40p

BIRMINGHAM LABOUR

BRIEFING

INCORPORATING NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 25 October 1986

COUNCIL MAKES STAND AGAINST APARTHEID

Birmingham City Council has announced it will scrap its agency agreement with the Department of Transport for the maintenance of motorways and trunk roads in the region.

The decision, which will take effect from 31 March 1987, means that the Department will have to find someone else to maintain the huge sections of motorway and trunk roads in the city.

The decision comes about because of Birmingham City Council's policy to include in each contract a provision 'prohibiting the supply of goods or materials whose origin is the Republic of South Africa' and also of placing no contract with 'any person carrying on a trade, business or profession in the Republic of South Africa'.

John Moore MP, the Tory Transport minister objected to the inclusion of this clause in the £2 million contract the city agreed with Wrekin Construction for repairs to the Oldbury flyover on the M5. He regarded this clause, in true Tory style, as 'an unwarranted limitation on the scope for competitive tendering'. He could not sign the contract because the City Council imposed tendering conditions which were 'not of a commercial nature'.

Announcing the City's decision, Councillor Bill Turner, chairperson of the Technical Services Committee, said: ' As a multi-racial city, Birmingham has a long overdue policy of denying aid and succour to the murderous and racist regime of South Africa. In pursuit of this policy we appear to have fallen foul of the laissez-faire politics of the Secretary of State for Transport. As he has chosen to ignore our policies and our arguments, we have no alternative but to ask him to look elsewhere for assistance with his motorway and trunk roads maintenance'.

In support of this policy, Labour leader, Dick Knowles, wrote to John Moore on 8 September: '...it seems to me quite clear that there is an ideological clash between the Government and Birmingham City Council...we have 14 black councillors and 15.2% of the population of Birmingham who are black according to the last census but the statisticians tell me that it is between 22% and 27% taking into account the third generation, it is just a year ago when we had the Handsworth riots and that to appear to be bending over backwards to break our own standing orders in order that we can employ people who have business links with the Republic of South Africa would be stupid and, if I may say so, against our duty under the Race Relations Act of 1976...I think the Government, because of its ideological commitment to their friends in South Africa, are making a grave mistake. My view is that it is a great pity that you should have gone down this road because of an ideological commitment to South Africa and therefore to its racist policies'.

'Briefing' welcomes this stand by the City Council of whom we have, only too often, had to be critical. Maybe now we can look forward to the development of a comprehensive and effective contract compliance policy. Maybe we can look forward to other anti-racist initiatives which affect more directly the population of the city. Maybe, too, we can look forward to the full implementation of the district party's policies for Race Relations and Equal Opportunities in the City. Ultimately it is on issues like these, rather than on an albeit brave stand on South Africa, that the Labour Council will be judged.

Inside...SOS Racisme...Black Sections...Summerfield Group to expand... Sinn Fein visit...Transport policy... Belfast...Conference resolutions... Party democracy...Head Office backs left stand...and more.....



Summerfield Caucus set to expand

Steady progress is being made towards setting up a new organisation of the Labour left in Birmingham. The so-called 'Summerfield Caucus - based on a core of left-wing councillors - will soon be launching an organisation open to all party members in Birmingham who agree with its aims.

The Birmingham Summerfield Group will be based on the same commitments to democratic reform as the left councillors have adopted but in addition there will be policy priorities. Party members will be invited to join a broad campaign aimed at implementing a more socialist programme for labour in Birmingham.

The recent developments go a long way towards meeting criticisms of the embryo Summerfield Group contained in July's 'Briefing'. At that stage there seemed to be a risk of Summerfield remaining a small, elitist group of councillors and others in the know.

However, discussions over the past few weeks have defused suspicions of this sort. At the same time, the originators of the caucus appear to have accepted that opening the doors to a wider party membership will not threaten them with imminent takeover by the 'ultra-left' (whoever they are).

This growth of trust is an important milestone in the rebuilding of a major new left initiative in Birmingham.

The fact is that the various strands of the left have come through the process stronger and more confident. The challenge now is to put ideas into action. The period leading up to the 1987 Council Elections is therefore probably the most crucial testing time in determining whether the right-wing's long control in this city really is coming to an end.

Rob Pocock, Perry Barr CLP.

Head office backs the left

The long-running dispute surrounding the manifesto for last May's local elections seems to have ended in wholesale victory for the line that 'Briefing' and other left-wingers have taken.

Dick Knowles has been cold-shouldered by the party chiefs at Walworth Road, who have written to him accusing him of being 'too harsh' on the District Party.

