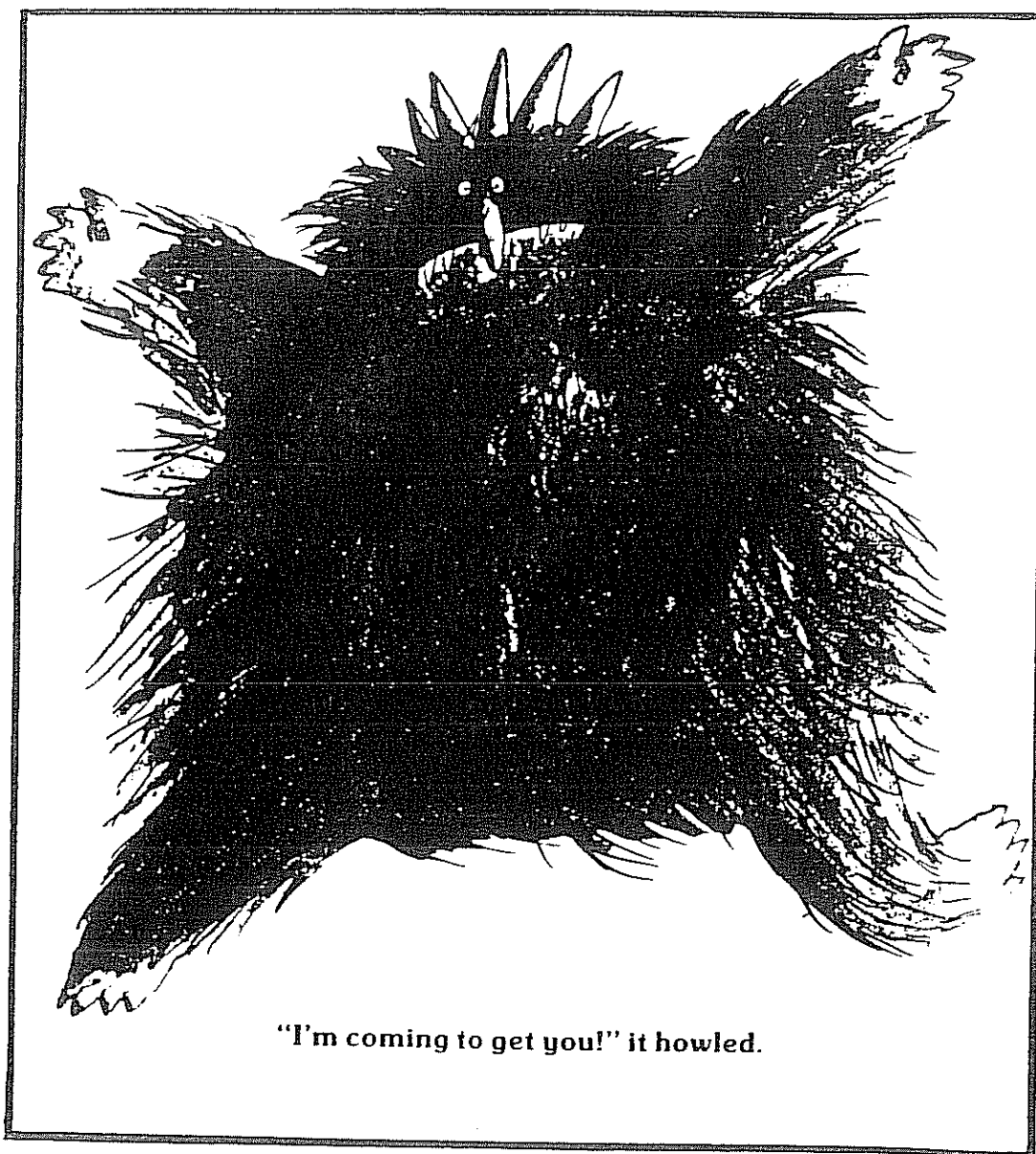


**THE
DESTRUCTION
OF
TOYTOWN
U.K.**



THE DESTRUCTION OF TOYTOWN U.K.

The following is a random collection of thoughts instigated by the great Poll Tax riot of March 31st, 1990. It ranges from on-the-spot observations by participants, to a wider theoretical reflection because every event whether small or large - and the Poll Tax riot was large - touches on the profound social crises in the U.K. which is fast approaching a Rubicon.



(In London a person) "must live in a state of perpetual combat and anger; and he really must try to blunt his sensibility, or he will go mad, or kill some obnoxious person and he will be hanged for it ----- mere cheating and flunky centres like the horrible muck-heap in which we dwell (London to wit) could be got rid of ----- . Take this for the last word of my dream of what's to be: the test of our being fools no longer will be that we shall no longer have masters."

WILLIAM MORRIS. November 13. 1887.

(on the evening of Bloody Sunday, the last time before March 31. 1990. the centre of London received such a trashing.)

Most people here knew in some kind of vague way there was to be some form of demonstration against the poll tax in London on the last weekend of March 1990. However, most were unclear about the actual details, even the day. Had it been organised by the Labour Party or the T.U.C. this would not have been the case. Posters, notices in the press, would have given the itinerary well in advance. There were reports that marches were retracing the steps of the original Peasants Revolt of 1381, one from Berkshire, the other from Kent. They came off alright but weren't much. One small contingent from Maidenhead, Windsor and Slough ended up on Saturday morning on Shepherd's Bush Green, W. London. Perhaps 100 strong, the little march moved off towards Kennington for the big rally. They passed by a small building site just after starting off from the Green. Two building workers in their early 20s started to sing the "Red Flag". An all but forgotten tune it was something of a surprise. One pensively wondered if these young building workers, not knowing much about history, were destined to repeat all the old mistakes. After all, the "Red Flag" was the hymn of social democracy. But it was a sign alright that a drift was taking place and connections were being made. An intimation of the fireworks to come.

The Poll Tax riot of Saturday March 31st turned out to be the biggest riot central London has experienced this century or the last. Only the twelve glorious days of the Gordon Riots of 1780, when no-popery was used as an excuse to loot the rich, very definitely eclipsed it. The only other comparable ones were those of the unemployed in the 1880s and 1930s which were far less destructive in character-especially the latter.

Unlike the incendiary, ferocious rioting of 1981 and 1985, it took place not in inner-city neighbourhoods but right in the dizzying, eye-catching, blinding centre of commodity affluence. Never in recent history have the sterile forbidding monoliths of Whitehall, which houses the machinery of State, been so taken over by a nameless wildness spreading havoc everywhere. Only to be followed by riot police deliberately pushing the rioters away from the infringed anteroom of the State, through Trafalgar Square - where Nelson's Column stands at the mythical heart of a vanished empire - and into the shop window of U.K.P.L.C. and the apex of connoisseur consumerism, born out of late 60s early 70s shopping rejection of mass consumption (e.g. Covent Garden which has spawned a host of imitations like Dean Clough in Halifax and Little Germany in Bradford where industrial buildings have similarly been turned into emporiums of consumption) and the 80s designer revolution, more explicitly Thatcherite, hard edged and go-getting in tone.

The police having instigated this line of advance how different it was from the post-mortem that followed the Handsworth riot of '85. Then local shopkeepers accused the police of using them as sacrificial victims when they prevented the rioters from flooding into Aston and then Birmingham city centre. In the absence of any plan the opposite happened on the eve of April Fools Day. Had the police tried to contain the crowd instead of attempting to clear Trafalgar Square, the demonstrators after some pushing and shoving, a few lobbed bottles and flimsy placards would have got tired and thirsty and left for the pub or gone home. The police plainly lost the battle and awkward questions will be asked, though we won't get to hear about them for some time, why a more elaborate strategy to deal with trouble had not been worked out beforehand. After all a generally successful, carefully prepared plan to counter insurgency is put into operation every year at the Notting Hill Carnival. Maybe even a few heads will role. 1

The police were obviously of two minds. There were on the one hand, the usual minority of police sadists who thoroughly enjoyed cracking skulls open. On the other were all the rest who looked scared and deathly pale. The City of London cops looked particularly bewildered, accustomed to dealing with trifles like shoplifting, drunkenness and the odd disco disturbance. Also, most cops don't want the Poll Tax as it marks an end to their long rates holiday - a factor which has been decisive in getting many a ditherer, looking for a cushy job with lots of perks, to join the police. Twenty years of cop demoralization hasn't been halted and, just like in the '81 riots, it was obvious the cops couldn't muster the will to combat trouble on this scale should it become a regular occurrence. The 80s has been hard on the police with no locality immune from outbursts of unpredictable violence causing morale to take a dive. Equally, - and it must not be overlooked - constant attacks have caused some to become hooked on viciousness, an esprit de combat which may to a degree offset the haemorrhaging of morale.

A few weeks prior to the Poll Tax riot, there had been a demonstration of some 60,000 people in Trafalgar Square in support of striking ambulance crews. Fancifully hoping it might prove as big as the East European demonstrations, still fresh in peoples memories, it came as a disappointment. Coming into Oxford St. at dusk on the way home, one felt it hadn't touched the hordes of shoppers which in their compactness seemed like a detachment from the main demonstration.

Now it was different, these were reinforcements. A group of young designer conscious blacks wondering what all the fuss was about, seized the opportunity to go on a looting spree. Tourists stood beside wrecked cars and had their photos taken, as if they'd slain the dragon themselves. This tourist trap was turning into a real international festival. Consuming insurrection they were, in turn, being consumed by it. The glossy brochures had never promised this degree of excitement. There was really ever so little hostility to the ransacking of the West End (for once one felt at home there) by gullible punters who gladly pay up only to feel let down. Those punters who bothered to make a comment tended simplistically to blame Thatcher and not the rampaging Visigoths. People felt happy for once.

