers; it is only by chance that they have never shot at anybody there through 20 years of war.

### The master

The most intriguing character in the plot is the drawing of the anaemic-looking mathematics teacher, named as Patrick Sheehy. Who is this man? The press was absolutely clear that he was a master bomber. Not just any old bomber or a YTS trainee, but a master of his trade. By March, however, we were being told that Sheehy was not what he appeared to be.

According to these later newspaper reports, Sheehy is a man with no known 'terrorist links or criminal record'. This of course only proves that he is a particularly cunning and dangerous breed of terrorist. Furthermore he is no longer such a master bomber, but is 'believed to be a trained assassin' (*Sunday Times*, 26 March). According to the *Sunday Times* the hunt for Sheehy is 'fast becoming as chilling as the plot of *The Day of the Jackal*'. The paper's hacks are too modest to name the author of the Sheehy plot.

To complicate matters further, Sheehy the top terrorist is in the habit of leaving packages of Semtex explosive around the country like some people leave umbrellas. A cache of Semtex was found at a north London reservoir in February and a package was discovered in the woods near Scarborough in March. The media were quick to point out that the Conservative Party central council's annual meeting was to be convened in Scarborough a few days later. So Sheehy the trained assassin must have been planning to shoot pellets of Semtex at the gathering of Tory notables. By the by, it is normal practice for the security forces to keep quiet about and stake out a cache of explosives which they believe are likely to be used soon. Yet they chose instead to plaster the Scarborough dump all over the papers. No doubt they had their reasons.

### For my next twist

In the best tradition of serialised pulp fiction, there is always time for one more twist in the Sheehy tale. Who knows what is hiding yet beneath the floorboards of that south London flat? Hundreds more of Sheehy's Semtex packages, carefully wrapped in death lists, could still be waiting to be discovered throughout the green belt. Sheehy himself, meanwhile, looks set to make a guest appearance at the international terrorists' convention.

Nobody has yet explained exactly what international terrorism means. Presumably there is a plot of Robert Ludlum-like proportions centred on Tripoli. Representatives from the Red Brigades, Eta, PLO, ANC, IRA, Hizbollah and a host of less well-known outfits must meet to debate issues and swap handy hints. Perhaps they run courses for apprentice master bombers and trainee assassins, or hold workshops on how to look like maths lecturers and the art of losing Semtex

packages in places where they are likely to be found.

We can now reveal that international terrorism has succeeded in infiltrating the British sniffer dog community. Libyan dogs disguised as genuine British hounds have gained employment at recently privatised British airports. Some have wangled jobs as cleaners. It is believed that a group of undetected hit-dogs are only waiting for the publication of the new edition of *Who's Who* before moving into action. And one of them has been photographed in a park with Pamela Bordes.

### Insecurity measures

Terrorism stories could be dismissed as a bit of a joke if they didn't have such serious consequences. While all the Sheehy stories were making the rounds, the new Prevention of Terrorism Act came into force, making draconian 'emergency' measures a permanent part of the British system. During the past decade terrorism has provided the pretext for extending the repressive powers of the state further and further. Major police operations at airports are now routine. Security checks and paramilitary operations are carried out in any town visited by a Tory politician. Every time a terrorist story breaks, it provides another argument for the perfection of a police state.

There is an even more insidious consequence of the terrorism scares than the extension of police powers. These panics create an atmosphere of insecurity and help to distract people from the pressing social problems that face us all. The authorities with the power truly to terrorise society can get on with the job of running the country for their benefit, safe in the knowledge that people can be frightened into acquiescence by the shadows in the dark.

## 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) 375 1702** today for details of the forum taking place near you.

**Digging the Chunnel**

# Death under the rock

**Keith Tompson  
and Joe Hall  
see dirty work  
afoot on the  
Kent coast**

Everybody's talking about the future threat to the Kent countryside posed by the Channel tunnel rail link. But what about the threat to the lives of the men digging the thing today?

Eurotunnel plc has built a hi-tech exhibition centre near Folkestone on the Kent coast, to advertise the benefits and the frontier-breaking character of the Channel tunnel. One entire side of the centre is taken up by a model of the completed Chunnel system. It is a huge railway set, showing the French and British terminais and the connecting routes to Paris and London. It isn't a very good advertisement.

On every viewing window, signs alert visitors (100 000 since the centre opened last September) to the fact that 'some of the trains on the model are not operational at the moment due to maintenance work'. As the latest departure left Sangatte for Folkestone, it experienced 'operational difficulties'. It fell off the track. An embarrassed Eurotunnel employee climbed up to put it back. You couldn't help thinking that it wouldn't be so easy on the real thing—and that the workers who had to clear up the mess would suffer more than a red face.

Transmanche Link (TML) is the consortium of big building firms contracted by Eurotunnel plc to construct the UK side of the tunnel. It employs more than 2000 construction workers, mainly at the Shakespeare Cliff sites where the tunnel is being burrowed under the sea. Several hundred more work in metal hangars or 'temporary factories' on the Isle of Grain in north Kent, making the huge tunnel segments in grim conditions.

In the first weeks of 1989 two workers were killed at the Shakespeare Cliff construction site, and a third was badly injured on the Isle of Grain. In stark contrast to the video-age publicity at the exhibition centre, TML has imposed a strict regime of secrecy to cover up the Victorian working conditions in which the Chunnel is being built.

The Isle of Grain site stands on an expanse of flat land, towered over by cranes like the walking battle machines from *Star Wars*. They shift the tunnel segments from the works



on to trains to Shakespeare Cliff. The 400 men work five 12-hour shifts a week in the noisy, filthy and dangerous hangars. The only employee you see as you approach the works is a security guard who tells you to clear off and warns you not to try photographing anything.

In the village of Strood, where most of the Isle of Grain men live in bed and breakfast accommodation, there is a common view that working there is 'the pits'. One worker was critically injured this year when his bowel was crushed. It took 30 minutes for an ambulance to reach the isolated factory. The company had made no provision for dealing with serious accidents.

The Shakespeare Cliff complex is even more fortified. A small army of security guards mans the main

entrance on the Dover-Folkestone road, and another little army stands sentry at the gates of Farthingloe village—the temporary shanty town which houses more than half of the workforce. Skull and crossbones signs decorate the fencing: 'NO PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT ALLOWED'. The chief security officer is about as cooperative as his mate on the Isle of Grain: 'You'll have no luck here. The men are under orders to say nothing, on threat of the sack. You'll have to contact TML's press office.'

So what have they got to hide? For a start there is Farthingloe village, a cold collection of barrack huts in a compound ringed by barbed wire, and none-too-affectionately known as Colditz by the 'inmates'. The thousand or so



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

**Gulag Farthingloe:  
the construction  
workers' version of a  
Kent village**

men who live there pay £45 a week for a cramped room. They are allowed no visitors, alcohol, TVs, pets or cooking facilities in their rooms. Managers can enter any room without notice. Any breach of the petty rules can mean eviction and likely dismissal. Many men work an 84-hour week, with one weekend off a month.

The construction workers are mostly 'travellers', who have come from Ireland, Scotland and the north to find jobs. They are used to the hazardous conditions that prevail throughout the building trade, but even hardened veterans of bad sites have found TML's conditions of work beyond their worse fears. The two deaths this year were typically brutal. A 19-year old chain man in a surveyor's gang was killed in a

collision with an underground train. A 36-year old worker died in an 'incident' involving the boring machine and an underground gantry.

The company is determined to keep the truth hidden behind its glossy publicity. Up on the cliff, while tired men were coming up from working 45 metres underground five kilometres out at sea, two TML workers confirmed that their contracts were akin to the Official Secrets Act: 'We can't say a word to you. Our jobs are on the line. You should go to see TML if you want a statement about the killings. That's union policy, too.'

'Union policy'? Surely with workers being killed and maimed and working such long hours for a ruthless employer, they must be non-unionised? Not quite; TML has agreements with the construction unions, most importantly with the building workers' union Ucat. But the agreement is that Ucat will operate as a company union, an arm of personnel management, working hand-in-hand with management to ensure that the Chunnel gets through whatever the cost to the workforce.

**'Esprit de corps'**

The main union official at Shakespeare Cliff is Ken Bolton, a full-time Ucat national officer. His wages are paid by TML, and he orders his priorities accordingly. The first step in the strategy to ensure stable labour relations has been the setting up of a training centre at Ashford. All new workers undergo a one-week induction course there, run by managers and union officials and designed to engender loyalty to the company and pride in the prestigious tunnel project. The recruits are encouraged to make sacrifices and forget about industrial action because 'the eyes of Europe' are upon them. The aim is to instil a military 'esprit de corps' to match the barracks-style living conditions at Farthingloe village.

Once the workers are on site, management's aim is to keep them divided into layers through a complex system of bonuses. At Shakespeare Cliff, the elite tunnellers earn up to £700 a week, while surface workers make up to £400. Workers at the Isle of Grain site complain that they are paid only half what the men at the cliff can make. It is a recipe for preventing any united action over pay and safety. With the aid of the company unions, it has so far paid off for TML.

The accident at the Isle of Grain earlier this year sparked the first serious strike by TML employees. Workers at the site spontaneously walked out in protest over the conditions and the lack of adequate medical facilities. This could have been the springboard from which the

unions forced safety concessions at all the Kent sites; for example, it is widely acknowledged that the company is not equipped to deal with a fire near the tunnel face under the sea. Instead, the Isle of Grain strike only served to confirm the divisions between workers at the different sites, and the unions' role in consolidating these.

Union officials moved in fast to defuse the Isle of Grain row and to ensure that the action did not spread to Shakespeare Cliff. Bolton simply asserted that there was no connection between the workplaces, since one was a factory and the other a construction site. The fact that both are run by the same firm, and that workers at each site are exposed to similarly hazardous conditions, seemed to elude him. Even when the fatalities at the tunnel occurred, the usual courtesies to the dead were not extended. Unions in industries like construction and mining have a tradition of stopping work for at least the remainder of the day after a death. But down in the Chunnel, unions and management agreed to suspend work for a few minutes, then encouraged the workers to get on with it and so save their big bonuses.

The unions at the Channel tunnel sites have helped the employers to create the modern equivalent of the Victorian conditions in which the canal system was built by 'navvies'. It is being constructed by transient labour, forced to leave home to avoid the dole, housed in barracks and treated as accident-fodder. The latter-day additions are high wages (to be paid for in life and limb), and a security and secrecy system that the government's GCHQ spy centre would be proud of.

**100 years late**

Perhaps none of this should come as a surprise. After all, the Chunnel is essentially a Victorian project. It was first conceived by Albert Mathieu-Favier in 1802, before the old Queen even reached the throne. Napoleon took an interest. The British and French governments signed an agreement to dig it in 1876, and the first drilling began at Shakespeare Cliff in 1880. More than a century later, the Chunnel is running into technical and financial trouble again.

Despite the boasts at the exhibition centre, the Channel tunnel is no symbol of enterprise and innovation. It is a sign of how slowly and barbarically capitalists implement the ideas of engineers and scientists. Even if they manage to finish it this time, it will be at the cost of more workers' lives, and a hundred years after its time.

Their profits, our health

# Cowboy capitalism

**While employers cut corners, argues Andy Clarkson, the government cuts safety standards and fiddles statistics**



PHOTO: Don Reed

The massive media coverage of major workplace disasters like the Piper Alpha explosion stands in stark contrast to the silence about the rising rate of everyday injuries sustained at work.

The authorities like to point to official figures which show a steady decline in accidental deaths at work, from 860 in 1971 to 370 in 1986 (figures exclude self-employed and 'non-employed' people killed as a result of work activities). But these statistics hide as much as they reveal.

Part of the explanation for the decline in work-related deaths is probably the shift in employment from heavy metal manufacturing industries to the apparently less lethal service sector. In one traditional sector which has increased its workforce in recent years—construction—the death rate is rising: 157 building workers were killed in the year ending last month.

**ABOVE:**  
Every building site  
needs a nurse  
these days

Another boom sector, the government's cheap-labour schemes for the unemployed, has also proved a deathtrap. Fifty teenagers have been killed on Youth Training Schemes since 1982.

Focusing on the falling death rate also distracts from the increase in major non-fatal injuries at work—up by almost half since 1985 in most sectors of employment (see table). In mining, for example, the annual total of major injuries more than doubled in five years—while the number of miners was slashed by half.

The increasing numbers of people in white-collar and service jobs are far from safe. New technology has meant new safety risks. Take 'Repetitive strain injury' (RSI). In a study published this year by the Edinburgh-based Institute of Occupational Medicine, 580 orthopaedic patients out of a sample of 1500 were found to have upper-

limb disorders arising from their work. Those at highest risk were keyboard operators: secretaries, VDU operators and supermarket checkout staff. The institute recommended that their work be modified 'to minimise the use of thumb, pronation and oblique supination (movement of the wrist) and the rotation of the shoulders with arms elevated'.

But who believes that today's employers will listen to such recommendations? The order of the day is speed-ups and corner-cutting in every workplace. The Thatcher government is turning a blind eye to all manner of sharp practice, allowing firms a free hand to maximise profits at the expense of health and safety.

## Hard noses and hats

Asked about increasing accidents in the construction industry during a trip to a London site, employment secretary Norman Fowler complacently suggested that 'companies need to be made aware that safety is a good investment' (*Building*, 12 January 1989). But, as Fowler knows, any hardnosed boss would disagree. With no action now taken on over half the building sites where a death or major injury has occurred, the average fine for infringements of safety regulations stands at £1000. It is cheaper for employers to take the risk of being fined than to pay for proper safety measures. While the bosses get helpful investment tips from the Tories, the finger of blame for declining safety standards always gets pointed at workers. Following in this tradition, Fowler says he wants a law to make building workers wear hard hats.

A bit of protective clothing is the employers' panacea when workers demand better safety standards. In the chemical industry, for example, gloves are often provided for work with toxic substances. However, workers generally find that it is impossible to do their work in the time demanded by the management while wearing such cumbersome gear. They are in a constant dilemma over whether to risk their health or their job, or both.

The change of attitudes towards safety regulations is amply illustrated

by the Tory government's approach to its own regulatory body, the health and safety executive. The HSE is currently engaged in a major cost-cutting exercise to reduce its monitoring machinery. And, just as the Tories have repeatedly 'adjusted' unemployment figures, so the HSE's statistics are being manipulated to mask declining safety standards.

### Riddor fiddle

In 1985 the arrangements for collecting HSE statistics were changed to a new system, the 'Reporting of injuries, diseases, and dangerous occurrences regulations' (Riddor). Geared to match a computerised format, Riddor offered a greater flexibility in using statistics. However, it also excluded important categories of accidents: those involving a) less than four days off work; b) road traffic; c) merchant shipping or aviation; d) the armed services; e) assaults on staff; f) the self-employed, except when subcontracted; and g) those notifiable under the 'Poisonous substances in agriculture regulations 1984'. Riddor only records fatalities which occur within a year of an incident. People who are affected by occupational diseases or new chemical compounds with long incubation periods don't count.

There have been other important modifications in the way that safety standards are monitored. There are an estimated 400 000 fixed work premises in Britain, excluding building sites. The already depleted numbers of mine, factory and farm inspectors have been cut from 3661

or construction' companies could be brought to book by a series of well-publicised 'blitzes'. Some chance.

In a review of its 'blitz' on construction firms this January, the HSE found that it had issued prohibition notices at 49 per cent of firms with over 50 workers, while only 35 per cent of sites with between five and 10 workers were similarly penalised (*Financial Times*, 13 January). In other words, the big firms are the guiltiest parties, operating the sites which employ almost all of the cowboy subcontractors. And since Downing Street has no interest in embarrassing staunch Tory companies like construction majors Taylor Woodrow and MacAlpine, they have little to fear from HSE 'blitz' threats. The HSE has already proved coy about upsetting the government by publicising the fact that the newly privatised British Steel Corporation is its most persistent offender, being prosecuted no less than nine times in the last two years for operating dangerous machinery, etc (*Labour Research*, December 1988).

### That's alright then

To make up for the erosion of its inspectorate machinery, the HSE relies more upon the 'self-reporting' of accidents by management personnel. In one case, the HSE admitted that its investigation of a complaint by workers striking against asbestos hazards at Battersea power station amounted to no more than a phone-call to management. Surprisingly enough, the boss told

order of 50 per cent' (p74). That is HSE-speak for cover-ups. As the responsibility for reporting accidents is shifted from government inspectors to management, 'under-reporting' can only increase.

Meanwhile, managers are cracking down on any idea workers might have about 'self-reporting' safety risks. Signalmen Mike Lisicki and Stephen Jackson were sacked by BR after they spoke out on TV about safety lapses before the Clapham rail crash. This year, the department of energy promised to 'look into' the case of a North Sea oilworker who had been fired for complaining about the use of dodgy second-hand equipment and skimmed welding work on a rig where the supervisor was in 'a state of panic' about production targets. From September 1987, factory inspectors themselves were banned from talking to the press by HSE director general John Rimington 'on pain of disciplinary action'.

### No good

In today's conditions of cuts and cover-ups, it is a sure thing that any new safety standard brought in will be for the employers' benefit. In October the government is to introduce the 'Control of substances hazardous to health' (COSHH) order to set safety levels for people working with toxic substances. Until now, such safety levels were based upon research by the two US chemical giants Dow and Du Pont. These statistics are now widely regarded as unreliable since they admit to taking economic costs into account. The Tories claim that COSHH is a 'health-based' alternative standard. But in March the BBC2 science programme *Antenna* pointed out that the COSHH safety limits are *exactly* the same as the old Dow and Du Pont figures.

*Antenna* concluded that toxicity testing was 'completely unreliable' and was being used to lull workers into a false sense of security while they worked with deadly solvents. The government's COSHH initiative is a response to pressure from the Confederation of British Industry to have some standard toxicity limit recognised in law; the bosses 'are keener on having a number than having the right number'. So the one new safety law which the Tories are introducing is designed to protect employers from compensation claims, not to protect workers.

It is now clearer than ever that, if we want to achieve some decent safety standards at work, it is no good relying on government inspectors or the law. We will have to deal with the cowboy capitalists ourselves.

## Injuries are rising across the board

### Major injuries by sector, 1983-88

Year	Agric	Mining	Manuf	Construct	Transport	Services	Total
1983	188	626	4118	2121	437	4009	11 499
1985	221	877	4749	2191	486	4188	12 759
1988	477	1372	6944	2587	1097	6274	18 904

Source: *Social Trends 1985, 1987 and 1989*

in 1986 to 3470 in 1988 (*HSE Annual Report 1987/88*, p37). The number of visits they carried out fell from 228 714 in 1985-86 to 214 706 in 1987-88 (p40). Government ministers have obscured the extent of this decline by topping up the falling numbers of factory inspectors with the figures for HSE administrative staff and trainees.

To justify this decline in its inspectorate, the HSE report explains that its policy is now to concentrate upon 'directing inspectors towards work activities with the higher risks, or where confidence is lacking in management's ability to control risks' (p49). The report argues that high-risk culprits like 'maintenance

the HSE that all was well, and that was the end of the matter.

Self-reporting has gone furthest in the coal industry, where plans to revise the strict provisions of the 1954 Mines and Quarries Act are well-advanced. According to John Howard from the Institute of Professional Civil Servants, which represents HSE inspectors, the revised safety laws will replace absolute obligations ('shall') with woollier requirements ('as far as is reasonably practicable'). It will be left to the colliery managers to decide what is and is not reasonably practicable.

In its 1987/88 report, the HSE estimates that 'under-reporting' of accidents stands at 'something of the

'Ozone-friendly' chemical firms

# A LETHAL ENVIRONMENT

Kerry Dean on Green capitalism in a Yorkshire chemical works

**T**hey said they are concerned about the environment. Concerned? What about the conditions in here? If they are so concerned, how come nobody from Swillington wants to work here? That was how one worker at the Rocol chemical works in Swillington, West Yorkshire, summed up the feeling when management told the workforce that the firm could not afford a decent pay rise, because of the high cost of converting to 'ozone-friendly' production.

The pay dispute at Rocol, which led to a three-week strike in February and March, is a warning about the cynical way that Green arguments can be exploited by employers who couldn't care less about the dangerous environment in which their employees work.

The pay at Rocol is atrocious. Before the dispute most of the 300 men were taking home £103.50 without overtime; the 25 women and others at the bottom of the scale got even less. And conditions

are worse. The workers are mixing lethal chemicals to make industrial lubricants. Danger money is only paid for a few of the worst jobs, at the rate of 96p a day—'it would get you a decent bar of soap'.

## Profits first

Safety measures are kept to a minimum, to maximise productivity and profits. 'Always they're cutting corners. We might be mixing some stuff which takes a quarter of an hour, so the foremen race you round to do other things in between. This is when mistakes happen. If the wrong stuff gets used we get blamed. They don't tell us what these chemicals do to you. The lab staff sneak us the information about the chemicals. We only found out a few months ago that this stuff Baragel is explosive and should be seen to in the flash room. We'd been mixing it on the factory floor for years.'

The workers have countless examples of 'accidents' caused by management's corner-cutting.

'One of the managers told a fitter to take the safety switch off the aerosol labelling machine because it slows the line down. Well, they took the safety switch out and one kid got all his fingers mashed to pieces. They sent a fitter down while he was in hospital to put the switch back in.' A blender had chemicals spilled on him, wiped it off and carried on working, only to discover that 'the stuff had burnt through his overalls and his trousers underneath and into his leg'. Paint cans explode in workers' faces—but at least one exploded over some big nob visiting director recently'. The acids and powders make the men physically sick, while workers say that at least four women working on the aerosol line have recently had miscarriages.

