BRIEFING

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

April 1991 80p/60p

Price of Poll Tax defiance:

Witch-hunt!

"IN A co-ordinated, secret conspiracy to intimidate and harass honest, upright, moderate Labour councillors, Briefing supporters in Lambeth have turned off microphones at Council meetings, shouted anti-semitic abuse, orchestrated disturbances in the public gallery, daubed 'scab' on front doors, slashed car tyres and smashed car windows. Meanwhile, they have deliberately set out to ensure Lambeth services are the most inefficient and expensive in the country."

Such is the gist of the absurd allegations made by the LCC in Lambeth and broadcast across the country, thanks to Walworth Road and Fleet Street. These allegations are being made because LCCers know they cannot win the debate in the local Labour Parties or on the Labour Group by democratic means.

The fact that none of these allegations can stand up to the slightest scrutiny is neither here nor there. They have served their purpose: to justify a witch-hunt against the left in Lambeth. Its immediate aim is to place control of the Council in the hands of the LCC. Its broader objective is to finish off the London Labour left once and for all.

Cllr. Greg Tucker Lambeth

Lambeth's real sins in the eyes of the Labour leadership were trying to maintain some resistance to the Poll Tax (a number of Labour councillors have refused to pay the Tax) and having the effrontery to oppose the Gulf War in public.

The NEC Organisation Sub-Committee called for an investigation into Lambeth Labour Group. Even before this decision was rubber-stamped by the NEC (and

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Witch-hunt!

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before we had received any formal notice of charges) details of the allegations against us were fed to the press. These are based entirely on a bizarre document written by LCC hack Ben Lucas. Amazingly, Lucas is able to recount in detail events at two Council meetings at which he was not even present.

Even before the investigation started, the Walworth Road press office had given the media the names of a dozen councillors who would be disciplined. Faith in this "investigation" is hardly increased by the knowledge that the Chief Investigator is himself a member of the LCC, until recently in Lambeth, and was seen vigorously applauding the attacks on Lambeth at the Greater London Labour Party AGM.

As usual, once Walworth Road had fingered the Lambeth left, it was open season for the Tory press, which rehashed every "loony left" story in its repertoire.

One wonders at the sanity of some of Labour's full-timers who think they are making Labour "more electable" by providing ammunition for media attacks on Labour Councils. The nadir was a two-page Evening Standard article detailing who was who on the Lambeth left and naming Labour Briefing as the "organisation" behind the scene.

We counter-attacked at the London Labour Party AGM, where an emergency resolution was tabled by two of the Lambeth CLPs and the RMT. Though defeated it gained significant support (over 250,000 votes), including from a number of unions.

In the debate, LCCer Siobhan McDonagh took the rostrum to rehearse a pack of lies from the Sun about Lambeth Council and finished off with the revelation that Joan Twelves had once been in the IMG! Southwark Council leader Sally Keeble followed suit. Since Southwark's services make Lambeth's look hyper-efficient, Keeble's hypocrisy was enough to push at least two trade union delegations into supporting our resolution.

The low point came when Ted Knight reminded the London Party of its previous opposition to witch-hunts. "We don't want purges, do we?" he asked. "Yes we do!" shouted LCCers around the hall.

Lambeth Labour Group has agreed by a large majority that the investigation is a dangerous diversion and should be dropped, as have two local CLPs, Norwood and Vauxhall. In response, Vauxhall's imposed MP Kate Hoey has written to every Vauxhall Party member attacking the Council and what she has the cheek to call "unrepresentative" councillors. Walworth Road has now blocked the Vauxhall GC AGM from going ahead on the spurious grounds that one ward did not give seven days notice of its own AGM (it gave five days notice of a meeting rescheduled because of the blizzard).

Lambeth Against the Witch-hunt has been formed to co-ordinate our defence. It brings together a majority of the Labour Group, many previous councillors, local trades unionists, the leadership of Vauxhall and Norwood CLPs as well as many activists from Streatham. We are confident we have the support of local Party members (Kate Hoey's letter has backfired). Lambeth NALGO has also passed a resolution against the witch-hunt - at a meeting originally called to discuss strike action against Joan Twelves' budget cuts!

We are under no illusions. It is clear that a significant number of councillors will be suspended and/or expelled from the Labour Group. Some may even be expelled from the Party itself. The Vauxhall and Norwood Parties may be closed down.

Briefing, which has been named by the LCC and the Tory press as the "organisation" responsible for all that is wrong in Lambeth, seems next in line for the witch-hunt. Tribune reports that NEC members are keen to "investigate". No doubt the LCC has already compiled the usual McCarthyite farrago for Joyce Gould to solemnly place before a credulous NEC as "evidence".

Whatever happens, as socialists committed to the Labour Party we will continue to resist the Poll Tax and give solidarity to all those fighting back against the Tories here and now.

■ ***Greg Tucker*** *was recently described as the "extreme face of left-wing Lambeth" in the London* Evening Standard.

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We say: *the Poll Tax is out - now finish the job!*

LIKE THE release of the Birmingham Six, the imminent defeat of the Poll Tax is a tribute to the power of grass-roots campaigning. Local non-payment groups gave the widespread hatred of the Tax a political focus and the twelve million non-payers a public voice. The groundswell of resistance made the Tax unworkable and raised the political price of maintaining it so high that even the Tories had to relent.

If there had been no non-payment campaign, the Tax would have engendered resentment, despair and mass bankruptcy but it would never have taken the same toll on the government. Indeed, the Tax itself might have lingered on for years. Certainly if it had been left to the Labour leadership, the campaign would have consisted of a few petitions and press releases. It would never have galvanised the kind of determined and inspired opposition which has been seen in every part of the country.

Now we have to maintain non-payment, not simply until the Tax no longer exists but until an amnesty is granted to non-payers and all the bailiffs are called off.

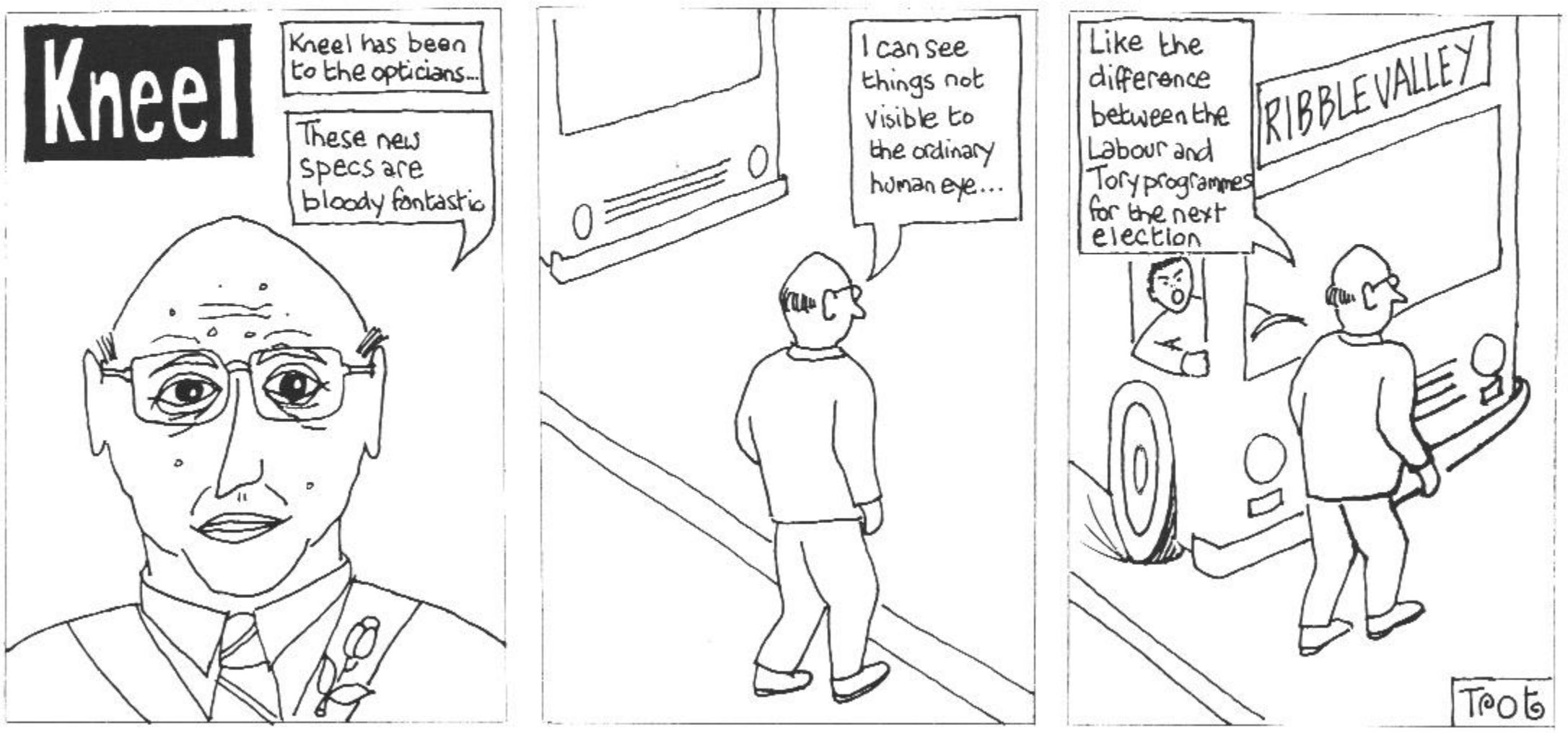
THE TORY retreat on the Poll Tax may well strip Labour of its last shred of political distinctiveness. With interest rate cuts on the horizon as well, our leaders will be hard pressed to give people a good reason to come out and vote Labour. The Party's main weakness in the run-up to a general election which we ought to be able to win hands down is now becoming glaring. After the years of policy reviewing and image revamping, the public still has no clear idea of what Labour stands for.

