Franco-German alliance urges end to EU veto

FROM CHARLES BREMNER IN BRUSSELS

Germany urged Britain and other less committed states yesterday to accept a scheme for sidestepping the national veto in European Union affairs or face the prospect of more eager member countries banding together in common actions outside the Union.

Ministers from the two core EU states delivered the warning when they tabled a Franco-German plan that would allow member states to pursue greater integration in foreign affairs, defence and justice.

a more flexible Union, published last week, is designed to allow more enthusiastic states to forge common policies free from obstruction by governments wielding the veto. Britain favours creating a more flexible Union in the revised Maastricht treaty, now under negotiation, but is refusing any dilution of the veto. Already worried that monetary union could create an elite EU "hard core", the Government wants to retain a say in every decision to set up special arrangements.

That right would be absent from the Franco-German scheme but it could come into being only if all EU states review, the inter-governmental conference (IGC). Michel

Michael Portillo has decided that Britain must go ahead with Nato partners in developing a ballistic missile defence system to protect alliance troops in future conflicts. In a speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in Brussels today, the Defence Secretary will detail for the first time his belief in a

"theatre" ballistic system, despite the huge cost. Nato's future, page 18

Barnier and Werner Hoyer, the two ministers for European affairs, depicted the Franco-German plan for "reinforced co-operation" as the alternative to a future in which frustrated, federal-minded states would start acting together outside the EU.

Paris and Bonn had no ulterior motives, M Barnier insisted. They were just working to ensure that an EU of up to 27 members in the next century developed as an economic and political power. British participation in closer co-operation would make a stronger Union, Herr Hoyer said. "I wouldn't be surprised if the United Kingdom coapproved it at the Maastricht operates because the idea of Union with 20 or more memflexibility is something it agrees with." The Franco-

Danes block move to fight Cuba trade law

By Charles Bremner

EXCLUSIVE

Evita, Her Dreams

and Heartache

Her Baby,

Her Life as

OUT NOW

DENMARK yesterday derailed the EU's hitherto smooth-running drive for joint retaliation against an American law that seeks to punish foreign firms that trade with

Citing qualms over sovereignty, Copenhagen said it would veto measures, due for adoption by foreign ministers next week, to block the effects of the Helms-Burton Act. This, among other things, allows Americans to sue European companies that are deemed to be "trafficking" in Cuban

property confiscated by the Communist state since 1959. It also enables the United States to bar travel there by executives of such firms.

Insisting that its decision was final, the Danish Government said it believed that the EU move to order blocking legislation throughout the Union infringed on its sovereignty. The issue is especially sensitive in Denmark because a citizens' group is pursuing the Government in the courts for handing too much sovereignty to the EU.

German plan evolves from the fact that a variable-speed system already exists.

Monetary union is the main example of a flexible scheme inside the EU, although membership for qualified states is not voluntary, except for Britain and Denmark.

The continental powers want to avoid a repeat of joint actions completely outside the Union, such as the Schengen accord, which groups Germany, France and five other states in a system for frontierfree travel.

Herr Hoyer made clear, however, that the prime aim of his plan was to end the obstruction to EU integration that came mainly from London, as Britain was the only state that opposed any dilution of the veto. The German junior minister, who negotiates for Germany on the IGC, has been outspoken in recent months in charging Britain with obstructing the desire of the rest of the EU to move to deeper integration.

His view on the veto, shared by a majority of EU states, was reinforced yesterday by Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission, "I cannot see how we can continue with unanimous voting in a bers," he told MEPs.

The Franco-German plan, drafted under the orders of Helmut Kohl, the German Chancellor, and President Chirac, would clear the way to common actions in such areas as foreign policy and the creation of a European defence force for those countries wishing to take part. Once signed up to such a scheme, participating countries would be bound by majority voting but they could not prevent any new members from joining. The Commission would continue to play its existing role as executive and initiator of legislation within the reinforced groups and the European Court of Justice would adjudicate in disputes.