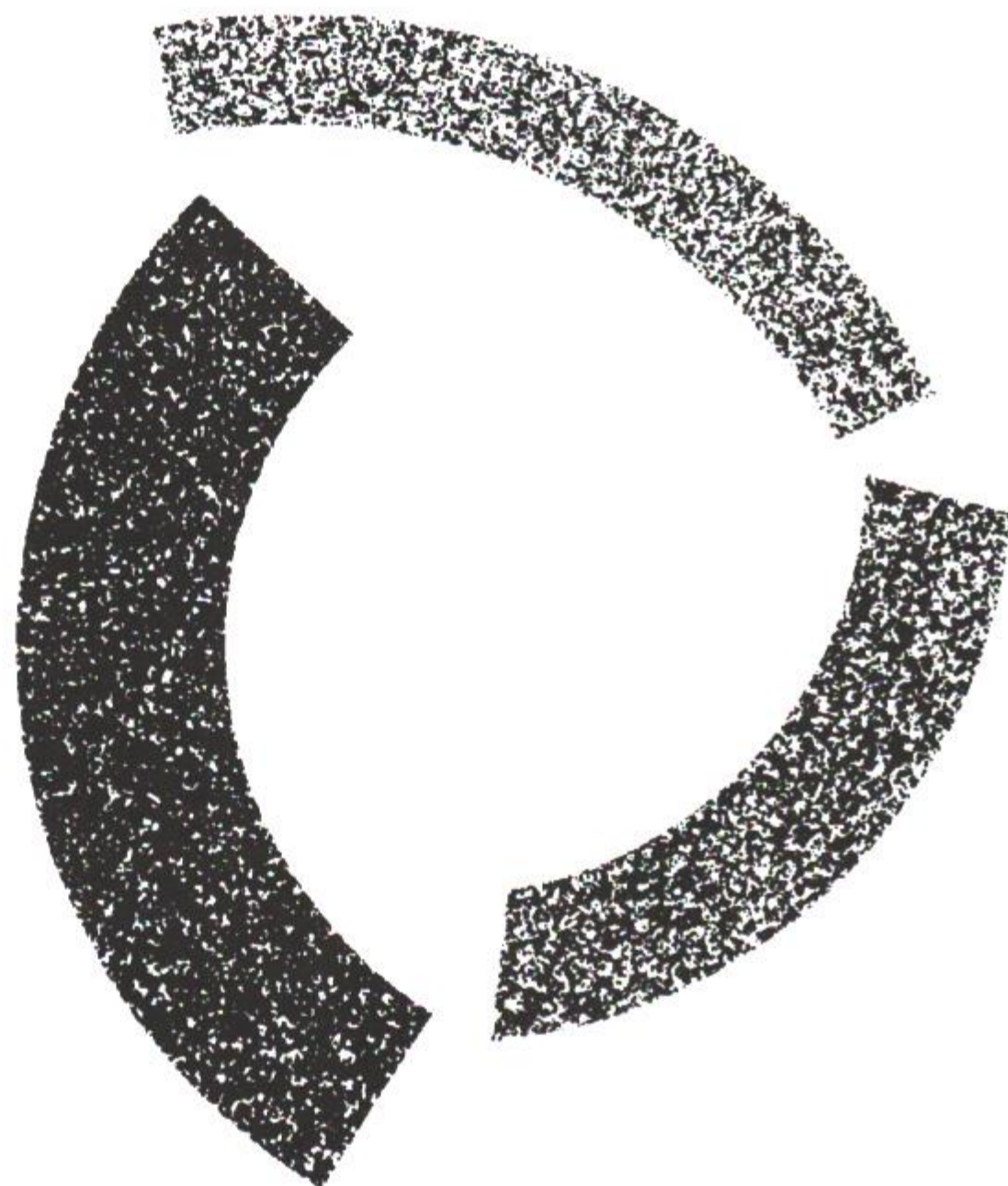
There is a health and safety man at Rocol. He is a manager. 'One lad got this dust down the back of his gloves, washed it off like you would, and the stuff reacts with water and burned all the skin off the backs of his hands. He went to

see the safety manager, who studied them for five minutes and told him he seemed to have burnt the skin off his hands! The health and safety man is an idiot. When some of the wrong chemicals got put in a toxic waste bin and the can began to swell, he went and stabbed it with a big metal pole—it could have blown the place apart.'

It was hardly surprising that, when the general workers' union members at Rocol went on strike for a decent pay rise, they were unimpressed by management's claim that the company couldn't afford it because it needed to invest in going ozone-friendly. In the end it took the threat of sackings, and some very dirty work by GMB officials, to break the three-week strike. The union stitched up a deal under which the workers got the company's original 7.5 per cent offer and, in return for an extra £3.75 a week, had to give up their right to the £30-a-week overtime which had allowed them to live. The environment in which they work, meanwhile, gets more and more lethal.

Green capitalism is a con. Workers at firms like Rocol must not pay with their health or their living standards for the employers' sudden concern about ozone.

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Reviewing Kinnock's policy review

# INNKEEPERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

Tony Kennedy on the new-look Labour Party

**Y**ou could be forgiven for thinking that the Labour Party had decided to make an independent entry into the Eurovision Song Contest this year. Its new song, 'Meet the challenge, make the change' is, however, strictly for domestic consumption. It is part of the party's current attempt to 'relaunch' itself, in the hope of popularising the results of its two-year policy review (to be rubber-stamped by the national executive this month), and of distracting attention from Thatcher's triumphant tenth anniversary celebrations. As with all diversionary tactics, the relaunch is mostly about making a lot of light and noise.

The emphasis on style and appearance instead of politics extends to Neil Kinnock's 'recruit a friend' campaign to increase the party membership. The suggested recruiting methods betray a lack of confidence in both the public's willingness to join, and the membership's enthusiasm for signing them up. Coax a friend into paying 'less than 20p per week' and you can win an Amstrad or a Ford Fiesta. The serious recruiter can earn rose badges in bronze, silver and gold. The national champion will get a reward from Kinnock at Labour's conference in the autumn.

What are the benefits of joining? The members' magazine, *Labour Party News*, has adopted the 'See Paris for a pound' methods of the tabloid press in an attempt to whip up enthusiasm. The cheap holiday may be in the Eastern bloc rather than on the Left Bank, but it sums up the use of easy-to-answer competitions rather than political argument to coax new members into the shrinking constituency parties.

## Narrow minds

All of these attempts to make Labour look fashion-conscious and fun-loving may seem bizarre, but they do confirm a more important point. Packaging and presentation are just about the only things with which Kinnock can give his party a distinctive and

dynamic image today. He certainly can't do it with policy ideas. The Labour Party is latching on to anything, no matter how inane or inappropriate, that might set it apart from the Tories or win a few votes from new quarters. Labour spokesmen now champion all sorts of narrow, indeed narrow-minded, interests.

At the Scottish Labour conference in March, for example, Kinnock declared his sympathy for Tory voters of the south coast shires enraged by what the Chunnel system might do to their property prices. In a speech which was supposed to reassure increasingly suspicious Scots about Labour's determination to stop the Tories railroading them into the poll tax, he chose instead to criticise a government which 'favours the building of a rail link straight across the garden of England'.

## Have one yourself

While Kinnock was standing on the shoulders of the Scottish working class to make his appeal to Kent landowners, Labour's local government spokesman Clive Soley suddenly discovered that he was an avid fan of opera (supposedly the in thing among the wealthy trendies) and announced that the Tories were damaging the national interest by refusing to pay for renovating the Royal Opera House. Meanwhile, Kinnock's trade and industry spokesman Bryan Gould appointed himself spokesman for the small publican. In the wake of the monopoly commission proposals for reforming the big breweries' stranglehold over the drinking business, Gould made a big deal of urging the government to give pub managers the right to buy. The aspiring Dirty Dens of the licensing trade (favourite slogan: 'No dogs or travellers') are now considered an important audience for Labour. And the corner pub (or, for Gould, high-street wine bar) has become part of the master plan for restructuring the British economy.

The full absurdity of all this is

revealed in the party's developing outlook on unemployment. In its submission to the policy review process the Tribune Group, which forms the backbone of Kinnock's support in the parliamentary party, proposed that Labour drop any promise to cut unemployment by a specific figure: 'Our concern with unemployment looked too much as if it were no more than a desire to help a particular set of victims of Thatcherism.' It seems the unemployed are a narrow interest group, but the interests of rural property owners, opera-goers and innkeepers are issues of national importance.

## Citizen Telecom

The attempts to distinguish Labour from the other parties on strange and peripheral subjects is unsurprising, given that the central themes of the 200 policies in the review are little more than repackaged Thatcherism.

For example, Labour promises not to renationalise any company privatised by the Tories. Instead it proposes to buy back the shares now on the stock market, and then issue 'citizen shares' to all users of the gas, electricity, water and telecommunications industries. In other words, Labour wants to show that it is more in favour of a share-owning society than the Tories. Kinnock and Gould must hope that the Tories' privatisation of water and electricity fail, because they could not find the billions needed to buy back those shares from the City. Labour prefers to focus on British Telecom as the prime candidate for its own version of privatisation; the state still holds a 49.8 per cent share in the company, so they could issue citizen Telecom shares on the cheap.

Labour's privatisation proposals have swallowed the Tory line about small share ownership offering users a real say in the running of major industries. Gould should try telling that to the thousands of share-owning British Aerospace workers sacked by management, or the share-owning engineers at BT who have suffered

worsening pay and working conditions since privatisation. All Labour's citizen shares would mean is that the holder is a consumer of gas, telephone or some other service. We already have pieces of paper which say that. They are called bills.

The policy review contains many other concessions to Thatcherite economics, dressed up in double-talk. There is support for 'supply-side socialism', which is the same thing as the supply-side capitalism championed by Reagan and Thatcher over the past decade. There is a proposal to introduce 'assistant teachers' in schools, supposedly to relieve qualified teachers of paperwork. It amounts to the same thing as the government's plan for unqualified 'licensed teachers', setting a precedent for lower pay scales and increased divisions among a workforce already at the forefront of Tory cost-cutting policies. There are plans to retain Tory anti-union laws and cheap-labour schemes. Then there is the contentious issue of defence policy.

## Missing the point

The Labour leadership is tying itself up in knots trying to ditch its old commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament without admitting that it has conceded defeat to Thatcher's militarism. Kinnockite MP and CND veteran Joan Ruddock has come up with the phrase 'reciprocal unilateralism' to cover Labour's conversion to multilateral disarmament. Defence spokesman Martin O'Neill has an even more inventive excuse for ditching Labour's commitment to remove US bases from Britain: the Americans might just dump them on another European country, and 'we would be failing in our duty as international socialists if we relied on our European comrades, who may be in political opposition, to prevent their redeployment'. If keeping US bases is the action of international socialists, then cooperating with US air-strikes on Libya must be an example of anti-imperialist solidarity.

It has taken Labour two years of policy review to come up with this assortment of capitalist ideas wrapped up in word-games and waffle. Despite the complex detail of the policy review, the Labour leadership has revealed its inability to forge a strategic alternative to Thatcherism. In a recent interview deputy leader Roy Hattersley said Thatcher 'has taught us a lesson that you don't win a political battle unless you have a clear ideological base'. In learning that lesson, however, Hattersley and the rest have missed the other point: you don't win by stealing somebody else's ideological base, either.

May 1979

# How the Sun rose on Thatcher

**Kirsten Cale looks at the contribution of Rupert Murdoch's rag to Thatcher's first election triumph**

The *Sun* has been the popular voice of Thatcherism over the past decade. The paper assumed that role even before Margaret Thatcher came to power, when it helped to set the tone for her first election victory 10 years ago this month. So what did the world look like, viewed from the gutter, in May 1979?

First, the non-political news of 1979. Then, as now, the *Sun* was big on the bizarre, the trivial and the prurient. Perhaps, pre-Thatcher, it lacked the confidence to go quite so far over the top as today: Freddie Starr had not eaten anybody's hamster, and the paper had yet to

begin challenging the Oxford English Dictionary by introducing such gems as 'bonking' into the language. But many of the little stories—'sex prisoner' locked in packing case, ex-policeman puts weedkiller in invalid wife's tea—would fit comfortably into the pages of today's model.

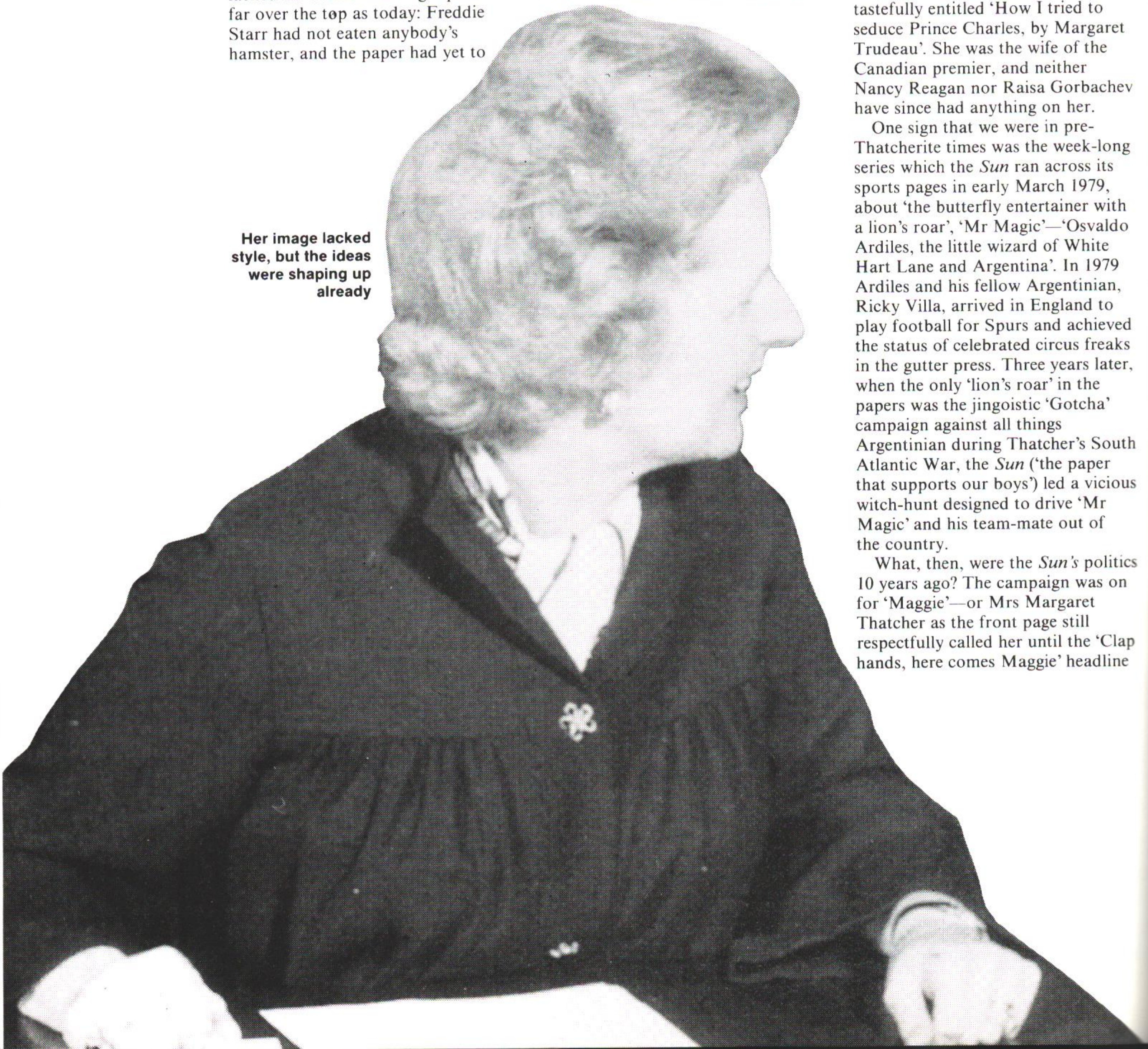
Royal sex stories were a bit thin on the ground 10 years ago. Even the *Sun* could not run endless 'Fergie's bum' features when said article was still sitting, unnoticed, at a school desk somewhere. It had to make do

with the chain-smoking exploits of Princess Margaret, who was back on the front page on 12 March and looking 'anguished' after her latest Caribbean holiday 'ended in love riddle' amid new rumours about her dodgy boyfriend, Roddy Llewelyn. Charles, of course, was still a 'beefcake bachelor prince' back then, and, if the *Sun* is to be believed, much sought after by rich and beautiful women. On 30 March it ran an exclusive on 'the fun-loving first lady who shocked the world', tastefully entitled 'How I tried to seduce Prince Charles, by Margaret Trudeau'. She was the wife of the Canadian premier, and neither Nancy Reagan nor Raisa Gorbachev have since had anything on her.

One sign that we were in pre-Thatcherite times was the week-long series which the *Sun* ran across its sports pages in early March 1979, about 'the butterfly entertainer with a lion's roar', 'Mr Magic'—'Osvaldo Ardiles, the little wizard of White Hart Lane and Argentina'. In 1979 Ardiles and his fellow Argentinian, Ricky Villa, arrived in England to play football for Spurs and achieved the status of celebrated circus freaks in the gutter press. Three years later, when the only 'lion's roar' in the papers was the jingoistic 'Gotcha' campaign against all things Argentinian during Thatcher's South Atlantic War, the *Sun* ('the paper that supports our boys') led a vicious witch-hunt designed to drive 'Mr Magic' and his team-mate out of the country.

What, then, were the *Sun's* politics 10 years ago? The campaign was on for 'Maggie'—or Mrs Margaret Thatcher as the front page still respectfully called her until the 'Clap hands, here comes Maggie' headline

**Her image lacked style, but the ideas were shaping up already**



The left was still 'lunatic' rather than 'loony', Tony Benn was a 'wild man', and Thatcher gave interviews on 'My face, my figure, my diet'

of 1 May. The *Sun's* statements were often less brash in the different climate that prevailed then, and the whole thing had a slightly tamer feel to it. But its pre-election coverage did highlight many of the political themes that were to figure large in the Tory programme, and pay off for Thatcher, in the years to come.

Warnings about the menace of 'union power', and the Labour Party's inability to cope with it, were an almost daily feature of the *Sun* election build-up. It even picked out the union official who was to become a major hate figure of the eighties. On 21 March 1979, the editorial pleaded 'Don't go Joe!', appealing to 'moderate, sensible' Joe Gormley to put off his retirement from the presidency of the National Union of Mineworkers and so stop Arthur Scargill taking over. 'If King Arthur is the natural successor', it said, 'Mr Gormley will be doing us all a favour if he stays on another three years. *Giving young Arthur time to grow up*'.

Gormley took the *Sun's* advice, and Scargill didn't become NUM president until 1981. In the summer of 1984, the paper showed how much it had grown up when, in the middle of the miners' strike, it tried to print a front-page photo of Scargill 'siege-heiling' at a rally. The printworkers put a stop to that plan; but that was pre-Wapping.

### Timid tabloid

Back in 1979, however, with the industrial unrest of the 'winter of discontent' fresh in the memory, the British establishment was less sure of its ability to beat the unions, and the *Sun* was wary of making promises that it wasn't sure the Conservatives could keep. 'Ask yourself', suggested a pretty timid editorial of 30 April, 'do you want a government which is at least willing to *try* to curb excessive union power—or do you want a government which has already surrendered?'. Elsewhere, the paper's reports gave some clues that the union leaders were really preparing to surrender to the Tories. '“Blacklegs” OK say unions' (10 April) told of a 'revolutionary' bid by union chiefs to stop unofficial strikers closing down British Leyland, by giving the go-ahead for scabs and managers to do the strikers' work. That was the fighting spirit which ultimately assured Thatcher of victory over the unions.

The most ironic element of the *Sun's* pre-election propaganda about 'union power' was its editorial of 17 April, attacking the Independent Broadcasting Authority for agreeing to a Labour Party request to ban the 20-year old film *I'm Alright Jack* from the screens during the election campaign. 'No doubt', the *Sun* declared, 'the brothers were alarmed

that Peter Sellers' hilarious portrayal of a Marxist shop steward would remind viewers of the winter's strikes. Did the IBA stand up to the Labour Party? Not on your life'. In 1988, the *Sun* blasted the IBA in far stronger terms...for refusing to obey Tory orders to ban the *Death on the Rock* documentary.

Alongside the 'union power' issue, there were many early warnings of the threat from the far left. The editorial of 15 March announced the dawn of the age of modern McCarthyism:

'The Communist Party is planning a new campaign of maximum disruption in British industry. This is not reds-under-the-beds hysteria....

'This sinister move shatters the myth that Communists—unlike the Trots and other members of the lunatic left—are a respectable and constitutional party....*Don't say you have not been warned!*'

Note the introduction of the rather awkward term 'lunatic left', putting down a marker for the paper's poisonous and much more aggressive campaign against the 'loony left' over the past few years. The idea that the Communist Party was able or willing to disrupt anything is also a telling comment on how far the old left has retreated before Thatcher during her decade in power. It is hard to imagine even the *Sun* working up much bile to spit at the party's latest proposals for an electoral pact with the SDP.

### 'Wild man' Benn

There was much else in similar vein. March brought perhaps the first scare story about the 'lunatic' race policies of Labour local authorities: '“Racial” paint book blacked—A children's painting book has been outlawed by Birmingham education department, because it has no pictures of coloured children'. Then the *Sun* started warning that Labour premier 'Uncle Jim' Callaghan was trying to con people with his 'cosy' election manifesto:

'Remember! A new Labour government would not be prevented from introducing full-blooded socialist measures because they are not in the manifesto...Uncle Jim is 67 and won't be there forever. Lurking behind him are Labour's wild men: Tony Benn and his national executive cronies, waiting their chance to drag Britain down the true socialist path!' (4 April)

This angle was to prove a real winner for the *Sun* and its favourite politician. After years of Labour leaders conceding the argument and hammering the left, 'wild' is not a word most people would use to

describe Benn; fast approaching 67 himself, he has become more like 'Uncle Tony'. And nobody seriously suggests that Neil Kinnock is concealing plans to sneak through 'full-blooded socialist measures'. Even the *Sun* has learnt to draw a line between plausible fiction and outright fantasy.

In the early months of 1979, then, the *Sun* began to push what were to become dominant themes in the Thatcher years, from the need for tougher policing and a crackdown on immigration to attacks on Labour's undoubted economic incompetence. The paper summed up its stance in a 'Where we stand' editorial just after the election had been called:

'The *Sun* is not a Tory newspaper (ask Ted Heath!)....But during the weeks ahead...we *will* be supporting Margaret Thatcher. For a variety of reasons:

- to slash direct taxation, reward initiative and restore incentives to work harder;
- to revive respect for law and order;
- to curb excessive trade union power;
- to strengthen our rickety armed forces;
- to ensure a constructive role in the common market.

'The *Sun* believes these are the things most people want. They are certainly the things people *should* want....The nation is suffering a crisis of spirit....There is a growing whiff of corruption in the corridors of power. There is a growing reluctance to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay....We cannot generate a new spirit without new ideas and a new team.' (30 March)

And what was the new team's recipe for putting life and spirit back into Britain? Thatcher gave a hint in an interview printed in the *Sun* on 16 March, about a subject which she has since fallen silent on: 'My face, my figure, my diet—Margaret Thatcher reveals her special beauty tips.' After some small-talk about the pros and cons of chocolate biscuits and lettuce leaves, Thatcher told the nation how to become more energetic—by keeping cold and hungry. 'You're more alert', she said, 'if you have not had too much to eat and you are not too warm'. In the 10 years since, Britain has boasted the fastest-growing group of alert pensioners, teenagers and homeless families in Western Europe.

On Saturday 5 May 1979 it was all over. 'Number 10, Maggie's den: Home—to the sweet taste of triumph.' And the *Sun* has been shining out of Thatcher's den ever since.

Boris Yeltsin

# A MAN OF THE PEOPLE?

Rob Knight examines the appeal of the star of the Soviet elections

**B**oris Yeltsin is a fortunate man. In the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union since the 1920s, he is the first to have his political career revived despite having lost favour with the party leadership.

How can we understand the overwhelming popular vote Yeltsin received in the March elections in Moscow? It cannot be because of his record as an administrator. When he was the Moscow party boss there was no improvement in living standards for Muscovites. His most conspicuous effort to improve the availability of fresh food, by opening market stalls on street corners, foundered on the usual problem of the Soviet economy: there was nothing to put on them. The empty and decaying stalls are the only visible legacy of his time in control.