THE LEADERSHIP'S response to electoral crisis is painfully familiar: the witch-hunt. At the very moment when people across the country are celebrating the Poll Tax's demise Labour is persecuting those of its members who were most active in opposing it. Labour councils making cuts to meet Tory capping levels blame local non-payers - and let the government off the hook. As in 1987, the local government left (or what remains of it) is being set up as a scapegoat for the failures of the leadership.

Labour Briefing is now being threatened with an "investigation". Well, Walworth Road may "investigate" all it likes. We will not be deterred from insisting on our democratic rights as Party members. We will stay in the Party and fight all-out for socialist leadership and policies.

We think *Briefing* is a unique voice for the non-sectarian, activist left in the Labour Party. Unlike the LCC we are not a membership organisation. We are and always have been the most open conspiracy.

Socialists who worked in the anti-Poll Tax movement should join us in the Labour Party - and finish the job the anti-Poll Tax movement started.



The day the Six walked free

As a long-time campaigner for the Birmingham Six, ***Valerie Veness,*** *Islington North CLP, shared in emotion at the Old Bailey on the great day.*

COURT NO. 8 at the Old Bailey was full - so along with many of the relatives, friends and supporters of the Birmingham Six I had retired to the pub opposite. I was deep in conversation with Martin McIlkenny (Richard's youngest brother) who was speaking very slowly. Even after many visits with the men I still have trouble with a strong Belfast accent.

Suddenly, people started running outside. There was a shout: "They're free!" We ran into the street and towards the Court. It was true. After nearly seventeen years in prison six innocent Irishmen were free. The joy and emotion of the men's families were so very different from the frustration of that day in January 1988 when their previous appeal had failed.

Outside the Court we waited for the Six to emerge. A huge cheer went up and I thought, "It's them!" Actually it was Chris Mullin, yet never have cheers for a Labour MP been more deserved. He had campaigned in a dogged and determined way at a time when hardly anyone was prepared to listen to the men and their families.

Suddenly the men themselves appeared. Immediately they went down to the waiting crowd and the press. For the first time I saw them outside prison visiting rooms. Their daughters pushed their way past the police cordon and rushed into their arms. For the families the nightmare was over! Their hard and consistent campaigning had made this come about. And make no mistake: it was their struggle that made all the other support possible.

This is a victory for "little people". Certainly the "Great and the Good" did little enough to secure freedom for the Six. It was isolated groups, families, friends and supporters coming together, that defeated the establishment and eventually wrung justice out of a corrupt system.

At this very moment, this judiciary and prison system is still locking up the innocent. Billy Power spoke for all the Six when his first words as a free man reminded us of all the other people, framed by police, unjustly imprisoned, many of whom he had got to know during his time inside. He mentioned Pat McLaughlin, the Tottenham 3, the Carl Bridgwater prisoners and others.

The night before the six were released, Richard McIlkenny's daughter Maggie told me, "The whole system needs to be changed. Hopefully the ending of this case will open the floodgates for all other injustices."

Yet the question remains: how could this have happened? I had got involved in the campaign because my CLP, Islington North, and our MP Jeremy Corbyn had taken up the Guildford Four case. Paul Hill's aunt and uncle lived in our constituency and had enlisted Jeremy's support. When the Four were released Gerry Conlon's first words called for justice for his father, for the Maguires... and for the Birmingham Six!

On my first ever visit to the men in prison, Paddy Joe Hill spent as much time urging me to assist other prisoners as he did protesting his own innocence. It is clear that the police grabbed the first Irishmen to hand. They were Irish in the wrong place and at the wrong time.

Uncorroborated confessions were beaten out of them on the pretext of dubious forensic evidence. For many years no "respectable" politician would take up the case. Eventually it was left to Joan Maynard, Jeremy Corbyn, Chris Mullin and a few others to highlight these injustices. A handful of clerics and journalists struggled in vain to get publicity. Families visited MPs - only to be turned away with polite words but no action.

It has taken seventeen years to expose a set-up that is unfair, unwieldy and corrupt. Despite all the talk in the House of Commons, the problem is not just a few corrupt coppers. It's the Prevention of Terrorism Act, it's the prison system, it's the bias of Appeal Courts, it's judges whose only job is to defend the establishment. The only decent thing Lord Chief Justice Lane can do now is to resign - but knowing the system he probably won't!

In my visits to Long Lartin, Gartree, Full Sutton and the Scrubs I got to know the Six. If I had any doubts, getting to meet the men banished them. They inspired me going through many dark days. No amount of compensation can ever replace what they have lost. If anything like this ever happens to me, I only hope I have a fraction of their courage, endurance and kindness.

"First I would like to know why. Why is it that Judith Ward is still in prison and we are released? There are many more people, both Irish and English, still wrongfully behind bars, including the Tottenham Three and the Bridgewater Four"

☐ ***Billy Power*** *outside the Old Bailey immediately after his release from seventeen years in prison.*

Don't forget the Tottenham Three

THE TOTTENHAM THREE were jailed for life in 1987, scapegoats for the death of PC Keith Blakelock in the Broadwater Farm disturbances two years before. They were convicted solely on the basis of self-contradictory statements made to the police without benefit of legal advice and after long periods of isolation in custody. These "confessions" were all repudiated by the men who made them and were uncorrobrated by any forensic evidence.

● **Contact the Tottenham Three Families Campaign, 247a West Green Road, London N15 5ED.**

Legal farce keeps Dessie Ellis in jail

Conor Foley, *national organiser of the Connolly Association, exposes the latest in the long line in Irish victims of British injustice.*

AT THE END of February, Britain's judicial system lived up to its infamous reputation. The magistrate at a preliminary hearing of the Crown's case against former hunger-striker Dessie Ellis re-wrote the charge sheet against the Dublin man.

With breath-taking disregard for the principles of international law, the magistrate made a mockery of the so-called "gentleman's agreement" between Britain and Ireland governing the treatment of extraditees.

Ellis was extradited to face conspiracy charges brought under the 1883 Explosive Substances Act. Britain is one of the few countries in Europe which still uses conspiracy charges; they are vague in definition yet sweeping in scope. Essentially they amount to the accusation that the defendant thought of doing something.

The provisions of the Act under which Ellis was charged only apply to British residents and subjects; yet there is not the slightest shred of evidence that Dessie Ellis ever set foot in this country before his extradition.

> ***" It was an Irish court which handed Ellis over in the first place."***

Rather than throwing the case out, the magistrate dipped into legal history to pull out a couple of alternative Acts and substituted new charges under these Acts for the old, discredited ones.

Dublin has condemned this decision. But it was an Irish court which handed Ellis over in the first place.

In the same week as Ellis faced this legal farce, an appeal court in Belfast finally overturned the 1981 conviction of Robert "Goose" Russell for attempted murder. Russell escaped from Long Kesh in the mass breakout of 1983. Picked up in the south, he spent four years in Portlaoise prison awaiting extradition. The six-county authorities now admit he should never have been in prison in the first place.

Again and again the demeaning spectacle of Irish citizens being handed across the border to a foreign authority on political charges has been followed by legal debacles and blatant frame-ups.

In the flow of self-congratulation in which the Dublin establishment is basking following the release of the Birmingham Six, it should not be forgotten that had those men escaped during the last seventeen years and made their way to Ireland the current government would have had no qualms in handing them straight back to the British.

A message from Richard McIlkenny

"Being locked up in prison did not leave much scope for actually "doing" things.

I write concerning my friends and myself - the Birmingham Six - and I have spent a lot of time thinking about what I should write and I have decided that if there is anyone out there who does not know all about us and the great injustice we and our families have suffered for seventeen years then they cannot be living in the real world.

However, there is an old saying: "There is always someone worse off than yourself." And bad though our position was, this saying proved very true.

In countries such as EL Salvador people are being brutalized and murdered regularly. In Nicaragua the Contra rebels terrorised and murdered the ordinary poor people of the country; villages were destroyed for not having enough food to supply these "rebels". People have been brutally murdered for being schoolteachers and using their gifts to educate children. Others have been similarly treated for daring to show farmers and landworkers better ways to use the land for the benefit of all.

We have suffered at the hands of the police and on entering prison on our first day were brutally beaten by prison officers. We have endured long years in prison but we are alive and because of the strong love of our families and our friends we have overcome the degrading and dehumanising conditions of our imprisonment. Our sufferings were bad but are not to be compared to the horrific treatment the Nicaraguans endured at the hands of the Contras.In places such as El Salvador the terrorising of the people comes from the armies and secret police of ruthless dictators who in their lust for power would appear to have lost all traces of humanity, if they ever had any.

We have survived, but in South Africa under a brutal totalitarian apartheid system of government great numbers of people have died and are still dying daily. Why? Because they are black, treated as something less than human because of the colour of their skins; our sufferings do not compare with the sufferings the people of South Africa have endured for generations.

In this world of ours something has gone drastically wrong over quite a long number of years and today the concept of justice has been swept aside and in many ways has been twisted and perverted to suit certain regimes and certain people for their own reasons and benefits.

Even in the so-called civilised world injustice and privations are dealt out to the poor and the helpless - the handicapped, mentally and physically, are treated with contempt and as not fit to live among the "normal people" of society.

Being in prison did not indeed allow me much scope for "doing" things but I have prayed and I do pray that justice may not be only a word but something that can be seen and enjoyed by all the peoples of the world."

GULF EXCLUSIVE

Subordinate to no one

Comrade MB, a member of the ***Pesh Merga,*** *the armed Iraqi Kurdish resistance, gave* Briefing *an exclusive interview during his recent visit to London. He must remain anonymous to avoid the attentions of both the Iraqi secret police and the British Special Branch.*

Briefing: What's the background to the current Kurdish struggle against Saddam Hussein and the Baghdad government ?

MB: There are 25 million Kurdish people. We are the largest nation never to have had our own state,though Kurds are large minorities in several states. The struggle for Kurdish autonomy in Iraq dates back to our betrayal following the Treaties of Versailles and Lausanne after the First World War. We were promised a nation state by Britain and France but were subsequently betrayed when the British occupied Iraq and the French did the same in Syria. After recognising the Ataturk regime in Turkey, both major powers decided to oppose all Kurdish autonomy. For us, Saddam Hussein is just the latest in a long line of rulers opposing our rights.

