

# Workers News



Paper of the Workers International League (Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency/Britain)

No. 37 March/April 1992 30p

**ELECTION SPECIAL • ELECTION SPECIAL • ELECTION SPECIAL • ELECTION SPECIAL • ELECTION SPECIAL**

# KICK OUT

# THE TORIES!

# VOTE

# LABOUR

THE GENERAL ELECTION on April 9 gives us the chance to throw out John Major's hated government and put an end to 13 years of vicious Tory attacks on the working class. Workers News has no hesitation in calling on its readers to vote Labour.

Since the election of the first Thatcher government in 1979, the Tories have set themselves the objective of rolling back all the gains established by workers in Britain over decades of struggle. Their purpose has

been to remove every fetter on the pursuit of private profit. Public services have been deprived of funds and ravaged by cuts. Public sector housing has been decimated, contributing to an unprecedented rise in homelessness. Public utilities and state-owned industries have been sold off at knock-down prices and transformed into private capital. Mass unemployment has been consciously wielded as a weapon to undermine wages and conditions. The list goes on and on.

Central to the Tories' assault on the working class has been the drive to undermine our basic defensive organisations: the trade unions. Successive rounds of legislation have seriously weakened unions' abilities to defend their members' interests, and have illegalised the most basic forms of solidarity action. Banking on the refusal of most union leaders to defy the law, the Tories have inflicted a series of significant defeats on organised workers. At present, strikes are running at their lowest

level for a century.

While the Tories could claim a number of important political victories, at least until they came unstuck with the poll tax, economically the whole exercise has proved a disaster, even in capitalist terms. De-industrialisation followed by a credit-led boom has ended in a massive balance of payments deficit, a mountain of bad debt, a record level of mortgage defaults and a major 'recession'

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**... BUT REJECT KINNOCK'S COWARDLY POLICIES**

# KICK OUT THE TORIES! VOTE LABOUR

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— in reality, a full-scale slump — to which no end appears in sight.

If the Tories are re-elected, workers will face another five years of the same medicine. Beneath Major's carefully cultivated 'Mr Nice Guy' image, he remains committed to the same anti-working class philosophy as Thatcher. He has already given notice of what we can expect after a Tory election victory. Another round of anti-union legislation, the racist Asylum Bill, the privatisation of British Rail — these are just for starters. The fight to get rid of the Tories acquires a real urgency.

## Kinnock's cowardly policies

What programme does the Labour Party leadership put forward to overcome the devastating results of 13 years of Tory rule? The answer, bluntly, is that it doesn't. Demoralised by Conservative victories at three successive general elections, the Labour leaders have worked hard to transform the party's policies into a pink version of Thatcher's right-wing populism. On issue after issue they have conceded and adapted to Tory ideology.

Far from mobilising the working class for a struggle against capitalism, the Labour leaders have made every effort to dampen down workers' expectations of an incoming Labour administration. They have made it clear that, as far as they are concerned, any improvements in the conditions of the working class will be kept strictly within the constraints imposed by the state of the capitalist economy. The bulk of Tory anti-union legislation, they have emphasised, will remain firmly in place under a Labour government. And poll tax registers will continue to be jailed.

Only the most meagre reforms are on offer from Kinnock and Co. Increases in pensions and child benefit are promised, along with the establishment of a minimum wage. There is a commitment, too, to freeing local authorities' capital receipts for the repair and construction of council housing. And it has been stated that a Labour government will reverse some of the Tories' NHS reforms, putting an end to the internal market and hospital opt-outs.

For sections of the working class these would represent limited gains, it is true. But in relation to what is required in order to overcome the poverty, unemployment, homelessness and destruc-

tion of public services produced by the years of Thatcherism, such proposals are pathetically inadequate.

Labour's programme baulks at even the traditional reformist policy of raising revenue by heavily taxing high earners, concentrating instead on fiddling with insurance contributions — mainly those of the middle class whose votes, paradoxically, the Labour leadership is so anxious to win. Long gone are the days of demagogic threats to 'squeeze the rich until the pips squeak'. The proposed top rate of income tax is no more than 50 per cent, which will scar-

been running neck and neck with Labour in the opinion polls, and a hung parliament or even a Conservative victory are very real possibilities.

## Vote Labour! No to abstentionism!

Why, then, vote Labour? Some will say that there are no discernible political differences between the two main parties, and that we should refuse to vote for either of them. Others will claim that the refusal to remove the Tories' legal shackles from the unions, and the

to a visit to the polling booth). Even Kinnock's 'new model' Labour Party is forced to appeal to some extent to workers' class feelings against the Tories, and to offer various reforms, minimal though they may be.

In short, the Labour Party remains what it has always been — a bourgeois workers' party. It is a party based on the working class, but with a capitalist programme and leadership. Contrary to the claims of ultra-left sectarians, no qualitative transformation has taken place in the political character of Labour. Despite their rightward shift, the party leaders have

## For a fighting programme!

The role of socialists in the general election is to mobilise the working class to drive out the Tories and force Labour into office, while preparing workers politically for the struggles ahead. In no sense does this mean supporting Labour's official programme. On the contrary, our aim must be to expose its pro-capitalist character, and the gulf which separates its feeble proposals from the actual needs of the working class. Nor should we seek to promote the left reformist politics of Tony Benn or the Campaign Group of MPs as alternatives to Kinnockism, as organisations like *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Outlook* do.

The Workers International League is a Trotskyist organisation. As such, we reject the view that a Labour majority in the House of Commons can provide the basis for constructing a socialist society. The centre of state power lies not in parliament but in the 'armed bodies of men' — the army and the police — which will remain in the hands of the ruling class irrespective of the outcome of a general election. For this reason, we do not agree with the slogan 'Labour to power on a socialist programme' popularised by *Militant*. A parliamentary Labour government does not hold 'power' and, consequently, is in no position to implement a 'socialist programme'.

The essential precondition for the establishment of a socialist society is the overthrow of the existing capitalist state, and its replacement with a workers' state based on workers' councils and a workers' militia. Only this type of government would have the power necessary to expropriate the capitalist class, lay the foundations of a democratically-planned economy and begin the construction of socialism. The WIL is committed to the struggle for such a government, without which we can never put an end to poverty, unemployment, bad housing and all the other evils of capitalism.

But a revolutionary government becomes an immediate prospect only in a revolutionary situation, which plainly does not exist in Britain today (outside the imagination of *News Line* editorial writers). It is therefore necessary to develop a concrete strategy which starts from the realities of the political situation as it is now, and serves to mobilise workers for the fight against capitalism and the struggle for power.

While we will insist that the Labour leadership carries out the limited promises it has made, what is necessary is to counterpose to Labour's official policies a programme of action which really does express the needs of the class. Practical proposals must be developed to take the class struggle forward. A series of demands must be placed on the Labour and trade union leaders — not that they implement socialism, but that they take up a fight on behalf of the working class against the bosses. Those who refuse to do so must be removed and replaced by others who will. In the course of these struggles, Trotskyists can win decisive sections of the working class to revolutionary politics.

Workers News presents the outline of such a programme on the back page of this special election issue. We urge our readers to take up the fight for these policies.



The banner of organised labour under threat: printworkers clash with police outside Rupert Murdoch's Wapping plant

cely cause suffering to company directors on £300,000 a year.

This cowardly refusal to claw back the huge tax handouts which the rich have received from their friends in the Tory government epitomises the 'new realism' of the Labour leaders. It is of a piece with shadow chancellor John Smith's hobnobbing with financial parasites and other enemies of the working class at City banquets, and the disgusting spectacle of Labour organising fund-raising dinners at £500 a head when many of its supporters are struggling to make ends meet. The overall purpose is to demonstrate to the ruling class that under Kinnock's leadership it is the Labour Party, rather than the Tories, that is the natural party of British capitalism. This aim is embodied in the reactionary nationalist slogan 'Made in Britain'.

Despite their sycophancy towards the class enemy, the Labour leaders have nonetheless come under fierce attack from the Tory press. Their response, characteristically, has been to duck for cover and equivocate over their plans for taxation and public spending. This political cowardice has produced a situation where the discredited Tory party has

anti-working class record of Labour councils, makes it impossible to support the Labour Party. These arguments are wrong. They are a recipe not for political action, but for political passivity.

This does not prevent some self-styled revolutionaries from preaching abstentionism. 'In 1992 there is no such thing as an anti-Tory vote,' the Revolutionary Communist Party bulletin *The Next Step* informs its readers, 'because all the political parties have accepted the Tories' political programme.' On this basis the RCP, together with other sectarians, reject the call for a Labour vote.

Millions of workers, for their part, will vote for the Labour Party in the coming election. They will do so as an expression not only of elementary class consciousness — rightly seizing the opportunity to inflict a defeat on the Tories — but also because of hopes that a Labour government, even under Neil Kinnock, will materially improve their lives.