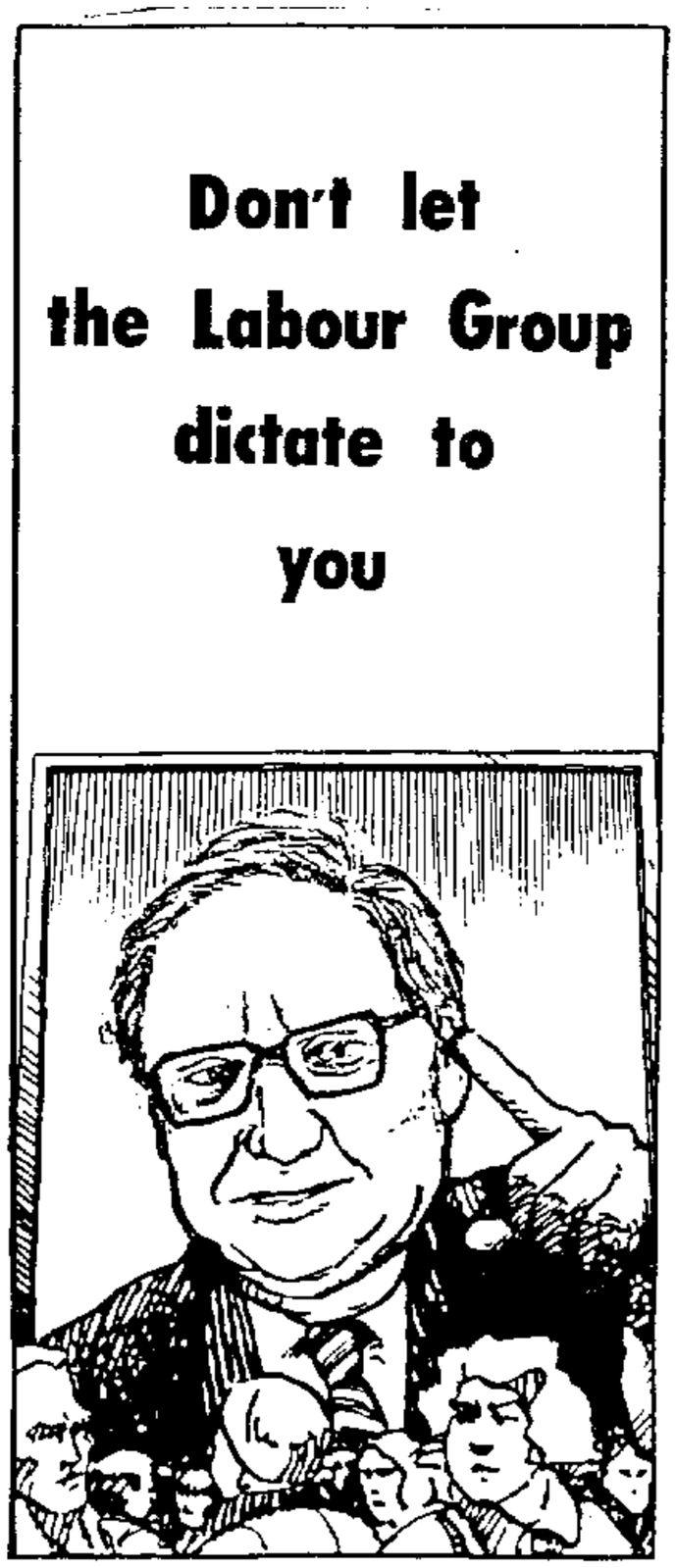
The letter from Joyce Gould, Director of Organisation, was read to the September District Party meeting by Knowles himself, adopting for a moment an uncomfortably humble demeanour. The letter has three basic consequences:

* the councillors cannot publicise their own policy over the heads of the party, in the way that Knowles did this year.
* the councillors have no right of veto over the writing of the manifesto statement.
* in the event of disputes between councillors and the party, it is the party's view which should prevail by virtue of its constitutional majority on the manifesto writing team.

This is an important constitutional breakthrough in the fight for greater democracy in the party. The significance of the Gould letter is that, despite the national tide towards witch hunts and isolating the left, the party's national officials were unable to find any constitutional means of defending Knowles' outlandish behaviour over the 1986 manifesto.

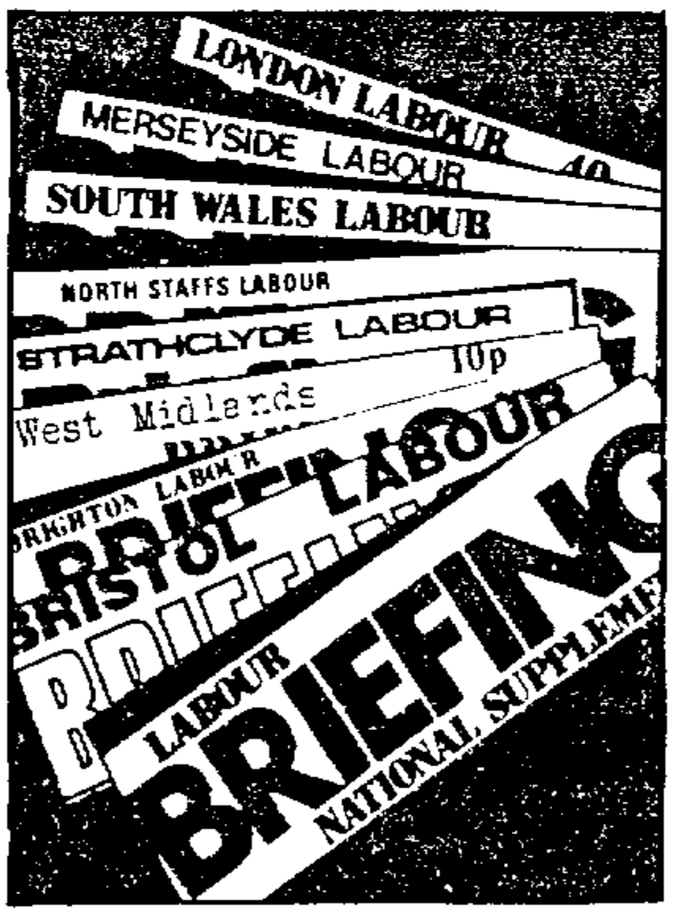
Chastened as he may be by the stance of the national officers, Knowles has still failed to concede the most important consequence of the ruling, which is that the present Labour Council is now committed to implementing the party's version of 1986 policy.

Campaigners in race relations and housing will now need to keep a watchful eye on events to ensure that on these subjects, where the greatest controversy occurred, there is now a switch in Council policy towards implementing the party's line.