B: What was your attitude to the Gulf War and US intervention?

MB: We did not and do not support any part of the Middle East coming under direct imperialist rule. We oppose both the Ba'athist regime and the US attempts to overthrow it. Our political parties have made mistakes in the past and allowed the Kurdish national struggle to be subordinated to the interests of hostile forces. Iran, Syria and Turkey have all sought to use us as have various regimes in Baghdad. This time our programme for national democratic rights is clear and we intend to liberate ourselves.

B: Surely an Islamic fundamentalist regime like the one in Teheran would be an even bigger disaster for the Kurdish people than Saddam Hussein?

MB: Iraq is NOT like Iran. We are Sunni and Shi'ite, Kurd and Arab; the differences of population and geography would make any sort of rigid theocratic state unworkable. Remember that the Komalla Pesh Merga have been fighting the Khomeini and Rafsanjani regimes in Iran. We are well aware of any threat posed by narrow fundamentalism.

B: How do you square that with the fact that you are currently allied with Shi'ite and other groups in Iraq which may not share your aims?

MB: We are prepared to work within any framework that guarantees our autonomy. If other groups of people wish also to enjoy the same rights, we are prepared to work with them - whilst retaining our own freedom of action.

B: What's happening in Turkey?

MB: Under pressure from the Kurdish national struggle (and because world attention is now focused on the region) the Ozal government in Ankara has had to make concessions. Until recently it was illegal to speak Kurdish. The Turkish government even released a statement that said there were no such things as Kurds in Turkey, only "Mountain Turks who had forgotten their own language"! The concessions are small. We still cannot have our own newspapers or public meetings but at least private conversations in Kurdish are not now a criminal offence. We know that Ozal is attempting to use the current situation to diplomatic advantage by wooing certain Kurdish politicians. However, we also know that the largest group of Kurds are those suffering repression in Turkey and we have no illusions that liberation lies through Ankara.

B: What is the Pesh Merga's attitude to women?

MB: Women are a vital - and equal - part of our revolution. Women have fought in the militias, organised in the towns and villages and helped develop our theory and programme. Kurdish women have traditionally played a much greater role in our society than in others. Without them there can be no liberation.

B: Lastly, what are your chances of success this time?

MB: In the end our struggle will be won because it is just, but we face formidable odds. The support of all progressive people is needed. We now have a "World Kurdish Congress" that has met in France and Scandinavia. The battle for autonomy in Iraq can now be won but it is also clear that Saddam Hussein did not commit his best troops in Kuwait. The T72 tanks and warplanes were kept back for just what is happening now. The Bush government is standing back and allowing Saddam a free hand against us. We are ready for the steps towards liberation - but we need your help.

Now that the war for Kuwait is over, socialists must see that attention and support is maintained.

Making a killing

AS POGROMS against Palestinians and Yemenis continued in Kuwait and government officials withheld emergency food rations from "non-Kuwaitis" (the majority of the country's population) a conference was held in London on the theme of "Rebuilding Kuwait: a briefing for British businessmen". Organised by Westminster Management Consultants "in association with" the Department of Trade and Industry and something calling itself "the British Task Force for the Reconstruction of Kuwait" (whose members include top directors at Morgan Grenfell and the Crown Agents) the "briefing" offered British firms helpful hints on how to get their share of the $500 billion in contracts which will soon be up for grabs in the al-Sabahs' benighted realm. The keynote address was delivered by the Kuwaiti Ambassador and the cost of admission was £138 per head.

Palestine: the wild card

Hanna Khamis, *Coventry South West CLP, examines Western plans for a post-war carve-up of the Middle East.*

LAST SEPTEMBER, Douglas Hurd declared that the major obstacle to a solution to the Palestine problem was Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Leaving aside the small matter of suspect chronology, does this mean that we now stand on the brink of a solution? Is there a Western blueprint for a just settlement to the long-running conflict and will it be enforced as ruthlessly as the US enforced the UN resolutions on Kuwait?

No doubt the European and even the American establishments would like to see an end to a problem that has been both the most destabilising and the most radicalising force at work in the region for over seventy years. However, despite talk of Middle East conferences, no one has any new ideas. The further weakening of the Palestinians, with the Intifada stifled by a brutal curfew, is the only new factor - but one with little relevance to any UN-based solution. The PLO has no concessions left to make; it has met all the conditions imposed by Security Council resolutions.

" The PLO has no concessions left to make."

In contrast, UN resolutions relating to Israel, though watered-down to escape US veto, have never been accepted by Israel or enforced by Western powers. In any case, with political and military leadership back in Washington's hands, the UN may not even set the framework for a solution.

Washington's ideal scenario would be some form of strictly limited Palestinian self-rule in part of the Occupied Territories, with Israel and Jordan both given a say in determining Palestinian foreign and economic policies.

The result would be a semblance of Palestinian self-determination without the risks of a truly independent Palestine, which could become a focus for anti-imperialist forces throughout the Arab world. But two major problems stand in Washington's way. The first is that there is no Palestinian leadership, even under today's desperate conditions, which could or would take part in such a total surrender of Palestinian aspirations. The second obstacle is even greater: the Israeli establishment is currently dominated by people without the slightest inclination to give up any of the Occupied Territories.



Palestinians march in London, 1988 Photo: Tim Nolan

During the War, prominent members of the Israeli government went on record opposing any such action as a betrayal of future Israeli generations. A proponent of "population transfer" (i.e. mass deportations) was given a cabinet post, possibly to placate those who wished to use the Gulf War as an excuse to invade Jordan and create a client Palestinian state on the EAST bank of the river.

Since there is little chance of Israeli acceptance, it is unlikely that Washington will even try to impose its preferred solution. Indeed, Israel has probably already received guarantees that it will not be put under any genuine pressure on this question. What then does the "New World Order" hold in store for the region?

Some form of Middle East conference will make token statements on the Palestinian issue, mainly for Egyptian and Syrian home-consumption. The Arab governments which participated in the anti-Iraq alliance did not do so for the sake of the Palestinians; some did it to have their foreign debts written off, others to regain respectability and a voice on regional matters. They will neither seek nor expect any fair resolution of the Palestinian issue.

The outcome will be Camp David writ large - a new accommodation between Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Israel which guarantees Israel's security, allows Israeli economic penetration of neighbouring markets and leaves its status as the regional super-power intact.

In this division of the spoils, the Palestinians, as always, will be the losers. But they will also be the wild-card. Their struggle will continue, though perhaps in greater isolation than before.

If, despite all the difficulties they face, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and in Jordan manage to relaunch the Intifada, they may still bring to flame the smouldering Arab opposition to yet another Western carve-up of the Middle East.

Behind wire in the cold desert

In an exclusive report, Briefing's legal eagle, ***Ronald Carcewe,*** *reports on the plight of Iraqi students held as PoWs in the "cage" on Salisbury Plain.*

BARBED WIRE, watchtowers, floodlights, guard dogs, soldiers armed with live ammunition, prefab huts, the shout of "gate" every time anyone approaches, military passes to be flourished at every step ... No, not an out-take from Colditz, though it could well have been.

The 35 prisoners of war in this British military camp on Salisbury Plain certainly had the technical expertise to build a tunnel, if they had wanted to. Until January 22nd all of them were students studying for MScs and PhDs at British universities and polytechnics.

On that day, one week after the war began, the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence acted on a list provided by the Bank of England several months previously. This list detailed the names and colleges of Iraqi students whose studies in this country were being sponsored by the Military Attache (as opposed to the Cultural Attache) at the Iraqi Embassy. The MoD and the Home Office concluded that the students were Iraqi military personnel and should therefore be detained as prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention.

Police officers were dispatched to arrest them. It seems even the Tory government thought twice about sending armed soldiers on to college campuses, though PoWs are normally apprehended by military personnel.

As PoWs the students had no right to appeal - not even to the panel of "three wise men" reviewing the cases of "civilian" detainees. They did have the right to make representations but were not allowed legal aid. Only if the camp commander felt there was a genuine doubt as to a PoW's status could the case be referred to a Military Board. This was done in four cases.

The Military Board consisted of three army officers and was headed by a colonel. At one hearing it was discovered that the Board had been given the wrong prisoner's file; the colonel insisted that the fact that they had discovered this and asked for the correct one showed their impartiality. The British establishment seems to feel that if you're going to hang a man, you might as well get his name right.

In fact the Board was amazingly fair (magistrates take note!). The prisoner's legal representative pointed out that the prisoner's initials as listed in the "correct" file were different from those appearing on the Bank of England list, and that there was another person at the same university with the initials recorded on the list. The prisoner was promptly released.

In the other three cases, the Board seemed to accept almost everything that the PoW or his legal representative said, though there was no supporting documentary evidence. The Board agreed to release two of the three on the basis that they were not in the military at the time they came to the UK and would not be in the military on their return to Iraq.

Life in the camp was hard. One PoW described it as a "cold desert". The Iraqis were held in an area of the camp referred to as "the cage" and were billeted in Nissan huts - during the winter blizzards. They had to wear British army uniforms, were given old, worn and torn blankets, and were fed non-halal meat with no vegetarian alternative (the MoD blamed the contract caterers). What wasn't eaten one day was served up the next.

Most of the PoWs had wives and children in the UK (including some British wives), but were allowed only one phone call per month and no visits. There were signs in Arabic in areas of the camp to which the PoWs had no access - was this for the benefit of the Red Cross? Their mail was censored and took up to fifteen days to reach them. They were guarded by 100-200 soldiers, despite the fact that it was accepted that they presented no specific security threat and were only being detained because they had been in the Iraqi army.

When the war ended, the British government decided that it would no longer treat the men as PoWs and offered each one the choice of either being repatriated to Iraq or returning to his studies in Britain. Despite their "holiday" in Salisbury Plain every one of them chose to stay in the UK.

Meanwhile, in the USA, where over 80,000 Iraqis live, not a single one was detained. Makes you wonder.