However the tourists and punters provided an invaluable cover. The police (now named "Stasi" after the E. German secret police - the chanted word comes easy to the tongue) didn't like clubbing too many window shoppers even though they split up quite a few well-heeled tourists and told them to "move on". With others it was different. The "Stasi" attacked disco queues where young kids were grouped together - notably those in Oxford St. - and kids walking out of pin ball machine arcades. A number got arrested that way. At the behest of publicans (?) the riot police closed down all the pubs in Soho, which, in itself, caused battles inside the pubs and running street battles outside untill after midnight. How many were locals, tourists, consumers or anti-poll taxers didn't really seem to matter.

There were many individuals from other countries, completely unaffected by the Poll Tax who had been swept up by the demonstration right from the start. French, German, Italian, Spanish, Chinese and many a Four XXXXer pissed out of their Crocodile Dundee send-up boxes. Three Americans (tourists ??) laughed as they lobbed a brick at the cops in a corner of Trafalgar Square. Other Americans enjoyed it too and got carried away talking about it in the pubs afterwards. So finally, it was an international event, one that used the Poll Tax as an occasion to get at any police and the alienation of international commodity relationships they protect.

Those "tourists" who didn't join in directly asked anti-Poll Taxers what was going on. The Japanese very politely. One black girl sporting an anti-Poll Tax badge replied to a question put by a Scandinavian: " that's what we do in England, we riot". Warming her hands on a pile of blazing garbage she was kind of proud to be a representative of this other "England". Once night had fallen, black gangs different to the designer conscious blacks mentioned previously began to appear on the scene. Perhaps they'd come in from London's huge Council Estates after first seeing the trouble "up west" on T.V. They also did their share of damage. During the day one had noticed the presence of blacks and Asians on the demonstration and amongst the rioting crowd but it hardly amounted to a mass presence.

There was a placard "Asians against the Poll Tax". In fact opposition to the Poll Tax amongst the Asian community has gone a long way to overcoming the damaging separation opened up by the Salman Rushdie affair. Well, that along with Bhangri Rock (a fusion of Punjabi folk music and rock) which has helped spawn something like a hippy sub-culture among Asian youth. In Bradford where the first public burning by militant Muslims of the "Satanic Verses" took place, the Tories have been unable to follow up any advantage they have gained by promising to bring the book within the scope of the blasphemy laws. Tending to have large, tightly knit families and shunning the dole if at all possible, the Poll Tax weighs particularly heavily upon them. With the Uniform Business Rate (part of the Poll Tax package - the corner shop paying the same as a supermarket-) small shopkeepers are hit twice over. Some Asian shopkeepers in Bradford proudly display "No Poll Tax Here" posters in their windows going some way to limiting the damage caused by the Rushdie novel. The relevant issue here was not Islam but the historical impossibility of the novel today. The clerical fascism of the Iranian Islamic revolution gives credence to the pathetic claim the Modern Novel still has a subversive potential. But Rushdie can be nothing other than a poor excuse for a James Joyce who pushed the novel to its brilliant extinction - even though both of them have been the butt of religious persecution. The Poll Tax furore may be an indication the Asian community once more is becoming more secular, more self-interested, more able to build bridges and reversing, say, that tendency towards ghettoization taking place in Bradford and elsewhere in the last four or so years.

Instead the retailing revolution was ransacked, looted and, here and there, burnt. Amidst all the wildness the vandalism was very selective - more so than is usual in contemporary U.K. riots. Posh cars like Jaguars and Porsches were burnt and the Renault show rooms destroyed in Long Acre. But an old, broken down 50s Morris minor was left unscathed. Liquor stores and music shops were pillaged and expensive guitars nicked but tool stores weren't looted (who amongst these youths wanted Bosch power tools for work?? But a mate did). A rare stamp shop was trashed - how would these items ever be fenced ? The same happened to many of the really posh nosh shops along Regent Street's aristocratic facade. But clothes worth hundreds of pounds still weren't that easy to make off with. Looters at Top Girl in Oxford Circus couldn't get the anti-shop lifting tag off expensive gear and in their haste tore it. Black girls in their longing for a bit of pricy flash ended up with torn shreds in their hands.

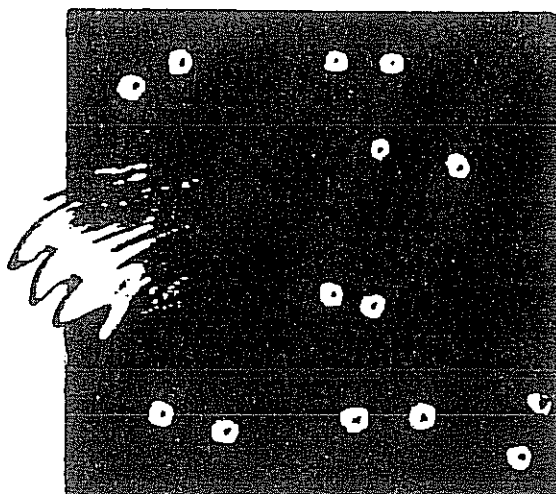
However the windows of Aer Lingus weren't trashed. Not because Aer Lingus wasn't a business like any other but because of a vague, general sentiment that what was Irish was untouchable because of the appalling miscarriages of "justice" over the last 18 years. (Nor was it merely a question of collective guilt either because it is now becoming apparent just how many confessions on mainland Britain have been extracted under police torture and threats and then accepted as bonafide evidence by juries long accustomed until, say, the last decade to believe police evidence. This grotesque manipulation of a judicial process which in anycase is rooted in class society and must, when all is said and done, defend exploitation is a key factor in the 20 year counter revolution that has paid lip service to "venerable" British traditions in order to impose a creeping dictatorship now facing near total collapse).

Only two nights prior to the demo, a T.V. program "Who Bombed Birmingham", on the framing of the Birmingham Six (jailed for allegedly bombing two Birmingham pubs which caused many deaths) had been screened during peak viewing hours. In a fair proportion of local inner city pubs it was possible to hear a pin drop while the program was being televised. At the organized speeches at Kennington before the Poll Tax long march, everything was heckled and mocked from the Labour Party to the T.U.C., to the Trotskyite Militant Tendency - but the same splendidly irreverent crowd was silent when it came to Ireland even though much has to be said about the Irish situation which isn't palatable to anarchists and leftists.

But let's leave out descriptions of the hundreds of trashed stores and other businesses - simply because many newspapers mentioned them in their centre fold spreads which also contained revealing - too revealing - photos of the destruction. A few individuals caught on camera doing a bit of looting or destruction will probably get the book thrown at them if caught. (It is reckoned some four weeks after the event roughly a 100 have been picked up in this way). Poor sods - a balaclava stuffed in a back pocket is

still essential. These shitty photos will likely add further impetus to liberal bourgeois campaigns out to curtail media sensationalism because all too often they are victims themselves of press smears. However, no one expected there would be such an outcome to the days events excepting in some wild fantasy. Some violence yes but not destruction on this scale. What's surprising is that the sentences imposed so far on those arrested have been relatively light. Are the police gearing themselves up for a big swoop at a later date? Or, are both police and judiciary wearying of constantly applying the thumb screws decreed by a penal mentality stuck in the dark ages and so typical of the U.K. As they wring their hands they know that harsh sentences do no good and merely contribute to outbreaks of violence.

One of the most striking things was the sense of enjoyment of those at the eye of the storm - an enjoyment mingled with nervous apprehension and fear. All that adrenalin pumping though the system left many a parched throat crying for water - or at least a stiff drink. But the barren waste of the shop window of U.K.PLC. was that night transformed into a place of revelry which connected with the Saturday night consumers of the bright lights.



The trashing of the central London shopping emporium seemed a fitting response to the High St. retailing revolution of the latter half of the 80s . Taking its cue from London, this had taken off nationwide following the defeat of the miners' strike in Spring '85. Where a 100 pits closed hundreds more Next, Tie-Rack, Knicker-Box, Sock Shop, Colouroll stores opened transforming the face of shopping into a "cultural experience" (sic) acclaimed by left yuppies. To have a heart attack in one of these places was in the worst of designer bad taste. But recently their profits have been squeezed and their shares tumbled. Their go-go management has been unceremoniously sacked like the director of Colouroll, John Ashcroft, the Thatcherite entrepreneur famous for saying "there are no obstacles in business, only opportunities" (in fact the reverse is more the case now) and leveraging the firm 2½ times its actual value. The whole boom had been based on an unparalleled expansion and availability of credit (Britain has more plastic floating around than any other country in Europe) which a capitalist economy as weak as Britain's cannot possibly sustain. It was, in sum, a binge of fictive capital such as Britain has never known.

With relentless speed the whole pack of cards really started to collapse in the first few weeks of 1990. Highly indebted (or in credit!) builders like Rush and Tompkins and Declan Kelly (great!) were finished, Next and Sock Shop in deep trouble and even that ultra packaged eclipse of rock, Bros, were skint. Overnight, stars of the 80s became yesterdays people and building companies engaged on prestigious waterside projects rushed to call the receiver in and share trading was suspended. The 80s were over and the business cycle could not possibly have fallen more neatly in the calendar. Indeed, this collapse was in many ways as significant as those in Eastern Europe but far less dramatic, though it was kept tightly under wraps. To become international news it needed such a riot.

This potlatch at the heart of what they think they want, a want they think has been freely chosen and not directed, must have disoriented quite a few East European and Russian T.V. viewers still hooked on all that Thatcherite free market junk. And what did East Germans make of the endless cries of "Stasi Stasi"?

