COVENTRY LABOUR

BRIEFING

50p Waged (including national Labour Briefing)
35p Unwaged

25p Waged (local Briefing only)
15p Unwaged

No.1 August 1986

LABOUR'S SHAME

by Cllr. George Lindfield

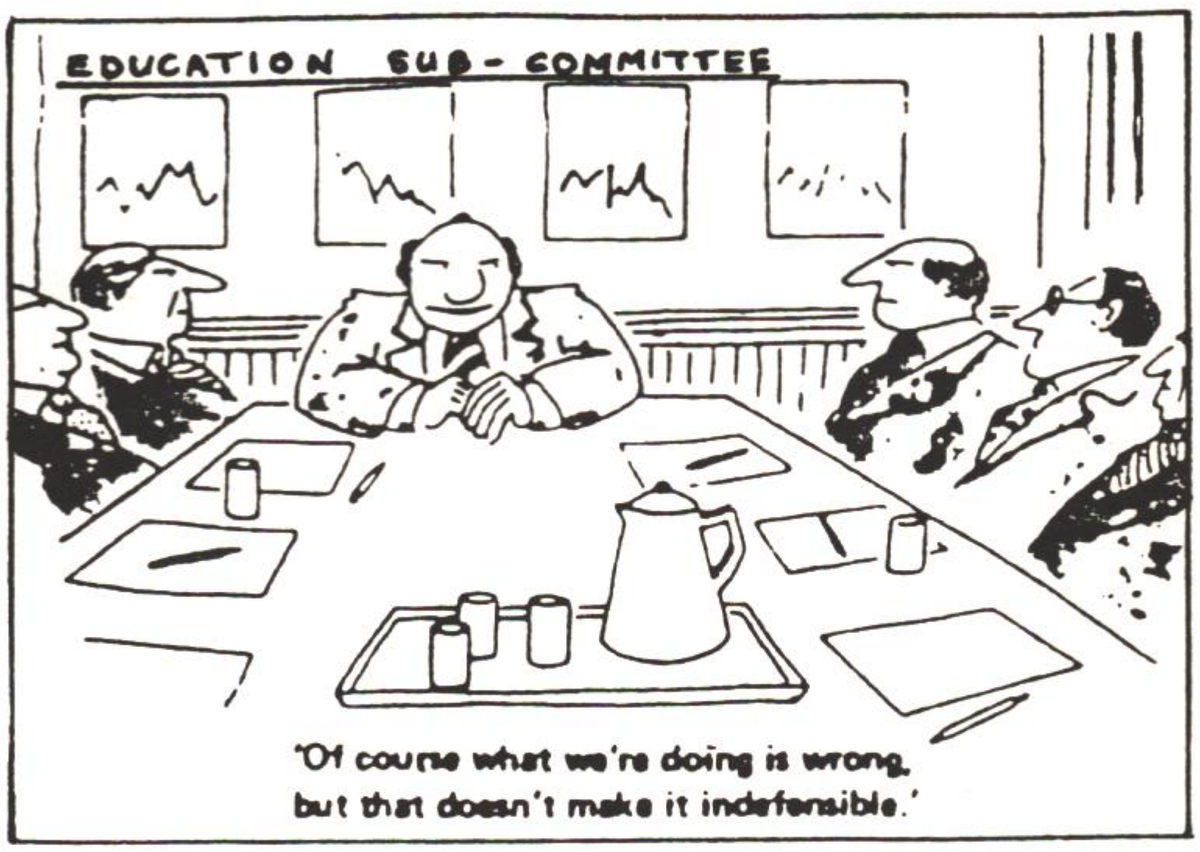
A member of the Labour Party asked me recently, if I wished to pursue socialist principles or get something done. It is tragic that there are those in our ranks who believe that achieving solid objectives for working people is inconsistent with socialism. This view is encouraged by a leadership which week by week is reneging even on the modest intentions of past manifestoes in the belief that the electorate are terrified of socialism. Coventry Labour Group leadership have taken this analysis a step further by actively implementing Tory Government policies. By acting as the agents of the Tory Government they have received the support of the local Tory press, the grudging admiration of Tory councillors and the ultimate accolade, praise from Norman Tebbit.