"Known links"

Besides the PoWs, over fifty Palestinians and Iraqis were served with deportation orders and detained as risks to "national security".

They all received a standard letter informing them that the Iraqi regime had threatened terrorist action in the UK and that their "known links", whether with the Iraqi regime or with an unspecified terrorist organisation, made them a potential threat to national security.

About half the detainees were released following hearings before a panel of three "wise men" appointed by the Home Secretary (an Appeal Court Judge, the ex-president of the Immigration Tribunal and a civil servant).

At the hearings the detainees were denied legal representation but were allowed a non-legally qualified friend and witness. The allegations against the detainees were never specified nor was any evidence against them presented.

The detainees were held at Full Sutton prison in Yorkshire, one of only two British prisons which met the standards required by Red Cross inspectors.

That so many of them were released only goes to cast doubt on the "known links" asserted by British intelligence; there were several clear cases of mistaken identity.

As for those whose appeals were turned down by the "three wise men", even they represented no genuine "security risk" in the eyes of the British state. After all, following the ceasefire the deportation orders were revoked and all the detainees released.

Labour after the war

A MEETING OF 150 in London's Westminster Central Hall on March 14th illustrated the breadth of continuing Labour dissent in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

Bernie Grant lambasted the Labour leadership as "imperialist lackeys who are prepared to do America's bidding against the peoples of the Third World".

Stan Newens reminded the meeting that a majority of Labour's Euro-MPs had defied Kinnock on the Gulf while Gavin Strang insisted that historians would vindicate opponents of the War.

Audrey Wise said we were wrong in our predictions of huge Allied losses because we underestimated the "wickedness of the Allied bombing campaign".

Cate Murphy reported that Labour Against the War is organising a fact-finding delegation to Iraq, sponsoring a pamphlet on the War and producing model resolutions for Party Conference. Other speakers included Jeremy Corbyn, Ron Huzzard, Louise Christian and speakers from Iraq, Israel and Palestine.

LABOUR AGAINST THE WAR needs your help. Keeping CLPs informed, publishing a pamphlet, organising a delegation to Iraq all costs money. Please join us, and get your organisation to affiliate too.

National organisations £20; regional organisations £10; CLPs and union branches £5; individuals waged £2/ unwaged £1. Please make a donation!

Name .....

Address .....

Organisation/Position held .....
.....

I/We wish to sponsor the delegation to Iraq and the pamphlet and enclose a donation of £ .....

● **Please return to Labour Against the War, c/o Basement Office, 92 Ladbroke Grove, London W11 2HE. Telephone: 071 272 7217.**

LAW model resolution

"We call on the NEC and PLP to develop and promote an independent Labour policy for a democratic peace in the Middle East. Labour should be seen to have a socialist and democratic policy clearly counterposed to the plans of George Bush and the Tories for a US-dominated "new world order". The main points of the policy should be:

1. Immediate withdrawal of US, British and other foreign troops;

2. Self-determination for all the peoples of the Middle East;

3. Immediate aid from US, Britain and other developed countries to combat the danger of epidemics, and to restore civilian life in the areas damaged and disrupted by the war;

4. Support for representation of the PLO and Kurds at any international peace conference."

● **Contact LAW if your branch, Women's Section, CLP passes this resolution.**

Blood on Kinnock's hands

AS ALLIED troops napalmed, strafed and carpet-bombed fleeing Iraqis (and their Kuwaiti captives) on the road to Basra, Neil Kinnock applauded. Only hours before even Bush had decided enough was enough, Labour's NEC rejected all proposals for a ceasefire. Since then, there have been no Front Bench statements of support for the Kurds, no calls for the urgent implementation of outstanding UN resolutions on Palestine, for democratic elections in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, or for an end to the arms trade. Most telling of all, Kinnock refuses to call for a timetable for the withdrawal of Western troops from the region.



Photo: Tim Nolan

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST the Arms Trade is targeting local authorities. Does your council invest in companies involved in military exports? If so, what are you doing about it? The idea of arms conversion is not new to the Labour movement; but the Gulf War has put the issue back on the agenda - a new chance to make the case for constructive use of technology developed for weapons production. Contact CAAT at 11 Goodwin Street, London N4 3HQ. Newsletter a bargain at 50p.

CONGRATULATIONS TO AUDREY WISE who trounced her opponents in the election for USDAW President. The postal ballot for the election took place against the backdrop of the Gulf War, during which Audrey's opposition to the carnage was widely reported.

Lambeth: Bound and gagged

Local services, living standards and democracy are being shredded in Lambeth, reports Councillor ***Greg Tucker,*** *barred from voting in full Council because he refuses to pay his Poll Tax.*

IN THE EARLY morning hours of March 12th, Lambeth became the last council in the country to set a Poll Tax. At £590, it will stand as the highest Poll Tax ever set. Even with this exorbitant Poll Tax level the Council was still asked to approve £30 million cuts, which will mean a minimum of 500 redundancies and the death of vital local services.

Lambeth is still likely to be capped, which could result in a further £8 million cuts.

To get the package through the full Council, two Labour councillors who have refused to pay their Poll Tax had to be barred from voting.

In the build-up to the Council meeting, the Council and its workforce were subject to a barrage of media attacks for failing to deliver services efficiently. Wandsworth provided a handy and highly misleading comparison. Tory Central Office (aided and abetted by Walworth Road) worked overtime to disparage the borough. Nonetheless, local people have made it clear they do still see Lambeth's services as worth defending. It's just that they don't agree with paying the Poll Tax to finance them.

Bryan Gould and Larry Whitty told the Labour Group it had to set a budget no higher than the government's capping level. NEC Advice Notes issued earlier had specifically suggested that Labour budgets could and should be set above capping levels if these levels meant unacceptable cuts. Nonetheless, Lambeth Labour Group was told it would be in breach of Party rules if it did not obey Gould's instruction. Right-wing Labour councillors were advised by Walworth Road that they would be protected from disciplinary action if they broke the Whip and voted with the Tories.

On the night of the meeting things got off to a poor start when Council Leader Joan Twelves and six other Labour councillors announced that they would pay their Poll Tax after all, a climbdown at just the wrong moment after a year of defiance. A special media-friendly extra-large cheque for £10,000 was presented to Council officials at the start of proceedings.

After deputations from Lambeth NALGO and the local anti-Poll Tax campaign had explained to councillors why they should oppose both cuts and Poll Tax, the Council meeting got under way with a resolution from Joan Twelves calling for £30 million cuts. This was opposed by a left "No Cuts/ No Poll Tax" amendment and a split Tory Group offering two budgets under the capping level.

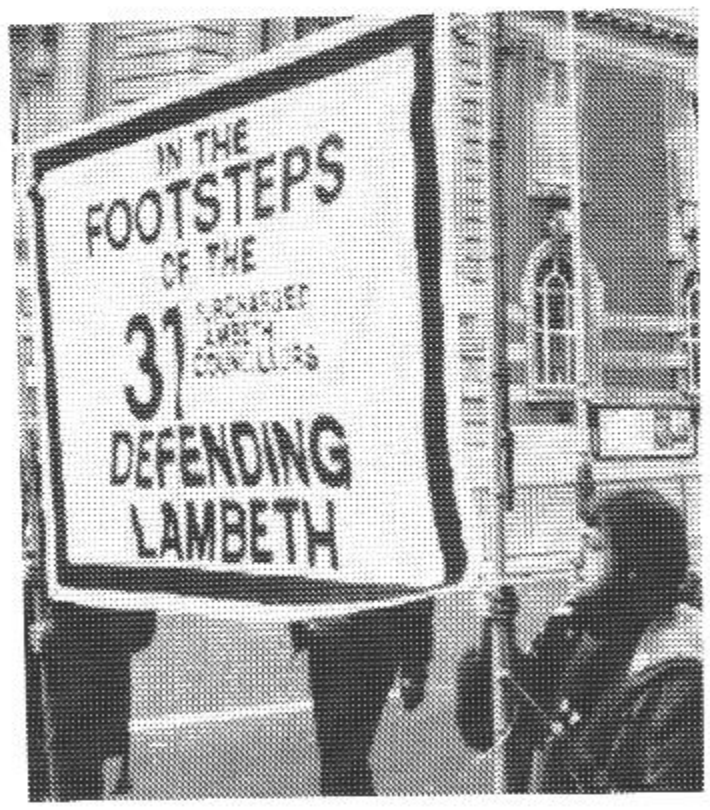
Then came the real finesse from the Joan Twelves group - legal advice to the Mayor that he should not count the votes of Councillor Steve French and myself because we had outstanding liability orders for non-payment.

Despite opposition from the majority of the Council (including from the Tories who wanted to be able to take the two of us to court) we were barred from voting on the Mayor's orders. We were, however, allowed to vote on budget matters - so the "No Cuts" amendment saw nine voting in favour. Every other vote involved Poll Tax setting - the taboo area.

Once the two of us had been gagged the Joan Twelves Cuts Budget should have been passed without difficulty. Surprisingly, it wasn't. A maverick Labour councillor decided to "give" his vote to the disenfranchised two as a protest against the gag. So three votes later and three in the morning finally saw the cuts budget passed 31-31 on the Mayor's casting vote. In the end, seven Labour councillors voted against both cuts and Poll Tax. Steve French and I were forced to register our views unofficially.

Opposition is growing. March 13th saw NALGO and NATFHE on strike against job losses. The 90,000 non-payers of last year's £521 Poll Tax will be joined by thousands more for this year's £590.

Joan Twelves has done herself no service by antagonising, in one go, the Tory government and Bryan Gould (by setting a budget above capping), Labour Group members (for arranging to disenfranchise two of them), the Council workforce (for making redundancies) and the community (for cutting services). Paying the Poll Tax on the same day just adds insult to injury.



We will all continue to defend Joan Twelves and co from the witch-hunt but she must expect renewed attacks for selling out the people of Lambeth at a crucial juncture.

Quick action by Lambeth workers

ON TUESDAY, March 13th, less than four hours after Lambeth's Labour leadership had agreed a massive cuts budget, the fightback began.

