

Vote Labour, but...

10p

BIG FLAME Election Special

June 83

**BIG
FLAME**



We want to get rid of this government. Thatcher and Co. have destroyed millions of jobs. They harass black people, deny them citizenship, and deport them. They want to severely restrict women's opportunities outside the home. Hard-won gains, like access to contraception and abortion facilities, are also under threat. The Tories are continuing to wage war against the nationalist community in the north of Ireland. And they are threatening our lives with a wasteful nuclear weapons programme. A defeat for Thatcher would be a kick in the teeth for the bosses – a setback for current ruling class strategy. It might also encourage working people to fight back.

But what about Labour? Every time there's an election, the Labour Party asks us to pull together to defeat the Tories. They tell us to curb our militancy. To shelve our differences, to avoid controversies, to play by the rules. Leaving it to the Labour Party to get rid of Thatcher isn't enough.

(turn to page 2)

We'll Have To

KEEP ON FIGHTING!

ECONOMICS

If at first you don't succeed...

THE CORNERSTONE of Labour's appeal is its economic strategy. The plan's aimed at cutting unemployment to a million within 5 years. These include:

- * A New Planning Framework, ('development plans' within companies and unions; 'industrial democracy'; a planning council).
- * A National Economic Assessment.
- * A National Investment Bank.
- * A massive rise in public spending.

Alliance does nothing to further either of these two objectives. Those militants who don't support Labour (like you?) certainly do not support the Alliance.

But we don't believe that Labour either has or would implement any sort of socialist politics. Its programme represents only an alternative way of managing capitalism - whatever Mrs. Thatcher says about it. It would defend the interests of the trade union leaders and planning officials who want a less active and more manageable working class. If Labour wins, the working class will have to fight the new government, although on different terrain.

Tony Benn has argued against challenging Labour's right wing: 'At this moment in the electoral cycle when you have an absolute duty to defeat Thatcher, if you spend all the time niggling away at the difficulties, then you are actually assisting her project of victory'. Comrades who joined the Labour Party in the hope of turning the Party outwards towards mass struggle now face an awkward choice. Either to back the Labour leadership, or to build an opposition which follows the lead given by struggles and campaigns based outside the party - e.g. CND, the Troops Out Movement, Anti-Deportation committees. Facing both ways will become harder and harder.

For us, the key issue in this election is how to develop the confidence and self-organisation of the whole working class, so that it can deal with any government. We want to develop a socialist-feminist alternative outside the Labour Party. We hope that those who agree with us will keep on struggling, and join Big Flame.

Labour leaders claim this is *not* a re-run of previous incomes policies. That they can 'rebuild British Industry' in partnership with private capital. And *at the same time*, bring about that elusive 'irreversible shift' in the balance of wealth and power.

What does this really amount to? How would it work in practice?

FIRST, we should be clear that Labour's is *not* a socialist programme. There's hardly a mention of public ownership - let alone the building of real power on the shop floor or in the communities. Labour is proposing a *managerial* solution. Using union leaders and civil servants to make capitalism work as in the 50's and 60's. And with the right wing in control, we can be sure that the better reforms will be ditched - and a wages policy rapidly introduced.

SECOND, the programme badly misunderstands the nature and extent of the crisis. This means that even modest proposals like the new planning institutions and consultation rights for unions in the workplace, will be hotly contested by the CBI, the City etc. The joint TUC/Labour Party statement on the plans (*Partners in Rebuilding Britain*) talks of the unions being prepared to 'weigh priorities' and where necessary, 'make sacrifices' (para. 19). But those sacrifices will probably be far greater than the TUC and Labour leaders reveal. For it will not be possible in the present recession to restore profitability, output and exports without cuts in real wages. Major companies won't agree development plans unless *they* stand to benefit. (Under the last Labour Government, there was only *one* planning agreement with a private company - Chrysler.)

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John Sturrock/Report

Remember?

THIRD, the programme is dangerous because its highly centralised mechanisms can, and almost certainly will, be used *against* workers. For instance, if a group of workers press a claim for a higher basic wage and shorter hours that falls *outside* the scope of the national economic assessment, they'll get no TUC support. They'll probably be accused of 'rocking the boat', maybe of endangering the future of the government... (Remember Wilson's vitriolic attacks on the seamen in 1966?) In many ways, this is *worse* than the social contract of 1975-78.