Continued from page 1

divorce court.

withdraw," he said.

put right. Professor Markman, whose

theories are based on 20 years of research,

made videotapes of engaged couples

having arguments and used them to

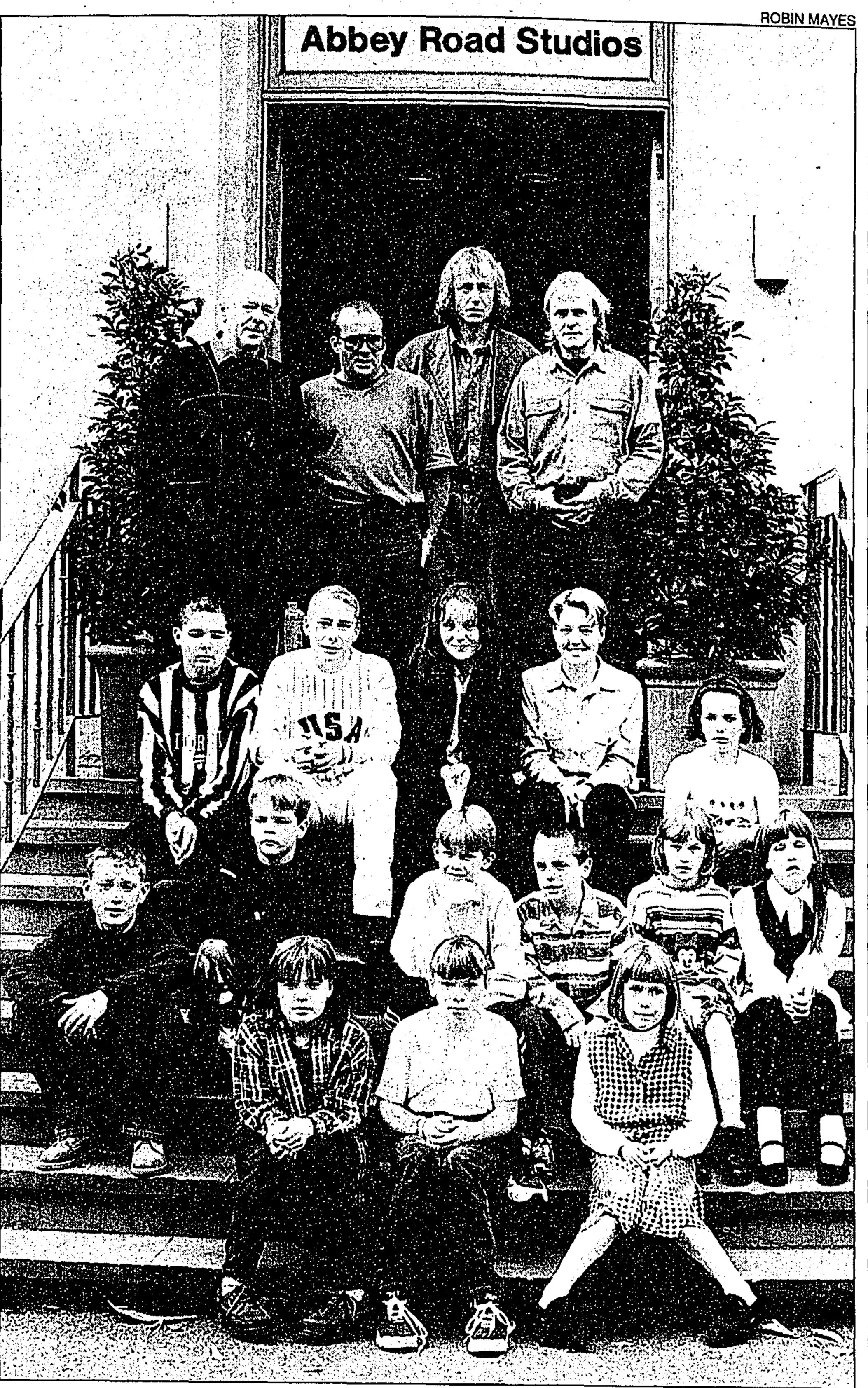
predict who would have a happy mar-

riage and who would end up in the

"Couples who are destined to divorce

are more likely to hurl insults at one

Finance for common actions would be found only by participants but the Commission's costs would continue to be met by the EU budget.



Musicians and 14 children from Dunblane, including brothers and sisters of Thomas Hamilton's victims, at Abbey Road Studios in north London to record a Christmas version of Bob Dylan's Knocking on Heaven's Door with an anti-gun message

relationship."

each other.

Clues to marital success and failure

character assassination erases five, ten or

even twenty acts of kindness in a

The way couples argue is more impor-

tant in predicting their chances of divorce

than how much money they have, their

attractiveness, sexual compatability, opti-

mism or how much they are in love with

Couples who marry in their teens or

Spending Newsinbrief watchdog criticises rail sell-off bombings

By Valerie Elliott WHITEHALL EDITOR

MINISTERS turned down a proposal for the taxpayer to share in profits made after rail privatisation, according to a National Audit Office report published today.

Evidence given to Sir John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor-General, showed that ministers blocked a plan from the rail franchising director for any excess profits to be shared between the private train operator and the taxpayer. Sir John also criticises the £39.6 million paid in advisers' fees on rail privatisation, which defied Treasury guidance.