Jon Rogers
Chair, Lambeth NALGO

NALGO and NATFHE members staged a highly successful one day strike and march through the borough. Some NUT members also took solidarity action.

Further industrial action is now expected against a Council which is threatening compulsory redundancies - with managers staging kangaroo courts to determine who stays and who goes.

Who's intimidating whom?

Briefing editor ***Mike Marqusee*** *investigates the media campaign against Lambeth Council and offers bewildered Party members a guide on how to use the media - LCC-style.*

LAMBETH COUNCIL HAS been on the receiving end of some of the worst tabloid abuse in memory. But Party members should understand that it isn't just the gutter hacks of Wapping who are responsible for the smears which always cost Labour votes. "Respectable" Fleet Street journos, in cahoots with Walworth Road and the LCC, have played an even more insidious role.

The plight of Cllr. Steve French illustrates the way the system works.

On February 2nd the *South London Press* claimed on its front page that during the Council meeting on the Gulf War "Steve French and some colleagues chipped in with cries of 'Victory to Iraq'". This was illustrated with a ten-inch-square photo of Steve, just in case any local warmongers wanted to duff him up.

Steve wrote to the paper making clear that he had not said this and demanding a retraction. The paper refused even to print his letter. Significantly, at this point not a single other newspaper had attributed any such remark to Steve. Not even the *Sun* picked up Steve's "quote".

Then the LCC got stuck in. In its February members' mailing (press released, as always) Ben Lucas (see page 26) claimed that "Steve French was heard repeatedly shouting 'Victory to Iraq' and 'bomb Israel' during the debate". Funny thing, though, Ben Lucas was not even present at the Gulf meeting.

This didn't stop Patrick Wintour using Lucas' allegations as the basis for a *Guardian* article published on February 28th. Wintour failed to inform *Guardian* readers that his source was an LCC mailing and implied that Lucas was an independent witness. He made no attempt to contact Steve or any other left councillors before running the story.

Steve wrote to the *Guardian* but the paper failed to print his letter. After a week's delay, Executive Editor Campbell Page wrote to Steve saying he would look into his complaint. After a further delay, Steve's solicitor faxed Page demanding urgent action. On March 14th Page finally informed Steve's solicitor that "*The Guardian* has *now* spoken to two persons who were present at the Lambeth meeting" (my emphasis) and that they would back up Wintour's story. In other words, Wintour only sought corroboration of his hearsay story two weeks after it was published.

Only after the Wintour article appeared did the tabloids pick up the "story". Since then no diatribe against the "loony left" has been complete without an obligatory reference to "cries of 'Victory to Iraq'".

Wintour is fond of referring to Joan Twelves as "a former member of the IMG", an accolade which former IS-member Wintour (yes, it's true) denies to Kate Hoey, who is no more or less a former IMG member than Joan. His article on the London Labour Party conference led with the news that Joan had lost her seat on the Regional Executive, but somehow omitted to mention the fact that Kinnock-supporter Glenys Thornton had been dumped as London Party chair.

" Again and again negative coverage of Labour councillors has emanated from within the Party"

Similarly, Wintour gave extensive coverage to MP Kate Hoey's comments on Lambeth Council but somehow omitted to mention that Hoey had been imposed on the Vauxhall constituency in the by-election controversy in 1989 and had a direct personal interest in having the local Party disbanded.

Wintour himself played a role in that affair when he published an article on the *Guardian* front page claiming falsely that Martha Osamor was under investigation by the District Auditor and the Fraud Squad - on the very day the Labour leadership banned her from the short-list.

On that occasion, Wintour cited anonymous "Labour Party sources" for his story. Again and again negative coverage of Labour councillors has emanated from within the Party. In this case one of the main offenders is Lambeth councillor Cathy Ashley, an LCCer who works as a "researcher" at Walworth Road.

Ashley denounced her fellow Labour councillors in the local press even before the Council meeting on the war. Since then she has been trailing a sob story about having her tyres slashed by anti-Poll Tax people (she broke the Labour whip to vote for use of bailiffs) all over Fleet Street. Her denunciations have won plaudits from the *Mail*, the *Sun*, and the *Telegraph*, but precious few votes for Labour.

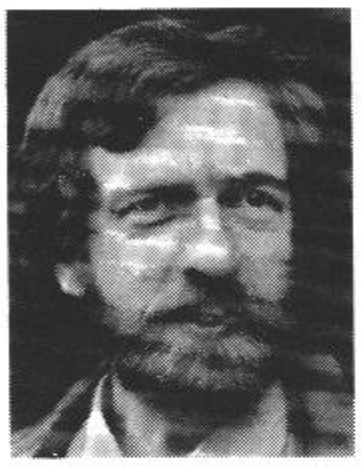
Kate Hoey and Streatham PPC Keith Hill have also been busy. On February 18th, in a press release issued on Streatham CLP headed paper, they backed the Organisation Sub-Committee's decision to investigate the Labour Group (made on that very day) and denounced "the antics of an unrepresentative minority". Clearly, Hoey and Hill (who also got themselves invited to Joan Twelves' private meeting with Bryan Gould) were set up by officials at Walworth Road to provide in-

As for Labour's new London Press Officer, Jo Scard, she spent her first London Labour Party conference touting Ben Lucas to journalists keen for dirt on the "loony left".

stant media fodder for the witch-hunt.

The *Evening Standard* in its two page spread on Lambeth (entitled "the return of left-wing lunacy") claimed wrongly that Steve French had "apologised" for his alleged "Victory to Iraq" remark, which, the *Standard* further claimed, had "stunned 30 of his colleagues". Funny none of them have come forward to confirm the story. In fact, not a single witness to the alleged remarks has yet to be identified by name. Fear of intimidation, no doubt.

Hope amidst the desolation...



☐ ***Commonweal*** *is a monthly column by* ***Jeremy Corbyn,*** *Labour MP for Islington North.*

WHEN WAR BECAME *a reality last August, everyone had to make a decision - for or against. For some this meant only a cynical accommodation to the "public mood", the chance of preferment by the Party leader or the possibility of plaudits from Tory journalists.*

But for others the stakes were higher. Lance Corporal Vic Williams, stationed in Germany, had to decide whether to go with the crowd to Iraq or to stand alone against what he considered an immoral war.

He made his decision and has now been court-martialled. I accompanied him, when, in a show of real courage, he gave himself up at Rochester Row Military Police Station.

Now that the real cost of the war is emerging - dead US and British servicemen, over 100,000 dead Iraqi conscripts, Republican Guards and civilians, lynch law in Kuwait - many will begin to ask: what was it all for?

MPs who voted for "the UN" or the "liberation of Kuwait" have trouble answering. In the aftermath of the war it is clear the UN has no role, the Emir and the rest of the Al Sabahs are back to kiss the ground, sign the orders for martial law and dish out the building contracts, the Palestinians see no change, the Kurds are left isolated, and the poor of the region have even less to eat.

" Now that the real cost of the war is emerging ... many will begin to ask: what was it all for? "

Since January I have spoken at over 70 public meetings and rallies against the war. In all of them I felt an amalgam of ideas, fears, and hopes. These were people who did stand up, who do want a different world order, who don't see the world as a sphere for Western plunder.

One of the great moments was an indoor rally of 2,000 in Paris, featuring a veteran of the campaign against the Algerian war, Greens from what used to be East Germany, an Algerian feminist and a union general secretary from Senegal. All had a vision lacking in the official Social Democratic and Socialist Parties of Europe and all had hope. With not a designer label in sight, we concluded with a lusty rendition of the Internationale!

BRITISH IMPERIALISM'S OLDEST *victim, Ireland, has been in the news again.*

The Emergency Provisions Act for Northern Ireland gives powers of internment and interrogation to the RUC and British Forces. Late at night in the House of Commons, after Front Bench agreement, the Bill was to be given an unopposed third reading. A small group of us forced a division. This meant over a hundred bow-tied, post-prandial and very cross Tory MP's were required to stay in the House and vote. Such is the power of opposition!

SITTING IN THE *well of Old Bailey Court Number 8, in front of the dock, I realised the real victory of the Birmingham Six.*

Behind me were the men who had had nearly seventeen years of their lives sacrificed on the altar of anti-Irish hysteria; in the gallery the strained faces of families, who had only seen their husbands and fathers in prisons or in courts since 1974. But in front was a spectacle of disarray. Leaning forward and looking through his half-moon glasses, the judge witheringly asked of the barrister for the Crown, "Are you engaged in a damage limitation exercise?"

Exactly.

AN MP'S LIFE *is one of contrasts. On the one hand there are the victims of the Tories filling our surgeries; on the other, there's the crassness of Parliament and its ignorance of the effects of its decisions.*

On a Friday evening a woman told me of the refusal by the Department of Social Security to give her a Social Fund grant to buy furniture for her family. Four days later, on the Social Security Select Committee, the Secretary of State is trying to convince me that the Social Fund and the much-vaunted "targeting" is working. But for whom?

A WEEK LATER *a group of pensioners meeting at Willesden College explicitly reject the designer electoralism of the Labour Party and demanded not just a decent pension but a proper health and education service for all ages.*

These are the "traditional" labour voters whom the left in the Party is supposed to have frightened away!

Labour's two worlds

ON A Sunday in March I experienced Labour's two worlds in one day.

The morning was spent canvassing, talking with people on the doorstep; the afternoon, sitting in the West Midlands Regional Conference, listening to smart-suited Party spokesmen (and they were men!) and union bureaucrats explaining that the glossy policy documents from Head Office actually do contain policies.

John Wilton
PPC Birmingham Edgbaston

I heard Larry Whitty tell the conference, "People who can pay the Poll Tax and don't have no place in this Party." Earlier I had heard people on the doorstep complain long and hard about this same Poll Tax. They said that they couldn't pay it and that a Labour Council in Birmingham shouldn't be implementing it. Are we supposed to desert those people, abandon them to the Tories?