BRIEFING

Birmingham Labour Briefing meets on the second Monday of every month. All supporters and interested parties are welcome to attend. Send any letters and articles to 48 Thornhill Road, Handsworth, Birmingha, B21 9BS. Telephone (021-) 551 9174.



IMPORTANT NOTICE

A while ago someone borrowed Kevin Scally's videotape of the 'Bandung File' TV programme for which Kevin was expelled. Could the person who borrowed it return it immediately. It is vital to Kevin's defence.

Birmingham Black Section formed



At an historic meeting in Birmingham Council house on 7 September, 20 Black Labour Party activists decided to establish the Birmingham District Labour Party Black Section.

Opening the meeting, Chairperson Gina Khan said that while publicity was telling us that Birmingham was the 'heart of England', it was time that the party realised that in Birmingham Black people were the heartbeat of the party.

Councillor Gurdev Manku said that many Black party members feared offending white members if they came out in support of Black Sections. 'People are really scared of the name Black Sections,' he said. 'People believe that because Amir Khan was expelled for setting up a Black Section the same would happen to them.'

However, he pointed out that it was necessary for Black people to organise and he outlined the steps forward made in Ladywood when Black people organised in that constituency.

The meeting elected a temorary executive committee with the intention of holding new elections in a few months time. The meeting also refused to recognise the expulsion of Councillor Amir Khan and elected him as Chairperson. Councillor Phil Murphy, vice-chair of the council's Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee was elected vice-chair. Alton Burnett was chosen as secretary. He said, 'Black people have been conditioned to be cautious but until we can organise ourselves and say this is what we want we will always be ignored.'

Councillor Sybil Spence, who was unable to be at the meeting sent a message of support stressing that Black SEctions would help unify the party by making the party take seriously issues of concern to Black people.

The new Black Section intends to take the debate on Black Sections into the District Party and to build support for the Campaign to Reinstate Amir Khan and Kevin Scally. It will fight for the council to take up serious anti-racist policies. It was pointed out that local Labour leaders had refused to include policies on race in the manifesto they issued in the recent Council elections despite the acceptance of those policies by District Party.

The next meeting of the Birmingham Black Section wil be on Sunday 5 October, 5 - 7 pm in the Council House. All Black Labour Party membehs are welcome.



For more information about Birmingham Black Section contact:

Chairperson: C'llr Amir Khan, Tel: 021 449 8530

Secretary: Alton Burnett, 5 Oak Drive, Erdington, Birmingham B23, tel: 021 384 3830.

SOS RACISME

Launched in France in 1984 to counter the growth of racist activities and outrages in that country, SOS Racisme is the biggest anti-racist initiative in Europe.

Since its foundation, it has mushroomed into a mass movement that has won the support of broad layers of French society. It has been especially successful amongst youth.

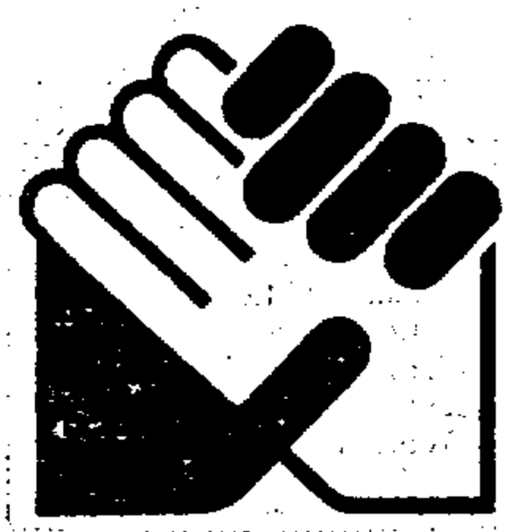
Now a delegation from SOS Racisme, along with a Swedish member of the International Bureau of the International Federation of SOS Racism organisations, is to visit Britain.

The delegation will be visiting London to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street. Then it goes to Birmingham, Sheffield and Newcastle upon Tyne before the visit culminates in a major Manchester event on 12 October.

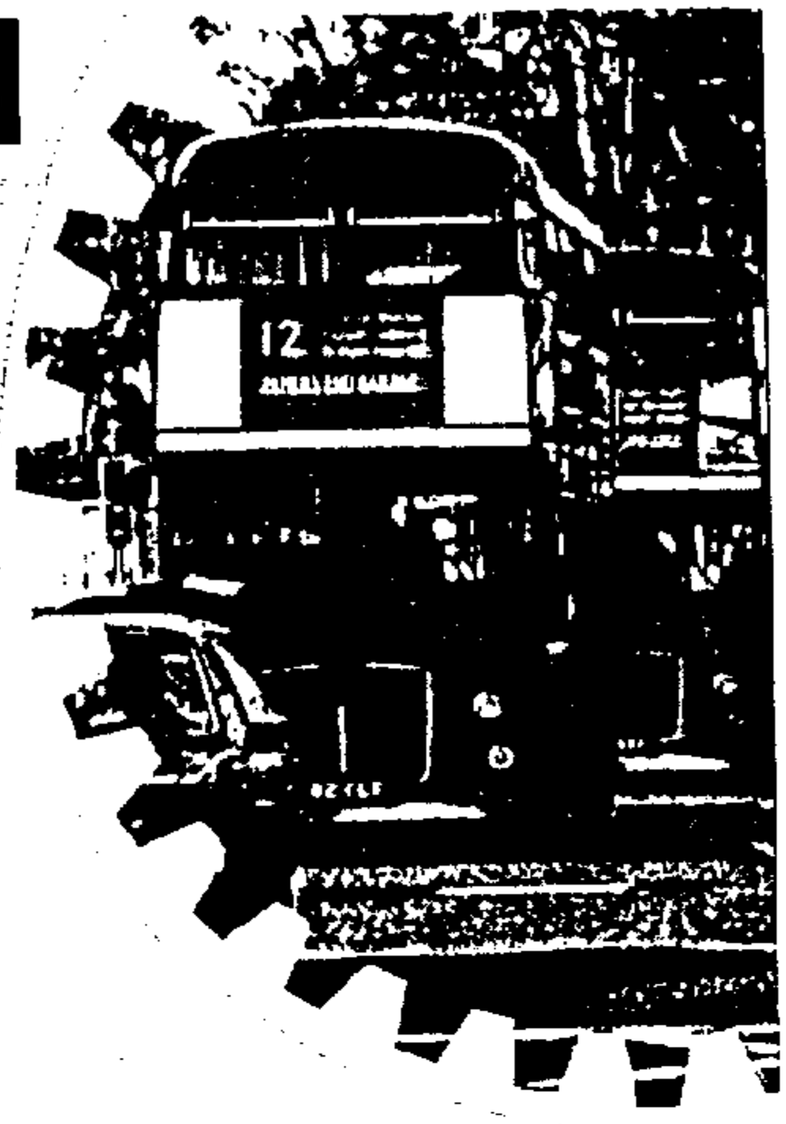
The Campaign Against Racism and Fascism Birmingham (CARF) is hosting the visit to Birmingham. A large number of anti-racist and Black organisations are involving in the planning:

Sunday 5 October - evening reception of delegation at the IWA Centre, 346 Soho Road, Handsworth.
Monday 6 October - daytime meetings with active anti-racists, victims of immigration laws, of racist attacks etc. Visits to advice centres etc. Evening public meeting at Carrs Lane Church Centre.
Tuesday 7 October - daytime as Monday. Evening social at New Inns Public House, Handsworth. Tickets will be available from Birmingham Trades Council.
Wednesday 8 October - delegation leaves Birmingham.

Sponsors and finance for the visit are urgently needed. Contact CARF c/o Birmingham Trades Council, 7 Frederick Street, Birmingham B1 5HE.

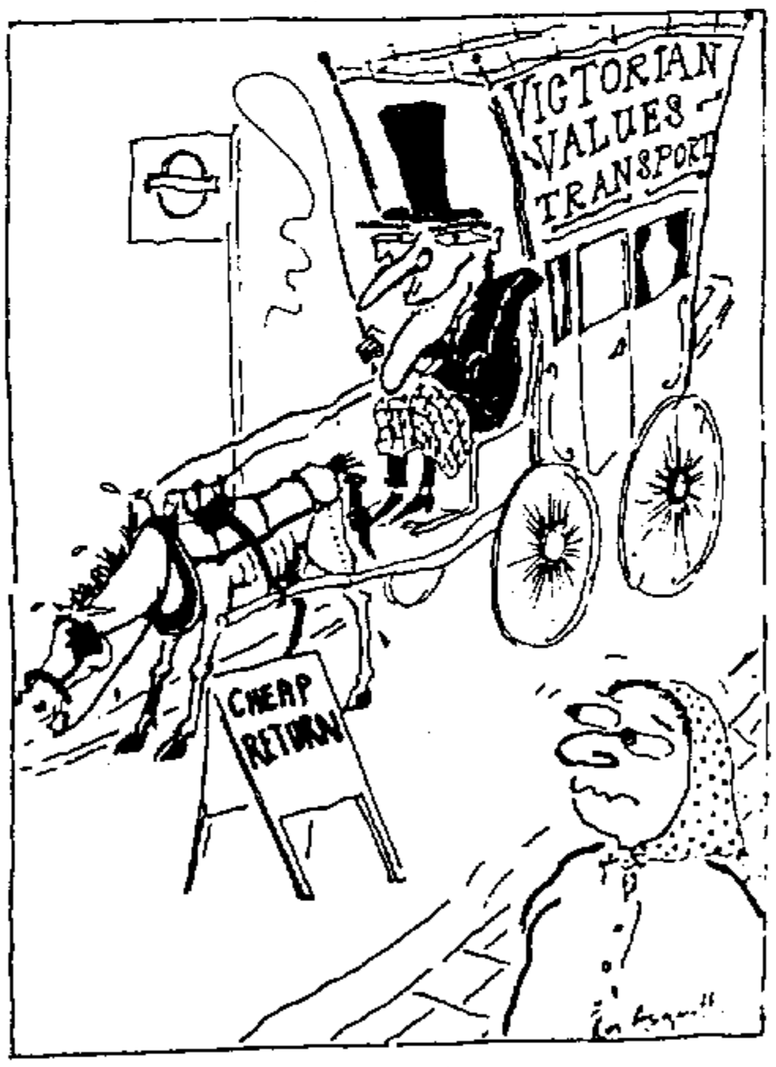


Transport ~ the need for party policy



Any article on Public Transport nowadays is out of date before it is written so fast are things changing under the 1985 Transport Act. However, now is as good a time as any to review the local situation, in particular the question of Labour's involvement in the Passenger Transport Authority (Joint Board) after deregulation on 26 October.

The taking up of places on the Joint Board was originally agreed to protect services ('maintain the basic integrity of the network' in the District Party policy document) and jobs (at the request of the trade unions). The first of these has been largely achieved. By setting the maximum budget available under 'rate capping' we now have, surprisingly, enough money to subsidise just about all the non-commercial services currently running. This would not have been possible with the Tories' proposed budget which woulod have been implemented had we not been there.