## Mafia-bashing

Neither is Yeltsin's popularity the fruit of a long struggle against the system. Like Mikhail Gorbachev, there was nothing in his career prior to 1985 to suggest a radical in the making. Yeltsin followed the conventional path upwards through the Soviet bureaucracy, emerging first as top dog in a provincial region before being promoted to run Moscow and sit on the politburo. His radical image stems entirely from his conflict with the Moscow machine which then ensued.

Nor is Yeltsin popular with the opinion-makers. The intelligentsia, who have done so much through the media to project Gorbachev as a reformer with the interests of the people at heart, dislike and distrust Yeltsin. None of the editors or TV producers used the new liberal conditions to come to his defence when he was sacked as Moscow boss in 1987. They all parroted the official line that Yeltsin had been deposed because he was trying to move too fast in a delicate situation. They depicted him as a blustering populist who, through his hasty blunders, could undo all the good being done by Gorbachev.

In a curious echo of the attitude of the Soviet intelligentsia, the British *Observer* recently accused Yeltsin of being a proto-fascist. The intelligentsia are hostile to him because, whereas they can only

envisage change coming from and through an enlightened party bureaucracy, Yeltsin has gone a stage further and has begun to appeal directly to the masses.

Yeltsin's appeal to the masses is simple but powerful. During his time as Moscow party boss and since he has focused his attacks on the 'mafia', the Moscow bureaucracy. He made himself popular with Muscovites and unpopular

have felt privately for years. His elevation into a national symbol of opposition had even less to do with his political vision; the fact that he was deposed by the most hated men in Moscow was sufficient to make him a martyr. And his popularity has grown as official attacks on him have intensified. When the party leadership announced a special inquiry into Yeltsin during the election cam-



Sacking a few officials won't solve the economic crisis

with said mafia by advocating an end to the privileges enjoyed by the bureaucrats. He has called for the abolition of special shops where otherwise scarce goods can be obtained by party functionaries. He has demanded that special party health facilities be made available to 'pensioners, orphans and Afghan veterans'. He sacked 27 top bureaucrats and threatened a lot more; this precipitated his fall from power when they all ganged up against him.

Thus Yeltsin first became a popular figure, not because of anything he achieved or any positive policies he proposed, but simply because he gave a public voice to the contempt for corrupt bureaucrats which Soviet citizens

paid, it provoked a spontaneous demonstration of more than 10 000 people in his support. These were the first mass demonstrations in Moscow outside the party's control since the twenties.

Yeltsin's populist approach guaranteed his success in the elections; but he remains a bureaucrat, with no more solutions to the problems facing the Soviet people than any other of that breed. Yeltsin's own method of reform while in power was to sack and replace officials. This is essentially the same process of purging which every Soviet bureaucrat since Stalin has used to shake things up. Even if completely different officials were in power and all their special privileges

were abolished, the central problem of the inefficient economy would remain unsolved. Yeltsin's proposals amount to 'sharing out the misery', a non-solution familiar to reforming bureaucrats East and West. This is recognised by many of Yeltsin's own supporters. He is seen as 'the best of a bad lot' as one put it.

Yeltsin's rise reflects the way in which the CPSU is fragmenting, which in turn is a product of the growing economic crisis. Since his fall from grace with the party leadership Yeltsin's criticisms have broadened out, although he has as yet refrained from attacking Gorbachev directly. He has said that society is now more democratic than the party and has called the supreme soviet 'a collection of extras'. He has talked in vague terms of a multi-party system and raised the possibility of organising an oppositionist bloc in the Congress of People's Deputies.

## In mid-air

Some commentators have argued that Yeltsin is a good thing for Gorbachev as he can act as a stalking horse for the president's own desire for more far-reaching reform. The argument goes that Gorbachev would like to be more radical, but has to keep his real intentions under his hat for fear of causing a backlash among conservatives in the leadership.

This analysis wrongly assumes that Gorbachev is in control of what is happening in the Soviet Union. The truth is rather more complex. All sections of the ruling bureaucracy recognise that things have got to change, but nobody wants to be the first to put their neck on the line. Neither is there a consensus on how to implement changes. The party leadership has rightly been described by a domestic critic as like 'a pilot who has taken off but does not yet know where to land'.

The impetus for change came originally from the stagnation of the economy. The election results have now introduced a new element: rising expectations of political change. The combined crises have made future events unpredictable and potentially uncontrollable. In these conditions the subjective intentions of men like Yeltsin, or Gorbachev for that matter, count less than the real social forces (the Soviet working class and Western capitalists to name but two), which begin to act on and through them. The ultimate destiny of the Soviet Union lies in either a return to capitalism or the advance to genuine socialism. But it won't be Boris Yeltsin who decides which way, or when, it goes.

PHOTO: Paula McCabe



Don Milligan

# PASSIONATE PAMELLA AND THE UNSEXY STATE

Dionysius does not frequent the saloon bar

I have never thought of British politics as sexy. Along with Lord Whitelaw, Denis Healey is said to have bottom. Some imaginative lads tell me that Neil Kinnock and Ken Livingstone exude that musk which the impressionable associate with power. There are glamour boys of course. Ex-member Robert Kilroy Silk has the sort of head that hair-care companies still display in barber shops. But by and large politics in this country are not unduly burdened with the urbane elegance associated with keeping mistresses or houseboys. Instead of a brazen old Andreas Papandreu, we are stuck with smarmy old Cecil Parkinson. Denials, self-justification, and humiliated wifely heroines issuing statements to the tune of 'As long as he needs me'.

## Enter the Arabs

So imagine my delight when sports minister Colin Moynihan appeared on the front pages escorting Pamela Bordes to the Conservatives' winter ball. But as the story unfolded my optimism ebbed away. No one could be found in the Palace of Westminster who had actually slept with Pamela. A couple of single chaps had been seen gadding about with her but they were just showing off. In the absence of the Soviet spies, Jewish rack-renters and black gangsters who populated the Profumo story, the Bordes affair needed something to spice it up. So the press put Arabs—'Sheikhs who had met the Queen'—between her silk sheets. When she was reported to have indulged in oral or group sex it was always with exotic foreign princes and racehorse owners.

The Arab and 'Libyan terrorist' link was a bonus for the Bordes-watchers. When British public figures are caught in the wrong bed they are no fun. They are always shame-faced and it is always a temporary fall from grace caused by hard work. Who could imagine British MPs exhibiting, or exciting, any erotic interest? I can see Moynihan licking his lips, but not much else. The boy belongs behind the bike sheds, not in the sensuous company of beauty queens. If the story was to arouse any real erotic interest it had to be

full of what the *Sun* calls 'Eastern Promise'.

Enjoyment of sex is considered a foreign vice, indulged in by races unburdened by the British sense of duty and honour. Our public men are depicted as eschewing all spontaneity and pleasure in favour of a single-minded commitment to affairs of state. All the tawdry mythology of Empire and its stiff upper lip is deployed to inspire respect for Britain's graceless rulers.

Apparently, Andrew Neil, editor of the *Sunday Times*, was closer to Ms Bordes. One fawning hack on Neil's newspaper claimed that their relationship was as turbulent as that between Antony and Cleopatra. It is not known whether Neil's expense account ran to asses' milk, but his Cleopatra was soon appearing out of a roll of carpet in the offices of *Observer* editor Donald Treford. Throughout the drama of her disappearance and her rediscovery under a thatched roof in Bali, editors, jockeys, stockbrokers and PR consultants vied with each other to reveal how Pamela was addicted to rich, famous and influential men.

## Bourgeois winkers

These admissions from on high stopped, however, when their sense of propriety got the better of them. Womanising is one thing, but this foreign, essentially effeminate, craving for sensual pleasure threatened the establishment with the anarchy of passion. Dionysius does not, after all, frequent the saloon bar or the golf club. The bourgeoisie here have always preferred the wink and the leer. They are still haunted by George Formby, with his little ukelele and salacious grin. For them sex remains a sad necessity; a right carry-on. Reared on a diet of Hattie Jacques, Kenneth Williams, and Noel Coward's suburban restraint, our powerful men know that sex is either absurd or a source of anguish. Unbridled, it will end in slapstick, tears or the *News of the World*. Great emotion, loyalty and achievement are demeaned by it. It saps the lion's strength.

In puritan Britain the *femme fatale*, or even the personal secretary, always threatens to

tangle the harness of public service. Pamela Bordes threatened both the integrity of respected men, and the security of the Palace of Westminster. Employed as a researcher working on the Net Book Agreement, she might let slip the commercial secrets of the British book trade during her pillow-talks with Colonel Gaddafi's agent, Ahmed. Loose talk might be heard in Annabelle's or Tramp's. Captain Mark Phillips, even the Princess Royal, could have been compromised during Pamela's riding lessons at Gatscombe Park. Pamela was, after all, a cheap little gold-digger, not 'one of us' by race or class. She had to be stopped.

## Parliamentary affairs

Here was a job for the Labour Party. Less sexy than even the government benches, Labour spokesmen could be relied upon to take it all seriously. Forget about the conference resolutions on women's liberation or homosexual rights. For Labour politicians, the celebration of sexual conformity and mediocrity is a symbol of their fitness to govern. By promoting love of family life and decrying Tory hanky-panky they announce that the church, the monarchy and the flag are safe with them. Labour's Methodist sobriety is meant to prove it is a decent party of government.

The aptly named Labour MP Ted Leadbitter, who in 1979 unmasked the keeper of the Queen's pictures as a homosexual and a spy, wrote to Thatcher demanding a full investigation into Pamela Bordes. Frank Dobson, shadow leader of the commons, called for tighter security checks on people employed at Westminster. The security they were worried about was protecting the illusion that important business is conducted in parliament.

It is imperative for mainstream politicians to conceal from the public that most of their time is spent in the bar and the tea room. By and large backbenchers do not do research, they discuss constituency affairs with their secretaries, deal with squabbles in their parties, and attend receptions given by professional lobbyists and commercial interests. From time to

time they get themselves appointed to fact-finding missions abroad. They are kept in line by the whip's office and the fear that a rival will leak some drunken embarrassment to the press, or the security services will let us know of some long-forgotten peccadillo with a pretty lad from the provinces. They are a conservative and colourless bunch of time-servers. Their role in life is to persuade us that, simply by electing them to lounge around on the quilted leather benches, we live in a democracy.

Turning sexual gossip into a national scandal allows these politicians to show how pure and proper they are compared with women and homosexuals and foreigners. It also affords them the opportunity for pompous affirmations of their own importance. The minister for war, Jack Profumo, did not fall from office because he cavorted with Christine Keeler, but because he lied to the commons. The British state can wage colonial wars, assassinate opponents, sanction the bombing of troublesome little countries. But all crimes pale into insignificance beside the spoiled honour of a patrician gent who lies to parliament.

The news that the executives of Palace Pictures had expressed an interest in meeting Bordes brought back all the half-remembered headlines of the early sixties. The movie *Scandal* has been packing 'em in—the radical left crowds are eating up the stylish recreation of the time when a Tory government was brought low by revelations of unimaginable sexual enthusiasm. The *frisson* of the days when the Tory Party lost elections is stirring old passions. Perhaps Pamela Bordes could serve as today's Christine Keeler? Might we not wrong-foot Thatcher with allegations of hypocrisy? Sadly, no. For scandal to bring down governments, other factors must be present. The behaviour of Rasputin and Mandy Rice-Davies only caused so much trouble because those in power were weak and those in opposition were willing. Thatcher outwitted by a Bordes/Kinnock double act? Never in a thousand Arabian nights.

Jim Sillars: from Labour to the SNP

# Old habits die hard

**Derek Owen asked Scotland's most dynamic MP if changing his party had meant changing his politics**

When Jim Sillars won the Govan by-election for the Scottish National Party in November, beating Labour in one of its 'safest' seats, he promised to make Margaret Thatcher sit on a thistle and to set the house of commons alight. Sillars,

formerly a Labour MP and the leading light of the breakaway Scottish Labour Party in the seventies, stood on a 'No poll tax' ticket and won the support of many erstwhile Labour voters, disgusted at their traditional party's failure to fight the Tories over the tax or anything else. His socialist image has helped to alter the old SNP's damaging reputation as a bunch of Tartan Tories.

Sillars has been described as representing a 'sea change' in Scottish politics. Yet the political waters don't seem to be lapping very high up the sea wall. The turnout in Govan was the second lowest for a post-war

British by-election. The forthcoming by-election in Glasgow Central, the SNP's next target, looks unlikely to inspire greater enthusiasm: the constituency had the lowest turnout in Britain in the last general election, and since the by-election may well coincide with Euro-elections in which nobody votes, we can expect more abstentions. When I went to see Sillars in his constituency rooms in the Glasgow Rangers social club at Ibrox, I asked the doorman for the SNP office. 'That MP guy', he said, 'what's his name again?'

The name is Jim Sillars, born in Ayr in 1937, the son of a railway worker, who made his way to Westminster via the Royal Navy, the fire brigade, the Fire Brigades Union

and a full-time job with the Labour Party. When elected Labour MP for South Ayrshire in 1970, Sillars had a hard anti-devolution line. He dismissed Sam Purdie, an ex-Labour member who stood for the SNP, with the declaration that 'the labour movement will never support a turncoat'. During the last SNP revival, which began with Winnie Ewing's Hamilton by-election victory in 1967, Sillars took a leading role in Labour's counter-attack, earning the name 'hammer of the Nats'. The main thrust of his argument was that separation or even devolution would be economic suicide for Scotland.

In the early seventies, however, Labour began to look more kindly on devolution as a tactic to outflank the SNP. Sillars himself was an enthusiastic convert. He has always insisted that it was his experience at Westminster, rather than any opportunist motive, which caused his change of heart. He was often quoted as saying that the commons gave no thought to the interests of Scottish workers and that the Labour Party treated its Scottish voters like idiots. Some might say that you could remove the word 'Scottish' from those two statements and they would still be true. But Sillars drew increasingly nationalistic conclusions.

## Thought police

He finally resigned from the Labour Party in 1975, when Harold Wilson's government failed to set up the elected Scottish assembly which Labour had promised in its October 1974 election manifesto. I asked him about this period. He said that 'there existed a dictatorship of thought in the British Labour Party with parameters of restraint. When we left these restraints we moved towards independence, Scottish and socialist with a capital S. British, which means London, decision-making processes in action drove us by logic down the road to independence'.

Sillars formed the Scottish Labour Party along with another MP, John Robertson, and several key Labour figures. From the first it was riven by internal splits, and had been 'entered' by several left-wing groups. The party flopped at the 1979 election, and folded. The Scottish Nationalists also failed to get anywhere near their 1974 results, winning just two seats.

**Sillars: a socialist alongside Tory renegades in a left-of-centre party?**

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Keeping  
Nigel Lawson  
waiting 15  
minutes is not  
everybody's  
idea of  
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conventions  
of state power

But Sillars, propelled by 'intellectual development', joined the SNP. The party was then developing a left wing, the '79 Group', which Sillars believed had the support of a third of the membership.

In turn, the SNP suffered internal wrangling and much of the '79 Group' was expelled. Yet Sillars now believes that 'going through this process strengthened the left wing'. Many expellees returned to the fold and some, like Alex Salmond MP and Kenny MacAskill, now policy vice-chair, hold positions of power today. According to Sillars, 'the left wing now make up 50 per cent of the party'.

### Can Pay, Won't Pay

He repeats the official line that the SNP is not socialist but 'left of centre', a label which David Steel liked to attach to the old Liberal Party. Sillars maintains that 'a compromise has been reached. We are firmly left of centre with a legitimate socialist wing and the whole party is now instinctively radical'. He insists that the right wing of the SNP has been 'marginalised', and places Iain Lawson (an ex-Tory who resigned over the closure of Gartcosh steelworks) 'in the centre'.

So what policies has this socialist alongside Tory renegades in a left-of-centre party to offer Scots? And how do they differ from the old, discredited Labourist solutions?

On the poll tax, Sillars himself supports a mass campaign of non-payment. This is at odds with the SNP's 'Can Pay, Won't Pay' campaign, which says that only those who can afford to pay the tax should refuse to pay it. When pressed on this, Sillars said that he would put forward the party line on national platforms but, when he was in his Govan constituency, 'if someone asks me: do I support them not paying, then I say yes'.

This bet-hedging sounds something like the Labour Party's two-faced position of opposing a mass non-payment campaign but supporting the right of individuals to refuse. It might allow Sillars to sound militant to his constituents, but it provides no answers to their problem with the poll tax. Like Labour, the SNP and Sillars have refused to advocate the most effective form of action against the tax: a strategy of non-implementation by the workers responsible, supported by action in the community.

### His 15 minutes

*A Scotland on Sunday* commentator recently suggested that the SNP would get nowhere by being respectable. Sillars agrees. He says that he has seen Labour 'dying from Westminster respectability' and that

the SNP 'must mount a challenge against the rules and norms laid down by Labour and the Tories'. Fair enough, but what challenge to the rules has he in mind? So far we have seen the parliamentary stunt he staged on budget day, when he was banned for delaying the chancellor's speech. Keeping Nigel Lawson waiting 15 minutes is not everybody's idea of challenging the conventions of state power.

### Demographic socialist

Alex Neil, a close confidant of Sillars, has stated that with independence Scotland will have full employment within seven years. Sillars disagrees; he thinks it will only take five years. How, I asked, given that even dynamic capitalist countries like South Korea cannot maintain full employment, and that pay and conditions there are intolerable? His response was that demographic changes meant there would be full employment by that time anyway. These changes mean that employers are 'already chasing young people to fill jobs'. Even if we were to accept that assertion and ignore the experience of the YTS generation, pinning your hopes on the birth rate seems a pretty inadequate response to the approach of another capitalist recession.

Some of Sillars' ideas on reviving the Scottish economy sound close to the old Labourist approach. The first part of his 'Five Year Plan' would involve major capital works to build an infrastructure, electrify the railways, build proper houses and expand the industrial base. The second step would involve major spending on education. And where would the money come from, ask the Tories, the same question which Labour has been unable to answer for a decade? Sillars says that North Sea oil would provide the starting funds; but as the oil starts to run out, this becomes a less and less convincing panacea. So Sillars and Neil concede that private capital will be important.

### Euro-capitalism

They envisage a flourishing Scottish economy based on 'diversified planning with centralised organisation where private enterprise like the Scottish small business sector will have a significant role to play', which doesn't seem very different from the recent Tory white paper on 'Enterprise Scotland'. They also see the European dimension as important; Sillars points out that, after 1992, capital will move around the Continent more freely. That may well be true, but Euro-capital will only come to Scotland to exploit cheap labour in an area of high unemployment. Sillars and Neil anticipate that a body similar to the

Scottish development agency will coordinate future investment. This is unlikely to inspire confidence, given that the SDA's major achievement was probably the Glasgow Garden Festival.

Many who insist that there is a uniquely radical Scottish tradition tend to downplay the issues on which Scotland has a history of reaction. Sillars is no exception. For example, he spent much of his political career in South Ayrshire and won a wide following in places like Cumnock and Patna, where there is a strong Orange tradition. When I asked about Orangeism in the Ayrshire mining villages, Sillars said that he 'never saw Orangeism as particularly significant in politics'. He insisted that there were 'never any manifestations of trouble, and therefore no need to react to anything'. In fact Orangeism has been a strong force for reactionary ideas throughout Ayrshire for years. During the period of Sillars' baptism into parliamentary politics, Ayrshire, like the rest of the west of Scotland, experienced a major increase in sectarian activity. Challenging sectarianism in Scotland remains a priority for socialists.

### 'Burns and Bible'

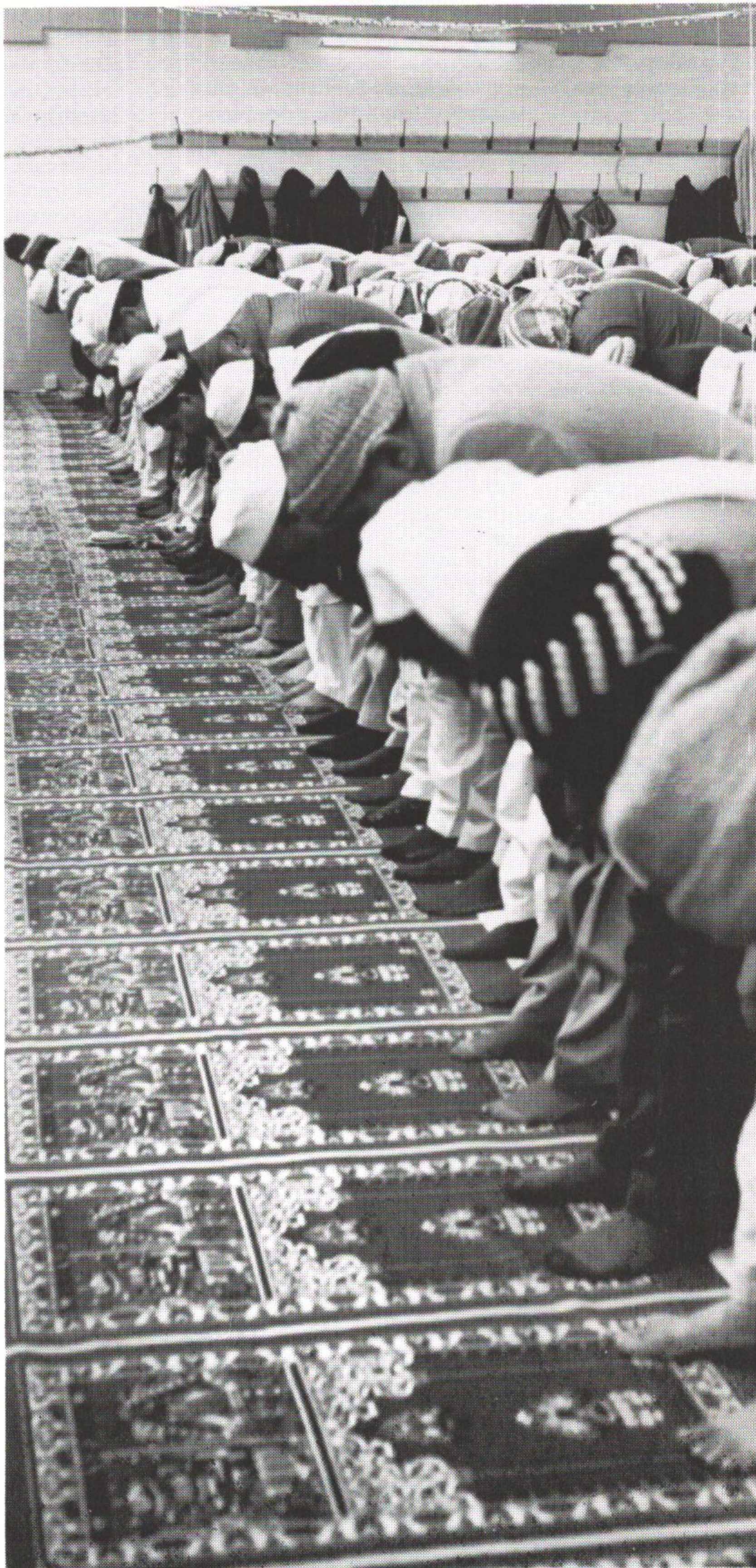
The Irish War is a key issue which has split Scottish society. Like many Scottish Nationalists and Labourites before him, Sillars refuses to support the Irish struggle for freedom from the British state, or to back the demand for troops out of Ireland, even at some time in the future. He also shares the hostility towards women's abortion rights which has characterised the Labour tradition in Scotland; while he does not favour repealing the 1967 Abortion Act, he says he would support cutting the legal time-limit from 28 to 22 weeks. This is the socialism which has got him a column in the Scottish edition of the *Sun*.