The Labour leaders are well aware of this. They know that in order to achieve victory in the election they need a *certain* movement of the working class (although they seek to restrict this

not broken Labour's links with the trade unions — if only because they need the unions' money. The Labour Party of Kinnock and Hattersley is fundamentally no different from that of Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden.

In circumstances where the revolutionary forces are weak, where no significant centrist or Stalinist organisation exists, and where a reformist party with mass working class support confronts openly capitalist parties in an election, it is the elementary duty of revolutionaries to urge a vote for the reformist party. In doing so, we assist the working class to assert its political independence from the bourgeoisie. For the same reason, in the event of Labour failing to win an overall parliamentary majority, we must campaign against any proposals for a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, and demand that Labour forms a minority government.

Irrespective of their subjective intentions, the ultra-left advocates of abstentionism only assist the class enemy. For, in reality, it is the removal of the Tories and the election of a Labour government which will provide the best conditions for workers to go onto the offensive against the ruling class and its agents in the labour movement.

Indeed, it is precisely this prospect which horrifies the ruling class, and makes it desperate to prevent a Labour victory. The dirty tricks campaign waged by the capitalist press, the dire warnings of a return to the industrial strife of the 1970s, the fall in share prices which greets every Labour advance in the opinion polls — none of this can be motivated by hostility to Labour's official, solidly pro-capitalist programme. It is fear that a Labour victory will be followed by a resurgence of the class struggle which explains these reactions. And this fear is entirely shared by the Labour and trade union leaderships.

## Vote Nellist and Fields

ALTHOUGH in general Workers News urges its readers to take a class stand against the Tories by voting Labour (for the reasons explained in our lead article), we do not make an absolute principle of this. Where socialists standing independently and to the left of the Labour Party represent significant forces in the working class, we support them against the official Labour candidates. On this basis, in Coventry South East and Liverpool Broadgreen we call for a vote for Dave Nellist and Terry Fields respectively.

While Workers News has politi-

cal differences with these comrades, we recognise that they are men of principle. Both have publicly defied the poll tax, in Fields' case to the extent of serving a prison sentence. They have fallen victim to Kinnock's drive to shift the Labour Party to the right. Their bureaucratic expulsion was carried out in order to demonstrate the Labour leadership's loyalty to capitalism and to woo Tory voters.

Both Nellist and Fields achieved a substantial swing to Labour in the 1987 general election, and clearly have a broad base of working class support in their con-

stituencies. Their decision to stand as independent candidates in this election has nothing in common with the stunts of the various ultra-left sects.

All socialists, inside and outside the Labour Party, must back their campaigns — and this includes those left MPs who opposed the expulsions. The re-election of Nellist and Fields would be a real smack in the face for the Labour leaders. It would help discredit Kinnockite 'new realism', and would advance the struggle to remove this leadership and its pro-capitalist programme.

# A GUIDE TO TORY BRITAIN

## THIRTEEN YEARS OF ATTACKS BY THE TORIES ... AND RETREATS BY LABOUR

THE TORY government is currently presiding over what even the capitalist press admits is the longest and deepest recession since the war. While the Tories try and pin the blame for this on the state of the world economy, it is clear to everyone that the legacy of the 'Thatcher revolution' is a major factor in the present crisis. The 'economic miracle' of the 1980s, of which Tory spokesmen were loudly boasting not so long ago, now seems a sick joke.

The first Thatcher government came to office in 1979 intent on reversing British capitalism's long-term decline, and overcoming the problems of low productivity and profitability. Its chosen instrument was the doctrines of right-wing Chicago economist Milton Friedman. The 'free market' was declared to be the only means of maximising economic growth, and state intervention was repudiated as socialistic in inspiration and damaging to economic progress; the one obligation governments did have towards the economy was to keep down inflation, and this, so the argument went, was to be achieved by restricting the money supply. As an ideological justification for the ruthless pursuit of profit, free from state interference, this had an obvious appeal to the Tory right. As a blueprint for revitalising British capitalism, however, Thatcher's monetarist mythology proved seriously flawed.

The immediate results of the Thatcherite economic programme, which was implemented in the teeth of a world capitalist recession, were devastating. Whole sections of manufacturing industry were simply wiped out. Factories were shut down, plant junked and workers thrown on to the dole in their millions. Between 1979 and 1981, manufacturing output fell by nearly a fifth, and by 1982 Britain, the former 'workshop of the world', became a net importer of manufactured goods. Soon the director of the Confederation of British Industry was threatening the government with a 'bare knuckle fight', and critics within the Tory party were muttering angrily about 'the economics of the madhouse'.

But there was method in the madness. The Thatcher wing of

the Tory party was aligned not with the industrial bourgeoisie, but with that section of the ruling class based on finance capital and the international monopolies, for whom domestic manufacturing industry was but one option as a field of investment. The Thatcherites regarded an artificially deepened recession which destroyed large chunks of the manufacturing base as a small price to pay for a 'leaner, fitter' – that is, more productive and profitable – industrial sector. Furthermore, the resulting mass unemployment was consciously used to weaken organised labour, whose collective strength had always frustrated previous attempts to restructure British capitalism at the expense of the working class.

In fact, the eradication of 'collectivism' in all its forms has been a central objective of Tory economic policy. Transport, health and education have been starved of funds, while central government financial assistance to local authorities has been slashed with the aim of forcing through cuts in social services and public housing. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds have been made ineligible for social security, and some have been reduced to begging on the streets. Nationalised industries have been sold off at below their market value, under the banner of building a 'share owning democracy'. The revenue has been used to finance tax handouts to wealthy Tory supporters, while workers have found themselves disproportionately burdened with increased VAT and later the poll tax. Indeed, a substantial shift of wealth from the poor to the rich has been one of the outstanding

# From bust to boom and back

## Economy

features of the past 13 years of Tory government. In this, at least, Tory economic policy has proved a resounding 'success'.

Having laid waste to manufacturing industry on the pretext that restraining the money supply was an overriding priority, in the mid-1980s the Tories quietly abandoned attempts at monetary control. With the deregulation of the financial system having removed restrictions on lending, the result was a credit-fuelled boom, which took off – fortuitously – just in time to secure a third Tory victory at the 1987 general election. Over the next couple of years profitability rose, manufacturing output recovered and even unemployment began to fall. A wave of triumphalism swept the Tory party. Britain's economic malaise had finally been cured, it was proclaimed, and a new era of ever-rising prosperity had dawned.

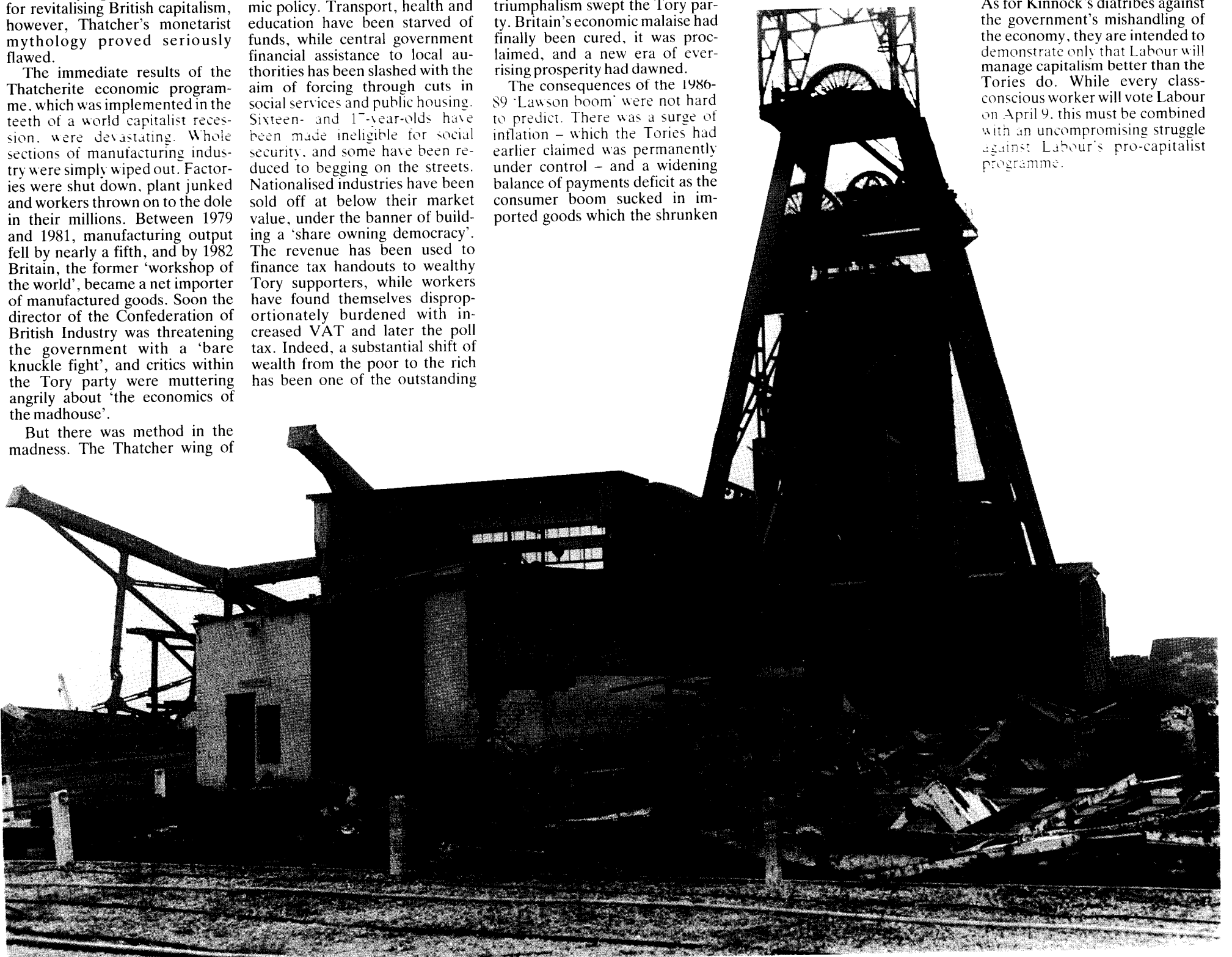
The consequences of the 1986-89 'Lawson boom' were not hard to predict. There was a surge of inflation – which the Tories had earlier claimed was permanently under control – and a widening balance of payments deficit as the consumer boom sucked in imported goods which the shrunken