However the loss of jobs in cutting the Passenger Transport Executive bus operation down to its commercial size has been severe. Where it might have been expected that workers would be re-employed to run tendered services this has not been totally true. This is because managements of all companies are using the threat of competition to secure the abandonment of previous working conditions and practices in order to cut costs both to win tenders and run 'profitable' routes. Thus, objectively, the Tory Act will be successful in reducung costs to the ratepayer of Public Transport. But as usual the costs will be met by the workforce in terms of lost conditions, and, on mini-buses, wages. However, the trade unions, or at least their officers, are urging us to remain on the Authority and, indeed, to take seats on the Board of the commercial company, West Midlands Travel, which the PTA will wholly own. This is difficult to resist because we know it would be worse under the Tories but not bad enough to get the barricades erected.

Other complications come and go. The latest is over Travelcard. Just as we were congratulating ourselves on achieving a bus and rail travelcard to maintain some integration at only 25% above the cost of the bus-only travelcard that West Midlands Transport will issue, then we discover that it won't be valid on subsidised services unless run by WMT. This means, for example, that you won't be able to use a travelcard on the Number one service through Moseley on a Sunday as it will be run by Solihull Motors!

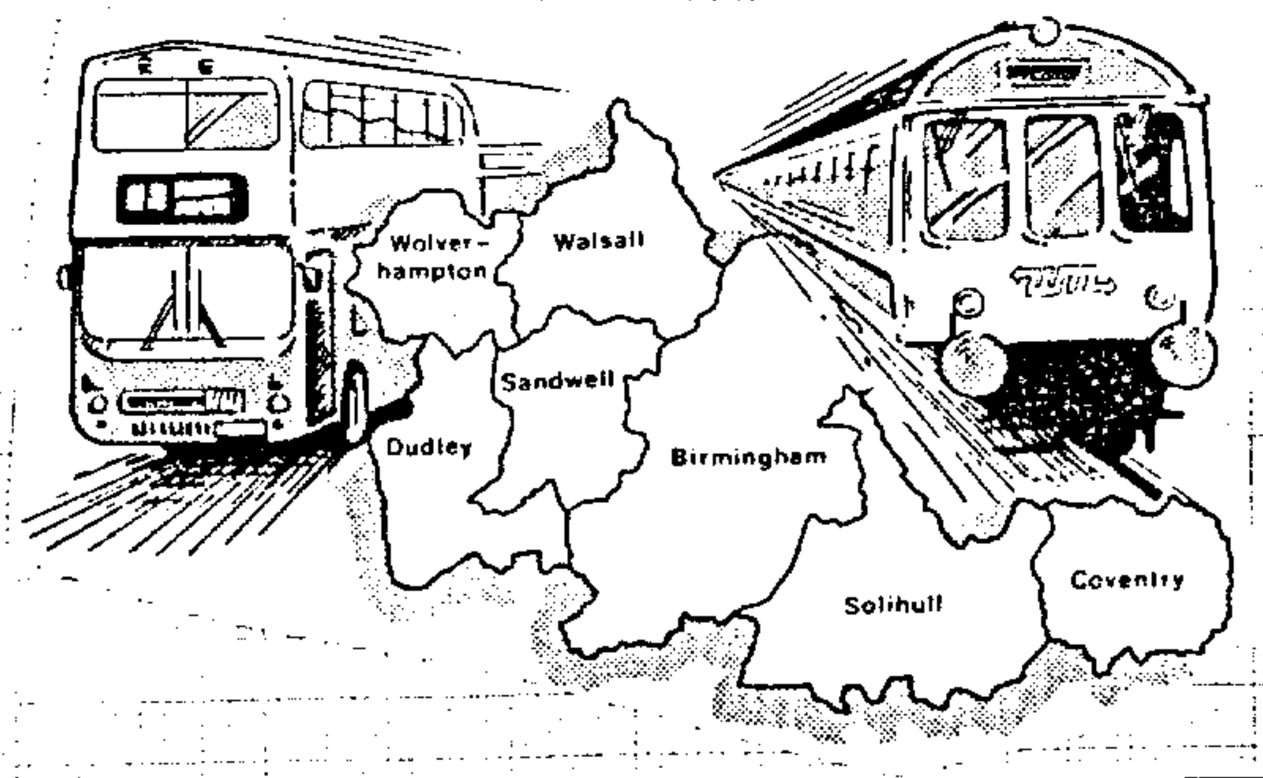
So what of the future? New problems are likely to arise after January when companies will be able to de-register routes they have found commercially unviable. Unless there is a sufficient reserve of money to replace them by tendered services they will disappear altogether.

But by far the biggest problem will be next year's budget (1987/88). Although the Executive have submitted an expenditure plan for £61.3 million, the Government have set a limit of £55.1 million, the same in cash terms as this year. With most of the money already committed, including pension payments and bus and rail subsidies, the only 'soft' item in the budget is concessionary fares - the free Senior Citizens travel or the half-fare children's travel. Dick Knowles' pledge, sorry promise, to use city money to protect Birmingham free passes will not cover the whole County area.

However, before these or any other issues (splitting WMT, privatisation?) arise I hope we will have a party organisation at county level. As someone committed to councillors being the implementers of party policy, having to make up our own as we go along, as with the PTA's policy statement, has been unwelcome, if necessary. I hope we can all make sure the party hierarchy moves quickly to set it up so party members, including rank-and-file trade unionists, can rightfully determine transport policies in the West Midlands. Otherwise we could be so busy driving the bus we won't realise when it's time to get off.

Cllr Stewart Stacey, Birmingham's lead member on Transport Joint Board. NUR member.