But to judge from several reports from the Soviet Union neither the riot or the outbreaks in U.K. prisons were given a sympathetic mention. Rather they were outbreaks of "hooliganism" and put the blame for the riot on Labour Party non-payers of the tax just like the Tories! Previously this regime has used this reactionary characterization to brand their own subversives. How times change! But this incredible volteface goes to the heart of the matter. The sweeping changes in Eastern Europe and the proposed ones in Russia, though not instigated by Mrs. Thatcher do bear her ideological imprint if not her name. And too much publicity about her difficulties threatens the spirit of perestroika. Also it further confuses the already befuddled workers of Eastern Europe just enough to bring the day when they rise up against all exploitation that much closer. And since the dramatic events in Eastern Europe in late '89, the Poll Tax riots are the first major headlining sensation that discloses something of the hell that exists in the West.

It's not really possible to characterize the riot beyond it was a massive revolt of youth. Those who were involved in the heavy fighting were mainly, but by no means entirely, marginal youth possessing, at times, a striking degree of awareness. Living on the verge of total pauperisation, often unable to claim any form of dole, they live in squats or on the streets. The lucky ones find temporary shelter through short-life housing agencies. If not employed in some crappy job, other than begging, theiving and prostitution they have little choice but to submit to E.T. (Employment Training) a very terrestrial form of "training" joke on a workfare basis. And London contains more of these no-hopers (thus resuming its position after some 60 years as the capital of casualism) than anywhere else in Britain - people obliged for their own self-esteem to make a style out of being rejected. In fact, the attack upon luxury cars has been going on for some time in Central London. Soho Square was closed last year in an effort to stop arsonists setting light to cars. March 31st was merely an extension, though vastly broader in scope of pre-existing tendencies in the underclass.

Were there thousands of young fully employed workers on the demonstration? And what about students? It was difficult to know short of going around and asking everyone for their personal particulars. A hastily concocted banner reading "Yorkshire Miners Against the Poll Tax" was waved beside the Higgs and Hill refurbishment on fire in a corner of Trafalgar Square. Young miners could be seen four stories up the scaffolding - ready for a bit of the high life. What became of them? Nicked by the riot police when the scaffolding was stormed?

One gets the impression (others have since confirmed it) that some of the Higgs and Hill building workers (on a weekends guard duty?) opened up the site to rioters. Earlier in the day, building workers had unfurled an oblong banner down the side of the high building attacking the Poll Tax. The burning building however came to mark the threshold of the possible - a conflagration at the visual epicentre of the State. The rioting ceased as if dumbfounded by its own achievement. The hubbub subsided and an eerie silence descended over the square like an eclipse of the sun silences the sounds of nature. Then a roar went up as the cabin burst into flames and battle commenced once more. And there it was - Nelson's Column wreathed in smoke, thick enough, at one point to block out the sun. 24 hours later another column was to be entwined in smoke, this time it was the unmistakable Victorian factory chimney of Strangeways jail in Manchester. Once seen, never forgotten - a gaunt brick finger of retribution sending shivers down the spine. In their own ways both are symbols of a foregone awesome power which cannot modernize itself and which is daily becoming more insupportable to the mass of the people.

Among the crowd were to be seen a fair number of young civil servants and Town Hall staff. They looked pissed-off and angry, ready for trouble. Hardly surprising, after all they have to take all the brick bats from the public arising out of

registration for and collection of the hated tax. And they've been the first to reply to the tax with limited strikes here and there (London, Sheffield, Edinburgh etc.) overtime bans and non-Poll Tax cooperation. Their refusal had been stiffened and then driven forward by the earlier rioting in London and Bristol. What's more the cost of collecting the Poll Tax is more than double that of domestic rates (roughly £1.3 million per local council in contrast to £550,000 for the old domestic rates) and a lot more staff need to be recruited to meet the increased workload. Meanwhile, staff are being drafted from other depts. to cope with the administrative shambles. With the result housing benefit, for example, is increasingly delayed leading to more homelessness, worry etc. in a bid to save on administrative costs. However there is undoubtedly a clear overlap here between street action and strike action - a ready appreciation of the other if you like. Throughout the 80s this happy meeting has been waiting to happen, briefly glimpsed during the miners strike in communities like Fitzwilliam, South Emsall and Maltby in Yorkshire in 1984.

The Poll Tax could also be a factor in precipitating a strike wave and trade union bureaucrats are already being forced to take it into account when putting forward pay demands. And, of course, the Poll Tax could be a factor in a head on collision with Tory T.U. laws especially those concerning secondary action, resulting in the sequestration of union funds. Sequestration has been partially successful in the past in crushing trouble amongst seafarers, printers and to a lesser extent amongst miners. Of course this does represent a failing by the workers themselves to systematically break-out of the trade union carapace, all too quickly returning to the fold after inspiring lift-offs which never cease to rumble on. However, to continue applying the law could easily cease to produce the expected outcome and result in workers intensifying strike action - which liberal critics have long predicted. Especially if the State continues to weaken and even more vicious anti-working class legislation gets onto the Statute Book - like the proposed laws to prohibit wildcat strike action. To say the least in an already highly charged atmosphere it is highly provocative. The Thatcher government has steered clear previously of legislation that specifically deals with industrial action bordering on the autonomous because it had been the undoing of the last Tory P.M. Edward Heath. Until recently, the laws curbing T.U. rights continually amended by the three Thatcher governments have been specifically aimed at the T.U. bureaucracy, the courts fining heavily unions which defied these laws. Now, however, individual workers particularly ones deemed to have instigated wildcat strikes are to be prosecuted and fined. These proposed laws are the government's response to the rash of wildcat strikes and coordinations in '89 but they could back-fire in a really big way. Even so, before all these new proposals, the existence of the most draconian labour laws in Western Europe prevented, even at the height of Thatcher's third term triumphalism, the many strikes in '88 and '89 turning possibly into another "Winter of Discontent".

There were a few older people in the thick of the fighting but they were a few. One guy with grey hair on being arrested, repeatedly had his head bashed against a wall by the police just outside the gates of Downing St. (Thatcher's residence). Poor bastard. If the everyday tensions springing from the accumulating anachronisms of the 80s weren't sufficient to bring on migraine attacks this police beating surely must.

In the vast crowd friends who hadn't seen each other in a long while met, then were instantly separated in the tumult. Bricks, wooden staves were raining down some missing their aim and clobbering the wrong side. The sky at times was filled with debris and one would duck involuntarily to avoid a pidgeon flying like a brick through the air. It was amusing to see riot police doing the same, swiftly putting their shields up to cover their heads.

But it was scary. Many times you felt trapped by the police and if they'd wanted to go really beserk applying French techniques of random clubbing and tear gassing, it would have been a massacre. But as in the many outbreaks of rioting in the U.K. in the 80s, the cops, once more, didn't altogether abandon traditional modes of policing. But that "reserve" could snap at any time and pushed up against the walls of the National Gallery, surrounded by police on all sides, the gate to a killing field seemed about to swing open. Dusk was gathering what's more. Others thought the

same and once the police started to push the rioters up the West End streets they were only too glad to be given this out. Rather than a police massacre, it was the toy town of nice Mr Plod that was massacred.

A similar display taking place over 100 years earlier had occurred in Trafalgar Square. On Sunday, Nov 13th 1887, the casual poor assembled in the square had rioted trashing gentlemen's clubs and breaking the innovatory expanses of plate glass on aristocratic shop fronts. A 100 years later this exclusive feature has become generalized as capital has come to be increasingly dependent on the consuming power of producers. But this singular event in 1887 as well as causing a containing wall to be built around the square for purposes of crowd control also anticipated the rise of the unskilled casual worker as a mighty social force, facilitating eventually the spread of anarcho-syndicalist ideas. It was a watershed, at once both an expression of the readiness of the casual poor to riot "apropos de rien" as Engels somewhat disparagingly said, and an anticipation of the mass unionism to come which syndicalists and later, employer led proponents of industrial unionism were to favour. (Another seminal event, the London Dock Strike of 1889 took place two years later.) And however limited syndicalist ideology is, it did implant still relevant questions like the destruction of the State which Bolshevism was to smother. Ultimately it won the battle, though both shared a common outlook regarding the notion of a revolutionary elite as an organised, generative force. And without doubt the main beneficiary of the March 31st Poll Tax riot were the anarchists.

The demonstration, which was 250,000 strong (though many newspapers and the B.B.C., like some latter day East European fix put it at 40,000) was, as stated at the beginning, outside of Labour Party or T.U.C. control, though the the Militant Tendency (Trotskyite entryists into the Labour Party) claimed to have played a major part in organizing and "leading" this splendid rabble without leaders. However this blatant hijacking was, for once, a serious cause of embarrassment to them. Ever anxious to demonstrate they're in complete command (which "democratic centralism" implies) McNally, one of their leaders went on T.V. to say Militant would hold an internal enquiry and "punish those responsible" as if they were known Militant members! In fact, stewards, related most likely to Militant in some capacity, tried to discipline the demo but were met with derision. Once the heavy 10 hours of rioting broke out they were nowhere to be seen.

In the aftermath, the press and others who deputize for the bourgeoisie, as is their wont when faced with a spontaneous explosion, tried to find out who was responsible for "planning" the riot. The result was free publicity on prime time T.V. for anarchist groups like Class War, Black Flag anarcho-syndicalists and the anarchist 121 Bookshop in Brixton, beyond their wildest expectations. Their newspaper sales are set to receive a massive boost. Much to their chagrin the Trotskyist S.W.P. and Militant were almost totally ignored. No free promo this time for them! A few weeks previously the skirmishing and riots around Town Halls, particularly in the S.E. of England, had given them a notoriety out of all proportion to their actual influence. This unexpected resurgence of Bolshevism - the harvesting of innocents - had been a depressing spectacle. Young, naive working class kids could be seen buying copies of the Militant newspaper on the paved forecourts of shopping malls as though it was some kind of fanzine for hooligans. Of course, one knew it would not be easy to carry out a Leninist conversion on the road to a 21st century Finland Station on these kids. But just one -or two- might have gone on to read Lenin's useless pamphlets all over again. Workers of the World Unite around all the false alternatives to capitalism!

