BRIEFING

SPECIAL CONFERENCE EDITION

'Jobs and Industry'

"The centrepiece of Labour's general election manufesto" is how the launch of the Party's plan for jobs was described 10 days ago. 1,115,000 jobs are promised within 2 years of election.

Some questions immediately spring to mind:

- assuming the plan works, is a reduction of just 1 million from a real unemployment total well in excess of 4 million good enough?
- do we really want more MSC type training?
- can workers place as much faith in private employers as Labour's leadership does?

But most crucially the proposals don't even bear a passing resemblance to socialist policies. The economic crisis isn't seen as a conflict of class interests, but merely "bad management" by the Tories. Kinnock's models are the "successful" capitalist governments of Japan, Germany and the USA. It would be interesting to know what Japanese or German workers think about that!

The whole scheme rests on increasing Capitalist production and profitability. Even while insisting that a labour government would halt the outflow of capital, Kinnock has reassured the bankers "we will ensure that the return paid on those funds is equal to what they can earn elsewhere" (speech to 1985 Party Conference).

The interests of workers and unemployed are totally absent. Unemployment will be tackled not because it destroys lives and communities, nor because it is used to discipline those still in work, but because it "makes us a less successful and productive country than our international competitors" (Kinnock launching the policy).

As if the experiences of the 1964-70 and 1974-79 Labour governments weren't enough. Then the poverty of 'planned capitalism', wage control and cuts were all exposed to Labour voters. And millions of them turned their backs, yet to return. The latest plans don't even have a fig-leaf of radicalism. Is there any real difference between them and the policies of the Liberal/SDP Alliance?

Richard Paine
Coventry SW CLP

The resolutions tabled originally on Jobs and Industry, item 1 on this weekend's Agenda, unfortunately do little to take us forward.

The GMBATU motion simply applauds the 1 million jobs in 2 years policy with little further ado.

The motion from Wolverhampton District Party does raise some important questions about the role of local authorities - questions which are virtually ignored in the latest package. But it fails to recognise the inherent and crippling limitations imposed on local authorities by the huge power of the rampant multinational corporations.

And the answers posed to these corporations in Northfield's motion are simply chauvinist and reactionary.

Produced jointly by:

'Birmingham Labour Briefing and Campaign Group' & 'Coventry Labour Briefing'

Socialist Witchunted

Once again, the NEC has shown itself keener to cause division within its own ranks than concentrate its fire on the Tories and the Alliance. In January, the NEC declared I was not a member of Selly Oak CLP, despite an assurance from a national official in December, that if Selly Oak CLP and I were to write formally requesting endorsement of my membership, the NEC would consider it 'favourably'.

Both letters were sent but the result was not favourable. A reply was sent to the regional Party before it was sent to Selly Oak. No reply was ever sent to me.No fresh evidence had been brought against me, no opportunity had been given for Selly Oak CLP or myself to present the case in a proper manner.If this is being treated 'favourably', I would not like to experience the unfavourable treatment.

My original exclusion from Yardley CLP came after a regional enquiry had cleared me of all charges and recommended my admittance into Yardley CLP in June 1984. This report was buried and a nine month delay intervened before the NEC voted against me and four other people. The next time the NEC discussed the matter they said I could not be a member of Selly Oak CLP as the constituency had not formally requested it. When Selly Oak and myself did just that, they ruled I could not be a member because I did not take it through the NEC when I first joined Selly Oak CLP. They originally excluded me on the argument that a CLP can decide for itself who to accept or reject, even if they are transfers, as in my case. Now they deny Selly Oak that very right.

The NEC and Yardley CLP are united in wanting to expel socialists like me from the Labour Party. Their methods are unjust and undemocratic. That is why I call this a political witch hunt. I call on every good socialist in the West Midlands to support Selly Oak's welcome stand against it.

Bob Whitehead (Selly Oak CLP!)

Women's Action Committee: Don't let women waste their energy!

Labour Women's Action Committee calls upon delegates to support resolutions 39 and 42.

The resolutions once again highlight the struggle women are still having within the Labour Party, a struggle on which they should not have to waste their energy. But until women have equality in the Labour Party the goal of socialism will evade us.

For several years, resolutions to this conference have asked that the Regional Women's Conference delegates from constituencies and Trade Unions be allowed to elect the women to the four women's places on the West Midland's Regional Executive. Each year support for this has increased. The majority of Regional Women's Conferences already have this right.