LASTLY, the programme has no perspective for mobilising people *outside* Parliament - *the* essential ingredient needed even to push through modest reforms in a recession. Worse still it will turn British trade unions against workers abroad. Its policy of import controls and leaving the EEC will, in a period of crisis, take on a highly nationalistic flavour. We will be encouraged to see things in the same way as our employers simply because they're British.

The alternative economic strategy cannot escape its fundamental flaw - it depends for success on the support of rank-and-file trade unionists. But in order to succeed, it has to attack the living standards and work conditions of those very same people. This can be no solution for us.

Tony Dupont and Phil North

TOWN HALL

Labouring under the Tories

The seizure of Town Halls by the 'new left' inside the Labour Party has been central to the strategy for finding a new way to socialism; contrasted to the 'utopianism' of a revolutionary left on the one hand and the dead hand of the old guard labour councillors on the other. However, the experience of the community in the South London borough of Southwark has raised more than a few doubts about this perspective.

Old Problems

Like many other labour controlled councils in London, one striking feature was the separation between the local Labour Party and the community. The problems included low pay for council employees, run down direct-labour services and housing problems which even led to the local tenants association standing independent candidates against the Labour Party. The response of the 'new left' was the capture of the machinery of power within the local Labour Party, the assumption being that change inside the Labour Party was enough - ignoring the vast gulf between the party and the local community. A radical new manifesto was developed in conjunction with trade

unions, tenants movements and other groups from the community, and at the elections Labour was rewarded with a larger majority than at any time in Southwark's history, as the almost entirely new slate of candidates swept the board.

All change?

Trying to organise in a borough which is run by the 'new left' council has been a salutary experience. Although the council has been widely praised for its support for CND, the experience of many in the community has been rather less joyous. At the moment the council are introducing redundancies, dropping a central plank of their manifesto. A document supported by the chair and vice chair of the housing committee throws away decentralisation and democratisation, and talks about increasing workloads, re-employment of staff on lower wages, and strengthening the central hierarchy with a massive new HQ staff.

The experience of the women's movement and the black community has also been a far cry from the vision promised. The Women's Aid Federation are having to campaign hard for council funding while the Housing Department is using the refuges for women who apply to the council as homeless rather than giving them permanent accommodation.

Neither has the council listed any black projects in its priorities for urban aid, and blatant racism in the housing offices, while greeted with a routine denunciation by the council, has not resulted in anyone being disciplined or agreement with the black community's demand for an enquiry.

Different approach

The whole structure and organisation of the services is wrong and needs a total overhaul ... from the bottom upwards, involving both workers and users, in new forms which put control into their hands so that services are remoulded to meet the needs of the community. The main task facing us, both during this election and after, is to encourage people to realise the importance of fighting for their own demands. And to point out that they will, even at local level, have to fight both Labour and Tory if they are going to win.

David Stones
(South London Big Flame)

THE THATCHER TAPES WORLD EXCLUSIVE



Happy Families?

Ronald Reagan recently sent his 'troubleshooter' Vernon Walters to London to find out why Margaret Thatcher is more popular than the President – despite their similar policies. Mr. Walters' frank discussions have been made available to Big Flame by the miracle of new technology. After the Stern diaries debacle, we were very cautious. But when we asked the Civil Service night cleaners to verify the tapes, they assured us that this sort of thing goes on all the time.

Mr. Walters: The President is very concerned about 'strategy mis-perception'; the American people don't seem to understand what he is trying to do.

Margaret Thatcher: Well you know, we find that this can be a great advantage. It would not help us if people understood our unemployment strategy.

Norman Tebbit: But unemployment has nothing to do with us.

Thatcher: Norman, we're talking to Vernon Walters, not Robin Day. I took office to restructure British industry, bring in new technology, and get profits moving again. Our first job was to curb trade union power, and the voters supported that because they blamed the unions for the Winter of Discontent. After our first Budget, inflation doubled and a million people lost their jobs. Then we realised this was the *right* policy at the *right* time. The less people had jobs, the easier it would be to break shop-floor resistance. Workers used to laugh when management threatened to close down the factory if they didn't accept the pay offer.

