Libyan distractions

American harassment of Libya, intensified this March and April by the naval and air manoeuvres off the Libyan coast and the subsequent bombing raids, is part of the comprehensive new Third World strategy now being implemented by Washington under the banner of 'the Reagan Doctrine'. Although the elements of this Doctrine were put into operation as soon as Reagan came to office in 1981, it was only in 1985, in his 'State of the Union' address, that it was spelt out in clear and official terms.

In essence, it has at least four components. One is the increased supply of arms and financial support to Third World regimes facing revolutionary insurgencies. US military aid to the Third World has increased at twice the rate of economic aid since 1981, and its use in countries like El Salvador has been for directly counter-revolutionary endeavours.

The second component is aid to groups seeking to overthrow revolutionary regimes in the Third World, particularly those allied to the USSR. Of the eight anti-communist insurgencies now taking place, four at least receive US support: those in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Angola and Nicaragua. The

four others – in Laos, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Surinam – could be candidates in the future.

The third component of the Reagan Doctrine is the active manipulation of revolutionary situations, in such a way that last-minute political changes are used to damp popular advances. The lesson drawn from the fall of the Shah in Iran and of the Somozas in Nicaragua was that the US should intervene behind the scenes to remove the dictator but save the regime, and in particular the army. This is the ploy which has now been tried in Sudan, Haiti and the Philippines, and, in a different way, in El Salvador.

These three elements of the Reagan Doctrine constitute a wide-ranging counter-revolutionary strategy, but one that does not directly involve US forces in combat. In a situation where the US public and Congress are not yet willing to sustain serious combat casualties in Third World situations, this is a policy of counter-revolution on the cheap.

But the problem with it is that it relies on some objective factors to be put into operation. Libya does not provide such conditions. While Gadaffi is an easy enough figure against whom to mobilise Western opinion, there is no active insurgency within Libya for the CIA to back, and the obvious regional ally to substitute for the USA in harassing Libya, namely Egypt, has till now been reluctant to do so. There is an opposition inside Libya, of a radical Islamic variety, and the unspoken irony of the situation is that if the Libyan regime as a whole were overthrown it would in all probability be replaced by one more like that of Iran.

Faced with the compulsion to show pugnacity in the Third World, and the lack of appropriate surrogates, the USA has had to steam in itself. But this leaves open the question of what harassing Libya is meant to achieve. It may be that the US naval manoeuvres and direct military strikes will set in train a process that will culminate in the removal of Gadaffi. But such actions on their own will not unseat Gadaffi, who has a well-organised security system: the under-publicised side of the whole story is that in the first years after he came to power in 1969 Gadaffi received protection from the CIA itself.

Like many of Reagan's other Third World initiatives, the campaign against Libya has political as much as military functions. For it provides an ideal opening for the playing out of the fourth component of the Reagan Doctrine, namely 'anti-terrorism'. This now fashionable activity provides a spurious legi-
his grotesque and dangerous politics.

Herein lies the real truth of Gadafy's confrontation with the USA. The verbal hype and posturings over territorial waters are of no practical significance whatsoever, and indeed provide an ideal excuse for US actions in the region. Like Khomenei in the hostages crisis, Gadafy practises an 'anti-imperialism of fools', one that diverts energies and attention from the real problems facing the Middle Eastern peoples and channels them into theatre and demagogy.

It seems as if, for reasons of naive idealism, or mercenary attachment, sections of the European Left have taken Gadafy seriously. The time to do so is when he makes a contribution to the liberation of the Arab peoples on land and ceases his diversions on the waves of the Gulf of Sirte.

Fred Halliday

The Militant dilemma

The enquiry by Labour's national executive into the affairs of Liverpool Labour party has been conducted under the full glare of the media spotlight. The original events that sparked off the enquiry -- the sacking of the council labour force and well-documented allegations of intimidation -- have been almost forgotten in the media's, and Militant's, efforts to portray an epic struggle between Right and Left, leadership and rank and file. And indeed the Hatton v Kinnock bout, at times so evocative of the amateur boxing milieu favoured by Liverpool's deputy leader, has now assumed its own momentum.

But, as the court rulings and dramatic walk-out by those dubbed the 'unmagnificent seven' by Neil Kinnock showed, the Liverpool case has thrown into sharp relief a whole series of dilemmas for the Labour party.

For starters the disciplinary procedures are an obvious mess. You don't have to be in favour of using them very often to accept that regular intervention by the courts is hardly helpful. Militant supporters have not only been to court over the Liverpool enquiry but also in a less well-publicised series of cases where local parties have sought to expel them. Cardiff, Penarth, Mansfield, Stevenage, Ipswich and Exeter parties have all been brought to court by members resisting expulsion, not all of whom are connected with Militant.

Plans are therefore in hand to draft a new disciplinary code which aims to be impregnable to any courtroom challenge. Its supporters will point to the clear contrast between the Labour and most union rule books which contain clear disciplinary guidelines. It will have to take on board the various rulings on natural justice made by the courts and in particular those made by the high court, the day before the NEC's abortive Liverpool hearings, that those making initial inquiries should not then preside in judgement and that confidential evidence should not be used.

One solution to this would be to revive the idea that has been kicking round the party for some years that the NEC should abandon its judicial and appeals role in favour of some new body established to perform these functions. Indeed some have suggested that there is no need for there to be one national body, inevitably a focus of media attention, and these powers should be devolved to regions. Cases such as Liverpool's would be presented to these new independent bodies by party officers acting on the NEC's instructions, not by the NEC itself.

No doubt such moves would be opposed by the NEC members who walked out, but there would be little problem in getting them through conference. The two leading left-led unions, NUPE and the TGWU, would be sure to support them and indeed, the T&G's Ron Todd, with the support of his executive, was swift to condemn the walk-out. Militant have failed to win any Labour regional conference votes, going down by a 17 to 1 margin at one, indicating that they are not winning much support over Liverpool outside their own ranks.

But many on the Left are deeply ambivalent about this. At one level it has become clear that the tactics and practices of Liverpool district party as revealed by both minority and majority NEC reports, and the evidence of Merseyside Labour Co-ordinating Committee, NUPE and the Black Caucus, have shocked many ordinary party members with a natural antipathy towards expulsions. But at the same time the rank and file do not want to see a purge conducted on the basis of political belief. The expulsion of two members in Roy Hattersley's constituency and the particularly striking case of Andrew Wilson who has been expelled out of Middlesborough CLP on what are widely regarded as trumped-up charges, which include using a union duplicator for election material as opposed to an NGA printshop, have worried many and certainly brought back to mind memories of the bad old days of the 50s when tight discipline was used to deal with the mildest dissent.

And without the consent of significant sections of the Left, expulsions could be more trouble for the Labour leadership than they are worth. David Blunkett, for example, was prominent at Neil Kinnock's side at the press conference after the abandoned NEC, but earlier in the year refused to back a Sheffield constituency's expulsion of a Militant supporter where no evidence of rule breaking had been offered.

There is every sign therefore that Liverpool is likely to be a one-off nationally initiated action. Being seen to deal with Derek Hatton has boosted the party's image, but a con-