

By Jeffrey Cox

LONDON

**H**ARDLY ANYONE IN BRITAIN BELIEVES THE Labour Party will win the recently announced June 11 general election. As recently as January, Labour ran the ruling Conservative Party a close race in the polls. But after a humiliating defeat in a March parliamentary special election, Labour began to lose ground to the centrist Social Democratic-Liberal Alliance. Now all the polls predict a new parliamentary majority for Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Some polls even show Labour coming in third. A strong showing in local elections this month further bolstered Conservative hopes.

As the British left faces up to the prospect of another five years of rule by Thatcher, many Labour supporters are asking what went wrong. Labour leader Neil Kinnock has tried hard to pull the party together since its disastrous 1983 defeat, and to persuade its warring right and left wings to agree to a campaign platform that emphasizes more spending on public works, education and health care. Every poll shows that voters care about those issues more than any others—and agree more with Labour policies than those of the other parties.

**Bomb in the polls:** Labour's non-nuclear defense policy, on the other hand, has hurt it in the polls. When it comes to scrapping all nuclear weapons, many traditional Labour voters stop short. The logic of "deterrence" is deeply entrenched in the minds of older and middle-aged voters who think in terms of Munich and the appeasement of Hitler. Other Labour supporters object to Britain's possession of every existing weapons system when asked about them one at a time, but become very nervous in the face of Labour's proposal to abandon all of them at once.

But Labour's recent slide in the polls cannot be blamed on its non-nuclear defense policy, which has been widely debated for several years and did not prevent Labour from leading the Conservatives a few months ago. There is great frustration in Britain, even among Conservative voters, about lack of progress in arms control. Chernobyl and the British-aided U.S. bombing of Libya have not been forgotten, and most British voters want U.S. cruise missiles out of their country. Labour is ahead of public opinion on this issue, but not so far ahead that they cannot win an election.

The best evidence that defense is not at the heart of Labour's problems lies in the rhetoric of their Conservative and Alliance opponents. Instead of attacking Labour unilateralism, the party's enemies and their allies in the popular press have been working overtime to exploit a deeply rooted wave of homophobia and racism in order to detach traditional Labour voters from their party.

**The "loony left":** The current code words in the practice of racial politics are "loony left," the phrase invariably used by the country's many right-leaning newspapers when describing the anti-racist policies of many Labour local governments, especially in and around London. These "loony" policies include affirmative action in hiring and contracting, purging school textbooks of racist images and funding voluntary agencies to promote the interests of black and Asian communities.

Although far from being extremist by U.S. standards, these policies have set off a fierce reaction. The popular newspapers daily accuse the Labour Party of everything from

## As general election draws close Labour's hopes slide away

banning the song "Baa Baa Black Sheep" in kindergartens to placing anti-racist "thought police" in classrooms to monitor teachers. By fostering the "loony left" issue, Conservative and Alliance politicians have been able to draw attention away from Labour's popular policies on employment, health care and education.

A second element of "loony leftism" is gay rights. A small number of Labour educational authorities promote positive images of gays

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and lesbians in school textbooks and sponsor educational programs for adolescents concerned about their sexual identity. This upsets many parents, including Pentecostalist West Indians and Pakistani Moslems who live mainly in Labour-dominated school districts. The controversy delights Conservative politicians, who never fail to introduce the word "homosexual" when discussing problems of local government.

Terrified into silence, Labour's national leadership has abandoned gay and lesbian Labour Party members to homophobia. With no defenders in the media or politics, gay and lesbian Labour politicians and officeholders put up with a steady round of verbal abuse and physical violence at public meetings, in the streets and even in their homes.

**One side to every story:** Without reading British newspapers every day, it is difficult to appreciate the right-wing bias of most of Britain's popular press. The widely read *Daily Mail*, for instance, has changed its attitude toward the left very little since the '30s, when it cheered on Hitler's attacks on German socialists and trade unionists. Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* attracts readers by

publishing photographs of bare-breasted pinups on the same page with lurid tales of homosexual politics in the Labour Party. Daily newspapers reach a larger percentage of the public in Britain than in the U.S. On the "loony left" issue they have demonstrated their ability to define the political agenda to Labour's disadvantage.