Walters: Amazing. But didn't homeless people object when you put building workers on the dole?

Thatcher: I don't actually know any homeless people, but they don't have too many votes. But really, you know, cutting back on Council Housing and the rest was very popular. People were sick of waiting 2 years for repairs, or queuing up for hip operations under Labour.

Walters: So you promised to improve the Health Service and build more Council Houses?

Thatcher: We gave people the freedom to buy their own home or to choose their own health insurance scheme or their own private school. This gave us the freedom to cut the Welfare State. The less money we spent on services, the less we needed to pay for them out of taxation and borrowing.

Walters: So you cut taxes and reduced the borrowing requirement?

Thatcher: You're not listening, Vernon. We raised taxes and borrowed more. But we cut the *social wage*; and mass unemployment helped us to cut pay packets too; this then curbed inflation.

Walters: The President is very impressed with Mr. Tebbit's new ideas to control the unions.

Tebbit: Thank you. I liked the way he sacked the Air-Traffic Controllers.

Thatcher: Actually, Norman and Jim Prior got most of their ideas from the TUC.

Walters: The TUC? Aren't they the bad guys?

Thatcher: You must explain this to Ronald. The TUC are our allies. In February 1979 they were so worried about unofficial strikes and the public sector disputes, they and the Labour Cabinet proposed a Concordat. Secret ballots before strikes, guarantees on public-sector pay in exchange for a no-strike agreement, watering-down the 'closed shop. Union officials to control pickets and prevent mass blockades. It's all there.

Tebbit: I thought of contracting out of the Labour Party.

Thatcher: And the TUC rescued us again last summer. The NHS dispute could have escalated in June – plenty of angry health workers were on the streets – and the train drivers were getting really excited over flexible rostering. The water workers were looking to their pay claim, and we had to be careful about closures in steel and coal. We were nervous, and had to prepare the troops to do the job. Then the TUC called off the rail strike and put the health workers on permanent stand-by. Spanswick thought the 'Days of Action' could go on indefinitely. It could have been a lot worse, you know. If Solidarnosc caught on over here, I don't know what we would do.

Walters: I thought we supported Solidarnosc?

Thatcher: In Poland, Vernon.

Walters: You've got on top of the unions. So why has £35 billion worth of investment gone abroad?

Thatcher: Vernon, when I go shopping for my family, I don't buy cornflakes for £1 if they're only 50p across the road. And I think investors feel the same way. Why should they pay 4 times or 10 times as much over here as they pay workers in South Africa or Taiwan?

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Walters: Are you afraid the TUC might support black South Africans trying to get the rate for the job?

Thatcher: Vernon, the TUC can't even support its own members. And look at their programme: out of the Common Market, import controls, unilateral disarmament; its's nationalistic isolationism. Vernon, these days it's only people like us who realise the importance of international solidarity.

Walters: The President sometimes finds the responsibilities of power a bit nerve-racking. I know it must seem a strange question, Margaret, but do you ever get shook up?

Thatcher: I know you're talking about the riots, and I will tell you, in confidence, that I was very very scared. We all were.

Walters: Did they make you reconsider your unemployment policy?

Thatcher: No, there was no U-turn on unemployment, but it did help us bring in the Youth Training Scheme and develop Free Enterprise Zones. There's always been high unemployment in the ghetto, and there we had to show the iron fist – just as you do in America. We had to show them that the streets are ours. We got a lot of help from Northern Ireland – riot control, CS gas, plastic bullets. I broke off negotiations with the Hunger Strikers to prove that I would not be bullied by politically motivated criminals in Belfast or in Brixton.

Vernon, given that the war in Ireland is going to go on and the ghettos aren't going to go away, the issue is very simple. We have to isolate the trouble spots and convince the British public that these are abnormal cases that require the full apparatus of state repression – let's not mince words, Vernon. And we got a lot of help from the Labour Party. Tony Benn spoke out straight away after the riots in support of the police. And you know police accountability is a very good technique for restoring public confidence. And though I hate to admit it, Vernon, the Labour Party's record in Ireland is very good. Diplock Courts, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, troops in 1969 – they made all the right decisions.