West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority





WEST BELFAST - SINN FEIN COMMANDS CLEAR SUPPORT

For a number of years, Birmingham Trades Council has sent a delegate on the Troops Out Movement delegation to Belfast. Similarly, it has a policy which holds that there can only be a working class solution to the situation in the north of that country based on the withdrawal of British troops. The purpose of the delegation is to allow people from Britain to see for themselves the situation in Belfast. Below, 'Briefing' prints and edited version of Roger Kline's report back to Trades Council on this August's delegation.

Getting to Belfast meant a twelve hour coach and boat journey via Stranraer and Larne. The timing of the visit was during the fifteenth anniversary of internment and came at a time when tension was very high - both between the Catholic and Protestant communities and between them both and the police and army.

The 'loyalist marching season' had been underway for several weeks and dozens of catholic homes had been seriously attacked. Provisional Sinn Fein had stepped up its campaign against contractors servicing the British Army and Ulster Freedom Fighters (a protestant paramilitary group) was warning catholic workers of the consequences of going to work in 'protestant' areas.

As someone who had never been to northern Ireland before, I felt very nervous.

130 people were on the delegation with a number of trade unionists, including a SOGAT father of chapel from the Sun/News of the World in Fleet Street. Also included were miners and miners wives from Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, South Wales and North Staffordshire.

The entire delegation were taken, as the first official visit, to look at the Divis flats. This barrack like group of flats makes even Birmingham's housing problems seem small. Huge rats, a sewerage system that doesn't work, dangerous asbestos and shoddy electrics have led to a vigorous residents campaign to have the entire complex pulled down. This campaign which has now even got the support of the British Town and Country Planning Association looks likely to succeed.

The house I stayed in was a new, if small, council house. Much of Belfast's older housing resembles Birmingham's inner city areas, though the houses are smaller, while the council estates are built on similar lines to those in Birmingham.

One interesting fact was that a number of houses left back doors permanently unlocked - perhaps a reflection of the close nature of the community.

The first and dominant impression of Belfast is the presence of armed police and soldiers. It is hard to appreciate what this means without going to Belfast. There are no 'bobbies' on patrol. Patrols take three forms. The first is a couple of Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) policemen, armed and accompanied by a patrol of five British soldiers moving cautiously through housing estates and shopping arcades. The second is an army patrol pure and simple, of six men. The third is a three vehicle convoy of two RUC armoured Land Rovers separated by a British Army Land Rover with two sharpshooters on top.

All three were heavily in evidence on our visit. Two comments are worth making. The first is the indifference affected by the population through which these patrols passed, at least in daylight. No-one stopped to asked directions; no child asked to be helped across the road. The RUC presence was clearly a token one as far as normal policing in catholic areas is concerned.

Our first evening in Belfast marked the anniversary of the introduction of internment, which left hardly a family in West Belfast untouched. Huge bonfires were lit over an area of several square miles. No violence whatsoever was observed by us until the early hours of the morning when army vehicles tried to break up a disco in a park on the Falls Road. Then a hail of bricks and bottles hit the Land Rovers. No shops, houses or other buildings were touched. Plastic bullets were fired and we decided our own safety overrode any role as observers. We went back to our digs. One of our hosts was wrongfully arrested.

A heavy programme of talks and discussions had been arranged with a variety of organisations. The main points to emerge were:

Trade Unions:

* However difficult an issue it may be to raise in unions, it needs to be raised, not just out of solidarity but out of self-interest. Ireland is a testing ground for methods later used on the mainland.
* Job discrimination in Belfast is especially severe.

Plastic Bullets:

* Plastic Bullets are not safe; they kill. We saw sixty fired on our first night. People are regularly killed and injured by these bullets.
* They are part of a range of weapons first tried in Ireland and then used on the mainland.

Show Trials:

* The use of 'supergrasses' to convict large numbers of 'terrorists' is increasingly discredited as the nature of the bribes and bullying which produce these 'witnesses' is revealed.
* For many years the judeicial system in the north has been criticised - biased protestant judges, the use of confessions, alleged torture, no-jury trials. There are parallels with some of the trials in the miners' strike, especially those after Orgreave.

But the highlight of the visit was taking part in the annual march to mark the introduction of internment 15 years ago. Some 15,000 took part, with many more lining the streets. The march was heavily policed with hundreds of armed soldiers along the route, three helicopters overhead and army foot patrols swarming over catholic housing estates the morning before the march. The mood was very tense indeed, especially as many thought the Army and RUC might try to show militant protestants they were 'even-handed' after the attempts to stop a couple of orange parades.

In the event, the march, led by Sinn Fein Councillors and Gerry Adams MP and the wives of political prisoners, was extremely disciplined. The final rally was entirely ringed by troops standing on Saracen armoured cars with helicopters trying to drown out the speeches.

In Britain, the struggles against the show trials, plastic bullets and so on are presented as of interest only to a minority. Sinn Fein is made out to be a fringe organisation which only gains support by terror.

We were not in Belfast long enough to gain any in-depth insight into how correct is Sinn Fein's analysis of the situation. Nor were we able to do a detailed public opinion poll as to exactly what the catholic population thought of the British troops, the RUC, or, for that matter, of Sinn Fein.

We did not have the opportunity to visit protestant areas of the city, not least because our hosts were terrified of being identified as catholics in those areas.

Nevertheless, we saw enough, asked enough questions, talked in enough homes and clubs, to know that the struggles against the British State, and support for Sinn Fein appear to command clear majority support in the catholic parts of West Belfast. That is shown not only by the Councillors and MPs they elect. It is shown by the near unanimous views we gathered on our four day visit.

Many British Trade Unionists still believe that what happens in Belfast should be of little concern to us in Birmingham. Some of those who think it does matter are afraid to raise what can be an unpopular issue.