Sillars' politics seem to place him firmly in the Scottish Labourist camp. He admits to being strongly influenced by the Presbyterian tradition of another South Ayrshire man—Keir Hardie, founding father of the Labour Party—and his basics of 'Burns and Bible'. In the recent round-table discussion in *Living Marxism* ('Whither Scotland?', March), Kenny MacAskill of the SNP asserted that his party was 'representing the old Labour line'. Sillars insists that this does not mean a 'one-party state apparatus mafia'. But if the politics are much the same, it's hard to see how the consequences for the Scottish working class can be any different.

Racial tensions in Bradford

# The 'sleeping demons' awake

Kenan Malik went to Bradford to investigate the Rushdie factor, racism and book-burning



The mosques have acted as spiritual, social and political centres for a besieged community

Closing time; the drinkers—white men in their twenties—spill out of The Queen in the city centre. Spotting a group of Asians across the street, one shouts 'Let's get the Pakis'. Half a dozen cross the road chanting 'There's only one Salman Rushdie'. It's another Friday night in Bradford.

Salman Rushdie has become the new symbol of Bradford's racial divide. Even more than Ray Honeyford, the local headmaster sacked for his comments about black schoolchildren, Rushdie has unwittingly caught the racist imagination. The letters page in the *Telegraph and Argus* has become a soapbox for those who claim to defend him and 'the British way of life'. White shoppers express vehement support for an author they have never read and whose views they would probably find as abhorrent as do Muslims. In Manningham Ward Labour Club, the drinkers speak of Rushdie as if he were one of the lads. At Elland Road, home of Leeds United, the racists on the terraces sing 'Rushdie is a Leeds fan'.

## Culture clash?

Among Muslims Rushdie is reviled in equal measure. Young and old agree that *The Satanic Verses* should be banned; many believe that Rushdie should be killed. All are aghast at the white response. 'All we want is our rights, the same as anyone else', says Shahid Ali, a taxi driver. 'But they don't want us to be equal. They'll tolerate us only so long as we don't demand our rights.' 'This country has a history of prejudice against Islam', says Liaquat Ali, general secretary of the Bradford Council of Mosques. 'The religious leaders used to terrify Christians that Muslims were barbarians, killers. Now with this Rushdie thing all those sleeping demons about Muslims have come awake.'

Pressmen who have descended on Bradford in recent months have depicted a town split by a culture clash. Local politicians have encouraged this view. 'Entrenched cultural values are involved', claimed Tory council leader Eric Pickles. 'On the one hand, the concept of literary freedom runs through all classes of

PHOTO: Kenan Malik



Many of the young Asian protesters are not religious, let alone fundamentalist

British society. On the other, Muslims ask how a society can exist where a perceived blasphemy against Islam is accepted.'

But dig a little deeper and the picture becomes cloudier. Many of the young Asian protesters are not religious, let alone fundamentalist. Many don't attend mosque, only a handful can recite the Koran, and few observe traditional Muslim taboos on drink or sex. On Saturday afternoons they can be found at Valley Parade cheering on Bradford City, on Saturday nights at the Palace nightclub, jiving to Peter Singh, 'Punjab's only rock and roll king'. Whatever their cultural roots, the young Asians have more in common with their white peers than with their parents.

Equally, many sections of 'British society' have shown a reluctance to uphold literary freedom. Pickles himself ordered Bradford libraries to take *The Satanic Verses* off the shelves. Gary Waller, Tory MP for Keighley, called for the book to be withdrawn. The Labour Party is split over the issue.

Clearly Bradford is not simply divided by opposing cultures. The Rushdie affair has exposed a variety of tensions between Muslims and whites, and within the two communities. To understand the Rushdie factor in Bradford we have to look at how racism, the black community's response to it, and the state's attempt to contain black anger have each shaped local politics.

### All-round alienation

Sher Azam, the president of the Council of Mosques who burnt *The Satanic Verses* on that first demonstration in January, was among the first immigrants in Bradford 30 years ago. 'Everything was alien to us', he recalls, 'the people, the language, the culture, even the weather'. Asians were recruited to work nights in the mills. 'We all worked in textiles. The industry needed workers for manual jobs which the indigenous population wasn't prepared to do. If you went on a night shift it was almost entirely Asian, apart from a few supervisors.'

Racism wasn't confined to the workplace. Asians faced discrimination at every turn. 'It was extremely difficult to find accommodation', says Azam, 'because nobody was prepared to let us into their homes. We had to live in such cramped situations—in many cases 20 to 30 people in a three-bedroomed house'.

The private landlords reflected official attitudes. Council housing too was the exclusive property of white tenants. To this day there are virtually no Asian council tenants. A walk around the major council

estates—Buttershaw, Holmewood, Howarth Road, Allerton, Ravenscliffe—shows all are exclusively white. 'I'd be astonished', says Labour councillor Charles James, 'if more than five per cent of council housing was Asian'.

### A sanctuary

The Asian immigrants lived in a virtual state of siege. Faced with racist hostility on all sides, Islam became the source of strength and identity for the new community. The mosques provided more than spiritual guidance; they dispensed welfare, organised social activities and became the political voice of the community. The strength of Islam in Bradford stemmed from the intensity of racism Muslims faced.

The second generation of Asians refused to accept the conditions their parents had put up with. They considered themselves British, wanted equality and were willing to fight for it. There was conflict in the workplace and on the streets.

By the seventies the uncompetitive British textile industry was imposing major cutbacks. The number of textile workers in Bradford fell by two thirds between 1965 and 1980. Asians had always got lower wages and worse conditions than whites. Theirs were the first jobs to go when the cutbacks came. And racism shut the door on any other job prospects. The result was a series of bitter strikes in the textile industry led by young Asians.

Workplace militancy was mirrored by conflict on the streets. Racist attacks had increased alarmingly. While the first wave of immigrants might have tolerated 'Paki-bashing', the new generation would not. They organised and fought back. And when they came into conflict with the police they fought them too.

### Bloody Bradford

In April 1976 24 people were arrested in pitched battles in Manningham, as Asian youth confronted a National Front march and fought police protecting it. It was seen as the bleeding of a new movement. The following year the Asian Youth Movement was born. The next few years brought further conflict between black youth and the police, culminating in the trial of the Bradford 12 in 1981. Twelve young Asians faced conspiracy charges for making petrol bombs to use against racists. They argued that they were acting in self-defence—and won.

This growing militancy produced problems for both the traditional Muslim leadership and for the British state. While refusing to accept racism, the new layer of activists also rejected many of the dominant Muslim values. 'Our children were growing up hating our culture', says Azam. 'They were

angry, withdrawn, we could not reach them.' Asian youth created an alternative leadership and challenged traditionalists on issues such as the role of women and the dominance of the mosque.

For the state, the militancy of Bradford youth exemplified the growing alienation of young blacks from British society, which finally exploded in the riots of 1981. The effect of the riots, wrote one commentator, was to 'transform pleas for more political opportunities for black people into the received wisdom that the black electorate *should* be more involved in politics' (M Fitzgerald, *Black People and Party Politics in Britain*, 1987). The authorities recognised that unless black activists were given a political stake in the system, their frustration could threaten the stability of British cities.

'They were shit scared', remembers Ali Hussein, a black activist involved in most of the campaigns over the past decade. 'They were staring at the possibility of widescale riots and they were looking for people to talk to. Anyone, anywhere. They pulled people off the streets and said "Come and talk to us".'

### Labour's 'headhunting'

In London the GLC pioneered the strategy of drawing the new layer of black activists into the mainstream after 1981. It organised 'consultation' with the black community, drew up equal opportunity policies, gave millions to black community organisations and set up race relations units largely staffed by black activists. As the activists grew dependent on council grants and facilities, so many were drawn further into the local state machinery; militancy was transformed into political manoeuvring (for a full discussion of this process, see K Tompson, *Under Siege: Racial Violence in Britain*, 1988).

In Bradford the process of providing the black community with a political stake in the system was more complex. The council had to deal not just with the youth but with the mosques, too. And because black politics had largely been conducted either through the mosques or on the streets, there was no established secular Asian leadership upon which the council could draw.

The council began by 'consulting' every black organisation to forge links with the community. It ditched policies which most antagonised Muslims, such as the busing of Asian children to white schools. Bradford drew up GLC-style equal opportunity statements, established race relations units and began funding black organisations. Significantly, it was the council which set up and largely funded the

Labour and the council helped destroy political militancy; the mosques are now reaping the rewards

Bradford Council of Mosques in 1981 to unify the religious leadership. The local authority also poured money into individual mosques and other religious bodies.

The Labour Party played its part in this attempt to pacify the Asian community. Labour groomed a new crop of Asian councillors—such as Amin Quereshi, Bradford's first black councillor, Mohammed Ajeeb, who became Britain's first Asian Lord Mayor, Mohammed Riaz, tipped to replace Pat Wall as MP. 'Labour went headhunting', says Hussein. 'They were desperate to create a new non-religious Asian leadership.' The council quangos won the allegiance of many militants by funding pet projects. Financial dependence was turned into political support, as activists were drawn away from militant protests and into the Labour Party to protect their council-financed jobs and organisations.

The creation of a race relations industry opened a new era in local politics. 'There developed a mutual relationship between the religious leaders, the secular leaders and the council', says Hussein. 'The religious leaders delivered the votes, the secular leaders delivered the money. And for the council it has meant a few years of relative peace on the streets.'

The neutralising of political militancy allowed the mosques to reassert their dominance within the Asian community. As racism has intensified through the Thatcher years, Asian bitterness has grown in Bradford. It is significant, however, that the big protests of recent years have had a religious rather than political focus, under the influence of the mosques. The major issues have been not racist violence or immigration laws, but halal meat, separate education, and now *The Satanic Verses*. Even the row over Honeyford's racism took a religious form as some Muslims used it to push for separate schools.

The council was quite happy for religious issues to take prominence. Its relationship with the conservative mosques meant that these controversies rarely got out of hand. When the Muslim Parents Association (MPA) used the Honeyford affair to campaign for separate schools, the council wheeled out the Bradford Council of Mosques to calm things down by criticising the MPA for being 'fundamentalist'. The high profile of religious issues also helped to sideline potentially more explosive political conflicts. By underpinning the dominance of the mosques, the council undermined more militant protests.

The different aspirations of the council, the mosques and the Labour Party machine could be managed

within the race relations framework so long as each gained from the relationship. But the austerity policies imposed by the Tories who took control of the council last year have upset the balance and brought out the underlying tensions. The £5.8m council cuts provided the spark which has been fanned in *The Satanic Verses* row.

The Tory council's wholesale cuts threaten seriously to damage the standing of the mosques. For example, the Bradford Council of Mosques has lost *all* of its funding, including £4000 for administration, £30 000 for running the city's only two day-centres for elderly Asians, and money for running advice centres. Other religious bodies have also suffered.

In response, the mosques have now seized on the Rushdie affair as a political lever against the council, the Labour Party and the secular leaders, to restore the balance of power. Faced with the loss of the status they gained through council support, Muslim leaders have sought to consolidate their position within the community by leading a popular anti-Rushdie crusade. There are precious few religious principles involved in this struggle. In 1984 the Council of Mosques campaigned against the 'fundamentalism' of the Muslim Parents Association as a tactical move to increase its bargaining power. Today it has adopted fundamentalism as a weapon to maintain that power. The Rushdie affair may have awakened the old demons, but Muslim leaders are holding on to them for all they are worth.

### Challenging both

In the absence of a political movement in defence of black rights, the religious anti-Rushdie campaign has been able to tap the deep anger among Asians about racism. The Labour Party and the council helped destroy political militancy inside the Asian community. The mosques are now reaping the rewards. 'A striking thing about the demos', said Hussein, 'is the number of young people. Many of them I recognise from the campaigns of a few years ago like the Bradford 12 campaign. They're the people I go drinking with. They're not religious but in the face of racist violence and brutality, they're looking for a way of expressing their identity, their anger'.

The Muslim leaders' threat to organise a boycott of politicians who do not back them has divided the Labour Party. Over the past decade Labour has created a political machine within the black community to gain electoral advantage. Now Labour is finding the same machine turned against it. The Muslim threat could have devastating electoral consequences. But Labour also faces

the threat of a white backlash.

The council's equal opportunity policies have created a well of resentment within the white working class. The token policies did nothing to alleviate discrimination against the black population. But they gave the impression that the council was favouring Asians, and that whites were having to make sacrifices. This inevitably intensified racial divisions. The Rushdie affair has brought things to a head and unleashed a new wave of racist violence. Racists vandalised the Council of Mosques' office and left a note: 'Leave Rushdie alone—or else.' Asian taxi drivers now carry clutch-cables to protect themselves. 'Any time we're on night shift we can expect to get attacked', said one.

Some Labour councillors now admit that their race relations strategy has heightened racial tension and forced them into a corner. 'The Labour group faces a delicate problem over the Rushdie affair', says Charles James. 'When we came to power we tried to put more resources into the hands of the most disadvantaged groups. But white voters saw this as providing extra resources for Asians, while Asians didn't perceive any appreciable difference. The issue cost us votes and has led to a difference of emphasis within the Labour group.'

The different responses of the three Bradford Labour MPs show how Labour has capitulated to the most reactionary forces—on one side the racists, on the other the fundamentalists. Max Madden, whose Bradford West constituency is more than a third Asian, has fought to get the book withdrawn and the blasphemy laws extended to cover Islam. In Bradford North, where about 15 per cent of the voters are Asian, Pat Wall MP has tried to appeal to both sides, describing *The Satanic Verses* as 'offensive' but opposing censorship. Bob Cryer, whose constituency is 95 per cent white, has vociferously campaigned for 'freedom of expression' and condemned the Muslims' electoral threat as 'blackmail'. Labour's craven approach can only further exacerbate divisions in the community.

The polarisation of Bradford is not the result of a culture clash. It is the product of racism—and the divisiveness of official 'anti-racism'. In the absence of a genuine anti-racist movement the reactionary elements on both sides have gained prominence. Book-burners appear as defenders of black rights, racist bigots as champions of free speech. Only those willing to challenge both can cross the chasm that now divides Bradford.

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Europe's anti-foreign politics

# Fertile ground for fascism

As the far right wins elections in West Germany and France, Pat Roberts unearths the root of the growing problem of racist politics in Europe

PHOTO: Gerard Uferas



Enoch Powell, prophet of British racism, insisted last December that his 1968 'rivers of blood' speech had been proven right, and that it was only a matter of time before a race war broke out: 'I am talking about violence on a scale which can only be described as civil war. I cannot see there can be any other outcome.' Powell may be a little hysterical, but there is no doubt that the politics of racism are gathering momentum across Europe.

The recent local elections in West Germany were marked by the emergence of an organised far right. The French National Front consolidated its electoral base in the March local elections, and its leader Jean-Marie le Pen has become a household name.

The electoral successes of the far right raise disturbing questions about the future of European politics. Are we seeing the re-emergence of fascism as a mass movement? What is the capacity of the far right to make significant gains in the period ahead? And how important is the question of racism likely to become during the next decade?

### Agenda setters

Racist and anti-Semitic propaganda is always likely to provoke an emotional response from the left. Yet emotion is never the clearest guide to understanding a problem. Instead we need to take a cool and objective view of the far right.

The success of the far right should be put in some historical perspective. This is not the first time that such groups have won electoral support. In the fifties, the Poujadist movement won 52 parliamentary seats in France. In West Germany during the early sixties, the far right's electoral support was comparable to today. It is also worth noting that, in the late seventies, the British National Front was a far more influential organisation than its fragments are today.

What is new and significant about the far right today is not its support at the polls. It has had similar success before, only to sink once more into oblivion. The most important aspect of the far right's latest resurgence has been its success in influencing European politics more generally. In both France and West Germany, the far right has managed to put the question of racism on the national political agenda. All of the other parliamentary parties have felt obliged to respond on the race issue—usually by making major concessions to the hardline racists.

In Germany, the ruling Christian Democrats have adopted a stridently anti-immigrant stance, while in France the main conservative parties have taken on board many of the sentiments of the Front National. We

cannot be sure what the future holds for the parties of the far right: but that is in one sense irrelevant, since whatever becomes of these groups racism is now firmly established as a central theme of European politics.

The evolution of the far right has been intimately linked to the question of immigration. The far right has won a constituency by mobilising racist opinion against immigrants. However, there is no direct link between the intensity of racism in a society and the advance of the far right. Racism is probably more prevalent in Britain than in any other European country. Yet here, groups like the National Front have little public presence. The prospects for the far right are determined above all by the degree of legitimacy and authority enjoyed by more conventional right-wing parties; where they are weak, it can prosper.

In both France and West Germany, the advance of the far-right parties is directly proportional to the difficulties experienced by the mainstream conservative movements. The old parties of the French right are deeply split and busy fighting each other. They lack a sense of purpose and have lost the ability to enthuse their traditional electorate. Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic government is deeply unpopular in West Germany. During the past two years it appears to have lost its way and is manifestly out of touch with the voters.

### Britain excepted

The main French and German conservative parties have failed to evolve a plausible alternative. Consequently many former supporters have lost faith. This crisis of confidence in the right-wing old guard has fuelled the growth of the far right. At present this can be interpreted as a protest by a section of the right-wing electorate. But it could also become more durable than a simple protest vote. The European right is unlikely to heal its divisions in the short run. Without a credible platform to unite the conservative electorate, the process of fragmentation will continue. The far right could become the major beneficiary of the divisions that plague the conservative parties.

Britain provides an interesting contrast to the French and German examples. In Britain, the Tory Party enjoys an unusually high level of support from right-wing voters. The Tories are fairly united, and project an image of single-mindedness and a sense of direction. Since Margaret Thatcher was elected 10 years ago this month, the Tories have proved able to enthuse their supporters and to retain the loyal backing of every section of the British establishment. Unlike on the Continent, the British conservative electorate has not lost

faith in its traditional party. At present there is simply no space for the emergence of an influential far-right movement. The Conservative Party can appeal to a wide spectrum of voters—from the hardened racist to the pragmatic businessman.

The Tories' success in marginalising the far right suggests that the rise of these movements elsewhere cannot be understood in isolation from the overall state of opinion in society. There is a tendency to discuss the politics of the far right, and in particular its racism, as something outside conventional political discourse. Liberal commentators regard the racism of the far right as some kind of an alien disease that contaminates an otherwise healthy society. Such an analysis obscures the link between far-right racism and the prevailing political climate in Europe. How could the far right exploit the issue of immigration if racism was not already a problem?

### National ID

The key to the far right's success is the all-pervasive influence of nationalist ideology. The celebration of nationalism is one of the strongest defining features of European politics. Throughout Europe, the authorities attempt to imbue society with the values of patriotism and chauvinism. Nationalist identity helps to minimise the effects of class conflict. It emphasises a supposed common identity between the rulers and the ruled within each nation. It thus plays a useful role in sustaining stability. In Britain, for example, the 1982 war against Argentina led to the emergence of the Falklands Factor, the creation of a chauvinist consensus which allowed the Tories to dominate public opinion and to brand their opponents as unpatriotic enemies within. Anti-foreign sentiments are never far below the surface of British society.

Promoting nationalism means more than simply celebrating a distinct identity. The idea that Britain (or France or Germany) is 'the best country in the world', or that it has some special quality, always implies that foreigners are in some way second best. To be pro-British necessarily means to be anti-foreign. The gutter press takes the anti-foreign message to ludicrous lengths, with its rabid outbursts against everybody from the 'savages' of black Africa to the 'sadistic donkey-beating señors' of Spain. But even mainstream public opinion is happy to endorse chauvinist attitudes towards the Irish, people from the Middle East or indeed those from the third world in general.

In such a climate of public opinion, immigrants will fall victim to the prevailing anti-foreign sentiments. At the very least

France: what Le Pen proposes, the CRS disposes



The far right is not so much an externally induced disease as an organic development from a racist society

immigrants are labelled as a problem; at worst they are blamed for all of the problems facing British people. Their arrival activates the undercurrent of anti-foreign feeling and transforms it into overtly racist attitudes.

Capitalist governments in Europe often take an ambivalent attitude towards immigrants. In the past, Western economies suffered from labour shortages; so immigration was officially encouraged. Once immigrants arrived, the authorities and employers found it was possible to divide the workforce along racial lines. This proved to be a useful device for retaining control over immigrant and indigenous workers alike.

### Informal oppression

At the same time, however, European governments also discovered that unmediated racism could be a problem in itself. If racism was too explicit and aggressive it could provoke violent conflict and social instability. For this reason most European governments have preferred to institutionalise an understated form of racism. Throughout Europe, immigration control was put on the statute books from the sixties, to underwrite the second class status of immigrants. Yet the practice of racial discrimination tended to be of the *informal* variety, rather than the publicly approved oppression suffered by, say, Jews in Nazi Germany.

However, experience has shown that racism cannot exist merely in an understated form for long. Once it becomes respectable, racism can gain its own momentum. Extremists on the right can use the race issue to win a wider audience. Since racism and nationalism are officially sanctioned, most governments find it difficult to resist anti-immigrant agitation. Mainstream parties which fly the national flag are easily put on the defensive when the extreme right accuses them of allowing the nation to be overrun by aliens. Having built their reputations as rock firm patriots, these parties cannot afford to appear 'soft' on foreigners. That is why the far right has been so successful of late in forcing the mainstream parties to formalise their racist policies towards immigrants.

To summarise the argument: the far right is not so much an externally induced disease as an organic development from a racist society. The elevation of nationalism into an official state philosophy provides the foundation for racist politics. The far right has the potential to gain influence precisely because its favourite themes are not outside accepted norms; racism is already an everyday fact of life. The far right is

simply the scum on top of a deeply polluted pond, the symptom of a wider problem of the European culture of respectable racism.

It follows that the problem of racism cannot be reduced to the threat posed by the far right. Instead, the potential for the growth of the far right is given by the powerful influence of racism in Europe. In a society where racial discrimination and violence are extensively practised, the far right always has opportunities. Anti-immigrant sentiment provides a ready made focus for mobilising reactionary opinion.

Whenever the forces of the extreme right make sudden gains in electoral contests, liberal and left-wing opinion reacts with a sense of outraged surprise. Such a response is not very helpful since it confuses the symptom with the problem. The recent electoral advance of the fascist right is the product of an entire era during which racism could advance without facing any effective challenge. The core of the problem is the toleration of respectable racism over many decades. There is little point in dealing with the visible symptom and ignoring the racist growth at the heart of the body politic.