There's a consensus on law and order in the political parties and amongst the British people as a whole. Just like there was a consensus on the Falklands. That's why we'll be back on June 10.

Walters: So what is Ronald's problem?

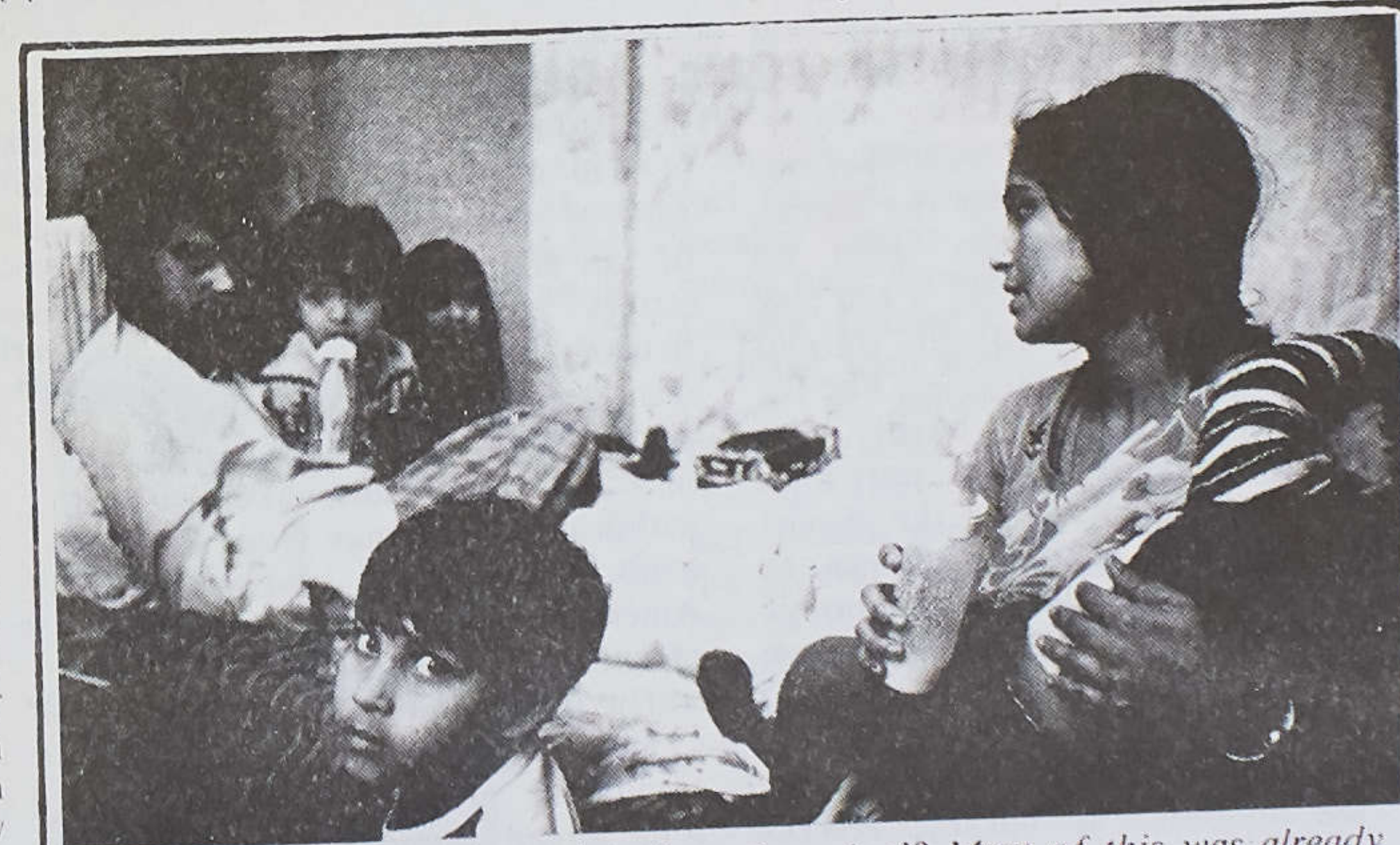
Thatcher: Well, you know, he never really was a first-rate actor.