But all this free publicity was for publicity by publicity. At no point did it divert, undermine the mode of publicity.. And in failing to realize this (the simple-minded "Freedom" gave it their unqualified approval) most anarchists are as retarded as the Trotskyists. There is bound to be an increase in those anarchist papers like "Class War" that are desperate for publicity and would like nothing better than to be involved in circulation wars with Murdoch's "Sun" whenever there is a lull in the class war. Andy Murphy of Class War went on T.V. to publicly condone the violence, saying that the main aim of Class War at the demonstration was to sell as many papers as possible. That the violence

was defended and applauded was all to the good but it was a case of media martyrdom if ever there was one because Murphy was suspended from his job in Hackney Council's finance dept. almost immediately. However, Hackney Council workers have, it appears, gone out on strike in his support. There seems to be some confusion about the details but it is a heartening response because if the Council is allowed to victimize one loud-mouthed media hound it could use the precedent to persecute others responsible for more subversive activities. Of all papers, "The Economist" (7th April '90) quoted another Class War warrior from Manchester as saying: "The left under Thatcher have been really bankrupt of ideas---Class War is really spot-on for the 90s in targeting the market (sic)". For sale, anarchy for the masses! Are bricking and this business-like phraseology necessarily separate? Obviously there is an influential rump in Class War that can live with the contradiction.

Of course, the anarchists generally were as little responsible as any other "organised" group or tag for the outcome even though, like everyone else they got stuck in. In fact, the pervasive atmosphere on the demonstration was a certain well-intentioned, woolly-minded but splendidly angry "anarchism" had one wished to question more closely the views of the participants, who were swept along by events in any case, affirming the ideology most appropriate to the flow of action. But, above all, the atmosphere on the riot was wholly non-sectarian and everyone was a friend so to speak.

But it's worth saying the best banners were not the traditional red and black banners but those that took the piss and provoked laughter like: "Class War rent-a-mob. On Tour" or "We want Robin Hood again" held aloft by a few 40 something, buxom, down-to-earth ladies from Liverpool. (Did the expressive elan of these banners directly influence the insurgent prisoners in the days after - e.g. prisoners transferred from riot torn Dartmoor jail appeared on the roof of Cardiff jail, which just happened to go up, holding a banner saying "Dartmoor boys on tour".) However, in the days following March 31st, it was apparent anarchism had suddenly acquired on the streets a hip character and had been invested with a new meaning which the music biz. from the late 70s onward had vested of all content. To call oneself an anarchist was the latest chat-up gambit - a promise of eros and wild deeds to come.

The actuality of the great potlatch of the temple of consumption was qualitatively different from earlier millenarian anarchist currents with a destructive edge. Then it was still possible to regard commodity production as having a latent use value and incendiarism, leaving aside the exemplary burning of churches and the like, as more a method of struggle than an end in itself - e.g. the sabotaging of machinery, railway engines etc. But in a world hurtling towards extinction like ours, because of the raving over-development of the capitalist mode of production reflected in this and every other Toytown, any class motivated attack on it that leaves nothing but waste for waste behind it, is both life-enhancing and life-saving.



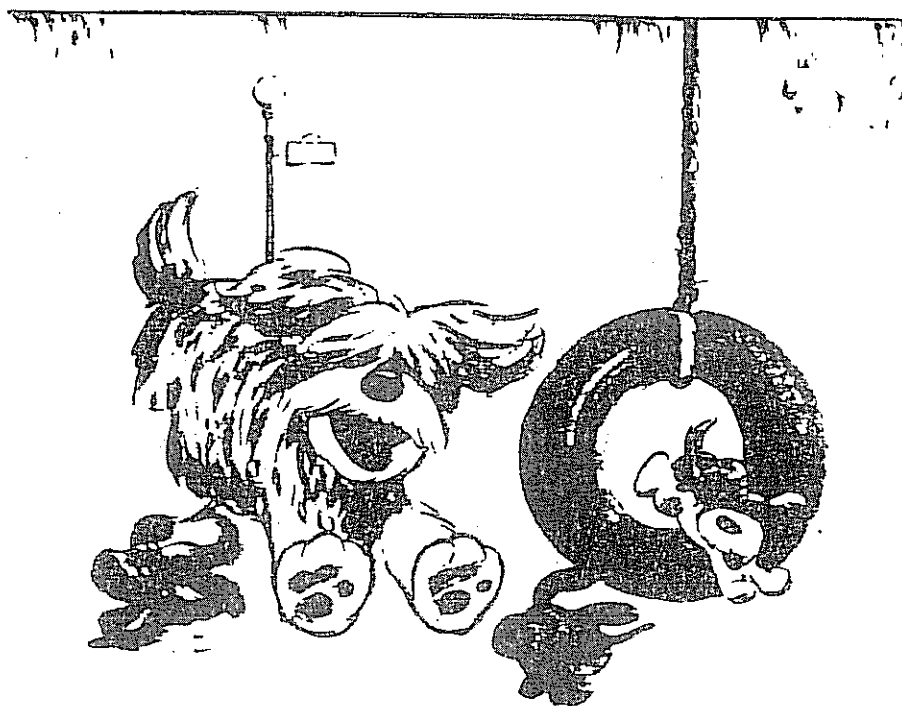
The Militant Tendency and the S.W.P. Trotskyists seemed very phased by the whole affair. The report in "Socialist Worker" (S.W.P.) didn't get the feel of the occasion - the sheer beauty of it - and, as usual, it was cagey about smashed shop windows, burnt cars and looting. Same old song. Militant continued with the shitty attitudes it had adopted towards rioters after the earlier Poll Tax battles in Bristol and London. A Militant Tendency "leader" of the Anti Poll Tax Federation, Tony Sheridan said he would have "no qualms" about "informing the police" about any rioters the Federation could identify. After all Militant has gone so far as to read out loud the names of anarchists at local Poll Tax meetings knowing police informers would be present. The Trots are now in a bit of a fix like the Labour Party. If Militant (or related types) don't organize another demo in a few weeks time they're likely to be outflanked by anarchists or, even more de-stabilizing for them, their own suppressed fears of the "lunatic fringe" sweeping all before it. They're frightened of this social id most of all and desperately wish the whole anti Poll Tax campaign be one of pacifist civil disobedience. Rubbished by the media they in turn resort to their own disgusting rubbishing. But something most unusual is now beginning to happen----

The media rubbishing of the Militant Tendency and the S.W.P. was fairly generally spread throughout the tabloids. However, the scoop on Scargill, president of the National Union of Miners and Bolshevik fellow traveller came from within the Kinnockite tendency in the Labour Party. For several days this story was splashed all over the "Daily Mirror" by Murdoch's arch rival media magnet, the Labour supporting Robert Maxwell. It was alleged Scargill had taken money from Libya during the miners strike to pay off his mortgage. The allegation is unlikely to stick and besides has been public knowledge, had one cared to look, since last summer. Why then make such a big fuss about it now. Because the real aim, at all costs, must be to put a stop to a re-birth of the "left" within the Labour Party, thus damaging Labour's electoral chances. Yet, inspite of all the trouble around Town Halls and the Battle of Trafalgar, Labour's lead in the opinion polls has not markedly suffered. In recent weeks some opinion polls have given Labour a staggering lead which, if an election was held now, would result in a bigger landslide than 1945. But it's all so volatile reflecting that those at the sharp end are running in all directions at once, forever sidestepping the revolutionary superceding of being an electorate at all and highlighting one of the major contradictions of autonomous responses in the U.K.: impressively lusty in action but weak in the head.

Despite Kinnock being the dictatorial pretender to Thatcher's throne (though to be fair, the P.M.'s dictatorial veto goes back to the Restoration of 1688, where the crown-in-parliament resumed overthrown monarchical absolutism) he - or the Kinnockites - cannot any longer use the argument that cutting up untidy is electorally ruinous. Kinnock on present form, like Thatcher, is incapable of controlling the forces now set in motion. His brand of authoritarianism has become as much a liability as Thatcher's. Using the tabloid press as judge, jury and executioner of the "left" was worth a try but this time it was hopelessly ineffectual. But it had been very effective in the past.

The main thrust of the secret services (M15/6) campaign from the mid 70s onwards, initially emanating from N.Ireland had been to use the tabloids as a mud slinging device in the hope some of the slurs and innuendo would stick. It was, basically, tabloid terrorism (rather than trial by radio and T.V.) playing on the puerile fears of a sub-cultural libertarianism/libertinism and militant trade unionists. It was extremely banal but it did influence popular attitudes. In fact the strong suspicion the secret services were responsible for a number of assassinations was probably secondary to the success of this campaign which culminated in Mrs. Thatcher's election victory in 1979. The exceptions are possibly the Birmingham pub bombings in '74, the assassinations of Lord Mountbatten, Hilda Murrell (said to have possessed important evidence on the sinking of the Belgrano which detonated the Falklands/Malvinas war) and Airey Neave (the top secret service agent who masterminded Thatcher's election to leader of the Tory Party in the mid 70s .) Neave did know, to put it metaphorically where all the bodies were buried and how the dirty tricks campaign emanating from N.Ireland, was orchestrated. Hey you career minded deadbeats out there here's your chance to write a best seller. Call it "Who killed Airey Neave?" Whether supposition or a fact that will in the future be proved, there seems little doubt something was going on we may never get to the bottom of. The important point here is that tabloid terrorism is ceasing to be effective. Like Saatchi and Saatchi its credit rating is going down.