Not only is the Labour Group leadership faithfully implementing Conservative Government policies in the sale of land and parts of estates, school closures and general reductions in services but the whole principal of its economic policy is a Tory one.

Although the council offers low interest loans to private industries and supports the Warwick University Science Park these measures have a very doubtful and certainly unproved impact on employment. The main thrust of the policy is based on stimulating tourism and hundreds of thousands are being spent on selling Coventry and prettyfying the centre of the city. In fairness to the Group some of the more audacious projects may prove tourist attractions I am sure that people will flock from afar to see the Belgrade fountain "improvements" and marvel at how much could be spent to achieve so little. The intention is to create jobs in service industries, an aim that the Group share with Lord Young. Lord Young is well aware that such jobs are usually insecure, lowpaid,and often non-unionised. Thus even if Coventry could be raised from its very low position as a tourist attraction the results would be dubious.

The Labour Group should be directly intervening to establish Co-ops, promoting diversification in the direction of socially useful industries.

The Group must look to its own employment policies and expand job opportunities under exemplary conditions for all people and especially for women and blacks. This councils employment record for blacks is appalling and career prospects for women are bleak. Coventry is in the Middle Ages compared with councils like Leicester and many others were positive action policies are pursued. The Council is increasingly using temporary jobs to



'Of course what we're doing is wrong, but that doesn't make it indefensible.'

avoid reasonable contractual obligations to its workforce, this practice should cease.

The council should pursue socialist policies and have a committee structure to reflect it. People orientated committees must be set up such as : a Women's Rights Committee, an Anti Racism Committee and an Employment Committee. The council should not hesitate to use its influence in national and international policies.

The Council house must become a people's council house with creche facilities, greatly improved provisions for the public to meet councillors, currently a disgrace, and greater freedom of access to information.

On individual issues the decision process of the group is also very weak. Critical decisions are often taken with limited consideration and little if any documentation, printed minutes are not circulated or available to members before group meetings. No wonder many Group members are often confused about what happened. On the decision to pursue parents for costs I have been given four conflicting accounts.

On other issues I have been sad to see the Labour Group among other things :

Renege on the decision to exclude the News International papers from the council buildings

Pursue poorly paid school secretaries for one weeks paid holiday

cont. over

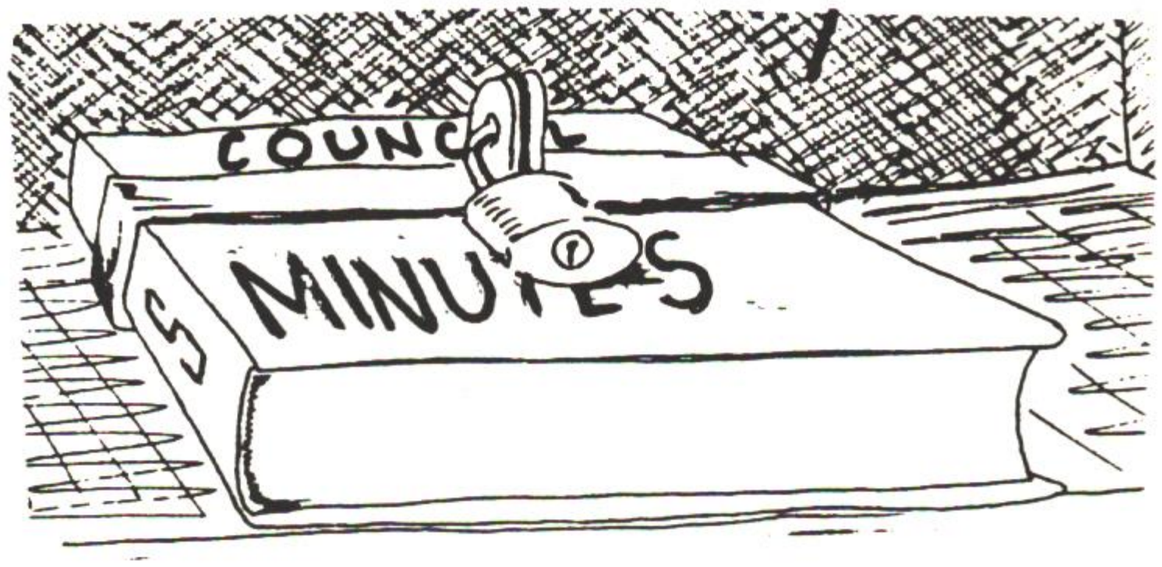
Appoint a Tory to the police committee

Refuse to give a public undertaking that the Coventry Labour Police Authority members would vote to rescind the decision on the introduction of plastic bullets.