In one important respect, the Labour leadership has played into the hands of its headline-writing enemies this spring. Kinnock believes, and not without good reason, that a Labour victory requires him to distance himself from the left wing of his own party. But his struggle against the left has turned into an internal power struggle with a momentum of its own, and has been carried on far too long. On the eve of a general election, Kinnock's ongoing attempts to discipline and expel left-wingers have given the public the impression of a party divided and unfit to govern.

While the press has been attacking the Labour Party for "loony left" anti-racist and anti-homophobic policies, the Labour leadership has carried on a surprisingly bitter parallel campaign against those black leaders—especially black women—who advocate "black sections" within the Labour Party. The idea of a black caucus within the party hardly shocks a U.S. Democrat, but the Labour leadership has treated the idea as if it were, in the words of Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley, "the political equivalent of AIDS."

**The lost left:** These damaging divisions, and the opinion polls, are very discouraging for anyone in Britain who cares about nuclear disarmament or the future of socialism. In the heat of intraparty warfare, Kinnock's enemies on the left often overlook his firm

commitment to a non-nuclear defense policy. Socialists in the Labour Party always argue that the leadership should campaign to persuade the electorate of the wisdom of its policies rather than swaying with every opinion poll. The party has done precisely that with its non-nuclear defense policy. A Labour victory, combined with the very rapid evolution of Soviet defense and foreign policy, might create the first real opportunity to do something serious about slowing down the arms race.

In domestic policy, democratic socialists everywhere need practical demonstrations from the European socialist parties that show democratic politics and progress toward a socialist society are compatible. European socialism's record since World War II has not been very instructive.

Hardly anyone still believes in nationalization as the road to socialism, but what should be in its place? Unable to answer that question, British socialists of all varieties appear to have lost their way. There is much talk of the death of socialism and the decline of the working class and the likelihood that Labour will never form another government.

Thatcher, on the other hand, appears to believe that the British working class is still much too powerful. She talks of using a third term to "destroy socialism" in Britain, and the Conservatives are already making plans for a new round of attacks on Labour strongholds in local government, education and the unions.

**Future plans:** Kinnock, to his credit, recognizes the need to redefine socialism, and talks about developing new forms of "social ownership" such as worker cooperatives, municipal ownership and employee stock-ownership schemes. These proposals remain vague. Many people objected to nationalization, but everyone knew what it was. Would social ownership mean genuine worker control, or merely stock ownership schemes designed to undercut collective bargaining? Would a Kinnock government put large amounts of money into an expansion of the cooperative sector of the economy?

Tony Benn and others in Labour's left-wing Campaign Group are already laying plans for "relaunching" the Labour Party after the election, win or lose, on a more explicitly socialist and anti-racist basis. They have yet to go much beyond the Labour leadership in developing an intelligible democratic path to social ownership. But they do recognize that sexual and racial politics can no longer be dismissed as a diversion from "real" issues.

If Labour confounds the pollsters and wins the election, Kinnock will have his own opportunity to redefine socialism with a major commitment to new forms of social ownership. But the wounds opened by his struggle against the left will remain regardless of the election results, and Kinnock will have to take steps to heal them.

If Labour loses, the task of maintaining some degree of party unity will be much more difficult. There may be a new exodus of party right-wingers to the Social Democratic Party, and there will certainly be a fierce struggle to assign the blame for defeat. If Kinnock continues to regard the left as the source of all problems the party could dissolve into an internal war that would last for years.

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Labour leader Neil Kinnock has felt the need to distance himself from the left.



# THE HOLLYWOOD FAULT LINE

By Jon Rappoport

LOS ANGELES

**A**NDY WHIT IS SO UNKNOWN THAT EVEN THE unknown video freaks in Los Angeles can't tell you what he's done. "Am I angry?" he asks, standing at the corner of Sunset and La Cienaga in Hollywood, shaking his head, slackly holding a beat-up old black video camera down his leg, like Clint Eastwood's magnum.