Just because some people can afford to pay, are we supposed to abandon those who can't? Whatever happened to the idea of solidarity? If my boss offers a lower pay rise than my union seeks but I can personally afford to accept it, am I supposed to do so and say "sod you" to my workmates who may need a higher rise?

On the doorstep what people want to talk about is the Poll Tax, their kids' education, rents and mortgages, housing, and health care. But getting our "policies" across to people concerned about these issues isn't easy.

Fortunately, our campaign in Edgbaston does not revolve around the unreal world of Regional Conferences and glossy brochures. It is focused on work on the doorstep; on contact with community and pensioners' groups; and on standing in solidarity alongside all people struggling against the Tories.

The Ribble Valley by-election was a warning of what happens when you get running a campaign with gloss but no politics. In 1987 we were 3.7% behind the Alliance in Ribble Valley. At the beginning of the recent by-election campaign polls showed us in second place. We lost the election and lost out to the Liberal Democrats in the course of the campaign itself.

People want to vote for something positive. We know the Liberals offer nothing and that Labour is the only real alternative to the Tories. But we need to convince the electorate of that and we can't do it by keeping our mouths shut, by speaking endlessly and saying nothing about what really needs to be done.

We can only succeed by hammering home at every opportunity - on the doorstep, in the workplace, in the media - the socialist policies that can make a real difference in working people's lives.

Cure for Insomnia

THE GRAND Theatre in Wolverhampton was dark and gloomy as the West Midlands Regional Labour Party conference commenced on March 9th. Stage lighting made the Regional Executive perched on the platform look like a garish red and yellow hologram. Whither the trendy beige-and-pink of the past two years?

Larry Whitty kept a straight face while telling delegates (who fell about in their seats) that the new membership system was "suffering a few hiccups".

All the conference resolutions were carried, except an emergency resolution moved by Dave Nellist calling for the lifting of all sanctions against Iraq except on the arms trade. A GMB emergency on the Gulf (echoing the NEC) was passed on a show of hands with NUPE and the FBU abstaining. Another resolution, calling on the Regional Office to undertake a defence industry alternative employment study for the region, was passed with only the EETPU voting against. When questioned afterwards they made it clear they thought an employment study would mean job losses and not new employment for old skills. What faith in Regional Office and a future Labour government!

The collecting and counting of votes caused a problem for tellers. A right-wing woman was awarded an extra 1,000 votes and a staunch supporter of Women's Sections had 1,000 votes go missing. No apology was proffered from the platform.

KINNOCKITE GLENYS THORNTON lost the chairpersonship of the Greater London Labour Party to FBU official Jim Fitzpatrick at the Regional Conference on March 1st by 487,000 to 152,500. Thornton had earned the displeasure of London unions by joining in a national HQ attack on Regional Secretary Terry Ashton - another episode in the long-running argument over who will get the blame for what may be another general election disaster in London. At the moment it's hard to see Labour winning more than four of its 21 target seats in the capital.

Thornton has chaired the London Party since 1986 with dismal effect. In the end she was backed only by the hard-core LCC and the far-right unions. Fitzpatrick, who opposed the Gulf War, was backed by the TGWU, NGA, COHSE, RMT, and (after Jeremy Corbyn withdrew) all the left-wing CLPs.

But nearly all the unions turned their backs on appeals from two Lambeth CLPs to stop the witch-hunt of the Lambeth Labour Group.

Telling legacy of the Thornton years: only twelve Women's Sections are now affiliated to the London Party and only five sent a delegate to the conference.

IN A DAMNING report, Camden Community Law Centre has revealed that the Council has failed to take any real action against racial harassment. Of 60 cases referred to the housing department in the first six months of last year, only three were being considered for legal action. At the same time, the Council has axed its Race and Community Relations Committee.

Edgbaston: *sharp contrasts and socialist politics*

THE BIRMINGHAM EDGBASTON constituency stretches from the Hereford and Worcester boundary on the west to just short of the city centre on the east.

It has an electorate of 55,000. There are 16,000 residents aged under nineteen and 12,000 over sixty-five. 13% of heads of households were born outside the UK.

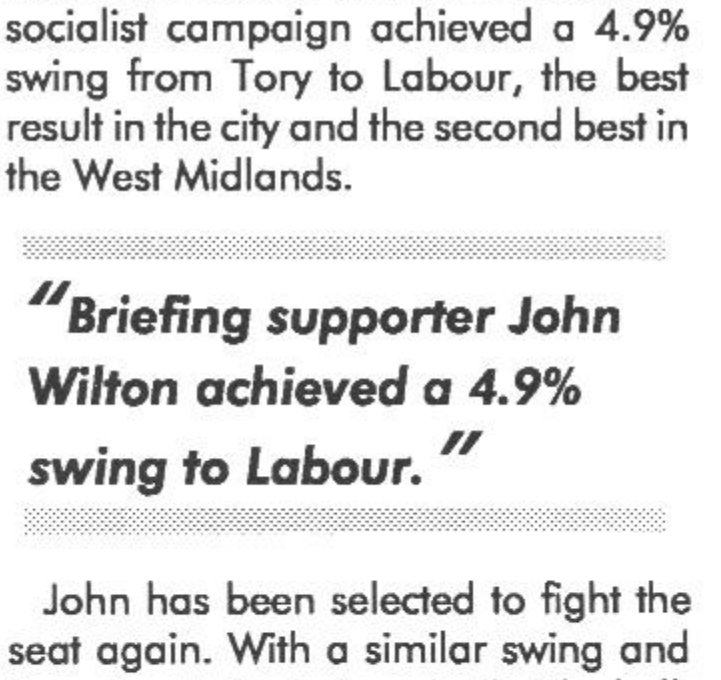
Male unemployment in the Edgbaston ward (one of three that make up the constituency) is 21% - this in a constituency that also boasts more Rolls Royces per head than any other in the country!

The Tory majority at the general election was 8,581. But in last year's council elections, with the collapse of the SDP vote, the difference between Labour and the Tories dropped to 580!

Our candidate in 87 was *Briefing* supporter John Wilton, whose explicitly socialist campaign achieved a 4.9% swing from Tory to Labour, the best result in the city and the second best in the West Midlands.

"Briefing supporter John Wilton achieved a 4.9% swing to Labour."

John has been selected to fight the seat again. With a similar swing and the return to the Labour fold of the bulk of local SDP voters, we could take the seat off our reactionary Tory MP, Jill Knight.





John Wilton

All three wards are currently held by the Tories. Dick Knowles, Labour Leader of Birmingham Council, boasts that he won't invest in Tory areas. This means Edgbaston has pockets of appalling housing, dilapidated schools and a general lack of community facilities.

Quinton ward consists of large council estates and acres of 1935 semis. The local Labour Party branch has a history of grass-roots politics and has recently saved a piece of woodland from the developers.

Harborne ward suffered defections to the Green Party following the 1989 Party Conference. It's a strong CND area with Victorian, middle class housing, a nuclear bunker (recently sold to private developers) and a smart shopping street visited by people from all over the city.

Edgbaston ward includes the Queen Elizabeth Teaching Hospital and Birmingham University with 3,000 student dwellings. The Party in this ward is sustained by a hard core of permanent members and a continual flow of students who usually move on to the Northfield or Selly Oak constituencies after a year in halls.

Six years ago the LCC had a stranglehold on the Edgbaston GC, but a split occurred during the miners' strike. Now it's very mixed, with many members new to the Party. A small core of right-wingers ensures interesting debates. Recently they proposed that someone with the same name (a common name) as a person who had once been a Labour Party member and had been known to sell Militant should not be accepted into the Party until visited by Party officers! Luckily the GC rejected this preposterous proposal.

All three candidates in this May's Council elections have stood before and are well into their campaigns. Many Edgbaston members are active at District Party (city-wide) level and have had an input into policy and manifesto making.

The newly elected Chair of the constituency is a NUPE shop steward. This has helped reinforce the link between NUPE and the CLP around health and social services campaigns.

Edgbaston could well end up with three Labour councillors in May. For the first time in living memory, socialists, the poor, the disadvantaged will have a chance of securing resources and will certainly have a clear voice speaking for them in Birmingham's Council Chamber.

■ *This month's constituency close up is by* ***Pauline Purnell,*** *Vice-Chair of Edgbaston Constituency Labour Party and Chair of Birmingham District Labour Party.*

Demagogic double-dealer

This month's class traitor is the man who wanted to "sound the death knell of the block vote" whilst wielding it as ruthlessly as anyone in history, ***John Edmonds*** *of the mighty GMB.*

"I'VE NEVER HAD an original idea in my life," John Edmonds admitted to a fringe meeting at last year's Labour Party conference. As the issue in question was the need for Labour to adopt a pay policy, the admission was telling.

After years of obscurity in the back rooms of the old General & Municipal, Edmonds clearly relishes his higher media profile. He sees himself as a natural governor of the labour movement and resents anyone who fails to acknowledge his eminence.

Edmonds succeeded David Basnett as General Secretary of what was then the GMBATU in 1986. He had gone to work for the GMWU straight from Oxford University in 1965 and swiftly climbed the union ladder, becoming a Regional Officer in 68 and a National Industrial Officer in 72. He has never done a day's real work in his life!

Edmonds' influence in the TUC is now inordinate. Norman Willis knows that nothing can proceed without Edmonds' go-ahead. When Willis was roused out of his customary torpor to write and press release a letter to Arthur Scargill demanding the "truth" about the Libyan connection, Congress House grapevine whispered that it was all Edmonds' doing.

To the media Edmonds is a "thinker", a man with "vision". He even told Bea Campbell in Marxism Today that he did his own shopping. He is in fact a master opportunist and complete cynic backed up by a heavyweight political machine.

The Generally More Bureaucratic Union has dealt with the crisis of membership that has afflicted so many unions over the last decade by seeking out mergers with like-minded organisations. First came the Boilermakers, in 1982, which like the GMWU had a powerful base in the North-East. Then came the reactionary Greater London Staff Association, the tiny but politically important National Union of Labour Organisers, and at the end of the decade, the 100,000 strong APEX clerical union, a bastion of the hard right. Recently the GMB devoured the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers.