British manufacturing sector was incapable of supplying. The hiking of interest rates eventually brought the expansion in consumer spending to a halt, but only at the expense of dragging the economy into recession. The Tories tried to reassure their supporters with the argument that if it didn't hurt it wasn't working, and by repeatedly announcing an imminent economic upturn. The reality behind the rhetoric was uncovered in February this year, when government statistics revealed that in 1991 gross domestic product had fallen by almost 2.5 per cent, the biggest slump in output since the early 1930s.

Having been encouraged to extend their personal indebtedness during the period of the 'economic miracle', many people have found it impossible to keep up the repay-

ments – in 1991 mortgage defaults resulted in a record 75,000 repossessions, while the banks were forced to write off six billion pounds' worth of bad debts. Unemployment is set to surpass the levels of the early 1980s, and is now approaching four million in real terms. Moreover, this slump is hitting traditional Tory supporters who enjoyed prosperity during the Thatcher years.

If the Labour leaders have proved unable to turn this debacle to their electoral advantage, it is because they themselves have become converts to many of Thatcher's economic principles. Thus shadow chancellor John Smith has emphasised that a Labour government would balance the budget, would engage in no large-scale borrowing to counteract the slump, and would spend no more than the economy could afford. As for Kinnock's diatribes against the government's mishandling of the economy, they are intended to demonstrate only that Labour will manage capitalism better than the Tories do. While every class-conscious worker will vote Labour on April 9, this must be combined with an uncompromising struggle against Labour's pro-capitalist programme.



The destruction of the Kent coalfield: Tilmanstone Colliery after contractors had started to demolish it. The same fate awaited Snowdown and Betteshanger



## Good and faithful servants

### Foreign policy

DESPITE Britain's relative decline as a world economic power, the Tories have been desperately trying to maintain a political role for the former 'ruler of the waves'.

Throughout the 1980s, this took the form of a mutual admiration society, politely termed a 'special relationship', between Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan. The strengthening of political relations between London and Washington enabled the Tories to present Britain as a leading world power, and helped create the nationalistic fervour necessary to sustain support at home.

In April 1982, Argentina stepped out of line when it invaded the Malvinas/Falklands in the south Atlantic - a group of islands it has every right to lay claim to. Here was an opportunity to test weapons on the battlefield, show the world that Britain was still 'great' and rally support behind the then unpopular Tories prior to the 1983 general election. Thatcher seized it with both hands.

The Falklands war proved to be a useful dress rehearsal for an even larger exercise in policing the oppressed. In August 1990, the Iraqis challenged the imperialists' strategic interests in the Middle East by annexing Kuwait. They faced the wrath of the US-led coalition - in which Britain played second fiddle, but very loudly.

The result was the methodical slaughter of tens of thousands of Iraqis using the most barbarous methods ever devised, and the destruction of much of Iraq's infrastructure. World order was restored on the imperialists' terms, this time with John Major hoping to take some of the credit.

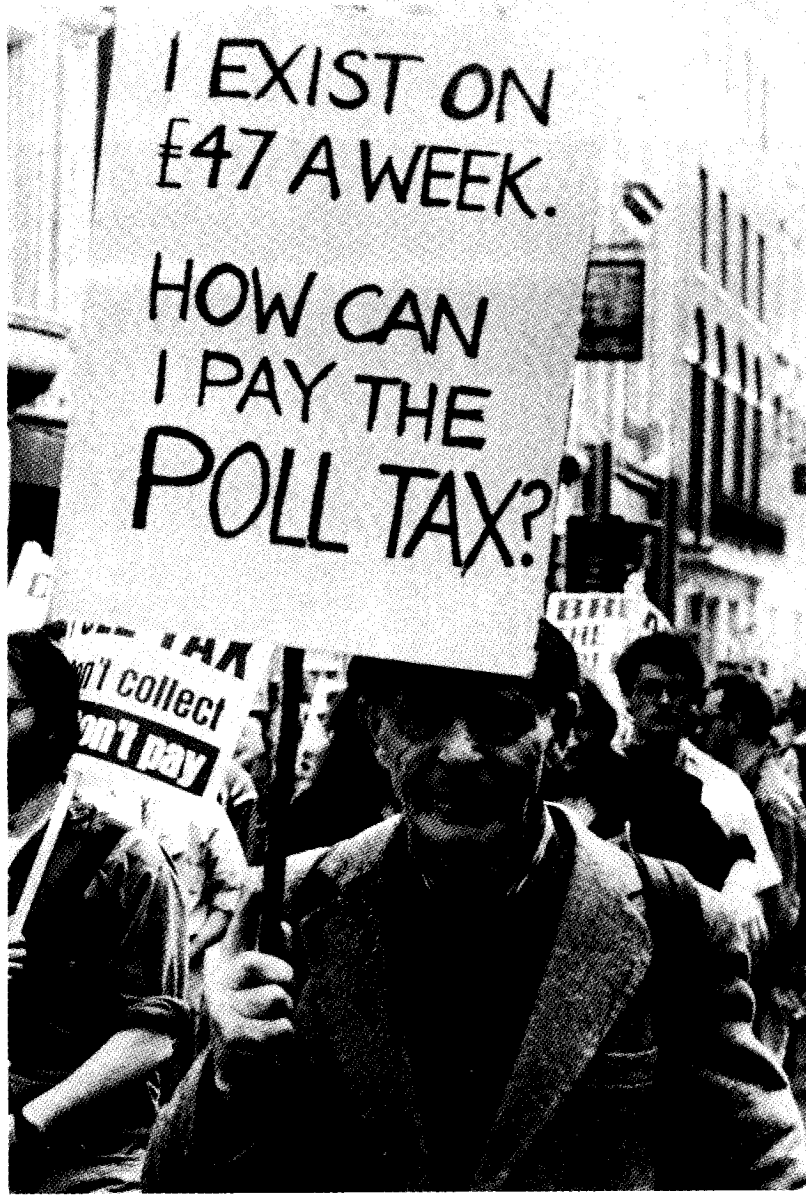
In Britain's stop-go relationship with the EC, conflicts have arisen over the exchange rate mechanism, the single currency and the Social Chapter adopted by the other EC states. Originally split on the issue of closer integration, the Tories have come to accept a 'united' Europe, recognising that economic opportunities would otherwise be lost to French and German capital. The Labour leaders who went into the 1983 election on a nationalist anti-EC platform now pose as the most fervent Europeans. But the Tories are seeking entry under terms commensurate with the low-wage economy they have been developing since 1979, which explains their opposition to even the meagre 'rights' contained in the Social Chapter.

Throughout the 13 years of Tory rule, the Labour leadership has operated a bipartisan line on all important foreign policy issues. During the Falklands war, with 'left' Michael Foot as leader, and in the Gulf war, with right-winger Kinnoch at the helm, Labour gave its full backing to the Tories and the armed forces.

Labour's defence policy has shifted sharply to the right - from unilateral nuclear disarmament in the early 1980s to maintaining a nuclear arsenal. Even if a Labour government abandons the fourth Trident submarine - and that is by no means certain - it is likely to spend the money on conventional weapons.

Instead of encouraging workers to rely on their own strength and organisation, the Labour leaders are trumpeting the virtues of the Euro-parliament and promoting the marginal benefits of the Social Chapter as a huge step forward.