Increase the fees for some pre-school play groups.

The removal of two Asian governors from Sidney Stringer School against their wishes and the wishes of other governors

Its important for the Left to publicise the inadequacies of the current Labour Group but clear alternatives must be presented as well. These alternatives are available and action must be taken to ensure they are implemented. There are those who believe that the recent influx of councillors together with those who are currently denied the whip will shift the group to the left. This argument appears rather dubious in the light of recent decisions which are increasingly hard line. When coupled with the declared



intention of some leading group members that Fran Smith and I will never be allowed into the group and the six month probation for John Mutton who is commanded to vote with Labour Group even though he will not take part in the decision making process this aim seems remote.
The actions of the Labour Group may appear like farce but the left must ensure they are not a tragedy for socialism and the people of Coventry.

Editorial

TURN BACK THE GREY TIDE!

Welcome to the new Coventry labour Briefing. To be produced monthly in tandem with the new national Labour Briefing paper, we intend it to provide a much-needed socialist forum within the labour movement in the city and surrounding towns.

The situation in our movement is a critical one. But the demoralisation of large layers of workers and activists sits in stark contrast to the heroic struggles of the miners, the printers at NI, the Silentnight workers and others. The willingness to fight back is there. We see the need to draw the lessons of these disputes, as part of the fight for a new leadership in the trade unions and Labour Parties.

Locally this situation is repeated as Coventry Council continues to slavishly obey Tory government edicts, attacking workers at every turn. Our lead article in this first edition by George Lindfield shows just how deep the reactionary nature of the Council leadership goes. But workers in the District, both in the Council - the 'dirty linen' workers, the school secretaries - and outside, have also shown a determination to fight back. 'Briefing' believes that the need for a campaigning socialist current in our movement is long overdue.

The local 'Briefing' group involves a broad range of militants active in the trade unions and Labour parties. Committed to building the forces of the left in opposition to Kinnock and his sycophants in the movement. Committed to opposing the developing witch-hunt of socialists. Committed to supporting and promoting the struggles of workers locally. Committed to fighting for the demands of the women's movement, black workers, gays and lesbians, and other specially oppressed sections of society.

Our perspective - linked to the national Labour Briefing - is also a national and international one. We will be taking up issues such as the continued British occupation of Ireland, the fight against aparthied, and Latin American solidarity work.

'Briefing' is determined to build a campaigning organisation in a principled but non-sectarian manner. We hope that our activities, and the local and national publications, will attract like-minded workers and unemployed. A welcome is extended to comrades who want to join us in this struggle.

REINSTATE AMIR KHAN AND KEVIN SCALLY

Cllr Amir Khan and Kevin Scally were expelled by Roy Hattersley's Sparkbrook Constituency in November 1985. Their appeals were rejected by Labour's NEC on June 9th by 13 votes to 12. Amonst the 13 was ... Roy Hattersley.

Amir Khan organised a meeting in Sparkbrook to discuss forming a black section. For this he was accused by the constituency Executive of 'bringing the Labour Party into disrepute' and expelled.

Kevin Scally has been a party member for 17 years, and is active in the Labour Committee on Ireland. He was expelled for appearing in the Bandung File TV programme in which he drew attention to membership irregularities in Sparkhill Ward. In December 1983 he, as Secretary, received 140 membership applications. Many of these hadn't been signed by the applicants, some came from non-existent addresses. Kevin's request for an enquiry was answered by an instruction from region that he should accept all future applications "in good faith". In frustration he appeared on the Bandung File. Other members who also appeared had no action taken against them.