There are no short cuts to women's liberation – and voting Labour certainly isn't one. So why are so many feminists, who all their lives have steered clear of parliamentary parties and their politics, now signing up as canvassers, urging women to vote Labour on June 9th?

Well mostly, of course, it's because there's the Tories. It's not exactly necessary to spell out the results of 5 more years of a more confident Thatcher government. While gains for the working class never seem to work out quite so well for women, attacks are sure to hit them hardest. In every part of their lives women would have more to struggle against – low pay (¾ of the low paid are women) when they do get work; less options of work with cuts in child-care and the loss of traditional women's jobs (the school meals service disappearing); worsening conditions at home as new public housing dries up, plus the pressures at home of unemployment and disgruntled teenagers and husbands;

more difficulty in claiming benefits as the current attempts to disqualify women as independent earners are stepped up; longer waits for abortions so that they cease to have a choice; more expensive rides to hospitals which are ever further away as the health service becomes more 'efficient'. A grim prospect for our day-to-day lives.

But behind this, the Tories are holding up the shining goals of 'Freedom' and 'Prosperity' – and one of the routes to this is through the 'Family'. Is the promotion of the Family a well thought out cornerstone of Tory ideology or it is merely a way of justifying their refusal to take responsibility for our health and welfare? It doesn't much matter as long as the effect is to marginalise women outside the family – single mothers, single women, lesbians, young women – attacking their standard of living, their choices and their valuation and acceptance by society. And to ask the Family to take responsibility for the sick, the elderly, the disabled, the unemployed



The Tories talk about family life as if it were sacred. So why have they been actively dividing black families as fast as possible: by deporting black women after marriages break down, by removing people as 'illegal immigrants' for not answering questions they haven't been asked, by changing the rules to prevent black women from bringing their fiancés to Britain, by carrying on telling families in Bangladesh or Pakistan they are not

'genuine'? Most of this was already happening under the last Labour government, and will continue in some form whoever wins the election.

The Tories stepped up the pressure by turning the Welfare State into an instrument to harass black people, deny them benefits, and feed confidential information about them to the Home Office or the police. Nowadays, black people can't even go to the hospital or sign on without being investigated about their immigration status.

youth, without providing the means. Not that money is the central issue, it's what happens to women's lives when they feel obliged to meet all these demands in the context of the Family: the Family has rarely brought women Prosperity and never Freedom!

A victory for the Tories would give such a boost to right-wing ideological confidence that we would certainly say goodbye to the chances of law reforms in areas where women are successfully challenging traditional ideas – over rape in marriage, women's protection from domestic violence, lesbian custody rights, the decriminalisation of prostitution.

Victorian values may have their appeal to M Thatcher but not to us. (Try reading *Stand We at Last* by Zoe Fairbairns for a flavour of what they meant to women.)

So what's the alternative? We could write a pretty long list of past attacks on women by Labour governments, patronising quotes from ex-Prime Ministers, and horrific stories of life for women in the Labour Party. But they aren't really the point: as long as we understand that women's liberation is not about elections and is about what we struggle for outside parliament, we can recognise that our struggles are affected by the nature of the government in power and join the campaign to get the best conditions for ourselves. It's not that we think we'll reach our basic goals through Labour – but at least the climate of opinion could shift to our advantage.

It is not true that 'any campaign which improves the situation of the working class makes the situation of women better as well', as Valerie Coultas claims in this month's *International*. But under Labour we're more likely to face a labour movement buoyant enough to respond to some of the initiatives of women.

Feminists are realising how fraught with contradictions many of our demands are. Think about how the demand for child care at meetings is assumed to be helping out women: it doesn't challenge our basic division of labour at all.

But it's hard to build anything with no raw materials. Our objective is to discover our strengths, the limitations of the system, and the contradictions in our demands. And our victories will push the prevailing ideology in our direction, just as a Tory victory in the election would drive it away.