I would recommend participation in next year's Troops Out Delegation to anyone in those categories. What has happened in Belfast since 1969 has profound implications for Birmingham in the years to come.

Roger Kline, Birmingham Trades Council Delegate to Belfast.

CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS - HOW BIRMINGHAM VOTED

THE LABOUR PARTY

When looking at the national list of prioritised resolutions, the striking theme is nuclear policy. 39% of the general resolutions are concerned with nuclear energy. If nuclear defence is included the total becomes 45%. Apart from the expected support for issues such as health, education, welfare and the environment, the other areas getting a lot of constituency support were: South Africa, women's rights and low pay. How did Birmingham fir into this overall picture?

Firstly, on the negative side, Small Heath, Perry Barr, Erdington and Yardley did not manage to get any resolution into the handbook. With over fifty different issues taken up in the resolution booklet, it doesn't look good for Birmingham if a third of its constituencies don't get a mention. Apparently the Er dington resolution was blocked because of non-payment of fees, but they mafe amends by sending a strong amendment calling for US bases out of Britain and Britain out of NATO. The second thing of note is that Birmingham is the only city apart from Liverpool where strong opposition to expulsions is expressed. This opposition is, of course, centred on the Khan/Scally case with resolutions supporting these two comrades from Ladywood and Selly Oak. Then there are amendments from Ladywood, Edgbaston, Hodge Hill, Hall Green, Perry Barr and surprise, surprise, Sparkbrook! An even bigger surprise will be if Sparkbrook continue to support their amendment.

Besides the expulsions issue, the other CLPs forwarding resolutions were: Edgbaston - against nuclear power; Hodge Hill - renationalising privatised industry and public services; Northfield - retaining the British car industry in public ownership; Sparkbrook - for fair immigration controls; Hall Green - opposing the Public Order Bill; and Sutton Coldfield - any member can attend GMCs. Nearby Solihull sent a resolution against a poll tax. The other amendments sent were: Selly Oak - a ministry of women's rights; Small Heathy - against nuclear power; and Yardley - public ownership for small firms around Telecom.

Although the Birmingham resolutions and amendments were deeply affected by the Khan/Scally issue, it is interesting to look at the areas not covered. First is the Irish question. With such a large Irish community in the city and a history of campaigning in the area by the Labour Committee on Ireland and others, this must be the first year for some time that no resolution or amendment has been sent. Is this a reflection of the impact of the Anglo-Irish Accord? The LCI will certainly try to reverse this state of affairs next year. Then there is nothing on South Africa. Are Birmingham parties going to leave all the campaigning work to the Trades Council? Both low pay and transport are, or soon will be, affecting this area and both received sizeable support from constituencies nationally. National legislation will be needed to turn these problems around, along with struggles in the workplace and community but there was no mention of these from Birmingham. Women's rights got a mention but no more. Obviously, Birmingham can't cover everything, but with those four constituencies not sending a resolution there is plenty of room still left.



Kevin Scally

Still, if delegates to conference were elected in line with the policies expressed, we could see a good sprinkling of left delegates from Birmingham this year.

Bob Whitehead.

Constituency	Resolution	Number	Page
Selly Oak	Scally/Khan	35	11
Ladywood	Scally/Khan	36	12
Sutton	Attendance at GCs	47	14
Edgbaston	Nuclear power	155	48
Solihull	Poll Tax	391	100
Hodge Hill	Re-nationalisation	399	103
Northfield	Public ownership of car industry	401	103
Sparkbrook	Immigration control	508	129
Hall Green	Public Order Bill	518	131
Perry Barr	None		
Erdington	None		
Small Heath	None		
Yardley	None		

NEC SLATE

It is important that the elections for the National Executive Committee (NEC) at this years party conference should shift the NEC to the left. Therefore, 'Briefing' is calling for votes for the following comrades in these elections:

Constituency section:

Tony Benn
Eric Heffer
Audrey Wise
Jo Richardson
Russell Profitt
Dennis Skinner
Narendra Makanji

Treasurer:

Gavin Strang MP

Women's Section:

'Briefing' supports the slate agreed by National Women's Conference which is

Diane Abbott
Frances Morrell
Clare Short
Margaret Beckett
Joan Maynard

'NOW YOU HAVE TOUCHED THE WOMEN, YOU HAVE STRUCK A ROCK'

Women's anti-pass campaign song, 1956.



The recent coming together of women in Birmingham to commemorate Azania Women's Day and the anniversary of internment in Ireland did much to highlight the similarities of those struggles. The common fact felt by those African and Irish women present was that it is only in the battle to end national and class oppression that the emancipation of women in those countries can be meaningfully fought for.

Joyce Diseko of the ANC reminded us of the 'oppression, discrimination and exploitation' of her people at the hands of Botha's apartheid regime and international capitalism. Her message was clear: the fight against racism is international. Those who do not fight acquiesce by their silence.

Like Joyce, the speaker from SWAPO Women's Council and an ex-Armagh prisoner Ann Doyle reported increased use of torture and violations against women's bodies. In southern Africa, women were being abused and even raped by soldiers and police. Joyce spoke of one mother of three who was raped in front of her young children. She likened the current situation there to that in Vietnam when defeated US troops abused countless women and children.

Sisters from SWAPO described the nightmare situation that exists in their country where South African soldiers outnumber the population by six to one. Rape, torture and political repression is so rife that thousands of women have been forced into exile, mainly to Angola and Zambia. But, whether abroad or at home, the majority of women actively support or are organised by SWAPO Women's Council which was set up in 1969 to ensure 'women's full participation in the struggle.'