More mergers are on the cards as Edmonds pursues his "new unionism" - a form of empire-building that owes little to recruitment and workplace organisation but everything to deals stitched up among existing union hierarchies. Rhetoric about women and part-time workers is an Edmonds speciality. But when women's and part-timers' rights mean standing up to employers, the GBM is nowhere to be seen.



But while the GMB has made little progress increasing its real influence in the workplace, in the higher reaches of the labour movement it has made vast strides.

During the 80s the union put together an impressive list of sponsored MPs, including Betty Boothroyd, John Cunningham, Gerald Kaufman, John Smith, Jack Straw, Don Dixon, Joan Lestor, Giles Radice, George Robertson, Denis Howell, Ann Taylor, and Merlyn Rees - enough Class Traiors to keep Briefing in copy for years to come!

The GMB's influence has now spread into the European Parliamentary Labour Party. Alan Donnelly, MEP for Tyne and Wear, formerly the GMB's national financial officer (and loyal scion of its powerful Northeast bureaucracy), is now secretary of the EPLP and acts as a crucial link between it and Kinnock's office.

Edmonds boasted that in the 1987 general election campaign "the GMB was the backbone of the Labour Party". Yet only 4% of Party members belong to the mighty GMB. This means that less than 2% of the GMB's 850,000 levy-payers are Party members in their own right. So much for the GMB's commitment to Labour's "mass membership" campaign, of which Edmonds has been such a voluble champion!

A few years back, in a revealing incident, Edmonds demoted senior national GMB officer David Warburton, a traditional right winger, for daring to put in writing what everyone else knows full well, that there is a "distance between the Party leadership and the rest of the movement".

Edmonds is not, however, a close personal supporter of Kinnock. Indeed, he has been known to let slip the odd caustic remark about the leader's obvious limitations. It is often said that when the time comes, Edmonds will be the only one in the Party with sufficient clout to tell Kinnock to push off.

Demagogic double-talk is second nature to this man. At the 1989 conference he declaimed: "This conference must sound the death knell of the block vote. Let us say it clearly. The block vote must go. The trade unions should retain influence but must surrender control." We're still waiting for the day John Edmonds surrenders control of anything.

The bailiff busters

The Poll Tax is on the way out. But what happens now to those of us who gave it the boot? Below we give a few helpful hints on dealing with bailiffs. They're not coppers, but just as nasty.

Will bailiffs turn up without notice?
This is extremely unlikely because bailiffs have to make sure you're there to let them in. But be careful who you let in if you have a liability order against you. If you open the door to a stranger shut it again and get proof of identity passed through the letter box.Bailiffs might well pretend to be someone else.

When are bailiffs allowed to come?
Betwen sunrise and sunset, but not on Sundays.

Can bailiffs break in?
No! But certified bailiffs can enter an open building without permission (i.e. climb through an unlocked window) and once inside can break down internal doors. They can force entry only if they have already been in and priced goods.

Will the bailiffs use intimidation to try to get in?
Bailiffs are adept at getting into homes and will try every trick in the book. Whatever they say: DON'T OPEN YOUR DOORS AND WINDOWS. KEEP THEM LOCKED!

If I hear the bailiffs are coming to my house what should I do?
If a liability order has been served against you get in touch with your local anti-Poll Tax group immediately. They can arrange for people to be on your doorstep as a peaceful protest. Also, arrange to have your friends and neighbours there. Have pen and paper and be ready to note down everything that is said to you or done in and around your home.

Can the bailiffs price goods by looking through the window?
No. If they say this they are simply trying to intimidate you.

Can bailiffs take goods that don't belong to me?
No. They cannot take goods that are on HP or goods that you can prove are not yours. You will need a letter, dated before the liability order, signed by a solicitor, saying you have sold the goods to someone else. Local anti-poll tax groups may be able to help you with this.

Do bailiffs seize property immediately if they gain entry?
Not usually. They will price the goods and then inform you that they will be returning after five days to take the goods. They may try to make you sign a "walking possession" form. Refuse to do this; it might help your case if you want to appeal against the bailiffs' actions later.

Can my landlord let the bailiffs in?
No. If this happens you should appeal.

What if I don't have enough goods to make up the total sum of debt?
Bailiffs cannot take anything if there is not enough to cover the whole debt.

What can the bailiffs take?
In theory everything that belongs to you except the clothes you are wearing.

Are there any exceptions?
Most councils have told the bailiffs not to take goods from people who are elderly, sick or disabled or who have very limited incomes. The council will only know if the bailiffs break this directive if we tell them. Contact your local anti-Poll Tax union.

Can I appeal against the bailiffs?
Yes. If at any time the bailiffs don't follow the rules or abuse their powers you can appeal. Always try to have witnesses available if you have any dealings with bailiffs.

Have the bailiffs been successful in Scotland?
No! Councils mainly use bailiffs to intimidate people. In fact, bailiffs are an uneconomical way tocollect money.

Will the police turn up?
The police should only be there to prevent a breach of the peace. They cannot force entry or assist the bailiffs.

The real law-breakers

Bailiffs employed by Birmingham Council entered premises in Handsworth under false pretences and "restrained property" (itemised goods to be taken away for sale) which the Council's own guidelines list as "essential items", including fridge, cooker and gas fire.

Two bailiffs from Crilleys, a local firm, arrived at the house of Poll Tax non-payers on February 15th. A seven year old boy answered the door and asked the bailiffs to wait while he went to neighbours to get help. When he returned, on his own, he found the bailiffs sitting in his front room with a list of goods for seizure.

The bailiffs then tried to get an elderly woman who spoke no English to sign for the goods. She refused. They threatened the seven year old that if he did not sign they would "get the van".

The local anti-Poll Tax group moved quickly. Within days, the courts ruled the bailiffs' actions illegal.

At the following meeting of Birmingham's ruling Labour Group, a motion proposed by Cllr Guy Daly to suspend use of bailiffs and withdraw the contract with Crilleys was defeated.

Council Leader Dick Knowles assured the public he had "read the riot act" to Crilleys.

But most of Knowles' ire is aimed at Poll Tax non-payers in Labour's ranks. He believes they are responsible for the 286,000 out of 690,000 people who have not paid or are in arrears.

At least Knowles knows what people think about the Tax. Tory Leader Reg Hales, on the other hand, believes the problem is Council inefficiency. "Thousands are still pleading with the Council to send them a bill", he claimed in a local newspaper.

The £136 scandal

***Kathy Pick,** joint secretary of Wandsworth Against the Poll Tax, unravels the machinations behind the lowest Poll Tax in the country - and shows who's really paying the bill.*

IT SHOULDN'T COME as much of a surprise that Wandsworth Council has set a Poll Tax of £136 - £40 lower than government guidelines.

The local Tories have dipped into reserves yet again, using £7.5 million to cut the Poll Tax and transferred another £15 million into the contingency fund.

> ***" This past year has seen £15 million cuts with 310 Council jobs lost. "***

When they set last year's £148 Poll Tax, the lowest in England and Wales, they used £17 million of the reserves and planned £50 million cuts in jobs and services spread over the next four years.

The Director of Finance had warned that unless there were cuts in jobs and services the Poll Tax in 1991 would have to be about £400. Wandsworth has been hurt by the end of the government's Poll Tax "safety net", which helped beef up the Council's funds at the expense of other boroughs.

This past year has seen £15 million cuts with 310 Council jobs lost. There have been further job losses because of cuts in the voluntary sector.

Wandsworth has now cut over 17,000 Council jobs since the Tories took power in 1978. Last year its rents were the second highest in the country. Now (since it's not election year) the rents are due to go up again - this time by a flat rate increase of £15.70 per week, no matter what the size of the flat or house.

Wandsworth Tories have also sold off ex-ILEA properties to top up their reserves.

Among the closures are twelve of the nineteen Council nurseries, law centres, and several schools including a special school. Seventy Council institutions or Council-funded organisations have been closed - affecting a wide range of services, including education and facilities for the disabled and elderly.

Some Tory Councillors argued for a Poll Tax of £170-190, which would have at least enabled the borough to maintain its reduced level of services. But they were defeated.

Leader Paul Beresford spends a fair amount of time at the Department of the Environment on Masham Street pleading for more money. Wandsworth now receives the second highest level of government subsidy in the country.

The low Poll Tax seems to have been inspired partly by competition with Westminster, a disgraceful reason to make the people of Wandsworth suffer job losses and cuts.

On a positive note, 31,000 summonses had been served on local Poll Tax non-payers by early March. Even with a Poll Tax of "only" £148 one third of the borough is worse off than it was under the rates, which is why so many are refusing to pay.

Dismal anniversary

IN A few months time it will be four years since Toby Harris and the LCC seized control of Haringey Council from the left. Odds are that not a soul in the borough will be celebrating. The Council has just set a Poll Tax of £560, creeping in under the capping level by virtue of another £22 million cuts and a staggering 1000 plus job losses.

Mike Marqusee
Hornsey and Wood Green CLP

This time education is hard hit, with 45 secondary teachers cut, school meals slashed, and the local college pushed to extinction. Library hours and social workers are cut again and the voluntary sector is decimated - among the victims are the borough's only law centre, numerous playgroups, pensioners' groups, various groups on Broadwater Farm, Reading Matters bookshop, and a host of black, ethnic minority, women's and disabled groups.

And on top of this there's a £10 a week rent rise.

Furious council unions are stirring themselves as this latest wave of devastation hits the inner core of the Council's services. The NUT will ballot for strike action; its members joined NALGO members in taking strike action on budget-setting day to attend a rally at which local MP Bernie Grant delivered a fiery attack on Harris' leadership.

The dismal performance of the Labour Group - **not a single Labour councillor voted against or abstained on the cuts/Poll Tax package** - is in marked contrast to the spectacular success of the local anti-Poll Tax movement. So far some 24,000 summonses for non-payment have been sent out; less than 10% of those summonsed are responding by paying the Tax; between 70-110 people are turning up at each court session to contest the liability orders. Another 20,000 have yet to be summonsed and untold numbers are in arrears. At the moment the Council's estimate of 7.5% non-payment of the 1991-92 Poll Tax looks way off the mark.

