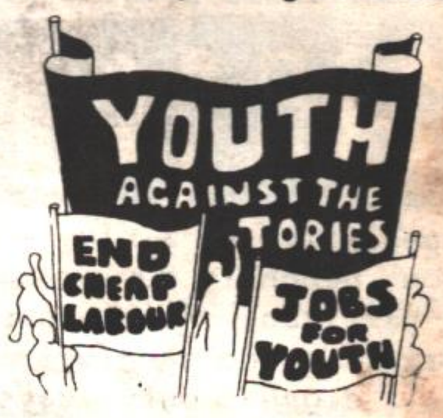
BRIGHTON LABOUR 30p

BRIEFING

No 38 FEBRUARY 1986

YOUTH FIGHT BACK!

Labour Party Young Socialists

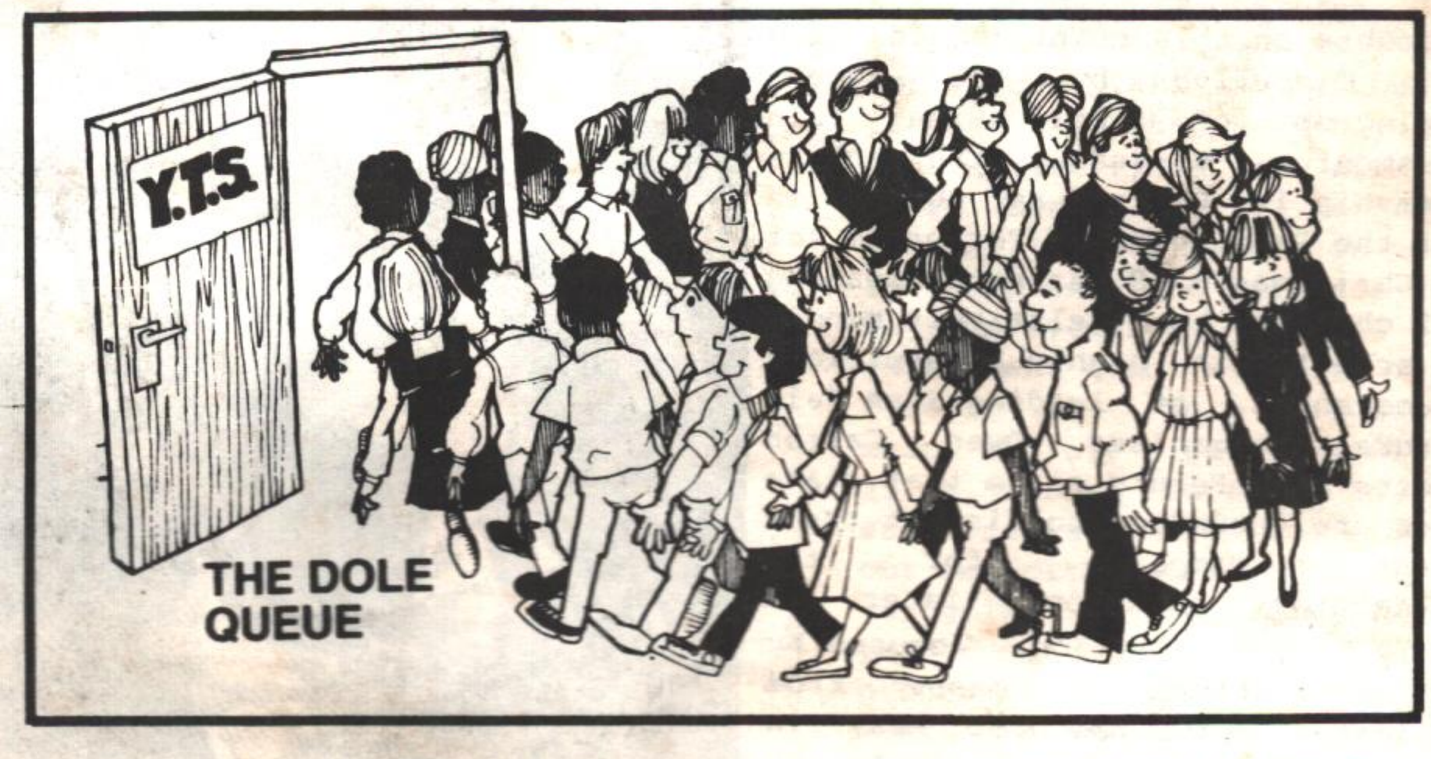


Last year's Southern Region LPYS conference took place during the last few weeks of the miners' strike. The consequences of the defeat of the miners are still working their way through society. It has given the green light to the Tories to increase their attacks on the working class, youth in particular. TRACY DOYLE reports on the issues facing this year's Southern Region LPYS conference.