These sisters reminded us that Namibia's colonial economy is dominated by British multi-national companies greedy for the easy plunder of Namibia's rich resources. One of the women asked 'Do the women, the Black people and the unemployed of Britain actually need or have the diamonds mined in Namibia at such a price?'

The stark realities of British repression in Ireland were brought home by Ann Doyle, herself incarcerated by our government three times. The first was when she was only fifteen and was picked up during the internment swoops into nationalist areas. She noted that most of those interned were never proved to have any republican links but yet some were locked up for almost two years before being acquitted. This system of British 'justice' must be the envy of many repressive regimes.

The women prisoners of Armagh have now been transferred to the new 'super prison' Maghaberry but even with 'the best security available anywhere in Europe' the British authorities continue to harrass and intimidate prisoners and visitors alike by continual strip searching.

It seems that, like the authorities in South Africa, Britain has found that neither laws nor bullets can stop women in struggle. Like all other bullies, the British government has resorted to humiliation and violation in an attempt to silence. They do not realise that it is their own humanity which has been degraded in the process. Ann Doyle echoed the feelings of all those present when she reminded us that racism and sexism are part of a long process that enables us to be divided and ruled: 'That's how imperialism works, playing one off against another and it's time we woke up to that fact.'

(The Conference was organised by Birmingham Women and Ireland and Birmingham Black Sisters. It was sponsored by Labour Women and Ireland)

Maggie Robertson, Birmingham LWI.



Photo: Joanne O'Brien/Format

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

ANC SOLIDARITY RALLY

30 September, 7 pm

Church Centre, Carrs Lane
(in City Centre)
Speakers include:
Paul Robeson Jnr
Solly Smith (ANC rep in Britain)
Christine Crawley MEP
George Bolton
Sid Platt

For more information contact:
25 Essex St, B5 4TR
Tel: (021-) 692 1765.

Sinn Fein Councillors to tour Birmingham

As mentioned in last month's 'Briefing', the Labour Committee on Ireland is organising a visit by a delegation of Sinn Fein councillors drawn from the nearly one hundred who have been elected throughout Ireland. The councillors will visit London, Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham in the week 18 to 25 October. Manchester City Council and some London boroughs have already agreed to official receptions.

The main object of the tour is to have more in depth discussions with councillors and others involved in local political activity in Britain than has been possible in previous, more hurried visits.

It is hoped to set up meetings about Plastic Bullets, Housing, the Irish as an ethnic minority and strip searching, to name just some of the important subjects which relate to this visit. If you can assist in setting up meetings contact Anita Richards on 236 3380 (daytime) or 523 3608 (home).

Councillor Pam Dean is co-ordinating the visit along with the Local committees of the Labour Committee on Ireland and Labour Women and Ireland. She can be contacted at the Council House with further ideas and suggestions. Since the tour is costing a lot of money, donations and offers of funding will be more than welcome.

Fighting for the battleground of the Labour Party

Labour Party activists often see the party's rules and constitution as boring and the preserve of bureaucrats. While there is a lot of truth in this view, the constitution and its use (or abuse) have a great effect on who controls the party and thus, to some extent, how near we are to socialism. For this reason, we must take note of any proposed changes which might alter the fundamental balance of power in the party. Three such changes are looming and all will be discussed at this year's party conference: the creation of a National Constitutional Committee; the removal of effective accountability from the reselection process and a series of changes in the Labour Party Young Socialists.



The establishment of the National Constitutional Committee (NCC) is intended to take effect before Christmas. It is designed to make party discipline easier to impose. If the NCC had the power to discuss the interpretation of the party's rules, if it was allowed to discuss issues concerning party organisations not just individual members, if it was not packed with trade union representatives when its purpose is to deal with discipline and constituency members, then it might be acceptable. Unfortunately, the NEC8s constitutional amendment csnnot itself be amended. Therefore the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy is suggesting the model emergency resolution printed with this article.

Then the NEC intends to propose, probably in 1987 or 1988, another constitutional amendment to replace the present system of reselection of parliamentary candidates with a new one designed to effectively end genuine accountability. No longer will General Committees in constituencies which monitor their MPs work on a monthly basis, have any say in the selection of candidates. In this way, local trade unionists also face a loss of influence. No-one claims the present system is perfect. It still results in the selection of far too many white, middle class men. But the impact of one member, one vote would potentially be to give MPs a job for life. After the introduction of mandatory reselection in 1979, the right has challenged it at every party conference. If the 192 resolutions on nuclear power are to have any influence whatsoever, if party conference decisions are to mean anything, then constituency parties must have some control over their MPs and mandatory reselection must be defended.

The NEC is also proposing to this year's conference the principle of changes in the structure of the party's youth organisation, the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS). Some of these changes can be welcomed, such as youth trade union delegates to the party's youth conference. Others are dubious. Why should student Labour clubs have delegates to regional and national conferences when their youth members are already potential LPYS members? But worst of all is the idea of reducingt the upper age limit of the LPYS from 25 to 21. This is an admission by the right wing that they are incapable of winning a political debate with supporters of 'Militant'.

Mike Hobday, Solihull CLP.

Model Emergency Resolution for Labour Party Conference.

'This Conference notes the decision of the NEC to propose a National Consultative Committee (NCC) without prior consultation with affiliated organisations, and calls on the National Executive Committee to put before this Conference a range of options regarding its composition and powers.

The options must include separate options providing for:

1. the constituencies to have the same number of representatives as the trade unions:
2. the NCC to have the powers to hear appeals concerning:

a. all disciplinary matters decided by the NEC;
b. the rejection of applications for membership;
c. the interpretation of the rules and constitution.
d. the rights of all groups of Labour Party members campaigning within the party;
e. the refusal to endorse candidates.

BRIEFING