If a Labour government led by Kinnoch is elected, it will not make any significant changes to British foreign policy. Like its predecessors, it will be the faithful servant of British capitalist interests abroad.



Taxing the poor: a mass demonstration against the hated poll tax

# Violent attacks on the increase

## Racism

ON JANUARY 3, Panchadcharam Sahitharan, a 28-year-old Tamil refugee, became the first person to be murdered by racists in 1992. Five days earlier, he had been beaten by a gang of thugs armed with sticks and clubs in Manor Park, east London. The climate in which such attacks have taken place with growing frequency has been fostered by the conscious efforts of Tory governments over the last 13 years to divide and weaken the working class.

After Thatcher won the 1979 election, openly fascist organisations like the National Front went into decline. The support they had picked up in the 1970s transferred itself to a right-wing Tory government, which was seen to be 'doing the job'. Thatcher had set the tone with her infamous 'swamping' speech in 1978, and with the passing of the 1981 British Nationality Act, which removed the automatic right to citizenship gained by birth and residence in the UK, racism gained a new 'respectability'.

But while the fascist groups were at a low ebb, racist attacks were on the increase, and police racism became more open and provocative. Combined with the high levels of youth unemployment, this was to turn many of Britain's inner-city areas into time bombs, which exploded in the youth rebellions of 1981 and 1985.

Alarmed by the consequences of their own policies, the Tories introduced 'equal opportunities' programmes and urban regeneration schemes. But these were merely cosmetic changes, incapable of stemming the growth of poverty. The main thrust of Tory economic policy had the effect of encouraging racism, particularly among a strata of lumpen white youth and small

traders who were not feeling the benefit of the 'enterprise culture'.

In 1988, another Immigration Act was passed, requiring Commonwealth and Irish citizens who entered the country before 1973 to reregister with the authorities, even if married to a British citizen. It also gave immigration officers the right to refuse entry to British citizens not in possession of a full passport, a measure not, of course, used against white holidaymakers, but designed specifically to exclude people from the black and Asian Commonwealth countries.

Although Labour councils have often been the object of racist jibes because of their supposedly 'pro-ethnic minority' policies, they have, in fact, helped create the conditions for racism to thrive by carrying out Tory cuts which attack the poorest sections of the working class. On a national level, the Labour Party has done nothing to mobilise its supporters against racists and fascists. Far from being tribunes of the oppressed, its leaders see their aim as representing the narrow interests of the middle class and the highest paid, home-owning, predominantly white, skilled workers.

With the collapse of the partial 'boom' of the latter part of the 1980s, and the ensuing recession and slump, racism is on the increase. In 1988, there were 4,682 attacks which the police were prepared to describe as racially motivated; in 1989, there were 5,420; and in 1990, 6,995. The actual number of attacks is far higher, but even the official statistics show that the rate of increase is accelerating. Fascist groups, spurred on by the growth of the extreme right in Europe, are once more taking to the streets.

The Tories go into this election with their racist Asylum Bill still pending. But even if they lose, a Labour government is likely to bring in its own version. There has seldom

# A GUIDE TO TORIES In a state

## Trade unions

WHEN THE Tories came to power in 1979, they had already prepared a plan for a sustained assault on the trade unions and the democratic rights of union members. Drawn up by Nicholas Ridley, the plan laid down guidelines for taking on and defeating the trade unions sector by sector, and was a key component in the Tory drive to increase the exploitation of British workers and restore the rate of profit.

In successive rounds of anti-union legislation, beginning with the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts, the Thatcher regime outlawed solidarity strikes, mass picketing and closed shop agreements. Trade union immunity from prosecution was lifted and the judiciary and police given powers to intervene in disputes on behalf of the employers. Massive fines were imposed by the courts on trade unions engaged in disputes, and those which refused to pay had their bank accounts frozen and assets seized.

Thatcher's economic policies,

which in the early 1980s devastated manufacturing industry, were designed to weaken organised labour by driving up unemployment in the trade unions' traditional strongholds. Large-scale redundancies were also imposed on the nationalised industries, mainly at the expense of unionised manual and clerical workers', in order to prepare them for privatisation.

The Tory government and the employers scrapped negotiating rights and withdrew recognition from shop stewards' committees, while at the same time distancing themselves from trade union leaders at national level. Individual contracts have for many workers replaced national agreements. The eight-hour day has effectively been lost to sections of workers, who are now obliged to work 12-hour shifts, and Saturdays and Sundays, as part of the normal working week.

At every stage of the attack, trade unionists demonstrated their readiness to defend their jobs and organisations. Workers with no previous record of militancy maintained strikes, in some cases under conditions of extreme isolation, for periods of a year or more.



Up from the sewers: fascists selling their paper in Brick Lane

been a more blatant attempt by a Labour leadership to play the race card than that witnessed on March 2, when Roy Hattersley announced in the House of Commons that the opposition would assist the bill on to the statute books before the election if the government would agree to three amendments - the right of refugees to an oral appeal against deportation, a change in the system of fining carriers who bring in passengers without proper documents, and fingerprinting of refugees limited to those suspected of multiple applications.

Faced with this situation, the urgent need is for a workers' united front against racism and fascism which will unite the labour and trade union movement with those communities under attack. There must be no reliance on the police and the state, which are themselves racist. Such a campaign must base itself on mobilising workers in action, not on collecting signatures of celebrities, MPs and trade union bureaucrats. It

must support the right of self-defence, fight for the repeal of all immigration acts, prevent fascist meetings or marching, and address the wider issues of racism in education, employment and elsewhere.

## Equal rights Women

WOMEN constitute 43 per cent of the workforce in Britain, a higher proportion than any other EC country except Denmark. They are mainly employed in the service and retail sectors in low-paid and part-time jobs.

While male manual workers increased their average earnings throughout the 1980s to £253.10 a week, women lagged far behind with £159.20. Women currently earn, on average, two-thirds as much as men.

# DRY BRITAIN

## of siege

But the militancy of the working class was not matched by its leaders. 'New' unionism rapidly became the order of the day – unions were no longer seen as combative organisations to defend living standards through collective struggle; their function was to provide 'services' to their members. As Kinnock swung the Labour Party to the right in an attempt to win over Tory voters, the union leaders followed suit on the premise that anything less would jeopardise the election of a Labour government. This process was assisted by the emergence of an outspokenly collaborationist wing in the trade union movement, led by Eric Hammond of the EETPU and Bill Jordan of the engineering union, which bypassed the more hesitant TUC leaders and helped the Tories achieve their aims.



From 12.5 million when the Tories took office, TUC membership fell to ten million by 1984 – a decline largely accounted for by the loss of trade union organised jobs. But the failure of the TUC leaders to resist Tory attacks, and the consequent defeats suffered by the trade unions throughout the 1980s, convinced many employees – particularly younger workers – that unions were incapable of defending their jobs, wages and conditions, and therefore not worth fighting for. Today, TUC membership is down to 7.8 million.

The result of the Tories' economic and political campaign against the unions, combined with the capitulation of the Labour and trade union leaders, has been to sharply depress the class struggle. In 1979, there were 2,125 official strikes and over 29 million working days lost through strike action. By the end of the decade, these figures were reduced to 672 official strikes accounting for four million lost working days. In 1991, the level of militancy was the lowest for at least a century – 354 stoppages and 759,000 days lost.

If the Tories are returned for a fourth term, they will push through a

further round of anti-union legislation. The main proposals of a white paper published in January are the introduction of compulsory strike notice of seven days, and the banning of strike ballots in the workplace. In addition, the right of members of the public to seek injunctions to halt 'unlawful' industrial action in the public services has been written in to the so-called Citizen's Charter.