On the decision to waive profit-sharing for the taxpayer, his report says: "Ministers took the view that while there might be drawbacks in presentational and value-formoney terms in not being able to claw back super-profits, these were outweighed by the value-for-money incentive arguments for a more substantial transfer of risk and reward to the private sector."

Ministers argued that by allowing the new private rail companies higher rewards which would help them to run more efficient services, they would encourage lower levels f subsidy.

Sir John complains about the failure to set spending limits on the fees of firms Patient escapes involved in the sell-off.

He said he was unable to say whether the rail sell-off was providing passengers with better services and that it could take several years to gauge whether the public were getting a better deal from the new companies than from British Rail.

"where there are lots of dangerous

instruments" and the most common

with children, careers, clothes and par-

ents-in-law the next most frequent topics.

was outlined at the conference, organised

by the marriage research charity One

Professor Markman's solution, which

subject of a marital dispute is money,

Yard alert on revenge

The head of Scotland Yard's specialist operations, Assistant Commissioner David Veness, warned yesterday of high expectation of IRA bomb attacks in the "dangerous months" ahead. His warning echoed the latest

MI5 intelligence assessment. Although there has been no hint of an imminent attack on a specific target, the IRA is thought to be determined to avenge last month's fatal shooting by police of Diarmuid O'Neill in a raid on a London house.

Lorry hit by brick

A lorry driver escaped unhurt after a youth threw a brick through the windscreen of his vehicle, showering him with glass. Barney Roddy managed to stop his vehicle safely after the incident on the Al231 near Barmston, Washington. Police said he was lucky to be alive.

Cancer verdicts

Leukaemia experts found no evidence linking water pollution in Camelford, Cornwall, in 1988 with three cases of the cancer at a local school, health officials said. A separate team from Bristol University found no link with electromagnetic fields from an overhead power cable.

dangerous psychiatric patient was being sought by police last night after escaping from a secure hospital for the criminally insane in Leicester. The public were warned not to approach Jason Fielding, understood to be the eleventh escaper from Arnold Lodge since 1993.

Firebomb alert

Bomb squad officers defused an incendiary device sent to Judge Lockett at Preston Crown Court. It is understood that detectives are linking it to similar devices sent recently to Lancashire County Council headquarters, social services and a family

plus One, is for couples to have weekly. Home win

The Arsenal and England footballer Paul Merson and his wife, Lorraine, are to see a marriage counsellor rather than split up. Last week they said that the player's rehabilitation from cocaine, alcohol and gambling had put such pressure on the marriage that they could not go on.

Photos banned

Diana, Princess of Wales has ordered a ban on photographs of her dancing at a charity ball in Sydney next week. About 850 people have paid £500 each to attend the event in aid of heart research. It was not clear if the ban extended to Australian television, which will be present.

Opera's plea

Welsh National Opera won High Court permission to seek a judicial review over the Department of Employment's refusal to grant a work permit to let the Chinese violinist Yi Wang, 27, join its ranks as number-four first violinist and occasional leader of the orchestra.

Back from dead

Paul Cunningham, the backpacker thought to have died from a drugs overdose in the Far East after a passport mixup, was reunited with his family at Oadby, Leicestershire. He returned days before his scheduled funeral. "We've all been through an amazing ordeal," he said.

Pizza penalties

footballers Gareth Southgate, Stuart Pearce and Chris Waddle have been paid about £100,000 each to star in a Pizza Hut advert, to be screened next month, making fun of their England penalty misses. All three have missed crucial spot kicks in the past six years.

meetings at which they can air their another and the men are more likely to whose parents are divorced are at an grievances. increased risk of failed marriages. "We find over time that one insult or Most rows happen in the kitchen Leading article, page 19:1 Labour is jittery, but polls

flatter to deceive Tories

By Peter Riddell

LABOUR MPs are jittery. An NOP poll in The Sunday Times suggests a sharp drop in their lead from 23 to 14 points over a fortnight. But Labour leaders do not need to panic. There is no evidence yet of a significant change in public attitudes towards the parties. The Tories still have a mountain to climb.