Paradoxically, the dirty tricks dept. could strike a blow for "liberty" this time if the situation in the U.K. threatens to get out of hand. Should Mrs Thatcher chain herself to parliamentary dispatch box and refuse to step down as P.M., incontrovertible evidence of her involvement in, say, the Belgrano affair or Westlands could suddenly see the light of day. The dirty tricks dept could easily find itself in the unenviable position of having to choose between the lesser of two evils: either weaken the State and be damned, or risk seeing it disintegrate and be doubly damned. And it would be some time before a reconstituted bourgeoisie would be strong enough to really crack the whip once more.



It is hard to believe the bourgeoisie will allow such a political collapse to take place and risk unleashing the pent-up grievances of the past decade. But change is in the air. The Tory Party is undoubtedly facing a crisis destined to shake it to its foundations. The only comparable juncture that springs to mind is when Sir Robert Peel repealed the Corn Laws in the 1840s. This was an attempt to assimilate the weaker aspects of Chartism to a pro-industrial "cultural revolution" that involved the Tory Party in becoming the representative of the rising industrial bourgeoisie firstly and the landed interest secondly. Because of the threat posed by the working class it was a compromise solution that stopped half way. Fearing to ram home its economic supremacy at the level of State and Society, it ceded its political aspirations to the old land-owning aristocracy. Content to play a politically subaltern role, the industrial bourgeoisie lost by degrees over the next century and a half even its economic authority. At the time of the repeal of the Corn Laws, the young Tory "radical" Disraeli was already at work on his novel "Sybil or the Two Nations" (1845). This astute piece of fictionalized political pamphleteering - there is nothing comparable, particularly in its sympathetic depiction of mill workers and northern coalfields, amongst today's Tory dissidents, who face a similar crisis - was an attempt to consecrate the different interests of workers and capitalists within a social whole ruled over by a culturally re-awakened aristocracy whose place was at the helm of State, not on their country seats. The emphasis in the novel is upon difference becoming a key feature of Disraeli's "One Nation (know your place) Toryism". This difference was kept within bounds by cultivating the "higher sphere" of monarchy worship, ritual and romance of Empire and was contingent upon a far greater economic incorporation of the working class. The concretization of Disraeli's original vision was also made possible by growing civic unitary authorities and monopoly tendencies within Victorian capitalism. However, until the late 1960s, it was a model of corporatism that was never seriously challenged. The wave of nationalisation following World War II, as well as being a drab, utilitarian expediency favoured by Labour's we-know-what's-best-for-you bureaucratic machine, also underpinned paternal, aristocratic anti-market senti-

ments forming a continuum with "One Nation Toryism" and beyond. Remember how that one nation Tory, the elderly Harold Macmillan (former P.M. in the 50s), vehemently attacked Mrs. Thatcher's privatisation program describing it as selling of the "nation's silver". The intellectual counterpart to this headmasterly model of nationalisation were men like G.B. Shaw, successor to the anti-democratic temper of Coleridge, Carlyle, Ruskin etc. as it was transposed into the labour movement. To compare this attitude to Lenin's is fundamentally wrong because Lenin did reluctantly admit the working class on its own did take steps towards its own emancipation, which Lenin of course, once given the opportunity, brutally repressed. Rather it treats the mass as an odious rabble, destined to remain so in the absence of any enlightened provision and direction from above (i.e. State control of the means of production). Nationalisation in Britain, while affording greater economic control, on the socio/cultural plain was about the cultivation of elites and only secondarily a mass program.

It was the Tories who were the first to evolve this specifically British corporatism linking ancient and modern, and it was they who were the first to perceive (within the party political framework) how this consensus had been dashed to the ground by the waves of revolt in the late 60s. Tory PM Heath's "Selsdon Man" was, in essence, an anticipation of Thatcherism. But, some four years after '68, this entrepreneurial Frankenstein had been made to appear like a remote ancestral primate, defeated by the massed forces of miners and dockers in particular. After a brief period under Labour of unstable corporatism - especially evident in the disastrous "Social Contract" - this monster was given the kiss of life by the incoming Thatcher government in 1979. The paradox of Thatcherism is that in paying obeisance to the past it also desecrated it, viewing class oppression as a failure of enterprise (or enterprise). Not knowing its place any longer, the working class, especially the skilled working class seized assets rather than offices, factories and shops etc. Endeavouring to get rich quick, an exaggerated posture of meanness stifled the unhappiness within, and sort to ward off the fear without.

Accompanying this change in the scales of deference was a shift in politico, artistic emphasis. The Eng. Lit./Society link (the Victorian poet and educational ideologue Matthew Arnold, beloved Culture i.e. a predominately literary culture, "seeks to do away with classes", a view which was not the same thing as abolishing class society) was severed, the privatisation program signifying the dismantling of a broader corporatism enshrining a literary romantic conservatism. Thatcher had used the advertising media successfully in her first election campaign, transforming advertising into a political creed, a way of life, and stimulating, particularly through the privatisation campaigns, the industry's growth. The typically dispersed nature of the industry - small workshops offices, out working - frequently was cited as an argument against nationalisation and its workforce therefore adjudged uninterested in "socialism" - to use an irredeemable word covered in the cobwebs of yesterdays mistakes and favoured therefore by our rulers. (It was astonishing the degree to which the left yuppies of 'Marxism Today', tail-ending Thatcher and imagining themselves so enlightened went along with the malignant equation nationalization = "socialism"). Concern over rising levels of illiteracy in the 80s was also a screen behind which a greater drama was being played out.

The Labour Party, though slow to shed its fustian image, towards the end of the decade began to catch up in leaps and bounds. Though losing by a wide margin the '87 election, the Labour Party was widely held to have won on "presentation" - meaning presentation of images, not arguments. Mimicking Thatcher, Labour's auto-critique of nationalisation terminated in the triumph of political image making orchestrated by Peter Mandelson, who had a background in advertising. It was not done in the interest of furthering autonomy - nor could it have been. Rather it was a blatantly authoritarian transformation that used modern day media to create an endless party political broadcast. In this seamless world of perpetual smiles and photo opportunities, real life was not allowed to intrude, even in the shape of hecklers or awkward questions from the floor. Nothing must be allowed to disturb the creation of the dream machine. All that was permitted were admiring, adoring spectators transfixed to the spot by their screen idol and future P.M. Neil Kinnock. This celluloid image of the great protector was rather different to Thatcher's projection of herself as the "snow queen" in 1983, which coming after the Falklands war suggested something unearthly of enormous chastening power.

Labour's uneven showing in London in the May local elections has strengthened the party's media centrism. Labour's headquarters believe it was a failure to get "the message across" that caused it to lose local Councils like Brent and Ealing, proposing to set up a "centralized election directorate" (note Labour does not shrink from using such terms) with special responsibility for London. The post has been described as a "Mandelson for London", a reference to the party's national communications director. The main purpose is to crackdown on Labour councillors who are encouraging people not to pay the Poll Tax, further proof of how up to a point former cherished notions like the freedom to dissent have no place whatsoever in today's reconstructed Labour Party.

But in the shadows beyond the T.V. lights, even the Kinnockite Labour Party is at work on policy documents which are an admission major constitutional changes are now necessary. Though shrinking from proportional representation and a written constitution, they are a response to the challenge posed by Charter 88, proposing to abolish the House of Lords and substituting a kind of "Senate" elected by some system of proportional representation. This second chamber could block for the life of a parliament, any legislation which affected fundamental "rights". True to type, the Labour Party can still only admit realities by effectively denying them. However their "no" does not mean a "yes" necessarily, because the House of Lords has periodically been threatened with abolition by the Labour Party, precisely to let off steam. It may be the same again but this time the pressure cooker is likely to burst.

The Labour Party also envisages a Scottish Parliament as part of a more federal solution to the growing dominance of Whitehall, which has increased immeasurably over the past ten years. However it fails to appreciate how this spring is set to uncoil in unanticipated directions. When the idea of a Scottish Parliament was first seriously floated in the 70s, disgruntlement rapidly spilled over into the English regions - not to mention Wales. There were even somewhat cranky demands for a Northern Parliament which weren't really taken seriously. Then, however, federalism came to nothing, partly because Scotland did not get independence as a result of Labour removing the goal posts' in a referendum. More importantly, federalism implied an increase in bureaucracy, even though of a devolved type. And at that time, the anti-bureaucratic after-glow of '68 was still strong enough to dissuade. Who wanted another expensive tier of bureaucracy staffed with a bunch of careerist assholes? Now, after ten years of harsh rule from the centre, it is a vastly different matter. People, particularly outside of London and the South East, desperately want a hedge, any kind of hedge, against the Whitehall machine, and will clutch at anything going. Thatcherism, after appearing to put a stop to such centrifugal tendencies, may have just given them that extra, final push.

Amidst this uneven championing of one fraction of the bourgeoisie against another, the "Winter of Discontent" in '78/'79 was a further confirmation that the U.K. was falling apart along the lines that ultimately mattered: class lines. Though initiated within the trade union framework, the TU bureaucracy could do little else but look on helplessly, as this elemental movement gathered force. Only to be followed a year and a half later in the Summer of '81, by unprecedented nation-wide rioting. But since, given the weaknesses and hesitations of our side, for the past 10 years a quintessentially English authoritarianism has been imposed, full of quirks that defy comparison, just as Orwell predicted somewhere it would be. Now it is mortally wounded, neither of the two main political parties have any idea how murderous people below have become, full of a bitter disregard for the fate of anyone connected with the ancien regime. When Pete Fuller, the art historical snarling lapdog of Thatcherism, was killed in a car crash, the reaction was "one bastard less". Having survived one violent storm after another throughout the 80s, Thatcher has paradoxically reinforced Labour's sense of its own impregnability. Retreating into the inner-world of screen images, policy documents "are little noticed, rarely discussed" ("The Economist", April 28. '90).