The characteristic response of the European left to the growth of the far right is to target fascism instead of fighting racism. This reaction is not particularly surprising, given the weak and discredited tradition of anti-racist politics.

Since the sixties, immigrants throughout Europe have faced countless attacks. State racism expressed through immigration controls and police harassment, and informal discrimination in employment, housing, welfare services, etc, has become conventional across the Continent. Yet through all this time there have been very few examples of solidarity with immigrants. Racism has tended to be treated as an embarrassing issue, best ignored. By contrast, the left has been less inhibited about tackling fascism. Why has there been such a differential response to the issue of racism and to that of fascism?

### The hard way

The answer is devastatingly straightforward. It is difficult to mobilise opinion against racial oppression. Standing up for the rights of immigrants provokes hostility. It requires a commitment to confronting well-established prejudice. Since fighting racism implies risking at least short-term unpopularity, it is often dismissed as not politically expedient.

There are even more profound reasons why the left has not made racism a major concern. It is



impossible to tackle racism without confronting the problem of nationalism. The view that immigrants constitute a problem is sustained by an exclusive nationalist ideology. At the very least, the nationalist outlook suggests that 'our people' must come first. In situations where resources are scarce (and especially in periods of economic crisis), the immigrant communities will readily be perceived as a threat to the position of the host nation. More strident nationalists will portray the threat not only in the language of economics but also in that of biology and culture. National pride will then be deployed to endow immigrants with the stamp of inferiority. It is only a small step from there to conclude that immigrants threaten the national way of life.

Racist views tend to become controversial only in their extreme forms. Since the prejudice of nationalism is deeply rooted, it is generally accepted that immigrants as such constitute a problem. Thus, for example, all the mainstream parliamentary parties in Britain supported immigration controls in their manifestos for the 1987 general



**Britain: these attractive individuals cannot compete with Thatcher's flag-waving**

PHOTO: Don Reed

election. In situations where debate is often about which political party is the best defender of the national interest, there is unlikely to be much concern about the difficulties faced by immigrants.

The left's failure to confront racism is rooted in its incapacity to handle the question of nationalism. Patriotism has always been one of the trump cards of the ruling class. Its influence is widespread and exercises considerable authority even over the labour movement.

Nationalist philosophy can only be exposed by challenging the legitimacy of the capitalist nation state, and all of the conventional norms and values that are bound up with it. The left has proved predictably less than keen to follow this controversial course.

Often the left itself is deeply motivated by the nationalist impulse. Traditional European socialism has a self-consciously nationalist focus. Sometimes the left even denounces the right for being unpatriotic. For example, it is often argued that European right-wing governments are selling out to the Americans on the issue of defence. Trade union leaders can often be heard

complaining about governments allowing foreigners to threaten jobs with a flood of foreign imports. Unfortunately there is nothing progressive about such sentiments. They merely represent the left-wing end of the spectrum of nationalism.

So long as the left continues to operate within the confines of the nationalist consensus, it will continue to evade the issue of racism. Such considerations, however, do not apply when it comes to taking on the far right. In contrast to racism, the issue of the far right raises few difficulties for the left. However widespread their ideas may be, the extreme right groups themselves stand outside the prevailing political consensus. Establishment opinion does not favour fascism at present. Precisely because they are so extreme, the left can attack the fascists without raising any awkward questions about the more conventional forms of racism and nationalism.

The targeting of fascists is quite acceptable from the point of view of the dominant tradition in capitalist politics. After the experience of the Second World War fascism stands discredited. Post-war European politics were built around a parliamentary tradition which denies the legitimacy of the fascist option. By adapting to this tradition, those on the left who identify fascism as the problem need not risk provoking the wrath of the authorities. In countries like Britain and France, where fascism is portrayed as a foreign outlook, you can even target the extreme right under the banner of patriotism—the very same banner which legitimises run-of-the-mill racism.

### Poor substitute

The substitution of the problem of fascism for that of racism is politically expedient. Unfortunately it is also futile. Anti-fascist demonstrations may help put pressure on the extreme right. But if racism remains respectable, the real danger presented by the right will remain undiminished.

Narrow anti-fascist politics are intrinsically flawed. They deal with the consequences and not with the root problem. To be anti-fascist is not the same as to be anti-racist. It only means to be against one extreme variety of racism; a racist Tory MP or *Sun* editorial could quite comfortably denounce fascism and support the deportation of black immigrants in the same breath. By its very emphasis on the extreme, narrow anti-fascism implies toleration of the more conventional forms of routine racism. Yet the prevalence of ordinary racist views guarantees the existence of terrain on which the extreme right could thrive.

The success of the far right in France and West Germany requires a coherent response. Where the far right is actively organising, it is necessary to mobilise the local community in defence of the immigrant population. However, denouncing the far right as Nazis is no way to counter its influence. The reason why the far right has gained electorally is not because voters have converted to the philosophy of fascism. It is unlikely that people have read *Mein Kampf* and decided to give the Nazi option another try. The main motive for supporting the far right is racism. The growth of the far right confirms that the left will continue to ignore racism at its peril.

What is required is not an anti-fascist but an anti-racist movement, to attack the ground on which the far right feels most confident. Instead of a negative campaign against the fascists, we need a positive initiative to win equality for the victims of racism. To deal with the far right resurgence in France and West Germany, the left must give top priority to campaigning against racism. For too long it has tolerated the measures that the state uses against immigrants. It must go on record as an unswerving opponent of immigration controls and of all laws which single out immigrants.

It is also necessary to provide a practical focus for anti-racism. Too often racial discrimination and even racial violence go unchallenged. Practical solidarity is essential to remove the threat of physical violence which faces immigrant communities.

### A right state

There is an unfortunate tendency to implore the state—usually its judiciary and police—to deal with the extreme right. Such a perspective is dangerously short-sighted. It is the state which endows racism with the cloak of respectability. So how can an institution which excludes, deports, harasses and discriminates against immigrants play a positive role against racism? Inviting the state to intervene against the right will only backfire. Such requests lend the state greater legitimacy by strengthening its image as a general guardian of the public good. In exchange for locking up a few fascist thugs, the state will win moral authority to deal with all threats to the British/French/German way of life. And it will use that authority to control immigrants still more firmly.

Experience has shown that the state will exploit any request to interfere in political life as justification for attacking those it really dislikes—immigrants, anti-racists and the working class. In Britain and the USA, laws supposedly enacted against the fascists in the thirties were largely

Fascism  
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used against the left. The demand for anti-fascist legislation provided a pretext for attacking the kind of 'extremists' whom the state truly wants off the streets—left-wing ones.

The German left has recently asked the state to ban fascist demonstrations and parties. This risks repeating the mistakes of the past by endorsing dangerous illusions about the role of the state. In principle the German state could ban a group of fascists; indeed Kohl did outlaw one tiny fascist sect, the National Assembly Movement, in February. But it cannot ban racism without abolishing itself. More to the point, calls for banning fascists grant the German state the right to outlaw groups for their political views. Since under capitalism the state is always most likely to ban the left, these calls fall only just short of demanding self-repression. Instead of looking upon the state as a potential ally, we ought to view it as the main guarantor of racist politics.

In any case, it should be evident that fascism cannot be banned out of existence by the stroke of an official pen. Racist politics are reproduced through the culture of nationalism and upheld by the basic institutions of capitalist society. In Britain, the left-wing tradition of demanding 'no platform' for fascists has created the

delusion that all is well so long as fascists cannot speak in public. Predictably, the denial of such platforms has not led to the decline of racism. 'No platform' is generally a bureaucratic solution to a political problem. It is particularly damaging in Britain, where the far right is relatively weak but racism is relatively strong. While the left engages in 'no platforming' pretty insignificant bunches of fascists, mainstream racists are left to get on with their work undisturbed. Incidentally, calls for banning fascists in Britain have already had predictable consequences. In helping to create a censorious climate, they have provided the pretext for the authorities to ban 'extreme' initiatives by the left and by supporters of Irish freedom.

### 'To the pavement'

Events suggest that narrow anti-fascism not only addresses the wrong problem, but is also politically dangerous. Effective action needs to be independent of, and directed against, the state. Without challenging the right of the state to discriminate it is not possible to provide positive support for those who suffer racist oppression. When the extreme right represents a physical threat to immigrant communities, anti-racists should

forget all about appealing to the police to provide protection, and instead organise the left and the working class to fight where it is necessary. This tradition, which used to be called 'introducing them to the pavement', drove the fascists off the streets of east London in the thirties; it will do so again when necessary.

For Marxists, the recent gains by the extreme right represent a major challenge. The elections in France and West Germany show the urgency of developing a perspective that can expose the prejudice of nationalism and discredit its claim to represent the interests of all classes in society.

### The Internationale

Nationalism and racism are not only a direct threat to the immigrant communities in Europe, they also represent a mortal danger for us all. Through nationalism, people become mentally enslaved by the ruling class. In such circumstances the most irrational ideas can thrive, setting white against black and letting the authorities responsible for all of our problems off the hook. The politics of internationalism, upholding the common interest of the working class around the world, provide the way to tackle these reactionary ideas and to meet the potential danger posed by the far right.

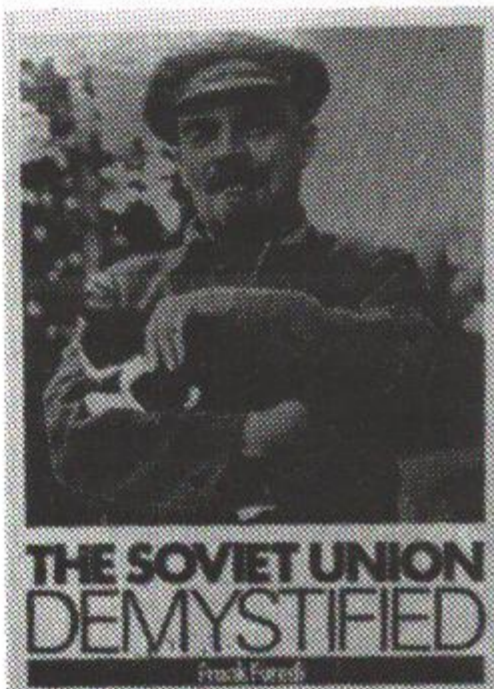


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Patriotic scoundrels

# 'THERE'LL ALWAYS BE AN ENGLAND'

Alan Harding on the eccentric nonsense of British nationalism

Years ago I hitched a lift out of Boulogne with a French fish salesman. The first pleasantries in my primitive French gave the game away that I was British. To my surprise, the driver started waxing lyrical on the sterling British character. Get one Briton, he said, and you have a gentleman; take a Frenchman and you have a regular guy. Put two Frenchmen together and you have anarchy; 'two Britons together and you have a great nation'.

I tell this story to suggest how widespread is the prejudice that the long-term stability and success of the British establishment results from a force of nature or the genius of the British character, rather than from the historical strength of British capitalism. 'I find it hard to doubt', says a typically modest British historian, 'that the parliamentary idea is at least as certainly English as socialism is German' (G Watson, *The English Ideology: Studies in the Language of Victorian Politics*, 1973, p9). While my French friend bemoaned the political divisions in France but said he still preferred regular guys to gentlemen, the political establishment over here has long taken it as read that Britain's past pre-eminence in the world was natural, pre-ordained and God-given.

This is the logic of the oppressor, which insists that the imperialists who have plundered the globe beneath the Union Jack are fulfilling their destiny, carrying what Rudyard Kipling called 'the white man's burden' of civilising those unlucky enough not to have been born in Blighty. The notion of natural British superiority has reached dizzying heights. Hugh Sellon, a Tory high-flier in the thirties, argued that political institutions are the result of topography:

'If the Englishman is, politically, a more balanced and stable creature than some of his neighbours, he may draw some of his balance from the fact that his eyes

have, since they first opened, rested on a landscape of peace and sober proportions which is founded nowhere so perfectly as in England.' (H Sellon, *Whither England?*, 1932, pp139-40)

Sellon evidently wasn't born in Moss Side, Spitalfields or the Gorbals; nor could his father have worked all his days in one of Blake's dark satanic mills. Indeed he doesn't seem to have opened his eyes on any of the dirty, grey and rotting urban environments that have been the 'landscape' experienced by the majority of British people for the last 150 years.

Less than a decade later the likes of Sellon were all talk of 'doing for Jerry' and whistling, through clenched teeth, stiff upper lip and pipe:

'There'll always be an England  
While there's a country lane  
Wherever there's a cottage small  
Beside a field of grain.'

The urban masses were conscripted to fight and die for Sellon's archaic vision, which most of them had never seen and which could certainly never be theirs.

This same eccentric conception of their country is still being offered as good intellectual coin by the young fogies of the *Salisbury Review*, the *Spectator* and other cult magazines of the new right. Their pretensions would be a mildly amusing joke at the expense of upper class twits; except that the joke has always been on those in the left and labour movement who echo the nationalist eccentrics. It is one thing to have a sense of manifest destiny when you own your own country and sizeable chunks of other people's; but it is idiocy (or abject toadying) to do the same when you are just an errand boy.

'An island position, wealth, success in world politics, all this cemented by Puritanism, the religion of the "chosen people",

has turned into an arrogant contempt for everything Continental and generally un-British. Britain's middle classes have been long convinced that the language, science, technology and culture of other nations do not merit study. All this has been completely taken over by the philistines currently leading the Labour Party.' (L Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, Vol 2, 1974 edition, p39)

If you doubt Trotsky's perception of the Labour Party then look no further than Tony Benn's editorial introduction to a modern collection of socialist material, where he proves he can give any Tory a run for his money when it comes to patriotic gobbledegook:

'Nor shall we ever forget Pelagius... Britain's earliest and greatest heretic who challenged St Augustine on the central question of original sin. He asserted the essential goodness of man, an idea that undermined the authority of the Papacy and anticipated by 1000 years the socialists who argued the same case.' (*Writings on the Wall: A Radical and Socialist Anthology*, 1984, p7)

Benn's declared aim is to rebut the Tory accusation 'that we are proponents of some foreign creed which has no roots in our own natural history'. For him it is essential to prove that socialism has true British roots, even if he has to resort to ancient theological disputes (Jesus must have been British too).

Where Benn mixes mysticism with reaction, George Orwell, a voyeur and dilettante of working class mores, patronised the humdrum and passed it off as the essence of Britishness:

'We are a nation of flower-lovers, but also a nation of stamp-collectors, pigeon-fanciers, amateur carpenters, coupon-snippers, darts players, crossword puzzle fans. All the culture that is most

truly native centres around things which when they are communal are not official—the pub, the football match, the back garden, the friends and the "nice cup of tea".' ('The lion and the unicorn: Socialism and the English genius', *Collected Essays*, Vol 2, 1970 edition, pp77-8)

The conclusion of Uncle George's homespun philosophising was that such unpleasantness as political violence in general, and the Nazi purge of their own working class supporters in 'The night of the long knives' in particular, were impossible among the stamps and pigeon-droppings of the mother country: 'The gentleness of the English civilisation is perhaps its most marked characteristic.' ('The lion and the unicorn', p61).

Britain, however, as well as giving the world a 'nice cup of tea', also gave it the concentration camp. Orwell himself began his career as a colonial policeman in Burma, part of the same service which had distinguished itself by massacring hundreds of Indians at Amritsar in 1919.

The rubber truncheons and castor oil have always been part and parcel of British law and order for natives and colonials. Within Britain, economic prosperity and political consensus allowed the authorities to avoid using such methods against most of their opponents, thus endorsing ideas about the unique civility of British society. Today, however, the last vestiges of economic success have gone. All that remains is the establishment's instinct for self-preservation (expressed through the increasingly frequent use of police riot batons), and the traditional left's abiding illusions in the benefits of Britishness.

Now we can see the decency and character of the British establishment for what it is: the desperate cruelty of a redundant, parasitical class. When Margaret Thatcher, in a famous speech before her first election victory, claimed that the British character had done so much for democracy and law, and in the same breath asserted that 'our' culture was being 'swamped' by black immigrants, she sanctioned the killing of Cynthia Jarrett, Clinton McCurbin and many more victims of racism on the streets and housing estates of Britain. She also reaffirmed how philistine and barbaric is her culture.

Hers is a tradition not of decency but of oppression; not of concern but of vindictiveness; not of tolerance but of narrow self-centredness. The British establishment has defended these values by the assumption of moral superiority—and ultimately by force of arms.

Rise of the Front National

# How the left let in Le Pen

**Suke Karey blames the Socialist and Communist parties for the success of the French National Front**

It may seem to some that the French National Front and its leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, are last year's news. In 1988 the Front National (FN) won 14.4 per cent of the presidential poll. By contrast in March of this year the FN turned in a distinctly downbeat performance in the local elections, and was even upstaged by the previously unnoticed ecologists. Three weeks before the March elections the FN barely managed to muster a thousand party faithful for its anti-revolution conference in Versailles; 100 000 had marched through Paris behind Le Pen on 1 May last year. The fascist frontman felt obliged to run his latest local election campaign on the slogan 'Front National: a second wind'.

Yet, although the Front National has made no dramatic gains of late, only a fool would underestimate the fascist threat in France. Racist violence is still on the rise. Somebody is still bombing immigrant hostels and attacking Arabs like Ali Raza, shot dead in February for stealing a croissant. Moreover, a closer look at the March election results reveals that the FN is far from moribund. Le Pen did not do well on a national scale; but then, he didn't really expect to. The FN strategy was to concentrate on building bases of support in particular localities. It paid modest dividends. In 160 municipalities, the FN won around 20 per cent of the votes. The fascists did particularly well in the Bouche du Rhône region where, in Martiques, they got 28 per cent of the vote. Their best result was in Gard Saint-Gilles, where they scored 34.15 per cent.

### 'We say out loud...'

The results of the municipal polls show that the Front National has consolidated a base of electoral support. It will represent a force that cannot be ignored for some time to come.

Le Pen, founder of the FN, was first catapulted into the public eye in 1983, when Jean-Pierre Stirbois, party general secretary, won 20 per cent of the votes in Dreux. Jacques Chirac, leader of the conservative

Rassemblement Pour la République (RPR) responded with a public call for an alliance with the FN to secure a national victory for the right. With this breakthrough the FN emerged as the focus of political debate. Over the next year every leading politician of the right had to define himself in relation to Le Pen.

The European elections of 1984 showed that Le Pen was more than a passing or local phenomenon. The FN successfully manipulated the general disenchantment with politicians from both right and left. Playing the racist card to great effect, Le Pen won a national constituency for his party. The same racist message—'We say out loud what you think to yourself'—also proved effective in last year's presidential contest. Around one in eight voters—more than four million—supported Le Pen for president in the first round of the elections.

### Personality politics

The March local elections confirmed that the FN can no longer be dismissed as a temporary focus for protest votes. Its stable base of support comprises around seven per cent of the French electorate. Three important factors help to explain the rise of the fascists in recent years: the deep divisions within the traditional French right; the demoralising impact of François Mitterrand's Socialist presidency on the working class; and the absence of any effective challenge to the growth of racism.

The French right has a history of fragmentation. It has long been noted for its faces and personalities, rather than any coherent organisations. Charles de Gaulle, the symbol of French liberation in 1944 and the most famous post-war president, won support as a national statesman rather than a party politician. He headed various fronts and alliances until 1968, when the Gaullist baton passed to the Union de Démocrates Pour la République before ending up with the RPR in 1976. Throughout these twists and turns, the French right has been split among many factions and small





parties, loosely held together behind a personality: first de Gaulle, then Georges Pompidou, then Giscard d'Estaing and finally (and least effectively) Jacques Chirac.

The right's difficulties reflect the historical problem which the French ruling class has had in establishing its authority and legitimacy—especially since its collaboration with the Nazis in the wartime Vichy regime. The longstanding lack of dynamism in the weak economy has made things worse, prompting divisive debates about the way ahead for capitalism in France.

### Gaullist gaps

It took the shock of losing Algeria, and the subsequent crisis at the heart of the French state, before the right managed to unite behind de Gaulle in 1958. In the seventies this fragile Gaullist unity gave way to bitter squabbles between d'Estaing and Chirac over who was the true heir to the war hero. The right suffered at the polls while the infighting continued. In 1974 d'Estaing barely scraped home in the presidential election. In 1981 the divided right let François Mitterrand of the Socialist Party squeeze through the gap and into the presidential palace. Defeat helped to consolidate the divisions, as each section of the right blamed the others for the setback.

Mitterrand's second presidential victory last year has hardly helped.

The Front National has been able to exploit the weakness of the traditional right. In this it has been aided by the vagaries of the French electoral system.

The two-round system of elections (with only the top two candidates contesting the second round), encourages the practice of swapping votes locally in return for a few concessions. For example, after the March municipal polls both the Communist and Socialist parties expelled winning mayors because they had done deals with opponents to win second round votes. Throughout the party machines, councillors, deputies and mayors deal votes with each other. They often have to take disproportionate account of small parties like the Front National, whose votes can swing the delicate balance of local power.

### Come on down

This habit of wheeling and dealing breeds unusually opportunist politicians. When an apparently dynamic party such as the FN emerges, they are often willing to jump on to the new bandwagon, taking their personal votes with them. This general tendency was boosted by Mitterrand's introduction of proportional representation. In the 1984 Euro-elections and the

general election polls of 1986, the Front National offered well-known figures a place on its party lists. As a consequence the FN was able to field more than 2000 candidates in 1986—up from just 65 in 1982:

'The FN...used its newly established central control to welcome in local notables who might bring some support with them, displacing as candidates loyal but rebarbative militants. The ancient and accomplished conservative opportunist, Edouard Frederic-Dupont thus took second place on the FN's Paris list, behind its leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen.' (D Goldey and RW Johnson, 'The French general election of March 1986', *Electoral Studies*, 5 December 1986)

Until the FN won 11.26 per cent of the vote in June 1984, it was able to advance with little opposition from the mainstream right parties. After that result, however, the old right-wing politicians decided that Le Pen was becoming a threat. In 1985 the two leaders of the 'respectable' right, Chirac and Raymond Barre, called for an end to all alliances with the FN. Yet they lacked the clout to impose their will on their local organisations. Even in March, 114 of the 316 slates in smaller provinces listed fascist candidates alongside those from the mainstream right-wing parties. Local politicians from the respectable right would rather deal with the FN than risk losing an election.

The second factor behind the rise of the FN has been the impact of the Mitterrand years on the French working class. Although Le Pen had sought to organise the far right from the early seventies, it was not until Mitterrand took office in the eighties that he was able to achieve a breakthrough.

The election of a Socialist Party president in 1981 raised great expectations among the left and working class people. Big business and the right looked upon Mitterrand's victory as an unmitigated disaster. In the event, however, they had little to fear from president Mitterrand. After a brief flirtation with high-spending Keynesian economics, he introduced a strict regime of Thatcher-style austerity which created mass unemployment and slashed living standards. This came as a slap in the face to those who had elected Mitterrand to implement positive reforms. The working class became demoralised as it was confronted with new economic fears and insecurities.