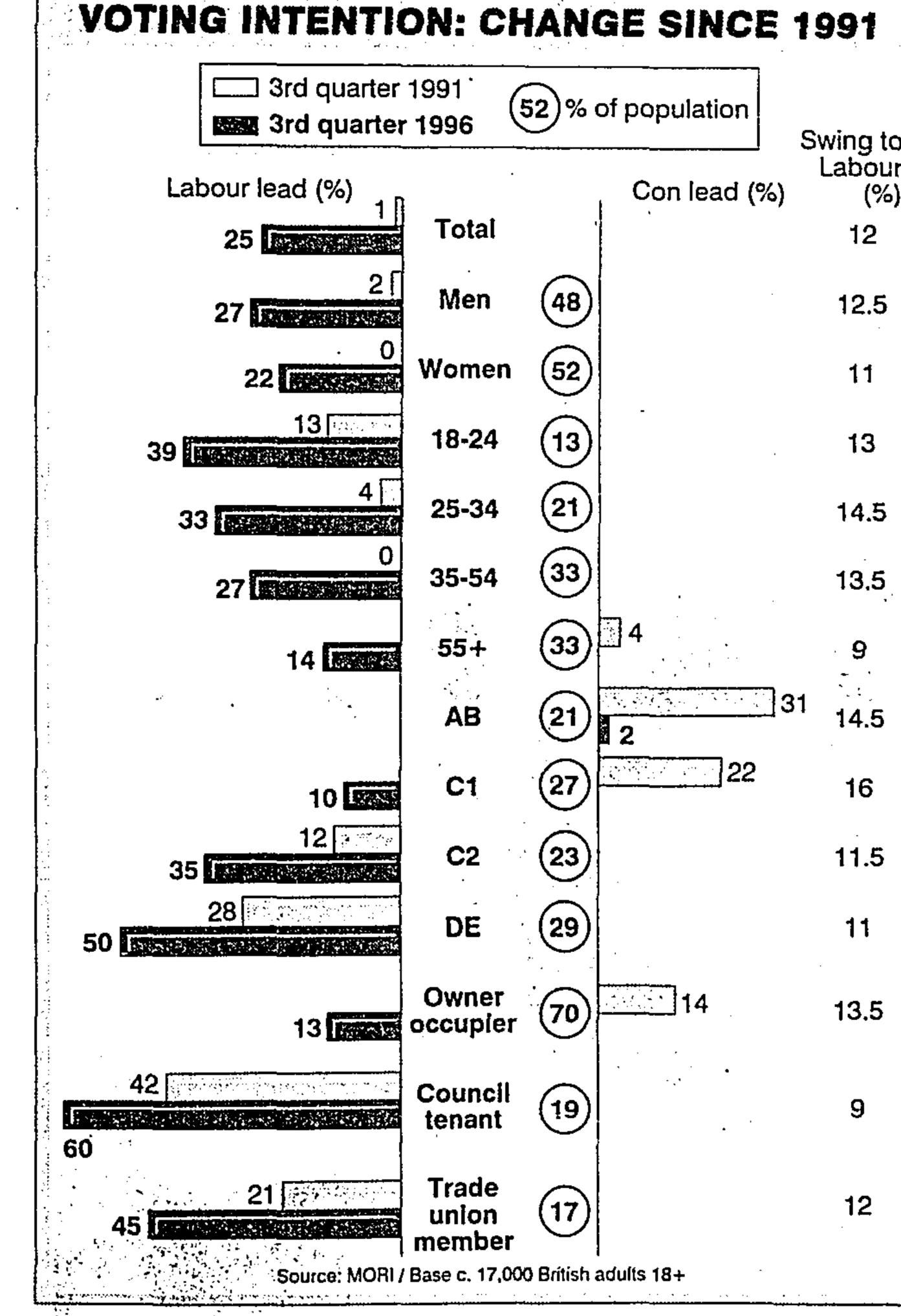
Some so far unpublished polls taken by other organisations over the past ten days do not suggest that there has been any sizeable change in support. The shift in the NOP survey partly reflects a comparison between a poll taken in the afterglow of Tony Blair's successful conference speech and one taken after the Tories' success in Bournemouth. The polls quite often bounce around during the

conference season. Tory support has been recovering for almost two years, but only very slowly and patchily with gains one month partly reversed the next. Since the spring, two trends have been clear: economic optimism has picked up and the Tories have won back support in professional and manageri-

al groups. The scale of the problem still facing the Tories is brought out by the chart prepared by MORI on the basis of 17,000 people interviewed between July and the end of September. MORI has compared the position with the third quarter of electorate — the Labour lead

1991, at the same stage of the last Parliament. In 1991, Labour had a lead of just one point. This year it is 25 points. Among 25 to 34-year-olds was four points then and 33 now. The other biggest differ-

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ences over the five years are among white-collar workers and owner-occupiers. The Labour lead among

these groups is certain to be much narrower on polling day, but that is not the point.

The key feature of the recent polls is that, despite month-tomonth variations and a slow Tory recovery, Labour retains an unprecedentedly large lead for so late in a Parliament. The Tories are running out of time.



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