Coventry Briefing spoke to Kevin Scally about the reinstatement campaign:

"The support is very encouraging. Our major focus is Labour Party conference. Because the expulsion wasn't initiated by the NEC, we're not entitled to appeal to conference. Amendments to Birmingham Ladywood's resolution on our case are key to securing a debate and our reinstatement. We're not of course allowed to attend, but we'll be there lobbying union delegations hard and speaking at fringe meetings.
Back in Sparkbrook Hattersley has really capitalised on the expulsions. Sparkhill Ward has been instructed by the NEC not to enquire into membership. All eyes are now on Amir's councillorship. He comes up for re-selection this year and there's a mad scramble to succeed him."

Amend the Resolution

To be timetabled for discussion the Ladywood resolution needs the support of at least 12 CLPs. That means amendments.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENT:

Penultimate paragraph, add:
"(3) neither Khan nor Scally have broken any constitutional rule of the Party".

In the last sentence delete "calls on" and insert "instructs".

'Conference believes that the party must remain a broad coalition of various shades of opinion and that tolerance should be extended to those who hold minority views.

'Conference welcomes this tradition of tolerance, which extends back to the election of Harold Wilson as leader in 1963.

'Conference notes:
(1.) That while the majority of the party disapproved of James Callaghan's televised denunciation of the party's nuclear defence policies prior to the 1983 general election, he was not subject to disciplinary action.
(2.) That a large number of Labour Party MPs have criticised one or other aspect of party policy, without being subject to disciplinary action.

'Conference doesn't necessarily approve of such public dissension but also notes:
(1.) The rejection of the appeal against expulsion from Birmingham Sparkbrook CLP of Cllr Amir Khan and Kevin Scally. Cllr Khan was expelled for calling a meeting to discuss the formation of a Black Section. Kevin Scally was expelled for appearing on a television programme and criticising the constituency party.
(2.) That both Khan and Scally are long standing party members who have given years of service to the party.

Conference believes that these comrades have not been treated fairly or consistently and calls on the NEC to readmit them to membership.

Support the Campaign

I/We wish to add our names to the list of sponsors for the Campaign for the Reinstatement of Amir Khan and Kevin Scally.

Individual Sponsor .....

Address .....

.....

Sponsoring Organisation .....

I/We enclose a contribution of £ ..... towards the expenditure of the Campaign for the Reinstatement of Amir Khan and Kevin Scally.

Please send to: Campaign for the Reinstatement of Amir Khan and Kevin Scally, 10 Park Drive, London NW11 7SH.

Coventry N.E. Womens Section
Abortion Rights

Speaker from the National Abortion Campaign

LEONORA LLOYD

8pm Friday 22nd August 1986
Barras Club

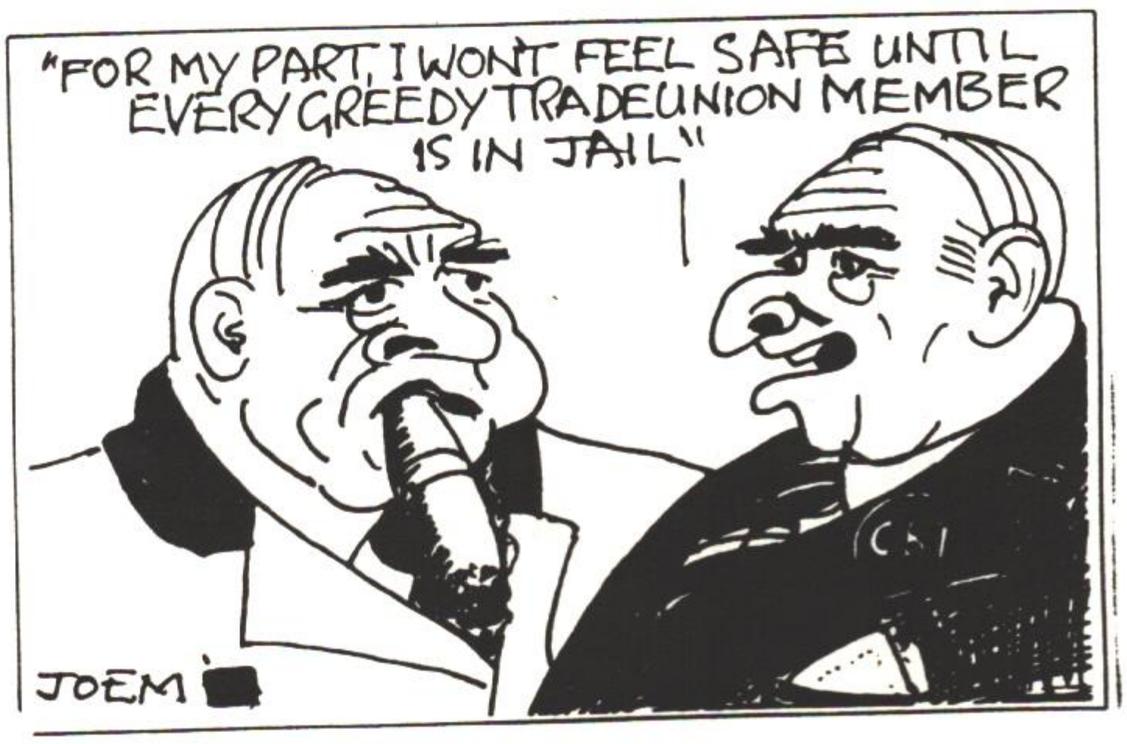
ALL WOMEN WELCOME!