The dramatic attacks on living standards and the general malaise in Mitterrand's France gave the right its chance to go on the offensive. Big

right-wing demonstrations provided the focus for an increasingly confident extra-parliamentary campaign against Mitterrand. Yet the leading figures on the mainstream right were reluctant to push the campaign too far, for fear that angry action on the streets would alienate their more moderate constituency. Le Pen was not inhibited by such considerations. With the old right caught in a quandary, the FN stepped in to provide the militant face of anti-Mitterrand protest. This formed the background to the fascists' electoral breakthrough.

While right-wing protest could be expressed through the FN, the left had nowhere to turn. The French Communist Party (PCF) had joined Mitterrand's cabinet after the 1981 elections. Communist leaders occasionally complained about the worst austerity measures, but only in the mildest of terms; their priority remained keeping the government stable. Millions were disgusted by the left-wing parties' behaviour. Many abstained in the 1986 general elections, and some even switched their votes from left to right to register a protest. By this time the PCF had paid a heavy price for its complicity with Mitterrand's regime, lurching from one electoral setback to another. With the left on the defensive, Le Pen was well able to project the FN as the only genuine party of protest.

### Who started it?

The third factor in the success of the Front National has been the underlying strength of racism in French society. Without the prior existence of a broad racist current, the more extreme rhetoric of the FN could not have found such a resonance. Anti-racism has always been very weak in France. Even the Socialist and Communist parties are strongly nationalistic and disinclined to treat racism as a pressing problem. Indeed, the left bears the main responsibility for turning race into a political issue, sowing the seeds from which the FN has reaped its harvest.

As far back as 1969, Communist Party mayors in the Paris region made public protests against what they called 'the inequitable distribution of immigrant workers and their families'—that is, the fact that immigrants were being 'dumped' on their working class municipalities. These arguments were aired again, in more stridently chauvinist terms, in 1972 and 1974.

By 1977, the PCF's position on immigration was to the right of the main conservative parties. The mainstream parties of both right and left favoured granting immigrants the right to vote in local elections;

the PCF opposed this reform. By now housing authorities in Communist-controlled areas were refusing to house immigrants. One housing development in Venissieux, a 'red' suburb of Lyons, left a quarter of its flats empty while many immigrant families remained homeless. In the end the municipal government chose to demolish a block of flats rather than let immigrants live in them.

### Bulldozer tactics

The Communist-run municipality of Ivry, a suburb of Paris, was very much in the forefront of attacks on immigrants. In 1978 the municipality abandoned its tradition of distributing used clothes to the needy, when it discovered that 80 per cent went to children of immigrant families. Three years later the municipality ruled that no more than 15 per cent of places in its summer camps could go to immigrant children.

Until 1980, PCF actions against immigrants were just unconnected local incidents. In the run-up to the 1981 election, however, the party leadership assumed control of a coordinated anti-immigrant campaign. In December 1980 the Communist mayor of Vitry led a mob which bulldozed down a dormitory housing immigrant workers. PCF leader Georges Marchais made a national statement supporting the mayor's lynch-mob. Marchais also backed a campaign against 'drug dealers'. As he and all France knew, 'drug dealer' (like 'mugger' in Britain), was a racist code word for black man.

Since 1981, the PCF has been less vociferous in its condemnations of 'the immigrant problem'. As they seek to win some immigrant votes to compensate for the many French ones they have lost, Communist leaders have claimed that their earlier local initiatives were simply designed to defuse tensions and so pre-empt the rise of racism. Whatever the intentions of the PCF may have been, it is hard to see how discriminating against immigrants could nip racism in the bud.

The major legacy of the PCF's intervention was to help turn racism into a national political issue. Events would show that the main beneficiary of this campaign was the Front National:

'The PCF initiative succeeded in defining the terms of the national debate in 1980-81, and it is striking that almost every side of the debate accepted the Communist definition of the issue: that immigrants from North Africa were too numerous, that they posed problems of racial/ethnic conflict, and that their presence was related to problems of

law and order.' (MA Schain, 'The National Front in France and the construction of political legitimacy,' *West European Politics*, 10 April 1987)

The tragedy was that, until the PCF's intervention, there was little popular demand for restricting the rights of immigrant communities. The Communist Party played the key role in making racism respectable in the French working class.

Without the all-party consensus on race, it would not have been so easy for Le Pen to build an electorate for extreme right politics. The French experience shows that for the far right to succeed, it must have organic links with the prevailing political culture. The FN may appear strikingly different to the other parties. But the difference is one of degree. What is unique about the FN is merely its determination to draw out the consequences of the existing racist consensus. In every respect the FN is a progeny of the political conventions of the Fifth French Republic.

### The public face

The Front National is the product of the racist political culture in France. It has no monopoly on the promotion of racism. It just publicly states, in clear and unambiguous terms, racist sentiments that transcend existing party divisions. Its main role today is to give shape to underlying racist sentiments, and to mobilise opinion against the immigrant communities. The FN thus represents a permanent danger to immigrants in France. Should it consolidate its position further, it will also become a threat to the French working class and its organisations. The FN provides a ready-made razor that can be turned against any expression of radical protest.

Neither the Socialist nor the Communist party is capable of offering an alternative to the FN. Both parties are responsible for creating the conditions in which the far right could prosper.

The Front National's electoral advance ought to provide a salutary warning of the dangers ahead. The problems facing French capitalism are set to mount up, and the FN could profit as an established voice of protest. The real danger is that, regardless of the fate of the FN, racism will gain more and more momentum unless it is challenged by an active anti-racist movement. Le Pen is the symbol of the fact that racism remains the number one issue in French politics—a permanent banner behind which reaction can be mobilised.

## Whatever happened to the National Front?

# NF-NO FUTURE

Kirk Williams plots the rise and fall of British fascism

**T**he British National Front is now a joke organisation—or rather, after its latest split, two joke organisations. It has few members, no clout, and stood no candidates at the last general election. Yet racism is stronger in Britain than in France or West Germany. So what's the difference?

The major difference is the dominance of the British Conservatives as the party of race and nation, compared to the incoherent and divided state of the mainstream right on the Continent. The British NF grew in the seventies when it was able to outflank the major parties on the race issue. But since Margaret Thatcher toughened up Tory attitudes to race and immigration, the NF has been left without a purpose in life.

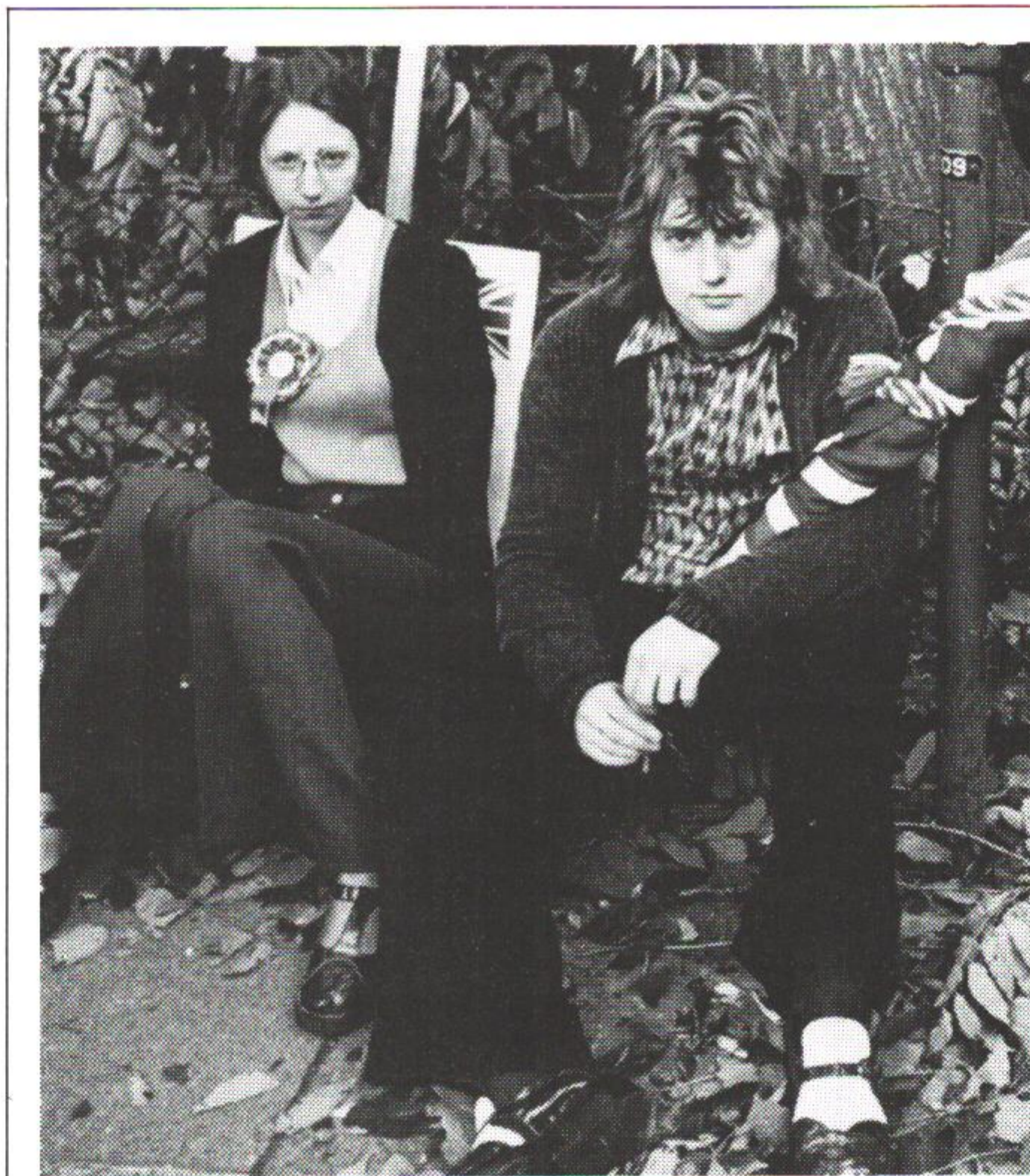
### Puss in jackboots

The National Front was formed in 1967, through the amalgamation of several small far-right groups. It was full of cranks. When Colin Jordan, the self-styled British führer, married the French fascist Françoise Dior, he wore a Nazi uniform. Then they mixed their own blood over a copy of *Mein Kampf*. Dior trained her cat to do a Hitler salute. The rise of this ridiculous outfit in the seventies had little to do with its own abilities. The NF became an effective pressure group because racism took centre stage in British politics.

The arrival of 30 000 Ugandan Asians in 1972 suggested that Edward Heath's Tory government was reneging on its election promise to get tough with immigrants. Within 24 hours there was a 100-strong picket in Downing Street and Front leaders were addressing Tory meetings. Tottenham Tory candidate Ray Pointer defected to the NF. Its membership soon shot up to 17 500.

Growing unemployment and general demoralisation with the established parties provided the National Front with an audience for its racist message. It won most support in the depressed inner cities and declining industrial areas with large immigrant communities; London (especially the East End), Wolverhampton and West Bromwich in the West Midlands, Leicester in the East Midlands, Bradford in West Yorkshire, Blackburn in Lancashire.

In 1973 a Front candidate won 16 per cent of the vote in a West



Ten years on, their party is about as popular as their shoes

Bromwich by-election—the only time the NF has saved its deposit. In 1976 it received another boost when the gutter press screamed about 'Five-Star Asians', who had fled to Britain from Malawi and were allegedly being cosseted by the Labour government. That was also the year of Robert Relf's imprisonment for insisting he would only sell his house to whites. There was a spate of racist murders and attacks. And, throughout 1976, support for the NF grew. In March the Front received 986 votes in Coventry; in June at Rotherham it got 1696; by the end of the year it won 3255 at Thurrock in Essex. In Blackburn the National Party, a split from the NF, won two council seats.

By 1977 many pundits were predicting that the Front was about to surpass the Liberals as the third party. In the local elections of May 1977 400 NF candidates won 230 000 votes. Thousands joined NF demonstrations. Party boss John Tyndall was rewarded with a full-page interview in the *Times*.

It has been downhill ever since. The most visible sign of decline was the NF's poor showing in the May 1979 general election, when its 303 candidates received 1.3 per

cent of the vote. But the writing was on the wall before that. The main political parties had pulled the rug out from beneath the fascists' feet, by giving new prominence to the race question.

The clearest expression of this change came in January 1978, when Margaret Thatcher made an unprompted reference to the Front in a TV interview:

'I think there is a feeling that the big political parties have not been talking about this [immigration].... In my view, that is one thing that is driving people to the National Front. They do not agree with the objectives of the National Front, but they say at least they are talking about some of the problems. Now we are a big political party. If we do not want people to go to extremes, and I do not, we must show that we are prepared to deal with it.' (Quoted in S Taylor, *The National Front in British Politics*, 1982, p144)

In the run-up to the 1979 election, Thatcher showed that she was prepared to 'deal with it' by making a major speech about British culture being 'swamped' by immigrants. Labour also tried to exploit the race issue, drawing

up tough proposals for a new immigration law which eventually formed the basis of the Tories' 1981 Nationality Act. But Thatcher was always going to be the winner in a contest over who could wave the flag most effectively. And once the Tories set about attracting the racist vote, the National Front was bound to be among the losers.

The *Sun* denounced the NF as 'Britain's nasty party', but added that 'fortunately, it doesn't matter what these twisted little men say. Because at long last one of Britain's two major parties has grasped the immigration nettle' (18 April 1979). After the election, an *Economist* survey found that, without the transfer of votes from the NF, the Tories would have won 16 fewer seats from Labour (2 June 1979). That would have reduced Thatcher's parliamentary majority to just 11. Thus the race issue which had allowed the NF some short-lived glory became a vital plank of the Tories' long-term winning platform.

### Milkmen and generals

The 1979 election debacle brought out many of the tensions in a party encompassing former generals and milkmen. Front leaders John Tyndall and Martin Webster split. Webster was demoted and then expelled in February 1984. The new leaders were Joe Pearce and Nick Griffin, influenced by the works of Otto Strasser, a rival of Hitler's in the Nazi Party. At the 1983 election the NF and Tyndall's British National Party each stood enough candidates to get a TV broadcast, but to little effect. They were trounced, the best fascist result being 3.7 per cent in Newham South.

Since then the decline and the splits have continued; in 1986 two groups calling themselves the NF emerged. As the fascists have been marginalised they have latched on to a bewildering array of issues. Supporting everything from Welsh holiday home bombers to animal liberation, the NF has run around in circles looking for a popular cause. But so long as the Tories maintain their tough line on race and the united support of the right-wing electorate, there is no room for the fascists.

The disturbing thing today is that, no matter how obscure the fascists become, many on the left will still waste time and energy chasing them. At a time when the truly powerful racists in Whitehall are stepping up their campaign of deportations and police harassment against black communities, we ought to leave the miniscule right to rot and get on with opposing the government which has rendered it redundant for a decade.

# A Full Head of Steam



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'Fill Your Head With Steam!'



## Fascism in the Federal Republic

# GREEN NAZIS?

Fenna King explains what's different about the far right in West Germany

In the British mind, Germany remains the country most closely associated with fascism. Yet for much of the period since Hitler died in his bunker and the Nazi Party was banned at the end of the war, the far right has had no prominence in West German society. This year, however, far-right parties have made some highly publicised electoral breakthroughs (in West Berlin in January and the state of Hesse in March), giving them a significant number of seats in parliamentary bodies for the first time in 20 years. The talk now is of the far right winning six or seven per cent of the votes in the 1990 federal elections.

'You are wearing a black leather jacket, black army trousers and a black shirt. Are your underpants black too?' asked the interviewer from the monthly magazine *tempo*. 'Nonsense', replied Michael Kühnen, billed as 'Germany's most feared neo-Nazi'. 'Black is the colour of our party uniform. We have to be recognisable as a group at all times. Black and brown shirts are a fashion of power. When we celebrate Adolf Hitler's hundredth birthday on 20 April 1989, we shall lend these clothes a new splendour.' (*tempo*, February)

### Plenty more

Kühnen and his 150 hardcore supporters in the Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (FAP) have been responsible for some of the growing number of violent attacks on immigrants, Jews and the left. The FAP was banned in February after the police found weapons, ammunition and Nazi insignia during nationwide raids on his followers' homes. But banning the FAP does not stop them forming another organisation with a new name. In any case, there are plenty of other fascist groups to choose from.

The 1987 report of the Verfassungsschutz (the state security police) listed 69 extreme right-wing groups with a membership of around 25 000. The report divided the neo-Nazis into 'National Democrats' and 'National Liberals'—that is, militant and 'respectable' fascists. The police excluded the Republican Party from the far right altogether. Yet the Republicans, who made a triumphant entry into Berlin city senate in

January after winning 11 seats, have policies which would put them to the right of the British National Front. Kühnen thinks that the Republicans are too soft on the existing political system, but 'on many issues' they are in 'complete agreement'.

### 'Hitler was OK'

Formal distinctions between militant and respectable fascists, and even between the fascists and the German right, tend to be artificial and confused. The hardliners are not just an isolated handful of thugs in black underwear. There is considerable evidence that a powerful constituency for far-right politics exists in West Germany. In a recent opinion poll 14 per cent of those canvassed took a positive attitude towards the memory of Adolf Hitler. Polls also show a general hardening of racist attitudes which transcends party divides and any other distinctions thought up by the political police.

After the Second World War, the German far right had cleaned up its act. The German ruling class was forced to dissociate itself from its Nazi past and project an apologetic image. The major party of the post-war right, the Christian Democrats (CDU), established mainstream conservatism as the standpoint of German capitalism. Many former Nazi supporters accepted this compromise in exchange for gaining international recognition. German nationalism was suitably toned down as part of this deal.

### Phoney war

In recent years the carefully constructed post-war political framework has started to come apart. The German establishment needs to recreate its nationalist symbols to keep its grip on society. However, pursuing this path will eventually mean rewriting the history of its Nazi past in a much more positive way. This would be a high-risk strategy both at home and internationally, which could unleash all sorts of tensions and trouble. Mainstream conservatives are reluctant to go too far in this direction; but a substantial minority wants a more decisive nationalist strategy. This helps to explain the political crisis facing chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian

Democrat-dominated coalition government, and the growth of the far right.

Racism has provided the focus for the new fascists. The Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) campaigned in the Hesse regional elections in March behind the slogans 'Stop immigration: Germany for Germans' and 'Stop phoney asylum-seekers'. It won 6.6 per cent of the votes in Frankfurt and now sits on the city council. The CDU responded by running racist newspaper adverts which repeated the NPD's message: 'Phoney refugees must be stopped—our country is becoming a country of immigrants through phoney refugees. To that we say No.' It is not hard to see why fascists can thrive in such a climate.

### Not just Germany

The same racism which permeates all European politics is the key resource of the German far right. That ought to dispose of the British prejudice that the German national character is somehow uniquely attracted to Nazism. Nevertheless, there are differences in Germany. In contrast to fascists in France or Britain, those in Germany have a political identity that goes beyond racism. The far right in Germany is also able to draw upon the country's wider conservative traditions.

The new German right has sought to integrate popular ecological issues into its racist programmes. Kühnen argues that 'National Socialism was the first consistent ecological ideology' and pays the Greens a backhanded compliment as the first post-war party to include 'biological laws' in their programme.

### Foreign environment

The romantic and irrational philosophy of German conservative culture can readily incorporate ecological concerns. Here is a typical example from an NPD journal, blaming immigrants for the deterioration of the environment:

'The foreigners' ghettos that have been created in the big West German cities in recent years have changed their environment decisively and qualitatively for the German inhabitants....The cultural changes in an environment that has developed its own traditions

are comparable with the most destructive interference of civilisation in nature and demand equally effective protection. The loss of land through roads and buildings is quite comparable with the taking away of space by the millions of foreigners. The latter process narrows the life chances of the Germans who are already cramped in, and lowers their quality of life.' (*Junges Forum*, March-April 1984)

By adapting such popular German themes as the Green arguments, parties like the NPD are able to promote themselves as a legitimate part of the national culture far more than their fascist counterparts elsewhere in Europe. The far right could also benefit from growing anti-American sentiment in West Germany, which has been encouraged by right and left alike.

The militaristic antics of somebody like Kühnen are not about to create a Fourth Reich. But they should not be confused with the far greater danger represented by the respectable far right. Nobody is likely to get very far in an overt neo-Nazi guise. But there is considerable potential for mobilising support around a populist xenophobic party like the Republicans or the NPD.

### Dangerous vacuum

The danger from the German far right must be taken seriously today. For a start there is no political alternative to German racism. The Social Democratic and Green parties are very defensive on the question of immigration. Both parties responded to the recent racist hysteria by drafting new immigration controls and settlement laws of their own. Without a major mobilisation against racism, the far right will retain the initiative on the question of immigration.

The old-fashioned Christian Democratic consensus seems unable to retain its monopoly on right-wing support. It is proving increasingly hard to reconcile the diverse interests of big business, the urban middle classes and the old petit-bourgeoisie around the CDU. There is now a vacuum on the right wing of German politics which provides the space for the growth of a far-right party. The onus is on German anti-racists to respond.

Melvyn Bragg

# THE SOUTH BANK'S LAST STAND?

Melvyn Bragg told John Fitzpatrick about his fears for the future of television and civil liberties in Britain

**M**elvyn Bragg, distinguished writer and broadcaster, has signed Charter 88, the call for a bill of rights and a written constitution to protect our civil liberties. Why? 'Because it needs to be done urgently and it could stop this strange erosion which is going on. The erosion has only been highlighted by Margaret Thatcher, the possibility has been there for a long time, because we have been lent these "rights" on sufferance. I'm too old to be lent rights on sufferance, it's high time something was written down that can be defended and stated to be inalienable. I was terribly disappointed that the Labour Party swerved away from it instantly.'

He thinks constitutional reform is likely only if Labour regains power and thinks that unlikely unless 'those four people who walked away and took about one and a half million right-wing Labour voters with them come back unconditionally. I think Shirley Williams would. I don't know about Owen or Rogers. I suspect Jenkins might. If they came back with no pacts or "I want to be chancellor", just ate some humble pie and brought back even half of their supporters I think Labour would get in. Otherwise whatever happens short of a massive catastrophe or scandal, or even with that, I don't see any change at the next election'.

If it was urgent how could we wait for a decade? 'I don't hold there's *no* prospect of Labour getting back. I don't feel that's hopeless.' Would constitutional change make any difference anyway? In America, for example, many of these measures exist, but it doesn't seem to help minorities there. 'It depends what you mean by make a difference. Their freedom of information makes a colossal

difference. The Watergate scandal couldn't have happened here, because we'd never have heard about it.'

A colossal difference—get rid of Nixon, end up with Reagan? 'That really is another argument. You're saying it doesn't matter a damn because the society we're in is up the creek and these are just meddlings on top. You're saying Charter 88 won't change much because society has to be changed radically from the inside.'