He came out here during lunch hour to shoot a few feet of tape for his latest unknown production, *Punch Drunk*, about different kinds of alcoholics in Los Angeles. There's a staggering, falling-down kind (downtown), the mixed-drink crowd in Beverly Hills and the Palisades (martini sippers with faded eyes and \$3000 watches) and even the mildly inebriated office crowd (Wilshire district). Here, on La Cienaga, he hoped to spot a few random shopper-drunks mixing lunch and boutique-browsing. It's raining, however, and he can't get a good line on anybody.

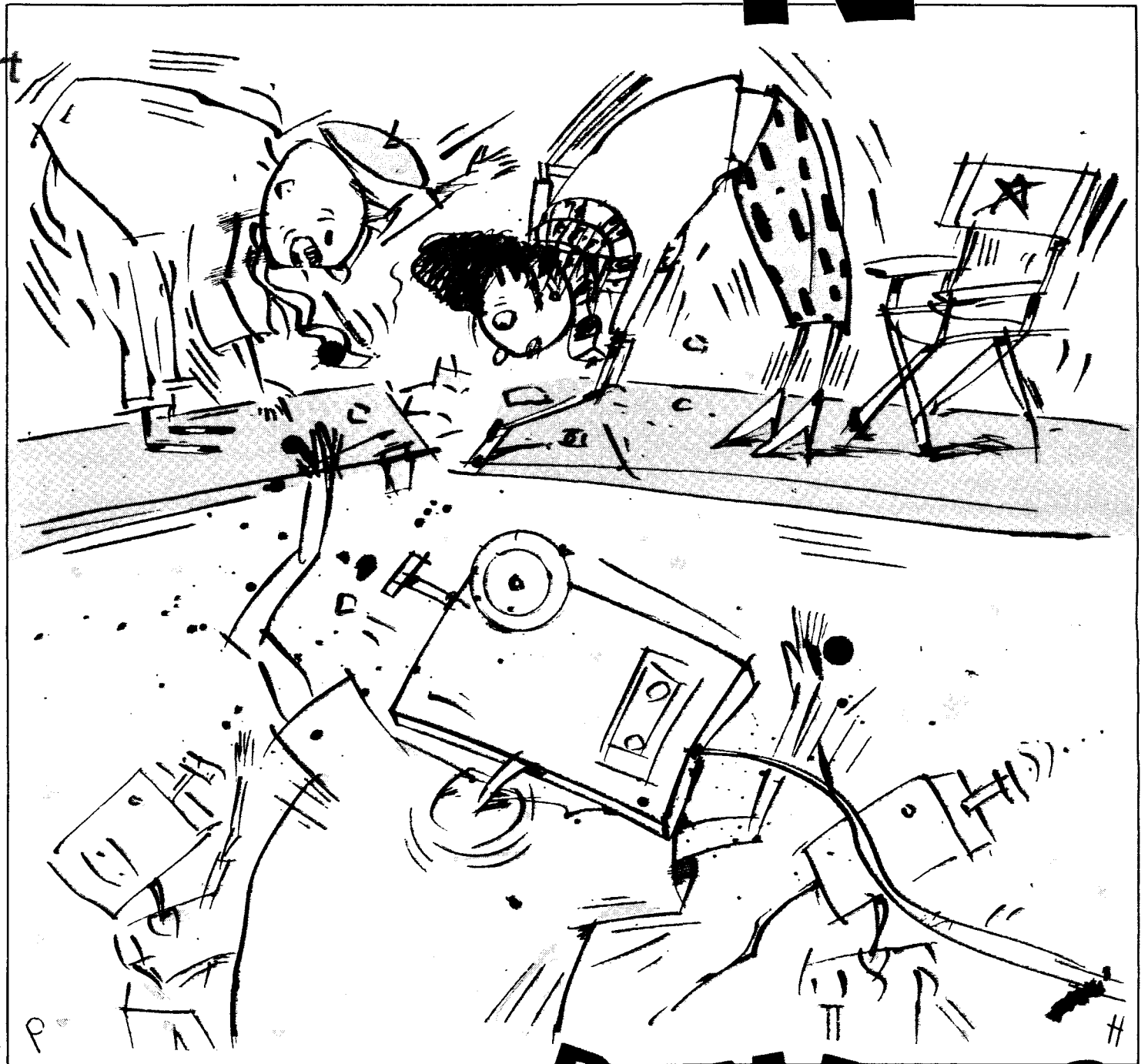
But Andy Whit has more to be angry about than the rain. He's here in L.A., where suburban teen-angst epics become \$30 million movies. And he's not seeing a dime—not treatment money or script money or overdub money or music money.