The Government's attempts to force unions to bow to their rule was given a boost by the TUCs capitulation to the AUEW and the EEPTUs decision to take government money. Youth are facing legislation to limit rights to DHSS benefits and the abolishing of the wages council. There is also the ever-present threat of new legislation on abortion and rights to contraception in a follow up to Powell and Gillick.

ATTACK FROM THE LEADERSHIP

It is now that the Labour leadership is increasing its attacks on the LPYS, limiting its budget and sacking the youth officer. This is no answer to those youth who want an alternative to the Tories and want to fight now. In May thousands of school students took to the streets to oppose YTS. In September and October, black youth fought back against state harassment by rioting. In the autumn, thousands went on the anti-apartheid and CND demonstrations. Throughout the year the mobilisation of school students and workers against apartheid has put imperialism on the defensive in South Africa



FRINGE MEETING

The LPYS does not give much of a way forward for youth campaigning from the resolutions. It will be important for Labour Briefing supporters to raise the issues that are not going to be heard in the conference. Labour Briefing and Youth Fightback are holding a fringe meeting on racism with Bernie Grant (Leader of Haringey Council) and Kingsly Abrams (black youth organiser standing for NEC at the LPYS conference).

OPPOSE THE WITCHUNT

The main job for the LPYS in the next year will be to defend the organisations of the working class shown specifically around the campaign for miners' amnesty. We must also unite with all those forces opposed to the witchunt of socialists in the Labour Party. The best way to do this will be to turn the LPYS outwards to the struggles youth are campaigning around.

For details of the Conference, see Sussex Briefing inside.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

LCI victory in Brighton

At last Brighton Labour Party has a policy on Ireland. At the Special General Committee of November 27th, delegates brought to an end a lengthy period of debate in the party by endorsing the position put forward by the Labour Committee on Ireland and the Troops Out Movement. GRAHAM DAWSON looks at how the policy can be put into practice.

Brighton Labour Party now recognises that: "... there can be no prospect of an end to violence or of long term unity between Catholics and Protestants in pursuit of working class interests while Britain's Northern Ireland statelet remains in being. Both for the Irish and British working classes, it is vital that partition and British rule in Ireland be ended, restoring the right of self-determination to the Irish people. This right can no longer be subject to veto by Ireland's Unionist minority." The party is now committed "to work for the immediate and unconditional British withdrawal from Ireland, militarily and politically."

ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

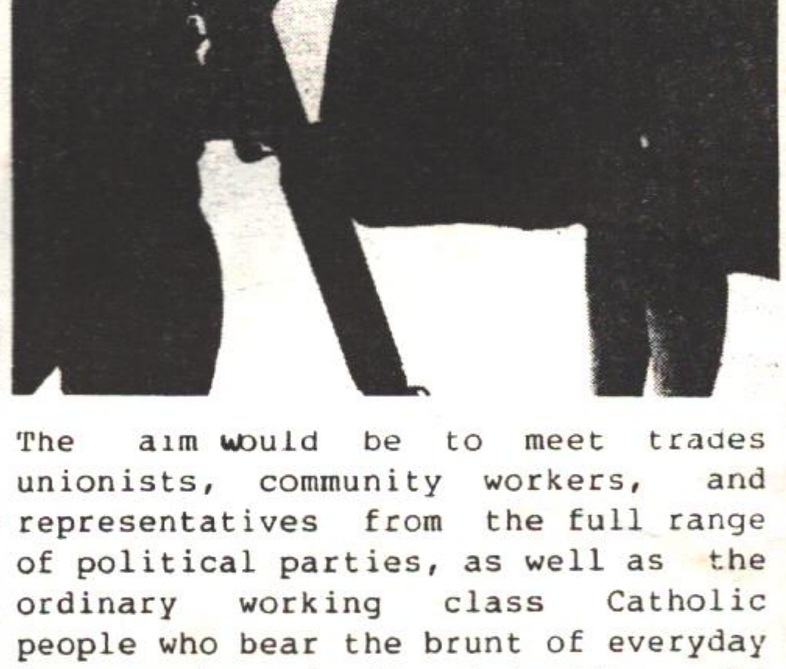
This is a very welcome development, especially at a time when the Labour front bench is moving back towards a bi-partisan consensus with the Tories. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed only days before the Special GC, which also passed an emergency motion from Queens Park condemning the leadership's unqualified support; "This Agreement has been reached in order to try to head off the growth in support for Sinn Fein."