Annie, North London BF

NATO's Allies

Neither Labour or Tory will leave us in peace



Steve Benbow/Network

Two things about this election should be clear to everyone. Although nuclear disarmament is an issue, the division of votes will not indicate the division of public opinion over disarmament. And whoever wins the election, the role of the independent peace movement will remain crucial.

The election is not a referendum on disarmament. Although Labour appears the most committed to nuclear disarmament, there are many reasons why peace activists may not vote Labour. These include the party's pro-NATO stance; the ambiguous position of Labour leaders like Healey, Shore and Hattersley; the previous Labour Government's support for Cruise and Trident; and Labour's apparent opportunism.

Many will not vote at all, seeing the electoral process as irrelevant to disarmament. Some will vote Liberal, Scottish or Welsh Nationalist, seeing these parties as more consistent in their peace policies. The 'peace vote' will be split many ways.

Vote Labour but...

Big Flame members will generally vote Labour. But we believe that to achieve nuclear disarmament, the continuing independence and strength of the peace movement are vital. That this is true in the event of a Tory victory, or a Tory-Alliance Government, is perhaps obvious. Less people believe it in the case of a

Labour victory.

Labour leaders are saying that unilateral disarmament will take 5 years, but will come. Such delaying tactics could lead to the division and weakening of the anti-nuclear movement. We have to insist that we cannot wait 5 years. And we will remain united and strong until disarmament is achieved.

Labour's defence spokesperson, John Silkin, argues that the money for Trident should be spent on helping the Navy to play a full role within NATO, and to defend Britain's overseas territories, like the Falklands. This is hardly the language of peace. NATO, portrayed as a peacekeeper against the 'Soviet Threat', is a military alliance to advance the collective economic interests of the US and Western Europe. Membership of NATO means complicity in every scheme which will advance America's world wide interests: in Turkey, NATO supports a military dictatorship which persecutes the labour movement; in Central America, NATO weapons have been used against the Nicaraguan people by the CIA-trained and funded 'Contras'; in the Middle East. And possession of overseas territories, as we've seen in the South Atlantic, can only mean war. We should combat Labour's imperialism as vigorously as that of the Tories.

Tory Threat

If the Tories win, the first serious confrontation will come in the Autumn, when Cruise missiles begin to arrive. One important factor here will be the existence of a movement right across Europe challenging the very core of NATO strategy. The clash over the deployment of Pershing missiles in Germany will come to a head shortly before the missiles come to Britain. Already, large peace movements in Scandinavia, Holland, Austria and of course Germany, are preparing a host of actions against this deployment. As for Cruise, the campaigns against deployment at Comiso, Sicily, and Florennes, Belgium are growing in strength.

The existence of such a huge movement frightens NATO leaders. They know they can deploy the missiles however strong the resistance. But they also know that NATO cannot rule by might alone - it needs the support of its resident populations. Otherwise the very justification for its existence is undermined.

Non-Cooperation

The strategy of non-cooperation, or making the system unworkable, will help to intensify the paranoia of NATO leaders. This can take the form of refusal to pay the proportion of tax going on 'defence'; rotating strikes around the country, particularly by unions implicated in missile deployment; mass boycotts of arms-related companies, especially those at Greenham, like Tarmac; withdrawal of savings from Government institutions; blockading of American bases, blocking the centre of cities for limited periods, causing traffic to snarl up....

These are just some of the ideas circulating around the movement, some already being put into practice. Some are aimed directly at Cruise, others are more indirect, and this is precisely what is necessary. For no matter how strong the movement, how widespread the strikes or boycotts, or how massive the blockades of bases, there can be no guarantee that we will prevent deployment. It is crucial then, that while trying to prevent deployment, the movement looks beyond. Making the system unworkable is the surest road to long term success.