'Nobody's produced anything like a programme about how that could be achieved with the willing cooperation of enough people to see it through. If they did, then I would be part of it. It doesn't seem a possibility. So what do you do? You go out and work towards that possibility. That's a very honourable course. I think by backing the charter we can make a substantial difference and things will change. Actually I don't think they're mutually contradictory. You do? You think I'm a liberal consensus chap, and you're a root and branch man.'

## Best behaviour

One aspect of the conformist climate which affects him directly is the erosion of freedom of expression on television. 'Censorship is increasing, there's no doubt about that whatsoever. For example, because of the new rules that apply to the reporting of Northern Ireland we are severely limited in reporting the history and the news of part of the country we live in. I think that is very dangerous. The six-part Robert Kee series on Ireland could not be repeated today because a great number of the people interviewed were members of the IRA. This hasn't been taken on at all well enough. I am disappointed with the BBC because it has the power and the clout—to argue it out, take test cases and lobby. They did an amusing *Panorama* programme, but it should have been harder than that.'

'The idea of challenging the government in sensitive areas of policy is now under threat. Roger Bolton who made *Death on the Rock* has been very strong and resolute about it. The man was harassed. It is quite extraordinary that there should not be a public outcry when a report by Lord Windlesham, a Tory, a respected figure, is instantly rubbished and denied. I also think there's a lot of self-censorship settling in. People are just not doing things. It's one of the reasons for the growth of arts programmes, because there is at least a feeling that you can operate there, whereas you can't in political programmes.'

He believes that these trends are not new. The way that ITV companies have to reapply regularly for their franchises and the BBC has to ask for licence fee increases has always allowed governments to put pressure on broadcasters. 'It's just more naked now. There are phrases like "on trial", "behave", "better be careful". These were always there, now they're on the surface. There's been a mountain range under the sea and the sea has dried up and we've just got the mountain range. These forces have been under-



PHOTO: Pandora Anderson



neath in society, and have been very unpleasant if you stubbed your toe on them or came up against them in your work. Now we're right up against it. We're down to the way it is. This is how it is with Mrs Thatcher right across society.'

**Money talks**

Bragg has opposed the recommendations of the government white paper 'Broadcasting in the nineties'. He fears for the future of television if the BBC becomes a subscription channel and the ITV companies are broken up when their franchises are sold to the highest bidder. Talent follows money, and if those changes were to happen the money would not be there to make good quality programmes for minority audiences (half a million to five million). 'Television is an expensive medium and to get the teams together to provide the minority spread of programming you need companies that have the money. Only then can you have your *Game for a Laugh* and *Coronation Street*, but also your *World in Action*, *South Bank Show*, *Bandung File* and so on.

'It needs money, but not loads of money. One hour of arts documentary costs about a quarter of the cost of an hour of drama, and

about a half of an hour of heavy documentary. The *South Bank Show* has proved that we can make very good films on low budgets. Take David Hinton's film of Francis Bacon, I think that is a tremendous film. We are able to bring on young film-makers and give them access to enough money to do that. The Francis Bacon cost absolutely top whack £115 000.' This is what Bragg fears would be impossible if the government proposals were to go ahead. 'It's bound to go because £115 000 is still too much. The advertisers can get at least the same audience for a seventh generation *Hill St Blues* and it will cost them £5000 an hour, because it's already made its cost twice over in the States.'

**Advertisers' hype**

Steve Garrett, commissioning editor for youth at Channel 4, recently told *Living Marxism* he was optimistic that advertisers would back quality programming because it gave them access to the ABs. Bragg is far from convinced. 'That's what they say. I'm actually fed up with British advertisers because they're very, very bright people and they do a lot of things that I deeply object to. First, they crow about their damn 30-second films on which they spend up to

£1m, 10 times as much as we do, and say how aesthetically superior they are to ITV, which is rubbish. Some of them are quite good, but they're nothing like as good as the Francis Bacon, or the William Golding film by Nigel Wattis or the Raymond Chandler by David Thomas or a dozen other *South Bank Shows* I could run off.

'Secondly, they talk on and on about their support for minority programming. There's no evidence that British advertisers put real advertising into minority areas. Forget it. Bollocks. Not at all. What they really say is, we want spots on *Game for a Laugh*, *Coronation Street* and, oh alright, we'll take the *South Bank Show*. They get the ABs on *Game for A Laugh* anyway, probably more than on the *South Bank Show*. What they bloody well want is BBC1.'

**4: wrong numbers**

'They bash ITV because they want to try and bring the advertising rates down. Now they're getting scared because the monopoly they thought was cosy for us, was actually cosy for them. When they have to go round to different places putting together the same sort of orders they're going to have to pay more. Steve Garrett is a bright fellow but he and all those other fellows in Channel 4 might

be living in a dream world. When push comes to shove, advertisers want numbers. I think Channel 4 is tremendous. If they go their own advertising way, fine. I wish them luck. *Brookside* will get advertising.'

**Heaven and Earth**

Bragg sees problems with the status quo, but wants above all to mobilise public opinion to prevent television in the new order becoming 'advertising-led rather than programme-led as it is now'. 'The BBC/ITV duopoly is over. Satellite is here, a fifth channel is coming. The fight is now for the institutions to hold on to their strength as institutions. In my darker moments one of the things I think might be happening is not a government conspiracy, but something that is more than a twinkle in Mr Murdoch's eye. The only way that satellite TV can get a grip on this country is if part of the terrestrial system is broken up, because that does have a really strong grip. People like their television and are loyal to it to a remarkable degree. It would be much easier for the satellites if that was broken. So you can see things going up in the sky and the white paper coming out of the Earth at the same time as part of the same scheme of things.'

**Jarman's cinema**

# A DOUBTING DEREK

**Pat Ford asked Derek Jarman how to make low budget, high quality films**

**D**erek Jarman is a film-maker determined to explore his own preoccupations and prepared to make demands on his audience in the process. His work is formally innovative and often highly personal, highly political and quite idiosyncratic. And he works on low budgets. In our film culture these are qualities which usually guarantee obscurity, but Jarman has been very successful. He has received much well-deserved critical acclaim and a wide cinema and TV audience for films like *Sebastiane*, *The Tempest*, *Jubilee*, *Caravaggio*, *The Last of England*, *Angelic Conversations* and most recently *War*

*Requiem*. He estimates that the total cost of his films is about £1.5m. 'In other words we've made all the films for the amount a young

in London's West End, which now functions as a town base when he comes in from his new countryish home in the shadow of Dungeness power station in Kent. He is charming, articulate, open—and 'very confused' about *War Requiem*, his film based on Benjamin Britten's oratorio which sets to music the First World War poems of Wilfred Owen. It is a disturbing and moving meditation on the horror and the pity of war and has

**'If I went to Channel 4 with a film like *Sebastiane*—gay subject matter, Latin, nudity, craziness—they would turn me down.'**

director could expect these days for one low budget feature film.' We were talking in his small flat overlooking Charing Cross Road

been favourably received, perhaps too favourably: 'A good review in the *Daily Telegraph*. That was a bit of a surprise.'

He agrees that the rather abstract anti-war nature of the piece doesn't exactly 'stick in the gullet' of those responsible for the war, but he ducks a little behind his subject matter; 'Wilfred's poems are about the trenches and that didn't leave me the space. It actually dictated what it was about'. There is a strong religious element, too, which he is also unsure about. 'I'm antithetical to the institutional Christian tradition, but I am only agnostic, not atheist. I've always thought doubt was very important. I've always tried to remember doubt.'

He is frank about the reasons for choosing Britten in the first place. 'Because of the very established position of Britten within the culture, and particularly the Requiem, it was possible to raise the money. Economics is absolutely the basis of all this—what is not mirrored, what is mirrored, and how.' He and Tilda Swinton (his leading actress in this and other films) remain 'equivocal' about the film. 'There is a certain emptiness. Perhaps that is because it is about the war, but perhaps we never got there somehow, never quite touched it.' The cinema was in stunned silence for several minutes after the film ended when I saw it in west London. He said

that this had been a common reaction, which gratified them and helped balance their feelings about it.

### Punks and poppies

I suggested that his more overtly political films such as *Jubilee* and *The Last of England* were more shocking because their positive images of homosexuality, and lurid images of punk and paramilitary barbarism, were less easily digestible than Owen and Britten, who fit comfortably into the culture of the poppy and the village war memorial. Even so, those earlier films were stronger on savage indignation and apocalyptic pessimism about the state of the nation than on probing the reasons behind the malaise. In this context, it seemed odd that a long montage of shots in *War Requiem*, of military conflict from the First World War until today, culminating in Falklands footage, included no reference to Britain's ongoing war in Ireland. He laughed uproariously: 'We couldn't get everything in! No, you're right. I forgot. It just didn't occur to me. Now if you had been around at the time I'd have put that in.'

Were not his films looking to past traditions of Englishness, as if they were more decent than Thatcherism or provided values and resources which we could draw upon now? He is under no illusions about many aspects of old England. He is still struggling to settle accounts with the 'vicious, imperialist programming' he received at a minor English public school.

### Hopeless fraud

There are things, however, that Jarman does look back on fondly. 'I've always said I'm a conservative film-maker. Not politically, but in a sort of Green sense, I'm in favour of the preservation of the things one thinks are valuable. I see it back to front. The miners are conservative, fighting for something which is worth conserving. Mrs Thatcher is the wrecker. You have to be my age (born 1942) to appreciate the physical destruction of the environment which has taken place for money. And the last 10 years has been a hopeless, fraudulent pursuit of money. I think this is a criminal government now. I think it's illegal.'

So far as pessimism is concerned he answers, with some force, that the making of his films is itself an expression of optimism. Indeed his success in creating a low budget, high quality cinema is a triumph of optimism over many obstacles—not least, the increasingly censorious climate.

'There is enormous censorship, and self-censorship too. Channel 4 has a monopoly and that is a very,

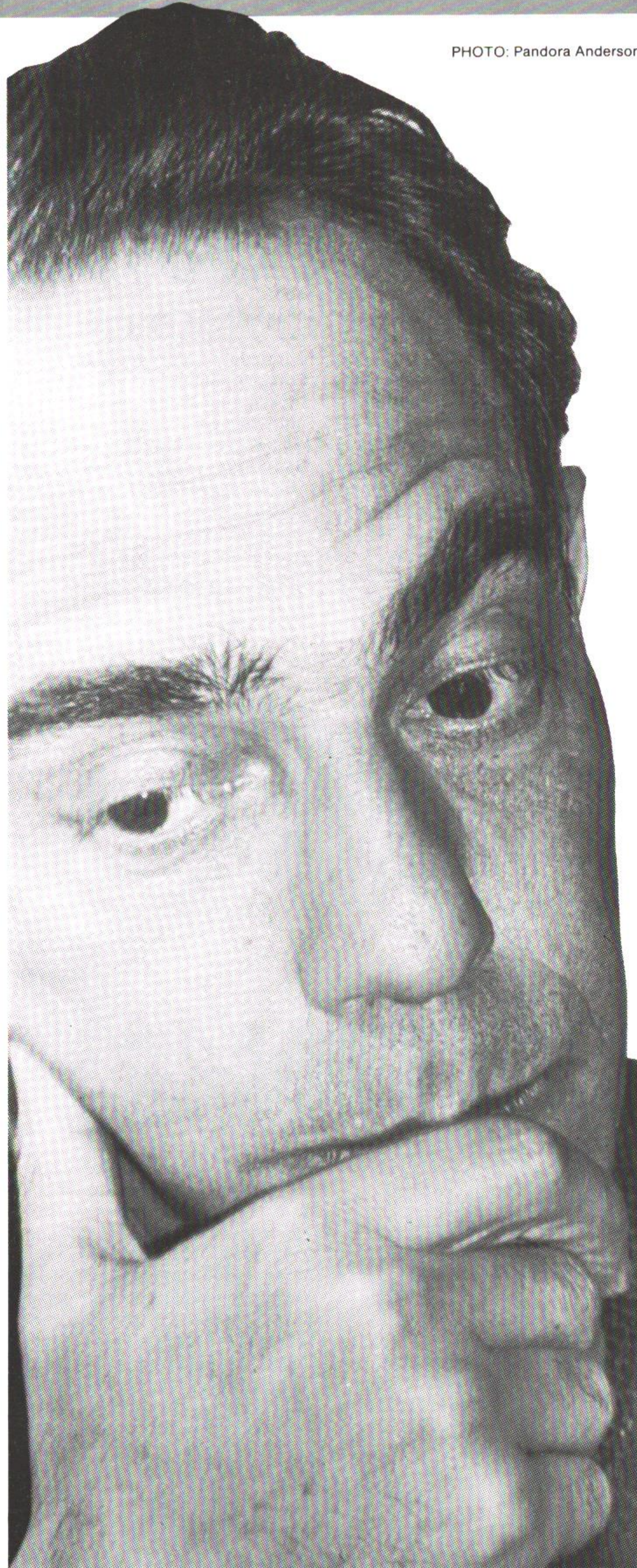


PHOTO: Pandora Anderson

very bad thing. People say it has created a new independent cinema. But what has it uncreated and precluded? It virtually precluded me. They turned down *Caravaggio*, and put me into the wilderness for five years. Because of *Sebastiane* and *Jubilee* they knew they could

never show my sort of cinema. You and I well know that in 1989 if I went along to Channel 4 with a film like *Sebastiane* they would turn me down. They might say they wouldn't but I perfectly well know they would—the gay subject matter, the Latin, the nudity, the

craziness, it would all be unacceptable.'

### The art master

Jarman was not put off, partly because he had never really accepted the rules in the first place. 'I had all the wrong programming for the cinema. I didn't know or care about it passionately. I just got involved. I was brought up as a painter in the tradition of the art master, of William Morris, of Le Corbusier's truth to materials. There is a philosophy and a morality in that teaching which is not there in the cinema, which is about compromise, about how you're going to fit in to what already exists.'

'I wanted to prove to myself that it was possible to make a cinema that I liked. I was told that it was cloud-cuckoo land, because the structures were so heavy, but I wanted to open up a situation where young film-makers could see that they could make films with small resources, and that this would give more people hope, and make the cinema more plural and interesting. In fact many young film-makers have taken their cue and are now working in super-8 and in video. There's a whole generation now making films cheaply. Isaac Julien's brilliant film *Looking for Langston* was on television recently, and Sally Potter's *Gold-diggers* is absolutely brilliant too.'

### Mood pieces

Jarman has made his own cinema after all. It is a cinema very much of moods and images and ideas, in which music and noise play an important part. It is not a cinema of narrative or plot. The beautiful, ingenious *Caravaggio* is a subtle evocation of all the tones and textures of the world of the revolutionary baroque painter. *The Last of England* (which Jarman thinks is his best film) is a more jarring assemblage of images and fragments and sounds, but even in these glimpses of post-Armageddon he can contrive some startlingly attractive effects. 'I've always been very interested in form as well as content. The artists I've always admired have evaluated their own lives and expressed what they find valuable. Van Gogh is a marvellous example. Take the *Irises*, now an icon for money I know, but at the same time they are there for everyone, they are irises and they are those irises in a room. Why can't I as a film-maker do that? It might be difficult sometimes, as in *The Last of England*, where to a certain extent you are reinventing cinematic language. Often, I'm afraid this sort of cinema is for those who are prepared to work at it.'

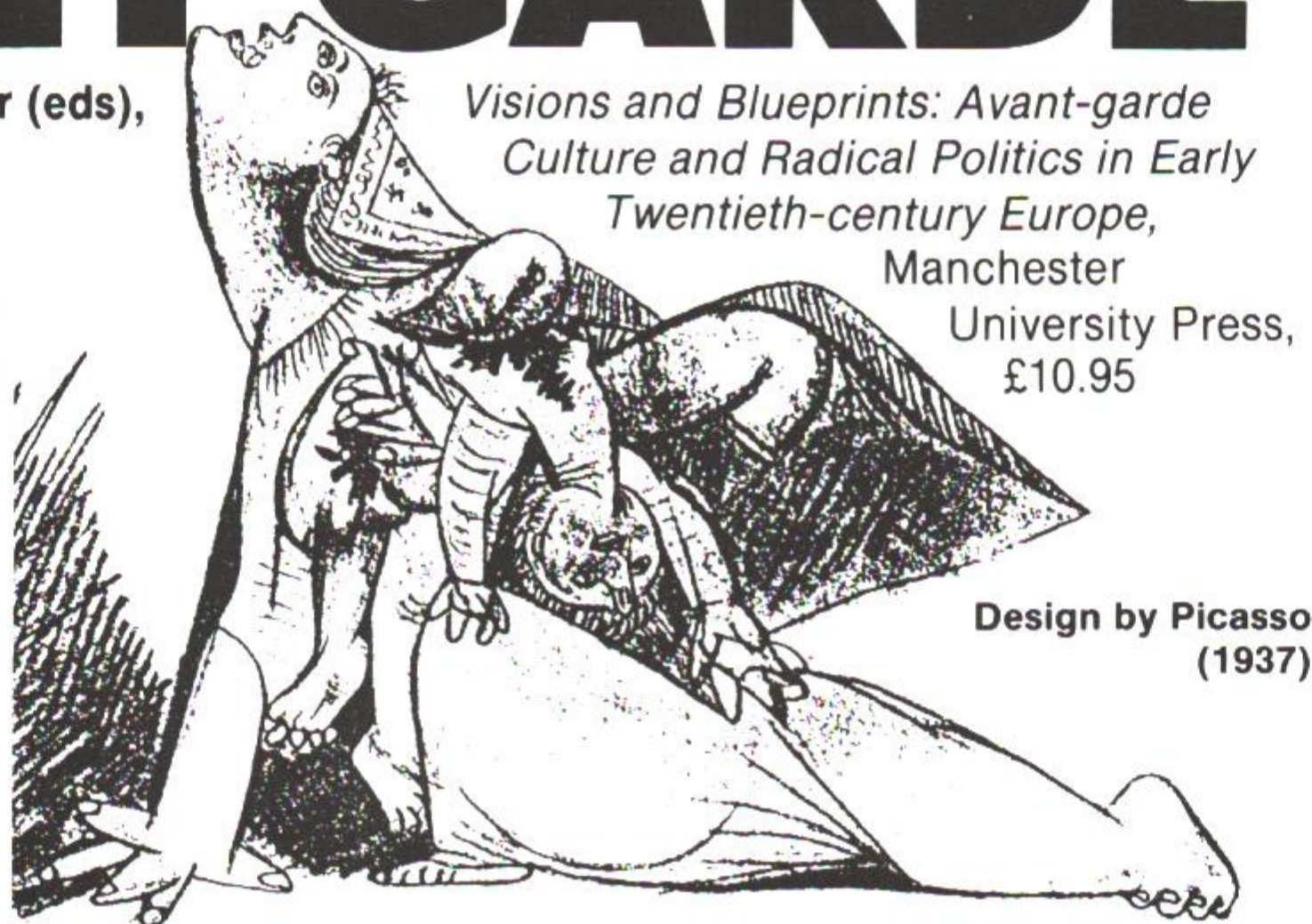
Politics and art

# AVANT-GARDE

Edward Timms and Peter Collier (eds),

*Visions and Blueprints: Avant-garde Culture and Radical Politics in Early Twentieth-century Europe,*

Manchester University Press, £10.95



Design by Picasso (1937)

In January 1932 the poet and Stalinist convert Louis Aragon was indicted by the French public prosecutor for demoralising the army and the nation by publishing the poem 'Front rouge'. André Breton, the leader of the surrealists, although he bitterly disagreed with Aragon's new politics, organised a petition in his defence. The signatories included Georges Braque, Bertolt Brecht, Le Corbusier, Fernand Leger, Federico Garcia Lorca, Thomas Mann, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso.

The incident, recalled by Peter Collier in *Visions and Blueprints*, provides an eloquent vignette of early twentieth-century modernism. It was a time when the connection between art and politics was immediate and intense,

when artists expected their work to change the world, when there were furious debates between them, and when some of the greatest art of this or any other

century was being produced. It was the period, up to the late thirties, of the great -isms, artistic movements which spanned different countries and different dis-

ciplines: cubism, futurism, dadaism, formalism, constructivism, surrealism, symbolism, expressionism and others besides.

The book would be worth getting simply for the two essays by Raymond Williams, a general introduction and a final essay on 'Theatre as a political forum'. Williams distinguishes the avant-garde from the earlier, less militant forms of modernism, and is at pains to emphasise that the anti-bourgeois dissidence it usually expressed could represent quite different political tendencies. The other essays are of more variable quality, and in some of them the arguments are clearly flawed, as with Peter Collier's contention that Gramsci, Trotsky and Breton all gave 'precedence to the cultural superstructure of society over its economic infrastructure'. Nevertheless, the essays explore a very wide range of artists and topics and could serve as a useful introduction to all the debates about the relationship between politics and culture, which started in earnest in these years.

Francis Walsh

Fiji

## QUEEN BACKS COUP

Kenneth Bain, *Treason at Ten: Fiji at the Crossroads*, Hodder & Stoughton, £14.95

At a meeting with Fijian prime minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara on 30 March 1988, Margaret Thatcher agreed that Britain would resume training Fijian army officers. These officers had just overthrown an elected government, opted out of the Commonwealth and declared a republic. Thatcher thus showed her approval of the first military dictatorship in the South Pacific.

Premier Mara only occupies his position by force. He lost the April 1987 elections to the Labour-led coalition of Dr Timoci Bavadra. The military coup began at 10 o'clock on 14 May (hence the book's title), led by Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka. Today Rabuka commands an SAS-trained army which is beating, raping and torturing the majority Fijian Indian population. One speciality is to

wet victims' faces with cow dung and make them lick it off, which is especially offensive to Hindus.

As a personal diary by a former British colonial administrator in Fiji, Kenneth Bain's book makes fascinating reading. But he doesn't understand what he describes. He thinks the origins of the coup lie in intra-Fijian squabbles, and dismisses as a sideshow the crucial ethnic tensions (long manipulated by the British colonialists) between the Fijian and Indian communities. Oblivious to the fact that capitalism can only rule by the death squad in most of the third world today, Bain supposes that overthrow of democracy must be rooted in Fiji's violent, cannibalistic past, and

wonders why Western and Commonwealth governments have expressed so little outrage at the coup.

Bain is most hurt by the Queen's role as head of the Commonwealth and Queen of Fiji. This symbol of democracy refused even to meet the deposed Bavadra and fully backed her governor general, who sided with the coup from the start and accepted Rabuka's invitation to become president of the republic. Confronted by the fact that his Queen prefers a dictatorship outside the Commonwealth to a democracy within it, Bain obviously feels his old world is collapsing. He's right. It is.

Jackie Reynolds

Playwright Joe Orton was murdered by his lover Kenneth Halliwell in 1967; Halliwell then killed himself. Eleven years later John Lahr published the 'definitive' Orton biography, and has since been the main figure in the Orton industry, from collaborating on the film *Prick Up Your Ears*, to writing the play *Joe Orton's Diaries*. Lahr is largely responsible for the standard judgement on the dead lovers: 'Orton was not hounded by society into a self-conscious martyrdom....Orton died from his short-sighted and indecisive loyalty to a friend.' Halliwell 'could love literature but never life or himself'. He had a 'festering and terrifying hostility towards the world'.