HARASSMENT

Any doubts on this point should have been dispelled by the recent stepping-up of anti Sinn Fein harassment. Virtually the entire leadership in Derry was pulled in under the Prevention of Terrorism Act over Christmas - 18 arrests leading to 2 charges, both relatively minor. The arrests in highly suspicious circumstances, of leading Sinn Fein electoral organiser Owen Carron supports Sinn Fein's claim that state forces are intending to disrupt their current campaign for the parliamentary elections later in January. The elections, caused by the resignation en masse from Westminster of Unionist MPs, in protest at the Agreement, will be an important first test of popular feeling. Carron, who organised the successful parliamentary campaign of hunger striker Bobby Sands in 1981, will fight this election as candidate from a prison cell.

GROUNDSWELL OF OPINION

It is important that Brighton Labour Party now adds its voice to the deepening groundswell of opinion in the CLPs critical of the Labour leadership's position on Ireland. It is also important that Brighton Labour Party works for its new policy in the Brighton Labour Movement and the town itself. The GC made a clear commitment ti initiate "regular dialogue between BLP and organisations with a mass base in the Irish working class, including Sinn Fein." As a first practical step in this direction, the General Committee called upon BLP officers to investigate the possibility of organising a local Labour Movement delegation to the Six Counties.





The aim would be to meet trades unionists, community workers, and representatives from the full range of political parties, as well as the ordinary working class Catholic people who bear the brunt of everyday harassment and discrimination. In line ith the Special GC's recognition "that the issue of withdrawal cannot be divorced from the continued repression of women in Ireland", the delegation ould also seek out women's groups in the two cities.

INCREASE SUPPORT

Interest and support could be increased by encouraging delegates from various sections of Brighton Labour Party, such as women, young and elderly people, and trade unionists. Also, delegates with particular interest in one of several key policy issues, such as housing, social security, abortion, childcare, policing and civil liberties and employment, could be encouraged to investigate and report back their findings.

DELEGATION TO SIX COUNTIES

The delegation needs to be planned with care so as to generate the widest possible interest and support, both before and after the visit. An initial proposal, to go before the Executive Committee, suggests a 6 day visit to the Catholic areas of Belfast and Derry, provisionally in June, for perhaps 10 or 12 comrades.

Labour's voice for withdrawal
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Labour's approach to housing

The all day Local Government General Committee on December 7th approved with some minor amendments Labour's strategy for sorting out Brighton's housing crisis. Labour's plans are probably the most comprehensive ever agreed by the local party and provide a well worked out strategy for the party when in power. Below, STEVE BASSAM, Labour's Shadow Chair of Housing outlines Labour's strategy, the philosophy behind it and the problems facing the party in carrying out the housing programme.

Seven years of Thatcher government have brought havoc and chaos to the housing system in Brighton. Expenditure on housing is now at an all time low. The Tories have allowed Brighton just £5.6m of housing investment money for 1986/87, just half in real terms of the barely adequate 1979 figure. This year the Council actually bid for nearly £20m. Council rents are in the top twenty nationally (including London) and average £21.58 a week. Private tenants face almost equally extortionate rent levels, and home owners live in mortgaged housing which as expensive as London property.

DETERIORATION

Over the last 7 years housing conditions have deteriorated in all sectors, despite considerable and belated investment through home improvement grants to home owners. Brighton's own council housing requires some £84m of investment for repair and improvements over the past 10 years, to ensure reasonable modernisation standards. The towns private rented sector presents perhaps the most depressing picture of all, with 1 in 4 private rented houses either unfit or substandard. Tenants face insecurity from ruthless profiteering landlords, particularly those who rent seedy bed and breakfast accomodation, where frequently several households are forced to share insanitary washing and working conditions. The homelessness caused by private sector landlordism and pressures of family break-up in overcrowded accomodation equals the problems experienced in many inner-city areas and northern towns where deprivation is most commonly found. Brighton's housing crisis demands a radical programme and one which will command popular support.

LABOUR'S APPROACH

The newly agreed Housing Policy Statement adopts a sector-by sector analysis and is based on a cohesive examination of the town's housing problems. It is not possible to reform part of the town's housing market without affecting other aspects of the overall problem. In response, Labour has agreed an approach which rests on building public support for an expansionist programme of construction and acquisition. To solve homelessness and end private sector squalor we need more new houses built. The evidence suggests that sufficient town sites do exist if we make good use of the available land space. The Borough Planning Officer suggests that there is room for over 3000 new dwellings (with the development of Bevendean Valley excluded) if we use and acquire sites not previously earmarked for housing. Some sites like Preston Barracks and the Station site still require negotiation and government assistance, others we own and can develop.