Women delgates at Women's Conferences are actively involved in the Labour Party and/or trade unions and are therefore appropriate to choose the women whom they feel will be the most able to pursue the interests of women. The shadow elections held at National Women's Conference this year illustrated the vast differences between the choice of women delegates representing women and the delegates at Annual Conference representing a majority of men, when selecting the women to serve on the NAtional Executive Committee Women's section.

Resolution 42 is merely calling for the Labour Party to mirror the situation in most households in this country where work, space, living standards and acceptable goals are negotiated and shared between men and women (if not by society as a whole, then by party members at least). Women are not trying to take over; we just want equality. Many people feel it is the male dominance of the party that obstructs the road to socialism.

Many poor / working women still see the Labour Party as irrelevant because of its male image - just look at the Shadow Cabinet! Until women have equal access at all levels of the party we will continue to call on you to support resolutions such as these.

Help us redirect our energies elsewhere - support resolutions 39 and 42 !

Pauline Purnell - Chair, Labour women's Action Committee.

Guildford Four

In January, the Home Secretary said he would not refer the case of the Guildford 4 to the Court of Appeal because there was 'no new evidence to justify re-opening these cases.'

They remain closed despite the recent 'First Tuesday' TV programme which produced new alibi evidence. A fresh witness positively identified one of the four as being in a flat miles away from the bombings when they took place. Further new medical evidence noted the 'suggestibility' of a second member of the four, casting doubt on the reliability of the confessions which were the sole basis of the convictions. Lord Devlin further claimed that the failure to charge the IRA active service unit captured in the Balcombe Street seige with the Guildford bombing meant that 'technically the course of justice has been thwarted'. This unit always claimed they were responsible for the bombing.

Why have these cases not been re-opened? Why have the confessions of the Balcombe Street unit not been assessed in a trial in open court?

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Contract Compliance skins the capitalist cat.

There's more than one way of skinning a cat. And there are more ways of putting capital under the control of Labour than old-style nationalisation.

Contract compliance policies are being increasingly used by Labour councils to impose socialist constraints on private firms. A resolution from Birmingham Perry Barr, amended by ASTMS and Aldridge / Brownhills CLP, asks this conference to give its full weight to developing contract compliance in local government.

What is meant by 'contract compliance'? Quite simply, it means whenever a Labour council places a contract or does business with a private firm - such as a building job or for catering supplies - it sets conditions that the firm must comply with if it is to get the contract. It's much the same as the Benn-style 'planning agreements' idea.

Building workers have been the first to argue for stronger contract compliance conditions. The Perry Barr resolution is based heavily on UCATT's own trade union policy, which is for the protection of building workers' rights in the private sector. The conditions include the requirement that private firms shall have full trade union recognition, plus trade union agreed working conditions, health and safety, and no labour-only sub-contractors (so banning 'lump' labour).

A vital ingredient is the requirement for private firms to employ a quota of apprentices. Private firms have left it to local authorities to invest in training young workers in new skills, resulting in skills shortages. Also, private firms can tempt trained workers into private employment by differentials, leaving local authority Direct Labour Organisations short of key workers.

Building firm contract compliance policies have helped to offset the damaging effects of the 1980 legislation of compulsory competitive tendering for all local authority building work, which threatened to undermine DLOs through a tidal wave of cowboy builders doing cheap jobs at the expense of workers' pay and conditions.

A new slant on contract compliance has been the equal opportunities clauses. Pioneered by John Carr and Ken Livingstone in the GLC, a contract compliance unit was set up in London to provide 'a key weapon in breaking down racism and sexism in private sector employment.' (GLC Policy Statement 1985) Firms are required to be equal opportunity employers and to eliminate racist and sexist practices.

The amendment to the Perry Barr resolution which has been accepted into a composite calls for the extension of contract compliance to exclude firms with South African connections. Even Birmingham Council (which all Birmingham delegates will admit to being only the meekest of moderate councils) has successfully used these conditions against Tarmac.

Questions still have to be raised about the effectiveness of contract compliance. Councils have to monitor firms to ensure conditions are complied with. This can prove expensive and it is still easy for firms to pull the wool over the eyes of monitoring officers. And we must also avoid double standards - we must require private firms to have equal opportunity policies but can we be confident that our own council's employment policies are truly free of racist or sexist bias?

Despite these notes of caution, however, there can be no doubt that the Perry Barr resolution should receive the wholehearted support of Conference as a major step in strengthening a much needed weapon to curb the excesses of Thatcher's unfettered capitalism.