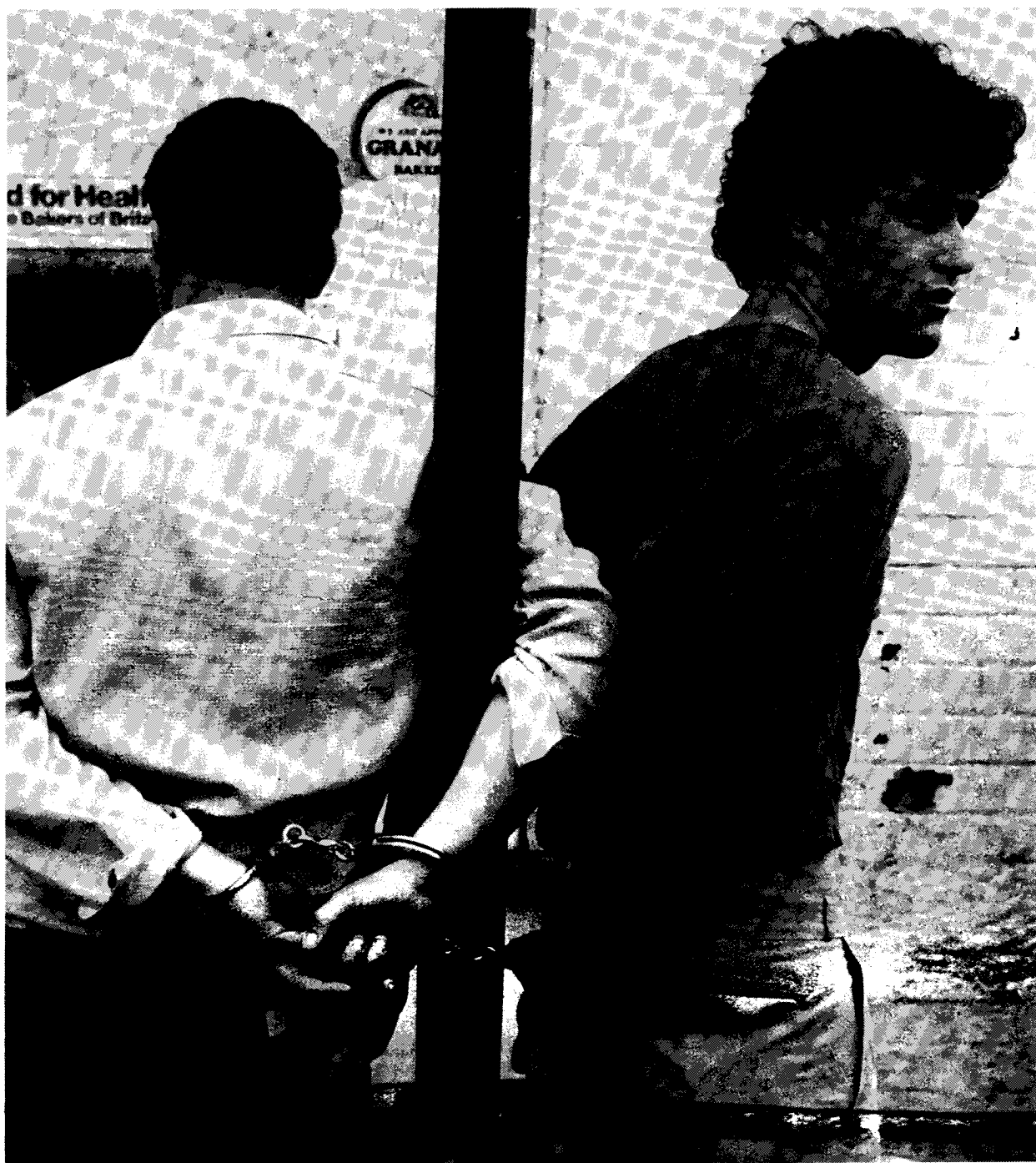
For some years, the Labour Party leaders have made it absolutely clear that they would retain most of the

Tory anti-union laws if they formed a government. Shadow employment secretary Tony Blair has repeatedly denied any plan to get rid of strike ballots – one of the most crucial components of the legislation. Responding to an attack on Labour's industrial relations policy in February, Blair explained that secondary picketing 'would be allowed only where an employer moved work away from the premises of the original dispute to another establishment'. As for the number of pickets: 'It has constantly been made clear that the present guideline of six will remain,' he said.

Far from restoring trade union immunity, the Labour leaders plan to set up an industrial relations court – a division of the High Court presided over by a senior judge – and set a limit (!) on what proportion of a union's assets can be sequestered.

To mask the fact that they have no intention of restoring workers' rights stripped away by the Tories, they propose a 'charter for employees'. Modelled on the European Social Charter, this envisages a basket of legally enforceable benefits, including a minimum wage, extended health and safety requirements, protection against unfair dismissal, leave for those with family responsibilities, full rights for part-time and temporary workers from the first day of employment, and tougher penalties for discrimination on the grounds of gender, race or disability. The attraction of this for the Labour leaders is that it promises to enshrine certain minimum employment standards in law at some point in the future when 'economic growth' allows. It's therefore not only cheap, but it has the effect of further undermining the role of militant trade unionism.

'A Labour government would be no friend to organised workers, whatever the Tories may say. The sooner this is understood, the sooner the task of rebuilding the unions as fighting organisations can begin.



Shackling the unions: two pickets arrested in Derbyshire during the miners' strike

## The marketing of health care

### NHS

IF THE TORIES are re-elected they will continue to implement policies which undermine the National Health Service. On April 1, 1993, a new wave of trusts will come into existence, taking the total to over two-thirds of the services previously controlled by the government and funded centrally by the treasury.

The trusts, many of which are in financial trouble and forced to borrow from the banks to keep going, are a half-way house to privatisation. The Tories will be able to boast of billions of pounds saved on government expenditure, but this will only be achieved at the cost of drastically cutting services, introducing charges for some aspects of health care and, by no means least, massive redundancies in the NHS

workforce.

The establishment of the trusts has provided the Tories' friends in the private sector with substantial profits. Services such as cleaning, catering and computer facilities have been privatised outright. Banks and insurance companies, meanwhile, have played on the concerns of the working and middle classes about future health care by ruthlessly marketing medical insurance policies. The pickings are so lucrative that a number of US-based companies have shut down operations at home and transferred their capital into the private hospitals which have mushroomed all over Britain in the last decade. The Tories haven't forgotten their friends in the multi-national drug corporations either, who are reaping fat profits from the 12 increases in prescription charges pushed through since 1979 – from 20p per item to £3.75 today.

In 13 years, the Tories have closed over 400 hospitals and taken 25 per cent of NHS beds out of service. Waiting lists have grown and the average distance to the nearest casualty department or hospital has increased. Large numbers of elderly people and the mentally distressed have been dumped back into the community to be cared for by chronically underfunded local services, or forced to wander the streets, all in the name of freedom of choice and independence.

The Tories have managed this scale of destruction of vital services by slick marketing techniques, and because the Labour Party and trade union leaders have failed to mount anything more than a vocal opposition. During the May election in 1983, Thatcher stated that 'I have no

more intention of dismantling the NHS than I have of dismantling Britain's defences'. Two months' later, the first 8,000 compulsory redundancies were announced by the DHSS.

Throughout the 1980s, health workers resisted government attacks on services, jobs and living standards, while the Labour and TUC leaders pursued a cowardly policy of isolating strikes. For a few senior managers, consultants and professional staff, the changes in the NHS have opened the door to huge salary increases. But the majority of NHS and trust staff continue to be among the lowest paid public-sector workers in Europe.

The Labour leaders have promised to 'reverse' the Tory changes to the NHS. But a closer inspection of their draft policy document shows that they now accept the division between the purchase and the provision of health care, the basic 'free market' principle which underpins the trust system. They have even retreated from their plan for flexible budgets which would assist hospitals which run out of money in the middle of the financial year. Additional funding will now only be available if hospitals can prove good performance in areas of 'priority health care'.

This represents a capitulation to the trust managers and health service professionals – whose enthusiasm for the 'internal market' has grown in direct proportion to their salaries. It shows that the Labour leaders, in order to gain the support of the City and the middle class, are prepared to abandon one of the most important gains the working class has made in the post-war period.

## rights still pie in the sky

Due to domestic responsibilities, they have less opportunity to earn overtime.

The economic recession has seen a sustained offensive by the employers on workers' rights and contractual conditions, especially those of part-time workers. Since nearly five million women work part time, they have been disproportionately affected.

The growth in unemployment has proved a boon to employers anxious to avoid implementing equal opportunities legislation. To date, only 13 per cent have established workplace creches, while many local councils

are closing nurseries to save money.

Cuts in transport subsidies have not only affected women as commuters. The trend towards one-person operated buses and trains has led to an increase in violent attacks on women. Surveys show that up to 59 per cent of women will not use public transport after dark.

Drastic cuts in NHS and social services budgets have forced many women to give up work and become unpaid carers for the elderly and chronically ill. Family planning clinics and abortion facilities have been among the services most heavily cut. In England and Wales, 54 per

cent of all abortions are now carried out in the private sector, at a cost of between £250 and £350. Trapped in low-paid jobs, in unhealthy working and living environments, with the burden of domestic work falling on their shoulders, women have the most need but the least access to decent health, education and leisure facilities.

As part of its election strategy, Labour is proposing to establish a minister for women. Yet the Labour leaders were busy throughout the 1980s condemning women strikers when they fought in defence of jobs and living standards.



# A GUIDE TO TORY BRITAIN

## THIRTEEN YEARS OF ATTACKS BY THE TORIES ... AND RETREATS BY LABOUR

### The most basic of all rights under attack

#### Housing

TORY POLICY on housing has been a crushing blow to the working class. Under the twin slogans of 'market forces' and 'home ownership', Thatcherism has produced nothing but social ruin and economic disaster for hundreds of thousands of people. Secure accommodation at low cost is no longer available to a large and ever-increasing section of the working class.