SHELTERED HOUSING

Labour's plan is to build 400 new houses from 1988, when Whitehawk should be completely redeveloped. The party has agreed that special attention should be given to Sheltered Housing for elderly and disabled tenants, who currently get the worst deal in terms of specialist housing. Brighton has almost the lowest percentage of Sheltered Housing in the South East despite having 24000 pensioner households in its boundary.

PRIVATE SECTOR

The party has also agreed to the creation of a Private Sector Sub-Committee. This will campaign for the improvement of standards in the private sector. The attack will be two-pronged. Firstly, by the enforcement of decent standards through existing legislation and secondly through the use, under a Labour Government, of acquisition powers to municipalise, redevelop and renew. Wards like Regency (which has 50% private rented housing) and Kingscliffe will become a priority. In the meantime we will need to divert and find more resources to cope with the growing problems of homelessness. Better advice, and the end of discrimination in allocation policy together with better use of the Council's own stock will ensure homeless people get a better deal from Council services.

HOME OWNERS NEED HELP TOO!

Labour has a good campaigning record on the problems faced by home owners, particularly those with low incomes. Brighton has roughly 60% home owners and they are mostly low income households. The problems that they experience with the home improvement grants system, with Housing Benefits (Rates) and in getting advice and help through estate agents and solicitors should be of concern to Labour. Our local policies are designed to improve services to them. Pensioner households, particularly these with poor property face a worrying old age and Labour's radical plan would enable flexibility between the public and private sectors and help with repairs.

VICTORY IN MAY

Much of this will require a change in government, but a victory in May partly worked around our radical approach to the totality of Brighton's housing crisis will do much to undermine Tory confidence and show Labour as the most credible alternative with fighting and socialist principles.

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GAS WORKS:
Keep it Public!



The Tories' plans to privatise British Gas are a blatant display of asset stripping proposed by a Government desparate to finance tax cuts before the next election. Energy Secretary Peter Walker describes the sell off as 'good for the consumer, good for the employee, good for the nation'. JOHN FARRAR outlines the implications of privatisation for the Labour Movement.

The Government states that the industry will be more efficient in private hands. How many private (or public for that matter) industries can produce a record of efficiency to match British Gas:

* It has met all the Government imposed financial targets.

* It is self financing.

* It LENDS money to the Government.

* In the last tax year it paid £700 million into the Treasury.

* The conversion to Natural Gas was completed on time and to budget.

* Productivity has risen by 50% in the last 9 years.

With results like these how can privatisation be good for the nation?

The recent increases in telephone charges imposed by the newly privatised British Telecom clearly indicates the ineffectiveness of regulatory bodies, ie. watchdogs. Experience in the US has shown that 'watchdog' bodies attempting to regulate the activities of large companies are flawed and ineffective. So far the Government has failed to give even the most basic assurances regarding the effectiveness of OFGAS - the proposed regulatory body:

* Who will control OFGAS?

* Will OFGAS be accountable to the consumers or the industry?



Cartoons by Cath Jackson

* What will OFGAS actually be permitted to regulate?

And this is supposed to be good for the consumer!

Sir Denis Rooke, Chair of British Gas, recently said that he could give no assurances over staffing levels in the new company. He could give no guarantees or assurances that existing terms and conditions of service will be protected. When questioned about the prospectus which lays down the terms for prospective buyers he claimed that the Trade Unions had 'no right to even ask to be consulted on this.' Sir Denis Rooke's answers make it clear how good it will be for the employees.

STOCKBROKERS BENEFIT

So who will it be good for? As usual the stockbrokers will benefit. They stand to rake off an estimated £400 million. Of course, the City Institutions and the multi-nationals will benefit again. When British Gas's North Sea interests were sold off in June 1984 there were £212 million shares issued. By mid 1985 there were 14,800 shareholders. However of these only 225 shareholders (1.5%) owned 89% of the shares. Rio Tinto Zinc alone own £63 million (30%). The much-flaunted selling off of British Telecom has resulted in the situation where only around 2% of the shares are owned by 'ordinary' people. Why should anyone believe that the sell off of the rest of British Gas will be any different? Finally of course, Thatcher and Co. believe it will be good for their fortunes. They hope that the sale will bring in some £10 billion to pay for tax cuts to sweeten their supporters for the next election.

TRADE UNION CAMPAIGN

The Labour Movement must rally around to support the Trade Union Campaign GUARD. It is essential that the public believe that the sale is morally and financially wrong. If the sale of British Gas flops maybe our other utilities, Water and Electricity will be safe. If we fail, they are doomed.

GUARD - for further information, contact NALGO SE District Office, International House, Queens Road, Brighton.

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