This colossal degree of unpreparedness suggests that political parties will be temporarily sidelined by an explosion from below. But for how long? The coming period of promising turbulence will most likely throw up a largely social democratic and Euro-federalist ideology, wanting what already exists in Europe - echoes of E. Europe, but unlike in E. Europe it will not be inhibited by the ideology of "communism", i.e. State

Capitalism, and reach beyond the State, Law, Culture, Private Property and Money. These notions can when spelt out in abstract terms induce fear because many people, who are by no means reactionary, see them as an extension of some of the worst aspects of bourgeois society - utter destitution, a complete lack of justice etc. Yet when they go on the offensive in their daily lives they are reaching towards these things without realizing what are the ultimate consequences of their actions.



In the crises that's developing all manner of help will be needed to contain the social forces that let rip. The eventual goal of these politicians in waiting, such as Charter 88, is a more modern European type of inter-class corporatism, one that emphasizes "rights" and a written constitution, citizens not subjects. Its "semi-autonomous" manipulative inter-party status may permit it to get close to and deflect attempts at a genuine autonomy (expressed through open assemblies combining strikers/unwaged etc, riots that turn into a local expression of genuine, revocably mandated, local democracy) because these demands have an understandably seductive appeal, especially after ten years of trashing by Thatcher and her mob who proclaim "parliamentary sovereignty" in order to undermine all opposition. Those lists published in the newspapers by Charter 88, bearing the signatures of the famous, self-serving public appearances with the opportunistic Vaclav Havel (presently the world's favourite pastiche of integrity ironizing role playing in order to conserve roles) could yet give it a broadly based "radical" snob appeal, given the right circumstances. A genuinely radical movement must, of course, call for an end to the culture of celebrities. And as for the stupid office of President!!

But if Charter 88 continue to praise the American constitution, as one of their leading members, the Caribbean born Beverly Anderson does, it could prove their undoing. America has over the past decade, even more so than Britain, experienced a vast redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich, marking an end to a consensus that goes back to Roosevelt's New Deal. To argue that the American constitution "produces a public which is vigorously assertive even amongst the least privileged groups" (B. Anderson. "The Guardian" May 5th '90) is laughable in the extreme. The "right" to eat out of, and live in a trashcan, the fate of the "least privileged" in America is a terrible wrong and most people here will not be blinded by such appeals. On the contrary, it will put them on the defensive, haunted as they are by the desolation of Cardboard City which smoulders in the back of the mind like the Cinder Heap did in the 19th century.

But is the Labour Party going to fracture like the Tory Party? Its foot dragging over the E.E.C. has turned into a positive commitment but they show little sign of getting to grips with or even appreciating what E.M.U. or a national European Bank means in terms of this country eventually. Because Britain is not like other European countries. At the heart of the economy there is a major structural disequilibrium between finance and industrial capitalism, the former an "off shore" superpower that overarches the rest of the economy, the latter a third rate laggard. Foreign perceptions of "Englishness" are, in the very last analysis based on this contradiction- e.g. snobbery, grossly inflated monarchical pomp, "us" and "them", a fierce 19th Century working classism (the "social apartheid"), the system of ultra-elite Public Schools, Oxbridge. A "second industrial revolution" to overcome this damaging economic split has periodically cast its shadow over the U.K. in the last 100 years. Joseph Chamberlain's system of tariffs and "imperial preference" at the turn of the century, designed to shelter British industry from mainly German and American competition, was one such attempt within the status quo. (Ironically it encouraged the growth of a parasitic rentierism and industrial complacency. The workers occupation in the early 70s of "Imperial Typewriters", a firm whose protected market had got confirmed its passing). Another came from Hobson, the famous critic of imperialism, who argued for an extension of democracy as an essential prerequisite for just such a change. It's time has now inescapably come steeled by the quite unnecessary industrial devastation caused by the dogmatic mishandling of the recession of '80/'82 (which even the Bank of England was unhappy about), and the fact that in the rest of Europe, finance and industry are much more closely tied together. But this overhaul implies something of an earthquake in Britain. It is not just a question of economic short termism typical of the unregulated London market, as Labour insists it is. This crass economic reductivism ignores how it threatens to bring down the whole creaking, quasi-divine, immemorial superstructure founded on it, and whose roots spread so far. No wonder the major political parties recoil in horror from it. And Mrs. Thatcher at least has the merit of honesty when she insisted that increased European integration would destabilize the Monarchy.

(It must be stressed the Monarchy in Britain is different from other European monarchies. Immeasurably wealthier, it is more than a ritual appendage of the State as are other European monarchies, setting the seal of something approaching divinity on the ordering of U.K. society. The Royal touch pretends to heal social division, graces "public enquiries" (Royal Commissions) and makes the body well, if the number of Royal Infirmaries dotted throughout the country is anything to go by. Pressure from a radical bourgeois restructuring of U.K. society could fracture the traditional form of the Monarchy, forcing the Queen to abdicate in favour of her son. Charles III may then have to lampoon his way into European modernity, in order to thwart a much more far-reaching social movement, using, among other things, his supposedly "left leaning" condemnations of high rise dwellings for the working class - which for quite some time could prevent him ending up like Charles I).

A smooth transition never would have been easy. Now with social tensions running so high and the State visibly getting weaker, exacerbated by Thatcher's chronic obduracy on all fronts, the problem, particularly in future for the Labour Party, is how to corral a social movement into a force for industrial renewal. This was, in all essentials, Peel's problem. It is also ours - or rather theirs.

William Keegan, an interventionist economics journalist, who previously drew all his strength from hating Thatcher in a subdued article in "The Observer" (April 29.'90.) - now she's on the way out, his aura of phoney radicalism is going with it - asked if industry could be made attractive. His notion of attractiveness referred to the enormous salary differential that existed between the City and Industry but the word inevitably conjures up a much wider expanse. Finance had acquired during the 80s something more than mere glamour. It was a kind of stylistic totality. But now can industry ever again arouse a visionary Futurist dynamic, full of life-enhancing promise with even a sub, latter-day Mayakovsky to sing its praises? The answer is no, a thousand times no. The bulk of the proletariat have never, will never merge their interests with those of industrial capitalism, especially with the world threatening to become a dead planet because of industrial pollution and unconstrained consumerism. How, then, politically incorporate the proletariat

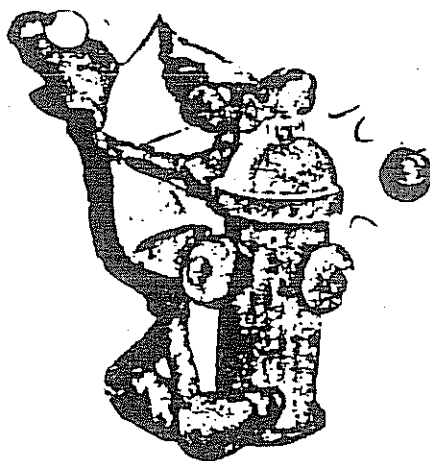
into the task of industrial reconstruction/exploitation? The only way to sugar this toxic pill is to advertise what's on offer in the E.E.C. in the shape of the Delors Plan, the much vaunted "Social Charter". Which is what the Labour Party has been doing, though somewhat innocently and the T.U.C. inviting Frere Jacques to speak at its annual conference in 1989. This was in a period of comparative stability however, but a social explosion now will not only demand the restoration of welfare rights but in all probability go on to extend them in unheard of ways. Not knowing where to stop it could go well beyond the actual content of the "Social Charter" which is still gloriously unclear. An inspired misinterpretation promises to have a wrecking effect on Europe also, particularly where the "Charter" tries to get round the right to claim dole and work but accepts the need to subsidise part-time, casual employment.

There has been talk the "Social Charter" will guarantee on an E.E.C. wide basis "collective bargaining rights" and a right to worker representatives on the boards of firms employing over 200 people. (Conceding these "rights", it goes without saying, does not mean capital is running scared. The fact Thatcherites cannot accept them is further proof of their terrifying obscurantism). However, if a study by the "Institute of Employment Rights" published in March '90 is correct, enforcing these rights is to be left to individual governments arguing that the Charter, is a "sign post of social progress" though "remarkable" (sic) for its handling of such subjects as equal treatment for both sexes at work, vocational training and protection for part-time workers. It would be rather odd if the latter were given E.E.C. wide guarantees while the bulk of the fully employed working class in the U.K. were not. This is simply asking for trouble. After well over five years of mass sackings (Silentnight in Barnoldswick, Fleet St printers and ancillary staff employed by Murdoch, P and O seafarers at Dover etc) many workers desperately want a constitutional guarantee of the right to strike replacing the common law right which could be taken away on the whim of a judge - as it was with the now famous 1903 Taff Vale ruling. Effectively abolishing the right to strike, this decision has been a factor in souring industrial relations ever since. It produced an ever vigilant, disenfranchised class aggressiveness, as though one had no right to exist, so typical of the U.K. and inspiring oratorical shafts like "what a judge knows about life could be written on the back of a postage stamp". This seething desire for revenge on a system which closes its eyes to mass sackings will be of major importance in the coming period. However, in promoting the "Social Charter" the T.U.C. is obviously looking forward to the day when it can take up a more active role in the State, albeit a Eurofederal State. In particular it would like to be given the powers to more persuasively control variable capital (wages), and that part of inflation which comes from spiralling wage costs.

The gradual erosion of welfare rights has been a major factor in drumming people into Thatcherite conformity, squeezing them back into a cut and dried obedience. By abolishing earnings related benefit at the beginning of her first term in office, she forced many skilled workers to become reluctant entrepreneurs. Learning to love Big Sister through this painful initiation rite was only successful so long as the economy boomed, and popular capitalism confused the identity of the proletariat, massive stock market flotations producing, in theory, a rentierism for the working man and woman. In the last six months in particular, this distorted class optic has become properly focussed once more as mortgage rates have risen and property prices fallen, combined with acute fears for the N.H.S., the Poll Tax and a host of other things. Even a Stock Exchange/Treasury survey published in March 1990 had to admit that about thirty years ago individuals owned more than half of the Stock Market. Now they own just 20%, considerably less even than the 28% at the start of the 1980s. After a sweeping privatization program without precedent in history during the 80s, this incredible fact takes some swallowing.

