SUSSEX LABOUR 30p

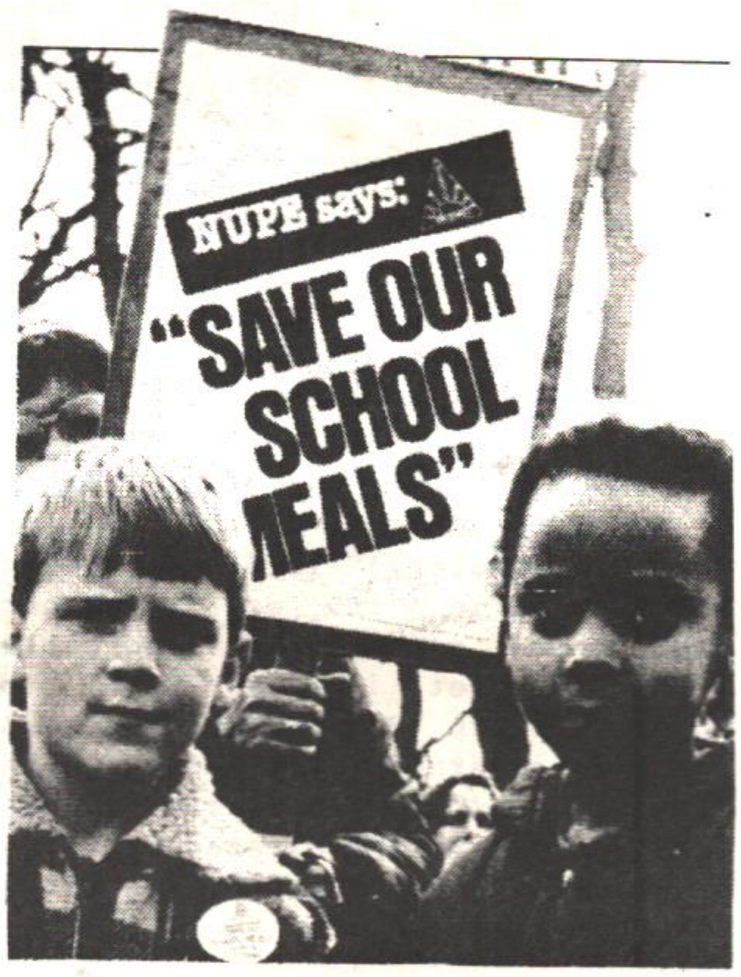
BRIEFING

No 1 FEBRUARY 1986

DEFENDING JOBS & SERVICES

Labour's budget policy for East Sussex, until the last Group meeting on 8th December 1985, was one of the last in the country to support a deficit budget policy with no fall-back position. It supported a deficit budget policy but recognises that one or a handful of councils are not enough to shift the Government from their massacre of local Government services. DAVE HILL, Leader of the East Sussex Labour Group outlines the latest situation, including a split in the Tories.

East Sussex Labour Group will attempt to get the Council to support a budget policy of voting for £16.5 of extra jobs and services. If it is possible to obtain these improvements on the day without setting a matching rate, demanding a proper rate support grant from central government, then we will do it, hoping to be part of a national resistance campaign by socialist councils. If however there is no way of securing extra jobs and services, Labour will vote for a matching rate rise. That is our fall back position - a bitter one to take, recognising that it is ordinary families who have to pay for the government theft of cash from local councils. What follows is a necessary factual account of the budget position and Labour's proposals which will hopefully be useful in local party newsletters.



FIVE BUDGETS

There are 5 alternative budgets being put forward for the February 25th 1986 County Budget meeting. A 'No more cuts but no growth' budget costs £227.3 million. The 5 proposals are Labour £16.5m extra, Liberals £10.6m extra, Chief Officers £8.4m extra, Tory leadership £4.1m extra, and the Thatcherite caucus propose cuts through service reductions and privatisation. The local context is £40m of cuts since 1979-80. In that year central government paid 39.4% of East Sussex spending. In 1985-6 this will be cut to under 20% - on a Tory budget the block grant would be 19.9%, for the Liberals 17.5%, for Labour 15.3%!!

THATCHER'S THEFT

On Labour's budget, block grant should, at 1979-80 levels, be £96m; yet it will only be £37.3m. Even if a Tory budget is passed, rate support grant at 39.4% of £231.4m should be £91.2m, but will only be £46.5m., a theft (even on Tory terms) from East Sussex ratepayers of £44.7m. In other words, if central government grant had not been reduced (to pay for Trident, and tax handouts to the richest 5%), then not only could more jobs and services be afforded, but there could be (if desired) a cash handout, a rate reduction too!! Just to keep existing services going with no improvements, because of the government grant rip-off, mean a rate rise of 18%. Tory proposals would mean a rate rise of 22.6%, Liberals 29.9%, Labour 36.6%. It's not an easy decision for socialists but if our deficit budget tactic fails, who is going to suggest we vote against teachers, books, home helps and proper conditions and pay for school meals staff? Not us.

SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL SERVICES

There are 5 proposals on teacher numbers. Labour is budgeting for 170 more, Liberals 120 more, Officers recommend 110, Tory leadership 46 more and Thatcherite caucus - no more! Class sizes in both primary and secondary schools used to be better in East Sussex than the Shire County average - but have now slumped to some of the worst in the country.

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LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

FIGHTING THE ODDS IN HORSHAM

There is something faintly absurd, certainly forlorn about campaigning for socialism in Horsham, a stronghold of Tory reaction so solid that the Tory majority in the last election was nearly 10 times the size of the entire Labour vote. In a town without a single Labour councillor the prospects for socialist advance are hardly enticeing. Nevertheless, socialists in Horsham do have tasks to perform and a role to play in the town's political life.

Horsham is a town where the entire vocabulary of politics is Conservative and where socialist ideas appear not only unacceptable but inconceivable. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that this means that there is no room for radical ideas, only that any attempt to presentsuch radical ideas in the context of socialism will meet with only a limited response. There are important constituencies which can be won over to the Labour Party by a well-constructed critique of the Conservative establishment even in Horsham.

VIGOROUS ATTACKS

Unionised white collar workers, council tenants, college and school students, pensioners, those on low wages and YTS schemes can all be attracted by vigorous attacks on the aspects of Tory policies which directly affect them. In addition, the Labour Party can attract a wider base of support through active participation in single issue campaigns such as that mounted to save Horsham Forest Hospital's maternity unit. It is imperative that the Labour Party is seen to offer a radical critique of all aspects of Tory (mis)rule in Horsham, from roads to streetlighting to council house rents. Demands which are radical / democratic in nature rather than socialist in themselves, such as feminism, are particularly important in a situation where Labour can attract little support through class interests alone.

CAMPAIGNING

The most important role for the Labour Party here is campaigning around a wide collection of issues, seeking to shake the complacency of Conservative Horsham. In such unfavourable circumstances, it is not surprising that the Labour Party has become slightly introspective, but it must realise that socialism to succeed must have a base of support in the South of England as well as the North, Wales and Scotland. It is important that more young activists are recruited to provide the party with a vigour which has so far lacked, while the party must treat propaganda as a much more vital element in its activities than hitherto. Even in the prosperous towns of Southern England, the struggle between capitalism and its victims goes on, however well it is disguised by the general air of quiescent apathy. The sooner the Labour Party realises that it must support struggle wherever and in whatever form it occurs, the sooner it will be able to pose effective opposition to the Tory stranglehold in town like Horsham.

GRIEVANCES

Horsham has been so badly managed by decades of Tory misrule that the Laboru Party hardly needs to look far for grievances to exploit. Young people in Horsham are treated with almost total contempt by the Tory establishment, their interests are ignores and their aspirations are unfulfilled. The Council refuses to spend money in anything like adequate quantities on streetlighting or roads, it refuses to provide pensioners with free bus passes, provide council houses with indoor lavatories or provide houses for Horsham's homeless. The Health Service in the area is badly run down, with a local mental hospital shut while public transport in the area is a joke. However, the District Council did find enough money in the petty cash till to build itself shiny new offices, a fact which will no doubt console those people on whose needs the Council was rather less ready to spend money. With Horsham's teachers as discontented as the rest of their profession, another angle for campaigning work is opened.

SINGLE ISSUE CAMPAIGNS

A campaigning local Labour Party able to offer a coherent and consistant critique of the Horsham establishment is a pre-requisite for improving Labour's fortunes in the constituency. The aim should be by participating in single issue campaigns to seek to radicalise those involved and attract them into the party while attempting to focus more generalised discontent with the establishment in a leftward direction. The opportunities are there for progress to be made. Even in the most impregnable Tory strongholds a flexible, campaigning approach around mainly local issues can bring significant, if modest dividends.

Tobin Aldrich,
Horsham CLP.

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On Social Services, Labour is pushing for more home help facilities and for the abolition of the minimum charge (to the poorest) of £1.50. Some Socialist London Boroughs have abolished all home help charges. Labour also wants more anti-drugs social workers, and day centres for the elderly. The Tory policy of 'care in the community' is being run on the cheap.