Zoot Sayer, Sheffield CND

SOME OF THE ISSUES THEY DON'T DARE TO DISCUSS WITH US

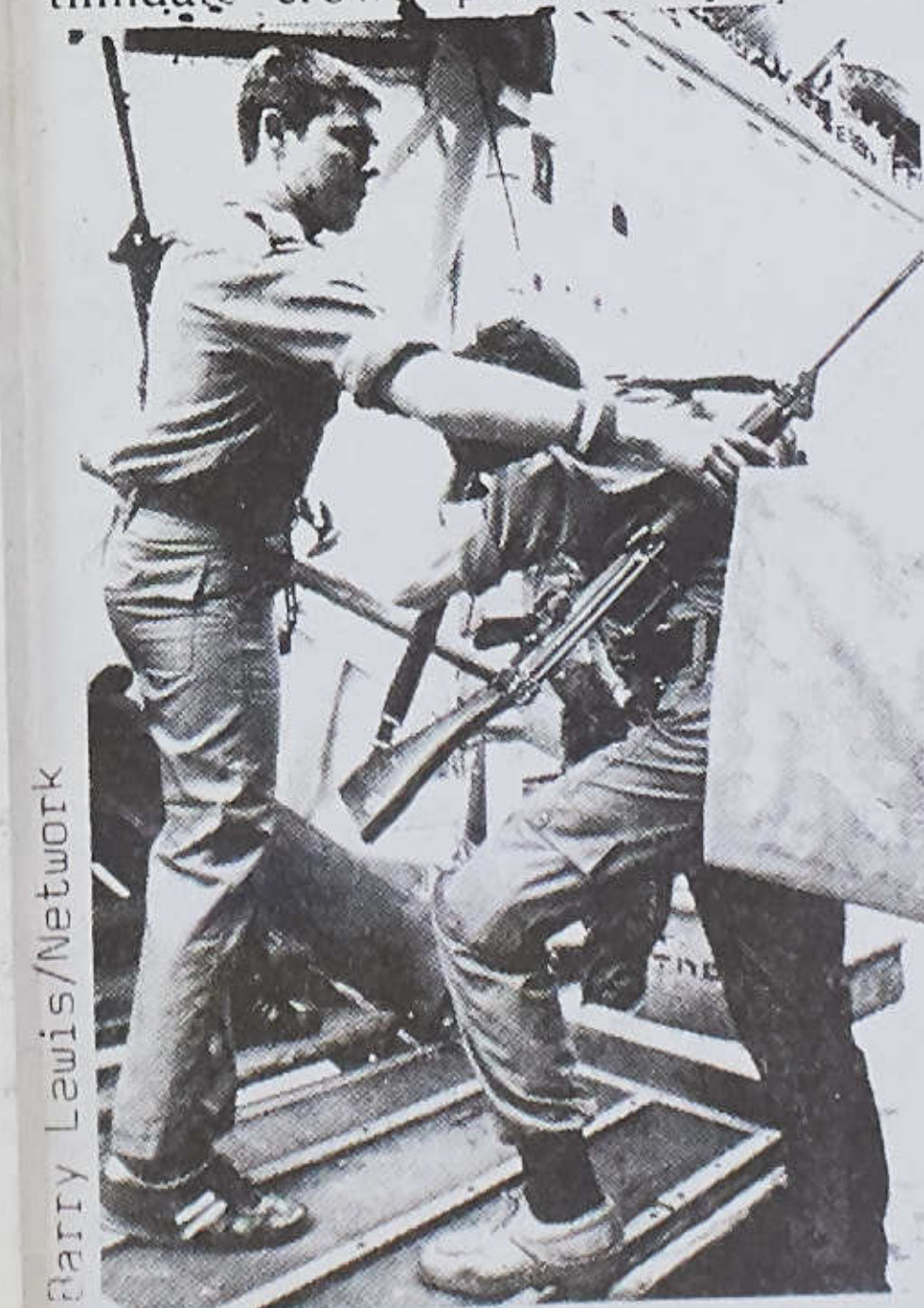
THE STRONG STATE

War in the Six Counties

In the six counties the most politically significant developments have been the Hunger Strikes and their aftermath. According to Thatcher the H Block and Armagh prison protests were the IRA's 'last card'. But Bobby Sand's election victory of '81 in Fermanagh/South Tyrone - and later the Assembly and local elections - showed the absurdity of yet another lie from yet another British government. The tragic deaths of 10 young Republicans were no defeat, but instead revealed their political status to the eyes of the world. Hundreds of recruits swelled the ranks of the IRA and INLA and the nationalist working class were mobilised on the streets of Belfast and Derry in numbers not witnessed since the heady days of 69-72.