Rob Pocock - Secretary, Perry Barr CLP; delegate, Birmingham District Labour Party.

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Calls for a judicial enquiry have come from a wide range of opinion, such as TV presenters Robert Kee and Ludovic Kennedy, Conservative MP John Farr, Cardinal Hume and from a series of former Home Secretaries, Labour and Tory, including Merlyn Rees.

Support the Resolution on the Guildford Four. Let's make sure it's actually taken, not shoved to the end of the agenda and forgotten.

Labour Committee on Ireland

Public Meeting

Speaker:

Alastair Logan
Solicitor for the Guildford Four.

Fighting Cocks Pub, Market Street, Telford, Saturday 21 March, 6.00 pm.

Labour Party Black Section

Public Meeting

Saturday 21 March
5.15

Fighting Cocks Pub, Market Street

All Welcome

Black people and jobs

The Black population (Afro-Caribbean and Asian) in the West Midlands region is the second largest in the country. In the County alone there are probably between 150,000 and 200,000 Black Labour voters. It is obvious that Labour's Jobs and Industry Campaign needs to take up the issue of Black people and jobs.

Two motions - numbers 32 and 34 - take up this issue. Black people face much higher unemployment levels than whites. Those fortunate to have jobs tend to have jobs with worse pay and conditions. In the past job expansions passed by Black people. These motions discuss policies to ensure Black people as well as white people get decent jobs under a Labour Government.

Motion 34 from Birmingham Ladywood calls for local authorities and the rest of the public sector to adopt equality targets within their own workforces and contract compliance policies for the private sector. It also raises two issues which must be tackled if contract compliance policies are to bite. Such policies can only insist existing legislation is enforced and so there is a need to tighten the Race Relations Act. The motion calls for the Act to place the burden on employers to prove they are not discriminating.

Contract compliance policies need to be monitored to ensure effectiveness. This monitoring needs more than just officers in contract compliance units. Unions must be involved and, when the issue of equal opportunities is at stake, Black and women workers. Autonomous Black organisation within the trade unions is needed to stop equal opportunities being relegated to a secondary issue.

Motion 34 also stresses that a massive public investment programme with full employment as the target is needed. If this means exchange controls, nationalisations and taking over the City then so be it. It is a question of priorities - profits or jobs.

Given that the motions explicitly refer to the Jobs and Industry Campaign it is suprising they are in the Equal Opportunity section of the Agenda and therefore may not be discussed. The message is that Black people are peripheral. Black Section supporters and the movers of the two resolutions intend to fight to make the Labour Party put equal opportunities at the centre of its policies. VOTE FOR RESOLUTIONS 32 and 34.

Support Black Sections

Black Section supporters were shocked to see motion 43 from TASS ~~No.12~~ Division on the Agenda. It calls on the Regional Executive Committee to campaign against Black Sections. Yet two years ago a motion in support of Black Sections from Birmingham Ladywood was ruled out of order. It seems that only one side of the debate on Black Sections is allowed.

This contradictory motion contains the usual myths about Black Sections. It claims Black Sections will isolate ethnic minorities from other comrades. The situation now is one where Black people are isolated. Their numbers on GMCs, on the Regional Executive, as Councillors and as MPs or PPCs in no way reflects Labour's huge Black vote.

The truth is that wherever Black Sections have operated they have involved more Black people in the Labour Party, in the wards, the GMCs and in trade unions, and the number of Black people selected and elected as Councillors has risen. It is not a coincidence that the 3 Black Council leaders and the 6 Black PPCs most likely to be elected as MPs ALL support Black Sections.

The TASS motion also says Black Sections create disunity in the Party. But Black Sections help create unity on the basis of equality by striving to overcome the lack of Black representation and policy weaknesses on racism and equal opportunities.

The contradiction in the motion is the call for unity at the same time as a call for a campaign against Black members trying to involve more Black people in the Party through Black Sections. Black Sections call for a VOTE AGAINST MOTION 43.

Black Sections are growing. A Birmingham Black Section was formed last year and has pressured the Council to take Black issues seriously. On 14 March, the third annual national Black Section Conference was held in Nottingham. The Black People and The Labour Party seminar held on 31 January overwhelmingly supported Black Sections, a fact conveniently omitted from the Executive Report to this Conference.

Black Sections will not go away because racism will not go away. We will continue the fight to make Labour take racism seriously and to make Labour reflect the Black dimension in its policies. After all, the Labour Party is OUR Party as well.