Public housing, a major social conquest for the working class, has been gutted. Public expenditure on housing has fallen by 72 per cent since the Tories came to power and, in the same period, over 1.2 million council homes have been sold off.

Starved of cash by Tory policy, new council house building has been minimal. Housing waiting lists have grown so long that many families who have had their names down for years still have no prospect of securing a decent home. Councils and housing associations are currently only providing 40,000 new homes a year when, according to independent research, at least 100,000 will be needed each year for the next ten years.

Those who have secure council housing have also experienced attacks on their living standards, with councils recently pushing up rents way above inflation. Already, 600,000 council tenants are in rent arrears.

The Tory ideal of home ownership has also devastated the private rented and housing association sector. Housing stock here has been halved over the last 20 years. The 1988 Housing Act gave an impetus to this trend; it was an unashamed landlords' law, depriving private tenants of protection from high rents and making evictions far easier. In the three years since the Act came into force, private rents have rocketed by 80 per cent.

The chronic housing shortage for the working class has forced an increasing number of people to accept any old hovel as temporary accommodation. From 1982 to 1992, the number of families in temporary accommodation increased from 9,000 to 60,000. Many dwellings are overcrowded, damp, infested with cockroaches, in a terrible state of repair, and often have neither drinking water nor a toilet. Families have to wait for months and often years before being permanently housed. This disgraceful situation even forced the Tories into action in 1990, in the form of a £300 million scheme to reduce the number in temporary accommodation. But in the short period since, the numbers have grown by almost 20,000 families.

Driven by the profit motive, the Tories have destroyed the social housing system. They have sold off council houses and housing associations, and are now trying to sell off the remaining council houses. They have also introduced a new law which will allow landlords to evict tenants at will. They have also introduced a new law which will allow landlords to charge whatever rent they like. They have also introduced a new law which will allow landlords to charge whatever rent they like.

ing to challenge the sanctity of private property. The many thousands who have been driven by the housing shortage to occupy houses that are often squalid and decrepit are now under serious threat. If they win the election, the Tories are determined to push through a new piece of legislation that will criminalise squatting.

As for the growing number of people who are forced to sleep rough, they are constantly harassed by the police, and are often arrested under the vagrancy laws. Their obvious presence on the streets of London is an embarrassment even to the Tories, whose main worry, however, is that they pose a threat to the flagging tourist industry.

Many of the homeless are young unemployed workers or school-leavers, who migrate from areas that have been devastated economically in search of work. They are caught in a vicious circle: they cannot afford to get a home if they do not have work and they cannot get a job if they have no fixed accommodation.

The terrible impact of Tory housing policy has not only been felt by the working class. The chief middle class beneficiaries of the 'golden' period of the Thatcher years have also been plunged into economic catastrophe. The early 1980s were years of easy credit, low interest rates and attractive incentives to home buyers. But the 'yuppie' bubble burst in 1988. By August 1991, there were 60,000 families who had been served mortgage repossession orders, and another 200,000 borrowers were over six months in arrears.

The Labour Party leaders like to promote themselves as the 'caring' alternative to the Tories. In fact, they have taken the Tory philosophy of a 'property-owners' democracy' to heart - they have promised to continue the sale of council houses. Their only concrete proposal to tackle the housing crisis is the phased release of up to £8 billion of local authority capital receipts - the income from the sale of council houses.

According to shadow housing spokesman Clive Soley, a Labour government ought to be able to start an extra 50,000 homes on this basis. In other words, just half the yearly requirement. 'I can't guarantee we would sweep away every single piece of Tory housing legislation - there is much in there that we put forward ourselves,' he said candidly in a recent interview.

The victims of Tory housing policy - the homeless, the squatters, those sleeping rough, those living in overcrowded and sub-standard housing, and those in rent arrears or who have had their homes repossessed - have no interest in another term for the Tories. They must join the fight to demand a radical programme of housing reform. They must demand a radical programme of housing reform. They must demand a radical programme of housing reform.



Students demonstrate in London against the introduction of loans

## Classroom war

#### Education

FOR THE last 13 years the education system has been under continuous attack at every level. This has taken two main forms: a steady reduction in funding and an ever-increasing degree of central government control. Under the banner of 'freedom of choice', the Tories are attempting to impose their own narrow, market-oriented outlook.

In the schools, many areas of activity have been curtailed through lack of money. Equipment and text books are in short supply; buildings are dirty, cold and dilapidated; and parents are often obliged to make up the shortfall in funding or see their children's education suffer.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 introduced a national curriculum in all subjects - what is taught is now determined by Tory-appointed committees. This has led to a 'redefinition' of history which excludes the last 20 years and focuses on Britain's role in world events, and a higher profile for the teaching of Christianity. National testing in English, mathematics and science at the ages of seven, 14 and 16 will be used to stream children according to 'ability', helping to undermine the comprehensive school system.

Other provisions of the Act are intended to assist this process of turning back the clock to pre-war days. Local management of schools is taking most of the control over spending out of the hands of education authorities, and opting out allows schools to go semi-private. This is already having the effect of setting one school against another and will lead to a further erosion of standards. The response of the Labour Party leaders to the Tory

popular schools will be able to select the pupils they want and working class children will, in the main, be consigned to overcrowded, under-funded and poorly equipped institutions.

Although comprehensive schools have always streamed pupils according to their perceived abilities, they are widely regarded by workers and sections of the middle class as a step towards an egalitarian education system. For this reason, the Tories are unwilling to call directly for their abolition. Instead, they are allowing the combination of 'market forces' and 'traditional educational values' to do the job for them - in future, many schools will be comprehensive in name only; in practice, they will be the equivalent of either grammar schools or secondary moderns.

Alongside the attack on schools has come an attack on teachers. The Tories have abolished union negotiating rights, introduced compulsory redeployment and blamed teachers for the problems arising from cuts in funding.

Further and higher education have also suffered. Starved of cash, colleges, polytechnics and universities have been forced to enrol ever-larger numbers of students. Conditions on many campuses have become intolerable, with too few lecturers, crowded classes, inflated prices in the refectories and an acute shortage of accommodation.

The response of the Labour Party leaders to the Tory

onslaught on education has been to promise some minor tinkering. Their pledge to abolish the remaining grammar and secondary modern schools, presented as a major blow against selection by ability, is not in conflict with the Tory reorganisation. Out of 5,000 secondary schools, only 159 grammar schools and 170 secondary moderns remain, and about a quarter of all comprehensives were established under Tory governments. That the Tories are deeply hostile to the concept of equal opportunity in education is not in doubt. John Major's infamous letter to Fred Jarvis, former leader of the National Union of Teachers, blames 'low standards' in education on 'the nature of the comprehensive system... and the intellectual climate underpinning it'. But the letter was a justification of the Tory education reforms which Major sees as having the power to 'reverse the failings of the comprehensive system'. The issue is no longer that of a dismantling the old system, but of preventing the emergence of a new two-tier system within the comprehensives themselves.

In fact, the Labour leaders accept most of the key aspects of the 1988 Education Reform Act, as well as the assertions about 'falling standards' which the Tories have used to drive through their changes. Anyone looking for a bold plan from shadow education secretary Jack Straw to reverse the Tory reforms and provide generous new funding will be sorely disappointed. A struggle must be taken up in the Labour Party and the trade unions to force the Labour leadership to reverse all Tory cuts and adopt a fighting programme on education.

# State of the union

## Ireland

AMONG capitalist politicians, support for the British occupation of the north of Ireland is a strictly bipartisan affair. Tories, Liberal-Democrats and the leaders of the Labour Party are in complete agreement over the need to defeat the IRA, crush militant republicanism and make the 'province' safe for imperialist exploitation. Their only differences – and they are minor ones – are on how best to achieve these aims.

In August 1969, it was the Labour government of Harold Wilson which put British troops on the streets of the Six Counties. The same government was in office when, in April of the following year, a shoot-to-kill policy for petrol bombers was declared.

In November 1974, Labour introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Thousands of Irish people living in Britain have suffered under this draconian legislation. Of those held in the course of its 17-year existence, 86 per cent have been released without charge, usually after rigorous interrogation which often included verbal and physical abuse. Of the rest, the lucky ones have been 'excluded' from Britain. Others, like the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six, have spent years in prison after being beaten up and framed by the police.

Then, in January 1976, the same Labour government authorised the first use of the SAS in the north of Ireland. Two months' later, it abolished political status for republican prisoners, transforming the ruling class prejudice that Irish freedom fighters are merely 'common criminals' into law.

The Labour leaders' role in the oppression of the Irish people has not been confined to their years in office, but has extended to support for every Tory initiative to destroy the IRA and maintain partition. Since 1979, the war in Ireland has increasingly turned on 'dirty tricks', with republican activists set up for assassination either by leaking information to loyalist paramilitary groups, or by sending in the SAS to act on intelligence reports. In the corridors of power in Whitehall this is considered the best option. Unlike internment and other open examples of repression, allowing the SAS to play the part of judge, jury and executioner has the advantage of being 'unofficial', and therefore gives rise to less political opposition both at home and abroad.