SOCIALIST PROPOSALS

Labour's major proposals are to restore conditions of pay and service for school meals staff (£0.466m), 170 more teachers plus ancillary and clerical support staff (£2m), more nursery education (£0.5m), improve facilities and staffing for young people in the Youth Service (£0.5m), £0.5m more for adult education, £100,000 help for low income families for clothing allowances, £2.5m for school maintenance, £1.1m for school books and materials. Our education improvements are to inject £8.3m extra as the first stage in reversing the damage that Tories have done to education over the last few years. Other major improvements are for £3.6m extra Social Services, and £0.5m for Libraries.

RIGHT WING COUP

The Conservative budget (pending the result of a right-wing coup attempt on the leadership of Mrs Mont) is, for the first time since 1980, called a 'no-cuts budget' of maintaining existing (paltry) levels of service and putting in a few extra teachers and school repairs. This so-called 'no-cuts budget' includes £40m. of cuts made in East Sussex since the Thatcher government took office, and recently imposed cuts in pay for school cleaners and caretakers. They are refusing to restore the national pay and conditions of school meals staff.

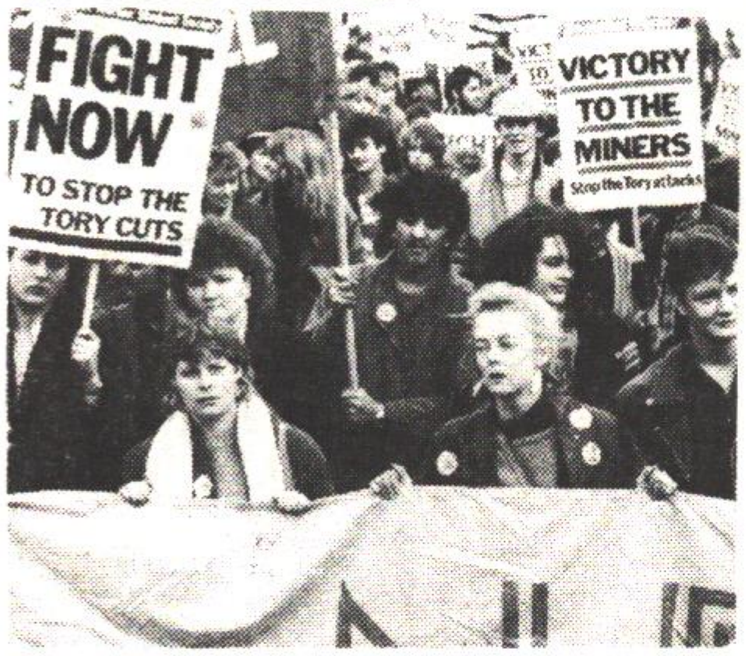
SOCIALIST MUNICIPAL RESISTANCE

The sage of socialist municipal resistance and expansion over the last two years has been bold, imaginative and, in part, successful. Short of a national resistance campaign by Labour authorities in defence of jobs and services (which it is is our policy as a Group to support), and pending the return of a socialist Labour Government, our proposed budget to be moved on 25th February will salvage and renew the local government services on which our class relies.

Justice for Miners

The campaign for miners amnesty is as important a struggle to defend the trade union movement as the 1984-85 miners' strike itself. Since their defeat many miners have been either sacked or imprisoned, and a bosses union, the Union of Democratic Miners, has come into existence. The NUM, the most militant union in the country has come under attack from the ruling class and the leaders of the Labour Movement.

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It is a testimony to the NUM's struggle, that 6 months after the end of the miners strike, motions supporting the miners amnesty were passed at the TUC and Labour Party conferences. Trade Union Briefing and the Campaign Group of Labour MPs launched the miners' amnesty campaign from last year's Labour Party Conference. It campaigns for the implementation of all conference decisions taken around the amnesty issue by supporting sacked and imprisoned miners now.

JUSTICE FOR THE MINERS!

Since the Labour Party Conference this has become the main campaign in support of amnesty, changing its name to 'Justice for Miners'. It has the backing of NUM Executive members, the coordinating body of miners support groups, a number of NUM lodges and areas and many branches of women against pit closures. Among the first initiatives are a benefit concert at the Albert Hall and a national demonstration in the first week of March.

UNITED FRONT

The campaign for miners' amnesty requires a united front approach of all those forces supporting the miners in the same way the Labour Left supported the strike itself. The LPYS should come behind this campaign; supporting its initiatives and building them throughout the Labour Movement.

Alistair Chisholm,
Lewes LPYS.

LPYS Southern Region Conference

YOUTH BRIEFING

The resolutions and campaign booklet does not give any hope for changes in the LPYS's campaigning over the next year. Low pay and YTS, drugs and racism are seen as the priorities in the campaign booklet. The resolutions are on a whole range of issues. Most of the motions and the campaign booklet put forward well meaning preambles that do not comit the LPYS to much at all.