Repression continues

Throughout this period the Tory government has continued a policy of unadulterated repression, inherited from the Labour government's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Roy Mason. Plastic bullets have been used to main, kill and intimidate crowd protest. As in the



Rarry Lewis/Network

The QE2 sails for the Falklands. Next stop, Ireland.

1970s, selective targets have been murdered in a systematic 'shoot-to-kill' policy. In the early months of the hunger strike the SAS gunned down leading figures in the H Block/Armagh campaign. Then in the wake of concessions Republican activists were assassinated to placate Loyalist reaction. On the 'political' front direct-ruler Prior followed in Atkin's faltering footsteps launching the Assembly initiative. As with previous British 'solutions' this has foundered on the rock of Northern Ireland reality, 'power-sharing' is impossible when sectarianism is built into the power structures of the state - the Assembly's only possible long-term future lies in Paisley's dream of a resurrected Stormont.

Lessons to learn

After 13 years of Army occupation the nationalist people's resolve to struggle for freedom from British oppression remains undefeated. Whatever government gets in, this fact remains constant. For the nationalist people all British governments have brought only repression. Despite Labour's paper policy of eventual Irish unity, the Party continues to support the Northern Ireland statelet - with all the repression that this entails. The Republicans are likely to do well in the general election, reflecting their increasing mass support. The Republican threat has momentarily provoked potential electoral cooperation between the two main Unionist parties - but whatever the formal results of the elections, of one thing we can be sure: the war will continue. And, as long as this happens, the British working class will reap the results in imported technology and legislation (riot shields, CS gas etc.) tested and tried on the streets of Ireland. These are the lessons to drive home before and after June 9th.

James Graham and Frank Barlow
(E. London BF and TOM)

Zookeeper re-elected

What immigration control, the Police Bill, and the Data Protection Bill have in common is that they are all part of the move towards more state control. Immigration surveillance has been specifically exempted from the safeguard clauses of the Data Protection Bill - quite simply, this exemption alone enables the further development of all political surveillance based on computer.

The Home Office Suspect Index (SI) contains details on everyone suspected of illegal immigration, international crime, terrorism or political subversion. Following the introduction of machine-readable passports, a behind-closed-doors decision was taken to computerise the SI and integrate it with the Prime 550 minicomputer installed at the Immigration Intelligence Unit's Harmondsworth HQ, the Police National Computer at Hendon, and the Immigration and Nationality Department's Bootle computer. All police forces have immediate access to the Harmondsworth computer, as have all agencies concerned with Immigration control.

The Harmondsworth computer runs a software program called 'Status', through which any Immigration Officer or Policeman can go through an address book within minutes to check if any names, addresses or telephone numbers appear in the databank. He could at the same time enter the address book into the data bank.

Put this together with the extension of police powers to search, detain, and otherwise harass people who they suspect of something and it spells Police State. This is the stark and sinister reality of the society our rulers are building - an apparatus of surveillance and repression with which to control the disinherited and dissidents of British capitalism.

You will not be asked to vote on this. Neither were the people who are asking you to vote for them now. Even in the very midst of the 'democratic process', no intelligent zookeeper gives the animals a vote on the issue of cages.

Eric Mason, Manchester BF.

To Change the Gov't:

The election bandwagon is on the road again. The politicians walk among us. Smiling. Shaking hands. Our chance to shape the future. Or so they say... But can elections – even this election – change that much? On past evidence – no. There have been differences between governments. But the essential structures of power have remained intact. Under Labour as well as Tory rule. A Labour victory will *not* be a victory for socialism.

Big Flame believes that the end of war, unemployment, poverty, sexual and racial oppression, and the creation of a free, equal and classless society involves the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. This can only be brought about by the mass involvement of the working class. No government will give us our freedom. We must fight for it ourselves. Whoever wins on June 9th, the struggle continues.

Health Workers fighting for a decent wage



John Sturrock/Network

BIG FLAME
TO CHANGE SOCIETY

p & p Big Flame at Sheffield Lommground Comiunity Printshop

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