The success of this policy has depended on the co-operation of the Labour leaders, whose attitude is best summed up by their response to the murder of three unarmed IRA volunteers by the SAS in Gibraltar in March 1988. While calling for a judicial enquiry into the affair, Labour leaders went to great lengths to explain their abhorrence of 'IRA terrorism'. As they saw it, an enquiry was the only way to preserve the good name of British justice and prevent the republicans from winning a propaganda victory.

In similar vein, Roy Hattersley's statement of 'opposition' to the media ban on Sinn Féin in 1989 included the following observation: 'The IRA – and the friends of the IRA – will only be

defeated when they are denied the last vestige of sympathy and the last suspicion that their cause is just.'

Labour support for the Tories has also covered the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985, the close collaboration between Westminster and Dublin on the questions of border security and extradition, and the ongoing attempts to find a 'political solution' which excludes the nationalist working class in the north.

Seen in this context, Sinn Féin's recent policy document 'Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland' is wishful thinking, even if Labour wins the general election. Launched at the Sinn Féin *ard fheis* in February, it calls for the Westminster and Dublin governments to agree to end partition, and for the Six Counties to be handed over to an all-Ireland government. There should be co-operation between the two governments to bring this about in the 'shortest possible time consistent with obtaining maximum consent for the process' and, as British troops withdraw, it is suggested that the United Nations should monitor the decolonisation process.

But British policy is already clear and has cross-party support in parliament. In Dublin, the Dail is considering scrapping Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, effectively renouncing claims to the north. Everything points to a continued commitment by the British ruling class to holding down the Six Counties by force, with the parties of the Dail in tow.

The anti-nationalist position of the Labour leaders is underlined by their tacit support for the latest shoot-to-kill operation by the British army – the killing of four IRA volunteers in Co Tyrone on February 16. One of the four, Kevin O'Donnell, had been tried in Britain on arms charges in March 1991. He was acquitted, but then deported under the PTA.

The widely reported rejoicing of the British security forces at O'Donnell's death, and the fact that the four were ambushed by a squad which included undercover troops in civilian dress, gives rise to the suspicion that his death was planned. When the Old Bailey jury failed to convict, it would appear that a government minister passed sentence and authorised the intelligence and security forces to carry it out. Though there has been speculation along these lines in the British press, from the Labour benches – silence.

With the annual vote to renew the Prevention of Terrorism Act taking place with an election announcement imminent, the Labour leadership was particularly keen to show that it was not 'soft on terrorism'. A Labour government would not repeal the Act, Roy Hattersley made clear in the House of Commons on February 24. It would revise the powers of detention and abolish exclusion orders, but retain the ban on 'terrorist' organisations and fundraising on their behalf. As Hattersley made clear when Labour first opposed renewal of the PTA in 1983, his main concern is to increase its 'effectiveness'. During the 1987 election campaign, he said that the IRA might be better dealt with by 'prudent, but substantial military power'. Presumably shoot-to-kill comes into this category.



Demonstration in London to mark the anniversary of Bloody Sunday

During the current round of discussions organised by Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Brooke, Britain's assassination squads were still at work. The Labour leaders have stated their intention to replace the 'Brooke' talks with their own 'McNamara' talks, under the auspices of Kevin McNamara. They have not said anything about replacing the murderous activities of the SAS.

Workers News calls for a Labour vote in Britain on April 9. The election of a Labour government would assist in the revival of working class militancy. This, in turn, would provide the best conditions for opening up a fight against the pro-imperialist leadership of the Labour Party and advancing the struggle for Irish freedom. In the Six Counties, we call for a vote for Sinn Féin.

If a Labour government is elected, workers should demand that it repeals the PTA, immediately withdraws all British troops, releases all republican prisoners and relinquishes all claim to the Six Counties.

- Defeat British imperialism!
- Self-determination for the Irish people as a whole!
- For a united socialist Ireland!

## Scotland

IN SCOTLAND, the widespread anger over 13 years of Tory government has taken the form of a resurgence of nationalism and a high level of support for the SNP. This should come as no surprise. In a country which was independent until 1707, and which has retained a strong sense of separate identity, nationalism has never been far from the surface. In times of economic uncertainty and political turmoil, it provides a ready-made conduit into which frustrations with the major parties can flow.

The Scottish bourgeoisie, of course, is not 'oppressed' by its English counterparts. Even before the Act of Union, the process of fusion was taking place, both ruling classes intent on joining forces to exploit the masses throughout the British Isles and overseas. And although the High-

land Clearances of the late 18th and the first half of the 19th century saw huge tracts of land taken over by absentee English landlords, the desire to see the more profitable sheep farming replace crofting in parts of the north was shared by clan chieftains, the Lowland capitalists and the Scottish clergy. Capital raised in Scotland as well as England was employed. Today, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the two, so integrated is the British economy.

Since Scottish capitalists are on equal terms with any other British capitalists, Scotland is not an oppressed nation. The Scottish working class, however, is oppressed – by British capitalists, just as workers in England, Wales and the north of Ireland are. The feeling of 'national' oppression among Scottish workers, when it appears, is thus rooted in their oppression as a class. But since the socialist resolution of the class struggle is not immediately on the agenda, and even the prospect of winning substantial reforms under a Labour government appears remote to them, workers can become susceptible to the false promises of the nationalists.

Unlike southern England, but similar to parts of the north, central Scotland – where most of population resides – used to be a highly industrialised region, with a larger proportion of workers than the British average. For this reason, Scotland has traditionally returned a majority of Labour members to Westminster. The Thatcher doctrines of the early 1980s, still making themselves felt in the recent announcement of the closure of Ravenscraig steel works, have decimated Scotland's industrial base and dealt a body blow to the living standards of the working class. Replacement industries, such as tourism and the concentration of electronics firms known as 'Silicon Glen', flowered briefly in the mid- to late 1980s, but are now closing down or laying off.

Had Labour mounted any serious fight against this carnage, it would have retained the loyalty of Scottish workers. As it is, the Kinnock leadership's refusal to back the anti-poll tax campaign, its ineffectual response to clo-

tures, and its fundamental acceptance of Tory economic policies, have increasingly alienated some of the Labour Party's most staunch supporters and given an impetus to the SNP. Similar feelings of discontent over Labour's performance undoubtedly affect workers in the battered industrial regions of England, but for historical and geographical reasons the option of voting for a left-talking nationalist party is not open to them.

Almost all the tasks of the bourgeois revolution have been completed in Britain. The existence of the SNP and Plaid Cymru does not, therefore, prove that there are genuine, unresolved national questions in Scotland and Wales, but points to the unevenness of capitalist development within Britain itself. Centralisation, the prerequisite of all modern capitalist states, has tended to concentrate economic and political power around London at the expense of Scotland, Wales and the regions of England. Because of this, sections of the Scottish middle class and small capitalists have interpreted their lack of success as the result of being 'denied their rightful national inheritance'. Hemmed in by a large and militant working class on the one hand, and the big bourgeoisie on the other, they turned their gaze on the promised land of an independent capitalist Scotland.

To Scottish workers, we say that, living in an imperialist country, the problems you face cannot be solved by nationalism. The economic arguments put forward by the SNP are bogus. Capital knows no national boundaries, and Scottish capitalists could no more be relied on to keep their money in an independent Scotland than British capitalists can be to invest in British industry at the moment. We therefore call on Scottish workers to vote Labour on April 9, and to insist that a Labour government, if elected, carries out policies to defend the working class. If, in the future, a clear majority of workers in Scotland want independence, up to and including secession, we would respect that wish. But while we would support their right to take that course of action, we would continue to warn of its dangers.



# PREPARE TO FIGHT!

## Workers International League MANIFESTO

WHATEVER the outcome of the general election, the first and foremost task confronting workers is to restore the fighting capacity of the labour movement. Whether we are confronted by a new Tory government or a right-wing Labour administration under Kinnock, there will be an urgent need to rebuild working class organisations on the principles of the class struggle.

### Back to the unions!

Since the election of the first Thatcher government in 1979, the trade unions have suffered repeated attacks and, as a result of the union leaders' cowardice, have gone down to successive defeats. Faced with a slump in union membership and a historically low level of industrial action, our aim must be to expand and revitalise the unions.

This means winning existing members back to union activity. It means a recruitment drive directed towards those sections of the working class who have little tradition of union organisation - towards part-time workers, women workers, youth and immigrant workers, and those employed on the greenfield sites and industrial estates. It means, above all, building a union movement committed not to the politics of class compromise, but to the aim of fighting and defeating the employers.

The trade unions must develop the strength to challenge the bosses' power in the workplace. In the face of redundancies, unions must fight for the distribution of existing work among the workforce with no loss of pay. They must force the employers to open the books to trade union inspection. The objective must be to establish workers' control of production.