CIVIL SERVICE ACTION

Civil service unions have been in the news recently, with the renewed threats against union members at GCHQ, and the barring of the newly elected Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) General Secretary, 'Militant' supporter John McCreadie, from office by the Union's Executive Council (EC) pending an equiry into alleged voting irregularities.

Briefing spoke to a local CPSA activist about the reaction the GCHQ announcement amongst the membership in Coventry.

> "On June 20th we were told that those people who had rejoined a trade union at GCHQ would be subject to further disciplinary action. Their increments would be stopped for 2 years, and anyone on the maximum of the scale would have their salary reduced by 2 years' increments. This could mean £2000 a year loss. Further action was threatened beyond this.
>
> On Monday 23rd well-attended joint meetings of CPSA and SCPS (the senior grade union Society of Civil and Public Servants) members were held in the Benefit and DHSS offices in the city. There were overwhelming votes to take 1/2 day strike action immediately.



> The disciplinary measures were due to be implemented on July 1st, but a circular came round the other day postponing this deadline, with a national meeting being held between unions and government on July 22nd. So further industrial action is being held off, although pressure on MPs is being kept up."

And what are the feelings about the General Secretary's election?

> "Although most people in our Branch voted for the third candidate from Broad Left 84, they don't like what the EC has done. If John Ellis (the right-wing candidate) had won by such a narrow margin, this enquiry would'nt have happened.
>
> Minor irregularities would be found in any Branch in a major election campaign. But I can't see any Branch doing enough to make the sort of difference we are talking about.
>
> Members are fed-up with the right-wings games. But equally we don't think McCreadie should have gone to the courts either. That was playing them at their own QC's game.
>
> I don't see much point in the call for a Special conference now being raised. It won't solve anything because it takes to long to organise. The enquiry into Irregularities would have already been completed."

South Africa

picket Sainsbury's, Bell Green

From 10.30am - 1pm Saturday 30th August
Riley Square

SUPPORTERS WELCOME FOR TWO HOURS OR JUST A FEW MINUTES

Organised by Coventry Briefing, with support invited from local Labour Parties, trade unions and Coventry Anti-Apartheid Group

Gutter Press

..... The "Progress Chasers" appointed by City Council leader Peter Lister to find ways of cutting council spending are due to publish their recommendations. The three, whose "brief" has been so secret that they have not even been able to meet together, but simply communicate by coded messages, are thought to be suggesting some tight measures. According to our sources these include making children pay to attend school, having more meetings in secret without secretarial assistance so that even more minutes don't get produced, raising rents, and closing every other school in the city.

..... Darling of the Cuddly Left and leading Tribunite Cllr Bob Holland clearly hasn't any children of pre-school age. Not judging by his remarks in favour of charging voluntary playgroups for using L.E.A. premises anyway. Holland, whose career has recently blossomed, is said to have his eye on Jeff White's job as Education Committee Chair when White takes his sabbatical. Shame if he gets de-selected before next May.