It would be plain daft to imagine these important class fractions, skilled workers and lower middle lower middle class or however you care to categorize them had been captured for the revolution. However this unexpectedly swift about turn, this collapse of former certainties means they are open to influence. Disillusioned and angry, they are ready to hit out, but not in a blind random way either. They have started to listen. As Labour recruits (or so the opinion polls tell us), they are not wholly dependable either. Having been tempted into "thinking the unthinkable" for several years by the Thatcherite monetarist revolution of everyday life, they could now start to dream of the possible . Because a solid block of dissatisfaction, quite breathtaking in its sweep now exists.

The curiously inconclusive article in "The Economist" (7th April 1990) cited earlier in relation to Class War seems to want to say something it daren't bring itself to say. And that is the Labour Party has moved to far to the right for the good of capitalism. That task of dousing and institutionalizing the flames of revolt must be the job of the Labour Left gathered around Tony Benn. The Tories accused the 30 non-paying Poll Tax, Labour M.Ps' of giving encouragement to rioters. This ridiculous attitude will only compound party political paralysis leaving the field open to more radical solutions. After all, had not Tony Benn been a target of Class War's "Bash the Rich" campaigns. And his broad church approach embracing charities, pensioners organisations and black groups is not without limits. "Anyone who wants to bung bricks at the pulpit will not be welcome at Sheffield in May", the article concluded. At this conference, the biggest shake-up of party structures since the party constitution was revised in 1818 by Sidney Webb and Arthur Henderson is to be proposed. The first conference of this type proposing a broad regrouping of the "Left" met in Chesterfield just after the October crash of '87. It was temporarily forgotten about as the immediate consequences of the crash failed to materialize. But by October '88 it was impossible to disguise the devastation the precipitate lowering of interest to ease liquidity, had produced. Together with the incredible tax breaks for the rich in the '88 budget, part of the liquidity package, this sent the economy OTT. And with every bank interest rate rise followed by a rise in mortgage costs (house owners in Britain being more literate about the consequences of international capital flows than ever before), the Tories dream of a popular capitalism turned into a popular nightmare. (Many demonstrators on the big, March 31st anti-Poll Tax demo were keenly aware of the vulnerability of the British State and were hoping their massed presence alone, never mind a riot, would provoke a run on sterling and a further 1% interest rate rise as hot money fled a country leveraged to the hilt. Alas, that weekend the Japanese Nikkei Dow registered its second biggest fall in history, temporarily taking the pressure off sterling).



The Poll Tax involves the social whole and not just the rights of workers to strike, like the early 70s Industrial Relations Act and subsequent anti-strike legislation. The first visible indication of what mass non-payment will do is likely to come from Scotland. Here the campaign against the tax has so far been marked by a relative absence of generalised violence probably because Scotland, for a variety of reasons, is much more corporatist in outlook than England. The ownership of wealth does not rule out "civic obligations" to the same degree as in England. And civil society - an awkward contradictory term to be sure - has not been pulverized to the point where an old woman crossing the road is fair game to many a BMW driver in southern England in particular. This atmosphere of free-for-all is undoubtably a factor in creating the amazing outbursts of destructive fury that England has witnessed over the past decade; a fury that both reflects and is a protest against the existence of social violence. But Scotland could equally arrive at the same point through other means because of the effectiveness of the Can't Pay, Won't Pay campaign. Should the local State fall apart, the essential services will have to be run according to different criteria (rotational home-helps, garbage dumped in rich areas etc) and reaching beyond the category of wage labour and money.

Arising from the decision not to pay the Poll Tax a remarkable drift is occurring: why pay any bill seems to be the implication. Forget water rates or rather the inflation-plus bills sent out by the newly privatised water companies. From the young to the very old, tending even to cut across social class, it is the same story. At the very least, don't pay until the bill falls due because the money, once banked, will only yield extra profits for the damned company. This growing refusal to pay must nurture within it a critique of money. But time will tell. Suffice to end with a few rough and ready comments.

Poll Taxes in the U.K. seem to awaken in the depths of the collective psyche such a bubbling cauldron of revolt that won't rest content until the whole fabric of alienated society is torn apart. The first Poll Tax precipitated the Peasants Revolt of 1381, even though the tax judging from existing receipts was limited, it seems, to a persons ability to pay unlike the present Poll Tax. Hampden's refusal to pay Ship Money, a head-count levy to build up the King's navy was a major factor in fomenting the English Civil War (1640-50) once Hampden's refusal spread everywhere. Interestingly enough, the revolt against the Ship Money began in Witney, Oxfordshire where, in early March 1640, 18 Tory councillors became the first grass roots Tories to rebel against the Poll Tax - an example which may have inspired many of the modish, get-with-it blue rinse brigade to consider doffing punk hair cuts and adopting rebellious attitudes.

Adam Smith inveighed against Poll Taxes seeing them as very scornful of the "security of the inferior ranks of the people" - and how right the man was! He added "In England the different poll taxes never produce the sums expected of them" being a prime example of a "bad tax" because "exposing people to the frequent and odious examination of the tax gatherers". For a government that treats Smith's work as holy writ not consulting him was a very odd oversight. Shades of lese-majeste .

Poll Tax has given all that unfocussed disquiet a centre. It's the point of contact in casual conversation at work, in pubs, at bus stops, super-market queues etc. It's a major factor in breaking down all the past decade of accumulating isolation and atomization setting a drift in motion. A couple in their late 30s began to talk to a frail pensioner in a shopping queue. Almost immediately the Poll Tax was brought up. "Are you going to pay the Poll Tax", they asked. "we aren't, they can't put us all in nick". The pensioner said he was exempt from payment. Helping him with his shopping basket they made a joke about prison, Winson Green in particular as they were from Birmingham - though never once referring directly to the prison riots. They recognised another pensioner in an adjacent queue and as she was a widow introduced her to the old boy saying, as they left, "see you under the miseltoe". The Poll Tax has also become a synonym for the rich as only they benefit from it. Everywhere one goes these days "the rich" are denounced almost in passing, as something that goes without saying.

The Poll Tax riot was magnificent, only to be eclipsed a day later on T.V. screens by the worst prison violence the U.K. has known this century at Strangeways jail in Manchester. Quite obviously the big Poll Tax riot was a factor in prisoners finally saying no to their conditions. At one point they even unfurled a banner that read "No Poll Tax" and the impromptu support group (surely unique in the annals of prison riots) outside the gutted jail sang the anti Poll Tax ditty. Strangeways has stood out among all the other April prison rebellions as the most inspiring the U.K. has known, one that caught the the public imagination which began to look on the prisoners not as "hardened criminals" but as comic turns. A fair proportion of people in the U.K. look on themselves as prisoners-on-leave, a psychological fact which reflects how deep the slave mentality is in this most untypical of "bourgeois" nations. The Poll Tax has significantly added to this feeling "we are all prisoners now": Hackney council has booked court time for weeks in the expectation of mass court appearances for non-payment. The antics of the rioters, many from Liverpool, ranging from the zany (playing with teddy bears, dressing up in chaplain's robes) to the downright cheeky (like when one of the prisoners appeared naked on the roof and started to take a shower in one of the hoses) subverted Liverpool's stage humour and theatrical tradition putting it into

a genuinely creative perspective, producing a frisson the former could not. No alternative comedian could equal the subversive humour of these cons who diverted the media's hunger for the sensational in such unforgettable ways. It was like a silent movie come to life with placards replacing subtitles, oscillating between the recklessness of a Harold Lloyd and the nerve of Cool Hand Luke. Inescapably it was a riveting comment on the satiation produced by capitalism's endless variety show. In fact, the sense of theatre in the big Poll Tax riot was noted by one T.V. news reporter who described a West End theatre audience as having "come to see Shirley Valentine. Instead the drama outside leaves them wondering". Though nothing subversive was meant by this remark it somehow seemed more pertinent than "revolutionaries" straight take with the T.V. cameras, accepting face to face interviews with reporters.



Brendon O'Freil, the governor of Strangeways had described the prison riot as an "explosion of evil". At the time it looked to be merely a face-saving rationalization, that pandered to Surburbia and the like. Later it emerged that O'Freil really did think that the drama played out at Strangeways represented a metaphysical "battle between good and evil" adding that one explanation for the violence was an attack by evil forces following the success of a Christian mission the previous year when 200 out of 1,600 inmates made a "commitment to Christ". In terms of hysterical ranting it easily equalled Manchester's top cop, James Anderton who claims to regularly receive spiritual guidance in tracking down the wicked. The difference is Anderton makes no bones about being a reactionary whereas O'Freil claims to be an enlightened governor - a sign of just how cuckoo leading "public servants" (warders, railway managers etc) in the U.K. have become, losing any sense of reality.

Many people are reckoning on further big trouble coming soon to a place near you, saying a May '68 is in the air. This response has become so common even the "Economist" editorial of April 8th 1990 gave voice to it, pointing to the deepening alienation (sic) between the mass of the people and "government" (unfortunately it did not use the word State - that would be expecting too much.) A slow May, a long, long infinitely drawn out May perhaps, coming about joltingly, of disparate explosions everywhere, that influence one another but in a confused and distant manner as if ignorant of the others existence but which coheres into something rounder, bigger and more comprehensive that could be of world-wide significance.

