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WANTED: mass extra-parliamentary action to DEFEND OUR SERVICES!

Alan Clinton, Chief Whip, London Borough of Islington

In the weeks since the General Election it has become obvious that everything we said during the campaign about the Tory threat to the living standards of every disadvantaged member of our society was, if anything, understated. The most reactionary Government this century has now embarked on a systematic policy of cutting to shreds all forms of public welfare provision.

In one week at the beginning of July the Government announced massive increases in spending on armaments and weapons of mass destruction, tax concessions for the wealthy, and horrendous attacks on education, health and social services. So, no doubt, more of the policies of their secret manifesto will be unveiled.

ROLLING BACK THE FRONTIERS

It has become clear that this vicious class war government is now well embarked on a systematic policy of divesting the state of many activities which have been thrust upon it by the efforts of the Labour movement, and even to some extend before that of the Liberals. By throwing economic and social activities back to the so-called 'free market' what they really mean is that they are handing them to private enterprise, or, more likely, abolishing them altogether. They are rolling back the frontiers of public enterprise as far as the telecommunications system nationalised by Gladstone in 1970, and the welfare services first fought for and built before the end of the last century.

The Tory appetite to destroy all vestiges of state enterprise will only grow as each new bit is eaten away. They aim to undermine the right to decent housing, pensions, social services, schools, trade union organisation. Just as their project is enormous and devastating, our response must be as powerful.

The priorities of the Tories could not be more clear. The main problem for us in op-

(CONTINUED OVER)



Andrew Wiard (Report)

Demonstration against the closure of the Prince of Wales Hospital

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

DEFEND OUR SERVICES! (continued)

posing them is that the proposed cuts are rarely immediate and palpable in their effect. This applies especially to the threatened slaughter of local government services, most particularly in the inner cities, which the Tories are even now preparing.

Whatever the difficulty in expressing this fact, it seems to me that the only means of success in resisting the devastating attacks that are now in prospect will be to build an alliance of those defending the services — trade unionists, tenants, community organisations, councillors.

EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY ACTION

The development of 'extra parliamentary action' by all of those groups clearly needs to be at the centre of all efforts to resist the Tory threat. The meeting of 'hit list' authorities held in Sheffield on 1st July last showed clearly that the old methods of 'consensus' and 'consultation' by local authority associations are falling apart in the face of the Tory onslaught. Some local Labour authority leaders think that they can still win the approval of a few 'wet' Tories in defence at least of the forms of local government. However, the stakes have become much too high for this strategy to have any credibility now.

There is no other way to push back Tory policies than by mobilising the strength of those who are threatened by them. The same breakdown in methods of gentle lobbying has been seen in the series of meetings that led to the establishment of the Association of London Authorities on 5th July. The old London Borough Association was being used increasingly as a party political sounding board to attack the GLC, and anything else they disapprove of. New instruments and new methods are clearly needed.

Some of the issues of these forthcoming battles now in prospect need to be clarified, and some of the difficulties squarely faced.

There is a danger, which the Tories are already trying to exploit, of confusing the issue of defence of housing and social services with the particular forms of local government which are also under attack. Of course we in the labour movement must defend the GLC and ILEA and the metropolitan authorities. They are after all being attacked for policies that do not please the Tories, as much as for their place in the hierarchy of governmental institutions.

However, the issue of support for the GLC and ILEA is quite distinct from the defence of the services provided by local government as a whole. They are of course linked in the sense that the Tories are determined to remove democratic forms in local government not only as manifested in elected 'strategic' authorities. They are attacking also the right of democratically elected local authorities to raise what resources they decide. So we in the labour movement will need to 'defend democracy' against the onslaught of the Tories. Some Tories in local government even accept his argument and — who knows? — maybe even some unelected members of the House of Lords might agree.

However for us it seems to me that the fundamental thrust in the battles ahead must be in defence of the local service which are so wantonly threatened by the Tories.

SERIOUS PROBLEM

Here of course there is a serious problem for the Labour movement. In the inner city areas since the cuts of Healey and Shore in the 1970s, Labour authorities have avoided major reductions in services by increases in rates. Since 1979 they have been punished by the Tories even further for this, and from next year local authorities in England and Wales will probably be prevented altogether from raising rates to maintain their services, as they already are in Scotland.

The result of the measures taken up to now has been that rates — although a somewhat progressive tax — fall on an increasing proportion of working class people. Even more important, rates have become perhaps the least popular of all forms of taxation — and not just amongst the petty bourgeoisie who object to taxation of all sorts. A reading of the *Standard* any day of the week will show a sustained campaign by the capitalist press to convince people that these high rates are used to finance profligacy and waste.

Thus the tiny proportion of ratepayers' money spent to further the rights of gays or women — expenditure which is entirely justified and which represents policies clearly presented to the electorate — is constantly vilified by the capitalist press. Here in Islington, there has been virtually no reference at all in local or national press to the millions of pounds we have directed into housing repairs and rehabilitation, or to the social services provision we have defended against every onslaught.

INCREASING RATES

So we enter this battle to defend the gains made by our movement with one hand tied behind our backs. Whatever merits there may have been in the past to a policy of increasing rates in order to pay for the services, this alternative will soon no longer be open to us. Worst still, however, has been the effect of rate increases on popular ideas about local government. The Tories and the media have managed to place a veil over the reality that rate increases have owed little or nothing to increases in local authority spending — which in fact has gone down in comparison to central government. Anyone who has canvassed in elections knows that hardly anybody is aware that by far the most important cause of rising rates has been reductions in Government contributions to local authority services. The Tories used every financial device available to them to reduce local government activity and the services it provides, and to blame local authorities themselves — especially Labour ones — for the results.

Our difficulties are compounded by the fact that the new round of Tory attacks will again be falsely portrayed as being about rates. Already we ourselves are talking about 'rate capping' when what we really mean is enforced cuts in services.

As socialists we cannot sit back and meekly accept these attacks on everything we stand for. But we have a propoganda battle to win first. We have to convince our supporters that the threat to service comes from a government which has taken a deliberate choice to allocate resources to cruise missiles and tax handouts. We have to go round to the workplaces, to the estates and to the working class communities with the message of resistance to the jack-boot of Tory cuts.

As Labour councillors we clearly have a responsibility to develop and to support all action — strikes, occupations, etc — in defence of services. Above all, we have the responsibility to shout from the housetops that such action will be essential to hold back the Tory menace.

RIGHT SHOWS ITS HEAD IN NORFOLK

Following the electoral defeat we suffered on the 9th June it is becoming very clear that the Right-Wing is about to launch the Witch-Hunt into a new phase.

The Right's ubiquitous spokesman hit Kings Lynn on Friday 1st July to speak to a mass gathering of the TGWU (about 60 turned up). He made his 'line' abundantly transparent.

In a major speech, Roy Hattersley revealed very openly that the Right are seeking an outright reversal on certain policy and organisational questions. He made references to 'policies that the electorate will never vote for and have never voted for'. Of course we all know what policies he was talking about.

Mr Hattersley also spoke of a revision of the Constitution to allow a system of one-person, one vote. He pursued the organisational point in heaping criticism on Bermondsey CLP and Peter Tatchell for 'losing us a stronghold'.

There then followed a question and answer session in which several left wing activists asked pertinent questions. I raised the issues revolving around the Witch-Hunt and Bermondsey. Hattersley confessed that the pulping of the 25,000 election leaflets was a 'tactical error of judgement', but he remained unrepentant on the issue of the timing of the Militant expulsions, adding that the 'real wreckers were the people in Bermondsey who flouted Conference decisions'. Mellish? No, the Bermondsey GMC.

What is obvious from this meeting is that Hattersley and Co. have the electoral result they sought: a massive labour defeat.

Now they have the excuse they need to carry the purge through.

The message from the few 'Lefts' in NW Norfolk is clear: 'Fight the Tories, Not the Socialists. Expel the Purgers, No to the Dream Ticket of Kinnock and Hattersley.'

by Michael Calvert
N.W.Norfolk CLP

HEFFER'S THE ONE!

by Reg Race



Labour Party Photograph Library

What tests should left wingers apply to the views of candidates for leader of the Party? I suggest that the following criteria be used.

• First, which candidate above all others supports the basic principles of socialism? It is clear that Heffer supports the extension of public ownership, so critical to the central conception of the Alternative Economic Strategy. Other candidates either do not believe in these central principles or wish to water them down.

• Second, which candidate above all others supports the integrity of Party Conference decisions? On any real test, Heffer must win: he has supported unilateral nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from the Common Market, and the Alternative Economic Strategy. Heffer has opposed the watering down of policy commitments arrived at by Party Conference in order to curry favour with the right wing of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Kinnock, on the other hand, has expressed a strong desire for the abandonment of specific policy pledges in manifestos and has advocated the maximum freedom possible for the leadership when in government: evidence for this can be found in his notorious statement to the 'News of the World' that he would resign as a Shadow Education Spokesperson if the Party adopted a commitment to restore the Tory cuts in school meals and milk.

• Third, which candidate above all others supports the demands of the women in the Labour Party and the demands of the anti-racists? This is a more difficult test for Heffer to pass with flying colours — but his attitudes on women's rights are improving rapidly (look at his candidate's statement) — and they are already considerably better than the views of any other candidate in the Leadership election.

• Fourth, which candidate above all others supports labour movement campaigns against repression and totalitarianism? There can be no question at all here: Heffer is head and shoulders above all the other candidates. He has not only spoken out on the 'easy issues' like apartheid and El Salvador, but has taken a very principled stand in support of Charter '77 in Czecheslovakia and Solidarity in Poland. On the NEC it has been Heffer who has taken a lead on all these issues, and his reward has been enmity of those in the labour movement in Britain who believe that the Soviet Union can do no wrong.

• Fifth, which candidate above all others supports the democratisation of the Party and the accountability of its public representatives? Again, Heffer is the candidate with an outstanding record — both of voting for democratic changes on the NEC, and in speaking out in their support. Kinnock, in contrast, has been on the wrong side of virtually every argument: it was Kinnock's vote on the NEC that stopped Conference passing an NEC constitutional amendment to give final control of the Manifesto to the NEC.

• Sixth, which candidate above all others has consistently opposed the witch-hunt in the Labour Party? Heffer's voting record on the NEC is exemplary: he is against expelling socialists from the Labour Party because of their political views. Kinnock, however, voted not to endorse Peter Tatchell as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Bermondsey, in favour of expelling the five members of Militant from the Party, and at the last meeting of the Organisation Committee of the NEC voted in favour of further action against CLPs.

To any objective participant in these Leadership elections, the choice must be very clear. Eric Heffer is the only candidate who can command the trust and respect of the Party: Neil Kinnock is not a left-winger. His principal characteristic is a strong desire for the Leadership to have complete autonomy from the decisions of Conference and the views of the membership.

As far as the Deputy Leadership is concerned, there is really no contest at all. I regard Michael Meacher as one of the most honest, most capable members of the PLP, and he has gained a respect and support of Constituency Parties and Trades Unionists for his courageous stand in support of a minimum wage. He will be an enormous asset as Deputy Leader of the Party.

Men, Kitchen Cabinets and the Labour Party Leadership - A Sad and Sorry Case of Sexism

Sarah Roelofs, Islington South CLP

Or how could Labour Briefing run a front page editorial on the Labour Party leadership fandango without mentioning women once *and* call on the left to "support and campaign" for Mr. Heffalump without pointing out his dismal record on women's liberation? (Answer at end of article).

In the frantic flurry to line up trade union votes in the Labour Party leadership stakes women were once again swept aside. Masculine ego knows best especially when it comes to 'political activity' and their own careers. Jo Richardson might have stood for Deputy Leader if this potent combination hadn't made itself so throughly felt in such a true and courteous and brotherly fashion — "well, ... Jo really isn't very well ... and ...".



Jo Richardson

For two or three days just after the election some members of the Labour Left met in a seeming profusion of kitchen cabinets to decide on the left's leadership candidates. There was furious discussion amongst those not privy to the afore mentioned cabinets of "who do you know in Benn's kitchen cabinet who might give us some information? ...". But throughout it all not one man was heard — or was reported to have raised his voice in *unequivocal* enthusiasm for Richardson's candidature — it was all hedged round with ifs and buts.

(And who or what are these kitchen cabinets anyway? Do they meet in kitchens with Habitat red and white cabinets? Who decides who attends? Is it like the Freemasons handshake, but with some unique way of raising a clenched fist? Sounds damn undemocratic — and Habitat living has always been pretty exclusive. Boycott kitchen cabinets!)

DESPERATE REARGUARD ACTION

Feminists in the party fought a desperate rearguard action against the weight of all the brotherly advice as they saw their one chance of having a real voice in a party campaign being taken — oh so gently — from them.

It is perfectly true that Richardson suffers from arthritis. But a proliferation of other Labour Party notables aren't 100% fit either — including the man himself, Tony Benn — and they don't incur patronising worry about their capabilities because of their health.

It is also true that Jo Richardson has not had ministerial experience — but neither has odds-on-nice-guy Neil Kinnock. Moreoever, Jo *would* have had ministerial experience (seemingly necessary for women only — Michael Meacher hasn't had any either) if she hadn't consistently supported Tony Benn in the deputy-leadership contest three years ago. Instead it was Joan Lestor who was appointed Party Spokesperson on women, despite Jo's much stronger record on campaigning on women's rights.

VERY DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP CAMPAIGN

Organised through the Women's Action Committee, feminists in the Labour Party would have run a very different leadership campaign to the presidential style ones currently on offer. For a start it would have been *led by women*. And it would have been collective and democratic and *open* involving everyone who wished to participate. It would have focussed on policies and not on one individual. This would have meant it was unnecessary for Jo herself to go rushing around the country fulfilling all the speaking engagements. Women involved in her campaign committee would have spoken on her behalf — or rather on behalf of her policies. *And* both the Labour left and feminists would have had a candidate they really believed in, really supported and could really campaign for.

In fact far more the left seizing an opportunity to promote a woman candidate, and put into practice their much talked of commitment to women's liberation, they have allowed the right in the party to be the only wing to field a woman. Gwyneth Dunwoody who, though she has supported the National Abortion Campaign in the past, is opposed to posivite action for women. At last year's Labour Party Conference she vociferously opposed the WAC resolutions for increased democracy for women in the party arguing the infamous 'I-got-here-on-my-own-merits' line. These are Gwyneth's true colours for she is on the right of the party and is standing tandem with Peter Shore.

HEFFER'S ONE GLARING WEAKNESS

Even worse, the only Bennite candidate for the leadership, Eric Heffer, happens to have one glaring weakness. Well, it's glaring for women if not for those men who write Briefing editorials. So for the latter's benefit and edification Heffer ain't too hot on women's liberation. All sorts of other issues were mentioned in the editorial as being important criteria to distinguish good (ie Heffer) from bad (ie Kinnock) candidates, but not women's issues. So, again in the interests of male education, Mr. Heffer it was who, at the NEC which discussed the party's manifesto, was responsible for moving a resolution to remove party policy on abortion — free abortion on request — from the manifesto. The resolution was passed. Thus many feminists will, justifiably, only be giving *critical* support to Heffer.



Frances Morrell

So who's left? Why nice Mr. Michael Meacher from the Labour Co-Ordinating Committee! (Isn't it interesting how what constitutes a credible alternative to so many socialists is a smooth-shaven-charming-persil-white-male-heterosexual?) Michael took very little persuading (another interesting question — why do women often need more support and persuasion to do things than men? Has it got anything to do with women's oppression?) to stand by as a deputy candidate while so many of his colleagues were murmering deep concern about Jo Richardson. And no sooner had Jo declined than our pink knight was — plop — into the ring!

Well Michael does at least give verbal

BRIEFING GOES NATIONAL

Following the defeat of Labour at the General Election it is now essential that radical sections of the Labour Movement both inside and outside the Labour Party, become organised in a co-ordinated campaign to defeat the Right. Briefing Groups have been successful in organising on a local level, but it is now time for the Briefing network to become more formalised and to be structured on a national basis. We therefore propose that:

(i) that there is a national Briefing supplement which will focus and organise around national and international issues and which will appear in local Briefings simultaneously each month.

(ii) a national Briefing co-ordinating/editorial committee is elected which will have responsibility for

(a) editing and producing the monthly national Briefing supplement (the autonomy of local Briefing groups over the remaining 'local' part of each Briefing will not be affected).

(b) organising and co-ordinating the national activities and campaigns of those sections of the radical Left who support Briefing.

The committee should meet monthly and should consist of 2 representatives from each local Briefing, plus 12 co-ordinators/officers. The latter should be elected now and should meet as soon as possible to organise the first committee meeting. The Committee shall also invite all national organisations of the Left to appoint one voting delegate to its meetings. Meetings to remain open to all Briefing supporters who wish to attend.

(iii) a conference is organised early in 1984 to assess the progress made by the different sections of the radical Left in overcoming their divisions and organising together within the Briefing structure, with a view to further strengthening the structure.

So Briefing is going national. The above resolution – overwhelmingly passed last month by representatives from Briefing groups across the country – means that we are now proceeding with our plans for the first national Briefing Supplement to be available to all local groups in time for Labour Party Annual Conference.

At our meeting on July 3rd it was generally agreed that Briefing is uniquely positioned to act as the leading co-ordinator for the activities of the left in the Labour Party as a whole. Our prospects also look extremely promising with respect to the 'broad left' groupings in the trade unions, some of which will be increasingly using Briefing for their own purposes in cementing their links with the Labour Party and the wider movement. There is now an unprecedented recognition on the 'hard Left' that while ideological pluralism and debate are essential, we can simply no longer afford to allow our differerences to obstruct the maximum possible unity in action on all those issues on which we are agreed. A network of local Briefing groups, trade union broad lefts, feminist organisations, ethnic minority groups, and other tendencies, co-ordinated within the framework of Briefing on a national scale, will allow us all to retain our own identities and autonomies while drawing on each other's strengths in the battles which lie ahead. The National Supplement will, we are confident, help us to provide the bridges we all need between the constituency lefts and the trade unions, between the labour movement and feminism, between white activists and black , between Parliament and extra-parliamentary activities and between national and local levels of struggle.

It is therefore intended that the elected and fully accountable National Briefing Committee will do far more than be responsible for a 12 page monthly supplement. In the months that lie ahead, we must build a kind of 'Joint Command' for all those revolutionary and anti-capitalist tendencies and organisations in Britain which are serious in their determination to win the power to transform society.

The Committee meetings are open to all Briefing supporters, and will be advertised monthly in advance. We urge all local Briefing and all left groups to send voting delegates.

support to women's rights and he supports WAC's demands. But feminists can't help being a little cynical — we've known his ilk from old. In practical campaigning and fighting terms such support can often amount to the merest tokenism. Moreover, Michael is a prominent member of the LCC and they — bless their pale pink socks — aren't even supporting Heffer for Leader, but the abstentionist and witch-hunting Kinnock.

FEMINIST REPRESENTATION ON THE LEFT SLATE

Two further points should be made about this sorry state of affairs. The first concerns feminist representation on the left's slate for the NEC elections. Some time ago Frances Morrell, a long time member of WAC, was persuaded to stand for a second time for the Women's Section of the NEC. Now she has been suddenly dropped from the LCC/CLPD slate. Apparently there was some feeling amongst LCC and CLPD executive members, after discussions with trade union leaders, that Frances really wasn't a very credible candidate. Why? Because she's such a strong feminist? Because she has maintained a principled opposition to CLPD's support for the 'witch-hunting' register? Because Frances, as a CLPD executive member herself, has consistently opposed the increasingly undemocratic behaviour and policies of the executive? Maybe the answer lies with the woman who was drafted in to fill the vacancy on the slate — Rene Short. Rene Short, unlike Frances, is not well known for her feminism. However, what then happened in this sordid little tale was that, while CLPD have maintained their support for Rene Short, a revolt ensued within the LCC from feminists in their ranks, who argued forcibly that the LCC should still support Frances. But no agreement could be reached. As Nigel Stanley, Organising Secretary for the LCC, in a letter to Socialist Action (8/7/83) so succinctly puts it:

"... there is no consensus as to whether to support principled feminists or candidates who can win."

The second and final point concerns the current non-existence of a Labour Party Spokesperson on Women due to Joan Lestor losing her seat in the election. The argument goes that none of the front bench spokespeople who lost their seats are being replaced until after the leadership elections in October. Instead the relevant deputies are standing in. Except that one appointment *has* already been made — John Silkin's deputy defence spokesperson Charles Morris has been replaced with John McWilliam. Ho hum. And of course it just so happens that Joan Lestor didn't have a deputy. And there is this rumour that the general idea is to appoint Gwyneth Dunwoody, when clearly the job should be given to Jo Richardson ...

Needless to say feminists in the Labour Party are finding their patience with such masculine cavorting running out. Many feminists feel the whole leadership caboodle, NEC elections and Uncles Eric and Heffer and all, should be boycotted by women. If men in the party persistently ignore, dismiss and belittle feminists and women's issues then why should we go on and on supporting such sexist ego-maniacs?

PARTICIPATING, BUT ON OUR OWN TERMS

At its last meeting WAC had a discussion over whether to boycott the NEC elections given the lack of feminist candidates. The majority of women present felt however, that such a tactic was negative and would only lead to a greater marginalisation of feminism. It was felt that we would have a far greater impact by actively participating, but on our own terms. WAC is therefore writing to all the women standing for the NEC's women's section asking whether they support WAC's demands. WAC will not support those that don't (or who don't bother to reply), but will stand its own candidates instead even though these may be completely unknowns. (WAC is also writing to candidates in the CLP section to obtain their views).

WAC will be discussing its attitudes to the leadership elections at its next meeting on 23rd July (11am, County Hall). One proposal will be that WAC critically supports Eric Heffer and issues a leaflet stating its criticisms. Feminist who support such a tactic identify with the socialist-feminists who, at the turn of the century, though they prioritised their work for women's suffrage, "never forgot that votes for women was one aspect of a much wider political campaign." Whereas when suffragettes in the WSPU, under the leadership of Christabel Pankhurst, decided to sever their links with the ILP because they "had long dismissed both Labour and the ILP as half-hearted about women's suffrage" the WSPU also "dropped all pretence of being an organization of working women." The northern working class radical suffragists who maintained their links with socialist organisations disliked the narrowness of the WSPU's policy and felt that "they had nothing in common with people who could donate £100 to WSPU funds or whose response to a crisis was to write a letter to the Times".* The only socialism worth the name is a feminist socialism and struggle for it must never be abandoned to men and non-feminist women for whom soggy socialism comes first.

** Note:*
Quotes from 'One hand tied behind us' by Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, pub. by Virago.

WAC can be contacted at:
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Ans. to leading question: Because men who write Briefing editorials can be as sexistly myopic as the rest of them!

Defending London's Services: The Role of the Regional Executive

Daily we hear of proposals to 'close' the GLC and ILEA, but less is heard of the 'closure' this would mean in terms of womens refuges, minority ethnic centres, law centres and the loss of employment and services. The threat is very real and needs to be tackled now.

Much will depend on the response from the organised Labour movement. And one of the first priorities must be to work closely with those who increasingly depend on the services provided by socialist councils such as the GLC and ILEA.

RISK TO LIFE

The Tory government just returned to power has no difficulty in visualising the health service, for instance, as yet another field of possible profit for private business. It is reported that Pritchards, who have failed to provide an adequate street cleaning service in Wandsworth, now plan to tender for ancilliary services in hospitals. Just what that could mean in terms of risk to life can be imagined.

It is, therefore, even more essential that a socialist justification for services is firmly stated. Unfortunately, this is not as elementary as it sounds. Too many 'socialist' councils have, in the past, confused the issue by talking endlessly of economic constraint. Yes. The economic responsibility for cuts has to be laid at the Tory's door. But, the argument must focus on the need for services.

Until recently, the Regional Executive has appeared to be a rather remote and nebulous body, that rarely strayed near the 'front line'. However, there are a number of constituency, trade union and socialist society delegates determined to look outwards.

TESTING GROUND

A composite motion, calling for the London Party to employ its own campaign and publicity staff, be more accountable to CLPs and oper up Herbert Morrison house as a resource for the London Labour movement, was passed at this year's regional conference. The fight to defend the GLC and ILEA will be a testing ground for this new direction.

The initial organisational steps have been taken. On June 28th, the Policy Committee agreed to call together all executive members, the GLC and ILEA leadership and the remaining London Labour MPs on July 18th. This was further discussed by representatives of these bodies on July 4th.

At this latter meeting, the areas of concern were prioritised, in anticipation that the Tories would target London Transport and ILEA first and then move on all councils attempting to provide "adequate" services with "rate capping" and then finally move against the GLC structure. The meeting also agree to work closely with the newly formed association of Labour Authorities (in London) and the Sheffield Steering Group (nationally).

As an initial step, the EC will meet with transport unions and co-operate with the reactivated "save ILEA" campaigns.



Local Level

However, the essential work to defend services will only be done at a much more local level and the real test of the EC's ability will be its success in mobilising CLPs, Local Government Committees and trade union branches to take up the issues at borough level with their local bus garages, tube depots, parent-teacher groups and I.L.T.A. and other teaching unions.

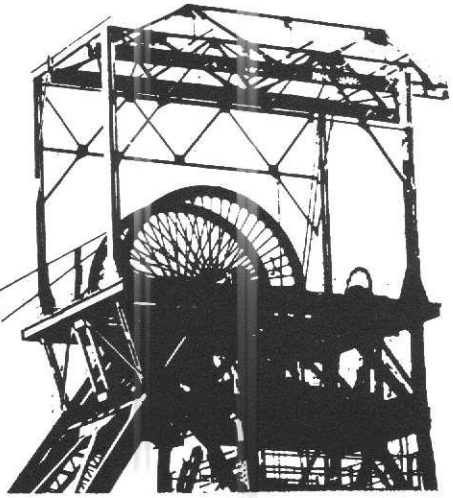
With this in mind, the EC will also be calling London wide meetings to share the concerns of local branches and parties. But, even this will not address the fact that many of those most affected by the destruction of services: women, minority ethnic communities and the unemployed still do not see the organised Labour movement as an accessible focus for struggle. It will therefore be essential for the EC to organise meetings specifically for interest groups in the community. For it will need every element of Party, Union and community organisation to see off the Tory threat.

So contact the EC members representing your area of union and ask what they will be doing to defend your services.

Nadine Finch
EC delegate from CLP's in North East London

INDUSTRIAL LABOUR BRIEFING





POEU Fights Against Privatisation

The Post Office Engineering Union has started the process of facing up to Thatcher's challenge to the future of telecoms in Britain. Thatcher's plan to de-nationalise British Telecom, the licensing of private trunk carriers like Mercury and the throwing open of Cable TV development to private speculation shows how determined the Tories are to make sure that telecoms revolution is firmly under the iron heel of market forces.

British Telecom is an oasis of growth and profitability in the wasteland of Thatcherite Britain. Nationally and internationally telecommunications has not only fared well in the face of recession, but in some respects has even been undergoing a great leap forward.

It's hardly surprising then that the new model Toryism wants to break the mould of a *public* telecoms network which has been the norm for most of the advances capitalist world, (the only significant exception being the USA), for decades.

Of course, the *public* telecoms network already makes a major contribution to *private networks*. The City reaps a rich harvest of interest from BT, around £500 million a year. The private manufacturers, like Plessey, rely heavily for profits on overcharging BT for exchange equipment.

RADICAL CHANGE

Despite this tithe to private profit, the Tories are intent on a radical change in the ownership and structure of telecoms in Britain. Part of the reason is the desire of speculators in search of lucrative areas to invest their ill-gotten gains. Part is the desire of the massive City financial organisations for fast, efficient, competing and cheap data transmission services. Yet a further factor is the desire of Thatcher and her industrial advisors in groups like the Institute of Directors to smash the "public sector monopoly union". According to the IoD they are the main obstacle to consolidating the gains that private sector employers have made during the fear induced 'common sense' of private sector workers.

The first salvo was fired with the 1981 BT Act which split up the old Post Office. It also allowed the setting up of companies like Mercury, backed by Barclays and British Petroleum, to cream-off the lucrative trunk market from BT. The populist cutting edge to this legislation was the 'liberalisation' of what could be stuck on the end of the telephone line.

The first Bill went through virtually unopposed. Trade union resistance was fatally under-mined by the POEU leaderships stance of welcoming the split between BT and the Post Office. Their strategy was to merely amend the 'liberalisation' clauses out of the Bill. (The UCW were correctly opposed to the split and wanted to campaign to kill the bill.) The Bill went through unscathed.

ALL OUT ASSAULT ON B.T.

Having tested the water, the Tories decided they could get away with an all out assault on B.T. The Telecoms Act allows the Tories to sell-off all, part or parts of BT by turning it from a public corporation into a limited company. Although their public stance is that they will keep BT together and merely float 50% of the shares, in private they are considering breaking up BT. Reports in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Economist* and the *Observer* have all said that because of the financial difficulties of a full-scale sale (which would have to raise between £3 and £5 billion) BT may be broken up.

BT is already being massively reorganised into a multitude of profit centers, along the lines of British Airways and for much the same reasons. BT uses its most profitable operations to subsidise socially necessary but un-profitable services, which re-organisation aims to end. The re-organisation has the added advantage of splitting up the work-force and starting to break down national and collective bargaining.

WILLINGNESS TO FIGHT

In the face of this onslaught, which coincides with the widespread effects of telecoms modernisation and new technology, the POEU membership is beginning to exhibit a willingness to fight to defend their jobs in a way never seen before.

A one-day stoppage last October was massively successful — in a Union that had only up until then had 1½ days of all-out stoppage in 90 years! The industrial action conducted by my Branch and London City before the election had a dramatic effect on government communications, which they moved heaven and earth to keep out of the press. That action was well backed by our members. We held a special Branch meeting at Central Hall, for example, that was attended by nearly all our 2,000 members.

The POEU does have tremendous potential for selective action which can hit the Government and the City incredibly hard. Back in 1978, a delegation of Citygents went to beg Callaghan to settle our dispute over a 35 hour week. But militant action by the POEU by ourselves will not be enough. Our fight must be taken up by the whole labour movement. It can be seen as a focus for action against 'privatisation' in general, in all public services.

But the Labour movement also needs to fight to defend telecoms in its own right. A massive public asset that has been publicly owned and built up over 70 years is going to be sacrificed on the alter of private profit. Telecoms is very much the wave of the future. What happens to BT and cable in the next few years will set the pattern for decades. It is tragic in these circumstances to see the Labour Party leadership almost irrelevant to this battle. No massive campaign has been launched either before or during the election to defend our existing public assets like BT. Small wonder new nationalisations get such bad press when Labour can't even defend existing nationalisations. The new left leadership of the POEU will be going all out against the Tory attacks on BT and trying to reach out to the rest of the Labour movement for aid.

Colin Talbot
Secretary, POEU Westminster Branch
POEU Broad Left National Committee
(In a personal capacity)

NUR: The Fight for Hearts and Minds

The first Annual General Meeting of the NUR to be addressed by its new General Secretary, Jimmy Knapp has finished. On the face of it, the union is now firmly Left. Abandoning Weighellism along with Weighell, the union has now declared itself firmly unilateralist, has rejected the incomes policies so beloved by him, and even more auspiciously, rejected the advice of the Platform, and scorned all future productivity deals. Already Railway Management are making threatening noises about the effect that such a policy will have on Government willingness to invest in the system, but this will not needlessly worry railworkers who have seen their unions collaborate in all sorts of deals for years — and still get no investment!

Industrially, such a policy is likely to lead to confrontation, and here will come the difficulty of translating even the best policies into action. By a narrow majority, both the NUR and Aslef have just accepted one of their most humiliating pay deals for years, and that acceptance was based upon the belief that the membership were so shocked by last year's defeats and treachery that they would not move this year. If the unions are to take the truth out of those rumours then they had better start right away, working on the hearts and minds of reluctant members. All unions, but even more so those on the railway, heavily affected as they are by the corporatist tradition, need to examine the way they work in the new atmosphere of rampant Tebbitry. As the recent election so tragically proved, and as several industrial disasters should have forewarned us, the labour movement can not take its support for granted. Because the governing body of the NUR has, for instance, supported CND, it by no means guarantees that 150,000 members will do the same, or even vote for the party espousing such policies.

BLOCK VOTE

This leads us gracefully into the issue of the block vote. The AGM agreed to support Kinnock for the leadership, which has to be, no matter how grudgingly, counted as an advance. If Weighell were here we would probably have had impassioned pleas to John Golding to answer the call of destiny and run for the position. On the LP Executive, the decision is left to the NEC of the union, and the ticket it likely to be far more "balanced" than in previous years — with the added bonus that the new General Secretary will actually vote as mandated, eschewing "flexible balloting".

Nonetheless, the disposition of the Block vote of the NUR does beg the question, once again of the views of the actual membership. Instead of merely throwing in a voting card at Labour movement conference, activists in the NUR, indeed all unions should now be working on a "hearts and minds" campaign in the rank and file.

UNION REFORM

On union reform, there is no reason why Tebbit, like the Devil, should have all the best songs, especially since we wrote some of the choruses.

We on the Left, were asking for periodical re-election for officers and executives, long before everyone else. We condemned the power of the trade union baronage as wielded through the block vote, long before the right-wing of the Labour Party discovered that it wasn't going their way for the first time for decades.

We know the reasoning behind the Tory's proposals — but that shouldn't stop our efforts, to democratise the unions.

It is not enough to elect good General Secretaries like Jimmy Knapp. Activists should be getting out of their caucuses and branch rooms to consolidate the silent majority before anyone else gets there.

Ian Williams
(in a personal capacity)

BRITISH RAIL REGRETS TO ANNOUNCE

So you thought Marylebone Station was only to be found on a Monopoly Board? Well, Briefing readers may not live in the greener pastures of Denham and High Wycombe, but the threat to close Marylebone Station is still something that concerns each and every one of us. First and foremost, because whatever marvellous plans the British Rail Board has to run trains into Paddington and elsewhere, jobs will be lost. Don't let anyone kid you otherwise. There will be no need for signalmen (sorry but they are all men), platform staff will be surplus (particularly as three other small stations would also come in for the chop) and train crews will also find themselves out of a job.

Any attack on any aspect of our public services, be they British Telecoms, the NHS or British Rail has to be resisted. The Tories will find it easier to denationalise British Rail be closing it down bit by bit, or selling off the profitable parts. At the same time, Tebbit's Law threatens to weaken our organisation and hence our ability to fight back. The National Union of Railwaymen decided at their annual conference in July to oppose closures with, where necessary, industrial action. Already, we are seeing the BR workshops about to be shut down, more and more lines are being prepared for what are now known as 'guardless trains', like the St. Pancras-Bedford line and so on. All this has to be opposed now, before the railways are completely decimated and we're all on the scrapheap.

At Marylebone we have established a co-ordinating committee with both NUR and train drivers involved. We want to involve the whole labour movement to oppose the closure which, if successful, would be the first London terminus to shut. If the axe falls on Marylebone, it won't be just the conservationists who will lose out. It will be another victory for the Tories. It's about time we had one or two of our own.

Tessa Van Gelderen
Marylebone NUR; Brent South CLP

Epsom Hospital Closures

The recent report published by the South West Thames Regional Health Authority, which proposes the closure of five Epsom hospitals and one in nearby Banstead, is the clearest indication since the election of the callous and brutal way in which the new Thatcher Administration intends to treat the old, the sick and the needy.

The people responsible for the report claim it is a huge step forward in the care of the mentally ill, but the truth is much different. It is the clearest example yet of the planned mass sell-off of Health Service assets for the profit and benefit of those who can afford private health care and who have no interest whatsoever in the services available to the rest of us.

The land involved, over 650 acres of prime Green Belt, will prompt near hysteria amongst the speculators of the City of London who will be clamouring to get their hands on it. Although the land is classified as Green Belt there is no doubt that this Tory Government, and their Resident Association friends who control Epsom Council, will be only to pleased to relax regulations and give their big-business associates every encouragement in their asset-stripping exercise.

Relatives of the hospital patients will be pressured into taking them back home, whether or not they themselves are capable of looking after them. Those who have no relatives, or whose relatives insist they cannot cope, will be pushed onto communities such as Islington and Hackney, which have patients in the hospitals and whose own Social Services are already starved of resources by the Thatcher governments legislation. Those still not otherwise accommodated will be dumped in private nursing homes with their fees paid by the local Health Authority, a policy already leaked from the secret document circulated amongst Regional Health Authority chairman by the DHSS.

Private nursing homes will be jammed full of psychiatric patients sedated by unqualified staff while their tills ring with government money which has been diverted away from the National Health Service.

The Health Authority claims that the money raised by selling off the land, which is recognised as the ideal surroundings for the care of psycho-geriatric patients, would be used to fund new community care projects. It is more likely that the proceeds would just be deducted from the Authorities

TGWU: Women Feel Their Power

Ann Pettifor
TGWU BDC delegate
Region No. 1

'Women's Cause a Triumph for Men' asserted the Guardian headline. They were of course talking the triumphant way in which *women* had persuaded the overwhelmingly male delegates to the TGWU's 30th Biennial Delegate Conference to reject a GEC Statement read by Marie Patterson, and accept a resolution calling for the union to support positive action measures being proposed within the Labour Party.

In her statement, Marie Patterson had begun by addressing the Chair*man*, and *fellow* members. (This despite the fact that Moss Evans, the General Secretary, had througout the week taken very good care not to exclude women in his speeches to Conference and to numerous receptions. All his remarks were addressed to the 'sisters and brothers') She argued that the greater political involvement of women in the party was vital, and that the TGWU's executive council were *"more than anxious to support wholeheartedly those measures that would improve access to the union and party for women and increase their participation."* This was immediately contradicted by her statement that this *"would not mean extending authority to the Women's Conference of the Labour Party to elect the women's section of the NEC, or to submit resolutions to Annual Conference."* In other words access and participation in the union and party is fine as far as it goes. And it does not go as far as the most powerful policy and decision-making bodies — all of them male-dominated. Unaware of this major contradiction and of the double standards that underlined her speech, Ms Patterson wound up by saying that the *"general executive council of the TGWU has no intention of dragging its feet on this issue of positive action."*



Photo: JOHN HARRIS

Ann Pettifor: challenged executive

The TGWU has a rather unusual rule which enables the Executive Council to deal with troublesome resolutions from the rank-and-file by issuing a statement in the debate; a statement that renders the troublesome resolutions null and void. That is, if the statement is accepted by the Conference. For the statement *not* to be accepted is unheard of, and is last believed to have happened in 1977 when Jack Jones was defeated over the question of the Social Contract. By and large, it is what David Gow in the *Scotsman* describes as an 'unthinkable' event. But it happened on Wednesday 6th July 1983 when women forcefully and successfully argued against the executive's statement with its denial of rights to women in the Labour Party — and persuaded the overwhelming majority of male delegates to reject it. Only a handful of votes could be found to support Marie Patterson and the executive statement.

CONSTERNATION ON THE PLATFORM

The rejection caused great consternation on the Platform. For it meant that the resolutions were to be taken after all, and with this kind of resistance from the delegates in the hall, what were the General Executive Council to recommend? The most controversial resolution was 447, which commits the TGWU to support "the extension and formal *constitution* of effective women's organisation in the Labour Party and the Union." This means that the TGWU would be bound to vote in favour of the resolutions that will appear on this year's Annual Conference Agenda, calling for a rules conference for the women's organisation. Secondly the resolution calls on the biggest block-voting union at Labour Party Conference to "promote the equal participation of women in the union and party's *powerful policy and decision-making bodies*, that is, the Annual Conference of the party and the National Executive Committee." In theory this means that the TGWU should support the proposal that the Labour Women's Conference, be entitled to submit five resolutions to the male-dominated annual conference; and that it should be empowered to elect the women's section of the NEC — an election in which very few women participate, as it involves the union delegations to Labour Party Conference — and 98% of *them* were male last year! In fact, we can expect the men on the TGWU Labour Party delegation to wriggle out of this commitment.

After a long debate and firm opposition yet againt from M. Patterson, Resolution 447 was put to the vote and overwhelmingly carried. The next day, yet another statement on 'Women's Rights' appeared and was read by the Women's Officer. Again, women objected to the way in which their resolutions were being case aside in favour of a statement drawn up by full-time officials. They urged rejection of the statement; a long and protracted vote was taken. The women won again!, and Marie Patterson's distance from the membership she is meant to represent, was fully revealed.

FEELING OF POWER

The impact of these decisions on the Conference was powerful. It gave delegates a feeling of their own strength and power, and it made women's rights a central issue at a male-oriented conference. The lay delegate who proposed the vote of thanks from the floor at the end of the week, made great play in his speech of the 'freedom fighters of the women's liberation movement who had made their presence felt at the conference all week.' And for once the comments were sincerely and directly expressed, without the sexist code-language that men need to adopt when seen to be siding with women.

There is still a long struggle ahead to win the TGWU over to demands of the Women's Action Committee of CLPD, and to the demands of women in the union. But there is no doubt that the signal for the battle has been given, and that women will not give up until they finally take their rightful place alongside men in the powerful policy and decision-making bodies of party and union.

— BY GEOFF MARTIN (Chair Sutton Area Hospitals Branch, NUPE, and Epsom and Ewell C.L.P.)

budget, so saving the government money in the short term with no consideration for the long term care of the patients involved. This all fits in with the government policy of public spending cuts which is a central feature of their overall economic strategy.

The loss of jobs involved if the Regional Health Authorities proposals are carried out is the other area that the report has glossed over. Over 5000 people are directly employed by the hospitals and union representatives are already planning a campaign to fight the proposals at all levels.

The unions and their supporters will run the risk of being accused of taking political action by certain sections of the Trade Union leadership if they strike or take any other direct action. They will be opposing a key part of the Governments policy and will need all the outside support they can get.

If Chapple, Duffy and Murray won't support workers fighting to defend jobs and public services, and would rather go and discuss the TUC's funeral arrangements with the Chingford undertaker, then let them. But if they expect the rank and file to follow quietly like lamps to the slaughter then they're going to be in for a nasty shock.

Thatcherism: bad for your health

In the next few months there will be a major threat to the health of the working class in London. It is not the latest flu virus, raging epidemic or environmental health hazard. It is the Tories and their post election round of NHS cuts.

Over 50 hospitals, 5,000 beds and 9,000 jobs are under threat which does not include further cuts as a result of the latest announcement of another £100 million to be trimmed. The Tories are back with a vengeance and one of their prime targets is the NHS — and the dismantling will begin in London. According to government 'norms' London is overprovided with hospital beds. Therefore the London District Health Authorities have to lose money to the underprovided green belt areas such as Essex and Surrey.

We do not argue that Essex and Surrey and other areas do have enough health provision. But, London is certainly not overprovided and should not have to lose hospitals and beds in order that other areas can get the minimum services. More money overall has to be spent on health, particularly on primary health care and on preventative services.

The Tories argue that there is no money available, yet they spend millions on imperialist wars, preparations for nuclear wars and on nuclear weapons. Their priorities lie in protecting and defending the ruling class at the expense of the working class. As waiting lists grow in areas like Hackney and Tower Hamlets private medicine booms and closed NHS hospitals like the London Jewish are sold to private firms. It is an obscenity that people living in the east end of London in severe conditions of poor housing, high unemployment, and economic blight should have a private hospital being opened for the Tory rich.

There is no real planning for the health needs of Londoners. Everything is planned around making the budget balance. The Tories talk ad nauseam about growth in the NHS since they have been in government. In reality there has been no growth in the NHS and we have seen the severest decline in the NHS since its inception. This year districts have been given between half to two per cent 'growth money' by the government. But it is necessary to increase budgets by 1% annually just to maintain services to cater for the ageing population and by another 2 per cent for the increasing cost of technology. The present cash limits allow only for an inflation rate of 5.6% and anything over that has to be found from the existing budget. Under circumstances like these any talk of 'growth' is sheer hypocrisy.

In several areas of London there are militant campaigns against the cuts in the health service. Workers and the community are uniting together to fight the Tories and save the welfare state. Campaigns like Hackney Health Emergency, the South London Hospital Campaign and the Brent Health Campaign show that the will is there to fight. Workers in hospitals will be putting their jobs on the line in the coming months as they take strike action and occupy threatened hospitals. They must have the support of their trade unionists and of the Labour party at all levels. The threat to the NHS should be met with the same kind of working class solidarity which we saw during the long dispute last year over pay. Stewards should get promises of supporting strike action if attempts are made to close local hospitals or to break occupations.



Labour Party Photograph Library

The Labour Party must come out firmly and actively opposed to hospital cuts and closures. In the aftermath of the defeat in the general election it is essential that Labour shows the working class that it will defend its rights and interests. There is no excuse for Labour Party members who sit on District Health Authorities voting for closures. It is not the role of the Labour Party to make the Tories' cuts. If it means defying the law and being disbanded, fined or jailed, then so be it. Trade unionists will be facing this threat every time they take action over cuts and the Labour party must be prepared to take the same risks. We do not have to balance the miserable Tory economist budget.

Wards should make sure that they send people to campaign meetings regularly and the crisis facing London's Health Service should be raised at every GMC — not just as a motion of support but as a promise of action. Labour Party banners should be on every demonstration and march.

Nationally the Party must firm up its positions on health. Gwyneth Dunwoody who has some disgusting views about the role of private medicine should be removed as shadow spokesperson on health and replaced by someone who is prepared to fight for a real socialist health service. An NHS free at the time of need, free from any form of private medicine, run democratically by the working class and capable of working for positive health.

Andrea Campbell (COHSE)

Towards a Socialist Health Service

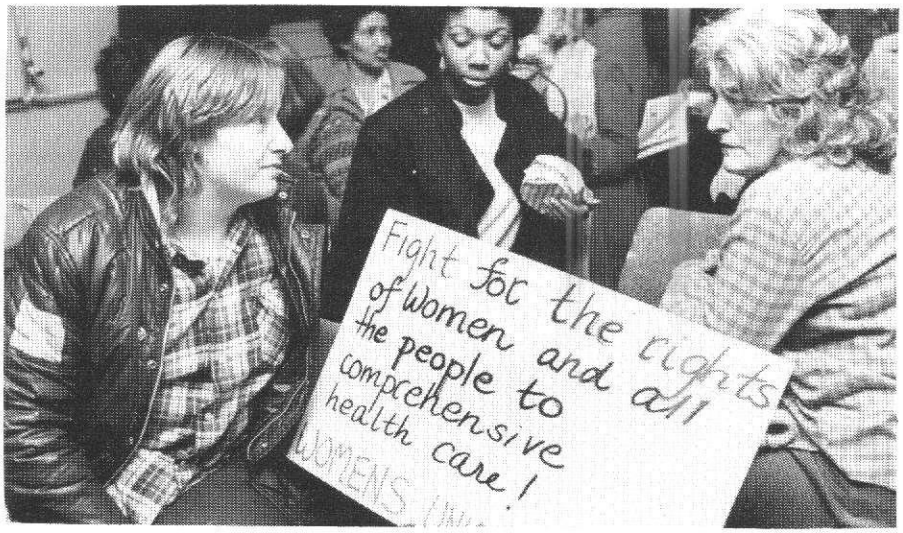
Labour's defeat at the general election came as no surprise, and it was easy enough to find reasons to account for it – Michael Foot's decrepitude, Labour's ineffectual leadership, the Tories' own ruthless media campaign etc. But none of these reasons really explain the *extent* of Labour's defeat in circumstances which ought to have been so favourable to it. Labour lacked a positive, credible *socialist* alternative to the policies put forward by Thatcher – a programme capable of tackling the fundamental problems which have become so much a part of the everyday experience of ordinary people. By examining just one aspect of Labour's programme, that of health, we hope to show that Labour must put forward such an alternative programme if it is to provide a credible and effective leadership for the working people of this country.

LABOUR'S PROGRAMME ON HEALTH

We would argue that Labour's manifesto commitments on health fail completely to answer the demands of those at the receiving end of the health service, and particularly the groups like pregnant women, mothers, the elderly, the handicapped and the disabled. This month's *Streetlife Supplement* will demonstrate, I hope, just some of the experiences such people suffer at the hands of the health service. The pictures such experiences illustrate is of a rigidly stratified system under the control of the consultants, with patients having no say or control over the treatment they receive – a system within which 'freedom of choice' all too often means 'doing what you're told' or 'doing without'. By looking at three aspects of Labour's programme on health – preventive medicine, maternity services and the role of Community Health Councils – we hope to show the extent of its failures to acknowledge, and to tackle, the real problems of the National Health Service.

PREVENTION OR CURE?

From its inception, the NHS has been dominated by the hospital sector while community medicine has consistently been neglected, and this emphasis on treatment rather than prevention has steadily increased since the NHS was created (in 1948 55% of the budget was spent on the hospital sector – by 1974 this had risen to 65%). The main causes of illness and death in our society are the so-called diseases of affluence – coronary heart disease, cancer, and the conditions associated with overweight and a diet too high in fats and sugars. Diseases which in the main could easily be prevented. *Ruth Levitt* argued as long ago as 1979 that *'the NHS has allowed its duty to prevent illness to be badly, perhaps irretrievably, ignored'.*[1] In particular, powerful vested interests – the tobacco industry, processed food manufacturers, etc. – have been allowed to force their products upon us, while little has been done to control their advertising, let alone the contents of the products themselves. A *socialist* programme of health care should tackle the problems of prevention at its roots, by limiting the power of these vested interests, but Labour's response to the need for prevention as outlined in the manifesto goes nowhere near either acknowledging the extent of the problem or the fundamental nature of the changes needed to tackle it, referring only vaguely to a commitment to *'give greater emphasis to prevention'.*



Gino Ginter/Photo Co-op

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

While hospital sector medicine has gained overwhelming predominance over the community sector, the use of high technology and drug-dependent medicine has correspondingly grown with it, leading not only to an increasing loss of control by the patient over his or her own body but also to an accelerating rate of iatrogenic disease – the result of inappropriate and often unnecessary medical intervention. And nowhere is this process more apparent than in the field of obstetrics. The rapid growth of 'technological childbirth' has undoubtedly turned the natural process of childbirth into a 'medical problem', a problem with which there would seem to be less and less choice for the mother herself to determine how, when or where the event should itself take place. As *Jane Stockton* argued in last December's *Briefing 'from the introduction of the lying-down position through to the use of induction, anaesthesia, episiotomy etc, our control over the birth of our children has been wrested away until now our only role is a totally passive one'.*[2] But Labour's manifesto, while *'respecting the wishes of women in childbirth'*, again does not begin to recognise the extent to which the 'right to choose' has been eroded within the NHS, and lacks totally any commitment to reverse this process.

TAKE THE POWER!

However, arguably the most fundamental flaw in the NHS is that relating to the power structure upon which it rests. In particular, while the medical profession retains almost total control over the NHS, the interests of the patient and the needs of the community go largely unrepresented. The *Radical Statistics Health Group*, for example, argue that the problems of the NHS will not be solved until *'the problems inherent in the structure of the service and the role of powerful interest groups which control (it)'* are tackled.[3] But this is the question that the Labour Party has consistently failed to acknowledge, beyond a worthless promise to ensure that Community Health Councils *'represent fully the consumer point of view'*. Moreover, it is also a fundamentally political question – one which above all others separates a capitalist welfare state system from a truly socialist health service. In other words, the most fundamental task facing a truly Socialist administration with regard to the NHS must be to devise a method of taking back the power from doctors and administrators, and of giving it back to the patients, health workers and local communities where it belongs.

LABOUR'S RESPONSE

And so by looking at Labour's policy on health care we can begin to see before us a powerful illustration of the underlying failure of Labour to, as *Stuart Hall* points out, *'construct an alternative philosophy of socialism for modern times'*[4], and more than anything else, it is the monstrous *irrelevance* of Labour's response to the failures of the NHS which shows us so clearly how much it has lost touch both with any real socialist principles and with the everyday experiences of working people.

Jim Ring and Susan O'Brien

1. Ruth Levitt, *New Statesman*, 19th October 1979.
2. Jane Stockton, *London Labour Briefing* No. 25, December 1982.
3. Radical Statistics Health Group, *In Defence of the NHS*, 1977.
4. Stuart Hall, *New Socialist* No. 11, May/June 1983.

Roots, Rules, Tribulation

Lynda Woodroffe (Brent East CLP)

The setting was somewhere in a Brent Park. Four black boys were listening to their music in the park at the same time as a bicycle was nicked from a local jogger. The police jumped on the black boys as chief suspects. They were taken in, detained, charged etc. The story is all too familiar. It was in fact the theme of a play written by an ex-head of English at Brondesbury and Kilburn High school. (B & K) There were to be four nights, but the day after the first night, ironically, the main characters, all black boys, were nicked by the police. The play had materialised.

On March 9th, after school, a crowd gathered around a small bunch of boys fighting after racist insults had been passed. Three white boys and three black boys were involved — not a large number. A police car passed, two officers got out and jumped on the black boys, letting the white boys get up and walk away free. A policeman was injured after an accident. They called for help. The I.R.U. (alias S.P.G.), which was currently policing the Kilburn area at the time, arrived. Eye witnesses said that 4 or 5 vans arrived and there were policemen everywhere. Some said as many as 30 police were present. Some said that many of the police carried very long truncheons.

BLACK BOYS ARRESTED

Four black boys were arrested and violently treated during the arrests and at the police station. Outraged by the police treatment and that the white boys had been allowed to get away free, about 100 white as well as black B&K school students, from the 3rd year up, went down to the police station to protest and demand that the white boys were picked up as well. About 30 of them stayed until the last of their school friends were released. Most ironically down at the police station was one of the posters for our play, 'Roots, Rules and Tribulation'!

Some of the 6th formers organised a lobby at the police station to demand that the white boys were arrested too. Some time later they were brought in and charged. They were well known racists and well known to the police.

My son, a fifth former at the school, who was an eyewitness from the start, thinks that the police should be charged. He was shocked at the number of police involved in a school brawl, at their violent treatment of the boys, and although he knew, in theory, that the police were racist, he had never experienced it so blatantly before. He gave a statement at the police station and wanted to say something about the violence used by the police at their intervention. The officer replied *that it was necessary to use violence to break up fights* (NB — teachers aren't allowed to, but manage to just the same)

STATE OF SHOCK

The school was in a state of shock for the next 10 days. The staff and parents attended many meetings and organised a delegation to Brent council's police committee, chaired by Ambrozine Neil, who has been very supportive and helpful ever since. Sixth formers held their own meetings and drew up a list of demands to the council, one of them being the withdrawal of the SPG from Brent.

Brent East GMC passed a resolution the very next day after the arrests demanding a public enquiry, a public meeting, withdrawal and disbandment of the SPG and a call for support for any actions taken in support of the victimised black kids.

On April 17th a large public meeting was held at B&K school where nearly 70 parents, pupils, staff and interested people attended. 15 and 16 year olds bravely spoke out in public for the first time. With the exception of 1 or 2 Tory supporters, an almost unanimous vote was taken to campaign to get the charges dropped from all the black boys. A steering committee was set up, comprising of many of the the B&K school kids who were eye witnesses and this is now organising a campaign for the kids. A picket was organised for May 12th, outside Willesden Magistrates court where the case was heard.

The picket was supported by several students, Harlesden Peoples Community Centre, Brent Trades Council, local parents and residents, and Brent Councillors, despite the poor weather and early morning, the teachers were forbidden to attend the picket, and the headteacher, a JP, went down to the picket himself to see off those younger students who turned up.

COURT HEARING

The court hearing was a disaster. The police had cooked up evidence to put up the two charges of threatening behaviour to two charges of affray and one of section 1f GBH. The maximum sentences for these charges are life. Then, and more importantly, the station commander made a revealing statement about the future of policing in Brent. He argued firstly for custody for the black students on the basis of the great public interest in the case, the possibility of the youths absconding and for fear of the safety of the white youths, (the black students have just turned 16 and the white youths are all over 18 and well known racists.) This was clearly an indication of the type of attitude the police are adopting for cases of this kind, for now and the future. Gone is the 'friendly, neighbourhood police officer' the Tories said they had put back on the beat.

Finally bail was granted and all 6 bound over with a fine of £100 if they were found to cause further trouble. Since then, one of the black boys has been regularly harrassed by the police. The committal case came up on June 16th. Two of the defendants were doing exams on that day and were told it was not necessary to attend the court, but found that they were fined £100 when they failed to attend. The campaign committee organised a street meeting in Kilburn Square on 16 July, four days before the next committal hearing — 'old style' committal. The meeting was supported by councillors, Brent Trades Council, teachers, local community workers, parents and pupils.

RACISTS ISOLATED

The school itself has suffered quite a lot recently from a merger threat, poor maintenance and falling rolls. The school population is about ⅓ West Indian, ⅓ Asian and ⅓ white (mostly Irish). One of the things it does not suffer from is overt racialism. The racists in the school are often isolated and dealt with by the pupils themselves. Many of the junior staff are openly anti-racist and anti-police. This is generally regarded as unrespectable by the heirarchy. The drama department, which is very strong and popular with the kids has always been quite progressive on these points. Many pupils use drama as an opportunity to express their fears about the racialism that surrounds them and very often the theme of their own plays are about the problems that exist in a relationship between black and white young people 'Roots, Rules and Tribulation' touched some delicate spots — the arrests verified their fears.

Anti-police feeling amongst the whites as well as the blacks in the area has snowballed. When a police car crashed into the back of another car the other day, the students were thrilled — their hatred and bitterness goes deep.

Looking back into the past record of the SPG, I see that it is nearly 10 years since Kevin Gately was brutally killed by the SPG in Red Lion Square, 4 years since Blair Peach was clubbed to death in front of 10 eye witnesses. On both occasions the SPG got clean away with it, not to mention the others — Liddle Towers, Jimmy Kelly, Colin Roach, the Newham 8, Bradford 12 etc. And in 1979, the TUC called for the disbandment of the SPG, but nothing has changed, except its name. They still have a carte blanche to infiltrate our communities.

SUPPORT THE B&K DEFENCE CAMPAIGN Write letters and send donations to The B&K Defence Campaign, c/o 101 Priory Park Road, NW6.

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Colin Roach Campaign Continues

Uproar greeted the verdict of suicide at the end of the Colin Roach inquest. The coroner himself, in his summing up, stated that no-one knew what happened to Colin Roach after he entered Stoke Newington police station. Yet, the coroner practically directed the jury to return a verdict of suicide.

No positive evidence was presented at the inquest in particular, in relation to the gun which killed Colin Roach. Prior to the inquest, the word was out in Fleet Street that the police intended to bring along a witness to say that he sold the gun to Colin Roach. This witness did not materialise.

Instead, we heard that the gun could not be traced since it was sold in Wales two years earlier. There were no fingerprints on the gun. Of the 280 fibres found on the gun, not a single one was connected with Colin or the bag he was carrying. The gun could not fit into the bag without poking out. If it was in the bag, it would have been seen by at least three people.

Even more bizarre, the jury complained to Home Secretary, Leon Brittan that the police investigation was not carried out in a professional manner. Brittan was not slow in announcing there would be no police inquiry. Instead, an internal police inquiry has been set up to investigate the jury's complaint.

The Roach Family Support Committee has rejected the suicide verdict and has pledged to carry on the campaign. The earlier decision to take the issue to the European parliament is now being implemented with the help of Euro-MP for North London, Alf Lomas. The London Labour Party is supporting the petition to the European Parliament.

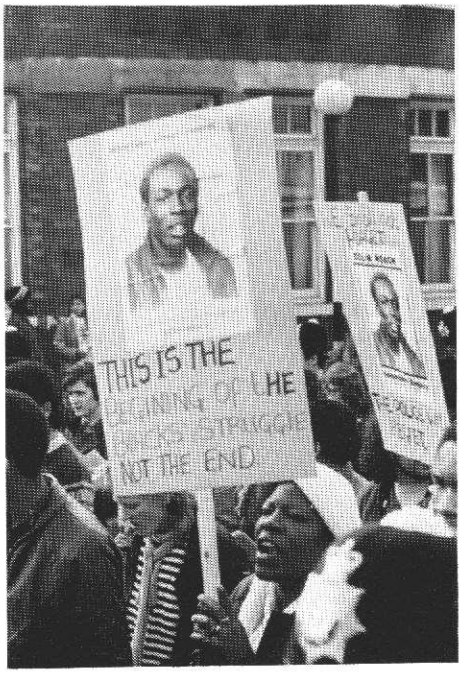
A public meeting held in Hackney Town Hall on Friday 8th July was very well attended. This indicates that despite the political smear campaign against RFSC by the Police Federation, Sir Kenneth Newman, and sections of the press, RFSC still enjoys widespread mass support.

The Police Federation first suggested that RFSC was running a black racist campaign. After the inquest, they then suggested that the Roach family was being manipulated by political groups. The Police Federation conveniently forgets that it was the Roach family who took this campaign onto the streets, and that the Roach family is the core around which RFSC is based.

When Sir Kenneth Newman, Metropolitan Police Commissioner presented his first annual report, he claimed that Trotskyists and left wing extremists are conducting a campaign of dedicated denigration of the police and attacking civil order. Elements of this according to Newman are present in RFSC. Earlier, local police had claimed that RFSC was a bunch of Marxists, communists, lefties and misfits.

The police reaction reflects their fear that the truth will eventually come out. As Ron Smith, the father of Helen Smith — the British nurse murdered in Saudi Arabia in 1979 said after the inquest:

> "Coroners of England and Wales NEVER, under any circumstances, incur the wrath of the deceased's family and/or the involvement of the English media *unless there is something to cover up* ... The mere fact that Chambers (the coroner) has gone to extraordinary lengths to mislead and to 'bamboozle' is proof indicative WITHIN ITSELF that Colin was murdered."



Newman's reaction is also an indication that the state is preparing for a new crackdown on those whom they classify as 'extremists' attacking civil order'. Our only crime has been to ask the Home Secretary to set up a public enquiry under the 1964 Police Act.

The new crackdown is shown by the actions of the police in bringing three charges of obstructing the police against Lester Lewis at the beginning of July. These alleged offences are supposed to have been committed in February. Similar charges have been brought against Pramesh Des, who drove the RFSC control lorry on the February 12th march.

Meanwhile the trials continue at Highbury corner magistrates court. The trial of Tower Hamlets Labour councillor Denis Twomey is currently in progress.

Denis was driving the campaign lorry. The police smashed the window and dragged him through it. He was then charged with assaulting two policemen. Later, he was charged with careless driving and assaulting an unknown policeman. Supporters of RFSC have paid a high price for demanding the truth. Six people have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment and fines and legal fees now total over £1500.

In the meantime, relations between police and local blacks are deteriorating. Stoke Newington police threatened to bust up the local front line unless people came to talk to them. A recent clash between black youths and the police in Sandringham Road has been suppressed by the media.

All this makes it far more urgent that a widespread public inquiry into policing in Hackney must be established.

Lester Lewis

LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING
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Letters

By agreement at the June EB meeting, I wrote a piece for the July *Briefing* about how the Regional Office had managed to 'lose' half the women's leaflet that members of the Women's Regional Committee produced for the election.

I described the reaction of the men at the Herbert Morrison House when I brought in the art-work ("too many words") and how it happened that "after several years' study and work, meetings, conference and resolutions, aimed at giving the party a better position on women, when it came to the election it all got ignored and shouldered aside by agents and officers — most of them men with little idea what the issues were."

The article concluded that the leaflet "was an attempt to say a bit more to women than just 'Tories bad, Labour good'. What a pity Labour women still can't decide to have a leaflet without a lot of men deciding otherwise."

And what a pity that the women who read *London Labour Briefing* can't find out that their Regional representatives did produce a leaflet, and the fate that it met.

For what happened when I handed the article (in good time and ready-typeset) to the Editor of *Briefing*? He took one look, didn't read it, said "too many words" and sent me off to cut it down. I humbly complied, but no doubt too late. The article didn't appear.

What on earth use is *Street Life Supplement* and all that, if the male editor of the paper behaves like our male Regional Officers and filters out something *he* doesn't consider important?

Rachel Lever

See article on Page 18

CALLAGHAN PAID

30 silver milk tops were delivered by Labour Party members and supporters to Mr Callaghan's secretary in the Central Lobby, House of Commons on Bastille Day.

The Daily Mirror had already carried a story which probably ensured Mr Callaghan was 'busy'. Nevertheless his secretary asked, on his behalf we presumed if we didn't have better things to do? We asked if he had not better things to do in the General Election than attack Labour policy on the bomb?

The fight goes on to bring Labour back to its roots and make the leadership past present and future accountable!

Briefing Lobby correspondent

EAST OF LONDON BRIEFING LAUNCH MEETING 'TURNING THE PARTY OUTWARDS' 26th July 8pm NE. LONDON POLYTECHNIC SPEAKERS: TONY BANKS M.P. GRAHAM BASH (ED. LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING).

Next Editorial Board Meetings; Monday July 25th at 7pm at County Hall; Monday September 3rd at 7pm at County Hall.

Briefing is having a month's break. Our next issue will be out on September 22nd. Deadline for articles: Monday 12th September.

London Teachers Defend Education

DEB

Bernard Regan
Inner London National Executive Member (in personal capacity), Socialist Teachers Alliance, Hackney North CLP

The fight by members of the National Union of Teachers in Inner London (I.L.T.A.) against Compulsory Transfer (or Redeployment) has been the subject of debate on the Greater London Labour Party Regional Council as well as featuring in the national press. It is important to state at the outset that the issue of C.T. is not a new one. C.T. was first introduced around 1976. The original agreement between ILEA and the unions was based on the protection of all jobs. Even then, however, many on the left inside the union fought hard to improve its terms lessening the impact on individual schools and teachers. In the course of the years it became evident that jobs were not being protected and the 1979 4% cuts introduced by the previous ILEA leadership confirmed the union's suspicions that jobs were being lost through 'natural wastage'. With union estimates of 40,000 teachers unemployed nationally, the left inside ILTA set about campaigning against CT. London teachers adopted a position of opposition as official policy in 1981 and subsequently reaffirmed it in 1982 and again earlier this year. Our opposition therefore is not something new. Members of the union have been prepared to challenge ILEA policy even to the extent of actually being expelled from the union.

WHAT IS C.T.?

CT is the forcible moving of a teacher from one school to another on the basis of the first school being 'overstaffed' according to calculations done by the Divisional Inspector in conjunction normally with the Headteacher. Staff are then told who is at 'risk' and depending on how many teachers retire, resign or leave for one reason or another, the school is told how many they will be expected to lose according to the calculations. No consultation even takes place with the Governors. An appeals mechanism is set up but it operates in almost total isolation from schools as a whole. This year some 350 odd teachers faced being moved. In some secondary schools this meant up to 18 members of staff where a recent reorganisation had taken place. (Secondary organisation has been an extremely traumatic experience for staff and school students alike, so ILTA has asked specifically for a moratorium on movement in those schools for a period before and after that reorganisation.)

There are now around 3,000 less teachers in ILEA's schools than there were in 1976. True there has been an increase in off-site provision (disruptive units etc.) but here has still been a loss of many jobs through 'natural wastage' estimated by the *Times Educational Supplement* at around 4% – approximately 1,000 jobs. ILTA wants to see teaching jobs retained, and retained in schools, believing that this is the best method for insuring the success of the initiatives the Authority is promoting on equal opportunities for girls, ethnic minorities and working class children.

DEMORALISING EFFECT

Compulsory transfer has a demoralising effect on a whole school staff, many of whom will have worked together for a number of years. Teachers who are transferred often feel, and are frequently treated as, less than adequate. Some having been moved once, only to face transfer twelve months later. Some have been known to face transfer four times in the last 7 years. In addition all the evidence points to a disproportionate number of women and black teachers being moved.

The Union is willing to negotiate a voluntary transfer agreement in the context of the protection of all jobs, full time and part-time – a promise made by the Greater London Labour Party itself at the special conference on a 'Programme for ILEA' in 1980.

At the moment the Union is asking for the following:

(a) a moratorium on compulsory transfers.

(b) negotiations on a completely voluntary system (like in Brent and probably soon to be achieved in Liverpool).

(c) measures to protect those redeployed in previous years against further movement.

(d) measures to protect part-timers and teachers on short-term contracts against redundancy.

The fact that around 1500 teachers took unofficial action despite the well-known witch-hunting tactics of the right-wing leadership of our Union, demonstrates the depth of feeling on this issue.

The present transfer system in addition to treating teachers as objects or resources is exceedingly bureaucratic, clumsy, inefficient and time-consuming for all concerned.



Labour Party Photograph Library

UNITED FRONT

The ILEA leadership should call a halt. It is an obstacle to developing precisely the kind of united front for the forthcoming Tory attacks on the GLC/ILEA which both Frances Morrell and Andy Harris called for in the last issue of *Briefing*. At the last meeting of our National Executive I made sure that the NUT motion to the TUC in September explicit-explicitly called for a campaign in defence of the GLC and the ILEA in particular.

In my opinion so big are the stakes involved that that fight will have to be based not just on the mass activity of the London Labour movement but of the Labour movement nationally. The best foundation upon which to build such a campaign will be a recognition by the ILEA leadership of the legitimate demands of London teachers on compulsory transfer.

The GLLP regional Council rejected our position by 22 to 11. I hope however that GMCs, wards and Party sections will give us a chance to put our case in order to change ILEA policy and prepare the basis for a real united front in defence of the GLC and ILEA against the Tories.

BATE

ILEA's Position on Redeployment

Andy Harris GLC/ILEA Member for Putney

No member of the ILEA Labour Group underestimates the strength of feeling in the schools about compulsory redeployment — the effects on morale of the whole school, the strain on individuals and the diminution of curriculum choice in some cases.

Most members are committed to trying to negotiate procedures that will achieve a totally voluntary system of deployment.

ILEA BACKED BY REGIONAL EC

Why then is ILEA, supported by the Regional Executive of the Party, faced with a run of unofficial actions by NUT members in not an insignificant number of schools?

It is necessary to explain the background to redeployment. Between 1979 and 1983 Inner London's School population has dropped by 58,000 (15.7%) — this fall is not uniform across the authority — the fall in secondary numbers is considerably greater in some parts of inner London whereas, for instance, nursery rolls are generally rising. Coupled with this the needs of schools change as the areas they serve change — so that for instance as the number of children whose first language is not English rise in a particular area it is important that the Authority can respond to this by making more, suitably trained teachers available.

In a nutshell as numbers and conditions vary so the Authority has to have a planning mechanism whereby a small number of teachers (some 350 this year out of a total of over 21,000) can be moved to meet the changing needs. This mechanism has been compulsory redeployment, modified in the last two years by initial voluntary phases, and has been operated in agreement with all the teacher unions.

The left in the NUT have campaigned against compulsory redeployment for many years and won the Inner London Teachers Association (ILTA) elections this spring on that basis. This action last summer against compulsory redeployment was supported by a number of ILEA members, including myself, because compulsory redeployment was coupled with a reduction of the number of teacher posts in the Authority. (In the time that rolls have fallen by 15.7% the number of full-time equivalent teacher posts has fallen by 2,171 (9.4%) over the same period). These figures show that ILEA cannot claim to be *wholly* fulfilling the desired maxim of the Labour Movement in London to use falling rolls to improve educational chances for the school students in our schools. In that respect it is correct that the left in NUT has campaigned against reduction in teacher posts through natural wastage.

Across all schools the average pupil teacher ratio in 1979 was 15.6:1 and in 1983 it is 14.5:1 — with no job loss these figures would have and should have been even better.

However the 1983/84 budget not only holds the number of posts the same as the previous year but actually increases them. Therefore in the view of many of us we are fulfilling our part of a bargain and in return some teacher movement has to take place.

The gain of holding teacher post numbers was achieved by the left in the ILEA group making this demand — for the educational justifications are clear over and above the imperative of maintaining teacher employment.

The current redeployment procedures were agreed with the NUT earlier in the year — prior to the election of the ILTA officers. In the ILEA budget consultations last winter no respondent said they wanted redeployment halted.

Consequently the budget does not contain a figure of £3m or £4m that would be needed to halt redeployment this year. Indeed if the procedure were halted mid-stream and the money had to be found, it could only come from that ear-marked to improve the pay and conditions of ILEA's manual workers.

In trying to reach an agreement with ILTA to instigate the need to carry through compulsory redeployment this year ILEA negotiators put forward the offer below:-

A. ILEA asks ILTA to recommend its members to follow the procedures on redeployment as agreed in the working paty this year and to work normally.

B. ILTA asks the Authority for its part to agree the following:-

(1) An assurance there will be a maintenance of the number of full time equivalent teacher posts in 1983/84 despite the fall in rolls.

(2) The Authority agrees to seek, within the approved budget provision for 1983/84 to improve the education of children in ILEA schools by:

(i) Reconvening the working party on supply provision to seek ways of substantially improving the provision in schools for September 1983.

(ii) Implementing the first phase of the new revised primary staffing formula — 75 new posts.

(iii) Considering staffing appeals on individual secondary schools already notified and, in exceptional circumstances, considering primary schools appeals received by 10 June.

(3) The reconvening of the redeployment working party to examine the procedures for redeployment of school teachers in 1984, including the feasibility of a completely voluntary scheme.

(4) Immediate discussions to beginon the contractual position at present of teachers holding temporary salaried contracts.

All this took seven hours of negotiations.

UNMEETABLE DEMANDS

The ILEA negotiators were prepared to put this offer to Labour Group for endorsement but the ILTA negotiators said that they would not put it to ILTA Council unless we specified the figure of 600 supply teacher posts in section 2(i). This is a demand of approximately £6m. We just don't have that sort of money. It is a position of making totally unmeetable demands.

And so the unofficial dispute has dragged on in a sad atmosphere of innum erable difficulties. With a three way split in ILTA, we are never quite sure of the authority of those we are talking to, with some schools closed on unofficial action on 8 June the day before polling day, with the General Secretary of ILTA publically accusing us of centralised planning Eastern European style, with ILTA telling us that ILEA had to buy the implementation of our anti-sexist and anti-racist policies, and with the Union actively trying to prevent the voluntary phase of the redeployment procedures operating.

ILEA cannot throw policies worked out in agreement with the unions into reverse half-way through the procedures — we can't plan in that way. For instance if redeployment were now halted one secondary school with a planned staffing ratic of 8.6 school students per teacher would improve to 4.4:1; another would improve from the already good 10.3:1 to 9.0:1. The cost of this will be the school that would have received the redeployed teachers would not do so, and the school students in those schools will be worse off.

The ending of compulsory redeployment is not a manifesto commitment but many of us would genuinely like to achieve an acceptable voluntary system that would still enable the authority to staff according to the educational priority index of need, reduce the strain on individually designated teachers and eliminate the agitation felt by both schools and Authority alike every spring and summer. Like the GLC we have a no redundancy commitment, and the GLC in order to achieve this has taken through some wide-ranging redeployments negotiated with the unions particularly in the area of housing where the unions were understanding in relation to mutual recognition that redeployment saved jobs by relocating them in areas of growing as opposed to diminishing need.

The vast majority of ILTA members accept that there has to be some movement of teachers between schools. We have a mutual interest in working out a voluntary system for next year. That is the important task and that is why ILTA should return to negotiation about this.

Barking and Dagenham Deputy Leader and Chair of Finance, George Brooker, called for a new dialogue between the council and local cuts campaigners at a conference last month.

In a candid moment, Cllr. Brooker admitted that since the general election his Labour group hadn't got a single plan or idea on how to fight Thatcher's cuts. Many at the conference asked what was new about that! Our councillors' strategy has so far, on George Brooker's own admission, involved £15 million in cuts in the past four years. Brooker claimed it was only the expectation of a general election victory that had kept Barking and Dagenham's Labour group going — in the meantime they had carried out Tory policies.

Hopes that the chair of Finance really had had a change of heart over the cuts and over consultation with the Labour movement were dashed, however, when he slipped and called on the cuts conference to set up monthly meetings where we could 'listen to a dialogue from the Council'. Nice one George!

By Chris Haculak (Barking CLP)

POST-ELECTION BRIEFING

How Hackney Got a Swing to Labour

Reasons for the decline in the Labour vote on June 9th are likely to be a major debate in the Party between now and the end of Annual Conference. It is therefore instructive to look at one area where the Labour vote actually increased and to suggest how this was achieved. On June 9th Ernie Roberts was returned as Member of Parliament for Hackney North and Stoke Newington with a majority of 8,495. The Labour share of the vote was increased by 2.2% on the 1979 figure. This was despite a low turnout (54.75%) which might be said to favour our opponents by those who argue that Labour's programme contained little of appeal to the electorate.

Elections cannot be won in one or two months of campaigning. Reasons for the Hackney North result lie in the Party's activities over the last couple of years as well as in the conduct of the election campaign.

CONTROVERSIAL

Hackney North CLP has not shirked the more controversial aspects of Labour's activities and policies. It has consistently supported the "Left" policies, such as unilateral nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from the EEC as well as the defence and improvement of public services. The CLP has pioneered important areas of policy, such as Northern Ireland and the Middle East. The former has become a popular local concern through publicity of the Irish Peoples struggle in both the Party's quarterly newspaper distributed to all households, "North Hackney News", and through public meetings. On the Middle East the Party's outrage at Lebanon invasion last year led it to an emergency resolution to Party Conference. Our delegate spoke in support of the resolutions (incorporating ours) that were carried supporting the Palestinians rights and the PLO as their representatives. Far from ignoring the Middle East situation, Hackney North, in an area with a concentrated Jewish population, sought to explain its policy in print, meetings, councillor and MP surgeries.

The nature of Labour's policies are not, however, likely to be the only reason suggested by the Right for Labour's defeat. The "activities of the Left" will also be advanced as a reason — indeed they already were in the Tory press a few days before polling day. Both locally and nationally Hackney North CLP is well known for initiating "Labour Against the Witch Hunt". I know of no case where such championing of individual rights and freedoms of Labour Party members was criticised on the doorstep during the election campaign. Even the local paper reported on the policy issues in the election campaign, despite apparent attempts by former Hackney central MP Stanley Clinton Davis to steer attention to the dangerous nature of the Leftists in both Hackney North and South.

LOCAL ISSUE

Hackney North has matched it support for and promotion of Labour's national policy by acting on issues of local significance. From the 1982 Council elections, the leadership of Hackney Council has come from Hackney North and the Party has established its rights to debate the questions of rates, rent and the fight against cuts as well as being a prime mover and participant in fulfilling manifesto commitments to decentralise Council functions, both in terms of location and control. Ernie Roberts as M.P. for the last four years has joined with the Party in taking up local issues not just from a position of community concern, but from a socialist commitment to fight for the rights and interests of working people. Ernie's tireless support for the demands of the Roach family, and the black community generally, following the death of Colin Roach in the entrance hall of Stoke Newington Police Station in January, is a well-published example of this socialist commitment.



Ernie Roberts M.P. supporting local workers in struggle Photo: G.M.Cookson

Even with such a history of local support for socialist policies and activities, much will depend in an election on the campaign mounted locally. Far from relying on the "traditional Labour vote" (found to be suddenly lacking in many areas on June 9th) Hackney North waged a vigorous campaign. There was no fudging of Labour's policies in the election literature or speeches. Canvessers sought to talk with voters rather than just accept the "We've always voted Labour" answer on the doorstep. Whilst local opposition from other parties was weak, we knew that there was a major fight against the combined effects of the popular press, radio and TV and the shortcomings of Labour's national campaign. We were under no illusion that three weeks of guarded Labour support in the Daily Mirror could undo the last four years of often vitriolic attack on the Party, its policies and leadership. Accordingly, in addition to the election address and national campaign material local leaflets were produced on jobs, housing, the health service, law and order, immigration, pensions and women, as well as in the Asian languages, Turkish and Greek.

SOCIALIST CANDIDATE

A swing to Labour in Hackney North was not produced by having a "moderate" candidate, nor by watering down Labour's policies and pretending that we're the "good old Labour Party" of Callaghan or Wilson. An increased Labour share of the vote came from a socialist candidate promoting Labour's socialist policies, and from years of active involvement in local politics. The voters of Hackney North were encouraged to vote Labour because they had both a candidate and a Party determined to carry through policies they advocated; policies reflecting an ideological position firmly on the Left.

Jerry Hughes, Chairperson Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

After June 9th: Organising the Fightback

It is clear that however good our policies and intentions might be, the message of how we are to implement them, and the benefits they would bring, is not getting across to people. We need to radically alter the way the Party operates, and re-establish our working class base where it has been lost — in factories, on council estates and in the dole queues.



POWER TO THE BRANCHES

Instead of the current elitist way the Party is run, with activists concentrating on the General Committees, we should put the power back firmly with the individual member — in the branches. Monthly branch meetings should be run in a more accessible way, less business, correspondence circulated rather than read at length, and let local members have a go at introducing subjects for discussion. Labour Party branches have a wide range of members with very different experiences. People who have worked overseas, those involved in Shelter, Tenants Association activists, etc. Let's develop the resources we have. But, just as important, each month should also see an activity night. Leafletting, canvessing local views about the Council, a film with a speaker, a coach to Greenham Common, support for and then travel to a demonstration, a public meeting with local and national speakers. The emphasis *must* be on turning the party outwards. For too long victory has been seen as passing a resolution on Ireland, rather than going out and convincing 'Standard' readers that Ken Livingstone was right to talk to Sinn Fein. Our public profile must be increased. *Use* the local press (find a sympathetic journalist), write to local groups, put out leaflets and put up posters. Be *seen* to do things.

IT'S A CLASS STRUGGLE

Apart from the vital area of the ethnic minorities, the only sector of our vote that held up seemed to be the middle-class academics! A conscious effort is needed to ensure that in the areas where the working class base has been lost, it is re-gained. That means *each branch* having a Trade Union Liaison Officer, who makes contact with the workplaces and unions within the local area, is ready to lend assistance to disputes, and for party recruitment, and to encourage members to set up workplace branches. This should be co-ordinated on a constituency and borough-wide basis-but preferably without setting up yet another committee or working group! The incredibly middle-class and intellectual nature of debate within the Party should be avoided. Of course, a left-wing University lecturer can often out-argue working class party members, or those who didn't go on to higher education, when putting a resolution. Is this really a victory for socialism?

Party leaflets, etc, should think about who they are aiming at. Of course most people are more than able to understand or see through the academic language and political jargon of our material, but why use words like "ethnocentric" whan they can easily be explained. And who ever says "renege" outside of a political meeting?

LISTEN TO PEOPLE

Loose federated structures should be set up, to keep a constant dialogue going with tenants and community associations, ethnic minority groups and Trade Councils. We need to listen to what people are saying, rather than dictating what we think is best. If we're here to further the economic interests of working people we need to get the message across about the damage selling council houses does. Above all, we need to ensure that the repairs, rent levels, and rights of tenants are such that they don't want to buy their council houses.

We need to be able to tell councillors what they should be doing, rather than having them report back what *they* see as the options and the direction they think we should take. How many of your councillors actually live on the Council estates that they represent? If they don't, how far do they go to ensure that they represent the views of those who put them in office?

WELCOME THE NEW MEMBERS

If other parties have had the same response as ours (about 160 new members during the Election period) then Branch meetings must immediately be made responsive to these new members. Informal introductory meetings, new members packs (not available from Head Office for the last 5 months) and dropping of initials and jargon (EC, GC, "move previous business") are essential. For a Party to be democratic, new members must be able to play a full and active part right away, and if they say something "out of order" things should be explained to them rather than denouncing them on the spot. These new members — especially those joining *after* June 9th — will be looking for activity, for concrete proposals, and for positive signs of a fightback. Use the Summer Festivals and Carnivals now coming up to give new members the opportunity to do something!

YOUNG SOCIALISTS — A PRIORITY

It is the youth that should give the most active fightback. It's a real indictment on our present Young Socialists that for the first time, more young people voted Tory than Labour. Young Socialists meetings need to be turned out of Party offices into community centres and local estates. Other groups such as Young Womens Unemployment Groups, Asian Youth, etc should be worked with rather than preached at. Putting on a film or a video can be a lot more effective than yet another white speaker on 'the coming revolution in India'. Young people will, above all, be looking for action-local demonstrations, leafletting the dole, but also discos, gigs, films etc. Create a whole social side to the YS in which politics then plays a natural part. How many young bands could practice in your Party Office's basement and then do gigs for you? On your demos have a band on a truck; balloons and placards, thousands of stickers, flyposts beforehand. A bit of originality and initiative. Politics shouldn't be boring and stale. There is a need for the 'more mature' members of the Party to prioritise the Young Socialists with funds and resources, to be prepared for the battle to stop the NEC closing them down, and remember that many of the new YS won't remember the Sex Pistols, let alone Bob Dylan!

We have 2 choices. We can retreat down the road to oblivion in nice, safe branch meetings of ten people debating the evils of capitalism and wearing 'I abstained in the Leadership contest' badges. Or we can throw our energies into building the mass socialist party than we're always claiming the Labour Party is. It'll mean a lot of hard work, a lot of home truths, but it's the only way forward.

Kevin Flack (East Lewisham CLP)

How London Labour Party cut women's leaflet

The London Regional Executive, following a decision at the regional Women's Committee, decided that a women's leaflet should be produced for the election. A number of us met and drafted, refined, cut down and finally knocked together a leaflet, typeset it and did the art-work, and I took it in to the Regional Office for production.

That's when the trouble started. They were all in the pub. It was me against six. . .

"It's a lot of words", said one (I'm not naming names: I'd been bought a beer by then). "Maybe it's too many words for a Regional Officer to read" I ventured, "but I'm sure the average woman in the street could cope..."

"No agent is going to order an A4 leaflet. We need at least orders for 50,000 to go ahead."

Threatened with total non-production, I wobbled. "Well, why don't you give them a choice: the back and front on its own could be an A5 leaflet, or they could have the whole thing."

Fine, they agreed, that would be done; the agents would be given a choice. "But what about the women's sections? Don't they get to see it?" I protested, realising I'd sold the pass. "I'll do my best, but there's an election on, you know" (no prizes, sisters, for guessing who *that* was). Anyway, it would be "going behind the back of the agents" if women's section secretaries even got a copy for information.

In the event, only the back and front pages were printed, as an A5 leaflet. Some parties definitely did order the full version, but we've no way of knowing how many; nor, how many women even got to know it existed.

No one is accusing our Regional Officers of sharp practice. It's just that, after several years' study and work, meetings, conferences and resolutions, aimed at giving the party a better position on women, when it came to the election it all got ignored and shouldered aside by agents and officers — most of them men with little idea what the issues were.

So what was left out? The leaflet had started with an anti-Tory first page: the cuts, quotes from Thatcher, Jenkin et al. On the back page was a resumé of Labour's promises for women, and a bit about the GLC and ILEA.

But we'd felt the need to get across to women some of the *ideas* we'd been discussing in the women's sections. The centre pages had facts about low pay, unemployment, and the division of work and pay between men and women. In addition, there was the following argument:

"Women put in two thirds of the world's work hours, receive one tenth of the world's wages and own less than one hundredth of the world's wealth." UN figures

Women have a raw deal. If we're not unemployed, we do two jobs: one at home and one at work. The average married woman spends between 23 and 35 hours a week doing household tasks; her husband spends, on average, less than 10 hours a week.

A recent survey found that most fathers never put their children to bed or read them a bedtime story. While women lose out on jobs, men miss out on family pleasures.

The Tories say that they're the ones who respect motherhood. But they and their boss friends use the fact that we have children to keep us in the lowest paid, least skilled, most disregarded jobs. We're told that paid work is 'a man's world', and just in case we don't get the message, many workplaces are plastered with nude pin-ups.

Even in better paid jobs, like teaching and the civil service, women earn much less than men. They lose out on promotion when they have children. And in jobs that are mainly done by women, like nursing, or intricate engineering jobs, skills go unrecognised and unrewarded.

If being a brain surgeon was a job mainly done by women, it would be looked down on and badly paid!

Underpaid at work; overworked at home. We're caught in a vicious circle that the Tories are happy to exploit and make worse.

How do we break the vicious circle?

Men have always organised society to suit their own needs. Women have to fit the needs of home and family to the demands of employers, even if it means stretching themselves in all directions.

We need to start fitting paid employment to meet the needs of working parents.



Andrew Wiard

'After several years' conferences and resolutions, aimed at giving the party a better position on women... it all got ignored....'

LABOUR SAYS:

"We live in a male dominated society, in which priority and status are given to paid employment.

Caring for children, and domestic skills, are undervalued.

Our aim is to redress the balance: to insist both that domestic activities are as important as paid employment, and that men and women should share, equally, the responsibility for both.

We completely reject the Tory government's view that married women have no right to paid employment. Our commitment to equality between the sexes — and to a better deal for families with young children — involves shorter and more flexible working hours, adequate paid time off so that mothers and fathers can still work and share responsibilities, and greatly expanded provision of child care facilities."

LABOUR'S PROGRAMME

Well, it may not win the Pullitzer Prize, but it was an attempt to say a bit more to women that just "Tories bad, Labour good". What a pity Labour women still can't just decide to have a leaflet without a lot of men deciding otherwise.

RACHEL LEVER

Leyton

Labour in Leyton saw off the defector Magee and the Tory challenge in the general election. It was a tremendous team effort in the best socialist tradition, and the victory belonged to all our Party activists and workers.

Despite lies spread by our opponents of our campaign crumbling one week and disintegrating the next, we were able to say (in an eve-of-poll leaflet) that we had knocked on every door in Leyton and had won massive popular support.

During the campaign we explained our Socialist policies to all by completing a 100 per cent canvass and by producing and distributing over 220,000 leaflets and ward newsletters.

We were not caught napping by the election announcement; our campaign was well planned beforehand with an organisation not only relying upon an effective election agent (this we had), but also based upon an active political organiser and organisers for each branch. My election address was part of our team effort. All branches had sight of an early draft and were involved in having a say as to its final form.

We had a variety of leaflets (we produced ourselves) to meet the special interests of electors; e.g. women, pensioners, blacks, parents taking their children to school, council tenants, workers relying on public transport, etc. Canvassers had never known such a choice of leaflets to hand out. On election day itself we shocked our opponents by man and woman-ing every polling station, having well-organised committee rooms, and by the number of Party workers we had getting our vote.

Leyton Labour Party 'President' 89 year-old Jenny Hammond described our effort and commitment as being 'as good as in the old days', and other experienced Party members acknowledged

Shows the Way

Harry Cohen MP
Leyton

it as the best campaign in which they had fought.

No wonder we had the best result for Labour in the south-east! Our aim locally now is to build on the links we have established in Leyton during the past year. If we do this, we will have a socialist network of political activists and support which is second to none. I have already told my general committee that I will wholeheartedly play my part as our MP in consolidating and continuing this effort in whatever way the Party sees fit.

TRAGIC MISTAKE

We know that the policies we fought on were right. Our victory locally demonstrates this. To retreat from them now to policies more akin to the SDP would be a tragic mistake and a betrayal of the hopes of millions of our supporters nationally. Our duty is to analyse the reasons for our national defeat — we know full-well in Leyton that we cannot pull off socialist victories in limbo indefinitely — and to make sure that our policies are properly communicated and understood by our people. Factors in our defeat were:

The polls swamping our policies. I would not object to the banning of these polls during election campaigns, but the real answer is to communicate our policies. Locally, we side-stepped the polls and the press by getting out onto every doorstep. We have to make sure that this is done nationally, not just in the four weeks of an election. Our campaigns must be a continuous crusade. We also have to join and lead campaigns against Thatcher-induced job losses, cuts in welfare services and her bigger and deadlier nuclear missiles wherever we can.

We should have a permanent 'rolling' manifesto, updated each year by our Annual Conference, in which our policies are clearly set out and which we can campaign upon.

A daily paper of the Labour and trades union movement should become a reality.

Leadership equivocation over our policies. There was a failure to support enthusiastically Conference policies, eg witness the defence debacle. The anger felt by many towards the Tories was not communicated. Thatcher herself was not shown up as the incompetent she is in many respects and also, tragically, no vision of a better, socialist future was put across.

The divided Party image. I have heard some Labour MPs already blaming reselection for this, in their own desire to turn back the tide of accountability within the Party. But that issue was settled eighteen months before the election. (It would have been settled before then but for their, and the now SDPers, rearguard action.)

What really contributed to this image was the unnecessary witch hunt in the last year. It fed the press lie about extremists which was not properly dealt with. That lie had been going on for four years without reply.

Poor organisation nationally. The national campaign gave the appearance of being organised from scratch in four weeks. Our policies were agreed well in advance and strategies for campaigning on them should have been well prepared. The role of the Campaign Committee of the NEC, widely alleged to have been inefficient and ineffective, also needs to be fully scrutinised. We cannot properly fight elections if we are organisationally handicapped, and Harold Wilson's phrase about not being able to run a vinegar stall in a chip shop should never be allowed to apply.

WET TORIES

A few final points need to be made:
Cecil Parkinson, the ex-Tory Party chairman, has been shown to have lied when he said that the SDP were a danger to the Conservatives in 80 seats. The SDP's historic role in this election was to take Labour votes and let in Tories throughout the country. One of our jobs now is to expose the SDP/Liberals as wet Tories (Owen, in his first speech to the new Parliament, even asked Thatcher to broaden her base to accomodate them), and support for them just allows the Tories to prosper

We also, though, have to recognise that we ourselves must no longer take what we thought of as our traditional Labour voter for granted. As I have stated, our socialist policies are right in that they are based on the needs and requirements of our people. But we must show that they are relevant. Talking in slogans or jargon, or just talk (whether in the local Council or on the General Committee) and no action within our communities, does not help.

Some of the right of the Party have been speaking in effect of 'following' the voters by latching on to short-term consumerist aspirations. But as a socialist Party, we have to do much more than that. We have to inspire and lead our people into a better future free from the various types of capitalist restriction of all our people before the accumulation of wealth for a few.

Only if we do this, and learn the lessons of this defeat, will we make Leyton an example for next time to be repeated in the form of socialist wins over the country.

County Hall Workplace Branch

The County Hall Workplace Branch held its inaugural meeting on 29th June, almost ten weeks, to the day, after six comrades first discussed the possibility of an internal branch.

One of the advantages of a workplace branch became apparent immediately the election was called. The Steering Committee was able to respond to the Tory manifesto threat to dissolve the GLC, by calling a public meeting without incurring costs for any particular candidate. The meeting was attended by over six hundred County Hall workers and addressed by Ken Livingstone and Rodney Bickerstaff. Unlike a Constituency Party, we are not required to disband during an election campaign.

It is hoped, in the future, to provide a platform for both national and international speakers at least once a month. With its central London location County Hall can be an attractive lunchtime venue, not only for speakers but perhaps also for political theatre and other arts. It might also be possible, with the co-operation of other London workplace branches, to set up a whole series of lunchtime venues across the Capital.

By presenting the Labour Party to the electorate at their place of work, and in a manner which is relevant to their perception of everyday life, we hope to be able to get away from the "you only want to know us when there is an election" syndrome.

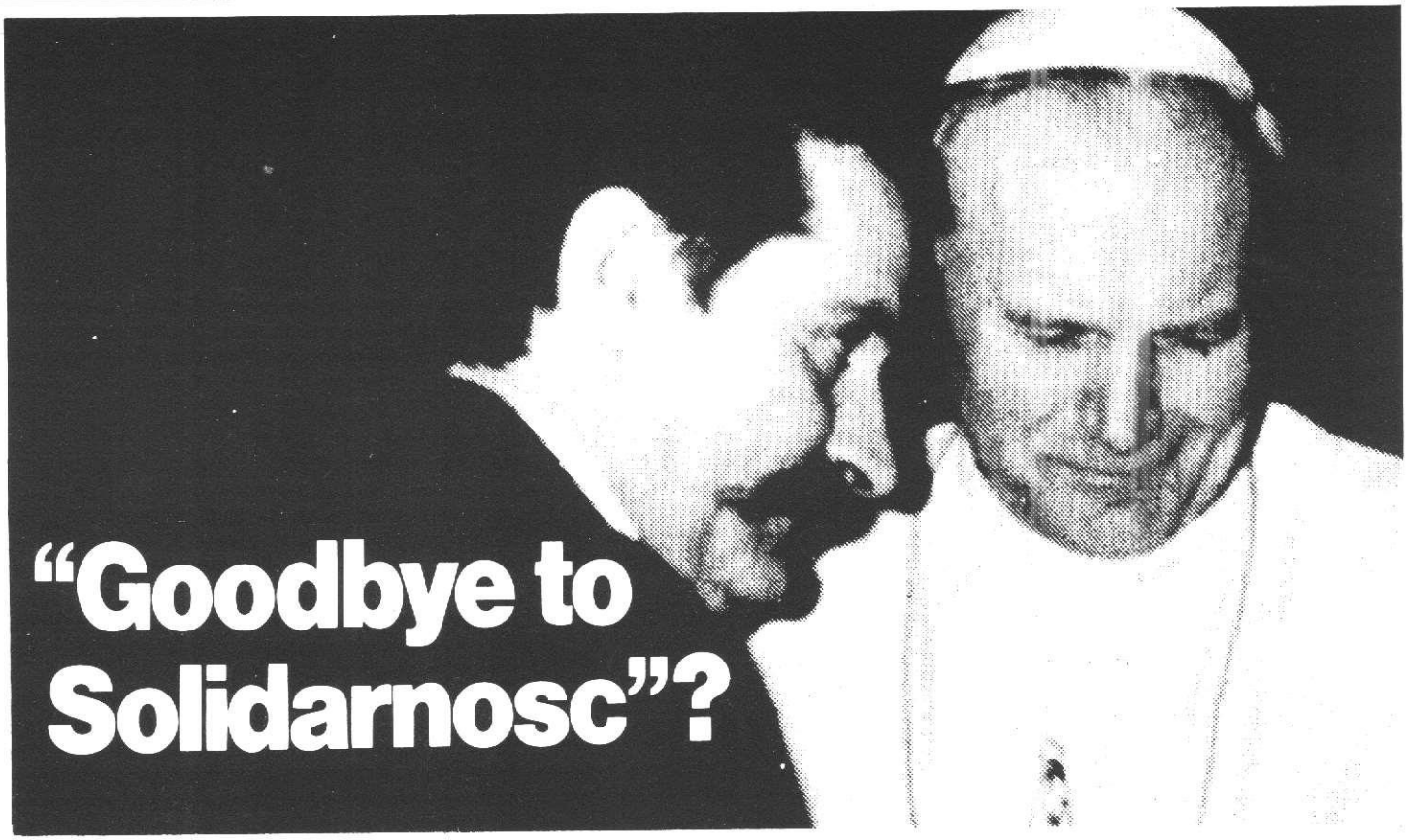
For the activists, there is the distinct advantage of being able to break down the unnatural constituency boundaries and talk regularly to comrades from other CLPs and compare progress. Whatever your local problem, it seems someone, somewhere has faced it before.

One fly in the ointment is that the Workplace Branch model rules contain a section on the meetings quorum which is apparently not open to debate. This section militates against a WP Branch which actively sets out to recruit members for the Constituency Parties. It does not necessarily follow that a comrade recruited at work would wish to be active there. They may prefer to be active in their own CLP, once contact has been made. Therefore a successful recruiting campaign could increase the quorum demanded (under the existing rules) to impossible proportions and so destroy the branch.

Another situation which needs to be clarified is that of comrades working for sub-contractors and of full-time Council members. The current ruling is that both of these groups are ineligible to join a branch at their normal place of work. The sub-contractors, because they must join their head office branch, even if they never work there and the members because they are employers. I believe both these rulings must be challenged.

The Workplace Branch does have an active role to play in the Labour Party. It does not challenge the authority of the Trades Unions in any way, in fact it can support and strengthen it. If you wish to set up a branch, all you need is nine other like minded comrades. Don't delay, do it today.

John Rogers Chair County Hall Workplace Branch & Barking CLP



"Goodbye to Solidarnosc"?

For eight days in June, the British media covered the Pope's visit to Poland as a cross between a pilgrimage and a crusade on behalf of Solidarity. On the ninth day, the Vatican's daily *L'Osservatore Romano* served Lech Walesa a redundancy notice, thereby implying that Solidarity also no longer had a job to do.

The Vatican's subsequent refusal to repudiate the content of its newspaper's editorial threw the media here into confusion. The *Times* published an article by a Reaganite American commentator denouncing the Pope for selling out to Communism. Meanwhile the BBC's 9 o'clock news reported, without comment, the contents of an article in the Polish government's most anti-Solidarity daily paper which said that Walesa was financial corrupt. For an awful moment out media managers seemed unable to distinguish between Cold War goodies and baddies.

POPE'S POLITICAL MANOUEVRING

The source of the confusion lay in the Pope's extraordinary verbal gymnastics and political manouevring during his visit. He mentioned Solidarity favourably in his speeches and seemed to support it. On closer inspection he went further and claimed that Solidarity really *belonged* to the Church, he saw its rise and development as one particular aspect of the overall spiritual struggle of the nation led by the church. Then on still closer inspection we can see that he was saying that the really fundamental thing was this national-spiritual struggle, while Solidarity could be seen as a passing and partial aspect of the main thing that could therefore very easily become redundant.

Meanwhile, behind the stirring, poetic ambiguities of the Pope's public speeches, there were the intense, long-drawn out negotiations between the Vatican and the Jaruzelski government on the precise, down to earth terms for future co-operation between them. The government's fundamental requirement is the definitive end of Solidarity and the working class struggle for social and political rights. This is no insuperable obstacle to the Vatican's agreement. What is basic for the Church leaders is, as always, to expand the influence of its own apparatus over the population through acquiring more media resources, more scope for its youth activities, its intellectual associations and for its educational activities. In addition, the Vatican wants to ensure that the Polish church is firmly under Rome's authority and that the government will do business with Rome on all important Church-State matters.

Already the Church has gained substantially from the martial law government, which has granted an unprecedented number of permits for new Church buildings, has given the Church big tax immunities and promised to grant the Church formal legal status within the state. Agreement has also been reached, it seems, on a Church-run agricultural bank handling billions of dollars' worth of business.

DANGEROUS CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

Solidarity from the start posed a dangerous challenge to the Church's claim to hold a monopoly of independent thought and inspiration for the Polish people. And if a deal with the government can be made to stick, Poland could become a strong base for future Vatican efforts to expand its influence in other parts of Eastern Europe.

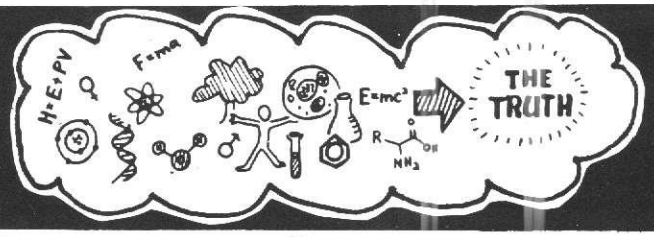
General Jaruzelski's government seems optimistic that its key strategic objective in destroying Solidarity — namely cementing an alliance with the Church hierarchy — can succeed. On July 22nd the government seems set to announce the formal lifting of martial law and a partial amnesty for political prisoners. Behind the scenes, church leaders are trying to exert maximum pressure on Solidarity's underground leaders and on Lech Walesa to use this occasion to call it a day and give up the underground resistance and the demand for Solidarity's restoration. The next weeks will show whether this pressure is successful.

Where the *L'Osservatore Romano* editorial went wrong was that it failed to realise an attack on Solidarity would do immense damage to the Church in the Polish working class. The Pope's difficulty has been to try to weaken Solidarity without appearing to openly oppose it. From the start in 1980, the church was dragged into supporting Solidarity and the Pope needs all his political skills to decouple the church from Solidarity's working class radicalism. Attempts by the Western media to present Solidarity as the church's creation turn reality on its head.

For those in the West who value above all the spread of Vatican influence in Poland and a re-opening of Poland to the world capitalist market, the Pope's visit and its possible repercussions may be welcome. For those who value above all progress towards socialist democracy in Poland, the Vatican-Jaruzelski entente is a step backwards.

Helen Jamieson and Oliver McDonald (Members of Editorial Board of Labour Focus on Eastern Europe)

science briefing



MIND-BODY-SPIRIT

Piers Corbyn reviews the scene around the Festival of Mind, Body and Spirit, Olympia 2-10 July.

Holistic Medicine, Kirlian Photography, Help Us Welcome Extra Terrestrials, Applied Metaphysics, Astrology, CND, Martial Arts, Touch Healing, Enlightenment in 5 days for £200 + VAT with money back guarantee! These are just a few of the galaxy of groups represented at the festival.

TEST YOUR REALITY!

It's not like 'normal' exhibitions of art or motor-cars where you develop your tastes. In this 'alternative scene' you must judge the validity of everything (though it's not always difficult) – including your own frame of reference.

You soon realise the boundary between 'science' and 'mysticism' is not as well defined as you believed (Kepler and Newton were ardent astrologers after all and much of theoretical physics seems mystical). Furthermore accepted standard frames of reference are always changing. Today's standard ('scientific') view accepts the earth goes round the sun and doubts astrology and healing by touch, for example. Yet merely a few centuries ago the opposite was the case.

These days many alleged phenomena are doubted on the grounds they cannot be explained. Yet not having an explanation for something does not mean it's not real!

WHOLENESS

Static adherence to modern science (or *any* framework) is a block to the development of knowledge. It stands contrary to the 'Unity of mind, body and the universe' concept of the Mind-Body-Spirit movement, yet such a vague concept seems to enable a partial 'understanding' of such *real phenomena* as healing by touch and the curing of asthma by foot massage. This 'holistic alternative to science under capitalism' does not suggest you can start rubbing your big toe to increase your dole cheque; but an approach based on 'wholeness' must surely help form part of a socialist alternative to the fragmentation of knowledge and experience enforced by capitalism.

THE FULFILMENT BOGEY

Despite all this there is a block on the left against the 'alternative' Mind-Body-Spirit scene, and this does not just come from the existence in it of very weird para-religious sects which are irrelevant to the discussion, or from socialists often slavish adherence to capitalist science. It also comes from the left bogey-person – enlightenment and self-fulfilment.

The present 'alternative scene' like much of the left today have their origins in the heady leaps of consciousness of '68 (Yes I was there). To the world at large most of the 'alternative movement' and the left are seen as equally mad and irrelevant sects.

The split between the two revolves around the answer *in practice* to the question: 'So you want to change the world; do you start with yourself or the rest of the world?' Self-transformation groups start with the self. Socialists I hope would say WE must start with BOTH. However in practice we don't! Hear this answer from a Briefing reader: 'What's so good about being in touch with yourself? That's not the major problem in life. The major problem is World War III!' But surely the experience of life is about being in touch with oneself? The self is the experience of life. Unless one wants that there is no point in stopping World War III!

DEVELOP!

Could it be that for many people on the left the struggle to change the rest of the world provides an excuse for NOT changing or developing oneself, or even broadening one's view of reality? As long as this continues the many positive ideas and energy of parts of the 'alternative movement' will, surely, meander away from socialism, filling the large space between capitalist alienation and the inability of the present socialist movement to provide any vision of self enlightenment as part of the struggle for socialism.

Are we going to do anything about it? Can we improve on £200 + VAT?!

1984 AND NEW TECHNOLOGY will be the subject of Science Briefing next issue. Complete with a long awaited article by Les Hearn. Contributions to Piers Corbyn, 55 Innis House, East St, SE17. Tel 701 5691.

The end for Pinochet?

Kate Clarke (Executive Member, Chile Solidarity Campaign)

The recent protests and strikes in Chile have given heart to progressive-minded people all over the world. Many dared to hope that this was the beginning of the end for General Pinochet.

Discontent has long been brewing in Chile, and has now found expression. It is nearly ten years since the fascist coup which murdered President Allende, and the working people of Chile seem determined to make this year one of struggle to overthrow Pinochet's dictatorship.

What are the characteristics of the present moment?

Pinochet is more isolated than ever before. Those sectors who supported him at the time of the coup have now deserted him, and some are actively engaged in struggle against the dicatatorship. The lorry owners, who were instrumental in bringing down Allende by their crippling strike in 1972, are now firmly against Pinochet and played a big part in the strike held a month ago. The copper miners, likewise, an elite among Chilean workers, have also had enough of Pinochet's "economic dream" and have shown in the recent event that they are going to stand up and fight.

What happened to produce this change?

Firstly, although it is true that some working-class sectors — Christian Democrat supporters — initially supported the coup (and there were extreme anti-Popular Unity positions by their leaders, who saw in the coup a means of destroying the Left, and thus enabling themselves to come back to power at some stage in the future), this initial support from these sectors died very quickly. They saw the brutality and suffering the coup caused among the working class and the peasants in the countryside.

Secondly, although Pinochet's Referendum held on the Constitution gave an overwhelming 'yes' vote to his new Constitution, in fact a lot of resentment was caused at the blunt trampling on what vestiges of democracy were still left. Many of Pinochet's supporters, both those in uniform and others, felt he had gone too far and have become increasingly unhappy about the way he has entrenched himself more and more, grasping more firmly than ever all the reins of power, and increasingly surrounding himself with many of the trappings of the good life.

Thirdly, the economic situation has become much worse. Only three years ago international bankers and conservative economists proclaimed Chile an "economic miracle". But in the last 18 months Chile has crashed into one of the deepest recessions in Latin America. The national product dropped by 14% last year, unemployment rose to over 20% (although in some areas it is much higher than that), real wages fell by 16% and bankruptcies reached record levels.

The most encouraging aspect of the present situation is the extent of the unity against the dictatorship in the organisation of the protests, which have been called for every month around the 11th. A Workers National Command has been formed, to coordinate and organize these protests, and increasing levels of unity in action are being reached. The dictatorship has responded savagely, imprisoned the strikers' leaders, and even the President of the Christian Democratic Party, Gabriel Valdes.

The Church has been outspoken throughout these ten years, and only recently the Bishops Conference warned Pinochet to stay out of Church affairs following accusations by the Junta's Minister of Education, Sra. Monica Madariaga, of "treason". She asserted that a textbook for religious education showed "clear signs of Marxist influence".

Last month miners, transport and building workers went on strike, thousands of lorry drivers kept their vehicles off the road, students stayed away from classes in very large numbers, cars drove slowly in the cities tooting their horns, and people in the middle-class neighbourhoods banged saucepan lids in noisy protest. There were demonstrations in many parts of the country and several in Santiago itself.

We shall have to see what this month's protests bring. But it is clear that the struggle in Chile is at a new stage, and gaining strength and courage very day.

'STREET LIFE' SUPPLEMENT

TAKING OUR HEALTH INTO OUR HANDS

We are all aware that many aspects of our lives and our lifestyles can make us very unhealthy. Often though, this is seen as an individual problem – people *choose* either healthy or unhealthy lives, and it is entirely in their own hands. Indeed fortunes can readily be made from selling books, special diet foods etc. to 'help' people to lead healthier lives.

But, how free is an individual to choose, for example, not to smoke, or drink alcohol, both of which are known to be bad for our health? The tobacco and alcohol industries make large profits and government income is heavily dependent on the taxes it receives from their sales. The advertising and social pressures to take up these habits are enormous. They are often seen as a relief from stress, but isn't there something wrong with a society which causes so many people to need relief from stress? I don't think either that it can be a question of 'individual freedom' for people to choose whether to abuse their bodies or not. There are very few examples where one person's freedom of choice does not encroach on someone else's freedom! Surely then, these issues are political issues to which we should be looking for collective solutions.

Sex too can be very unhealthy. To listen to the media one might think that sexually transmitted diseases of varying sorts were reaching epidemic proportions. The individual solution is to be strictly monogamous and in some cases even to avoid sex altogether. But isn't there an alternative and more desirable solution be found if we were collectively responsible for each other's health and were more open and honest about our sexual relationships?

when we are kept in ignorance of many of the hazards we face? Understanding the technological developments within the medical profession and obtaining accurate information about drug side effects, harmful food substances, alternative medicine etc. is becoming increasingly difficult. Being in control of our bodies must mean being in control of information about our bodies!

This issue of the Streetlife Supplement contains articles on some of these questions. We can only scratch at the surface of many of them, but we hope they will encourage further thought and discussion.

Jane Stockton

Women's health information centre

DEFINING OUR OWN HEALTH NEEDS

Women use health services more than men – both in sickness and in health – and we are the majority of paid and unpaid health workers. Yet the definition of our health needs and the type of health care that is available to us is controlled by men.

By choice and necessity, we, as women, are becoming more active in defining and meeting our own health needs:

★ We are not ill if we are lesbian or when we are pregnant and giving birth, menstruating and going through the menopause, having an abortion or choosing contraception. These are part of our lives that we want to take away from medical control.

★ The class, racial and sexual divisions of our society are reflected in the amount and type of ill-health that we experience, as well as in the hierarchy of the health care system. We need to counter attitudes which blame women for their poor health and ignore stresses such as overcrowding, poverty, unemployment, sexism, racism, isolation and lack of accessibility for disabled women.

★ The health services that we need are often unavailable, inadequate and sometimes bad for our health. We must fight for the NHS to meet our needs and for us to be able to make our own decisions about care and treatment.

For these reasons we have set up a central Women's Health Information Centre, W.H.I.C.

W.H.I.C. is a national information and resource centre for women's health issues, which is part of and responsible to the Women's Liberation Movement. We aim to make information on women's health available to women and to support self help groups. In addition, we are working for improvements in the health service for women and to publicise and campaign on women's health issues.

OUR ACTIVITIES

We are collecting and classifying journal articles, newspaper reports, pamphlets and books on women's health issues. We have information from a wide variety of sources, ranging from accounts of women's experiences to medical literature. We also produce a regular newsletter.

Women who wish to be informed of our activities and receive the newsletter can contact us at:

W.H.I.C., Ufton Centre, 12 Ufton Road, N1 5BY.

Campaign against Depo Provera

CHALLENGING THE POWER OF THE DRUG COMPANIES

In April this year 'public' hearings about the licensing of Depo Provera were held. But although the hearings were formally held in public there was no statutory right for the public to participate.

The hearings (held under section 21 of the Medicines Act 1968) occurred because for the first time ever the Licensing Authority (i.e. the Minister of Health Mr Kenneth Clarke) overruled the recommendations of its expert advisory panel (the Committee on Safety of Medicines) and refused to license Depo Provera for use as a long term contraceptive. The manufacturer, Upjohn L.T.D., then exercised the right to a review of their application by an independent panel of experts chosen by the Licensing Authority.

Depo Provera is an injectable contraceptive (which is synthetic hormone and has a three month duration) and was first marketed in Britain in 1963 for the treatment of endometriosis. Upjohn applied for a license for long term contraceptive use in 1976, but this was only successful in securing a license for use as a short term contraceptive for women being immunised against rubella, or whose partners were undergoing vasectomy.



CONCERN ABOUT SAFETY

In 1981 it was licensed for the treatment of renal, breast and endometrial cancer and in April 1982 the C.S.M. recommended that it should be licensed for use as a long term contraceptive. Up until January of the same year, the C.S.M. itself had expressed concern about the safety of the product and advised against a license for long term use. However at private hearings before the C.S.M. in July 1981 and January 1982 Upjohns representatives had managed to assuage these doubts.

The Licensing Authority's reason for overruling the C.S.M.'s advice were that they believed that the risks of using Depo Provera out-weighed the benefits, and that those women for whom the drug was recommended would have difficulty in giving informed consent.

THE SECRECY OF THE BRITISH REGULATORY SYSTEM

Depo Provera has attracted more public concern for longer perhaps than any other drug currently marketed in Britain, and this was reflected in the desire expressed by many groups to participate at the hearings. Moreover, the controversy surrounding decisions about this drug has served to highlight the secrecy of the British regulatory system.

At the preliminary hearing held in November 1982 requests were made that other interested parties should be allowed to participate at the full hearings in April 1983. The Panel after consideration decided that there was no provision under the Medicines Act for anyone other than the manufacturer to present oral evidence and call independent witnesses. However as Upjohn was agreeable the Panel would accept written evidence from interested parties, but this would have to be seen to have been submitted under the auspices of Upjohn.

This could be considered a minor victory but it is in no way an acceptable level of public participation. By comparison, at similar hearings (requested by Upjohn) in front of the USA Food and Drug Administration earlier this year parties other than the manufacturer exercised their statutory right to participate on an equal basis. This reflects both the traditionally more open and adversarial regulatory system in America (although by no means perfect) and the greater strength of consumer groups.

The written evidence submitted at the hearings was prepared by the Co-ordinating Group on Depo Provera, which was formed to represent a number of women's groups and health groups, who had expressed broadly similar interests in wishing to oppose a long term license. They spent approximately three months working on a voluntary basis, sometimes having to forgo earnings to compete against a company whose pharmaceutical sales in 1979 were estimated at $956 million.

SIDE EFFECTS

The group's evidence consisted of a review of the same scientific research upon which Upjohn were basing their claim to Depo Provera's safety. Widely reported side effects include 'menstrual chaos', breast swelling and discomfort, hair loss, acne, weight gain, fatigue, depression, headache and loss of libido. Most women given Depo Provera experience at least one of these problems. In addition Depo Provera has caused cancer in a number of animal studies, and is a known teratogen in animals. Long term use may also lead to increased risk of arterial disease, and may effect carbohydrate metabolism making those women already prone to diabetes more susceptible. It is also secreted in the breast milk of lactating mothers, to unknown effect on babies being breast fed.

What did become clear both from the evidence submitted by the CGDP, and the oral testimonies of the witnesses at the hearing, was that there are no definitive answers to some key questions. All of the studies that have been carried out have shortcomings, and in some areas there is almost no research at all. This is despite Depo Provera's extensive use for over 17 years.

NO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Most alarming perhaps is that the research findings on Depo Provera are much wider than those to which the CSM had access. But because the CSM's meetings are held in private, there is no public participation, and the minutes of the meetings or the research reviews they produce are not available for public scrutiny, we have no way of knowing if the quality of the research on other drugs is the same (and as questionable).

It is probable that there isn't a drug for which there are no side effects or risks that have to be set against the benefits that may accrue to users. But the assessments of this risk/benefit ratio is not merely a technical question which should be confined to experts. Those likely to be taking the risks should also decide if the risks are acceptable.

Obviously the decision about DP will be important for individual women. This will apply especially to women in the Third World, who are likely to go on being given the drug without their 'informed consent' if Britain gives it what appears to be a 'clean bill of health'. But whatever the committee decides about the drug itself it is this question of popular participation in regulatory decision making that makes the DP issue one of wider significance. While the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act gave trade unions some degree of participation in the regulation of workplace hazards, this does not yet apply to the growing number of potentially dangerous chemicals found in consumer products and in the wider environment.

Gill Dransfield
Co-opted member of WHIC

Hackney C.H.C.- CHANGING THE N.H.S. TO MEET ETHNIC WOMEN'S NEEDS

In the Hackney Community Health Council we spent a considerable amount of time discussing what action we should take to make the health service more responsive to the needs of the ethnic minority communities and to facilitate the use of the health service by the large percentage of the population who speak English as a second language. Many of the problems that were brought to us concerned women.

Women who speak English as a second language were in a particularly vulnerable position. They had often just arrived in Britain, had no experience of the health service, were terrified of being seen by male doctors and were not used to discussing their bodies with their husbands, let alone having their husbands interpret their needs to a strange male doctor. It was even worse when they had to rely on a young son to bring them to hospital.

The hospital, too, had problems. Staff were unable to get accurate information on past pregnancies or on previous health problems, so very significant misunderstandings arose. Also staff were unable to communicate with the mothers any concerns that they had for the baby, and so couldn't give advice on breast feeding or family planning, let alone simple reassurance.



Unable to communicate

What usually happened was, what happens in most places in this situation, staff resorted to speaking loudly to the women and got angry and frustrated when they were not able to communicate.

We rejected the suggestion of an interpreting scheme as these tend to be hospital controlled – the interpreter working for the hospital staff, not the women. Instead, we took as a model the patient representation scheme in the United States and the use of local women as community health workers in many third world countries. We applied for funds to set up a scheme which would employ local women as health workers – whose job would be to 'speak for' women who were unable to speak up for themselves, to advise women on the optionsof care available to them, to negotiate with the doctors, midwives, appointment clerks and catering staff on their behalf, to help and encourage them to breast feed and to care for themselves and their babies. The workers were also expected to help the hospital staff to understand the women's needs and to put forward suggestions for changes of policy to cope with the difficulties they encountered.

We now have four workers who between them speak Turkish, Bengali, Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi and Punjabi. The women's educational background is varied but they all have children and three of them live in the community.

The project is managed by a Steering Group made up of representatives of local community organisations and the hospital. The workers visit women in their homes at least once; run groups for women, some in local clinics; visit the hospital wards daily and sort out any problems and advise women and the staff; get information on behalf of the women; inform staff of special concerns; visit women in labour and stay with them if they are alone.

We based the project on the belief that improving the service would benefit all women. Issues such as the availability of women doctors, the number of observers allowed in a labour ward, the outpatients appointment system, or the examination protocol are not specific to women who speak English as a second language. Yet these are issues that are discussed at the Project's Steering Groups, where proposals are put forward and attempts are made, if not to solve the problems, then at least to move towards some improvement.

Improving Women's control of their bodies

By choosing to invest our energies in supporting this project, we have concentrated on promoting health and improving women's knowledge and control of their own bodies. We have avoided the medical model of concern for individual disease. The project has done little to alter the perinatal mortality rate because the causes often lie in the health of the mother and above all in how well she is nourished before getting pregnant. The workers and the staff in the hospital feel, however, that they may well be influencing the outcome of future pregnancies, either in the women themselves or in their children, and above all they have eased tensions in one hospital and made childbirth less traumatic for some women who do not speak English as their first language.

Fedelma Winkler
Secretary of Hackney C.H.C.

THE STREETLIFE SUPPLEMENT AND THE NATIONAL BRIEFING SUPPLEMENT

During the discussions that took place around the setting up of the national Briefing structure the issue was raised as to whether the Streetlife Supplement should form part of the National Briefing Supplement. Since London is, as far as we know, the only Briefing to contain a supplement on personal politics, we decided that the views and experiences of a group of women in London sent out to other parts of the country was no substitute for the involvement of women and the discussion of personal politics in other local Briefing groups. In fact it could have the effect of letting men in other areas off the hook in terms of not making them face up to the male domination of their own Briefing groups. We decided therefore that the Streetlife Supplement should remain part of London Labour Briefing and should not be in the National Supplement. On the other hand we would actively seek to encourage the discussion of personal politics in other areas and we will be sending copies of all our articles to all other Briefing groups for inclusion, if they wish, in their local Briefings. We will also be working to ensure that women have an equal voice in the National Editorial Committee and in the National Supplement.

Streetlife Editorial Collective

NEXT ISSUE

The theme of the next issue of the Streetlife Supplement will be on pornography. All articles and letters should be sent to Jane Stockton, 110 Agar Grove, NW1 by 5th September.

MY LIFE GOING UP IN SMOKE

Apparently, women are rapidly overtaking men as cigarette-smokers (M.J.Wilson, 'Statistics of Smoking in the UK'). At the moment more men die of it, but women are rapidly gaining ground, apparently gaining an equality in death which most never achieve in life. Looking around me, it seems that the number of cigarette-adverts blatantly directed at women has definitely increased; the industry has even developed certain brands which are specifically aimed at women.

Much as this kind of thing disgusts me, I still smoke because I am dependent on the nicotine. I gave up for the first time six years ago – just cut them out completely. And how I suffered! I was tense and irritable. I put on weight and had terrible headaches and cravings. But I persisted for a year and a half, although I still wanted one most days.

It was on holiday that I started again. We'd been out for a wonderful meal and followed it with a local liqueur. I was offered a cigarette and took it, thinking that I was quite safe now. Indeed it was. I had that one and it was all I wanted. But the next time I had a good meal I did it again – because it was quite safe, wasn't it? By the time I came back from holiday I was smoking one after every meal and pretty soon I was back to 25 a day.

I suppose everyone has their own reasons for starting to smoke in the first place, but there are some general trends. For boys and men, it seems symbolic of manliness and being adult. By smoking, boys tell their friends that they have already entered the tough male world which promises power and sexual adventure. But for girls and women? Certainly there is a common belief that it keeps you slim, and more recently the idea has gained ground that smoking helps you to 'swallow' your feelings. But I also think that for many women it symbolises entry into the adult world – as it does for men.

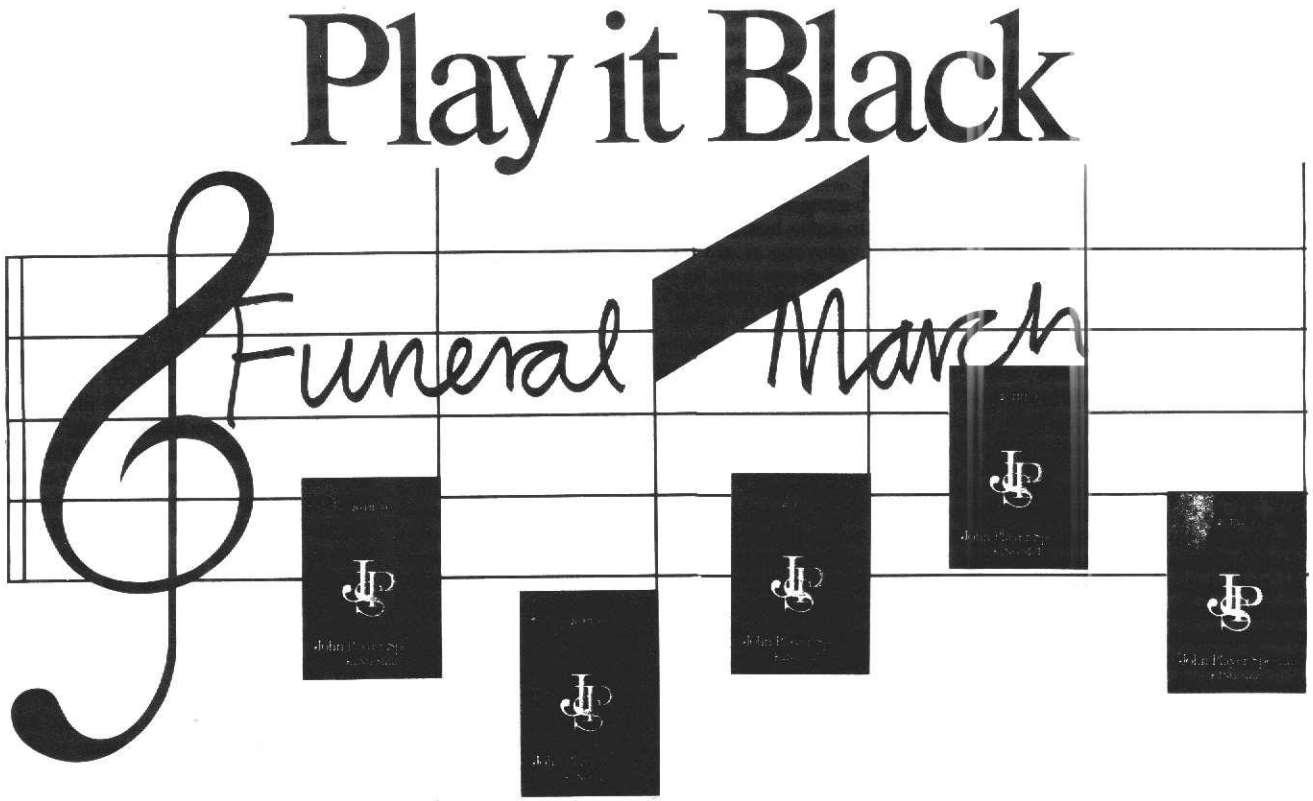
If there is any sex-stereotype about the reasons why people start smoking, it certainly hasn't been taken account of by the government anti-smoking campaigns, which seem to assume that what works for men will work for women, too.

For me at 18, starting smoking was to do with being one of the crowd, relieving my anxieties about 'A'-levels and doing things that my rather puritanical parents thought were quite beyond the pale. They neither smoked nor drank and I wanted to do both. I wasn't going to hide from life like them; I wanted to experience it all.

A year ago I heard about a kind of chewing gum which can be got on prescription only (but which is very expensive) and put myself on it. I want to give up for health reasons mainly, but also because I dislike the smell, which clings to my hair and clothes and gets worse the more you smoke. This time I thought I would be more tolerant with myself – I couldn't bear to go through all that agony again. Very gradually, I cut down and chewed the gum maniacally. My jaws ached, my throat was sore and it gave me hiccups! Yet I made real headway. But after six months or so I was still having the odd cigarette and, worse, was addicted to the gum. I rang the Maudsley Clinic, which apparently runs a smokers' support group and dishes out the lovely nicorette gum free. But Oh dear! When I was put through to the clinic I was told that there was no-one there who could tell me when the group met and would I ring back. I never did.

I am still chewing and smoking, but one of these days I'm going to give up – after the next one.

Hilary Alton



ALCOHOLISM - Drinking to survive

'Sure you won't have a drink?' people say as they look slightly questioningly at your refusal. 'Go on, why not,' they say, 'you're not an alcoholic or something!' If you can find the certainty to say 'yes, I can't afford to drink, once I start I can't stop' they look at you vaguely, disbelievingly and dismiss it from their minds. Or they tell you about someone in their family who was a 'real' alcoholic, by implication placing alcoholic behaviour 'out there', where it couldn't possibly be one of us.

A 'drink problem' usually means to these people tramps, street drunks, or unfortunates certainly not your friends, lovers, the people you work with or political comrades. And yet it is so common. The heavy drinking that starts every evening, after work, before and after the meeting, at dinner-time; that leads to more and more attempts to shovel it down. Getting tanked up at parties, or holiday, over Christmas, and yet all this is regarded as *normal* drinking!

'NORMAL' DRINKING

It is convenient to label alcoholism as a disease that afflicts just a few unfortunates. It comforts us in the reassurance that so-called normal drinking is qualitatively different, and safe. But it is a myth. I have come across many people who drank moderately, then heavily, then obsessively, then reverted to lower levels of drinking. In fact the yearly cycle of the Christmas binge up, new year's abstinance, and gradually escalating intake towards the holidays follows the same unbalanced pattern for the majority of the population. But a few of us come to depend particularly heavily on drink, and we're labelled as the alcoholics. I think that the number of people leaning on alcohol in our society is far larger than is generally admitted and an alcoholic is different only in degree rather than kind.

I drank to obliterate stress, to wipe myself out so that I didn't have to deal with the conflicts of carrying on with work, relationships, childcare, in a highly competitive and individualistic world. I drank to blot out my sexual insecurities, and the physical tension I would suffer in the effort to present a 'front' at work and at meetings that seemed confident and assured. What I wanted was to be able to be personal and *unassured*, to speak frankly of the difficulties we all experience in fulfilling or fighting against the expectations laid on us by the group we are in. To put it simply, I think I drank because I didn't fit the stereotype of a 'man'. Other people would probably drink because they had specific oppressions laid on them as women, gay, black, working class, powerless, marginalised, etc.

I also think that the nature of political activity is highly likely to lead to drink. Politics places huge stresses on a few individuals, not only in terms of workloads, but also in terms of the highly competitive, individually combatative style of debate we use. Politics is about confrontation and division, which creates hard-driven, wound-up people who need to sink themselves into mindlessness with drink or some other 'opium of the people'.

My experience was that drinking was also a protest against the divisions and denials of the nuclear family. To be in a close relationship with just one person and a child means inevitable restrictions and dissatisfactions. You have too many emotional needs to squeeze into such a tight box. The family, as we know it, is lonely, restrictive and individualistic. You are expected to find your bliss solely through one person, and in the effort to fit, to rub all the rough edges off between you, you end up stifling your emotions, denying yourself roots. You end up blaming the other partner for countless petty restrictions, niggles and awkwardnesses. Or you end up drinking grossly, belligerently as I did. Or you find some other compulsive release.

DRINK BECAME A PROP

For me drink became a prop. As soon as I got home from work I would sink a few glasses. Then I would keep a secret store of alcohol in cupboards, behind the draining board, in the cellar, or slip out to the shop and down a whole bottle before I got back home. I could only feel free and relaxed with a certain level of alcohol in my veins. And, of course, by the end of the evening, if I was left alone boozing at home, I would end up completely sloshed. But though I always grabbed my glass and downed it quicker than anyone else, and though I drank obsessively on my own; the only real difference in my behaviour compared to standard drinking was that I hid the amount that I was downing from my wife. That was the guilt I had internalised and the feeling that I was odd, that I did drink strangely.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Alcoholics Anonymous was unsatisfactory. With its meetings in church halls and ten commandments and its moralistic atmosphere; with its belief that you needed guidance and help from someone stronger than yourself, it couldn't offer any socialist solutions. The group contact was good, and people gave each other support, but no one was interested in the root causes.

The one function that AA does perform is the vital business of discussing openly and honestly your behaviour. I found, once I could say to people that I had a drink problem, and begin to see that I wasn't alone, that it began to be possible to exist without a drink. But it was talking to people who were *normal* drinkers that made it possible for me to see my 'problem' as a deep-rooted social malaise present in all of us. Not to be alone, or ghettoised among the alcoholics, but to recognise the pressures of role and job and status and sexuality that drive us all into seeking oblivion. And it was only being brutally honest to others about the precise details of my 'alcoholic' behaviour that I learnt to distance myself from its hold.

Now I don't drink at all. I refuse politely, get stared at slightly, and watch as I see people starting on the same compulsive downward spiral as I experienced. I hope they read this article and recognise that anyone, *everyone* is subject to the pressures that lead to such desperate solutions, and that drink is one of the main and pressing problems of this society.



Dear *Briefing*,

In reply to Chris Knight's letter in July's *Briefing* I was quite capable of following the gist of his article on Christine Delphy, despite the language he used, my point was mainly about the use of language. I do not accept his argument that you have to deal with Marxist intellectuals by using their terminology. If the words mean anything at all, their meaning must be capable of being expressed in a simpler, more comprehensive form. My point is that for the idea of socialism to reach the people who need them most, as we are all saying they must, we will need to express ourselves in a language the majority can understand. More serious still, abstract language encourages abstract thought. The problems of the dispossessed are concrete and these are the problems which *Briefing* should be dealing with.

I think it would be a useful intellectual exercise for people like Chris Knight to attempt to translate Marxist thought into the language of the street, without losing any of its meaning – if they could do that, they would truly prove their superior intellect, and do the rest of us a great service.

In the same issue of *Briefing*, I agreed with Jillian Charlton that capitalism is our enemy, not the male sex, and feminism can become a diversion from the fight for socialism if it fails to establish the connections between women's oppression and the exploitation of the working-classes, the third world, animals and natural resources by the owners of capital. Middle-class feminists in particular, must take care not to believe they can side-step the issue of their own class role simply by attacking men. The task of all socialists following the election is to build a vision of a socialist future which can link all our aspirations and struggles, and can appeal directly to the majority of women and men in our society to counteract Thatcher's cosy Victorian family illusion. We should, I believe, try (difficult though it may be) to save our anger for the real culprits, those who profit from the misery of others, and try to show towards each other the kind of patience, tolerance and understanding which is in keeping with the kind of society we are trying to build.

Jan Wallcraft
Hornsey and Wood Green CLP

On June 25th, the women at Greenham Common pieced together a 3-mile rainbow dragon, which was stretched along part of the perimeter of the base. *Liz Knight* of Enfield CND reports:



THE MORNING: SEWING

We woke to find we were sharing the tent with about eight other women. We emerged from the tent to find the common in lush mid-summer bloom, the warm earth smelling deliciously – so different from our last visit in the cold spring. Women were putting up notices and laying out booklets and posters on a folding table at the entrance to the tent. Others were lighting a fire.

We took our dragon booklets and curled up on our sleeping bags for a read:

> 'Human affairs are in confusion at the moment, but we are trying to see some sense behind it all, and come together in body and mind to work for a safer, more enjoyable future.
>
> "Today we are making a giant rainbow patchwork dragon. As with the web and snake symbols – the dragon has come to us, rather than us search for it. What does the dragon mean? It has been around for who knows how long – it emerges in countries all over the world. The root meaning of the word is "to see clearly".
>
> 'Earth energy, music, dancing, singing, colour . . .'

I feel the seriousness of this day.

Ridicule, contempt, hate, violence, imprisonment, death surround us. I am white, middle-class, English, vastly privileged and secure compared to the great majority of women in the world. But that doesn't mean that I imagine that I am safe, or that the nightmare doesn't affect me.

I am writing this account cosily in the garden of a terraced house in Middlesex. A siren blares, and my stomach turns. Darkness, screams, my daughter dead, horror unimaginable: and I imagine it for the next four minutes.

Yes, then I go back to my cup of tea. I don't have to carry water for miles and watch my children slowly starve. But I know that this is happening as clearly as I know we will all die soon and horribly if we can't change society in time.

There are only a couple of thousand of us at Greenham for the day of the dragon. But we can hear messages coming to us on untapped lines from all over the world. For me, all the messages, all the questions and the answers come together in the idea of the dragon. It's not a solution. It's not a programme of action. But it says – Act. Together as women. With all our courage and invention. Now.

For the couple of weeks previous to coming to Greenham I'd been feeling unusually tense. My period was late. The heavy thundery weather and the ominous state of world politics seemed to link into my personal undefined anxiety....

The three-foot wide strips of material were being laid out on the grass verges in front of the big tent and alongside the base fence. Green and gold silk from an Indian sari. Fluttering patches of orange and scarlet satin like dragon's scales. We unrolled all our pieces, our own and those sent by Enfield women who couldn't come: Dru's dove and rainbow; Gill's message about understanding; hand and foot prints from Sue, Frances, Anne and Marilyn and their children. Then there was Rosie's crayon picture of the view from her window; Jan's drawings of mammals, fish, birds and insects, and a painted rainbow, flowers, snakes and dragon from Joyce, myself, and our children Adam and Hannah.

As the strips became longer we laid them out, and other women took up the ends and added theirs....

NOON: REHEARSING . . . REMEMBERING

At the Orange Gate, the dragon's head had arrived.

Huge and red and shiny, made by women at the camp, it half filled the back of a lorry.

Women were gathering round to perform some kind of drama. Some had painted faces, flaming pink or yellow hair, and limbs smudged green (with grass?). Some were bare-breasted and bare-footed and wore bits of bright cloth in their hair. Some were dressed as men: they were the patriarchs.

A smiling woman began to tell the story, which went something like this:

> 'Once women were free and united, and lived together in harmony with nature (and with men?). This was the matriarchy.'

The women dance, do cartwheels, and head-over-heels over each other's backs, whooping and singing like birds or monkeys – and laughing at each other's antics.

> 'Then the patriarchy came to split us up and claim ownership over us and over nature.'

Amid more laughter, the capitalist steps out with a tray of tin cans which he sells to some of the women. Some juggle with the cans, others dance free. But eventually they are all subdued one by one: by the priest who puts veils on their heads – including a little girl's – and makes them kneel; or by the robot who makes them plug into him and act exactly as he does, or by the thug of alienated technology – bald and dressed in nothing but tin-foil and dark glasses – who whips them into submission with a silk scarf; or, finally, by the modern macho, with ACID written on his cheek, who 'lovingly' turns 'his' woman into an immobile smiling dummy.

As this process takes place, the oppressed women cry out like hurt animals, and some of us watching call and boo and hiss in sympathy. There's a jokiness about it all, but somewhere the pain is reaching me. Cheerfully the story-teller continues:

> 'But meanwhile some women somewhere were keeping the spirit of woman-power alive.'

Two women step forward, one wearing a painted cloak with collar and headdress of rainbow feathers, the other in shirt and jeans playing a guitar. She plays as the other woman sings the song of the rainbow dragon – how she's been asleep for the last few thousand years, and how the time's coming for her to wake at last.

With the music, the enslaved women stir. A good witch appears. To cheers from us watching, she and others bring wool out of their sleeves or pockets and start winding and weaving it round the startled patriarchs. Instruments are brought out, a drum, a pipe, and the music gets stronger and more rhythmic.

The women dance, encircling the patriarchs, winding them around and around firmly and gently with the wool until they are crouched powerless on the ground. Then the women leave them – and they get up as the women they are, to join the dance. We all start joining in, swaying to the cheerful rhythm. Someone starts singing and we all take up the round:

> 'Building bridges between our divisions
> I reach out to you and you reach out to me.
> All of our voices and all of our visions
> Sisters we can make such sweet harmony ...'

We join hands and spread out into widening circles, dancing, smiling at each other. The sun is very warm. I feel good. But I am still expecting something.

THE AFTERNOON: GOING IN: TOUCHING EARTH

A brief meeting after the drama and we plan our action. Those of us who wish to and feel ready are going to enter the base. Women from the camp have prepared the way.

Policemen on motorbikes go back and forth up the road, unsure what's happening. Many of us don't know either!

Our group gets lost, then we find the place . . . Slipping in the deep mud, clasping strong hands which pull me through . . . We rush up the wooded bank, knowing there is another barbed-wire fence at the top which we must get over to reach the runway. The helicopter roars just overhead. We crouch under the trees. It feels like a game, reminds me suddenly of playing cowboys and Indians in the woods with my brothers as an eight-year-old, hiding, running, climbing, and in our excitement never noticing the scratches. I feel grateful that at thirty-six I can still find my eight-year-old self. Three of us from Enfield have gone in together. I run the last stretch, leaping over bracken and brambles.

Too late. We're seen. A US soldier with a dog and two Ministry of Defence policemen have moved in on us this side of the second fence. But about 50 women are already over: we can see them hurriedly painting the runway as army jeeps and police cars move up on them.

We cheer and wave; someone grabs *our* ladder and carpet off the fence and throws them in our midst as we make a circle and dance our triumph. More police can't get to us this side, as the inner fence divides us from them: we take advantage of their disarray and skip off in groups in different directions over the common.

We walk up to the side of the fence near the road where women are gathering to support us. The two policemen and a couple more US soldiers with dog and truncheons herd us towards the corner. A couple of women evade them and run off. Another tries to and is grabbed, falls over. We skip around them. The soldiers look anywhere but in our faces. Meanwhile the policemen are painstakingly making a gap for us in the barbed wire of the inner fence.

'Don't hurt yourselves,' says Jan, meaning it. The hole is made and we are escorted ever so carefully through it. We thank them for helping us get to where we wanted to go all along. Do they look embarrassed just for a second?

There are six of us now. We sit down in a little bunch, linking arms, singing:

> 'Oh you canna spend a dollar when you're dead . . .'

I keep one hand on the earth. Greenham women have been in here many times before.

(continued on next page)

For me it's the first time. The earth feels warm, peaty. There are little white stones in it. I'm in love with it. I understand, in a way for the first time too, what we are doing. What words to use that don't sound ridiculous, even to me? I don't know, so I'll just have to say what comes. We are reclaiming the world from the death-dealing powers that have stolen it from us. We are doing it in sixes and sevens because we are in sixes and sevens. When we are thousands and millions we will do it in thousands and millions. But we are not waiting for that, for the mass movement, for the right conjuncture, for the right connections. I am – we are – the movement, the conjuncture, the connections; or else those are just words used, as words so often are, to hide from ourselves our own existence. The task is enormous, and it's as tiny as touching earth.

We will not move voluntarily. They bring the army truck nearer, and start lifting us in. They're quite gentle with us this time, though one woman gets her head banged (accidentally?).

The US army driver and the British policemen don't know what to do with us. They haven't received their orders. We are driven at a good speed all through and around the base, up to and into the central area barricaded by yet more gates and fences, then out again and past the huge missile silos, altars to nuclear war, some apparently completed, others still being built.

They drive us out of a little back gate where there are just a few women sitting sewing, surprised to see the bus and us. The door is opened and we are hurriedly ushered out.

I feel relaxed, full of bounce. I notice my hands are muddy and my period has started at last. Good. Jan's pink trainers are covered in mud, so is one boot of Rosie's.

THE EVENING: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

In the big clearing in the woods at the left of the gate the dragon was to be put together. The head had been placed in the middle of the space. Behind it lay the painted, printed and embroidered pieces of material, now joined up in one long, long strip. But it wasn't finished yet.

It was getting dark, not because it was really dusk yet, but because storm clouds were filling the sky. On that dark peaty earth surrounded by dark trees the colours of the dragon glowed: round and round in huge spirals they coiled inwards to the dragon's head. A big fire had been lit near it. I went up to have a good look at it.

A little boy was patting it carefully. It was made of papier mache on a wire frame, and propped for now on wooden supports. Painted bright red, with green bumps on the nose and raised blue eyes, it had a single yellow spike (like a unicorn's horn) on the forehead. Tied on the horn were two round bells, with a ribbon attached on which was writte: 'Bells for Peace from the New Japan Women's Association'. All along the jaws hung long rainbow-coloured ribbons, and between the nostrils was painted the women's symbol. A blue banner printed with white doves hung down at the back of the head and the rest of the body continued in spirals around the field. Women whose work was finished were walking slowly round looking at all of her.

Hundreds of place names, thousands of people's names, the very old and the very young, some men as well as women. Patterns and poems. Paintings and drawings. Pictures made of cut-out felt. Intricate patchworks: squares of stripes and spots and checks and flecks. Images of life: trees, flowers, animals. The colour green. Of hope: the moon, the rainbow. Of peace: the white dove, one world, blue and gold. Of love: clasped hands, children, black and white and brown. Of women's strength: the women's symbol, the web, the serpent, the dragon. The colour red.

Life. Hope. Peace. Love. Strength.

Words, like all words, that have been bought and sold so many times their meaning is almost lost to us. We hear them and – How nice, we say, how sweet. How twee. How sentimental. How weak. How pointless. How incapable of changing anything.

In songs and poems and stories and conversation we sometimes rediscover them, with a kind of shock, but they quickly disappear again into the chaos of lies and disappointment which hides us from each other and ourselves.

Jam tomorrow. The politicians and salesmen and conmen of every description who at present have power over us tell us that life, hope, peace, love and strength are just around the corner, and in their gift to us – if we will only pay the price. What price?

First, silence. Second, submission. Finally, suicide. Living with and in their enormous lie is already a kind of death: dying for it in nuclear war is just the next step.

The dragon is the negation of the lie. She says No with scarlet anger. She is the affirmation of our lives.She says Yes with an enormous grin. She makes visible the invisible. She makes us visible to ourselves. She makes our words audible to each other. She joins us where we were split.

THE NIGHT: CELEBRATION: RE-CREATION

I feel tears coming. It is all up to us: all of us. We have made her, and now we have to keep her alive, tomorrow too, and the next day, and the day after that....

There's a lot of laughing. What's happening? The dragon's head is lifting slowly, wobbling, over our heads as we dance. Her wooden props have gone and about six women are inside her, lifting her up. I hold that sight in my mind: the huge red head, beautiful and absurd, lifting over us and trembling against the stormy sky.

She moves forward. Women are picking up the cloth behind her and holding it right up over their heads. The drum keeps beating and we keep dancing, moving one by one to take up the next bit of the dragon. The head lilts over the earthy clearing, and the body lifts and dances behind her, more and more and more, longer and longer, bright colours flashing as we bring her bit by bit to life.

Suddenly some crisis up ahead brought us to a stop. We started, stopped, started and stopped again. Nobody could have foreseen the problems of manoeuvring a three-mile long dragon out of a wood, down a narrow twisty road and past cars and police vans. At one moment the cloth would be pulled out of our hands and we'd have to run to keep up with it. Then the cry 'Stop! Stop!' would echo up the line and we'd be standing for twenty minutes at a time wondering what on earth was happening. So we sang: 'You can't kill the dragon . . . old and strong she goes on and on and on . . . she is like a mountain . . .' We talked. We danced on the spot. Then – 'Come on! Come on!' – we'd be moving again, sometimes creeping, sometimes running. At one point an impatient police van drove right through the dragon and ripped it apart. Other tears were caused by the sudden stops and starts, but women with needles and thread walked up and down the line repairing breaks on the spot.

We'd walked for a while, then a whooping and cheering came down the line and a message from the front: the dragon's head had arrived at the main gate! (Her tail was still leaving the Green Gate).

We zig-zagged our dragon into the road in a moment of glee. Effortlessly, we had stopped all the traffic. What else could a dragon do? We'd only just begun to explore our potential!

We stepped back to let the traffic through – we hadn't intended to stop it; but the police took a dim view of our little sortie, and a police car started kerb-crawling right next to Jan to keep us (or her) in order. Jan chatted away to the occupants. The police walked in the road and held up all the traffic behind their car. Their reasoning escaped us. But we knew they were afraid of the dragon, even though – or perhaps because – she smiled and was so very friendly.

We turned off to the right of the main gate. The dragon's head had been laid down in a grassy clearing among bushes and the tents of women staying at the camp. As the dragon came slowly in, pairs of women in rows facing each other on either side of it took it and folded it neatly in great heaps. As each pile got too big, the next piece was carefully separated and a new pile started.

We had seen her home.

I went to have a last look at her big funny head and to say my own good-night. It's not good-bye. She's found us and we won't lose her again....

Now I have to go back to the time and place where I usually live. But that's okay. I've been over the rainbow (yes, where blue birds sing and dreams come true!) and I've met the other side of myself. I've reached out for a woman's hands and found them strong. I've touched earth and found it warm. I've seen a dragon. I've helped make head and tail of it. And I wasn't dreaming. I know I can travel there and back again.

The pattern of the day has woven together to make beautiful sense for me. It embraces the past and stretches out to a future whose edges I think I can glimpse.

Corny nonsense? A sentimental dream? Set it beside the nightmare of the nuclear destruction of the world. Is that more real? Or is nothing quite real to us as we drift half alive towards the end?

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. We must choose the dream and make it real – or else the nightmare will grab us and will end all dreams and all reality.

We walk back the two miles to the Green Gate and up the wooded lane to the car. Our legs feel as heavy as elephants'. Jan has to drive and to keep alert somehow. I'm in the back and curl up under a blanket next to Melissa. I start dozing off.

On the motorway Jan points out the moon. I open my eyes wide. There she is, right in front of us over the motorway, glowing smokily in the still stormy sky, huge and full. We follow her home.

Liz Knight.

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