Orton and Halliwell

## FOUR-WALL DRAMA

Simon Shepherd, *Because We're Queers: The Life and Crimes of Kenneth Halliwell and Joe Orton*, Gay Men's Press, £7.95

*Because We're Queers* is essentially a reply to this view. Simon Shepherd identifies in Lahr's work a desire to see Orton as the victim of his homosexuality. Shepherd argues that the idea of homosexuals as lonely, weak, jealous, destructive and 'never happy' has distorted our view of Orton and Halliwell. He looks at their development as a couple, as artists and finally as a myth. He has attempted not so much a double biography as an account of a period; unpick-

ing fiction from fact, he presents the cramped world of homosexual dramatists and performers in the fifties and sixties. He looks at the pressures which bore down on this milieu from society, not from within their own heads, and which harried and hounded Joe and Kenneth to their deaths.

However, in trying to rescue Orton and Halliwell from Lahr's hostile assumptions, Shepherd has taken the poisoned bait. He has assumed that the most im-

portant thing about Orton and Halliwell was that they were homosexuals who died violently in a little room in Islington. In doing so his approach remains too close to Lahr's, and reinforces the accepted cautionary function of their story. Undoubtedly, oppression was the crucible of their talent, and the cause of their deaths, but this couple were important because through their collages, pranks and devastatingly funny plays they developed an acute sense of the destructive and sinister propriety of English manners. *Because We're Queers* is a good book that would have been better had Shepherd rejected the morbid focus of Lahr and the rest.

Don Milligan

**'W**e're rednecks, we're rednecks, and we don't know our ass from a hole in the ground; We're rednecks, we're rednecks and we're keepin' those niggers down.' ('Rednecks' by Randy Newman) Imagine a land-mass occupied by American Bernard Mannings and you have the popular conception of the hillbilly South and the esteem in which its music is held by the average 'thinking person'. This stonewalling prompted Jo Hagan to call his pioneering London country and western club 'Rednecks'—a nod towards the self-deprecating irony that underscores many of country's excesses.

As a black bloke brought up on soul and African music, Hagan is well aware of the stigma C&W carries—and occasionally celebrates: 'We get the experts and fanatics along, but I'm not carrying out a crusade. The sense of humour is very important, and most people come for simple enjoyment; they dress up, but although it's fashionable at the moment, we get very few posers. Most come out of curiosity, and are surprised how much more there is to the music than they realised. Then they bring friends.'

The club has just reopened as Son of Rednecks, and on a typical night you will hear anything from

the western swing of Bob Wills or Ernest Tubb (who introduced electric guitar to be heard above the brawls of the Texas oil-town honky tonks) to the mesmeric Cajun music of Louisiana. The eclecticism of country is well-represented, with its origins in black jazz and blues, English and Irish folk, European polkas, waltzes and yodels, Tex-Mex and R'n'B. If it makes the bottles bounce, it'll do.

Renewed interest in country comes with the marketing of 'World Music' in general. The HMV shop in Oxford Street sports a window display of vintage Sun rockabilly and lurid painted blue-

grass sleeves, and unearthing the rough roots and sleazy underbelly of country is a thriving cottage industry these days.

The publication of a revamped version of Nick Tosches' *Country* will give the newcomer a clue to what's happening. Subtitled *Living Legends and Dying Metaphors in America's Biggest Music*, it's a manic, Hunter Thompson-style journey through country's less-than-respectable past, and a swansong for a music that Tosches believes died in the sixties, emasculated and sanitised by commercialism. The book captures the lewdness and exhilaration of the cultural womb that sprung Jerry

Reelin' and a 'rockin' at Red Runs the River, London

# COUNTRY LIFE

Toby Banks on country and western, old and new



Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley on sleepy middle America in 1956. They took the wild spirit of the honky tonks, added the visceral rhythm of bluesmen and hillbillies, put a thousand volts through it, bottled it and sold it like Coke to the teenage millions.

Now there is 'New Country', young (by country standards) acts aiming to cut through the Nashville schmaltz and get back to roots. They range from the souped-up honky tonkers Dwight Yokum and Steve Earle to the 'folkabilly' of Nanci Griffith. They aspire to reclaim country for the tradition of Hank Williams; if a label has to be found, they prefer 'New Tradition-

alist'. But Tosches thinks that 'only Jerry Lee Lewis and George Jones can really sing country music', because they came from another time and place. The New Country singers can only copy them. 'Whether they are commercially successful or not is down to marketing.'

### Rebs march north

Whether New Country is really country, or an elaborate conceit like a Levi's ad, doesn't matter as long as enough people believe in it. This is where marketing comes in. The New Country scene dovetails with old Nashville's need to break through the commercial Mason-Dixon line that cuts it off from the lucrative under-40s rock market. On the face of it, the prospects are good. New Country professes to offer unpretentious songs about subjects which people can identify with. Truth and sincerity coupled with a harder modern sound compares favourably with the egotistical posturing of eighties stadium-rock. And the eloquence and sophistication of Lyle Lovett and KD Lang belies the crass country stereotype. As Lang points out, hillbillies have satellite dishes on their farms and are not impervious to change; and there is a general desire in society for more 'humanistic' music. Country seems well-placed for a two-pronged advance.

Nevertheless, cracking 'the younger demographic' is a tall order. As one A&R man put it: 'You look at the top country acts...find me a kid who wants to look like *them*.' The problem lies in the hustler mentality that pervades the industry. Nashville boasts a leisure-suited executive for every embroidered 'Nudie-suited' hopeful or has-been who picks in the bars of Music Row. But the place is still shot through with the gaucheness of the hick who can't pass up the chance of a fast buck.

It's the instinct that drove 'Colonel' Tom Parker to strap on a cash belt and flog tacky souvenirs while his protégé Presley, 'The Hillbilly Cat', was raking in a fortune on stage. It's what made Hank Williams, at the height of his fame in 1952, marry Billie Jean Eshlimar—and then do it again, twice, in front of a paying audience. And today it's what makes millionaires like Webb Pierce and Johnny Cash open their mansions with guitar-shaped swimming pools to coach parties of matrons. Even country's most staid institution, the Grand Ole Opry, incorporated the name of its sponsor (Purina, the pet food people) into its title for national broadcasts of its shows. As the Country Music Association put it, 'The C in country music stands for cash'.

Ironically, country's greatest

figures have fallen foul of its stultifying conservatism. Hank Williams was deified upon his death, and his plaque holds pride of place in the CMA Hall of Fame. But when he was alive and at his peak, the Grand Ole Opry banned him for his drinking. The Opry also refused to let his backing group use drums. Drums were for 'niggers' and the Opry was trying to lose the 'black music' tag which country had in the forties. Then, as today, country's primary audience was the white Southern poor—bastions of racism and reaction, home of the Klan. Songs like 'Some niggers never die (they just smell that way)' may not be promoted officially, but they are always there in the bars and the tiny private record labels.

'All I've seen of this old world is a bed and a doctor bill; I'm tearing down your brooder house 'cause now I've got the pill.' (Loretta Lynn, 'The pill')

Role model for New Country women is Loretta Lynn, the First Lady (Tammy Wynette is Queen). She is the coalminer's daughter whose Hollywood biopic starred Sissy Spacek. Lynn lived in a log cabin in Butcher Holler, Kentucky, until she married at 13 and got pregnant 'before I knew the meaning of the word', and then again, three times in four years, when she did. None of this worried Nashville, but when the First Lady released 'The pill' in 1975 the playlists closed. Her popularity increased: they reopened.

### Soap and sin

Dolly Parton, 'don't kiss nobody's butt', sleeps with who she likes and is one of America's biggest stars. Her self-deprecating humour ('Lots of women buy as many wigs and makeup things as I do. They just don't wear them all at the same time') has won her a devoted following, and forced Nashville to take her on her own terms. If you want the ins and outs of everybody who was ever anybody, read Randall Riese's new *Nashville Babylon*.

But, like the rebel men, country's headstrong women are populists, and Nashville's wings are wide enough to embrace them all. In Music City there's always room for another 'character': self-destructing emotional wrecks can be rehabilitated posthumously, and stoical survivors make good country soap opera—Tammy Wynette (five husbands, 18 serious operations, one kidnapping) now stars in a TV soap. It's all grist to the Nashville mill. The frailty of the stars helps sustain the God-fearing, family-loving, patriotic thread that holds the industry together. Saturday night is for

'feeling single, seeing double', honky tonk angels and the bottom of too many glasses. Sunday morning is for heartaches and hangovers, remorse and praying for forgiveness. The timeless values have a high nostalgia factor.

In the end, country is a world of clichés. The emotive quality of singers like George Jones can bring out the profound truth of a banal lyric, and make a trite song moving. For millions, this reflects the world of clichés in which we live. Country rarely strays from the domain of the individual. Of course it has thrown its weight behind right-wing Southern politicians, with songs proclaiming 'I'm no communist' and 'All you Shiites are shi-it', and their popularity embarrasses the image-makers in the Nashville skyscrapers. Big names like Merle Haggard feel obliged to take pot-shots at anti-war campaigners ('When you're running down my country, you're walking on the fighting side of me'). Mostly, though, it rakes over the ashes of broken dreams and failed romances, and then sparks the promise of new ones.

### Forgotten heroes

At its worst country is everything its critics accuse it of: 'The blind boy's dog' tells how the boy sends his guide dog to fight in Korea. But at its best it has the redemptive quality of any good music. It's America's authentic white working class music because it articulates the experience of individuals whose hopes of satisfaction are pinned on finding true love against all the odds. Sometimes it's a reassuring way to experience pain or to vicariously feel someone else's. For Jo Hagan 'it's escapism, but then what music isn't? It's cynical, but with humour—more than the blues—it's not nihilistic. Western pop deals with emotions in an abstract way that's bland and hard to identify with. Country is like good soul: you believe in the people singing it. I don't think you have to be old and cynical to enjoy it [Jo is 30], but I doubt it will break as a youth cult'.

Whatever the success of Nashville's commercial overtures to New Country, if America's forgotten heroes are rehabilitated in the music world a small justice will have been done. 'As Ernest Tubb said', recalls Tosches, 'beholding his lambent image in the glossy shine of his chartreuse boots: "Good taste is timeless."'

Son of Rednecks: Thursday nights, at Turnmills, 63 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1 (Farringdon tube). Nick Tosches, *Country*, Secker & Warburg, £6.95. Randall Riese, *Nashville Babylon*, Congdon & Weed, (US \$12.95).

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

# Letters

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

## GREENS GO STRAIGHT

I was interested to read several left-wing Greens complaining that *Living Marxism* had misrepresented their movement, and that it was much more radical (even revolutionary) than your coverage gave it credit for (letters, April). The day after I read these letters, I was even more interested to read reports in the press of the Green Party's spring conference, which rather suggested that *Living Marxism* had, if anything, given the Greens too much credit for being radical.

The key motion at the conference was one calling for the Greens to support and encourage a boycott of government charges like the poll tax and water rates, as a protest against environmental damage. It was rejected.

Tim Cooper, a former co-chairman of the party, seemed to sum up the arguments against the motion. He said it was alright for individuals not to pay, 'but for a political party that aspires to government to suggest that people should break the law, and that we would support them on that, on such a range of issues, is deeply disturbing'. He condemned the motion as one 'that says we as a political party do not uphold the rule of law in the way that other political parties do'.

So you can't campaign for action against the poll tax because law-breaking is no way to win middle class votes, win establishment approval, and thus win elections. I seem to have heard that before; from Neil Kinnock's 'revolutionary' Labour Party.

Jonathon Porritt may not, as one of your annoyed Green correspondents pointed out, be an official spokesman for the party anymore. But his pre-conference call for the Green Party to get stuck into *realpolitik*

seems to have been accepted. I'm sure left-wing Greens are sincere about their personal views. But if they carry on making out their party is something it isn't, they will end up like the Labour left wingers who have spent their lives insisting that their party is a working class one, while their leaders have got on with attacking the people they claim to represent.

**John Markham**  
Hants

## THE RIGHT TO BE OFFENSIVE

Mick Hume's defence of the right to be offensive (April) seems timely in the light of the Rushdie affair, but it's a pity that this 'right' was not so widely defended 20 years ago when the establishment backlash against liberality really began.

The 1970 trials of *Oz* magazine and the *Little Red Schoolbook* led first to horrified angst from the publishing world. When the onslaught continued, the protest trickled away in the following month. It is true the 'offence' was of an amateurish and unserious nature, with no clear sense of what it was trying to offend. However, the left's preoccupation with more obvious trade union matters at a time of working class militancy meant that those who could have come forward to defend democratic rights were largely absent from the struggle.

By 1982, the attack against 'offensiveness' was in full swing. Those sections of the liberal media and intelligentsia who had led the outcry against the *Oz* trial backed the establishment in condemning Howard Brenton's play *The Romans in Britain*. This thinly veiled attack on imperialism and British rule in Ireland managed to offend just about every established social

more. The scene was now set to brand criticism of the British state as an offence.

The left still seem unsure about how to approach this issue from a Marxist perspective, and appear willing to leave this important issue in the hands of what remains of liberal and middle class opinion.

It is true that the right to be offensive must be defended. What is just as clear is that we need to be able to meet the backlash from those we offend.

**Keith Lennox**  
Sheffield

## ANTI-SEXIST CENSORSHIP

Whilst agreeing that there is a long tradition of censorship in this country, best exemplified by the Falklands War when the present government controlled information presented in the media, there is nonetheless still a place for a form of censorship.

The Thatcher government is actively restricting information in the interests of 'national security' to ensure the populace only know what it wants people to know, as opposed to the truth. This was most recently demonstrated in the *Spycatcher* case. That ended an age-old tradition of voluntary self-censorship by the media, thereby removing the autonomous freedom that the press has enjoyed for a long time. I believe national security is no justification for censorship, and cannot be tolerated in what is supposedly a democratic society.

However, simply opposing all forms of censorship fails to deal with the real problem of extreme racist, sexist and pornographic material. For example, there is a proven link between extremely degrading pornographic images of women and rape. The media itself has also censored information we read but the mass media is not an all-powerful entity. Writers such as Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, and artists such as Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger have used the media to their advantage. By questioning the media, and putting their own messages against it and within it, they have upset media images by turning these images around.

Government censorship is too wide-ranging. The government or government-appointed bodies must not be allowed to control information. But censorship could fall within the control of a completely independent non-government body. The function

of such a body should be to examine material such as pornography, both heterosexual and homosexual, including films and videos, because those can be damaging in the hands of young people.

There is a need for reform of what is considered decent and indecent as there is much hypocrisy within current legislation. For example, the government allows anyone to read Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and the freedom of expression of his views is guaranteed. But customs officials are still seizing gay books and magazines imported from the USA and denying the lesbian and gay community the right to read. Such reforms must be fought for. The project of defeating government censorship and media censorship, replacing it with self-censorship and an independent body, have to be addressed in the context of redefining what is decent and what is indecent. *Living Marxism* has not addressed this question because it condemns all censorship.

**Chris Hall**  
Leeds

## A FRAGMENT WRITES

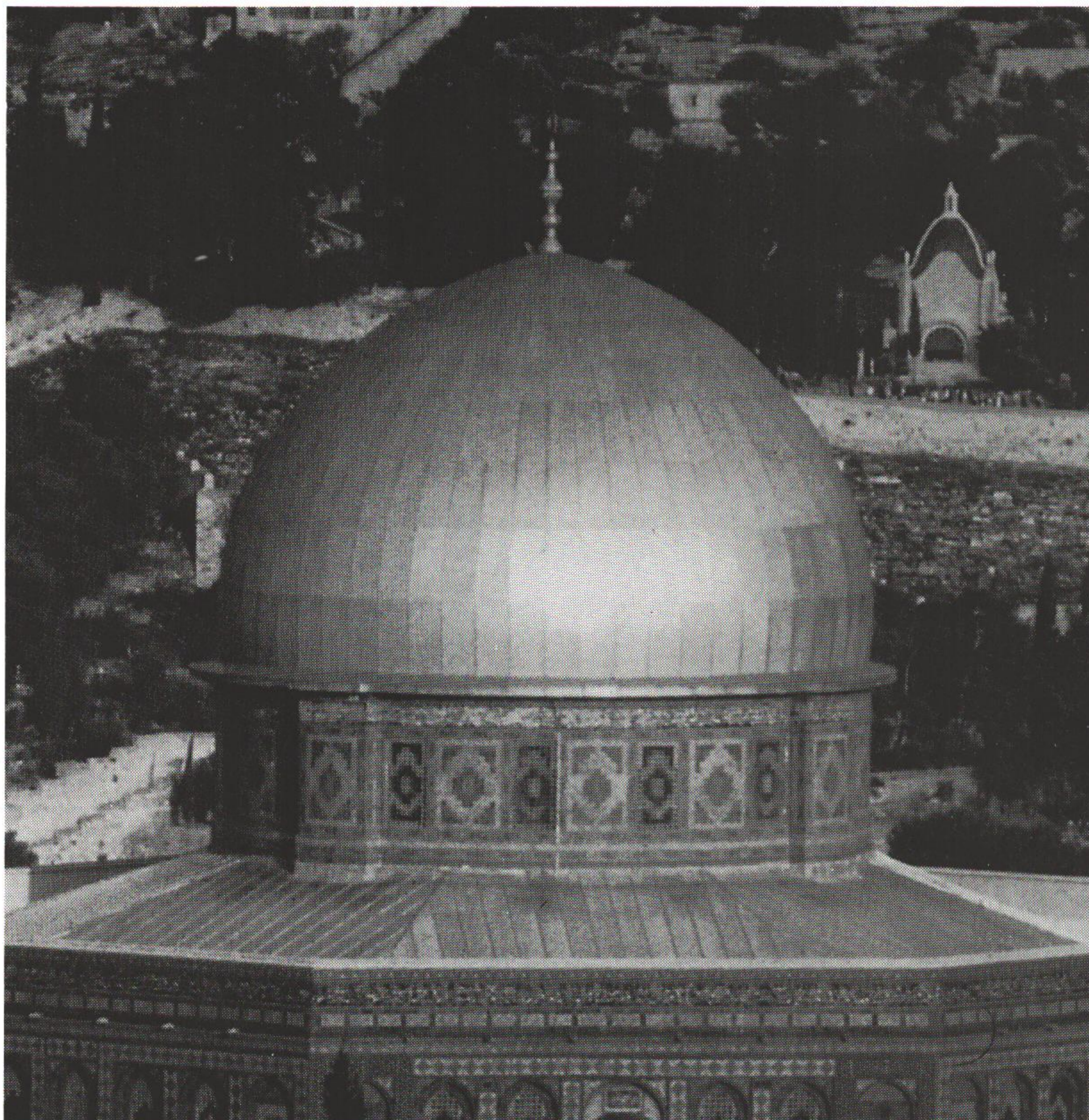
In her *Living Marxism* interview Sheila Rowbotham described the disenchantment and disintegration which afflicted the Beyond the Fragments conference in 1980 ('Ten years beyond the fragments', April). She remembered that 'Don Milligan didn't like anything'. This is more or less true, but there was no need for Sheila to be quite so cryptic about it.

At the closing plenary of the conference the organisers presented those assembled with a draft resolution that banged on about Solidarnosc and democracy. This document omitted to mention anything about the oppression of homosexuals or the need to fight it. The organisers steadfastly refused to accept any amendments or additions—you either voted for it or against it. This struck me as strange, until I discovered that the text of the 'final resolution' had been released to the BBC world service *before* the conference had even opened!

This incident throws some interesting light on Hilary Wainwright's statement, in the same interview, that 'so long as I believe in socialism I'll believe in that democratic discussion'.

**Don Milligan**  
London

# P A L E S T I N E MUSIC *of the* INTIFADA

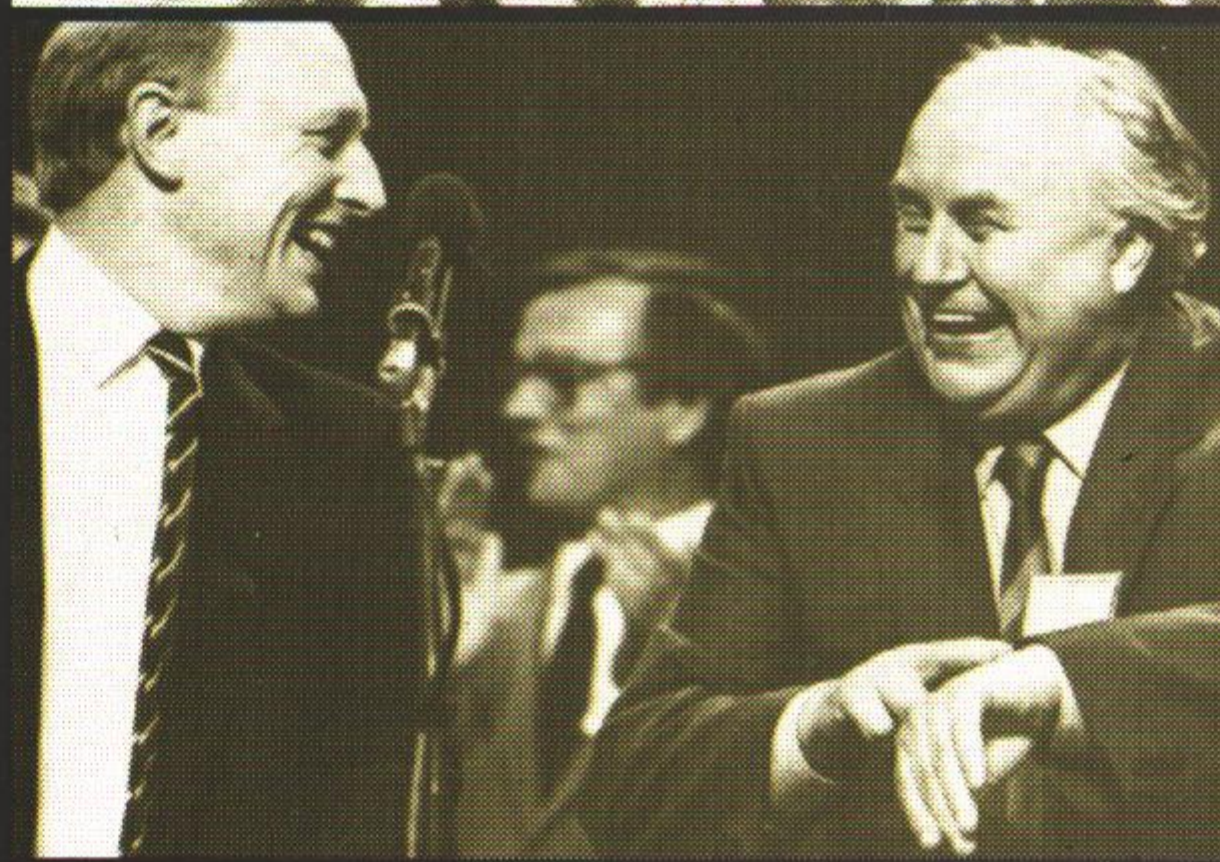


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