### Organise rank-and-file opposition to the bureaucrats!

Under their existing leadership, the unions are incapable of fighting effectively against the bosses. Trade union leaders have, of course, always been more interested in feathering their own nests and securing a place in the House of Lords than in confronting the capitalist class. But in recent years they have shifted even further to the right. Feeding off a chain of trade union defeats - for which they themselves bear primary responsibility - the union bureaucrats have implemented their own, industrial, equivalent of the Labour Party leaders' 'new realism'. The bureaucracy has abandoned millions of its members to the dole queues, endorsed government cheap-labour schemes and openly defended Tory anti-union legislation, including individual ballots before strike action.

The need to clear out this gang of class traitors could not be more evident. To do this requires the organisation in the trade unions of a rank-and-file opposition to the bureaucrats.

International links between militant trade unionists must be forged in place of inter-bureaucratic relations. The moves towards European capitalist unity add a special urgency to this. Close relations must also be established with workers in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union who are resisting the ravages of capitalist restoration.

### For an unemployed workers' movement!

With real unemployment at 3.5 million and rising, the need to organise unemployed workers is clear. We must fight for a National Unemployed Workers' Union, with full TUC status. Particular emphasis must be placed on recruiting unemployed youth. The unemployed must also have the right to join the trade union of their choice.

### For a workers' united front against racism and fascism!

Unemployment and economic slump provide fertile ground for fascists, and

also for a more general growth of racism which extends well beyond the small forces which the neo-Nazi groups can muster. We are for the right of black communities to organise self-defence against racist attacks. But this must be part of a struggle to build a unified, democratic anti-racist movement - a united front of working class and black organisations to deal with the racists and fascists.

### Remove the Labour Party's right-wing leadership!

Like the trade union bureaucracy, in recent years the Labour Party leadership has moved sharply to the right. After Labour's defeat in the 1983 election, left reformist policies were abandoned one by one. Unilateral disarmament, opposition to the capitalist European Community, commitment to public ownership, promises to repeal anti-union legislation - all have been unceremoniously junked. The Labour leaders are now the proud possessors of a programme which, in all its essentials, is identical to that advocated by the party's extreme right wing when it broke away to form the SDP in 1981.

The lessons are clear. Just as it's necessary to build a rank-and-file opposition to the bureaucracy in the trade unions, so it is in the Labour Party. Not an amorphous 'left wing' on a reformist programme, nor a self-serving centrist sect like *Militant*, but a genuinely Marxist tendency which, while making temporary alliances with left reformists, will fight for revolutionary politics.

### What we demand from a Labour government

We do not share the illusions which exist among broad sections of the working class that a Labour government will seriously address their problems. On the contrary, we warn that a Labour administration under Kinnock, taking office in the midst of a capitalist recession both in Britain and internationally, will attempt to resolve this crisis at the expense of the workers. But in fighting against this leadership we must demand a Labour government that defends the working class and carries out definite measures against the ruling class. We therefore agitate for the following policies to be implemented by a Labour government:

**ECONOMIC MEASURES** Nationalisation, without compensation to the major shareholders, of all companies announcing closures and redundancies. Privatised industries to be fully renationalised without compensation. Nationalisation of all building and development land. Nationalisation of the major banking and finance houses. Cheap credit to small businesses.

**UNEMPLOYMENT** An immediate programme of public works/job creation to build and renovate hospitals, schools, and community, leisure and sports facilities, together with projects to protect and improve the environment. An immediate increase in unemployment benefit and income support to the level of the statutory minimum wage. Reintroduction of earnings-related benefit. Abolition of existing government training schemes in favour of proper apprenticeships and state-financed training under trade union control. Restoration of social security benefits for 16- and 17-year-olds.

**TRADE UNIONS** Abolition of all anti-union laws; removal of all legal penalties on trade union action; return of all fines. For the legal right to strike, to picket, to organise workplaces and to negotiate on behalf of workers. Employers must be legally obliged to recognise unions.

**WAGES AND HOURS** Employers to be legally obliged to give annual wage awards; the minimum allowable rise to be equal to the real rise in the cost of living for workers. Reject the Labour leaders' £3.40 an hour minimum wage! For a minimum wage above the Council of Europe's 'decency threshold' of £5.15 an hour. A 30-hour week with a corresponding increase in the minimum wage.

**WORKERS' RIGHTS** All workers to be eligible for the full rights of permanent employees from the first day of employment, including legal protection against unfair dismissal.

**PENSIONS** Immediate increase to the level of the average wage. Voluntary retirement for both sexes at 55.

**WOMEN** Equal pay. Free abortion and contraception on demand. Abolition of all discriminatory legislation. Adequately staffed public transport - no to one-person buses and trains! Statutory requirement for local authorities to provide women's refuges.

**CHILDREN** Round-the-clock, state-funded child care provision.

**LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS** No ban on fostering or adopting children. Repeal of Clause 28 and all other discriminatory legislation. Reduce age of consent for gay men to 16.

**RACISM** Repeal all immigration acts. Local authorities to evict tenants guilty of racist violence.

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES** Reverse all cuts in public expenditure. Abolition of private medicine. Abolition of Trust status and internal market in the NHS. Nationalise the drug companies. For a state-funded crash research programme into AIDS. No charges for prescriptions, dental treatment or eye tests. For a fully comprehensive nationalised health service, free at point of use.

**EDUCATION** Restore cuts in funding since 1979. Reverse opt-out and local management of schools. Restore teachers' negotiating rights. No to the national curriculum! For a curriculum geared towards the needs of all sections of the working class, stripped of the Tories' nationalist arrogance. Adequate provision of bilingual teachers. Abolish private education. For a state education system on a strictly secular basis, with no pupil selection system. No to student loans! For full mandatory grants with a 100 per cent increase on present rates.

**HOUSING** Crash programme of council house building and refurbishment, including provision for the single homeless. Requisition of empty housing. Restoration of full rights to private tenants. Reduction in rents in public and private sector; private rents to be set by rent tribunals. Restore adequately funded and staffed Direct Labour Organisations. Sufficient sheltered accommodation to be provided in every area for the elderly and those with mental and physical handicaps. End the repossession of houses from mortgage defaulters; nationalisation of the building societies.

**TRANSPORT** Repeal deregulation; nationalise the bus companies. For a state-funded, integrated transport network providing low-cost, comfortable, single-class travel for all.

**POLL TAX** Amnesty for all non-payers;

release all prisoners; drop all outstanding cases. Replace council tax by property tax directed at the rich.

**ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENTS** No to the lottery! No to business sponsorship! Increased funding for all subsidised theatres, museums, libraries, dance companies and orchestras. Nationalise the film studios, the major cinema chains and the film distribution companies.

**MONARCHY AND HOUSE OF LORDS** These are not mere feudal relics, but have real political power. Their immediate abolition, along with the Privy Council, is a basic democratic necessity.

**IRELAND** Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Release all republican prisoners. Withdraw British troops from the north of Ireland. End partition.

**FOREIGN POLICY** Withdraw British troops from the Malvinas/Falklands and give control of the islands to Argentina. Gibraltar to be handed over to Spain. Withdraw from NATO and all other imperialist pacts. Scrap Trident - but with no redundancies or pay cuts for workers dependent on armaments industry.

### For a revolutionary government based on workers' councils!

Although some of these demands could be achieved under capitalism, and by a reformist government, the implementation of all these policies would be incompatible with the continued existence of the capitalist system. Indeed, the point of these demands is precisely to rally a movement which goes beyond the bounds of parliamentary reformism. Our aim is to mobilise the working class for capitalism's overthrow.

Reforms, however militant the movement which secures them, are incapable ultimately of resolving matters in the interests of the workers. Increasing poverty, homelessness and social misery in general are proof that capitalism is incapable of satisfying the most basic needs of the working class. What is necessary is to destroy this system. We must smash the capitalist state apparatus and establish a real workers' government, based on workers' councils (soviets) and a workers' militia.

Such a government will carry out the expropriation of the big bourgeoisie, nationalising the monopolies under workers' control, and without compensation to the major shareholders. This will provide the basis for ending the anarchy and waste of capitalism. It will open the road to the construction of a planned economy, under the democratic control of the producers and consumers, in which production will be carried out not according to the requirements of private profit, but according to the principle of social need.

As a guarantee against bureaucratism, all government members will be directly responsible to workers' organisations and subject to immediate recall. They will be paid no more than the average wage of a skilled worker.

There can be no socialism in one country. A revolutionary government will adopt a revolutionary foreign policy, giving political, military and financial aid to anti-imperialist struggles. It will fight for a socialist united states of Europe, as part of a world federation of socialist states.

### Build a Trotskyist movement in Britain and internationally!

In order to achieve these aims, it is necessary to build a mass revolutionary party in the British working class - a Trotskyist party which will be part of a reformed Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution.