LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING
40p
No 37 MARCH 1984

No collusion! These Tory plans are UNCONSTITUTIONAL!

Ken Livingstone has described the Tory Government's plans to abolish the GLC and impose rate-capping as unconstitutional. These plans ruthlessly tear up the precedents established in Britain's 'unwritten constitution' over the centuries, in effect abolishing democracy at local government level altogether. BRIEFING urges all our supporters to make the maximum effort to ensure a huge turnout on March 29th, and build towards a campaign of resistance in which no holds will be barred – if the Tories break their own traditions of legality, they cannot expect us to remain 'within the law' either!

"We would very much weaken our position if Labour indicated that we would co-operate with the new system of rate capping.

I do want to see a Parliament that is supreme. That is necessary for a future Labour Government to control the economy. But what are we to do if Parliament acts to take away freedom? I don't necessarily believe we should give a blank cheque to the present majority in Parliament.

We have been told for decades that we have an unwritten constitution in this country. The present majority in Parliament now seeks to remove fundamental powers of that unwritten constitution, including the right of local authorities to fix their rates and to oppose central government.

It is inconceivable that a Labour GLC could begin discussion with our trade unions about how to cut thousands from our payroll.

The Department of the Environment could not cope with running as many as 20 Labour Councils if we all refused to comply with their spending limits. We would destroy the Labour Movement in this country if we allow ourselves to be turned into the agents of this Cabinet.

If we get this rate-capping legislation, we must *not* cut our budgets. And we must support our staff in refusing to obey government commands.

If that puts us outside the law, then it is the laws that are wrong."

Ken Livingstone



John Chapman

GLC/ILEA demonstration, Hyde Park, 24th January 1984

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

London Regional Executive – standing still in 1983

London Regional Council (LRC) was unable to make any significant progress in 1983. Lack of independent financial resources, an absence of collective intiative and the deafening silence from the National Executive led to the worst election results in the general election. Since then, several Council by-elections have been lost to the Tories and the Alliance.

An attempt to increase the representation of women on the LRC was rejected out of hand by the NEC. Further representations are now being made to secure this.

In order to sharpen the campaigning in London, to convert the regional office into a resource centre and to employ a press officer and a campaigns organiser, the LRC sought a meeting with the General Secretary and the National Agent in September. This meeting has yet to take place.

Within the resources available to the LRC, a campaign plan has been drawn up for 1984 with the aim of increasing Party membership. The incoming executive will decide upon the theme of the campaign taking account of the resolutions passed at the Annual Meeting. CLP organisers will be brought together to arrange local/area meetings and events to back up the campaign. A rally to launch the campaign will be held in the Autumn at a central venue – preferably a theatre.

Other achievements of the year were the completion of the first draft of the manifesto for the 1985 GLC elections; successful participation in the "Save our Health Services" Campaign; the launching of the local government campaign in November and the setting up of a co-ordinating committee of Labour MPs, GLC members and ALA members.

The task in 1984 is immense. The Labour Party will have to re-establish its electoral base in many areas. Voter-registration, establishing workplace branches, recruiting new members and activating existing members must be at the forefront of the agenda of each CLP and – more importantly – affiliated unions.

Narenda Makanji
Member, London Labour Party Exec.

BRIEFING'S SLATE FOR THE REGIONAL EXECUTIVE

CHAIR LATHAM

CONSTITUENCY SECTION

AREA 1
J CORBYN
M GORDON
N MAKANJI
J McDONNELL

AREA 2
V ANAND
R LABI
P PENDLE
K VENESS

AREA 3
D HARRIS
P HEALY
P SPALDING
V WISE

AREA 4
L CHRISTIAN
R PROFITT
J TWELVES
T WRACK

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE

G EASTWOOD, C McGARRY, B HARRIS, R TAYLOR, P JARVIS.

TRADE UNION SECTION

In this section we ask our supporters to vote for the following.

H BARKER, B BIRNBAUM, M GILBY, O JACKSON, L PHILIPSON, G WILKINSON, G WILLIAMSON.



John Chapman

Russell Proffitt, Central Hall, Westminster, 7th February 1984.

London Regional Conference
BRIEFING FRINGE MEETING
'Which Way for the Labour Left'
Speakers: Ken Livingstone, Jane Stockton, Tariq Ali, speakers from Ireland.
Chair. Nadine Finch.
Place: Camden Council Chamber.
Saturday March 3 at 12.30 pm.

FOR the February meeting of the London Labour Party executive, the representative of the electricians' union, John Spellar – defeated MP for Birmingham, Northfield – has tabled a resolution calling for the resignation of GLC leader Ken Livingstone as a part of his strategy to defeat the Government's GLC-abolition legislation!!!

WHEN IS A CAMPAIGN NOT A CAMPAIGN?

Nadine Finch
Retiring Member of Regional EC

Motions for this year's regional conference have now been debated in most London GCs and in more than one, this was the cue for the aggressive, male and white sales pitch which many women now associate with the LCC.

The substance (?) of their argument is that the EC has failed to campaign in London. It is easy, as a first reaction, to accept their criticism given frustrating situation where the EC control neither employees nor resources and are asked to represent a quarter of Greater London.

But a more useful reaction is to raise the question: campaign about what and on whose behalf?

Last year, Islington North, seconded the key 'campaign' motion which aimed to gain control of the GLLP's paid officers and Herbert Morrison House. The

Ealing unions take on Tory hawks

THE hawks have taken over the Tory majority on Ealing Council. Now in their second term of office, they seem bent on privatising everything that moves – and a few things that don't.

First to come under the auctioneer's hammer was street cleaning, handed over to Exclusive Cleaners Ltd last October. The experience has been less than a success for all concerned. In November Tory councillor Green stated that the service was 'grossly incompetent and inefficient and the present operation seems to be a complete waste of ratepayers' money'. Streets remained unswept for weeks on end, littered by a soggy mess of autumn leaves.

Workers transferring from the Council to Exclusive fared even worse. One was sacked after four weeks when his driver failed to pick him up, as arranged, at the end of his lunch break. Another arrived back at the depot two minutes late after lunch. He was sacked too.

Privatise school meals service

The Tories now propose to privatise the school meals service and the jobs of 400 dinner-ladies are under threat. But there is resistance. On 14 January, a demonstration several hundred strong, and led by a large contingent of the dinner-ladies themselves, marched on the Town Hall.

There is more co-operation between the council unions than he can ever remember, says Chris Morey, NALGO branch secretary. For several years, particularly the NUT but also NALGO have been fighting the cuts, with occasional successes. The manual unions have hitherto been relatively paralysed by the inability of the GMBATU and NUPE to work together. That seems to be changing.

Recognising that the privatistation of street cleaning was only the beginning, the manual workers shop stewards decided to set up the Ealing Campaign in Defence of Public Services (ECIDOPS).

Roy Beak, a GMB shop steward and secretary of ECIDOPS, describes it as 'a campaign to put across to the public the real truth about privatisation.' They are also trying to get across to council workers that they are all threatened.

Very wide spectrum

The campaign certainly brings together a very wide spectrum. Representatives of all the main council unions are involved, as well as the three CLPs and some hospital workers.

There is currently an air of optimism in all the unions. The campaign is revitalising the unions and the members, says Roy Beak. Previously, he says, 'the leadership in the trade unions has not been doing a proper job in the borough.' Now some younger people are coming forward. The shop stewards are more active and more prepared to fight. Chris Morey says there is a 'feeling of unity right across the NALGO branch.'

Put to the test

The optimism will soon be put to the test. The NUT is proposing a half-day strike on March 1st over teacher losses in middle schools. NALGO is balloting its members on indefinite strike action in the event of proposed redundancies in public relations and entertainments taking effect. The redundancy notices are likely to be issued at the beginning of March. The manual unions are still considering the next move over school meals. In the meantime they are petitioning and building support in the PTAs.

Whatever the outcome of the present struggle, it seems certain that the unions will emerge more united and determined and with closer local links to the Labour Party. The Tory administration in Ealing will face increased public hostility to its dogmatic Thatcherite policies.

Bob Wood (Ealing-Acton CLP)

BRIEFING GROUP SET UP IN EALING

By Peter Purton (Ealing Southall Labour Party).

In the last month comrades from the three constituencies of Ealing North, Southall, and Acton have come together to set up an Ealing Borough Briefing Group. Activists in the three Parties have long been dissatisfied with the lack of political action, the low level of discussion and the right wing grip on the Labour Group across the borough. The Briefing group has set itself the ambitious goal of organising the Left in all three areas. We intend to meet monthly, and divide our agendas between business and political discussion. Our next meeting (February 27th) will be discussing how we think our Parties should be organising around the European elections.

Further details from: Kevin Veness, 01 422 2056 (Ealing North), Ruth Clarke 01 840 2099 (Ealing Acton), or Peter Purton 01 571 5019 (Ealing Southall)

STREET CLEANING — EXCLUSIVE FLOP

Having claimed that privatisation of street cleansing would result in an efficient service at less cost, Ealing's Tory Council has been forced to admit that in the first 4 weeks of the new contract, Exclusive Cleaning — the private contractors — only managed to do 69% of the work they were scheduled to carry out. The figure was even worse for residential areas, with a mere 38% swept on time and scores of complaints received.

Exclusive has now been forced to employ additional staff as well as bring in workers from other contracts it has in an effort to cope. Despite this, the Director of Technical Services reported to the Council's Local Services Committee at the end of January that "the contractor's achievements (what achievements?) in residential streets continues to cause concern".

Believe it or not, the company has tried to blame its poor performance on "parked cars and a lot of leaves"!! Didn't anyone tell them that Ealing's 65,000 street trees would start shedding their leaves with the approach of winter and that a lot of people park their cars on the road?!!

EC did draw up a Campaign Plan, improve election material and initiate a campaign newletter for London. It also seconded one of its regional officers to the national NHS campaign.

However, it is clear that the LCC, whilst supporting these moves, is unhappy about other activities of members of the EC which they see as Non-Campaigns as they involve work on issues not deemed relevant to the majority.

The EC however, has continued to respond to grass-root appeals to support, for instance, the struggles of the Grenadian and Guyanese communities in London and been censured by the new leadership for meddling in international work. It has also failed to endorse the ban on newspaper sales at meetings, actively supported women who are committed feminists and campaigned about police racism. In return, the NEC now wants to sell off Herbert Morrison House.

Some members also consistently supported the right of the Sinn Fein to enter into a dialogue with the Labour Party and community in London. And thus took the party into areas where policy is still being formed and an admission that there is still work to be done on policy does not gell well with the freckled, smiling face of unity, especially when it involves thorny issues of racism, sexism and trade union militancy.

But I would hope that the Regional EC will in the next year take forward the campaign structure it has now formed and use it to support that whole range of Labour Movement issues as they affect women, men, the black and Irish community and all living in London.

Fulham tenants on the march

Tenants of a Council estate in Fulham have decided to take to the streets to protest against the decision of the local Council to move all the families out of the estate and sell it to a private developer. The decision to sell was made last November by the Tories and the Liberals who control Hammersmith and Fulham Council.

For years Tory Councillors have justified the sale of Council houses in terms of the capital receipts that would result and which could be used to finance much-needed modernisation schemes on old estates. The tenants of Fulham Court were promised modernisation in 1981 but the programme has been postponed every year due to 'lack of funds'.

SICK OF BROKEN PROMISES

Sick of broken promises, the tenants started to become militant last year and asked Hammersmith Law Centre to take up cases on the estate where the Council was failing to carry out repairs. Dozens of cases were taken up and repairs were carried out, but so serious was the level of disrepair that the Tories had to set aside an extra £100,000 for repairs on the estate in 1984/5 because of the threat of legal action.

In the meantime the tenants had sent petitions and deputations to the Housing Committee and a Council meeting and once brought a Council meeting to a complete standstill through their vociferous protest. They also hired an independent Environment Health Inspector who condemned the estate because of the inadequate heating, the dampness in most of the flats, and the cramped conditions. He even declared the estate a statutory nuisance under the 1936 Public Health Act because of unhygienic refuse chutes.

BARRAGE OF PRESSURE

Faced with this barrage of pressure the Tory Council had to do something. They came up with the proposal to sell, and one of the reasons given was so that they could use the capital receipt to modernise another run-down estate in the north of the Borough!

To their immense credit, the residents of Fulham Court have given an enormous thumbs down to the Tory proposals — they voted overwhelmingly at their AGM to refuse to move and to continue to campaign for modernisation of their homes. Their refusal to co-operate is a major victory in itself for those who believe in maintaining decent housing for working people at prices they can afford.

It would take three years to re-house all the 350 families from Fulham Court according to the Tories. Labour councillors say it would take at least five years. Even then it would mean that nobody else could be rehoused within the Borough except homeless families covered by the Homeless Persons Act. No-one would be rehoused from the Housing Register, no tenants could get a transfer within the Borough, and housing improvement programmes would quickly grind to a halt.

If the estate were sold and redeveloped, the newly modernised flats would be sold off at market rates which on that site — near a tube station and shopping centre would mean over £40-50,000 a flat — not the sort of prices the average Fulham Council tenant can afford but the sort that middle class Tory voters might well be prepared to pay. In the meantime, the community that now lives on the estate would be broken up, destroyed, scattered round the Borough to other estates, many of which are in a similar condition to Fulham Court.

MARCH TO PARLIAMENT

But the tenants have taken a stand in defence of decent homes for working people. Their march to parliament is a recognition of the role of central government in starving local authorities of funds, though there will be no reduction in pressure on the Council. It is part of a fight not just for decent homes but also against the privatisation of Council resources. The tenants have asked for support from both other Tenants Associations and from trade unions. The Council's blue collar unions are opposed to the sale and will support the demonstration. Hammersmith NALGO are not only supporting the march but have blacked work on the sale.

The fight by the tenants of Fulham Court is a fight that every socialist should support and I would urge people to join the demonstration and to get their Labour Party/trade union/Tenants Association to support it and turn up with a banner.

The programme for the demonstration is as follows:
March to Parliament — Wednesday 7th March
12.30pm Assemble Fulham Court (Fulham Road by Fulham Fire Station)
1.00pm prompt Leave Fulham Court
3.00-4.00pm Arrive House of Commons — to be met by Labour MPs including Eric Heffer, to present a petition and to hold a public meeting.
For further details contact me on 381 5529 or Ian Beddowes (Chair of Fulham Court Tenants Association) on 731 6694

Councillor Ian Harrison,
Labour spokesperdon on Housing
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Hackney : Occupation to defend services

On Monday, 16th January, about one hundred Council building workers and tenants occupied the St. John's Area Housing Base in Cherbury Street, Hoxton, N1 in a protest at the Council's failure to provide a proper repair service for tenants, and in an attempt to force the Council to implement its manifesto pledge on the decentralisation of services. In response, our Council has stopped the wages of the shop stewards engaged in the work-in.

Furthermore, workers who later occupied the Bowling Green Walk Supply Depot were evicted on the 22nd January in a dawn raid carried out by senior management who used a sledge hammer to break down the door. Jim Wilson, secretary of Hackney NALGO which is supporting the occupation, has written to Council Leader Anthony Kendall deploring these "anti-trade union tactics" and demanding that it uses "negotiation not confrontation to end the dispute".

The latest meeting on the 3rd February between the B.T.O. and the Council has failed to resolve the dispute, and has provoked the L.B.H. Joint Shop Stewards Committee to issue a letter to all councillors objecting to a new set of demands placed on the workforce. These include a request for sworn affidavits from the workforce stating that work has been done, and asking for the TGWU and UCATT to issue councillors with an indemnity against surcharge before they pay the workforce for the period of the work-in.

Support for the occupation has already come from the Federation of Hackney Tenants Associations, all the Town Hall Trade Unions, both Hackney South and Shoreditch, and Hackney North CLPs, and the local Liberal Association. It is clear that our Council is out of step with the local Labour Parties and must be brought into line very quickly.

The issues raised by this dispute are extremely serious and need to be resolved if we are to prevent future disputes.

*What is the Council's commitement to decentralisation? Do they really want to encourage active workers and tenants control?

*Which Councillors or Council Committee authorised the evictions from Bowling Green Walk? Why were strong-arm tactics used by a Labour Council against its workforce? We need assurance it will not re-occur.

*Why have new legalistic conditions been imposed at this stage of the negotiations? Who decided these and on whose authority?

*How will this action aid the Council in gaining the support of the Town Hall Trade Unions to fight around No Cuts, No Rent or Rates rises?

A full investigation is needed to identify the causes of this Council's anti-working class action and to prevent its recurrence.

In the meantime, the workforce and tenants need your support:

1. Donations are needed to help pay the wages of those in dispute. Collection sheets from: The Convenor of Hackney Council B.T.O., 145, Well St., Hackney E9.
2. Get messages of support sent to the St. John's Area Base.
3. Get your Trade Union or Labour Party branch to pass resolutions indicating their support and demanding the Council settle the dispute in favour of the workforce.
4. Get speakers to your branch, and organise local public meetings.
5. Notify the press, telling them you support the work-in.
6. Encourage your members to visit the Base.

Rob Jones,
Trade Union Liaison Officer,
Hackney South/Shoreditch LP

DISPUTE AT LIMES GROVE



From Outwrite.

The Limes Grove Medical Practice in Lewisham offers a unique range of services from general medicine to psychotherapy, acupuncture and herbalism, with a particular emphasis on women's health. For the past seven years it has also operated in a unique way, as an equal pay collective, and as a collective of workers and patients participating jointly in decisions of policy, finance and appointment of workers. Now however the Practice is under threat because of a dispute between the Partner, Dr. Barbara Jacobs, and the other workers.

In November, Dr. Jacobs announced her intention to break the collective agreement on equal pay, by ending the basic sessional rate and introducing a wages differential. A meeting was held which was attended by about 500 patients, and a compromise was agreed. This consisted of a six month cooling off and consultation period, with a group of patients' representatives acting as mediators. The intention was that a legally binding constitution for the Collective and contracts for the workers would be drawn up. Meanwhile it was agreed that there would be no industrial action taken, and that Dr. Jacobs would be paid a guaranteed £850pcm. A recalled patients meeting was to be held at the end of this period to receive reports from the mediating group.

TWO WORKERS SACKED

On 6th January Dr. Jacobs, without consulting either the patients mediating group or the workers, unilaterally sacked two of the workers – the women's health worker and a psychotherapist. No warning, either verbal or written, was given, just two weeks notice. Neither was there any complaint about the workers' conduct or work.

The workers are members of SE London Medical Branch of ASTMS, and so an ASTMS full-time official wrote to Dr. Jacobs protesting at her action and stating the union's intention of referring the issue to an industrial tribunal.

At a meeting of the workers, Dr. Jacobs, the patients mediating group and two ASTMS Branch officers, which took place on the day the two sacked workers' notice expired, Dr. Jacobs stated her intention to cut the jobs of the two workers and not replace their services in the future. She also said she would not reinstate them or undertake to accept democratically arrived at decisions of the collective. She wished to operate instead as a 'co-op' with a 'right of veto over decisions' – quite a turn around from her previous public statement to 'work collectively'.

After several years of hard work to make the Collective a reality, our members are bewildered and confused. Our ASTMS group has organised a work-in at the Practice to try and gain reinstatement for the workers, oppose the cuts in jobs and to save the Collective with all its unique features and services. Support is being received from patients and trade unionists, as well as the local Labour Parties and the women's movement.

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Currently you can take a number of steps to assist our members.

1. Invite a speaker from Limes Grove to your Labour Party or trade union Branch meeting.
2. Organise financial support – our two sacked members are not receiving any official dispute pay.
3. Write to ASTMS at 79 Camden Road, NW1 expressing support and asking for the dispute to be made official.
4. Write to the Medical Practitioners Union (MPU) Section of ASTMS, (of which Dr. Jacobs is a member asking them to support our members.
5. Write or phone the workers expressing your support. They can be contacted at 43 Limes Grove, SE13. Tel 01-852 5544.

Glyn Beagley,
Chair, S.E. London Medical Branch,
ASTMS (in a personal capacity)

FEMINISTS CAN EXPEL PEOPLE TOO

Alan Swain, a wife batterer, was expelled from East Lewisham Labour Party at its February GMC.

You may remember that it was in East Lewisham that Frank Chapple sent his notorious letter to local EETPU members asking them to join their local Labour Party in order to defeat our 'extremist' policies such as support for CND. Swain was one of a handful of people who then joined our Labour Party, as a delegate from the EETPU (we have since had a letter from Frank Chapple saying how pleased he was at his members' response to his circular!). Swain was interviewed by the Executive Committee, and we unanimously recommended his expulsion. The voting at the GMC endorsed this by 34 votes for, one against (Eric Richards); three EETPU delegates abstained. At every stage up to the EC explusion-recommendation, we had been in touch with Kath Butler, London regional organiser, who supported our action.

WOMEN'S GOSSIP – POLITICAL ACTION

Swain's expulsion arose from a discussion held at our women's section a few months ago when one of the women said she had heard a 'new member' objecting to the local Labour council giving money to hostels which made it easy for wives to leave their husbands.

Through the connections between us, we realised that his wife was in the refuge, so we obtained the necessary evidence to try to get him expelled on the basis of the incompatibility of his actions with the aims and principles of the Labour Party. The discussion that it has raised in our local party is that our "private, personal" lives are having to be made accountable in the same way that our public, political life is accounted for: anything else would be pure hypocrisy.

It is a clear example of the racism and sexism which goes on in the party and which it is our responsibility to fight against. Initially some women felt anxious about raising this subject, out of fear for the individual woman concerned and for ourselves – we actually felt very threatened. It has not been an easy discussion to raise, we've been accused of wanting to vet potential members and possibly putting them off joining the L.P. Our reply is unless sexism and racism is openly confronted in the L.P. those who will be put off will be women and black people.

From members of East Lewisham Labour Party, Women's Section.

London Labour Briefing are holding a fund raising party on Saturday 10th March at the newly opened Lewisham Labour Club, Limes Grove, SE13.
From 8 o'clock til 11.30pm.
Licensed bar, disco, free food.
Cost £1.50 waged; £1.00 unwaged
(Entrance to Labour Club through car park between numbers 9 and 11 Limes Grove.)

Two replies to Sarah Roelofs

Fighting on bread and butter issues

THE piece published in February's Briefing by Islington South's Sarah Roelofs is symptomatic of the trap fallen into by some of London's Labour Left, focussing as it does on the question of gay and lesbian politics. Most comrades will know the circumstances of Islington's Council and Labour Parties; the unique period early in 1982 of an SDP-led Council; the 51 out of 52 returned for Labour in the subsequent Borough elections; a constant campaign conducted by the national press, unprecedented in its ferocity; savage cuts in Rate Support Grant to the point that we lose all grant next year; certain inclusion on the rate-capping hit list; the loss of two of our three recent by-elections.

In these circumstances, some Labour local authorities might indeed be tempted to cut the budget, accommodate the government, accede to the "ratepayer lobby", give in to the press, forget about decentralisation, deny our views on the Irish Question, and put the rents through the roof. Islington is not doing any of that.

Although Briefing's pages accuse Islington Council and CLPs of backsliding "on several controversial issues", we are currently exercising a certain amount of caution on one – not with regard to our manifesto commitments on Equal Opportunities – but on whether we wish to go down an entirely new political path, on terrain mapped out by a small lobby of gay and lesbian activists.



Demands that cannot be met

Our caution is justified because, at heart, there is a form of political strategy being exercised by Sarah Roelofs and her sisters which may be damaging to Islington Labour Parties' objectives in local government. It is the strategy of raising demands that cannot be met; the strategy of trying to prove that even a Left-led Labour Party cannot deliver the goods, a strategy based upon internal manoeuvre that is now totally archaic in a Left-led electoral and campaigning Party.

Take, for example, Islington South's famous proposed "gay and lesbian rights" motion. It was not a statement of gay rights, but an instruction to the Greater London Party to virtually operate a mandatory shortlist and selection of gay candidates. Islington North also considered the resolution and, like Islington South, decided by over a 3-1 majority against giving it priority. The question that has to be asked is whether a resolution like this is really designed to succeed at all? Its defeat on the other hand, conveniently becomes a peg to hang a wide ranging and undisguised attack on the Party, MP and Council.

Islington's CLPs and Council, rather than backsliding, are realistically looking at the enormous obstacles of anti-gay prejudice. Hopefully, they will consider the equally large obstacles presented by much of orthodox Left thinking on the subject.

Class dimension

A major problem which is rarely acknowledged, is that activists in gay and lesbian politics come from a group whose social, occupational, educational and cultural background bears little resemblance to the population of the Inner City. Indeed, in women's politics in Islington, there is a very marked divergence between those active in Women's Council and Sections and the growing number of women who are active in Tenants Associations. To argue that women do not participate in politics, ignores the changes in the tenants' movement where women now frequently dominate meetings both in numbers and in contributions. Until those organisations in the Party which deal with gender politics, prioritise basic bread and butter issues like the economic status of working class women, they will not attract their interest or support. This class dimension also requires an understanding of the way that women and their families actually live and survive – the papers and magazines they read, the TV programmes they watch, the diet of the family meals, the relationships with children, neighbours and relatives, and

(CONTINUED)

No help from Sarah

Dear Briefing,

I read Sarah Roelofs' article about Islington's supposed sell-out on Lesbian and Gay Rights with some interest. I am a gay member of the Party, and have been involved in the fight for gay visibility in the Labour Movement for the last 25 years. But that wasn't the main reason I joined the party. I joined because as a working class man, at the bottom of the shit-heap, I realised that I had to work with others in order to change my own life. As it happens, I still live on a run-down council estate, still get put down by reactionaries and patronised by middle-class opportunists who tell me that life would be perfect if only I learnt to sell papers.

I also happen to be Chair of Islington Council's Gay & Lesbian Sub Committee. This was set up last year, in order to attempt to respond to the needs of the Lesbian & Gay Community. Whether as employees or as ratepayers and service users. We are beginning to look in a detailed fashion at the way in which conscious and unconscious discrimination are allowed to flourish and take root. We are looking at ways in which we can use the existing structure of local government to influence the ways in which we plan services, not just for gays but for all single people.

We have been hampered in our work by gays and lesbians in the Party either staying in the closet or adopting a straight-forward oppositionist line, like Sarah. We have never seen any of the paper-sellers at the Sub-Committee, and would probably not find it useful if they turned up. But, there have been lesbians and gay men from groups which operate in and from the Borough trying to make an impact on the Council's practice. Perhaps Sarah would like to read page 2 of the manifesto which those of us who were actually in the Party in 1982 drew up and on which we fought the local elections.

Briefing articles like Sarah's actually make it more difficult for people like me in the Party, who are tainted with shabby compromise (or the will to actually get things done, rather than dig elephant traps for other people) and who want to convince our working class constituency — and within that lesbian and gay voters — that getting their repairs done is as important as scoring points against Margaret Hodge.

Bob Crossman

Bread and butter issues (continued)

much more; the sum of which is the *culture* of working class women's lives. Women's organisations in the Labour Party – and this is probably true of the Party itself – by the very limited experience of their membership, are now dangerously out of touch with this culture.

Gay and lesbian politics also mistakenly equates anti-gay prejudice with racism and proposes similar solutions. This ignores history. Black politics and anti-racism have clear class dimensions in a way that gay politics has never had. Low pay, long hours, manual working, unemployment, housing conditions are communal class experiences for blacks and whites and form the backbone of socialist politics. In contrast to this, the class nature of gay politics is much more ambiguous.

Anti-racism has also had at least 15 years of advance, including a period of genuine mass political involvement after the National Front's peak in 1974. If gay politics had experienced something like the Anti-Nazi League or Rock Against Racism, it could now rely on a firm base of support in popular thinking from which to then advance new and bold initiatives. That's a model of political action that relies on ground upwards political activity, not the other way around, as is argued for in the last Briefing.

Of course, the Labour Party must take a lead in the slow process of changing peoples' attitudes. But it's vital that this avoids self-defeating acts of direct confrontation. Attacking people in a bigoted way for their bigotry simply reinforces their prejudice rather than building majority support for gay and lesbian rights.

Strategy for minorities

Ultimately, the issue of Party, Council and gay politics comes down to a question of strategy for minorities. Here we cannot rely on Left orthodoxy. It is no longer possible to write manifestos which include comprehensive and separate policies for each minority. That is the politics of the stitched up coalition and American style Big City politics. That is partly why Brent Labour Group split, you cannot make deals indefinitely, satisfying all demands. It's also bad socialist politics because it separates and isolates communities, and lacks a central set of values or ideology. The Labour Party, as a socialist and democratic organisation exists to mobilise a broad majority of the population behind a programme of radical change. At crucial moments, this requires electoral majorities. And it is a mistake to believe that we will become a majority simply by adding together all the minorities. The only solution is to integrate minority politics fully into general policy.

This requires a recognition that the Party in power, balances needs and resources, proportions the elements within policy, and sets priorities.

That is what Islington Council is doing. And our priorities are to deliver the services and to maintain living standards for our tenants, pensioners, children, the disabled and the lower paid of our employees.

We are aiming to rebuild political confidence in this Borough, but cannot do so when sectional demands are used to cover general attacks within the Party.

New coherence

And that has to stop. Unfortunately, London Labour politics is still locked into a 1979 style of oppositionalism. Comrades have got to learn that the old Right has long ago been routed (here in Islington's Parties, it barely exists). The Party in London does not belong to someone else – it's not gripped by a clique of General Secretaries. It's made up of CLPs and Labour Boroughs run by us. We need to take that responsibility seriously.

And Briefing ought to inject a new coherence into the now disparate and marginalising elements of London's Labour Left.

MARGARET HODGE
(Leader, Islington Council)

Islington planning: No room for women

Local councillors on the Planning Committee of Islington Council clashed with about 60 women and children in a hostile bitter meeting on January 26th. Planning permission for a Women's Centre in Featherstone Street, South Islington, to be bought with a grant of £300,000 from the GLC was rejected. 6 women's groups — the National and London Women's Aid, Homeless Action, Women's Reproductive Rights, the Rights of Women and Lesbian Line are to be evicted and now have nowhere to go. Two other groups — Women and the Manual Trades and the Women's Health Information Centre — are also affected and 57 jobs are at risk — 33 women are already employed and 24 jobs would have been created if the application had been granted. 'All you want is jobs for the boys' shouted one woman in response to a councillor who 'wondered if they were real jobs'.

DUBIOUS GROUNDS

The grounds for rejection were that the South Islington area has been designated an area of industrial development which precludes giving planning permission for offices. As there is no special category for 'community use' this is designated as 'office use'. Not that the building has been in industrial use for at least 4 or 5 years — the previous occupiers had had personal planning permission to use it as offices (in this case the use of the building reverts to its previous use when resold). However making an exception for a Women's Centre was out of the question for all but one — Barbara Rodgers — of the six councillors involved. She was sharply attacked by one of the councillors who said he would like an assurance that if the decision was used by the Dept. of the Environment to allow office development he hoped Barbara Rodgers would resign. Acrimonious comments such as this did little to reassure the women there that the councillors cared twopence about them.

PLANNING IS NOT POLITICS

The councillors insisted that planning had nothing to do with politics but was a purely bureaucratic procedure. They could roll the regularities off as if they were God

Continued on next page



Socialism in Barnet

Laurence Spigel
Finchley CLP
(local councillor)

Barnet Council is little different from any other Tory dominated local authority. It fulfils its fuction reasonably efficiently i.e.: it conspires to provide the minimum level of public services whilst at the same time diverting resources to support white middle-class interests and institutions. Education, leisure services, planning and social services coupled with low rates are all geared to the needs of this section.

The financial disciplines of cash-limits, targets and GRE's has only served to make the underlying character of their policies more apparent. Voluntary aided schools are expanded whilst a successful comprehensive is closed; a public swimming pool is closed and sold for a luxury leisure centre; public land is sold for speculative development whilst the housing waiting list grows; the Housing Revenue Account is forced to make a profit and subsidize a greater proportion of social provision for tenants out of the 3rd highest rents in London.

The Tories have been determined to reject any developments which acknowledge the needs and aspirations of the ethnic minorities. They have repeatedly rejected applications for community centres from black groups; opposed proposals for a borough wide policy on multicultural education; refused to modify the housing programme (what there is of it) to meet the needs of larger Asian families or to provide social services to the growing elderly Asian community. The list is endless.

ACTIVE LABOUR PARTY

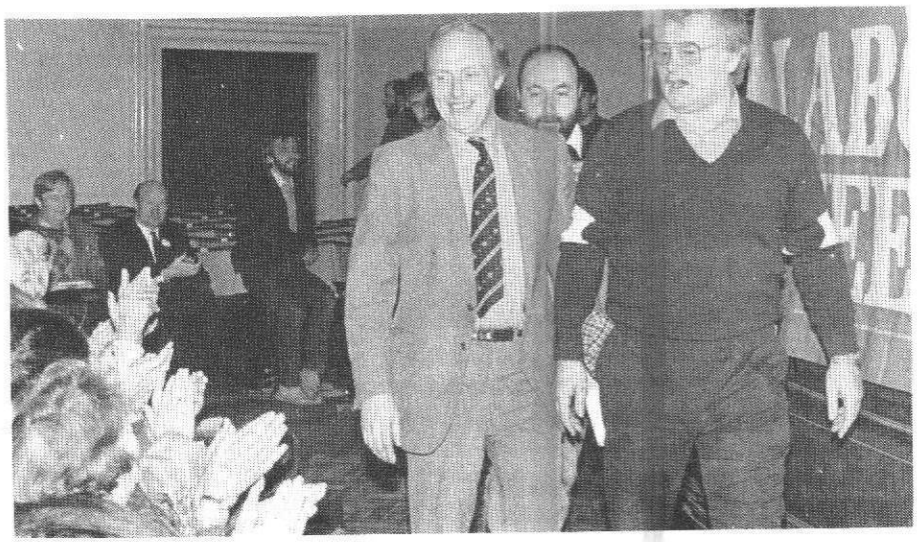
The local Labour Party has been active in campaigning on many of these issues. This is reflected in the growth of membership to over 1,000. We have had to develop our attitude on a range of issues and highlighted the class character of the local state apparatus. However, more than anything, these developments have emphasised the question of democracy within the party. The Labour group has grappled with this issue for the last two years. My own view has been that the local government committee should become the central forum for determining the policies and tactics of the party in relation to all local matters. I find it simply astonishing that the notion persists that councillors (or MPs) can exercise any monopoly or veto. The LGC should be our 'parliament'.

Such an arrangement would enable effective control and accountability to be exercised over our representatives. Finchley CLP are proposing that a similar system be established with the GLC Labour group, with delegates from every constituency. A relatively simple measure, which at a stroke would deal with the twin problems of the regional party and the block vote. It could effectively become the London-wide LGC.

Our activity against racism and sexism within local services has also forcefully reminded many of us that our 'movement' still labours under an oppressive legacy of sexism and racism. It is symptomatic of the state of the Party that a group which elevates to the level of principle some of the worst features of our traditions can achieve any credibility whatsoever.

Unfortunately these traditions, like the block vote, exercise a certain fascination and dominate discussion of alternatives. In Barnet our experience suggests the need to confront the deep rooted conservative traditions which disorientate and demoralise the Party. Councils which sponsor radical initiatives help to make sure that these ideas take a firmer hold and prepare the way for similar measures when we are next in government. That may not be so far away and we can perhaps avoid the debacle of the 60's & 70's.

Within hours of his 'election' Kinnock made clear his lack of sympathy with the aspirations of the women's movement and his lack of understanding of the need of popular control of the economy as part of a socialist economic policy. His views are not surprising. They arise naturally in a party still dominated by the limited vision and pointless bureaucratism of the (male) trade union movement. The recent hectic round of activity, locally and nationally should not be confused with progress. A socialist party needs socialist ideas and socialist institutions. The Labour Party has precious few of either, yet.



John Chapman

Kinnock leaves Central Hall, Westminster, 7th February 1984. "Adoration of the Magi"

ISLINGTON PLANNING (CONTINUED)

given. What they ignored is that the process of drawing up rules and procedures is as political as is the discretion allowed in enforcing those rules, women generally are not catered for in planning regularities apart from in a domestic and child caring capacity i.e. as needing somewhere to live. Planning regulations assume women do not go out to work let alone meet in women's centres. In this case a women's centre was categorized as 'office use' although the planned use of the building was for a conference room, creche, drop-in centre, cafe, training workshop, print shop and offices. To argue that this use is synonymous with commercial offices and to assume that granting it would lead to a surge in office development in the South islington area is absurd.

WHAT DISCRETION DO COUNCILLORS HAVE?

The irony of this application was part of the building in Featherstone Street had already been subject to a planning exception when it was previously occupied four or five years ago. An exception was also made by this Council administration for the Labour Party Co-op Hall in Seven Sisters Road which was also contrary to the Council's development Plan. Another exception that the Council made, for the London Gay Centre, received more publicity, and it seems this adverse anti-gay press was a factor in the rejection of the women's building. It now appears that while exceptions are the usual Exceptions are, of course, frequently made by planners and indeed need to be made to allow flexibility. But it now appears that Islington Council will not make exceptions for women — why?

FISH AND CHIPS BEFORE WOMEN'S NEEDS

Women have also been discriminated against in other applications. At the same meeting on January 26th an application for planning permission for an Irish Women's Centre was similarly refused in favour of a fish and chip shop. The road in question, Blackstock Road, in North Islington, is not short of such places, but Irish women, who form a sizable part of North Islington's population, desperately need a women's centre for support and to help them deal with the discrimination they face. Another application that was refused in December 1983, was that from the women's cafe, Sisterbite, in Upper Street. The cafe now faces closure.

All three women's groups are appealing Islington Council's decision to the Department of Environment. In at least one case there appears to more than a 50% chance of the women winning. It would be a supreme irony if women were to be allowed their building from the Tories rather than a left Labour Council. It is clearly time that Islington Councillors reviewed their planning policies and priorities. At the moment many Labour women in Islington can only feel the policies are extremely sexist.

Sue Lees, Islington North CLP Womens Section.

Why Vauxhall challenged Richard Balfe's selection

By Joan Twelves and Greg Tucker (Secretary and Vice-Chair of Vauxhall CLP — in their personal capacities)

On 25th January the NEC upheld an appeal lodged by Vauxhall against the selection of Richard Balfe as candidate for the Euro-constituency of London South Inner. As Richard Balfe is well-respected on the left and has a good record as an MEP, our appeal has attracted a few questions which clearly deserve an answer.

In fact the story is quite simple. As a result of the proposed boundary changes, Vauxhall found itself moved from a Tory Euro-seat into London South Inner — which now comprises the whole of the boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. The normal process of selection took place locally and, from a choice of three, Vauxhall agreed to nominate Lambeth councillor Hazel Smith. Six CLPs nominated Richard Balfe, and two made no nomination.

OPEN-MOUTHED

We went along to the selection conference on 13 December expecting an uneventful evening. However, before the meeting got started, Regional Organiser Kath Butler reported that she had informed the National Agent's office of irregularities and proceeded to read out a letter which had been sent to a number of delegates from the RACS saying Richard Balfe was sponsored by the Co-operative movement and asking delegates to vote for him. Our delegation sat there open-mouthed. As the only CLP to have nominated an alternative candidate, Vauxhall immediately moved that the selection conference should not proceed. This was lost, so we asked for a five-minute adjournment for Vauxhall to discuss its position — a number of our delegates wanted to walk out. When the chair ruled no adjournment, the whole delegation got up to leave — we got our adjournment, and decided to stay. We had already made it clear to the meeting that we intended to appeal whatever the outcome and felt we should stay so we knew exactly what happened. Richard Balfe was selected by 43 votes to 25 — Vauxhall appealed, and our appeal was upheld by the NEC. A new selection conference will take place at the end of March, and CLPs have been invited to start from scratch or renominate. We have renominated Hazel Smith.

ENCOURAGING WOMEN

Vauxhall supports encouraging women, members of ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups to stand for public office and we oppose shortlists of one — whilst we obviously cannot guess on what basis people voted at Vauxhall's selection conference, there was a strong feeling that our nomination was based on these criteria rather than any opposition to the sitting MEP. As a "newcomer" to the Euro-constituency, we had previously had little to do with Richard Balfe and therefore had no direct experience of him as an MEP, although we recognise that his record is better than most. We have been disturbed at the way the right-wing has been able to use our appeal to attack him, and we had to take this eventuality into account before lodging our appeal. However, we feel that the rule about financial sponsorship not being raised during selection is important and one with which we agree. Selection should be based on politics, not on who's got the cash. If candidates are to send mailings to delegates, these should be political statements on agreed terms and of equal length which go to all delegates through official channels.

We were surprised when the meeting rejected our moves not to proceed. Our own General Committee unanimously ratified our actions and fully supported our decision to appeal. Whilst we could understand, and strongly sympathise with, those delegates who just wanted to get the business over with, we were disturbed by comments that there was nothing wrong with sending out such a letter and by an undercurrent that we were just being troublemakers, first by putting up an alternative candidate and then by complaining about the proceedings — and this from comrades whom we believed supported women candidates and opposed shortlists of one.



Labour Party Photo Library.

The left has fought long and hard over reselection — Vauxhall itself was in the forefront of this fight in the mid-70s. We feel strongly that left MPs and MEPS should not see alternative candidates as a threat but should welcome this. Reselection is not just a weapon to use against our political opponents — all public representatives of the Party must be prepared to defend their record in office and show they are the better candidate. And nobody should see being an MEP as a meal-ticket for life.

BLACK LONDONERS UNDER THREAT

Radio London's highly popular programme – BLACK LONDONERS is under threat. Two of the programme's five presenters have been sacked, the first step, it is feared, of strangling *Black Londoners.*

Whilst the BLACK COMMUNITY finances the BBC in London through licence fees to the tune of some twenty million poinds. the BLACK LONDONERS programme has been starved of resources. And now its meagre budget has been cut by forty percent. Instead of pumping more skills, more human and financial resources into this almost skeleton programme, the BBC is doing exactly the reverse.

The Black community is not prepared to take this lying down. And thanks to the energetic action taken by Councillor Ben Bousquet and others – a Black Londoners Action Committee had been reformed to fight the cuts.

A successful picket of the BBC's Radio London offices in Marylebone High Street took place on Wednesday February 1st, where prominent members of the Black communities were joined by MPs, councillors and members of the public both black and white, including Tony Banks. At the Executive Committee of the GLRC a resolution in support of the Black Londoners Action Committee was signed by every single member of the executive present at the meeting.

The Black Londoners Action Committee has also held a meeting jointly with the trade unions involved in the dispute – NUJ and ABS at the House of Commons on Tuesday, February 7th. Messages of support arrived from many members of parliament – including the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, the Shadow Cabinet and members of the GLC and the ILEA.

In the course of the many short pithy speeches that were made, attention was drawn to the fact that whilst we were encouraged to concern ourselves with apartheid and racism in South Africa, the racism at home in our own backyard and on our own London doorstep was being ignored. The BBC had a duty to reverse its policy and fundamentally reappraise its attitude to black people employed there.

In the words of Jeremy Corbyn's message of support – *"We have fought and won this battle against the BBC before and we will win it again!"*

VIDYA ANAND
THE CHAIR,
BLACK LONDONERS ACTION COMMITTEE (ILFORD SOUTH CLP)

The rates strategy – a view from Hackney

If the Left (and London Briefing) are to achieve the objective of real influence and socialist change in local politics in London then Frank Hansen (December) is right: the left must translate its slogan into effective direct action. The question is how?

Some months into the second Conservative administration, Councils all over the country are still faced with the question: Should they give in to the Tories' demands (and the demands of some of their own supporters) to make, manage or conceal the cuts or should they use their position to organise and lead resistance based on the labour movement. No local Council was able to successfully wage a campaign last year against the Government and it seems unlikely that any Council will this year be willing to set in motion the steps that are necessary to create such a campaign of resistance. The challenge that local "socialist" Councillors face is not their commitment to ideological positions but their commitment on basic economic issues, the role of the local state and to supporting (and thus be supported by) the trade unionists they employ. Sooner or later these failures in defending basic class rights will constrain and destroy the successes gained in other fields.

HACKNEY COUNCIL

Hackney Council, for example, has supported progressive positions on women's oppression, racism, nuclear disarmament and international issues. Its record in attempting to organise a solid local movement on rate, rents and cuts is less impressive.

When the left campaigned a couple of years ago for the election of socialist Councillors it neglected at the same time to make clear what such Councillors were to do once elected. We have the spectacle then of many Councillors, who would identify themselves as socialists, having very hazy conceptions of their role on a local Council. Many see their jobs simply as improving "service delivery" and do not see this direction as an implicit strategy which doesn't provide a clear political direction. Hence the confused discussions and counterpositions: being employers is seen as being divorced from their trade union consciousness — thus disputes with the workforce are not couched in terms of how does one as a *socialist* promote trade union organisation and confidence, but how does one as an *employer* maintain the services being withdrawn by the unions.

The lack of political perspective and the dominance of the socialist "do gooder" has meant that Councillors have been politically disarmed.

PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN

Thus in Hackney, there has been a publicity campaign based on the premise that the decisive factor of whether or not Hackney receives increased rate support grant is dependent on back banch Tory MPs representing the Shire Counties, and the House of Lords rather than on the combativity of the working class. The decision of a conference of the Hackney Labour Party and Labour Group last September, to work as closely as possible with tenants and trade unionists to create the best conditions for a fightback has been put to one side. In the meantime, British Leyland type tactics have been applied to residential social workers taking industrial action, supported by all except a handful of Councillors. The campaign within Hackney "Britain's Poorest Borough" has now shifted towards a special case being made for Hackney inevitably at the expense of other people. Within Hackney there is already talk of staff freezes or "prioritisation of job filling" not to meet political objectives but to placate worried unions. These questions of course will inevitably face other "socialist" Councils if not this year then next year through rate-capping and the destruction of local democracy it entails. Rate-capping may be very popular in areas where Councils have taken their last opportunity to use rates to defend services unless we can defeat the Tory myth of "overspending" socialist Councils.



"ENOUGH IS ENOUGH"

There is a case in saying "enough is enough", defying the Government and refusing to implement cuts or rate increases. It is not enough for the ALA to say it or even to say it and mean it. Individual Councils have to say it, individual Councillors have to say it and individual party members have to say it. It is the party that must prepare for a major battle, not the ALA, for it is socialist authorities and local socialist democracy that are threatened with extinction. It is the role of socialists in the local state which will be extinguished. This is a different attack from other years, if not ideologically, then at least in the seriousness of the intent. If we can accept that premise within the left, within the Party and within local Councils then our tactics can no longer be those of "muddling through" (as Frank Hansen designated it) and Poplar and Clay Cross should become practical examples rather than folk-lore.

The Tories are mounting this attack to destroy socialist credibility in local government, not balance the books. The left's job is to put the issue clearly as one of the ultimate destruction of the local democracy and the local provision of services.

LITTLE SOLIDARITY

The campaign of the GLC, ILEA, ALA and boroughs such as Hackney are alright as far as they go but there seems so little solidarity between them that one wonders if some people are hoping that special pleading for their corner might do the trick. While CLPs can pass resolutions demanding and defending the "3 nos" position how many Comrades are prepared to put their own financial position on the line to advocate, organise and take part in rent and rate strikes and occupations to defend Labour Councils? If individual Councillors stand and fight are they on their own or are party members, particularly GMCs and party activists in trade unions and local community groups and campaigns, standing with them?

When individual Councils come to make rate this year or next tactics will be determined in the above context. We must refocus attention not on minor or major shortages in finance or the balancing of rate rises and cuts but on the potential destruction of socialist activity at a local level. Individual Councillors must understand and act in this knowledge not simply out of concern for service delivery or individual fears of surcharge and bankruptcy. They must also be persuaded that there are others in the local movement and across the left who will "stand and fight" with them. Tactically individual Councils are being carved up by the present system of rate support grants and a financial system of rate rises as the only real means of preserving jobs and services. Tactics adopted around "not making a rate" or resignation should be seen in this light as a means of fighting both the system as well as the fact of the serious financial position.

DEFIANCE

Defiance should be maintained at every level and any public platform including the Council Chamber will serve. Both the present system and the proposals for rate-capping must be fought. The Liverpool example must be followed!! But no council by itself can defeat the Tory Government on this issue. Only a national campaign centrally organised together with unions could do this. So along with all our discussions about local tactics and campaign must go the the call — the Labour Party, nationally, the PLP and the TUC must organise a massive campaign against the Tory attack on local government.

To argue this way is *not* to encourage passivity. On the contrary it gives the local and particular campaigns and perspective of success. In turn, fighting at the local level gives the best framework for such a national campaign.

by *Bill Brown* **and** *Hilda Kean*.

GLEB : a socialist strategy for jobs

By John Palmer

(John Palmer works for the GLEB and is a member of the National Steering Committee of the Socialist Society. He is writing in a personal capacity.)

In the debate on the left about the defence of the GLC and the Metropolitan Counties remarkable little attention has been paid to the economic and industrial strategies they are pursuing. Yet, in the words of Ken Livingstone, 'perhaps the most important and lasting contribution which will be made by the GLC to the working people of London will be seen as the creation of the Greater London Enterprise Board'.

Socialists would agree that the most effective defence of the GLC is one which boldly stresses the socialist policies of the present administration, which as it happens, are the most popular aspects, and those with the most potential to mobilise in action (without of course belittling the importance of the democratic issue, or of exploiting differences in the enemy camp). After the fares issue, the most important aspect of this is the jobs issue; indeed politically it is in a sense the most important aspect as it most clearly poses a central ideological challenge to the present government. That is why the I & E policy, of which GLEB is the operational 'cutting edge' should be central to the defence campaign.

The objectives set by the GLC for the Enterprise Board are, at one and the same time, extraordinarily ambitious and, measured against the devastation caused by deindustrialisation and slump, necessarily modest. But debate should centre on the claim made by advocates of the GLEB approach that it 'exemplifies' what a socialist solution to the crisis should look like.

More immediately, GLEB's intervention in the London economy is justified as a means of giving desperately needed support to the trade union movement facing wholesale redundancies and factory closures. But it also provides politically crucial space for trade unionists to challenge for greater control over management decisions including such vital matters as production, investment, new technology and the firms broader industrial and social objectives.

GLEB's industrial strategy has to be seen in the context of the GLC's commitment to 'popular planning' and the wider strategy of the GLC in counterposing a socialist alternative to the power of the Tory State and the multi-nationals in London. Thus the GLC supported 'people's plan' for Docklands sets out a radically different vision of how that part of London should be redeveloped in the interests of working people. At the same time the GLC has been actively involved in helping workers at Kodak, Ford and other multi-national companies, creating the links with plants in other European countries in an effort to co-ordinate a strategy to counter the insidious threat to jobs and production.

A key element, therefore, in the GLC/GLEB strategy is one of 'planning from below' and the extension of workers' power here and now rather than grandiose neo-Keynesian economic strategies which depend on the illusion that a capitalist economy can be managed and run in ways that somehow avoid deepening crisis. In that sense what the GLC and GLEB are doing is helping to develop an alternative 'alternative economic strategy'. It is for this reason it should be actively debated by the left not merely within the narrow confines of London but nationally — and indeed internationally — especially since trade unionists in Europe and elsewhere, inspired by the pioneering example of the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards in the late 1970s, are closely watching the experiment in London.



Chi Chan

MAGNALITE LTD (HOUNSLOW).
Asha Mathro assembling lamp wiring harness

No-one except a charlatan opportunist can deny that what has been described as 'the propoganda of practice' is not beset by all manner of political hazards. As Mike Ward, the Chair of the GLC's Industry Committee, has pointed out, there is a danger that when local authorities intervene to save jobs they could become 'sucked into the capitalist system'. That is one reason why GLEB and the GLC rigorously insist on the independence of the trade union movement from management even when negotiating an increased voice in key management decisions through enterprise planning.

The Enterprise Board has made support of worker co-operatives one of their key priorities without disguising the immense problems faced by the co-ops in merely surviving within a predominantly capitalist economy. But if that is one face to co-op reality, equally the other face, first pointed out by Karl Marx, is the important way in which co-ops demonstrate to working people that they can run their own economic and industrial lives.

The Enterprise Board, therefore, has to operate within the realities of the market economy in London. But, together with the GLC, it also directly challenges the monetarist logic of the market and supports enterprises which transcend the logic of capitalism. GLEB's Technology Networks provide the financial and scientific expertise necessary when workers develop socially useful products. GLEB has been able to assist trade unionists in a number of plants facing the threat of closure to develop their own plans, and on some occasions actually contribute to forcing management to reconsider its closure strategy.

The GLC has provided a budget of around £30m a year for the Enterprise Board which, at first sight, seems like a lot of money. But measured against the continuing rise in unemployment — notwithstanding the alleged economic upturn — it is a pittance capable only of being employed to demonstrate what could be done if state resources were put behind an alternative strategy.

No amount of intervention by the GLC, GLEB, or anyone else, can substitute for the fighting capacities of independent trade unionism. But to be effective in a period of deepening crisis, that fighting capacity must be linked to a deep political understanding of the need to transform society from top to bottom.

It is this perhaps which distinguishes GLEB from other, more conventional, enterprise board strategies pursued by the Metropolitan Countries. But at the same time the Board has to show practical results for what it aims to do and in the first 12 months of its operations has been able to commit more than £18m to around 136 separate projects which will preserve or create nearly 2,000 jobs over the next two years.

Sometimes this means GLEB taking a minority investment in a private firm or helping to fund a worker co-op or simply acquiring the company outright. Examples of all of these are Moughan & Macken, the Mitcham based steel construction firm in which GLEB has a minority stake but where the workers have successfully negotiated an enterprise plan which gives them a major say in key management decisions, Lithograph, the worker co-op advanced technology printing enterprise and Magnatex, the wholly owned Hounslow based manufacturer of motor components.

One of the slogans adopted by the Enterprise Board in its key publications is 'the key to the future of London is the imagination, knowledge and creative energy of the people of London'. By showing in practical and imaginative terms that this is true GLEB and the GLC are helping prepare the labour movement for power. I would hope that all Socialists, in the LP and elsewhere, will see the need for active, if not uncritical, support for the GLC jobs strategy. Perhaps Briefing readers could raise the issue in Labour movement organisations, suggesting GLEB/GLC speakers and information material.

EDUCATION briefing

ILEA's hypocrisy



Scott Lidgett pupils

ON the 24th of January, virtually every London school was closed for the day of action in defence of the ILEA and the GLC. Teachers supported the demonstration in their thousands and marched side by side with their political employers. Back at school, however, teachers are far more sceptical about their employers' good intentions. At the end of the campaign, political jobs may be saved but what of the education itself?

This year in ILEA secondary schools, 700 teaching jobs have been identified at risk for next September. A taste of the mayhem to come is given by this sample of projected cuts:

School	Job Loss
Holland Park	24
Hammersmith	18
Hurlingham/Chelsea	16
Homerton House	18
North Westminster	23
Warwick Park	35
Stockwell Park	45
Lillian Bayliss	35

(As an ironic aside, Briefing readers may remember that one of the two teachers forcibly moved from Scott Lidgett School last September, following the defeat of the strike, was moved to Warwick Park. With Warwick Park due to lose 35 teachers this year, no doubt everybody will be able to appreciate the care and thought that goes into ILEA's socialist planning).

No amount of assurances from ILEA members is going to alter the fact that severe disruption and damage to the curriculum in these schools will result from this policy. Moving staff against their will from one school to another is purely an exercise in staff discipline. Its intention is to demoralise teachers and make them more docile, preparing the way for further and more brutal cuts at the Tory government's bidding. Educational criteria are never discussed. All that teachers hear is the employers' despotic insistance that they know best.

Every ILEA school can make cogent and unanswerable educational arguments as to why staff must be kept. There is no London school so well off for teachers that it is able to deliver the children's birthright – good education – to all its children. Staff losses under these circumstances can only mean damage to children.

All the ILEA's high sounding phrases about the defence of London's standards are hypocritical and dishonest in the face of their onslaught on the teaching force. Their "half a cake is better than none" mentality is worth nothing to those London children who get no cake when their teachers are moved.

At the London Labour Party Conference on March 3rd, and 4th, there will be only two statements in defence of London children – a motion from Croydon CLP against job losses and an amendment to the Croydon motion from Hackney North and Stoke Newington against compulsory transfer of teaching staff. It is in the interests of London children that both the amendment and the motion are supported and that the ILEA's leadership is reminded what defending education really means.

By a Scott Lidgett teacher

School closures in Barking

Once again the Labour Authority of Barking & Dagenham has succeeded in alienating local parents and trade unionists by deciding to close three of the borough's nine maintained comprehensive schools. It has done irreparable damage to the reputation of those schools by announcing through headlines in the local press that those schools were to close. Six weeks after that announcement the Labour Group decided to look again at the idea of tertiary education because there was so much local opposition to school closure. In the meantime parents of children attending those schools and people who work at those schools are still confused. They do not know whether the schools are safe – Councillors have refused a request from the NUT that they make a public commitment to the continued maintenance of the three threatened schools.

Events surrounding the decision to close schools, then the decision to consider tertiary again, reflect two things. Firstly the willingness of local parents and trade unionists to campaign against the councils ideas and secondly the lack of forethought, planning and interest in education which exists within the local education authority.

OPEN MEETING

The local anti-cuts committee organised an open meeting for parents and trade unionists to plan a campaign against school closure. Leafletting in the shopping centres and of local homes was organised, school staffs sent petitions as did many local people, and councillors and council meetings were lobbied.

The Labour group of the council has now asked the education department to look in detail at the prospect of tertiary education in the borough – an idea rejected by teachers unions a year ago because it proposed tertiary on four or five sites and was seen by many as a cost cutting exercise rather than one designed to improve education. Within eighteen months the Barking & Dagenham Authority will have written three separate reports on educational reorganisation – exposing their lack of educational ideas. They have been 'caught on the hop' again because they refuse, time and time again, to discuss, consult, or negotiate with their employees and the parents – their electors – about any educational issue. They don't really know or care about what interested groups want. They are working *against* members of their own party, local trade unionists and working people instead of *with* them.

'CUT IT'

The councils answer to educational problems when they arise seems to be 'Cut It', 'Close It' and save money – not examine problems and see how they can be positively dealt with. To many of us who work and/or live in the borough we might as well be dealing with the most entrenched Conservative Authority. One positive result of the situation we are in at the moment is that trade-unionists, parents and members of the local Labour Party are committed to mounting a campaign to defend comprehensive education in the borough and an Education Alliance has been formed.

No doubt the council will make the usual excuse – that local parents are apathetic about education and cannot be mobilised in its defence – as they tried to two years ago during the teachers strike. They were proved wrong then and they will be proved wrong now.

Ruth Martin,
Secretary, Barking & Dagenham Association NUT.

Newham; no school closures!

Peter Pendle
Newham Councillor
Newham North West C.L.P.

The review of secondary education in Newham, which has been going on for almost two years, is drawing to a close. On Friday 9th December the Council took a decision, in front of a packed hall of five hundred residents, teachers and pupils, not to accept the recommendations of the Education Committee to close three L.E.A. secondary schools in the borough. Instead, the Council adopted a motion, by twenty-one votes to nineteen, which called for the retention of all thirteen L.E.A. comprehensive schools. Twenty Councillors, almost one third of the Council, failed to attend the meeting!

Since July 1983, when the Council rejected the option of Tertiary Education in order to solve the problems of falling school rolls and low achievement, there had been a growing lobby among Councillors and some party members to close schools in Newham. It was argued that only by closing schools could a comprehensive education system be retained. The fact that Newham's schools and parental choice starving others, was forgotten. At a poorly attended Local Government Committee Meeting in November, arranged on a Friday night, a motion to reduce the number of schools in the borough by one mixed and two single sex schools was adopted. This was despite the fact that two of three constituency Labour Party's in Newham had clearly voted against school closures.

At the same time as the L.G.C. decided to support school closures, parents, teachers and pupils were mounting a massive campaign to oppose them. Petitions were collected and meetings of several hundred people were held at many schools. The opposition to school closures was almost total. Councillors on the Education Committee however, decided to ignore the wishes of the people who had elected them. At a stormy meeting, held on the 30th November, the committee recommended what was in effect a reduction of three schools. Many of those who voted for the motion were on the 'left' of the Labour Group, and were in many cases the same people who had voted against the tertiary option in July and for retaining sixth forms in schools.

Parents and teachers were clearly outraged by the Education Committee recommendation and stepped up their campaign, increasing pressure on Councillors to vote against closures at the full Council meeting. On the Saturday prior to the Council meeting a large demonstration was organised and several hundred people marched to the town hall in East Ham to hand in a further petition. On the day of the Council meeting teachers at schools throughout the borough took strike action, with a mass picket outside the Town Hall before the meeting. Finally, the pressure worked and many Councillors who had kept silent until this stage spoke out against the closures, some because they has been mandated by their local ward branches to do so. School closures were rejected by two votes. The Labour Group had earlier taken a decision that it would be a free vote.

However, the battle was not only to do with avoiding school closures. Much is wrong with education in Newham and the motion that was adopted recognised this fact. In addition to retaining all thirteen L.E.A. secondary schools the motion called for the establishment of Community Schools, all of roughly equal size, the establishment of neighbourhood school feeder patterns, increasing support for disadvantaged schools and increased education support for girls in mixed comprehensive schools.

Many lessons can be learned from the education review. It is essential that the local party is involved in decision making at an early stage on important issues. It was not until school closures became a real possibility that the party woke up and started to put pressure on Council members. On major issues the party must discuss the matter fully and come to a decision which it can unite around and take to the community to win its support. It is also important to realise that attacks on local government by central government can come in a number of ways. One of the first things the Tories did when they were elected in 1979 was to introduce an Act which allowed parents far greater choice in the schools their children went to. The aim of this Act was clearly to bleed certain schools of pupils, forcing councils to close them. Many 'left' councillors fell for this subtle attempt to force them to make cuts in the education service provision. Instead they should have fought this attack by opposing parental choice and by improving the provision in all schools, proving that each school is as good as the next.

It looks as though there will be one last attempt by certain Councillors to force through school closures, although hopefully this will again be defeated. It is a shame that certain comrades feel it is necessary to turn their backs on fellow trade unionists and the people who elected them on a manifesto promise to use falling school rolls to improve the provision of education in Newham.

120 Compulsory Redundancies at the North East London Polytechnic

The effects of the present Tory Government's policies will shortly be forced home to many students and workers at the North East London Polytechnic. Funding to NELP is being cut by £850,000 and this will almost certainly result in 120 redundancies, together with a reduction in the standard of course provision.

The Polytechnic is jointly run by three local authorities, Newham, Barking and Waltham Forest, through a Joint Education Committee. They have meekly accepted the reduced funding from the government, which is clearly an attempt to attack the opportunity for working people to obtain decent higher education. Indeed the local authorities have made the situation even worse. Mainly under pressure from Barking Council, the three authorities have reduced their contribution to the polytechnic by £500,000. Newham Council argued that the authorities should maintain the size of their contribution to the budget but Barking refused to accept this. The so-called Labour Council seemed more interested in avoiding government penalties on spending than protecting jobs and opportunities for working class people. The result of both the governments and local authorities reduction in funding will be 120 more people unemployed in East London.

At the Joint Education Committee Meeting held recently, Labour members from all three councils voted in favour of proceeding with compulsory redundancies, despite protests from NATFHE and the National Union of Students. Only one Labour member voted against proceeding with this policy. Clearly, Labour Councillors are now implementing the policies of the Tory Governmnent, by accepting the cuts without a fight. The unions, however, will attempt to oppose the cuts and redundancies. They must be supported by the Labour Movement in East London.

By Peter Pendle

What NATFHE is doing

We have sent letters to all Barking's Labour councillors pointing out the statement issued by the Labour Party NEC (Nov 1983) which calls upon Labour-controlled authorities to *"avoid compulsory redundancies"*. So far I have not received a single reply. We are also arranging to lobby them all individually and organising a mass lobby of the next council meeting on 7th March.

The Director at NELP, Gerry Fowler, is going to issue self-evaluation forms to all teaching staff in order to decide who to sack! Needless to say NATFHE (the lecturers union) are refusing to have anything to do with any form of selection procedures. When the redundancy notices are issued (probably in May) we are also planning to go on strike for a week and then refuse to take part in any assessment procedures (eg marking exams), until compulsory redundancies are withdrawn. These sanctions wil undoubtedly get national backing as this is seen by our union as a national issue. If compulsory redundancies go through at NELP they will surely follow at other institutions.

All the unions at the Polytechnic are united in fighting the cuts and as a joint union body we have broken off negotiations with the Director and will now only speak with our Employers (the JEG). Since then, the only communication I have received from the Director is the following draft code of practice:

"I do wish to point out to you, as I have done to other members of staff, that the use of the terms 'chair' and 'chairperson' may be common non-sexist practice, but it is also common illiteracy. As an examination of its Teutonic roots shows, the suffix 'man' does not bear sexual connotations. I must make it clear that in this institution of higher education my staff, when acting in that capacity, will be expected to speak and write in the fashion normal to an English speaker, unless there is some disability or disadvantage which prevents them so doing."

Thus speaks the ex-Labour Minister for Higher Education.

Messages of support and offers of help will be welcome. Ring 590 7722 Ex 2227 or write to NELP, School of Education & Humanities, Longbridge Rd, Dagenham, Essex.

Martin Hoyles (Secretary NELP NATFHE Coordinating Committee)



Why we lost in Brent

Dear Labour Briefing,

I await with interest your analysis of the by election result in Brent (in St. Andrews ward). Here surely was a great opportunity for the voters of Brent to show their anger at losing their Labour Council. Sadly it didn't happen, making the possibilities of Labour regaining control even more distant.

No doubt you will come up with lots of reasons and special factors for this result. One you won't mention is the widespread disgust with the violence and barely concealed racism against the defecting councillor which accompanied the loss of council control and which was so obviously co-ordinated by elements of the left in Brent. Antics like this only serve to discredit the whole labour movement. Maybe it would be more appropriate for Labour Briefing to ask why a Labour council which for years had strong Labour majorities now depended on the casting vote of the mayor?

Part of the answer to that and to the general poor state of London Labour I believe is the arrogant and narrow minded approach of sections of our party so ably demonstrated in current issues of Labour Briefing. Most of your contributors lack any sense of comradeship or awareness of the issues which affect working class people in London.

Increasingly, your pages reflect only the interests of a self-opinionated and self-appointed elite whose main concern is to exploit differences within the Party for their own purposes and career interests.

Labour Briefing may have at one time served an important purpose. Now it serves none except to provide the enemies of our party with ready-made stories to weaken the prospects of a return to power by a committed socialist government.

Yours fraternally,
Paul Wheeler

Dear Briefing,

I was very sad to see Chris Huculak's article on possible education developments in Barking & Dagenham. I am not sure why he adopted such a negative stance towards re-organisation. Perhaps it was a burst of uncharacteristic conservatism. Perhaps Chris's socialism consists simply of spending more and more money, regardless of political and educational consequences. Actually I am sure it was a well-intentioned stand.

Even so, rather than just slagging off one possible initiative, it might have been better to have raised the level of debate by, for example, mentioning:

1. The difficulties providing a wide curriculum faced with falling roles.
2. Fighting "parental choice" (grammar schools) faced with surplus places in our school.
3. Encouraging discussion and co-operation amongst pupils in classes of two or three.
4. Distributing resources so that there is a fairer share of teachers, equipment, etc., regardless of school, age, academic ability, etc.

These are problems which should be solved by Socialist and educational principles, not necessarily by throwing money at the present – not notably successful – system.

Falling roles present us with a great opportunity to ensure our education service is best organised to meet education and Socialist aims. In Barking & Dagenham we now have nine schools. If the comprehensive principle can best be served by 6 or 12 then that is what we should demand.

The "normally sedate" (!) local SEA could not accept the initial re-organisation plans due to lack of information and consultation, but successfully urged Barking CLP to reject a resolution simply rejecting re-organisation outright.

Cynicism is often laudible and sometimes understandable but not when it degenerates into prejudice. It is surely wrong for socialists to condemn change simply because the Council is examining it. Perhaps it is true that some people are more interested in "municipal monetarism". It is up to people like the SEA and Chris to ensure that any decisions made for or against re-organisation are based upon educational and socialist principles.

Comradely,
Cameron Geddes,
The rarely sedate Secretary,
Barking and Dagenham SEA.

MASS ATTENDANCE AT THE WELL WOMEN CLINIC.

The campaign against the closure of South London Hospital for Women continues with a "Mass Attendance" at the Well Woman Clinic, 3.30-5.30, 28 February 1984, South London Hospital, Clapham Common South Side, SW4.

The Well Woman Clinic has been open only for a few months. Once a month it provides women with breast and cervical cancer screening, and a chance to talk about their health, on a walk-in, no appointment basis. Yet even this very limited facility will be lost when the hospital is closed.

There is an enormous demand for Well Woman Clinics. Women's concern about their health is growing. Despite this the government has refused to provide the funds to keep the South London Hospital for Women open. The Campaign is asking as many women as possible to visit the Well Woman Clinic on 28 February, to show the government and the health authorities that women demand more and better health facilities. Women's health has been neglected for too long. Women are more than half the population, yet the government plans to close the only general hospital run by women for women.

Further details: Kate Doggett, Community Health Council, 673 8820, Rachel Heatley, 874 6244.

LEUKAEMIA & WINDSCALE

The renaming of Windscale, nuclear reprocessing plant, to Sellafield may have confused some people but not radiation and fallout.

A Medical Research Council report recently published in *The Lancet*, doctors journal, reveals an unexpectedly high number of deaths from leukaemia in the district of Millom which extends to the boundary of Sellafield (Windscale) between 1968 and 1978. The leukaemia death rate there is four times the national average. In the village of Seascale – near the plant – leukaemia deaths are ten times the national average according to a programme on Yorkshire Television. Would Mrs Thatcher buy a house in Seascale?

Piers Corbyn, Bermondsey CLP.

Articles and correspondence for Science Briefing are welcome:- to Piers Corbyn, 55 Innis House, East St, London SE17. Tel 01 701 5091.

LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING
Political Editor: Graham Bash, 23 Leghorn Road, London NW10. Tel: 961 3803
Editor of Streetlife Supplement: Jane Stockton
Production Editor: Chris Knight
Treasurer: John Pickering

Next issue out. March 26th. Deadline for articles. March 12th. Next Editorial Board: Monday March 26th at 6.30pm at County Hall.

Advertising rates for London Briefing:

Whole Page	£110
Half Page	£60
Third Page	£45
Quarter Page	£35

BRIEFING SUPPORTERS' CARDS

Please show your support for London Briefing. Obtain your 1984 supporters' cards from Jim Ring, 55 Stonard Road, London N13. Cost £10 (£5 unwaged).

LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING

Reporting London's news
— and making it!

Annual subscription £6.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

SUBSCRIPTIONS

NAME . . . . . .

ADDRESS . . . . . .

Please send to Central Books Ltd., 14, Leathermarket, London SE1. (Cheques payable to "Central Books Ltd").

'STREET LIFE' SUPPLEMENT

Building our future into

THE WAY WE ORGANIZE NOW!

The Labour Party is a white, male, predominantly middle class party organised in a hierarchical, bureaucratic, competitive manner. Membership of the party entitles one to attend monthly Branch meetings at which a typical agenda consists of hearing what happened at the last meeting, at the GMC, the LGC and the Council meeting, and discussing what to do at the next meeting. Is it any wonder that women, black people, working class people don't bother getting involved? Nor will they get involved as long as the Labour Party continues to organise in a way which reflects many of the faults in the organisation of society as a whole – something we are supposedly seeking to change! Nor will they get involved until the issues the Labour Party deals with and the way it deals with them *feel relevant* to the problems and oppression these groups experience in their daily lives. This issue of the Streetlife Supplement takes up some of these themes.

Jane Stockton

The dominant and the muted:

Women, Labour Party meetings and subversion

'. . . Part of it is confidence, of course. When you grow up female in this society, then you learn not to have confidence in yourself as a person. You have to overcome that, and men don't, or at least not in the same way. But even . . . and if . . . when you catch up on that, there is still a problem. I find it easier to talk to women informally. That's the way I want to do it. **That's how you can listen and exchange, which is what I want to do when I talk . . .** *Not just to speak* **at,** *to deliver a convincing monologue from a platform. Public speaking is a pretty one-way process and I am against it in principle.* **It gives a lot of rights to the few who do the speaking and none to the many who have to listen.**

So it's still a problem for me. Sometimes people tell me I'm good at it, and I get a bit confused . . . being good at something you don't approve of, making yourself sick . . . I get stomach nerves . . . with everyone telling you it's necessary. Sometimes I think we won't get very far unless women are public speakers, and sometimes I think we won't get very far when they are. I wish . . . I wish I could think of more egalitarian ways of talking **with** *a lot of people.'*

Man Made Language by Dale Spender

Labour Party meetings are structured by the party's dominant group – men. The purpose of their structuring is to sustain and construct *themselves* as the centre, the reference point – whether it be in general committees, caucuses, labour groups, union branches – to ensure that all business is conducted in relation to themselves. Seldom is the purpose of Labour Party meetings to talk *with* others.

As a result the Labour Party has one of the most inegalitarian hierarchical communication systems that I at least have ever experienced. Even the local primary school fares better at communication.

The consequences of this system on the party are severe. First it is a system which silences women. Second, and as serious, it is a system that ensures that a large part of the party's 'business' falls on the deaf ears of those loudly exercising their power – and right – to do all the speaking. It is therefore a grossly inefficient way of conducting and organising a major political party.

I can best describe this system – a system of constructing meetings to sustain men as the central reference point – by sharing the experience of my own constituency party, Streatham.

For some years past Streatham General Committee has met in the rather cramped conditions of the local library. The meeting there was always structured like a Victorian Schoolroom. Rows of obedient delegates, with bodies and eyes turned away from each other, focussed on the 'top table' at which sat the Chair and Secretary. Most years both of these were male.

Debates were led by men who maintained a flow of loud and noisy contributions; leaping up from their seats and directing their speeches along pyramidal lines to the top table. The same lines were used by the top table to send orders or instructions back to the meeting; instructions frequently couched in parliamentary language. The chant: 'Order! Order!' was often used.

My ward party is structured along similar lines – despite the fact that the setting is a union canteen, with bunches of friendly tables, *around* which people sit. This, at first, almost brought down the 'Victorian School' structure, making

(CONTINUED OVER)

'STREET LIFE' SUPPLEMENT
BRIEFING
ON PERSONAL POLITICS

Women, Labour Party meetings and subversion

Continued from previous page

it doubly difficult for the 'top table' to enforce vertical one-way communication with the male stars of the show. So the Chairperson started to bring along a wooden hammer – which he bangs onto a wooden base, specially designed for the purpose. The sort, I think, that judges must use in courts. Bang! bang! goes the hammer whenever lateral lines of communication start developing.

The impact of these structures (seating arrangements, and accoutrements like hammers, are never wholly arbitrary) is to force and channel lines of communication towards the reference points, the 'centres' of the meeting; these invariably are men. The structure is almost always successful in sustaining them.

Dale Spender has provided ample evidence of how men construct systems, language and a large part of 'reality' . . . *in their own image*. It is no accident that all of us (even those like me who are noisy and stroppy!) use sexist language and behaviour to maintain this reality. We have it deeply ingrained in us that reality *is* male. We need only to look about us in the Labour Party to have that reality confirmed. Men sit at the 'top table'. Men are always in the Chair. Men are General Secretaries; girls are secretaries. Men do all the talking. Men interrupt women. Women give way – for men. Men are the editors. Men are the candidates, the delegates, the representatives. And men are almost always the subject of resolutions. Politics is male. That is the reality.

HOW TO CHANGE IT?

How to change it? We can start with language. Men have named the work, the structures, the posts, the procedures of the Labour Party – after their own images, interests and perceptions. We can start re-naming them. 'Chairmen' can become 'chairpersons'. 'Girls' can become 'women'. The generic term in party background papers etc can become 'women' and 'she', instead of 'man' and 'he'.

Perhaps *Briefing* could start a new column, a rolling dictionary. New words could be added as we start to re-name our experiences. 'Intuition' can become 'sound judgement'; 'emotional' can become 'authentic feelings' etc. We could have a wonderful time giving positive names to words that have male meanings intended to negate women.

From there we could move on to the highly subversive process of *Naming the Dominant*. To do this of course will mean *no longer remaining silent*. 'Chair, this man is dominating the meeting. He is inhibiting comradely discussion. I demand that an end be put to his very long speech!' Few of us will be able to muster up this sort of courage, *or be permitted this kind of intervention*. For those unable to Name the Dominant loudly and publicly, there is a *silent* way: the (non-purring type) tape recorder. All you need to do is to slip one into a meeting, lay before you a stop-watch, and time and tape male and female contributions. Tabulate the number of times *males interrupt females*. Ignore the riveting debate. Results must be scrupulously fair. *Circulate a written analysis at the next meeting*. Keep this up at every meeting until the Dominant – shamed by this Naming – shut up.

FROM EXPERIENCE

Finally we can start defining and naming new structures for the party. The re-structuring of meetings in particular, can have the most dramatic impact. I speak from experience.

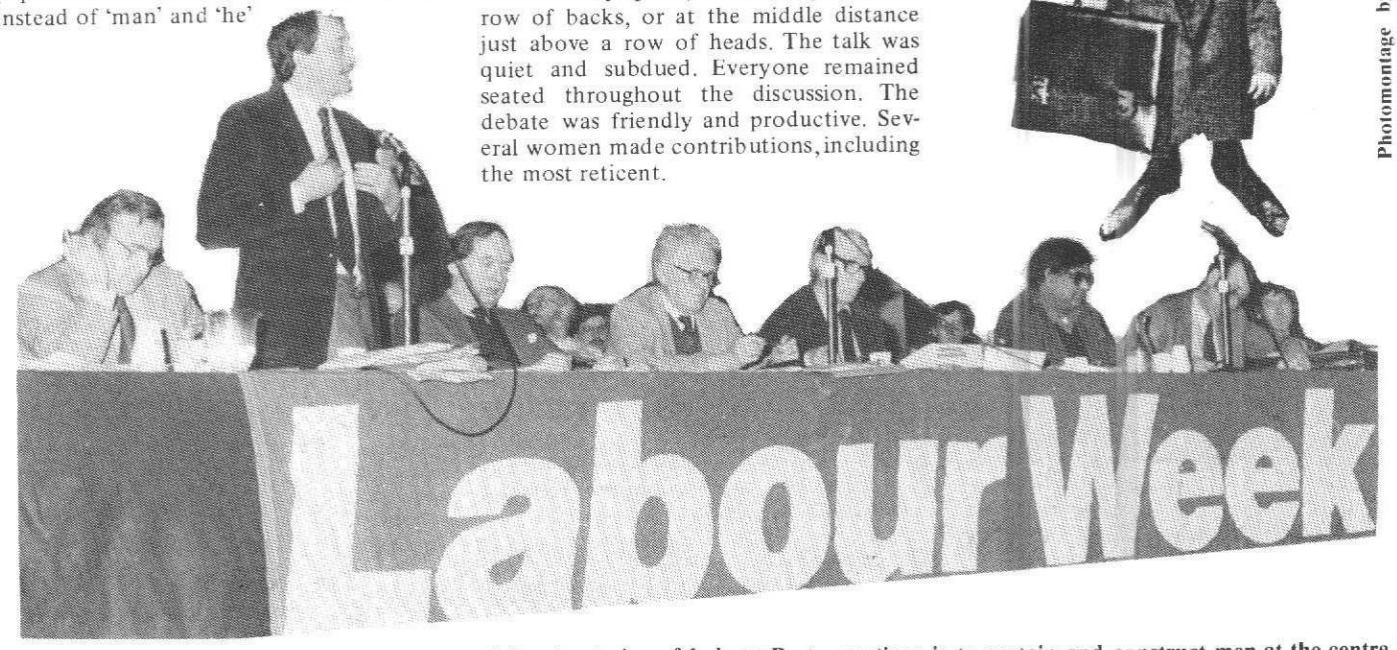
Two months ago Streatham elected a woman to the chair – Anna Tapsell. (We must start naming women too; and put an end to their invisibility within the party.) The first meeting over which she presided was electrifying in its impact. People talked *to* each other, not *at* a top table. They went further, they looked at each other as they spoke, instead of gazing at a row of backs, or at the middle distance just above a row of heads. The talk was quiet and subdued. Everyone remained seated throughout the discussion. The debate was friendly and productive. Several women made contributions, including the most reticent.

Why? Because we were all sitting *around* a circle of tables! Anna, by relinquishing the authority of the 'top table', had also dispensed with the pyramidal structure that so ably sustains men. A genuinely subversive move. Will the men fight back? Watch this space.

Ann Pettifor



Photomontage by Christen Themptanden from his book 'Överman' (Topdogs)



"The purpose of the structuring of Labour Party meetings is to sustain and construct men at the centre."

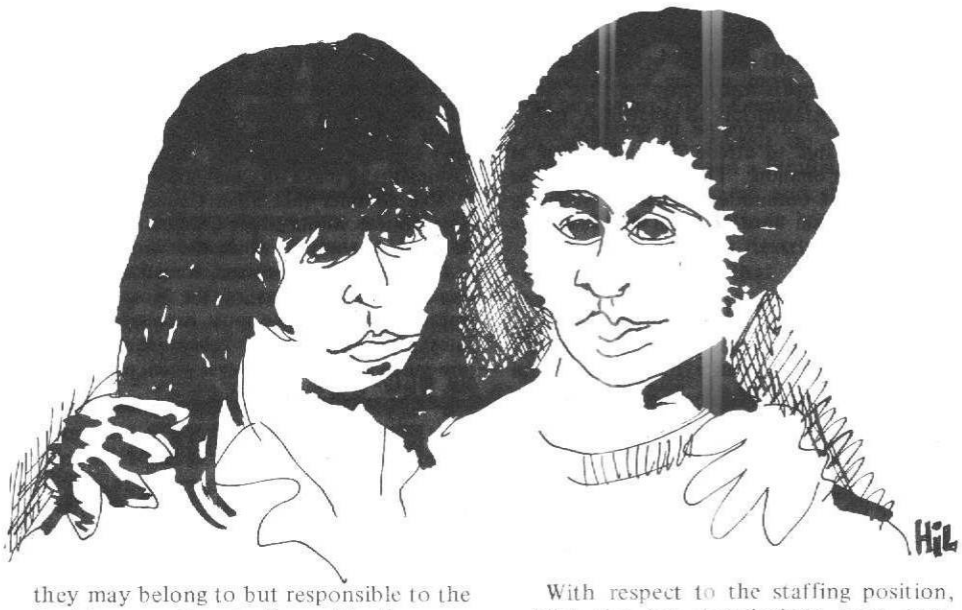
'STREET LIFE' SUPPLEMENT
BRIEFING
ON PERSONAL POLITICS

Brent Women's Committee

Organising from the grassroots

In May, 1982, Brent Council decided to set up a Women's Sub-Committee. However, it was felt by the Labour Women Councillors that the Committee should not be set up until women's groups in the Borough had been consulted, an approach which differed from that of most other Women's Committees where staff were appointed before women in the community had been consulted about what they actually wanted.

Meetings of Labour Women and existing women's groups in the Borough took place in order to discuss the proposition, giving women the opportunity of raising many matters they were concerned about that had been highlighted by existting Women's Committees, in particular how to deal with disagreements between Labour policy and decisions arrived at by women. The first Open Meeting of the Women's Sub-Committee was called by the Brent Women's Centre and the Asian Women's Resource Centre in January, 1983, when over 200 women attended. The discussion revolved around whether or not women in the Borough wanted a Women's Committee. With various reservations, it was agreed to set up a Women's Committee. Amongst the reservations expressed were problems of bureaucratising the Women's Movement. It was therefore resolved that the guidelines and structure of the Women's Committee must be decided in open forum. We devised our own Women's Mailing List, ensured that there would be creche provision at all Open Meetings (and Women's Sub-Committee Meetings), signers for the deaf, translators for Asian women, access for women with disabilities and, if requested, women would be able to use transport paid for by the Council. A working group of volunteers was established and called 'The Steering Group'.



WORKING OUT THE STRUCTURE

The second and third Open Meetings concentrated on working out the structure, guidelines, consultation process and job descriptions for the staff. Different working groups were set up between Open Meetings to draw together proposals for discussion. Briefly, the consultation process agreed was that all discussion would take place in Open Meetings that would be well publicised. Therefore, the Women's Sub-Committee itself would only be a rubber-stamping body. Nonetheless, in view of the Tories' hostility to the Committee and their aim of seeking to abolish it at the first opportunity they got, it was accepted that there was no need to have more than one Tory Woman Councillor on the Committee along with four Labour Women Councillors. Fifteen female co-optees were elected using positive discrimination and not by being representatives of different 'types' of women. It was agreed that these women would not be responsible to the groups they may belong to but responsible to the decisions made at Open Meetings, as would the staff. Furthermore, they would be expected to convey to Open Meetings decisions and difficulties that arose in the Women's Sub-Committee. In recognition of the valuable work that has been produced by the Women's Movement over the past decade, it was agreed not to set up specific discussion groups or working groups where they already existed. In essence, therefore, any specific working groups and any Women's Groups in the Borough would be able to put forward recommendations to the Open Meetings.

There have now been five Open Meetings and the topics considered have included employment within the Council and in the Borough, housing, women and health and future meetings will cover issues such as safe transport.

IMPORTANT DECISION

A very important decision was taken by the then ruling Labour Group in that it agreed that the Policy and Resources Committee to which the Women's Committee must report would not overturn or change any decisions made by the Women's Committee but would refer matters back for further discussion with reasons why the matter had been referred back. Under the Labour administration this has been successful, as there have been no conflicts between Labour policy and the Women's Committee itself.

With respect to the staffing position, whilst the job descriptions were completed, we did find ourselves in a position of having to re-discuss the grades so that the jobs were in line with other Advisers within the Council. Women who have been involved felt extremely strongly that they did not wish to see inflated wages within Local Government, particularly as this would more than likely assist in preventing working-class women in the Borough from applying for the job. Yet the dilemma was that these women workers should not receive any less status than other advisers. Brent NALGO also delayed the adverts going to press (its Executive is male-dominated) because of their wish to be consulted over job-sharing. This was despite the fact that many women active in NALGO and other women employees at the Council have been involved in the Open Meetings and able to contribute to the policy-making.

OUR EXISTENCE IS THREATENED

Unfortunately, despite having spent over a year building up strong links between many Women's Groups and individual women in the Borough of Brent, our whole existence as a Council Women's Committee is now threatened. In November a Labour Councillor, a black woman who had always supported the right of women to organise, joined the Tories. This enabled the Tories, with Liberal support, to take over Brent Council. A Tory woman was made Chairman of the Women's Committee and its meetings were suspended. The Liberals, after

Continued on next page

'STREET LIFE' SUPPLEMENT
BRIEFING
ON PERSONAL POLITICS

Organising from the grassroots

Continued from previous page

lobbying from local women, agreed to reconstitute the Women's Sub-Committee but with different composition, i.e. two Labour women and two Tory women, although the Chair could be elected by the meeting of the Women's Committee. However, their paper commitment to equal opportunity was exposed at the first meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee since the new administration of Tories with Liberals had taken effect. They decided that despite the fact the three jobs had been advertised they should be re-considered in the new budget for 1984/85. Furthermore, they prevented the Women's Sub-Committee from making a donation of £500 to Brent Women's CND Groups who have incurred a lot of expense in ensuring Brent women are able to attend days of action at Greenham Common. Therefore, whilst the Women's Sub-Committee exists it is being ignored and will have no teeth until staff are appointed.

BUILT FROM THE GRASS ROOTS

Our feeling is that the reason Brent Women's Sub-Committee has been extremely successful with an average of over 50 women attending every Open Meeting is due to the fact that a Women's Committee has been built from the grass roots whereas, to our knowledge, all other Women's Committees are run from the Town Halls/County Halls. This has been very important in ensuring that the principles involved in the way women organise within the Women's Movements have not in any way been tampered with. Furthermore, only the Co-optees need to contend with the bureaucratic language used in Council Committee papers. It was hoped that once staff were in post this would enable us to take the Women's Committee out into the community in a far more meaningful way so that we could reach women who may not wish to come to meetings, are unable to come to meetings for many reasons, but have very valuable comments to make on Council policies.

We consider that other Councils and other Committees within Brent Council could learn a lot from the way in which the Women's Committee organises because, to our knowledge, consultation meetings of the Women's Committee are by far the most successful and the most representative. This is because all decisions are taken at grass roots level which ensures that none of the Women Councillors become removed from women in the community due to the pressures that Council life can bring upon an individual.

THE FIGHT WILL GO ON

All the women who have worked in building up not just a Women's Committee but a large group of women involved in fighting for women in Brent, feel very emotionally committed to carrying on building the Group. We may be prevented from having power within the walls of Brent Town Hall – but somehow we must keep together, growing in strength, and campaign and agitate around women's issues outside the Council structure, especially now we have to fight pernicious anti-women Tory rule in Brent and paper-thin commitment to equal opportunities from the Liberals.

Angela Brittain, Co-ordinator,
Brent Women's Committee Steering Group
and
Angela Shariff (Councillor),
Ex-Liaison Chair,
Brent Women's Sub-Committee

MEETINGS, THE LEFT, AND GETTING THINGS DONE

Political activity and organisation is effective, interesting and involving providing it has a clearly defined purpose which is understood and accepted by participants.

Take meetings for example. They are boring when they have no purpose beyond routine holding of meetings to continue previous meetings. Already you must be feeling the boredom of dutiful routine attendances at some of your own meetings! Meetings are effective and interesting if they have a clear purpose beyond the holding of the meeting. To see this, one just needs to remember those exhilirating meetings – or maybe they were more accurately described as 'mergings of purpose' in an occupation, strike, demonstration or squatting campaign when everyone involved knew why they were there and where they – together – were going.

FACTIONALISM

Of course it may happen that individuals are involved in a particular activity or meeting for reasons not only, or not primarily for the purpose of the activity or meeting. If this is so then it will be factional and divided. You must remember that meeting where . . . !

PERSONAL MOTIVATION

The personal (possibly subconscious) reasons for involvement may also conflict with the purposes of meetings and activity



leading to an overall ill-definition of its purpose, boredom and factionalism. Reasons for going to a meeting, apart from the stated function, might include being 'important', being a little Lenin or Rosa Luxembourg, meeting someone, going to the pub afterwards, hearing one's own voice, chatting someone up, defending one's pride, getting people to come to another meeting, etc. etc. . . . These factors, particularly matters concerning the power and self-importance of individuals, of course affect the structure of meetings in terms of hierarchies, speaking 'down' to people and subsequent alienation of newly involved people.

I suggest that all these reasons for involvement, of oneself and others are worthy of attention, and that knowing them can only make one, and us, more effective.

ORGANISATIONAL FETISHISM

Failure to recognise the 'paramountcy of purpose' in political activity leads to routinism and organisational fetishism: a clinging to old forms of activity, a clinging to certain norms of organisations and structures when their usefulness and purpose is long since gone. To achieve anything we have to chuck out organisational dead wood and start to look at things in a new or potentially new way *all the time.*

Piers Corbyn

'STREET LIFE' SUPPLEMENT BRIEFING ON PERSONAL POLITICS

Going mad

My experience in a left group

In the last issue Streetlife discussed the prevalence of neurotic and psychotic disturbances, how they are related to the structure of society in that women and black people are most affected, and the class-based limitations of various forms of 'treatment'. I think we need to go deeper into the mechanics of 'breakdown'. Since in most cases a 'breakdown' is some sort of psychotic episode – a crack in the structure of reality – this is the term I will use. One of my own experiences was associated with a political organisation, and I think the limitations in our notions of political organisation that it uncovers is that our view of the world tends to be far too literal. The women's movement has gone some way to identify forms of oppression which go beyond external and material realities, but although this has changed some of our ideas it has not affected yet the forms of organisation we use outside the women's movement itself.

Going mad means that the structure of reality falls apart. This structure depends on relationships with the people closest to you. When the people you trust cannot be trusted, and when you cannot afford to admit that or simply cannot see it, the structure of your world is broken at its core. Usually this starts in the family. Freud and Laing have documented the underlying and unspoken hostility which is part of the truth of family relationships. If a child is sensitive to a mother's hostility, a father's jealousy, and is not yet able to see it for what it is, this hostility must be internalised; the child accepts the blame and has to assume that the whole world is hostile. She connives at her own victimisation and goes mad.

CONSPIRACY AND THE PARANOIAC

To put it another way: I do not know of a single case of paranoia in which there has *not* been a conspiracy around the paranoiac. I met a woman in hospital whose paranoia had grown to the point where she experienced hallucinations. This woman lived on her own in a flat in a house so badly soundproofed that conversations could be heard on the floor above or below. She was constantly harassed by a man living above her who always wanted to know what she was doing and criticised her way of life. In addition, she had a couple of quite destructive friends. In the end she concluded that there was a conspiracy against her (there was) but mistook the nature of this conspiracy and took it to be universal. Interestingly enough, there was in this same hospital almost an epidemic of this kind of paranoia on a certain housing estate, where conditions were so bad – lack of privacy, vandalism, street gangs – that it is perfectly understandable the people living there could start imagining hostile conspiracies.

MY EXPERIENCE IN A LEFT GROUP

Other people drive you out of your mind, usually the people closest to you, people you trust. Of course you connive at being the scapegoat, because you are (probably) compelled to repeat an early family experience in which you had no choice; it is well known, for example, how a rejected child actually seeks out rejection in adult life. Until you are aware of it, you tend to follow the familiar pattern. I think I can identify the particular (of course quite unconscious) victimisation which I experienced in one left group as a familiar form of sexism. The men in the organisation consistently saw me in terms of casual sexual encounters, and not good for 'serious' relationships. In other words, I was the whore and not the wife. From one or two such encounters the idea became general, and there was a progressively worse cheapening of me. Of course I connived – it was a familiar pattern which I had begun to establish at university in Ireland. The difference was that Irishmen have nothing on the English when it comes to sheer piggery, and on the whole they insisted on treating me like a human being. In England the comrades I trusted had withdrawn their support for my view of myself as worthwhile, and because I could not identify what they were doing, I connived – I was going mad.

HOSTILITY FROM WOMEN

I haven't yet cracked what happened with the women in the organisation and in a woman's group I was in at the time. There was most definitely hostility, and I think it was a reaction to the fact that I was setting myself up for this hostility as spillover from what was happening with the men. I did not discuss this with them because I had not seen what was happening. They didn't see it, partly because they didn't know everything that happened, partly because they didn't pick up the subtle communication between the men. A process of victimisation progressed in which I set myself up as victim. It seemed to have been a familiar role.

This may be harsh and shocking, but the realities of relations between people often are. The most destructive aspect of those realities is that they cannot be admitted. There is a real hostility which no-one will recognise, and there is no way out of the corner except by abandoning reality completely. This is not the whole truth about the relations between me and my comrades, any more than maternal hostility is the whole truth about the mother-child relationship. Going mad is nearly always understandable, but certainly not rational; this is where Laing makes his mistake, by failing to realise the levels of irrationality which control behaviour and which were identified by Marx and Freud ('false consciousness', 'compulsion'). It is always a two-way process in which you allow other people to drive you mad; there is no question of apportioning blame, but of using our theoretical knowledge of the irrational to understand the mechanics of a fairly common experience.

Celia Holt

Write for the Streetlife Supplement!

Labour Briefing is the only specifically Labour Party publication which provides space every month for the discussion of personal politics. The women's movement has taught us that the struggle for socialism and for women's liberation affects *every* aspect of our lives, right down to our individual personal and sexual relationships. The aim of the Streetlife Supplement is to use this lesson to break down the separation between the women's movement and the labour movement by trying to discuss political issues through our own personal experiences. Each month we try to publish contributions around a particular theme, and then follow these up in meetings held on the 3rd Thursday of every month. If you would like to contribute to the Supplement or would like further information, contact Jane Stockton, 110 Agar Grove, London NW1.

'STREET LIFE' SUPPLEMENT
BRIEFING
ON PERSONAL POLITICS



Photomontages by Christen Themptanden from his book 'Övermän' (Topdogs)

We are no man's wages

Capitalism demands the life and soul of men. Men are paid for selling their soul to the system with women. Men's lives in practice become fragmented (alienated). The bulk of their energies, emotions and time is spent on their work, careers and public lives (politics, for example). Having spent all their time and energies in their public lives, men have to express their emotions through sex which is a good time-saving method of having a relationship with someone. Unfortunately for capitalism and production even men are human and cannot ignore all the multitude of time consuming facets of their emotional lives, so these are handed over to the care of women. Women are brought up to serve the emotional needs of men (and many have jobs on top of that!). So while men are brought up to believe that their self esteem and emotional stability depend on the work they do and the sex they can get hold of, women are brought up to believe that their self esteem and emotional stability depend on the man they can 'capture' to serve for the rest of their lives.

SEX TYPING STARTS EARLY

Sex typing starts at a very early age. For example, despite our attempts at countering the prevailing ethos, our daughter at the age of four is already demanding dolls, dresses etc., plays in the home corner at school and talks about getting married(!), while the climbing frames and the go-karts at her school are always occupied by the boys. As a secondary school teacher if I ever left a mixed sex group to talk freely amongst themselves, the girls would always talk together about some aspect of human relationships; relationships with each other, with boys, with their parents and so on. The boys almost *never* talked about human relationships but about public usually competitive subjects, football, wars, fights etc. Boys train themselves to censor out their emotional lives – that's 'women's talk'. The result, in a traditional relationship, is that men hand to women the emotional side of their lives, which they cannot cope with and are not trained to cope with. In doing so, men in fact hand to women an awesome power. Over men always hangs the fear of losing the emotional support of their women when it is needed. To cope with this problem men have to dominate women in other ways; with violence (or rape), intellectually, or just by talking longer and louder than women in public situations. The state backs up men through the media and the courts. In fact if you look at couples that adhere to a more traditional set of values, e.g. our parents' generation, in the home the woman is often a stronger personality however the couple behave in public. (Wendy Holloway in 'Sex and Love' page 139 quotes our mothers as saying 'All men are boys. They need mothering.')

The women's movement has set out to attack those ways that men have dominated women; by fighting violence against women, by fighting discrimination against women in public life (in jobs, politics etc) and by regaining women's history and thus our intellectual worth. It has also set out to attack the male attitude that women equal sex, the attitude that sex is a commodity and of sex as an end in itself rather than as part of a fuller emotional relationship. In these ways the women's movement is attacking the very pillars of capitalism. It is a revolutionary force, and is integral to socialism.

Cath Tate, Streatham CLP

NEXT ISSUE

The theme of the next issue of the Streetlife Supplement is the Press and the Media. Briefing readers will be only too familiar with the anti-Left bias of the media, both in the way they deal with issues and in their treatment of individuals on the Left. Indeed, many Briefing contributors have had personal experience of harassment by the press! How have they dealt with such harassment? How much influence does the press have on our personal values and behaviour? How should we deal with and use the media in our political and personal lives?

Articles and letters should be sent to Jane Stockton, 110 Agar Grove, NW1 by *Saturday 10th March.*

STREETLIFE MEETING

The next Streetlife meeting, to discuss topics covered recently in the Supplement and themes for future issues, is on *Thursday 22nd March* at 8pm at County Hall, London SE17. All Briefing supporters are welcome to attend.

Published by London Labour Briefing, 23 Leghorn Road, London NW10.

Printed by Wernham Printers Ltd [TU], Forster Road, London N17.
Typeset by Bread 'n Roses [TU], 30 Camden Road, NW1, and by Folrose Ltd [TU], 98 Gifford Street, London N1 and by Lithoprint, 329 Upper Street, London N1.

LABOUR
BRIEFING
NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT
No. 5 March 1984

SAVE OUR CITIES!

by DAVID BLUNKETT

The debate on the defence of local government is clearly going to be the BIG issue for Labour in 1984. Already we have seen a head-on clash between Neil Kinnock and Ken Livingstone at the Labour Party local government conference in Nottingham at the beginning of this month. Neil Kinnock argued that Labour Councillors should stay in office to minimise the effects of job losses and cuts in services while Ken Livingstone took a different view urging Labour councillors to break these outrageous laws by refusing to discuss with trade unionists about how to make workers redundant.

Below we print a shortened interview with David Blunkett on his views on the way to save our cities. The full version appears in Manchester Labour Briefing.

Labour Briefing: How are the campaigns in defense of the Metropolitan Councils against Rate-Capping and in defence of local government services being conducted?

DB: The proposal to abolish the Metropolitan Councils has unified people. Some say services would still be under the democratic control of the cities and boroughs, but the Tories have no intention of letting that happen. That's a major threat to those who work in services and those who receive them. It is a straight forward issue, that can be explained simply. The resources that the authorities have been able to pool has already been very impressive.

It is a different matter to explain the Rates Bill. If you ask people "are you in favour of something that stops rate increases?" the chances are they'll say they are. We have to explain that the Bill is not about Rates but levels of expenditure and quality of services and the issues of the introduction of the penalty system and cuts in grants. It's about whether democracy is allowed to work or if the Tories have decided to do away with it when it's not in their favour.

LB: What support have you got in Sheffield?

DB: It's impossible to say how far people will go. Everybody is very happy to go with you until you actually get to the barricade, then people are a bit wary whether you are going over it first. We don't see Sheffield as the key. We see that as the unity of purpose between local authorities, trade unions, tenants groups and population in those authorities. We don't pretend that we could survive the aftermath of the Rates Bill unless we work with authorities of a similar mind to ourselves.



Labour Party Photo Library

LB: What about Liverpool?

DB: The difficulty with the Liverpool situation is that it is unique. Not simply in its financial position, taking over a Liberal budget

Continued next page

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

DAVID BLUNKETT

(CONTINUED)

with a Labour programme, having no reserves or back up funds to survive the coming year, but because Liverpool is a living tribute to private enterprise and Tory policy in the destruction of the economy and industry. The Liverpool Party and Labour Group are forced to make choices in unthinkable areas. How we can help Liverpool now, when most of the left wing Councils in Britain are saying we must work together, that if we are going to go then we ought to go together, bearing in mind the disaster of Clay Cross, is a difficult one. It's an ongoing debate between some of us and the Liverpool Councillors.

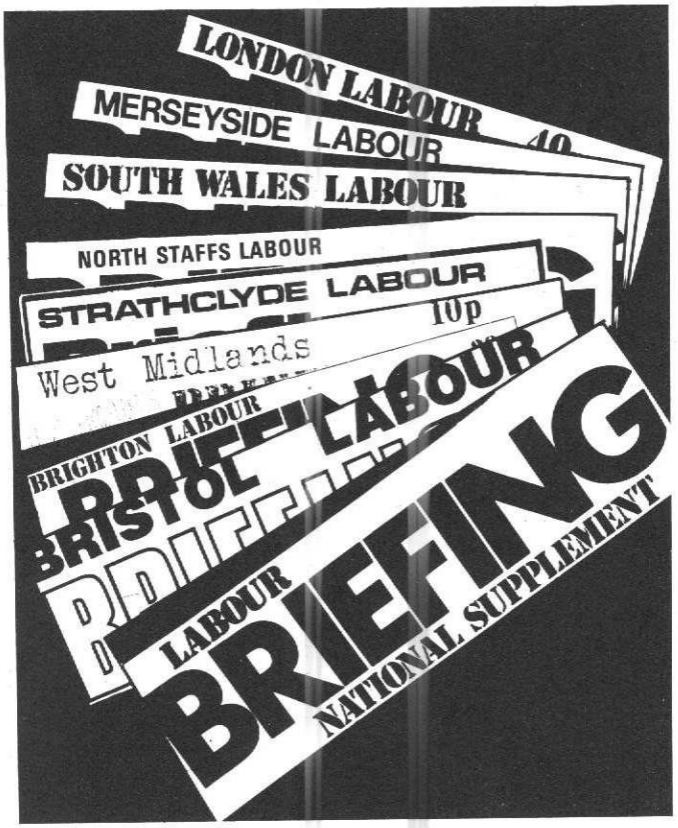
Obviously we will give moral support. But there's no question that between now and this April, that other Councils will be able to go on the same line as Liverpool.

The lesson of the past was there wasn't good communication, wasn't exchange of information, wasn't a coming together of Labour Authorities and Trade Unions, so any initiative taken by an individual Authority was in isolation. Lothian and Lambeth are examples of that. In the past there have been classic examples like Clay Cross.

LB: As a new member of the NEC, how do you think we need to rebuild the Party after the General Election?

DB: We need to establish what we mean by a mass movement. We need massive recruitment. We have appalling membership figures and are badly off because of it. We need to establish that set of values, that cause, which will unify people, identify them with an organisation that is going somewhere.

We have to change the climate of opinion back to collective community politics, to commit people to democratic socialism, that will not simply win an election but start to win people so that we can carry out our policies.



If your local BRIEFING is not among the above, please send a copy of the front page of your next issue to the Supplement Editor for inclusion next month.

BRIEFING IN SOUTH WALES

The first edition of South Wales Briefing was published last month, four pages sold with the National Supplement. It has generated a lot of interest and sales are going well enough to enable us to produce eight pages this month. There are active Briefing groups in Cardiff, Newport and Caerphilly and one being set up in Swansea.

All out for Chesterfield

THE CHESTERFIELD by-election is an important event for the labour movement.

It could put Tony Benn back into Parliament, as the most popular tribune of the Left.

Thanks to the media, victory is by no means certain. The Left needs to mobilise.

The Chesterfield Labour Party campaign headquarters is at Unity House, 113 Saltergate, Chesterfield (0246 208387). The campaign unit phone number is 0246 78596, and the press officer, 0246 78607.



Help from Labour activists from outside Chesterfield is welcome.

WORKPLACE BRANCHES — THE NEW BEGINNING

On January 28th, thirty comrades from all over the country held a seminar at Camden Town Hall to share their experiences of Workplace Branches (WPBs).

Although it's early days WPBs offer an exciting opportunity to revitalise the party both in the recruitment of members and support for Labour's ideas. So far, the creation of WPBs has relied on local initiatives from existing activists. This presents problems. First, because in isolation, setting up WPBs takes time by trial and error. Second, because the party machinery is, itself, lacking in the experience or knowledge to help.

The seminar was called to pool existing knowledge and use this to advise the NEC on how to make WPBs more effective. The conclusions were interesting. It was felt that the existing constitution presented no real difficulties to the organisation and business of a branch. However, it is necessary for the NEC to re-evaluate the interpretation of what a workplace is. Currently it is too rigid, thus preventing WPBs being established in some instances.

It will be useful to establish a National Steering Committee to offer advice and support with a Starters Pack and a National Register to be freely available to all WPBs.

It is clear that the NEC needs to campaign at Regional level to establish as many WPBs as possible. Indeed they have instructed Regional Offices to do just that and in London every CLP has received a letter encouraging members to establish new branches. There will also be a consultation meeting of existing WPBs in the near future.

Political education, recruitment, public/workplace meetings and workplace newsletters are the bread and butter of existing branches. In addition many WPBs have realised their importance in generating discussion on the socialisation of their company or industry (public or private). These ideas make it imperative that a regular, national newsletter be produced for the network of branches. Whatever else we do, we must also campaign for positive support within the trade unions to set up branches — particularly financially.

The signs are that WPBs are the key to reconnecting the grass-roots to the ideas of Labour. The real question is whether the NECs welcome initiative is sustained or will it peter out after raising false hopes? We will be reconvening our own debate in Nottingham on 24 March, where the Institute for Workers Control is holding its latest in a series of consultations with constituency parties. Meanwhile we are continuing to maintain our own register of WPBs and are busy designing a basic starters pack.

If you want to set up a WPB, contact Geoff Dixon, 1 Pelham Court, 44 Hatherley Road, Sidcup, Kent. Telephone:- 01 302 7983.

THE GUILTY SILENCE

By Keith Lichman, Secretary, Labour Against the Witch Hunt.

Kinnock's N.E.C. has kept a moderately low profile on the witch hunt since his October victory. Only Tariq Ali suffered directly at our leader's hand. Predictably, the ripples in the Party were short-lived and short ranged. After all, Tariq is black as well as a Marxist.

Nevertheless, the wheels have been grinding, and they have been grinding exceeding small. All over the country, ordinary individual Labour Party members are coming under suspicion because of the papers they read or the people they know. In a backwater of the Birmingham Yardley constituency, 5 people have been branded as 'Trots' and refused admission or transfer to the Acocks Green Branch. The reason appears to have been that the branch membership secretary heard, from a source which was never revealed, that 30 Trots were going to move into the area and take over the Yardley Party! The good burghers of Yardley are no doubt sleeping more peacefully for the exclusion of these desperados.

The prize for lunacy probably goes to Joan Snow, secretary of the Wembley Central Branch of Brent South Constituency. Her official branch AGM notice contained such stirring phrases as "Stop the rot! Stop the Trot!" "Better broad left witches and wizards than hard left vile thugs and demons" and "Come on real socialists join your local Labour Party in the struggle to defeat the infiltrators, think of them as infill-traitors and you get the right idea!" (sic). The "broad left" that Mrs Snow writes of is the grouping Reg Freeson recently tried to start. Freeson was the NEC's "democratic" choice of Labour candidate for Brent East CLP. Brent East's choice was Ken Livingstone.

A larger scale event altogether was the expulsion of eight *Militant* readers from Blackburn. Ominously, it looks as if the NEC will consider whether to endorse these expulsions at its February meeting. It should not escape notice that this will in effect be the eve of the Chesterfield by-election. The betrayal of Bermondsey followed a similar pattern. Let us hope this NEC will give Tony Benn the same chance its predecessor gave to Ossie O'Brien at Darlington when it deferred discussing expulsions the day before the by-election.

WYTHENSHAWE

The "crowning glory" in the NEC's achievements since last October is the defeat of the Wythenshawe Labour Party. The Wythenshawe story is complex and would take pages of close print to do it justice. In short, however, it turns on who will control the Manchester City Council. Before the party's suspension, the left in Wythenshawe looked like tipping the balance on the Council. The NEC, using the Party's paid Agent, stepped in and suspended the CLP on a set of flimsy and specious charges concerning the 1983 AGM, which the left had won. At Party Conference last October, Wythenshawe gained massive support for its cause, but lost the vote on a show of hands.

Wythenshawe was promised a reconvened AGM by the NEC. The first attempt to hold it had to be abandoned by National Agent, David Hughes. Twenty five right wing Trade Union delegates had been produced, at least one of whom, on his own admission, was an actual Conservative voter and not a Labour Party member at all.

Discussions of a not particularly open and democratic nature are beginning about the 1984 left slate for the NEC. Clearly people like Ms. Short should have no place on it. But people like Meacher and Sawyer need to deliver a genuine and public opposition to the witch hunt if they are to merit future support.

In the present climate, while the



L.P. Photo Library.

René Short

backwoods loonies are hunting, silence is as much a sign of approval as open encouragement. If the Party leadership is genuinely serious about winning the next election, Party unity has to be real and more than skin deep. The foundations for a Labour victory could be soundly laid at the next NEC meeting by Kinnock rejecting the Blackburn expulsions and putting a full stop to the other local skirmishes. That alternative for the Party is many more years in the wilderness while the Tories complete the job of dismantling the welfare state and abolishing meaningful trade unionism.

Hughe's second attempt to beat the left in Wythenshawe was more successful. On January 15th a "reconvened" AGM was held. Some of the left wing wards in the CLP received no notice of the meeting and only heard of it on the grape vine. Believing it to be a reconvened 1983 AGM, only the 1983 left delegates turned up. Hughes produced 20 new right wing delegates and overruled objections to foul play. The right swept the board. Apparently a 1984 AGM will be held in February. Left wing observers on the NEC are sceptical of Hughe's ability to conduct the meeting impartially. His "flexible" interpretation of the rule book on January 15th once again raises the question of how to extract a fair decision from the NEC.

INCREASED STRANGLEHOLD

On broader questions of Labour Party democracy, Kinnock's NEC has quietly increased its stranglehold. A sub-committee of the Organisation Committee has been set up to hear disciplinary appeals for Party members. This "Appeals" Committee is composed exclusively of trade union members deeply implicated in the witch hunt, namely Ken Cure, Neville Hough, Sam McCluskie, Sid Tierney and Charlie Turnock. It will report to the Organisation Commitee every three months. Since most disciplinary appeals arise from the constituency section of the Party, and at present involve mainly left wing victims of the witch hunt, the prospects of a fair hearing are dismal. The NEC's practice during the last eighteen months of the witch hunt has been to ban itself (and therefore the NEC's left-wing minority) from questioning witch hunt victims on appeal. With the new Appeals Commitee operating, the left of the NEC will not even be permitted to listen to appeals. While the attacks on the Party's membership proceed behind closed doors, all our NEC comrades will hear will be silence.

COLLECTIVE SILENCE

Silence, indeed, is spreading like a disease through the Labour Party. Following Kinnock's accession to the Leadership, the "win an election at any price" tide has been rising. 'Its corollary appears to be collective silence and a loyal desire not to rock the boat, while the dark deeds continue in the bilge. Even from the view point of political expedience, this attitude is disastrous. While the witch hunt continues, while the leaders of the party subscribe to or acquiesce in the notion that the Party cannot win with a clear socialist programme, public confidence in Labour will continue to decline.

The role of a number of the NEC members on last year's left slate has been extremely disappointing in this respect. Some, like Michael Meacher and Tom Sawyer have been infected by silence and abstentionism. Others like Renee Short have actually voted for expulsions.

BEYOND MURRAY'S TREACHERY

When the Air Traffic Controllers in the USA were in dispute with Reagan's Government – and this resulted in the dismissal of the controllers, the bankruptcy of their union and the imprisonment of their Trade Union leaders – there were many of us in this country who felt that whilst Thatcher might try to emulate her trans-Atlantic partner she would never get away with it.

Unlike America. we have a fine tradition of sympathy action and the industrial giants of the TUC would never let an affiliated union be humiliated.

Any doubts regarding the TUC opposition to the Tebbit legislation were removed by the raising of the £1m fighting fund and the procession of Trade Union leaders offering to be the first to go to gaol. Remember the rhetoric. . . ' there will not be enough room in the prisons to gaol us all.'

ANTI-TEBBIT PACKS

Just in case any of us cynics still had not got the message there was then the leaflet campaign, the day of action, the educational courses and of course the wonderful anti-Tebbit packs.

In case the Government failed to be impressed by all of this there was the TUC General Council:

'Where the General Council receives a request to assist a Union faced by or experiencing legal action by an employer, and are satisfied that assistance from the movement is justified, they are empowered. . . to co-ordinate action by other affiliated unions in support of the union in difficulties, including, if necessary calling for industrial action against the employer concerned or more widely.'

The Tories did not stand a chance. The first sign of a union in trouble and not only would they have all those anti-Tebbit packs to contend with but the threat of widespread industrial action.

Unfortunately the Tebbit packs did not include wing mirrors so that unions who actually believed the rhetoric could watch what Bro Len Murray was doing to their backs. And when the NGA confronted the anti-union legislation at Warrington they discovered that Len Murray had discerned a wind of change in the TUC relationship with the Tories (or indeed any one else who might be able to offer him sandwiches at No 10).

Unfortunately Bro Murray failed to tell anyone about this vision of his until after the near bankruptcy of one of the major unions, the arrest of over 140 trade union pickets at Warrington and the indiscriminate police baton charges and hospitalisation of others outside Shahs factory.

'CRAVEN BETRAYAL'

At the meeting of the NW TUC Regional Council on Saturday 29th of January a resolution was carried calling for the resignation of Len Murray following his 'craven betrayal of the NGA' and a further resolution was also carried calling for a recall conference of the TUC to re-affirm the Wembley decisions.



John Smith (IFL)

Warrington - Mass picket of Stockport Messenger printers.

These resolutions together with others homing in on Congress House from all over the country show that there is still fight left in the movement as do the 21 votes on the General Council that were in favour of supporting the NGA. But we should not let ourselves be diverted into an internal squabble to get a recalled conference or the resignation of Bro Murray at the expense of examining ways to confront the legislation on the picket line.

TRADES COUNCIL

Within my own Trades Council we have decided that if a union finds itself in conflict with the Tebbit legislation we will immediately offer to organise the picketing and so offer the Trade Council, not the union, as the target for legal action.

There are two logical reasons for adopting this policy. Firstly it is a truism that the NGA was fighting on behalf of the whole movement but unfortunately bore the cost alone. The struggle against the government is a multi-union struggle so the natural promoter of that struggle at a local level is the trades council.

Secondly the Trades Council have no money. From the outset the Thatcher government have framed their legislation to make it impossible for a Trade Unionist to be jailed. . . remember Pentonville. Court actions against Trades Councils and/or their officers will not generate the huge fines meted out against the NGA which no one in the movement could expect them to continue paying. If the Trades Council cannot pay the fine and the officers cannot pay the fine what will the Government do?

In such a situation the government can either let the law be disobeyed and therefore fall into disrepute or can impose gaol sentences.

The question then arises as to what they would do if every union branch, every shop stewards committee, every labour party branch indeed every individual activist is publicly calling for a continuation of the picket in question even if the trade union involvement has 'officially' called it off.

If mass disobedience of the picketing laws takes place will they in fact be prepared to jail us all? If they do will the movement respond? Most activists have already judged Murray. But if we use his actions as the excuse to do nothing ourselves then we are as guilty as he is.

The last line of defence of the Trades Union movement was never Len Murray or the TUC. It was always, is and always will be the rank and file. The main question is not what Murray will do next or what Thatcher will do next but what we are prepared to do next.

Paul Davies Secretary
Merseyside County Association of Trades Councils

Exciting times at Greenham Common

Since the installation of the Cruise missiles at Greenham the security forces have begun to persecute the protestors with a vengeance. Labour MPs Kevin Barron, Roland Boyes and Bob Clay visited the Airbase recently and reported that the barbed wire on the perimeter fence now had razor tape added to it. 'Put it at ground level, then when they come into the camp they will chop their legs off'. Valerie Coultas talked to one of 'those Greenham Women', Hilary, who's been at the camp for 8 months.



"The sentences have been getting heavier. We had a battle over the same magistrates trying us and they got this new stipendiary magistrate. He won't accept Greenham as an address and forces women to pay on the spot. Now women are being sent down for 30 days, rather than five as it was before. There's been a lot of threats of evictions and they have threatened to widen the road. The latter hasn't happened because we've made it clear that it would be a political move. They try as much as possible to keep us out of Crown Court to avoid us getting publicity. They wrote off £¼ million damage to the spy plane. The week before last we did apparently £2,000 damage through spray painting and they dropped the charges. Two women are going to Crown Court for cutting the fence last July. But the judge is going to hear all their evidence first to try and stop them using politics to defend themselves. They're getting much heavier with women in the courts. Women have been beaten up and thrown down the steps in front of the magistrate.

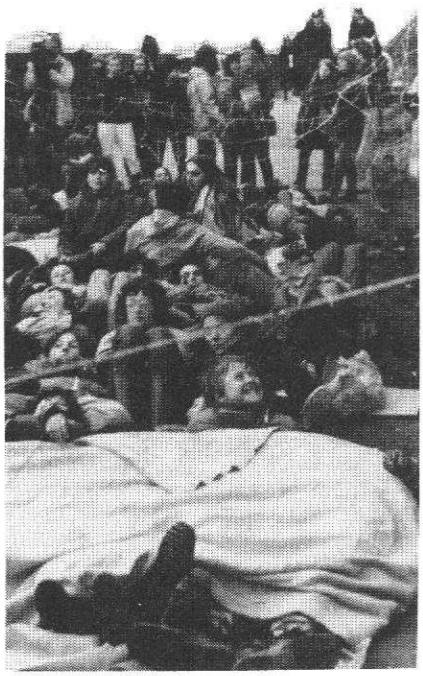
BAD PRESS BACKFIRED

Some of the bad press we've received in the gutter press has backfired. People send us money just because they're angry at the hatchet job articles. It's clear that they're trying to create divisions between women — the 'lesbian feminists' at the camp and the women who come at the weekend. Threats of shooting women have also backfired because it makes our case against the aggression of the American imperialists so much clearer to people. They're trying to stop the police getting to know the campers. Before an action, they rile up the new police they bring in. If the police get to know you they get less aggressive. They tell the police not to tell the soldiers about their overtime. Already there are many arguments over whose fault it is when women get into the base. There's the American airforce, the paratroopers, the MOD police, the American Military Police and the ordinary police all squabbling with one another. They're getting rougher with women when they're arrested. Women are beaten up in the cells and hot water has been thrown over them.

VIGILANTE GROUPS

Vigilante groups come at night. Adverts are put in the pubs in Newbury and these reactionary middle-aged old men come and harass us. The worse thing they've done is burn down the benders. They're made of plastic. If a woman was inside she'd be killed. They throw fire crackers, maggots and shit into the benders. One night there were shots. In Newbury we're unpopular because we're bringing down the price of their houses. Our letters are ripped open, or more subtly opened at the Post Office. The latest move is to try and deport women. I'd like to see CND supporting women-only action and encouraging women to take action. We're opposed to *all* weapons. You have to oppose all forms of militarism. The most important thing we're doing at Greenham is taking away patriarchal structures. Our actions have been more exciting and dynamic than traditional ones. I think the strength of the women's peace movement is that we allow women space, to allow different women to work together. In CND I found myself shouting about sexism all the time, rather than being able to shout about peace."

Greenham Women Against Cruise plan to take action around the Emergency Service routes on Feb 29. Ring 01-251-8046. Regional Women's actions are planned for May 24th, International Women's Day for Disarmament. Ring 01-226-6285. If you want to send donations for fines make cheques payable to 'Greenham Women (fines)' and send to 79, Petherton Road, London N5.



LABOUR WOMEN AND FEMINISM

Labour National Briefing is intending to hold a day school on Labour Women and Feminism on **15th September** around the following *suggested* agenda:

Introduction **Speakers – Jo Richardson and a woman from Briefing.**

Session 1 **Theme – How should the Labour Party Fight for women's liberation?**
Format – Workshops
Topics – NAC and Reproductive Rights, Greenham Common and the women's peace movement, sexual harassment and trade unions, women and racism, pornography and violence against women, heterosexism and sexuality, women's committees, international sisterhood.

Session 2 **Theme – Making the Labour Party accessible to women.**
Format – Introductory plenary followed by block workshops
Topics – History of women's participation in the L.P., Women's Action Committee and positive action, Women's TUC, black women and the Labour Party, women with disabilities.

Session 3 **Debate between Briefing women and LCC women on 'What strategy for Labour women?'**

All women are welcome to attend the planning meetings, the next one of which will be on *Sunday 26th February at 2pm at A Woman's Place, Hungerford House, Victoria Embankment, London WC2.*

For further information contact Jane Stockton, 110 Agar Grove, London NW1.

Council women's committees prepare for March 26th-30th

Council Women's Committees in London have got together to initiate national co-ordination of women's input into all the campaigns against rate capping and abolition. March 26th-30th is 'Defend Democracy Week' organised by the Local Government Campaign Unit with the backing of the TUC. The 29th is the day of the national demonstration in London and will be focussing mainly on the rate capping proposals.

The Women's Committees have started to have an input into these events to make sure women's needs and interests are met. Ideas so far have been: women marching with their 'work' eg meals on wheels trollies, mops etc; women's stalls; leaflets; theatre groups; speakers at the Rally; women's sections in the march; women's armbands/sashes and local women's events.

CAMDEN

If Camden is anything to go by, it is obvious that women's lives will be dramatically affected. Locally women are 53% of the population and are both providers and consumers of Council services. In social services 88% of manual workers are women and many of them black — 96% of home helps are women; 92% of care assistants and meals on wheels drivers. With 25% of the women in Camden being over 60, we are also the main users of the services — 73% of the users of meals on wheels services and Elderly People's Homes and 80% of users of home helps. As single parents (92% of whom are women) we rely on child care services to go out to work (53% of single parents work full time). Yet with the effects of rate capping all these fundamental jobs and services will be threatened.

A steering group has been set up from the Women's Committees, the Local Government Campaign Unit and the Association of London Authorities Campaign Unit, to feed in women's ideas for 'Defend Democracy Week' and to plan for starting national co-ordination. We want to get women from all over the country and plan our events leading up to April '85. If these bills go through we need to work out *now* how we'll refuse to implement them next year.

Anyone interested in this Women's Campaign contact Judy Watson 278 4444 x2738. Details of March 29th from Judy and/or Diana Minns LGCU 387 9893

Kate Allen
Judy Watson
Camden Council Women's Cttee & Unit

Women's Conference: We want power!

Women's Conference has a habit of being subsumed by events. Last year it was the General Election — oh dear, Women's Conference cancelled, never to re-emerge. This year — well nearly. It's the European elections. Women's Conference moved forward (to clash with NUPE Conference) — and it looks as if it will become, as Doug Hoyle so succinctly put it at the National Labour Women's Committee Meeting, "the jumping off point for our Euro-election camapaign". And we women thought it was a conference for women to get together to discuss policy for women in the Party. Well, well. Women's Conference, like so many women's events and issues, just doesn't rate the importance it should in the Party.

That being said, however, we are trying to change it. And it is vitally important that this year's conference becomes the "jumping off point" for far more than just the euro-election campaign. There are major issues at stake for women to be dealt with.

Firstly, there's the whole question of organisational changes for women. Yes, I know they're boring, but without them we'll stay unimportant and unlistened to in the Party. So all the 40 odd resolutions neatly buried last year by the cancellation of the Women's Conference must rear their ugly heads again (and again and again!). And a few new issues need to be raised as well.



Rules Conference

The most important question is that of a rules conference for the Women's Organisation. Isn t it interesting how the Party works? We spend all our energy trying to get the Party to implement resolutions **carried** at Party Conference — often without success. Now we find that it has been agreed to implement part of a Women's Action Committee resolution **defeated** at last year's Annual Conference. Joyce Gould has apparently been given the go ahead to draw up a rule book for the Women's Organisation. However, the crucial part of the WAC resolution calling for consultation and a rules conference is **not** being implemented — I wonder why? Women's Conference must discuss this issue and several resolutions on this have been submitted.

Another matter which needs attention is the cavalier way in which policy-making in the Party has been stopped; particularly in relation to women. It cannot be said that our women's policy is in any way adequate and yet the Party has stopped the Women's Rights Study Group from meeting and appears to have no intention of starting it up again. If policy is to advance for women in the Party this vital link must be reactivated as soon as possible and Women's Conference and women's organisations must exert pressure to this effect.

Sudden upsurge in interest

It is always nice to know one is having an effect, and it would appear from the sudden upsurge in interest at Head Office in women's organisational matters that WAC has made its mark. However, a number of proposals are being bandied about — maybe eliminating Women's Councils, giving trade unions a block vote at Women's Conference, altering the system for additional women's delegates to Annual Conference — that needs watching. Changes must **not** be allowed which limit women's free and democratic expression in the Party. We want changes to open up our organisation and give it power, not to clamp a lid on it. It is imperative therefore that **full** consultation and debate take place before any changes are made. Changes must come from the bottom up, not be imposed from above.

Mandy Moore

For further information about the Women's Action Committee, please contact Ann Pettifor, 39, Caldervale Road, London SW4.

Women's Reproductive Rights Conference

The first conference of the Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign was held in Cardiff on 21st and 22nd January. The campaign grew out of an understanding that there are many issues concerned with reproduction and fertility that need to be brought to public attention. Womens involvement in the National Abortion Campaign showed that abortion is not the central issue for all women, it needs to be placed in the context of all women's experiences of fertility control and reproductive choice.

As stated in the article in last month's Briefing (headed 'Debate — Support Reproductive Rights, if you missed it), Depo Provera, Artificial Insemination by Donor, Maternity facilities — given as a few examples — may be of more concern. Indeed there are disturbing accounts of the ease non-white skinned women find in being granted abortions, at a time when the facilities are being cut back. Abortion is sometimes granted on condition that fitting an IUD or sterilisation is agreed to.

WORKSHOPS

There were workshops on these issues as well as sexuality, contraception, NHS cuts, older womens health, young women's rights, Black women and racism held on the 21st. All the workshops on the 22nd dealt with the focus and organisation of the campaign. Over 150 women attended the conference from all parts of Britain. It was clear that especially as many issues had not been taken up before, the politics of each strand of the WRRC needs full debate and discussion.

BLACK WOMEN

The plenary held on the 22nd centred on racism in the NHS, the involvement of black women in campaigns like WRRC and racism within the womens movement as a whole.

Young womens right to confidential contraceptive advice came up as did some discussion over the title of the campaign.

Most of the workshop themes were not taken up by the whole conference because there simply wasn't enough time.

It was agreed therefore to reconvene the conference in Liverpool on 25th February.

No strategy has been decided on getting affiliations from the labour movement. It is obvious to me that if the campaign is to be effective, the issues outlined must be taken up. The main focus of attention should be on campaigning among working class women, both black and white. The involvment of the trade unions and the Labour Party is essential. Affiliations, donations and the active involvement of women in local groups are vital steps in bringing womens reproductive rights issues into public debate. It will also help put the control of the campaign where it belongs — in the hands of women.

Contact WRRC at 374 Grays Inn Road, London WC1 (tel. 01 278 0153) for more details of the campaign and conference.

Sarah Bryant (Cardiff Central CLP and Cardiff Briefing)

Prioritize Abortion Rights

LARC's successes in the Labour Movement since it was formed in 1977 have been hard-won. But the Labour Party has an established pro-choice policy and it is up to us now to see those who will have to put this policy into effect are indeed committed to do so.

The Campaign always reaches its peak when restrictive legislation is being discussed in the House of Commons — but attacks on abortion rights do not stop there. Cuts in the NHS have severely attacked abortion provision; the availability of local abortion services — never adequate — is diminishing rapidly. We are aware of the conflicting demands on decreasing local health service budgets and as socialists and trade unionists are involved in the campaigns to defend and improve the NHS as a whole. But abortion rights are fundamental, and we cannot waive our commitment to a woman's right to choose because we are faced with a government that attacks the NHS per se. We must also look to a future in which we have a government that is willing and eager to fund the NHS and to make sure that abortion services are not forgotten.

CHANGED THEIR TACTICS

Whilst at present there is no restrictive legislation before Parliament, all those who have been involved in the pro-choice campaign know that the anti-abortionists have just changed their tactics. Having failed to get restrictive legislation through Parliament, anti-abortionists are trying new methods of restricting access to abortion — legal proceedings against doctors, emotive demonstrations of disabled people, and the demands of anti-abortion MPs that lower time-limits guidelines are issued by the Government.

Much publicity has been given recently to professional attitudes to late abortions. In fact, recent reports have shown that many late abortions are caused by delays in the referral system. That is why one of LARC's most important areas of policy is to improve NHS facilities, in particular, the provision of day-care clinics.

We are working towards an understanding of the positive legislation that is needed to make a woman's right to choose a reality. In the future it will not be enough to merely defend the '67 Act. And it is through the Labour Movement that we can go forward.

SINGLE-ISSUE CAMPAIGN

We see the strength of LARC in the Labour Party as coming from being a single-issue campaign. This is not a principle we hold above all others — it is a tactic through which we can win support for our aims and commitment to positive change. When a woman's right to choose is established both in law and with the provision of facilities to put it into practice, and when those who would attack our rights have been roundly defeated once and for all, then we will put our badges away. Until then we see the need to continue as a campaign that has the achievement of abortion rights as a priority.

The issues raised by the reproductive rights campaign are important ones and we do not criticise those women who choose to campaign on them as their priority. Women in the Labour Movement must support each other, both through their campaigns and in the party generally. Otherwise our gains and our aims are both at risk.

Jeannette Gould and Raewyn Stone
Labour Abortion Rights Campaign
PO Box 110
London SE21 8ND.

Abortion rights & facilities— What future?

University of London Union, Malet St, London WC1.
25th February 1984. 10.00-5.00.

NATIONAL ABORTION CAMPAIGN CONFERENCE

New attack on abortion rights:

* Anti-abortion MPs are planning to use the Infant Life Preservation Act 1929 to reduce the already tiny number of 'very late' abortions.
* Yet again 'back door' methods are being used to attack women's limited abortion rights. This move, if successful, will lead to:
* More prosecutions of doctors who support a woman's right to choose,
* More hardship for vulnerable groups like young and older women,
* Less control for *all* women over their own bodies.

Conference will discuss:

* Abortion facilities and the cuts,
* Young women and the 1967 Act,
* Black Women's experience of the NHS
* Anti-abortion activities,
* Campaigning in local areas, in trade unions and in the Labour Party,
* How to take the struggle forward.

RATE CAPPING: WE

THE RATES Bill is the culmination of the attacks mounted on local government since 1979: one of the Government's first moves then was to stop local authorities buying houses in the private sector to help improve local housing conditions and relieve the waiting lists. The measures since then have increased in severity and magnitude, through legislation and reduced central Government funding through the Rate Support Grant system. As a result many Labour councils were thrown into the front line of defending local services and jobs. Now the financial attacks are being supplemented by measures which affect the democratic rights of local government. The Tory manifesto 'commitment' (a concept denied the GLC by the courts in their Fares Fair fight) to abolish the Met. Counties, the GLC and ILEA, and introduce rate-capping, are the logical next step by a Government devoted to centralisation and control. Civil servants at Cheltenham are denied the right to belong to a Trade Union, local authorities are now being denied the right to make their own decisions about local needs.

The opposition to the proposals for capping the rates/ cutting the services has been overwhelming in its political range and quantity. Only a lone, planted academic writing in the Times on the day of the second reading of the Bill, the CBI and, of course, the Cabinet, have really publicly supported them.

The size and strength of the opposition have led the Government to set up its own unit to sell Tory plans for local government; have led to the forty pages of pure panic seen in the Jenkin memorandum leaked before Christmas; and are the aubject of a briefing document sent to all Tory councillors by Conservative Central Office on 12th January. We have won the arguments, haven't we, so what needs to be done?

Real Threat

We need to campaign. We need to go out and convince ratepayers and consumers of council services that the Rates Bill is a real threat to *them*. We need to explode the myth that there is popular support for an ill-thought-out paragraph in the Tory Manifesto.

Already, some councils are showing us what can be done:

**Sheffield* are running a 'Defend Sheffield' week at the end of this month,

**London*'s campaigns, run by the GLC, ILEA, and the London Boroughs,

*Campaigns are being run by councils such as Liverpool, Leeds, Kirklees, Harlow, etc.

There is a lot of ground to be made up in a very short time. The campaigns must not just be run in isolation by the councils most under threat, but must be initiated through local parties and union branches working together to bring in local community groups, voluntary organisations, tenants' groups.

The first national focus for such campaigns will be the Democracy Week, organised by the TUC in conjunction with the Local Government Campaign Unit. Running from 24th March, with Regional events for the first few days, it'll culminate in Democracy Day on 29th March, in London, which will involve local authorities, Trade Unions, community groups, women's groups, voluntary organisations, municipal vehicles, floats depicting council services under attack, a march, rally, kids' events, and evening entertainment. If you haven't started your local campaigning yet, use this as the beginning. Contact your local government unions, who should have set up joint committees, write out to local groups getting them to join in, publicise the Week in local activities, street stalls in shopping centres, etc. Make sure that everyone is as convinced of the arguments as we are. Therein lies our strength.

DIANA MINNS,
(Information Officer, LGCU, in a personal capacity)



LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN UNIT POSTER

Note: The Local Government Campaign Unit has been set up by concerned local authorities and Trade Unions to co-ordinate the response to the present attacks on local government. It acts as an information resource for those defending local government, liaises with other campaigns, co-ordinates what's being done or encourages others to do so. Further details of Democracy week and Democracy day from them on 01-387 9893.

CAN KILL THE BILL!

Two views from Nottingham

DON'T WAIT FOR KINNOCK

Addressing this year's Local Government Conference Neil Kinnock said that councillors should "mitigate the effect of the cuts". In doing so he not only asks members of the Labour Party to implement Tory policy but also expects them not to feel too bad about it.

This remark delivered amongst his usual mixture of comedy and charisma reveals a political perspective wholely restricted to parliamentary debate. His tactics and those of Cunningham, the Shadow Environment Secretary, for opposing Rates Bill and ratecapping legislation is to attempt to postpone and frustrate it at committee stage and if all else fails to rely on opposition in the House of Lords. Hardly a vigorous campaign of opposition but one wholely compatible with the low status given to local government by the leadership.

Implicit in this approach is that we mst wait three or four years for the formation of the next Labour Government. The message from Nottingham was that such a suggestion is unrealistic and totally out of touch.

The Deputy Leader of Liverpool City Council, Derek Hatton, refuted Neil Kinnock's soft-belly approach and suggested that if we followed the Kinnock plan the fight would be lost before it had even started! The consequences for services would be catastrophic and are already being seen in councils like Wakefield. Is this the model "Kinnock" council?

There is no alternative for socialist councils. We cannot allow services and jobs to be cut back and see local democracy taken away by a dictatorial Tory Party. We must not allow the work of recent years in London, Sheffield and other places to be thrown away as if it can be just picked up in a few years. Our priority should be building opposition to Tory plans locally and nationally.

The most popular timetable seems to be that espoused by Ken Livingstone, and to a lesser extent by David Blunkett, that possibly 20-30 councils will be prepared to go for confrontation over ratecapping in 1985. Implicit in Livingstone's approach is that Liverpool should wait and fight with the rest. However, this would mean Liverpool sticking to the Liberal budget in 1984/5, and this asks too much in a city where public services suffer from a decade of neglect and where poverty and mass unemployment is endemic. Such a move would be a betrayal of working people of Liverpool who after 10 years of cuts voted for a Labour Party committed to houses, jobs and services.

The policy of the City Council to eradicate disadvantage among working people recognises that the starting point must be to ensure adequate finance. Liverpool's actions are not those of an "overspending council". Indeed since Labour took control expenditure has been tightly controlled. The issue is that the Government has deprived local councils of millions of pounds. In Liverpool's case the contribution of the RSG to the city's expenditure has fallen from 40% in 1975 to 29% in 1982. These figures dispell Tory claims of extravagance and waste as pernicious lies to undermine local democracy. The idea that "creative accounting" can help Labour Councils avoid making cuts is certainly creative thinking!

It is clear that the demands of the Rate Bill and rate-capping require every council to understand the reasons and follow Liverpool's lead.

Nationally the Local Government Conference offered a forum for delegates from across the country to hear Liverpool's arguments. Whatever happens Liverpool City Council must not be isolated. Derek Hatton has emphasised that support from other councils is vital. The defence of democracy must begin this year before the Tories are prepared for all out confrontation.

Ian Millichap
Wirral DLP



John Chapman

Ken Livingstone and Frances Morrell. Festival Hall rally in support of the GLC and ILEA, 24th January 1984

'MAXIMUM SUPPORT' FOR LIVERPOOL

Government legislation to dismantle local democracy and the worsening plight of Merseyside – and Liverpool, in particular – were the focus of attention at the National Local Government Conference in Nottingham in early February.

On the issue of the abolition of GLC and the six Metropolitan Counties, the Conference agreed not to co-operate with the Government department; the Met. Districts came under particular pressure to unite with the rest of the Party and the movement in order to refuse to co-operate in transferring the service to the Districts. These quangos which are due to take over services such as transport, police and fire-fighting will be boycotted. Furthermore, Labour councils should instruct their officers not to participate in the preparative work.

Special Circumstances

At a fringe meeting on Saturday, Liverpool City Council appealed for support from the rest of the Party. Facing elections in May, councillors are asking "for an understanding of the special circumstances of Liverpool and that while other Councils need not, and will not, follow the same strategy, they should offer maximum support and assistance". The four points on which Liverpool are campaigning are:

*No redundancies among Council workforce.

*No privatisation of public services.

*Improving public services and creating jobs.

*Securing greater resources **from the Government**.

The Conference was organised into several working groups to set an agenda for the future progress of socialism in local government. Subjects covered by the groups included education, children in care, the local economy, equal opportunities, housing and the rating policy. Report-backs from the working groups will make interesting reading – especially for the Party's front-bench representatives.

In the final debate of the Conference, NEC member David Blunkett emphasised the urgency to find a coherent way of uniting Authorities to fight the removal and total crushing of democratic freedoms.

Cllr Narendra Makanji
Harringey



Don't leave anti-racism to us!

Monica Johnson (Secretary, Dulwich CLP Women's Section), the Seconder of the Positive Discrimination composite and the only black woman delegate at the 1983 Labour Party Annual Conference, was interviewed for _Briefing_ by Sarah Roelofs.

SR: When and why did you join the Labour Party?
MJ: I joined about two years ago through the Women's Section. I come from a working-class Labour voting family in Cardiff and felt that I wanted to become more active, but I think if I'd have started with a ward meeting I would never have gone back. But I had a wonderful time at my first women's section meeting. I can't remember what we discussed, but I can remember laughing a lot! It was the first time I had sat in a room just with women and I felt an immediate rapport. I was the only Black woman amongst about ten other women of all ages. They were serious about their political commitment, but still had a sense of humour and I liked that. These women were different to the student politicos I'd come across at University.

SR: Were you politically active at college?
MJ: No, not really. I felt rather peripheral to what was going on. I didn't join any of the women's groups that existed – but it wasn't that I was put off exactly. There seemed to be no contact between me and all the women active in the women's movement. I think now the problem was of the invisibility of Black women – that white politics, including white feminism, renders Black women invisible. But I felt very much apart from all the activists – especially the young men at union meetings declaring themselves Maoists, or IMG or whatever. They never seemed to be discussing issues that were of concern to the people I grew up with – to Black working-class people. But the Women's Section was more of a mix and it included some women who were not consciously feminist which I think is a good thing. We were arguing and discussing more. And because of the age spread we have had to look at issues of concern to older women which I think get ignored too often.

SR: Are you still the only Black woman?
MJ: Yes, and it makes me very sad and torn sometimes. But I do feel I need to be there even as a token Black woman. I quite often feel disillusioned with the Labour Party and feel like dropping out. But I feel I owe it to my Black sisters and brothers to stay in there even though they've said quite categorically that there's no way they would take part in the Labour Party. The Labour Party has never put itself out to attract Black people and I think they do feel very much unwanted. The Labour Party is seen as a white party with little difference between it and other political parties. And recently a lot of disillusionment has set in – Black people feel they've given their vote and put some trust in the Labour Party and not received very much at all in return. And that the Labour Party is only interested in racism at election time. The issues that affect Black people all the time are generally ignored – racism, racial harassment, education, housing etc. There's some rhetoric and some worthy words in the manifesto, but when it comes to putting the words into action – well quite simply the will isn't there. What about the racist immigration laws for example? When I went canvassing during the election I spoke to so many Black people who had faithfully voted Labour for years and just weren't going to any more.

SR: But you're not only voting Labour, but staying an active member?
MJ: Well, I had my ups and downs! But I believe the Labour Party is our only hope no matter how awful it is. And I have some grounds for hope.

SR: Such as?
MJ: The last proper National Labour Women's Conference in Newcastle. It was so fantastic seeing so many women delegates with such a will for change! I honestly believe that women in the party are going to be at the forefront of any change in it. That's what keeps me going – I have very little faith in Labour Party men.

SR: Have you discussed racism in the Women's Section?
MJ: Yes, and we've agreed we need to be constantly aware. I convene a working party in Dulwich that is looking at Black and ethnic minority involvement – or rather lack of involvement – in the Labour Party. And I take the issues raised there into the Women's Section.

SR: What about the Labour Left?
MJ: It really saddens me that on the whole the Left – and they're overwhelmingly white – have failed to look at racism and their own racism specifically. I know when I raise it it causes a lot of anxiety – there'll be anxious-looking faces and silence and a lot of concern. But there seems to be an inability to move forward on the issue – unwillingness in some cases. Something that makes me very angry is when it always falls to me to raise the issue of racism. I don't enjoy being marginalised in that way or being seen as the authority on the subject. The Labour Party needs to look very seriously at race and racialism – even the committed Left who think they're anti-racist. I believe being white in a white racist society leaves its scars – even well meaning socialists can collude with racism. Look at all the CLPs in Britain and the number of Black people would be tiny.

SR: Tell me about the Positive Discrimination composite that you spoke on at annual conference.
MJ: Yes, Composite 28 wasn't on the agenda at the beginning of conference. A group of us – white as well as Black – worked very hard to ensure it was debated. I felt very strongly that though it wasn't perfect it was extremely important. It was the only composite to raise issues of concern to Black people, such as the racist immigration and nationality Acts. It was second best obviously to have it remitted, but better that than have it defeated. I'm unhappy about the term positive discrimination – I prefer positive action. What I said in my speech was that it's not about a lowering of standards or about doing anyone any favours, but about the Labour Party showing an active commitment to Black people. The time for shame is long past – it's time to act. Jo Richardson replied from the NEC and gave a commitment to raise the issue with members of the Black community and that the NEC would come back to 1984 conference with positive definite proposals. I have a lot of respect for Jo Richardson and quite frankly if it had been anyone else I would have snorted. I haven't heard anything yet – we must start pushing. I have some anxiety it will slip to the bottom of the list.

SR: What do you think of Black sections?
MJ: I think Black sections may be a way of bringing Black people into the Labour Party. In such meetings they can meet and organise autonomously. In Dulwich it's been raised in the working party and we'll be taking the proposal to the GC.

SR: Do you encourage Black people to join the Labour Party?
MJ: Yes, I do. For one thing I feel the pressure being the lone Black woman in my CLP. I do try as it would give me more strength. But there needs to be much more discussion around racism – the Labour Party can't go on taking us for granted. We need Black councillors, Black MPs. Therefore, Black people have to be active in the Labour Party. I'm unwilling to go on living in this country ruled by white people, mostly white men. I'm unwilling to go on with them making all sorts of decisions about things that matter to me, policies that affect my life. It's intolerable and unacceptable. The only way to change it is to be actively involved. But I do truly understand and sympathise with Black sisters and brothers who don't wish to be actively involved with the Labour Party and who argue for autonomous Black organisation. We certainly need autonomous Black organisation as well. But I also feel that Black people must have a share of the power, they must be where the policies are made and I think that means being actively involved in the Labour Party.

*SR: Do you think **Briefing** has tackled racism adequately?*
MJ: I don't think any paper I read has – except the women's newspaper ***Outwrite***, and ***Spare Rib*** recently. I think ***Briefing*** has a long way to go. It's acknowledged the importance of the issue, but I would like to see more regular articles looking at racism and how to tackle it. Articles that encourage people to look at racism, their racism and to raise it in their CLPs. So that it isn't always left to us, to Black people.

*SR: What do you think of **Labour Briefing**?*
MJ: I think it's really great – I particularly like the Streetlife Supplement. I enjoy reading that section more than anything else. I like to see women writing and I like the emphasis on personal politics. ***And*** it's good to see men writing about the personal side of their lives and how that affects their politics and vice versa. I think that's really important. It gives a more human side to politics – that's really important.

DEBATE ALTERNATIVES TO NATO

BRIEFING is launching a debate on alternatives to NATO. We start by printing below a controversial viewpoint from Peter Tatchell. Replies are welcome.

For those of us who support unilateralism and withdrawal from NATO, we face a real problem: despite the massive efforts of Labour and CND over recent years, still only 30% of the public support unilateralism and less than 10% want Britain out of the NATO 'nuclear alliance'. The main reason we have not won the arguments is really quite simple: rightly or wrongly, many people fear that without nuclear weapons, Britain would be left defenceless and vulnerable.

However much they abhor war, most people believe that in certain exceptional circumstances, we would be justified to fight a war of *self-defence* to prevent even greater evils such as the barbarity of fascism or imperialist occupation.

If Britain were ever threatened with invasion again, just as in 1939-45, there would be strong public support for us to wage a war of *self-defence* to preserve our right to self-determination and to protect our hard won civil liberties and trade union freedoms.

We will never allay people's fears of vulnerability and win majority support for unilateralism and withdrawal from NATO unless Labour and the peace movement can offer a credible non-nuclear alternative to substitute for the Bomb.

Accordingly, to win the disarmament debate, we have to develop a militarily effective, but *non-productive,* socialist defence policy which is non-nuclear and non-imperialist, whilst also being self-reliant, strictly defensive and distinctly democratic.

The model of alternative defence which most clearly embodies these principles is a strategy of non-belligerant *territorial defence* based on a citizen's army. Employing this type of strategy, small nations such as Sweden, Yugoslavia and Switzerland have successfully deterred attack and preserved their independence for many years.

If Britain switched to a territorial strategy, our sole military objective would be to deter and defeat attack by making our country so *hard to conquer* that any aggressor would face unacceptably high losses. This strategy would no longer require us to depend on a global navy, overseas military garrisons, the American military 'umbrella' or the NATO alliance. Instead, we would base our defence within our own borders and rely on our own efforts.

A territorial policy would involve the development of a system of 'total war' home defence, combining both military *and civilian* forms of resistance. Rather than simply being oriented to a war of frontier, a territorial strategy would also be geered to 'swallowing' invading forces and progressively harassing and wearing them down through a war of attrition employing the tactics of rural and urban guerrilla warfare, mass strikes, boycotts, sabotage and civil disobedience.

Implicit in this *non-aggressive* strategy, is the necessity that we dispense with our *offensive-oriented* nuclear *and conventional* weapon systems. Instead, the armed forces would be re-equipped with more effective *defensive* hardware such as anti-tank guns and tank traps to stall mechanised overland attacks; surface-to-air missiles and interceptor fighter planes to defend us from in-coming missiles, aerial bombardment and paratroop landings; and coastal mines and small, high-speed submarines and patrol vessels armed with torpedoes and anti-ship missiles like the Exocet to protect our ports and coastlines from blockade and seaborne invasion.

A territorial strategy explicitly rejects dependence on an elite professional army. Based on the concept of an 'army of the people', rather than an 'army of the state', it would require the creation of a part-time mass citizen's army capable of defending every street and house, as the people of Stalingrad did during the last war.

Such an army could be created by radically reforming the Territorial Army. To make it attractive for both men and women to enlist *voluntarily,* there would have to be a long overdue *civilianisation* and *democratisation* of the armed forces — the abolition of compulsory barracks accomodation, petty regulations, square-bashing, 'spit and polish' kit routine and discrimination against women and homosexuals. It would necessitate the relaxation of strict dress rules, harsh military discipline and the class divide between officers and the lower ranks. Also essential, would be the extension of full civil, political and trade union rights to soldiers as *already* exists in the Dutch, Norwegian and Swedish armies.

Because a territorial strategy is *non-threatening* and poses no danger to the security of other countries, it could positively contribute to a reduction of international tension and a de-escalation of the arms race. Most importantly, by offering a credible alternative to nuclear weapons, territorial defence might enable us to finally win majority support for unilateralism and withdrawal from NATO. If nuclear war really is so horrific that it would effectively spell the end of human civilisation, then the Labour Party and CND ought to give serious consideration to this democratic territorial alternative.

By Peter Tatchell

The Renegade Hobsbawm

Nadine Finch,
Islington North CLP.

In the recent public debate on Labour's lost millions, Eric Hobsbawm yet again exposed the major inadequacies of his forward march to socialism.

His analysis is firstly fatally affected by media watching and so he criticises the Labour Party for scoring own goals, attacking its own leaders and indulging in civil war. But neglects to criticise their policies, or the fudging of key issues, that many political analysts have detected as important vote losers. Instead he suggests the ultimate forming of a party broad enough to encompass all but the Thatcherites.

There is a certain irony that this suggestion originates with the Communist Party, when what is really needed at this time is a Labour Party committed to centralised economic and social planning.

For the present crisis is not resolvable by a mish-mash of Liberal community politics, a bright new leader and a few mentions of the needs of women. No amount of tactical alliances will strike the necessary resonance with the mass of voters who are not, as yet, politically conscious.

The Tory machine was not slow to realise this and adopt a short term strategy of addressing itself to 'popular' concerns: the role of the family, the safety of the streets, the alienation many people felt when trying to deal with state services. Their portrayal of these issues was crude and ultra-conservative, but it encouraged many to believe the Tories, at least, felt these issues were important.

At a local level, the GLC and ILEA, Sheffield and Liverpool are taking up the argument. They are facing up to criticism of the "socialism in practice" that most people know – the local Town Hall. And they have had the courage to say, yes, radical changes are needed. They have initiated anti-racist and anti-sexist programmes and introduced nuclear free zones in protest against the absurd amounts spent on armaments that only increase the risk of nuclear holocaust.

Elsewhere, socialists are joining the women at Greenham Common not only to protest but also to obstruct the Tory/U.S. war machine, or refusing to fall victim to the international movement of capital and fighting to continue to work collectively in new style workers co-operatives.

And through these processes, small as they are, people are being politicised and are conscious of the practical benefits of socialism.

Nationally, however, with the exception of the politically soft issues of the NHS, the leadership has silenced itself in the cause of unity.

They and Hobsbawm have chosen to accept the media verdict on the Labour Party. However, they should not bask too long in their new popularity. Like their own unity it is a media tactic.

It enables the Tories to continue to set the terms of the debate and reinforce their ultra-right culture of ideas.

Socialism (even an extremely broad based socialism) can only succeed if the mass of people understand the changes it promises to bring and are involved in this process from the beginning.

So I, like many women and socialists, am confused by a class front that omits to campaign against rate capping, the police bill, immigration controls. I am hesitant about a class front eulogising a leadership hostile to women being allowed proper representation within his party. And I am pessimistic about a popular front that has a computer to count voting strengths but has no analysis of the strength of populism now rampant

For the opportunism evident in the present Labour movement leaderships could be just another manifestation of this anti-socialist trend.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR BRIEFING

BRIEFING INTERVIEWS EL SALVADOREAN TRADE UNIONIST

Rosa Rivas is an El Salvadorian Trade Unionist with a long history of trades union activism. As a member of the Private Employees Union, she was responsible for organising a union branch in her first place of work – a shoe shop in a chain owned by Somoza. She was later sacked from another job after trying to form a union there. In 1979 Rosa started working for the CUS (Committee for Trade Union Unity), an organisation which groups together various left wing trade union federations. Following the assassination of the leader of the United Trade Union Federation of El Salvador with whom she had been working closely, last year, Rosa had to flee the country. She is now touring Britain as a representative of CUS, trying to raise awareness within the British labour movement about the situation in her country, and to build up solidarity between British and El Salvadorian Trades Unions.

B. How do you assess US policy towards El Salvador in the light of the forthcoming elections, and the American invasion of Grenada?

R. The US is giving its support to the Christian Democrat Party, because they see that this is the only possibility now. The US can see that the right cannot militarily defeat the FMLN since most of the soldiers of the government forces are unwilling to fight against their brothers and sisters. With the Christian Democrats in power, the US hopes to preserve a facade of democracy, and hopes that by carrying out limited reforms, the Christian Democrats might succeed in stemming the popular feeling for the FMLN. If however D'Aubuisson's extreme right wing Arena party gets back into power, the US would be provided with a pretext to invade in order to "restore democracy". It wants a pretext to invade our country in order to destroy the forces of the FMLN which the army has been unable to destroy. However, the experience of Grenada has shown the US that it will not be so easy. If the US invades El Salvador, or *anywhere* in Central America, there will be a blood bath, another Vietnam.

B. What role do you see the trades unions playing in the ultimate overthrow of the regime in view of the role the general strike played in the overthrow of Somoza?

R. At present it is too dangerous for us to organise a general strike. In future, in a particular context, it may be possible, and this would be our aim.

Strike Action

B. What then are the possibilities at present of organising strike action over less overtly political issues such as wages or conditions?

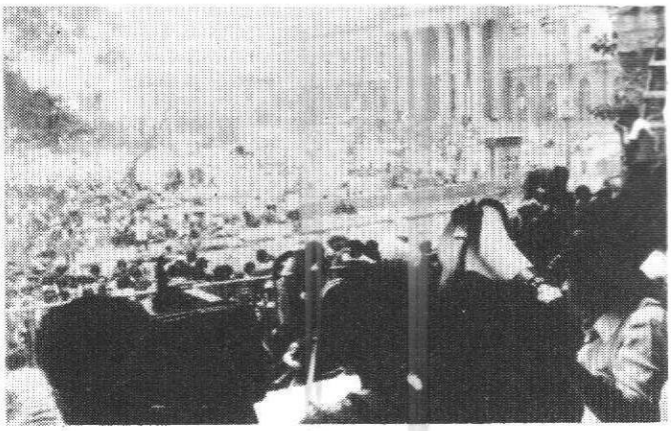
R. The spirit of struggle is such at the moment that it is possible to organise strikes for instance to force bosses to allow the workers to eat their lunch in the factories, or to win certain social security provisions. Strikes are also organised in response to the kidnapping or assassination of union leaders. Very often, the bosses respond by sacking the workers without redundancy pay. Sometimes, once the strike is over, the leaders are kidnapped or assassinated. Take the case of the Urban Housing Institute Union, they said nothing to the workers when the strike was on, but the very day the strike ended, they kidnapped their leader, for which the Death Squads claimed responsibility. When the workers continued to demand the release of his body the government admitted that this leader was in their power. This shows that the Death Squads and the government are the same thing.

B. How do the different trade union federations relate to one another politically?

R. Most of the trade union federations are grouped together in an organisation called MUSYGES (Unitarian Movement of El Salvadorean Trades Unions and Associations) which was recently formed, associating for the first time the previously pro-government unions, the CGS and FESTRAS with the CUS and some other independent federations. Apart from these two unions, all the federations within MUSYGES are united in a common political platform, based on the demand that the US gets out of El Salvador, and leaves us to decide our own future.

B. Why did the CGS and FESTRAS join MUSYGES given their antagonistic political position?

R. Because they have come to understand that only by uniting with the rest of the workers and their federations can they achieve anything for their members. This has meant for the first time that they are suffering threats from the government, which is saying "Well you have always been with us in the past, why have you suddenly changed?" On August 26 last year, the two leaders of CGS and FESTRAS were kidnapped by the military who told them they had better stop participating in MUSYGES or they would suffer the same fate as the left wing trades unionists. However, in spite of these threats they are continuing to participate.



Labour Party Photo Library

Scene outside San Salvador Cathedral when Archbishop Romero was assassinated. D'Aubuisson, now 'President of the Assembly' in El Salvador, organized Romero's assassination and arranged a lottery amongst Army officers to decide who should pull the trigger, according to the US Ambassador to the country at the time.

The Arena Party has responded to this by attempting to set up its own right wing trades union, the CNT. They are offering certain trades unionists large sums of money, the use of buildings, and certain guarantees as a bribe for them to join Arena. But in spite of all the bribes the workers have not wanted to participate because they know that Arena is D'Aubuisson's party.

Women's Participation

B. What is the level of women's participation in trade union activity as individuals? Are there any autonomous women's organisations?

R. There are relatively few women in trades unions in El Salvador. Most women trades unionists are either in the Seamstress Union, or the Private Sector Employees Union. Women's participation is therefore relatively low. We do have an autonomous women's organisation named AMPES (Association of Progressive Women in El Salvador) which organises work to help the refugees in the camps. They collect medicine and clothes for them in the different estates and shanty towns, and organise classes in reading and writing. Women also take part in the fighting. Last year a women-only battalion was formed, called the Sylvia battalion. This has taken part in some of the heaviest fighting. It was the Sylvia battalion which beseiged and captured the town of "San Vicente" last year. AMPES organises help for that battalion, collecting money to buy clothes and sanitary towels for each fighter.

B. What practical things are you asking our trades unions to do to assist the struggle of the El Salvadorean people?

R. One of the things we are asking for is material assistance for our federations. We would also like British organisations to press the British government not to send observers to the forthcoming so-called, elections. We are also asking them to send letters to President Reagan saying "Hands off El Salvador – let El Salvador decide its own future" and to tell Reagan to get out of the bases which they have in Honduras. We also want trade union leaders to form a commission to go to El Salvador to see with their own eyes what is happening there, as far as the suppression of trades union rights and the assassination of trade union leaders are concerned. Finally we are asking for solidarity with all trades unionists, because we are all fighting the same enemy, which is capitalism that wants to continue to dominate people everywhere.

Interview by Anna Wagstaff (Oxford East Labour Party)

US Defeat in Lebanon

On February 8th, the Reagan administration's nerve finally broke and the Marines were ordered to retreat from Lebanese soil. Reagan's efforts to use force to prop up the Phalangist Gemayel regime had received a significant, perhaps crippling setback. And Thatcher thankfully welcomed US permission and withdrew the British troops from the conflict.

Gemayel's failure to come to terms with his Lebanese opponents, who represent a large majority of the Lebanese people, produced a militia offensive that broke the backbone of his rule — the US trained and financed, 30,000 strong Lebanese 'National' Army. The offensive was led by the Amal Shi-ite militia in ailiance with the Sunni militia and the Druze fighters.

The Israeli withdrawal to positions further south last year had deprived the army of logistic support. Its unity was then destroyed when about 10,000 of its Muslim soldiers answered the call of Shi-ite leader Nabih Berri to desert. Thousands more of its troops went 'neutral' in the struggle. Only the massive intervention of US ground troops could restore the Army's effectiveness.

The US claims its troops, who fled to the protection of US battle-ships off-shore, may return when conditions are 'more favourable', but the Lebanese crisis again demonstrates that murderous American fire-power is not enough to keep a grip on even small countries such as Lebanon. It will have to think twice before committings its own ground troops against the Lebanese popular militias.

The militia's military victory will not be matched by immediate political gains. While the 17 May 1983 peace treaty between Gemayel and Israel is now dead, the opposition leaders, grouped in the National Salvation Front are not in a hurry to reap any reward from Gemayel's defeat. They have simply called for a constitutional amendment reducing presidential terms from 6 to 2 years, allowing Gemayel to resign next September. The Front's most prominent leaders, Suleiman Franjieh, Rashid Karameh and Walid Jumblatt are talking to the Syrians on the basis for a national accord: the possible role of a UN Peace Keeping force and a second Geneva conference on national reconciliation.



Happier days: US marine (centre) training recruits to Gemayel's "Lebanese National Army" last year

This would not reward the Lebanese masses for their steadfastness and sacrifices. Instead it will only strengthen the hand of the Syrian regime in masterminding a settlement that will satisfy their interests. The only hope for the future remains in the hands of the Lebanese workers, to stand up against any compromise.

LABOUR AND NATO — Breaking the US Connection

A Briefing Discussion Conference

COUNTY HALL, LONDON
Saturday 24 March 10.30 — 5.00pm

Speakers include: Alan Sapper, Jeremy Corbyn, Joy Hurcombe, Peter Tatchell, Fred Halliday, Tariq Ali, Alan Thornett, Sarah Roelofs, Alan Freeman

Creche: Apply in advance.
Open to Labour Party members.
Limited numbers. Send £1.50 for tickets and papers to:
Briefing International Committee,
23 Bayston Road, London N16.

NAME .....
ADDRESS .....
.....
I would like ..... tickets and background papers and enclose £...

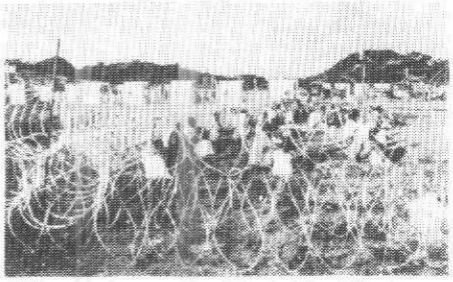
GRENADANS PROTEST

The media is making much of Grenada's return to normality. BBC TV were there to witness the arrival of the first Cunard liner since the US invasion and the Caribbean Development Bank and the interim government are busy arranging for finance to complete the international airport, *now* so important for the island's development (in the US model).

But, although one of the American tourists disembarking from the Cunard Countess gave thanks to President Reagan for sending in the troops so that people like her could enjoy the island again, Grenada is not yet an American play park. Reports are coming through of small marches and a disturbance at a disco in protest at the heavy handed 'advising' of the occupying troops. Helicopters, coastguard ships and jeeps still patrol the island. US psychological operatives are questioning another batch of government employees and despite 250 police, the US told the recent British Foreign Affairs Committee delegation that 500 more were urgently needed.

The fact that events are not progressing as well as hoped is also indicated by the bussing in of representatives from the US's eight major Caribbean allies last week, so that they could ask Reagan not to move the troops until after the elections.

This will, of course, inhibit activity amongst the youth and Bishop supporters who are still harassed by these troops. At the same time it could enhance the chances of the parties favoured by the US such as the Grenada Democratic Movement. This party was formed by Grenadians living abroad and judging by a recent letter in Caribbean Times urging Grenadians living abroad to get involved in the forthcoming elections, they are still gathering their forces.



White wooden crates used for holding US prisoners

Some island sources also think that the US are interested in using ex-dictator Gairy's residue of popularity with older Grenadians. They imagine he may be given an honorary president or be asked to form an alliance with the GDM. This supposition is backed up by the fact that many of those now being appointed to the civil and diplomatic services are in fact ex Gairy supporters.

On the progressive front, former Peoples Revolutionary Government ministers not in prison have been meeting with other Caribbean left parties and here in Europe some lawyers are beginning to agitate on behalf of those detained.

Nadine Finch (Islington North)

NATO'S TURMOIL AND DANGERS FOR LEFT

(Following Fred Halliday's survey of Reagan's global strategy last month, we continue our series of articles on underlying trends in world politics with a look at the crisis in NATO as it tries to defeat the peace movement)

The political leaders of West Germany, Italy and Britain, as well as those in the smaller states inside NATO's military structure are being squeezed between Reagan's staggering, militarist assertion of US power over them and a huge peace movement larger than any other mass protest in Europe since the war. In their search for a solution that unites their foreign policy interests as capitalist states with an effective line against the peace movement, these political elites have been offered rival options by the two NATO states least affected by the crisis — the United States itself and France.

Whatever other problems the French state has, Mitterrand is least threatened either by a peace movement or by US pressure on military policy. France isn't taking Cruise and its nuclear weapons are — unlike Britain's — genuinely free from US control. Mitterrand's public rhetoric has been impeccable from an American point of view. Even before his election in 1981 he backed Cruise and Pershing and his verbal abuse of Moscow and body count of expelled Soviet diplomats is remarkable. But from Washington's angle this just makes him more difficult to attack in public. It doesn't make his efforts to pull Bonn away from the US into a military alliance with France any more endearing to the hawk-eyed Reaganites in the Pentagon.

A PARIS-BONN AXIS

Bonn and Paris have had close diplomatic relations ever since the Elysee Treaty of 1963, but these never matured into a military axis. Until, that is, February 1982 when Schmidt and Mitterrand quietly aggreed to give effect to the Treaty's clause allowing military links. In October of the same year, the new Chancellor, Kohl, took the further step of agreeing to a "permanent Franco-German Commission on defence and security". On April 20th last year the French cabinet approved the military hardware to give this link substance: new tactical nuclear weapons capable of hitting Eastern Europe backed by France's 7 nuclear armed submarines targetted on the USSR. Previously, French tactical nukes had been aimed at the Federal Republic (making military co-operation difficult!) but now Mitterrand could offer the Germans an alternative of sorts to the US nuclear umbrella.

The plan has a large measure of bipartisan support in France. Indeed Chirac went so far, in a speech to the Adenauer Foundation in Bonn on October 17th last year, as to offer the West Germans "direct participation" in the "central questions" — ie a finger pretty near the trigger.

The French Defence Minister has indicated he would like other European states to join the club, using the hitherto moribund West European Union as the framework. Its attraction lies in the fact that it includes the original 6 Common Market countries plus Britain and no one else. Thus the US would be excluded, as would neutral Ireland, anti-Pershing Greece, etc., while France's exile from NATO's military structure would also be circumvented.

The French package has another extremely appealing feature for capitalist Europe. It offers to pool resources for a



Time's cartoon shows ET's offensive value against the Soviets

European military strike force in the third world, expanding a European imperialist sphere, rivalling the US and also making it possible to influence US policy there. France is already beefing up a 47,000 strong 'rapid action force' for such a role.

Formally, these plans are not directed against the US. They are presented as a means of having an "American-European" deterrent in Europe and a 'partnership' in keeping a grip on the third world. These ideas are being keenly studied by the planning staffs of the French, German and Italian foreign ministries. Genscher is very enthusiastic. There are also great hopes of pooling the resources of European military industries — the now renowned General Kiesling was particularly energetic in this field before being catapulted to fame.

A US-BONN AXIS

Kiesling's fate brings us to the US counter-attack, which nicely dove-tails military strategy against the USSR with political strategy against a West European bloc through the new US military doctrine for Europe known as "Airland Battle". The doctrine has three prongs: chemical weapons against Warsaw Pact front line troops; ET (so called Emerging Technology) weapons involving conventional 'deep strikes' to knock out second and third eschelon Warsaw Pact forces in the East European countries; and thirdly, Cruise and Pershing nukes to destroy the Soviet command structure within the USSR if Moscow tried to continue the war.

This doctrine has everything: a new arms race in 'conventional' high technology to screw the Soviet economy; the chance of winning a limited war in Europe without going nuclear; the marginalising of France's nuclear force as an irrelevant and dangerous old-style 'flexible response' game based on first use of nukes; a bigger role for the Bundeswehr which could use ET, the decimation of West European defence industries since ET and chemical weapons are monopolised by the US; and last but not least a wonderful ploy against the peace movement — the US is moving towards 'Non-nuclear defence', scrapping all the battle-field nukes and some of the small tactical ones and perhaps even turning Cruise into an ET weapon.

If the US plan was implemented in full, Western Europe would have a higher nuclear threshold, but it would also be much more firmly subordinated to the US and committed to a more aggressive military doctrine than before. The French plan's logic leads towards more independence from Washington but retains nukes for early use and plunges Europe into new military adventures against the peoples of the third world.

Despite her taste for the politics of blood and iron, Thatcher is forced to be a largely passive spectator in this struggle within the NATO hierarchy. Tory domestic political interests — the imperialist anti-American Tories inside the party and the 'rule Britania' working class Tory vote — make the French plan enormously appealing. But the unmentionable secret of British military policy — its almost total dependence especially in nuclear matters on the US for its public posture as a 'great, independent power' — forces the government to hide its impotence behind noisy verbiage.

Meanwhile the formidable American lobby in Britain, from small fry like Peter Jenkins, through Owen and the Economist to a huge chunk of the military establishment led by people like Sir Frank Cooper are pouring out a sickly treacle of rhetoric about NATO going towards 'non-nuclear defence' by going for ET and Chemical weapons. And we should not forget our very own grand old man of Atlanticism, Denis Deep-Strike Healey.

Both gangs, the Euro-imperialists and the Airlanders are dangling bait before noses of the peace and labour movements. The Euros say, "come and join our camp and argue your point about a non-bellicose Euro Defence Pact from within," the airlanders say, "non-nuclear defencists of all colours unite against the ghastly French and Thatcher and we'll argue about costs and weapons systems later."

But we must not forget the principles that both groups share in common — the principles of NATO. These are that the West European states must accept relentless militarist pressure against the peoples of the USSR, imperialist wars in the third world, defence as meaning the security of capitalism, and unbending hostility to socialist advance anywhere.

The dog-fight within the NATO hierarchy is positive if it produces unconditional concessions to the peace movement. It will be disastrous if it leads to the abandonment of principles in the name of an illusory 'realism'.

So when Neil Kinnock now takes a harder line against Polaris, we applaud, and note down the quotes. But when he adds we must spend more on new conventional weapons, we would be wise to suspect the worst: yet another of the projects Healey master-minded in the 1940s, the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s for using leftish rhetoric and half concessions to labour sentiments to hitch the labour movement to US militarist doctrine.

Oliver MacDonald, International Editor, Labour Briefing

SOLEY — "UNITING IRELAND WITH UNIONIST CONSENT"

Clive Soley's article in *The Guardian* at the end of January, 'Why Labour wants a united Ireland', *(Guardian 27/1/84)*, is to be welcomed by all those who support Irish reunification. Serious discussion on Ireland, never mind feature articles in 'quality' Fleet St. dailies, is a rare event. Similarily, since the adoption of the Labour Party's policy of a united Ireland three years ago, there has been a dirth of Labour leadership proposals on how to achieve it. That such now appears in The Guardian written by a Labour front-bench spokesperson on Ireland is significant. The fact that the article's thinking is up a Fabian gum tree should not be allowed to obscure the importance of the article's appearance and authorship.

Soley concedes that 'the Irish problem is a British problem too'. He acknowledges 'that the border has been a political and economic disaster for Ireland' He even admits that Britain was 'unwise to allow the division of Ireland' in the first place. However, be that as it may, there now exists a "British-Irish problem" of "a question of power". Well, so far so good.

It is in analysing this 'power question' that Soley exposes his Fabian underthinking. Fabianism is a crucial component of the Labour Party's ideological heritage — for various historical reasons it had "a more profound effect on the ideology of the Labour Party than Karl Marx and his followers". A Fabian Society message to the ILP conference in 1899 talked of the development of "socialist missionary work" in Ireland.

REPRESSED MINORITY

Soley explains to us that in Northern Ireland there is a repressed and frightened minority and an insecure and frightened majority. Thus, "both groups have predominantly negative power" and the question is how to turn this negative power into the positive power of new political and economic structural initiatives which will allow for the reunification of Ireland with the consent of the Unionists. Answering this question Soley identifies as the responsibility of Dublin and London which must involve measures that will "encourage confidence, flexibility and open-mindedness" in the Unionists. Encouraging such sensibilites amongst the nationalists does not appear to be involved — but then they already consent to a united Ireland.

Soley proposes four such measures (which he has already suggested to the New Ireland Forum which is currently conducting hearings in Dublin): an unequivocable commitment by Britain to a United Ireland; full joint citizenship rights; a British-Irish Council without legislative powers as a forum for discussion of political and economic matters; and creating an all Ireland court and police force which would increase border security and give urgent attention to relieving the pressure of emergency legislation in the North which is undermining civil rights. The not insignificant matter of undermining — nay lack of — Catholic civil rights since Britain allowed partition in 1921 is ignored — but then, as has already been noted, nationalist Catholics already consent to a united Ireland. The also not insignificant matter of the part played by the British security forces, not least the British Army, is likewise ignored — but then Soley presumably feels the Army encourages confidence in the Unionists, even if it encourages exactly the opposite in the nationalist community by perpetuating the repression he previously mentioned.

UNIONIST CONSENT

It hardly needs to be said that Britain has tried several 'political and economic structural iniatives' over the years — except withdrawing — all to no avail. Soley's proposals are seemingly primarily aimed at increasing Unionist confidence and alleviating Unionist fears in order to win Unionist consent. This stress and bias to Unionism, which makes Labour policy of a united Ireland *conditional* on Unionist agreement, is the most publicised feature of the policy by the Labour Party leadership. Soley even goes so far as to defensively argue that no government could govern an Ireland containing so many dissenting Unionists. Zimbabwe? There were/are very many dissenting whites there.

Soley wishes to achieve Unionist consent by reasoned argument. For the Fabians, socialism was...to be won by reasoned argument'. Will reasoned argument really win Unionist consent or merely that of some Protestants? One is reminded of racists who feel insecure and frightened of Black people. Will reasoned argument make racists feel less threatened? What measures could be proposed to encourage racists confidence? Racism is endemic in a society with a racist state which brings priveleges to white people. The racist state itself must be dealt with. Soley ignores or forgets that Unionist ideology is *predicated* on, and built into, a form of state which allows material privelages to the Protestants. The Northern Ireland state, partition itself, will ultimately have to go before Unionism can be reasoned with.

FABIAN SUPPORT

One further point of interest: 'Fabian support for Irish Home Rule was not so much for national independence, but stemmed from the more central tenet of the Fabian creed concerning the desiribility of decentralised government'. *Soley's united Ireland in its final form "would be a federal structure". A northern Ireland within a united Ireland? A seperate federal state for Protestants? But that is how Northern Ireland came to be set up in the beginning. Are we coming full circle?

It is difficult through-out all this not to feel that Soley is casting himself and the Labour Party in exactly the role of neutral socialist missionaires, reuniting, by dint of care and understanding, a divided community. This is ironic in that Soley rejects at the beginning of his article a tendency on the part of the British "to present themselves as the honest broker trying to help two warring tribes come together in peace and harmony." Yet such does appear to be Soley's intention and thinking — the Labour Party with their wisdom and justice, will unite Ireland by allieviating Unionists fears and winning the latter's consent. But what on earth is it to do with Britain at all — aside from the fact that Britain just getting out and allowing all the Irish people to decide their future themselves? Soley never once refers to the principle of Irish self-determination, even to disagree with it. But then self-determination does not feature in missionaries vocabulary — by definition.

** From Troublesome Business, the Labour Party and the Irish Question, by Geoffrey Bell, Pluto Press, 1982. Chapter One.*

Sarah Roelofs, Islington South CLP

NATO'S IRISH PLAN by Ken Livingstone

The following is an extract from a speech by Ken Livingstone to Southern Irish trade unionists at a mass meeting in Dublin in early December 1983. It is reproduced from Labour and Ireland, *journal of the Labour Committee on Ireland.*

"For a number of security objectives, the Southern Government was targeted and an attempt made to influence a number of key policy decisions... The objective I want to concentrate on, because it is the most important, is the integration of the Southern State into the NATO Microwave Network. This I can assure you is nothing to do with ovens. Back in 1979, NATO strategists were evaluating their nuclear policy. Until that point they had been working on the basis that in a nuclear war there would be almost total immediate destruction. Now they have a new idea — that a 'tactical' war can be fought in Europe without extending the nuclear interchange to the United States itself. In this scenario, the traditional position of Irish neutrality cannot be tolerated.

They needed to place in Ireland UHF radio communications that would extend into the Atlantic, radar facilities and forward bases. The intelligence operation established through British involvement in Northern Ireland started on this project to implicate Southern Ireland into the NATO defence strategy without any debate. We are effectively seeing the colonisation of Irish telecommunications to benefit NATO's nuclear defence. The microwave link already established conveys all nuclear defence information required by NATO through a system called 'Backbone'. The telecommunications network that operated from Belfast now beams direct to Dublin, through Daneforth to Holyhead.

Ireland has now been put in NATO's frontline in the same way as the rest of Europe. You won't be surprised to know that when the Dublin government was asked who paid for all this construction work and what it cost, they refused to say.

So much has been done now to integrate Southern Ireland into NATO's defence strategy that one of the major reasons for maintaining Britain's control in Northern Ireland is going. That factor will I believe come to weigh heavily upon the thinking of the Tory government."

LABOUR ZIONISM

Labour Zionism is the collectivist wing of the Zionist Movement. It believed Palestine could only be colonised through collective rather than private enterprise action. Whenever there has been a contradiction between Zionism and their Socialism, the latter has been sacrificed. This applies as much to Mapam — the marxist Zionist party, as to Mapai — the main party in the Israeli labour Alignment. The main difference between Begins Revisionist Zionism and Labour Zionism has always been tactical — the goal of a purely Jewish state remained the same. For this reason there has always been an interchange of members — General Sharon was special advisor to the last Labour Premier, Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Dayan switched from the ILP to become Begins first Foreign Minister.

In Britain, Poale Zion — the overseas wing of the ILP, has been affiliated to the British Labour Party since 1920. It too is loyal to Zionism above all. In the 1931 byelection in Whitechapel, it vetoed Stafford Cripps candidature by threatening to vote Liberal. The MacDonald National Government was welcomed by Mapai who saw it as marginalisimg the anti-Zionist left in the Labour Party (MacDonald unlike Sidney Webb was extrememly pro Zionist). Today Poale Zion is on the extreme right of the Labour Party having voted for Healy in the Deputy Leader elections and for the Shore/Dunwoody ticket at last conference. In the General Election, P Kleinmann, Jewish Chronicle press correspondent and Poale Zion member of Islington North, was given a page in the London Standard to urge support for the SDP against Jeremy Corbyn, and likewise in Brent East.

Labour Zionism was responsible for the main burden of colonisation in Palestine. It created the apartheid 'union' Histardrut, which barred Arab members from joining and which campaigned for Jewish employers to employ only Jews. It campaigned for different wages for Jews and Arabs and for a boycott of all Arab produce. The Kibbutzim are also Jewish only having been built on confiscated Arab land. Today they own industries which employ Arabs at a fraction of Jewish wages. Labour Zionism campaigned around 3 slogans — Jewish Labour, Jewish Land and Jewish Produce.

Historically Labour Zionism has been more racist than its revisionist opponents. Just as the 'socialist' Nazis — the Strasserites — were more anti-Semitic than their more cultured brothers. We are calling this conference in order to illustrate the real nature of Labour Zionism and to weaken the links between Labour Zionism and the British Labour Movement. Instead we wish to see links formed with the Palestinian working class and their trade unions.

Tony Greenstein

LABOUR MOVEMENT CONFERENCE ON PALESTINE

Saturday May 19, County Hall, Waterloo

Speakers include Moshe Machover (Labour Zionism), Uri Davies (Histadrut), Jeremy Corbyn MP, PLO Representative, Colin Talbot, POEU, Peter Tatchell.

Registration £2 per delegate
2 delegates per labour movement organisation

FRANCE: MITTERAND — PREPARING FOR ELECTORAL DISASTER

By Chris Bertram Hackney South and Shoreditch CLP

(In the months up to the "European Elections" we will be surveying politics in the main West European countries. We begin our series with a look at France.)

On the evening of 10 May 1981 Paris was an exciting place to be. The streets filled with people carrying red roses and flags, cars hooted their horns. The reason? After a quarter of a century of right-wing government Francois Mitterrand had been elected President. Filled with enthusiasm the French people realised that a 'changement' was indeed possible and in the immediately following general election voted the Socialist and Communist parties in with a massive majority.

In the spring of 1984 the picture is very different. Workers strike against government backed closure plans. The extreme right enjoys renaissance, winning seats on municipal councils. The Communist party looks close to vanishing from the electoral map. Chirac, the Gaullist leader, looks more confident than ever. Where did the popular enthusiasm go to?

In the first months after coming to power Mitterrand, with his Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy sought to implement some of the key areas of their social and economic programme. Some limited nationalisations, most particularly of the banking and finance sector were coupled to a Keynesian strategy of boosting public sector spending to act as a catalyst for industrial investment. The government also moved against some of the more authoritarian aspects of the Gaullist legacy, abolishing the State Security Court and declaring a wide-spread amnesty.

The forward moves of the government were not to endure long. The economic policies did not stimulate domestic investment but rather sucked in imports and weakened the position of the franc. Faced with a political offensive on the part of the employers' organisation, the CNPF, the government introduced incomes policies and spending cuts, culminating in last year's austerity plan and a cabinet reshuffle that included the sacking of Jean-Pierre Chevenement, the leader of the Socialist Party left-wing.

INTERNATIONAL POLICY

The shift to the right in domestic policy has been a fitting complement to France's international policy, where the Socialists have pursued a violently militaristic and anti-Soviet line. They have given the go-ahead for a new generation of theatre nuclear weapons and have backed Reagan's line over arms negotiations. French troops 'keep the peace' in Chad and Lebanon in the unbroken tradition of French imperialism.

The initial impact of the government's right wing policies was to demobilise their supporters but the first electoral defeats in March 1982 were part of a process that has now led to defections to the right and far right by some and a fightback against austerity by others.

The municipal by-election at Dreux, in September last year was marked by the racist campaign of the National Front, who, with the backing of the Gaullists and Giscardiens, won places on the municipal council. The reaction of the government was to declare that illegal immigrants had to go, setting itself a target of 100,000 expulsions. Mitterrand's unofficial manifesto had talked of the rights of immigrants, ministers are now discussing schemes of 'voluntary repatriation'.

Racism has been the weapon with which the government has sought to attack workers' struggles against austerity. This became evident in last year's Renault strike, but the cynicism of the Socialist and Communist leaders was most manifest in the struggle at Talbot at the new year. Mainly immigrant workers, led by the Socialist union, the CFDT, struck against a government approved redundancy plan. The Communist-led CGT, acting as a transmission belt for government policy, scabbed on the CFDT. The resulting violence led to the defeat of the dispute, the Communist and government strategy being to persuade white-workers that immigrants would bear the brunt of job loss.

MILITANT NOISES

The CGT is now making militant noises in relation to the government plan for 'restructuring' industry (a code-word for redundancies), this is a response both to pressure from the base of the union and to accusations of being the government's poodle over the Talbot dispute.

Just as the experience of the Wilson/Callaghan years helped form the current of which Briefing is a part, we might hope for the emergence of a left alternative in France. The signs are not good. The principal opposition formation inside the Socialist Party, the CERES, has no real alternative to the reflationary strategy that failed in the early months of the Mitterrand regime, it is also a strong supporter of the nuclear deterrent. The folk memories of 1940 play a strong part in explaining the nationalism and militarism of the French left — simply the tanks at the gates are now Russian rather than German and imaginary rather than real. To all intents and purposes there is no peace movement in France. Both the small Parti Socialiste Unifié and dissident currents in the Communist Party look towards the Socialist Party majority. The trotskyist organisations either abstain from the fight against austerity by saying that the main enemy is the Right, or restrict themselves too narrowly to the field of economic struggle. With the Socialist Party now the main party of the French working class it is certain many of its militants will begin to take stock of the gap between their aspirations and the experience of the last few years. It is there we may see the rumblings of an alternative.

Next National Editorial Board: Sunday 25th March, 12 noon, at County Hall, London.

Published by London Labour Briefing, 23 Leghorn Road, London NW10.
Printed by Wernham Printers Ltd (TU), Forster Road, London N17.