..... Amazing how Coventry Council couldn't wait to get Murdoch's "papers" back into City libraries. It's thought that Cllrs Robinson and Hardy, both understood to be avid 'Sun' readers, just couldn't cope without their free copies. Solidarity with the print-workers?

..... "We should prosecute them" - delegate's comment at recent District Labour Party meeting. Who you might ask. The Thatcher government? Private contractors? No, no ... this is Coventry remember. He meant the parents fighting school closures.

..... Across in N. Warks the right-wing has denied trade union delegate David Jones nomination to the Constituency Party Executive. Already on the EC, David was on holiday at the time of the AGM in February. A nominating letter from his Branch Secretary mysteriously wasn't read out. Seats were left vacant. At the next GC meeting four other delegates were elected to the vacant positions, beating Devid on a ballot, the papers for which had already been printed! Since then he has complained to Freda Westwood at region, and Joyce Gould nationally. It's now in the hands of regional organiser Eileen Murphin. "Everybody could see it was a plain fiddle to keep me off the Executive", observes David. Strange isn't it how the Party's bureaucracy will jump quicker for some members than they will for others.

..... N. Warks Constituency's political pedigree can be judged by the fact that the same Executive has since actually had a vote as to whether to accept an application to join from a UDM member. The application was rejected by 9 votes to 4.

SINN FEIN COUNCILLOR SPEAKS

On 9th July over 30 people attended a meeting arranged by Coventry Troops Out Movement, to hear Lilly Fitzsimmons a Sinn Fein councillor. An elected represeentative for the Lower Falls district in West Belfast. She spends most of the time working in one of Sinn Fein's Advice Centres, helping people with housing, debt or D.H.S.S. problems.

Councillor Fitzsimmons, on a speaking tour of England, brought solidarity greetings from Sinn Fein. Her prepared statement dealt with issues as wide ranging as internment, the "criminalization process" paid perjurers, Bloody Sunday and strip searches.

Her view of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was that it offered nothing to nationalist people because it made no attempt to remove the loyalist veto. Further she believed that there would have been no agreement at all, if the governments of Britain and Ireland hadn't been worried by the electoral success of Sinn Fein.

She concluded by saying that all the repressive measures will remain while Britain controls the 6 counties of the north of Ireland but that eventually the great majority of the Irish people will have the last say.

Richard Aubery
Coventry Troops Out Movement

Footnote:

Coventry Trades Council is now committed to organising a Day School on Ireland, details of which we hope to have by the next issue of 'Briefing'.

We will also be carrying a report from Coventry members of the Troops Out Movement, who are going on a delegation to Ireland in the next couple of weeks.

SCHOOL SECRETARIES

Coventry City Council leadership has temporarily stepped back from it's impending decision to unilaterally cut 1 week's paid holiday leave from school secretaries' conditions of service. Yet another example of the complete lack of socialist perspectives from the Labour Group, let alone basic trade union instincts.

Briefing interviewed a Coventry school secretary about their dispute:

CLB How long have you worked for Coventry L.E.A.?

CA 8 years.

CLB How long as a school secretary?

CA A Junior School Secretary for 4 years. We are not called Secretaries. We're known as Clerical Assistants, but most of us carry out a Secretary's duties.

CLB What hours do you work?

CA 26 hours, but I feel we should be there as long as the school is open.

CLB How much holiday did you have before this decision?

CA 4 weeks.

CLB When and how did you hear of the decision?

CA When I received notice from NALGO in the school envelope.



CLB What are your feelings about the decision?

CA I think it is disgraceful. We are low paid and work very hard for the money we receive. Most of us take work home in the school holidays to finish because there isn't time in the last week of term. Some even go into school during the holidays to do the work.

CLB If the decision is adhered to, what can you or your union do?

CA Continue to fight.

WARDS DEFEATED

The practice of St. Michael's Branch of holding two AGM's per year to obtain the "right" result was maintained in 1986 but backfired on the Ward/McCoy faction. In recent years the Branch has witnessed the outgoing officers refusing to start an AGM because their faction was outnumbered and in the following year abandoning the meeting after the first vote (for Chairperson) had resulted in their defeat. The West Midlands Regional Office has on each occasion obliged with a recalled AGM several months later. Accusations have abounded of members brought into the ward with bogus addresses to attend the recalled AGM's and to maintain the Ward/McCoy faction in control.

This year at the first AGM power slipped away from the old guard by the narrow margin of two votes. Only after subsequent meetings in which Charlie Ward was selected as the candidate for the May Election did Charlie and Joan Ward declare their hand by identifying *two* imposters who had attended the AGM and they thereby successfully appealed to Regional Office for yet another re-call AGM. However it is alleged that the two real members were visited immediately before the meeting when it was established that they would not be attending and were immediately afterwards asked to sign letters saying they had not attended. These members and their visitors are regarded as supporters of the Wards.

The re-called AGM was chaired by the Constituency Chairperson and supervised by the Constituency officers. The only unpleasant episode was when Charlie Ward challenged the presence of several members recruited by Ali Khan because he had never issued any membership cards to him. This was true but strange as Ali Khan had been the Membership Secretary for the previous year! Fortunately Ali Khan was able to produce a receipt signed by Charlie Ward for the membership monies paid in. In the event the Ward/McCoy faction was defeated by margins of 13 or 15 for all posts. The new officers and post holders of the ward are a mixture of left and right, white and black (Asian) but are united in the intention of operating the Branch in a more open and democratic way than the old faction.

SCHOOLS FIGHT TO CONTINUE

Coventry City Council is still publicly intent on reclaiming £13,200 in costs from the individual parents who took them to court in an effort to save their schools from closure.

This vindictive decision is entirely in line with the Council's overall anti-working class strategy.

The Coventry Campaign Against School Closures (CCASC) is still alive and kicking, and fighting the Council's decision.

Coventry Labour Briefing (CLB) interviewed John Stevens, chair of CCASC about their campaign, the current situation and the future.:

CLB - Why did you take legal action against the Council's decision to close Schools?

JS - The legal action was taken as a last resort against the Local Education Authority (L.E.A.) after all other channels had been exhausted. Let's not forget that the school closure document "Future Choices" was rejected by 85% of those people and organizations to whom it had been circulated, including the West Midlands Police Authority!

CLB - What was the result of the case?

JS - Unfortunately for CCASC, St. Michaels parents decided to go on their own to the High Court to try and stop closure of their school on the grounds that it stood on "Church Land" and that they had not received "adequate consultation". They also argued that there was no fall in children seeking places at the school and that the L.E.A. had purposly withheld funds for essential repairs. CCASC applied for a adjournment of the St Michaels hearing so that both cases could be heard together when better prepared. However the Council used all its political muscle to force an expedited hearing at which we found ourselves in court at the same time as St. Michaels in a state of unreadiness. The Judge Mr. Justice Mann found that the Council had met the **minimum** legal requirement and ruled against St. Michaels. CCASC held a meeting and decided to withdraw, with the option to return at a later stage. The Council asked the court to dismiss the case and allow them, THE COUNCIL to claim costs at their discretion.

CLB - When did you first hear that the council was going for costs?

JS - I first heard of the Council's intent to reclaim costs from the 'Evening Telegraph' who rang me at home on the Tuesday prior to the first Labour Group Meeting after the May Local Elections. They were now sure of a right-wing majority in the Council, after the close results they had suffered previously when they had passed their proposals on the Mayor's casting vote after a 26-26 tie.

CLB - Why in your opinion are the Council trying to extract £13,200 from the individuals who took the case on behalf of CCASC and St. Michael's.

JS - Before I answer that question let me give you their reasons as they would have the ratepayers believe:

a) The cost of the court case if not paid by CCASC would be met by the ratepayer.

b) If they do not get the costs from CCASC they would be surcharged for misusing ratepayers' money.

c) Not to press for costs would create a precedent.

Now you want my opinion on why I think that they are trying to extract the £13,200 from the action Groups. Quite simply they intend to bring in further school closures very soon and are hoping that this will frighten off any prospective actions from the parents of children in the next batch of schools to be closed.

CLB - What do you say to the council's claim that they are legally bound to go for costs?