Above him on the pyramid of video obscurity are the semi-unknown video-makers who show their work in the crumbling art galleries that litter the city. Seven people sit in flaking metal chairs and applaud lightly after gazing for 20 minutes at a small screen, where a man knelt on a living room rug and broke panes of glass, slowly and methodically with a tack hammer. This is "what-does-it-mean? -don't-ask-questions-because-you-might-look-stupid" video art.

**Video shockwaves:** Above these semi-unknowns are the political and environmental and documentary video-makers, and they're making disturbing waves. The shock is turning into a video explosion that could undermine Hollywood or even overtake it. The foundations are sending video artists money. The galleries are showing them. Los Angeles' new Museum of Contemporary Art is committed to video. And in lofts downtown people pay the price of a movie ticket to look at something more daring than high-school bubbleheads crashing daddy's car into the shopping center drug store.

It seems that the natives are getting restless in movieland, and the consequences will undoubtedly change the face of filmmaking. Some of the younger generation, who in the past might have been trying to break into the UCLA film school, which boasts famous graduates like Francis Coppola and George Lucas, are instead buying video equipment and taking it to the city streets.

Film executives are fond of saying video presents absolutely no threat to The Industry, while they are struggling to make deals



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## A VIDEO-QUAKE RUMBLES BENEATH THE FILM ESTABLISHMENT

for their studios that will raise video-release revenues from major motion pictures.

The phenomenon of "after-money," in which the movie that drew nobody to the large screen makes a fortune in video, has launched video outlets as the fastest-growing retail business in America.

**Avoiding air-conditioned minds:** Camera-heads like Andy Whit realize that if they can break into that market directly, without having to pass through air-conditioned buildings and talk to movie executives, they will have pulled off the town's biggest coup since cowboys put on rouge and took over Hollywood Boulevard.

Imagine: unknown video-maker creates single-handed masterpiece for \$12.37 and sells it to retail video outlets, or lays it out on consignment. It's good; word spreads. In

six weeks the artist makes big bucks.

Is this an impossible pipe-dream? No more impossible than independent producers such as Stanley Kubrick cracking the closed studio system of the '50s and no more impossible than contract players such as Goldie Hawn turning around and producing their own films and becoming millionaires overnight.

Except in this case the video rebels have aesthetic and political ideas that deviate much further from the traditional Hollywood mold. These video-makers incorporate a more global view of political reality, environmental concerns and economic justice that the Industry establishment, as it now stands, can't easily assimilate.

In a city where some estimates place the Salvadoran refugee population at 300,000—

greater than current population figures for San Salvador—the big issue is Central America and Reagan's war.

There is, for example, the stunning, meticulous work of Louis Hock, whose videos track his four years of living with illegal Latin American aliens. Hock's work is taped at such close range that it breaks down any attempt at sentimental construction of the fate of these displaced people.

And Cal James, who moves in and out of the L.A. art scene, is completing a two-hour video piece on Nicaragua called *Friends of the Contras*. The first hour finds James reminiscing in a Honduras hotel room about the 1984 bombing of Eden Pastora's press conference at which cameraman Tony Avirgan was nearly killed. In the second hour James stalks the streets of L.A., probing the