On the demo/riot there were a number of placards linking Thatcher's name to the erstwhile dictators Hoenneker and Ceausescu. This is, however, a would-be dictatorship of the free market and its resemblance to Bolshevikh dictatorships merely incidental, pretty much as one dictatorial regime resembles another in certain key aspects. Still Britain in the past decade has come to resemble aspects of Orwell's 1984. One could for instance substitute "new speak" for Thatcher or "market speak", a language that also asserts at its most insane extreme $2+2=5$. There's a scrambling of all logic, even of the formal kind nevermind dialectical logic which was always a total anathema to these morons. They simply lack the wit to perceive how the self-evident truth of the "free" market turns, when examined, into its opposite, a centralized, politically manipulated system of bribes (e.g. the ridiculously low "market" valuations of nationalised companies to sweeten their sale thus boosting the stock market artificially.) Shades of E. European accountancy here surely, more crafty than inept. Or take the decision to possibly Poll tax cap all local councils announced on April 20th. This local soviet/supreme soviet tying together requires, in order to function smoothly a sort of pre-perestroika Russified bureaucrat the Soviet Union is presently struggling to purge in the name of the market.

MERELY CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING LUNACIES.

Example: To solve overcrowding on public transport these goons say it is necessary to raise fares thereby inevitably forcing people into private cars and onto an already choked motorway system costing capital billions because of delays.

Example: Obviously capital, in order to control inflationary wage demands needs to sharply increase unemployment because in the short term this has proven to be effective. Instead statistics, which have been grotesquely manipulated continue to show a decrease in unemployment when all evidence on the ground shows that unemployment is rapidly increasing. In the immediate future, the Dept. of Employment Job Centres are to be given agency status, a short step away from temping outfits like Kelly Girl and World of Work. This step and fetch it, amphetamine-driven management promises to bring unemployment down by 1½ million - virtually eliminating it - when more "rational" capitalists would like to see 1½ million added to the unemployment register.

Example: To further free the market, key industrial statistics are to be rubbed out. The government argues that less time need now be spent on form filling, thus stimulating industrial efficiency! This wholesale cutback includes figures on performance, productivity, market share and home demand. Far from affirming the "magic of the market" never fails, this piece of sorcery is a transparent attempt to suppress information, to hide the decline in manufacturing.

On a general level, the manipulation of statistics has been so outlandish under Thatcher, that some statisticians belonging to the Royal Statistical Society have formed a break-away group to demand a return to statistical verities. Given the role, statisticians have played in the suppression of truth, one can sneer. But even they, like us, find government claims unacceptable that purport to show that the incomes of the poorest 10% rose faster than average between '81 and '85 when in fact it rose less than half as fast. When the statistical "error" was exposed the government had no choice but to admit its "mistake".

Example: Thatcherism is entering its Marie Antoinette phase. Kenneth Clarke, Minister for Health, when told in Northumberland that at least 20% of hospital beds had been lost, replied "so what-a bed is just another piece of furniture". It's even been suggested recently by the Thatcherite Institute of Economic Affairs that the church should operate on a profit and loss basis and the clergy be put on a saving of souls bonus scheme. Was this a joke, a sign that Thatcherism had reached the stage of self-parody, a humorous parting shot before retiring gracefully? But no - it was meant in all seriousness.

A lot of revolutionaries from abroad looking at the U.K. from outside are gripped, from time to time, by its many and varied explosions. But once they try to live here for any length of time the sheer insanity of the place begins to get to them. Then like all those who have known nothing else, they ache to escape. The air smells of a lunatic asylum. But more interventionist forms of capital cannot tolerate much longer this system - never mind those at the sharp end of its pathologically unsocial policies.

An ex-pat friend in Berlin who escaped horror story U.K. keeps remarking on the similarities between now and pre-Civil War England. Wild and far-fetched....??

Are there any points of comparison between now and circumstances prior to the Civil War of 1640/50? On closer examination there are more than a few suggesting something other than mere coincidence.

The poor were subjected to increased indebtedness and a similiar squeeze, mainly through rising prices because of growing Crown monopolies on many basic essentials. Today, there is a similiar widespread feeling that prices have been allowed to rise in the newly privatized industries that enjoy a virtual monopoly, to boost profitability and premiums paid to their shareholders. There is - or has been - enormous, almost totalitarian pressure, put on people to convert to believing in the market. Over three hundred years ago the terrifying Archbishop Laud applied an even worse pressure on dissenters to conform. Now, though coming from the centre as formerly, it is a secular messianism diffused through several branches of the State, particularly education, which is more dumb-fuck than need be for the purposes of mis-education. Also, Charles 1st had, like Thatcher, no "mandate" in Scotland but continued to believe the situation could be reversed. His attempt to reimpose his authority led to a national revolt which aroused a broad sympathy in England. Indeed, Charles 1st humiliation at the hands of the Scots was a factor in critically weakening the State leading to the outbreak of Civil War. The parrallel does seem extraordinary.

The decision by John Hampden not to pay his Poll Tax (Ship Money) led to a general refusal to pay all taxes in 1639/40, prompting comparisons with the refusal of people, now, not to pay other bills (water rates etc) in addition to the Poll Tax. Similarities can also be drawn with the way in which the States' victims today are held in the greatest respect. There was financial corruption on a massive scale under Charles 1st just as there has been in the City in particular, during the 80s. Likewise, the most improbable people are driven to take a stand and there's a contemporary ring to Charles 1st pretence to defend the poor against predators - although this time it is not the rising bourgeoisie intent on seizing common lands, but rather the bureaucratic usurpers of the workers' movement with Thatcher nobly (sic) defending the interests of the rank 'n' file trade unionist. Similarly there's a rightist attack on the self-interested battery of 'caring' agencies, representing an absent community, the latter do not want made real. Moreover, all former securities centered on the village community were being undermined and the marginalization of the landless and propertyless, begun under the Tudors, was rolling-on unchecked. Substitute that for the dismantling of the Welfare State and -----



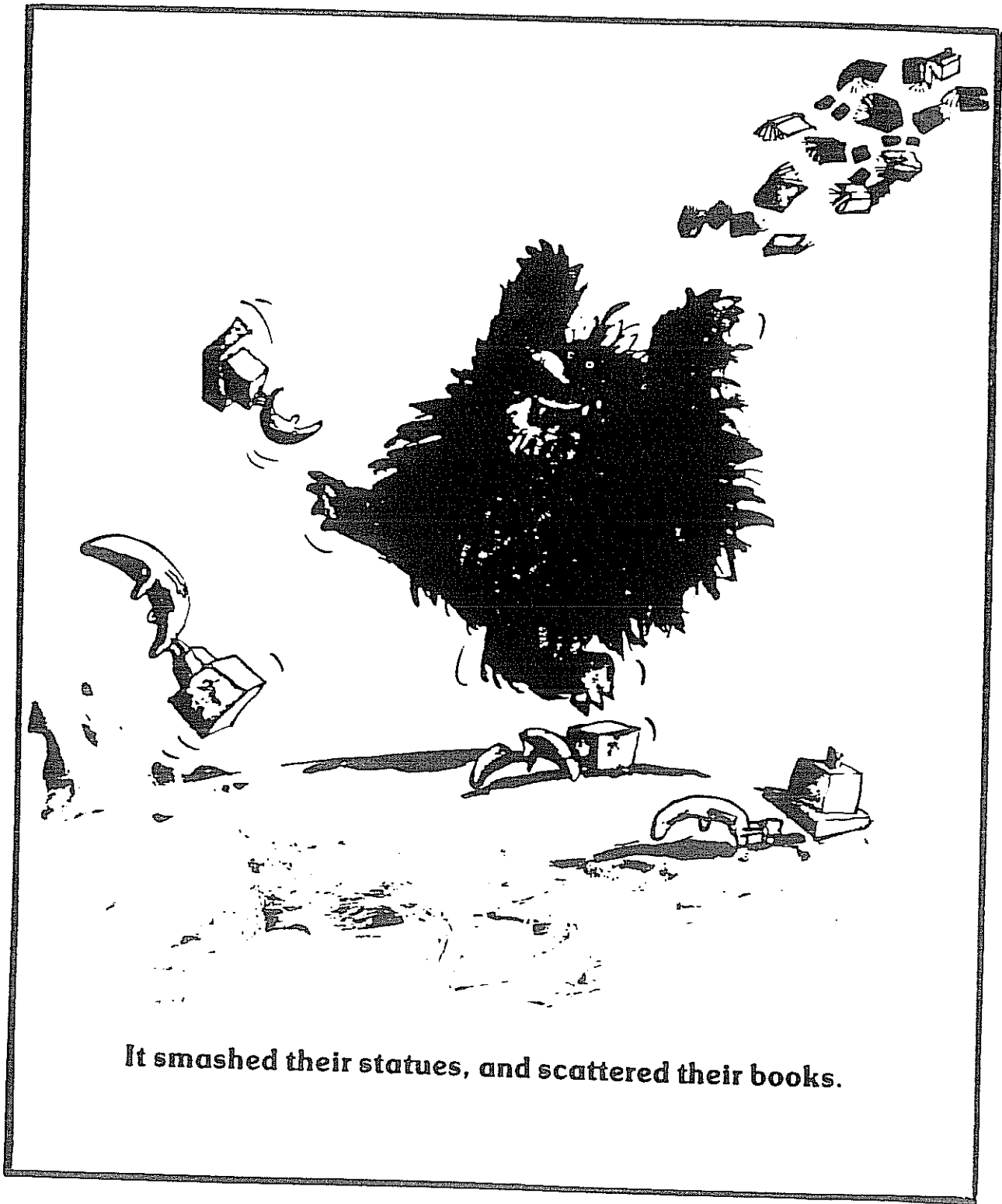
" The Toytown Revolutionaries" : Summer 1990.

(no apologies to Neil Kinnock for violently throwing this striking term back in his face).

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... but then, with a terrible roar,



It smashed their statues, and scattered their books.

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