EXCEPTIONS

The exceptions to this are the Brighton, Lewes, Oxford East and Southampton motions. Most other resolutions call on the NEC, or the next Labour Government to take action, whereas only the 4 motions mentioned above comit the LPYS to do anything. The Brighton resolution calls for the LPYS to campaign around amnesty for the miners, organising a speaking tour for sacked miners, producing a leaflet, adopting an imprisoned miner and encouraging collections for the miners.

RACISM

The Lewes motion is against racism internationally and in Britain. It calls for:

* Building demonstrations and actions to isolate apartheid and defend the black people of South Africa.

* Opposing fascists on the streets in Britain.

* The Labour Party to turn outwards to black struggles, in particular supporting the right of black people to organise themselves in Black Sections.

The Oxford East and Southampton motions are on South Africa. They both call for direct links with Trade Unions in Britain and South Africa and raising money for SOLSAY. However these motions do not mention



the main campaign in Britain, the anti-apartheid movement. The other main issues to be discussed are YTS and low pay and the moves against the LPYS. These motions fail to commit the LPYS to any concrete campaigns. Hopefully they will be amended to give the conference discussions more teeth.

YOUTH fightback

Join the LPYS

LABOUR BRIEFING NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

For some time now, regular Briefing readers will have noticed that more articles are being received from various towns around Sussex. A recent meeting of supporters from all Sussex decided to launch the Sussex Briefing, with the aim of covering the news from Worthing to Hastings.

The deadline for the March issue of Briefing is Monday 10th February. Articles to 35 Quebec Street, Brighton BN2 2UZ.

Living below the Breadline

The Government have finally realised that the Social Security system needs reform. They "reformed" it in 1980 because it was giving out too much money. They then triple unemployment and now find unsurprisingly that it gives out even more. The talk in the Fowler Review about better targetting nad simplification has been called in far less radical circles than this as "downright lies".

What is basically wrong with the review is that it was prepared by a team of business tycoons and government ministers for the benefit of people like them who do not even understand the present system. The team had few women, no trade unionists and no one who had ever claimed benefit.



'IT MIGHT BE 'COMMUNITY CARE' AS FAR AS YOU'RE CONCERNED, BUT FROM WHERE I STAND IT'S 'UNPAID LABOUR'!!'

MAINTENANCE

Parents of young children are worst off. £10.10 per week for a child under 11 is ridiculous. Child benefit is subtracted at £7, so is one parent benefit at £4.55. So if you are a single parent working you get £14.55 more, but on Sup. Ben. you get £4.40 LESS than if you had no children! If you receive maintenance this comes off as well. Since this leaves you with much less than the meagre single person's allowance, you have to live off your child. This is of course if you get your money: the DHSS are so overworked that hundreds of files are lost, Giros are late, and staff morale is low, resulting in a high turnover at local offices. If you have nothing to fall back on, a late Giro is a personal disaster.

OVERPAYMENTS

Overpayments can be disastrous too. If the DHSS find out they want it paid back - but of course you have already frittered it away on electric, gas bills, etc, so they stop it from your money. This happened to a client of mine. They then los the file for a year and stopped twice as much as they should. We sent the book back for amendment, and they lost that. Her baby has often to be fed on bread and margarine whilst she goes without.

CRIMINALISED

If you wprk in the badly paid jobs available you can only do so illegally. You are criminalised for working. You have no rights at work whatsoever. You are in fear of the neighbours if you have a boyfriend round. You are hassled to seek support from the father. At least one of my clients has been forced into a violent relationship due to having her benefit stopped for alleged cohabitation.

TORY IDEALS

Yet all of this is not the fault of DHSS staff. It is laid down in law. The Fowler Review places a greater degree of questioning the claimant yet claims to support Tory ideals of personal freedom. This is 'targetting'. It seeks to cut staffing levels. This is 'efficiency' (for whom)? It seeks to return to discretion by DHSS staff, so that if you do not get your 'loan' for a roll of lino, you will blame the DHSS worker. Or if the money has been used up, you can blame your neighbour who got her claim in first. There will be no appeal.

TAX HANDOUTS

The only purpose of the Fowler Review is to 'save' money - a couple of billion or so. This is to provide tax cuts for the rich. This is the opinion not only of the government's supporters but even neutral commentators. The only supporters of the changes are from people appointed by the government. Robbing the poor to pay the rich is the only relevant fact of the green paper and white paper review. Anything else you hear is bullshit.

CAN WE AFFORD CAPITALISM?

The government neither know nor care about poverty. When I am asked as a social worker which of my clients deserves more, as I will be, I can only honestly reply "pay them all and if you have not got the money, go and get it." If capitalism cannot afford it, can we afford capitalism? Answers please, on a postcard...

Mark Francis,
Hastings and Rye CLP.

NB. The author works as a social worker. His views are never to be taken as those of his management.

THE ODD VOLUME



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