JS - Mr. Justice Mann did <u>not</u> order costs against the Action Groups. The Council said, "My Lord, we request that the case be dismissed with costs that would be claimed at the Councils discretion" Mr. Justice Mann said "so be it". So from where we stand the Council have no legal obligations whatsoever.

CLB - How does CCASC intend to go forward from here?

Good question. We are committed to the fight against school closures on any other ground than educational. So when the next batch of schools to be closed is issued, we will still be in there fighting the council. What we MUST REMEMBER IS THAT EDUCATION IS FOR LIFE. Without education no industry can function be it Manufacturing or Service, or whatever.

I hope that our Group in Coventry now calls upon the Action Groups fighting school closures in other areas to get together on a national Basis and form a NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST SCHOOL CLOSURES to show the Thatcher Government and all the L.E.A's that we are not going to stand by and watch our once great Educational System be reduced to a DICKENSIAN system where THE RICH ARE EDUCATED AND THE POOR ARE NOT

NO PROFITS - NO BUSES

Coventry Briefing compiled this article after discussions with a city bus driver.

"If we didn't take part in the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority the Tories would control it"
- P. Lister, Chairperson

The effects of the abolition of the West Midlands County Council are working their way through in the transport policy of the new Authority.

From October 26th the 1986 Transport Act comes into force, replacing the idea of transport as a social service with the need to make a profit. Preperations for the big day are underway - cuts in services & staff have been announced, and despite mass meeting votes to oppose compulsory redundancies TGWU official Ken Colclough has already announced full cooperation with the management plans.

In Coventry speed-up is already in effect. For example the 32 Bell Green - Tile Hill North service is down from 2 hours to 1½, the 23 Allesley Park route slashed from 45 to 30 minutes.

In the drive for profitability a number of services are to disappear altogether - the Sunday service to Walsgrave Hospital for one. Here in a nutshell is the essence of the new approach. The bus taking people to visit sick and dying relatives and friends doesn't make money - no bus.

Following announcements of redundancies in engineering (300) and supervisory (200) sections, it's now revealed that some 1050 traffic jobs are to go. This is over 25% of the W. Midlands Traffic Section workforce.

Mass meetings in Coventry, where 127 Traffic jobs are to go, have unanimously voted to oppose compulsory job losses. The latest meeting was on Friday 25th July - just 4 days before Colclough's sell-out statement which followed the Central Negotiating Committee meeting on July 29th.

Colclough's view that mass redundancies cannot be fought is the logival complement to Peter Lister's view that there is no way of challenging Tory policy other than by implementing it.

Even within his own terms however Lister's attitude is craven. Whilst the West Midlands Authority is limited to £3.2m for subsidies of non-profit making routes, there is provision within the new regulations for local authorities to use their own money to defend socially-necessary routes. Sheffield Council <u>is</u> taking up that option - needless to say Coventry isn't.

So on October 26th West Midlands Travel takes over the running of our services. Managing -Director Isaacs gets a £10000 a year rise (to £52000), those drivers who remain in work and those buses still running get new uniforms, new paint and a new logo to develop corporate consciousness.

We get less services - what Peter Lister and Ken Colclough get is unclear.

Jobs slashed, services destroyed - thank God the Tories aren't in control.

Briefing MEETINGS

Meetings open to all supporters and sympathisers are normally held on the 4th Monday of the month at Koco, Unit 15, the Arches Industrial Estate, Spon End, Cov.

Babysitting costs or a creche at the meeting are available, but please try and give us prior notice.

<u>August Meeting</u>

Monday 18th August 7.30pm
at Koco

Main discussions:
South Africa (guest speaker)
+ nominations for the 1987 Coventry Municipal Panel

LABOUR BRIEFING

Briefing has an open editorial policy. Letters and contributions from readers are welcomed, though we reserve the right to edit for reasons of space or where the item is openly racist or sexist.

The local Editorial Committee is elected by and responsible to the Coventry Briefing Group.

Deadline for articles for next issue is August 25th. Please submit all items to Mick Chilvers, 72 Stoke Green, Coventry.

Published by Coventry Labour Briefing. Printed by C(L)PSU.