TOWER HAMLETS RESIDENT Abdul Khalid is married with five children. He earns £90 a week as a cook. He pays £37 a week in rent and £10 a week for school meals. Tower Hamlets has liability orders against him and his wife. Their combined Poll Tax bill is £594. Added on to that are court and bailiffs costs bringing the debt up to £836. Remember Mr Khalid the next time some local councillor tells you not paying the Poll Tax is "anti-social".

Centurions in tube squeeze

*RMT member **Pat Sikorski** exposes crass management tactics on London Underground and details the union's plans for a fightback.*



OVER 600 rail workers roared their approval as speaker after speaker called for the removal of London Underground Limited (LUL) management at a recent mass meeting in Euston.

For two weeks from April 8th, the RMT will ballot LUL members on strike action against management's latest cuts in jobs and services. The LUL District Council of the RMT expects a big majority to back industrial action.

The LUL management duo of Wilfred Newton and Denis Tunnicliffe, brought in after the Kings Cross fire, has turned London's longest running farce - its collapsing tube system - into a major tragedy.

In an interview with the Financial Times shortly after his appointment, Tunnicliffe said that McDonalds had shown how to provide a cheap, efficient service to the "customer". Three years later, his ragged band of McDonalds-style managers (dubbed "Centurions" by their boss) has been reduced to switching off the lifts and escalators to save money.

Management has developed a three-level cuts programme aimed at balancing the books before the end of this financial year. LUL is at least £100 million over budget; experienced insiders guess the real figure is probably much greater.

LUL unveiled what we now know as Level 2 of its cuts programme at the beginning of March. It involved 980 job losses, reductions in staffing levels and train services, a re-scheduling of debts and calculated "risks" on safety matters. The bosses offered to set up two "working parties" but took care not to submit their proposals through the formal negotiating machinery. Instead, the measures were to be imposed in the first week of April.

The RMT rejected both the cuts and the poisoned chalice of "working parties". However, ASLEF and the booking clerks' union TSSA took the bait and joined the working parties. Soon after, TSSA was informed that, contrary to the original plans, not 300 but 390 booking clerks would have to go. ASLEF's attempts at "negotiation" were equally unsuccessful. Originally, 80 train operators and shunters had been threatened with the chop; LUL now wanted to get rid of up to 130.

A leaked document then revealed that Level 3 of the cuts package involved the loss of 246 extra train staff, 458 extra station staff and 94 more train maintenance staff, bringing total job cuts to over 2,000.

This is management's last desperate throw of the dice. They were installed by the Tories to prepare LUL for privatisation and have pursued that aim ruthlessly. But as the next election gets closer the game becomes riskier.

Prolonged strikes and tube disruption would add to the Tories' woes, especially as transport is a highly sensitive issue in the South-East.

On the other hand, if the workers force management to climb down the Treasury will have to put more money into the tube system. This would be a major U-turn and the scapegoats would be Tunnicliffe and his "centurions".

Top management is now trying to tough it out with the RMT. Their leaked document states baldly that "industrial action is likely to result from the Level 2 initiatives, and in view of this there is merit in introducing the more radical working practice and employment changes from Level 3".

As in 1989 we can expect LUL to use the anti-union laws and the courts to try to derail the workers' resistance. Attempts will be made to keep the system operating by getting scab workers and managers to run a skeleton shuttle service which will be advertised in the media as a "full service".

If the strikes persist, management would try to shutdown the whole system and lock out the workforce, allowing back only those workers it wants and only on its own terms.

But to do this they will need public backing. At present they just don't have it. The latest of a series of major disruptions saw nearly 7,000 passengers on the Central Line being walked out along the tunnels in an operation that halted the service for five hours.

250,000 RMT leaflets arguing against the cuts package were well received when distributed to passengers at London stations.

We will need their support in our fight for safe public transport in the capital.

NUPE recall conference

FACED WITH financial crisis, the Rodney Bickerstaffe/Roger Poole leadership of NUPE attempted to push through a package of cuts in branch funds and a large increase in subs at a special conference held in London on March 2nd.

Keith Veness
Delegate, Hackney NUPE
Officers

Our other "leader" Tom Sawyer now stays in the background and indeed spent the whole of this conference sitting quietly at the back of the stage. Apparently organising witch-hunts in the Labour Party leaves him little time to spare for NUPE matters.

The conference opened with the chair of the standing orders committee, Ina Love, attempting to railroad the conference into agreeing the backdating of any subs increase to March 1st. After howls of anguish, the proposal was put to a vote by a show of hands. Our President, Brother Thorburn, declared the vote "carried" despite clear indications that it was not. Some of us duly rose to demand a card vote. The result was a five-to-one defeat for the platform.

Suitably chastened, the President then offered ten minutes for each motion, except Rodney Bickerstaffe's, for which he proposed double the time. More howls and boos from the audience forced "Bick" to agree to ten minutes.

The conference agreed a rise in subs from April 1st - the only alternative being the sacking of staff and officials. It also agreed an equivalent rise in benefits. The issue of monies to branch secretaries provoked a lively debate before the Executive recommendations were carried. On the last vote on stewards commissions the platform was defeated once again.

This was the most critical and combative NUPE gathering for many years. Ordinary shop stewards and branch officers are not happy with the supine stance of the leadership. One delegate from Newcastle described his officials as the "highest paid bouncers in Britain" as he only saw them stewarding Labour conferences! There were also many references to strikes against cuts and days of action in places like Liverpool, Hackney, Haringey, Wandsworth and Tyneside. The full conference in Scarborough in May looks set to cause the leadership a few problems!

MORE THAN 600 miners are on strike at Emperor Gold Mines, Vatukoula, Fiji.

The Resident Manager has issued warning notices to 400 of the miners threatening them with dismissal. He claims that they have broken company rules if they are absent without leave for more than three shifts in any six months.

The strike is over sub-human living conditions in the housing provided by the employer, extremely low wages, dangerous working conditions, rough treatment by supervisors, and the demand for recognition of the Fiji Mineworkers' Union, which the company has refused to negotiate with.

The Fiji TUC is assisting the mineworkers through its affiliates and officers, but financial assistance from abroad is needed. The strike is likely to continue for some time.

Donations and solidarity messages to:

FMU,
c/o FTUC,
32 Des Voeux Road, PO Box 1418,
Suva, Fiji;
fax (679) 300306.

BT job cuts

THE NCU has been told by British Telecom that its workforce faces up to 36,000 job losses over the next three years. The cuts will largely affect manual engineering staff and will devastate key areas of the NCU. Amongst the losses are: 6,000 telephone operators, the sell-off of "City call" and "Weatherview" services, and the ending of "0800 Freephone" numbers.

China's dangerous workers

THE HONG Kong Trade Union Education Centre reports that leaders of the Workers Autonomous Federation in China who were prominent in the 1989 pro-democracy movement have been jailed for thirteen years. Apparently they showed "no willingness to repent". The South China Morning Post comments: the sentences "are likely to be stiff because the Chinese Communist Party traditionally regards workers as a much more dangerous factor of instability than intellectuals". Resistance within China appears to be at a low ebb, although unemployment is rising rapidly towards the 11 million mark.

Genghis Khan corner

THE GOOD burgers of the Isle of Man have apparently decided that Thatcher's moves to take trades union law back to pre-Taff Vale days are quite insufficient. They are now proposing to revert to the pre-Tolpuddle era by making strikes illegal in "essential public services". Their toy-town parliament ("Tynewald") has announced that this act "makes trades unions legal for the first time", even if it is solely so they can be prosecuted for striking!

BREL - THE COMPANY which runs British Rail's engineering workshop - was privatised eighteen months ago. Trafalgar House joined with a Swedish/Swiss multinational to buy a controlling interest in the business, which is worth £100 million but was purchased for less than £5 million.

Graham Till
RMT

Two days before an increase in the value of a £1 share to £10.54 was announced, 1200 of BREL's 7000 workers were threatened with redundancy.

One BREL director bought 44,000 shares when the company was privatised for a mere £44,000. He now earns a dividend of 80p in the pound and his shares are worth £450,000. Nice work if you can get it!

Maxwell agrees to Pergamon enquiry

ROBERT MAXWELL has agreed to take part in a full enquiry into the Pergamon dispute.

After a well-supported demonstration outside the Mirror building on International Women's Day, the publishing tycoon agreed to let former Inland Revenue Staff Federation General Secretary Tony Christopher preside over an enquiry.

The NUJ are hoping that the enquiry, which is likely to be under way by the end of March, will provide the basis for formal discussions and an agreement for full union recognition and reinstatement of all the sacked workers.

Meanwhile, news comes from the US that Maxwell had taken control of the strikebound New York Daily News. The seven unions involved in the five-month-old strike were given the choice of accepting Maxwell's "conditions of employment" or seeing the paper closed down. The unions capitulated and the paper is now back in production. For the record, the New York paper's previous owners, the Chicago Tribune, dangled a $60 million carrot in front of Maxwell. He was only too pleased to grab it.

■ **Contact: NUJ Pergamon Press Chapel, 60 Cricket Road, Oxford OX4 3DQ; 0865 60762 ansaphone.**

Watch out, SPUC's about

ANTI-ABORTION fanatics in the Society for Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) have spread their vitriolic campaign into the unions. Leonora Lloyd of the National Abortion Campaign told Briefing, "SPUC is telling its members how to vote in elections in NALGO, USDAW, MSF and the TGWU, all unions affiliated to our campaign". SPUC is clearly trying to affect union policies by backdoor methods, knowing it cannot alter them by open argument at union conferences.

Did You Know?

DESPITE THE Tories' much-vaunted idea (shared by Jack Cunningham) that competitive tendering improves services...

In-house DSOs have won 78% on all contracts competitively tendered for in local authorities and the NHS; DSOs have won 87% of all school meals and catering contracts; 25% of private contractors have had to be removed after winning a tender, compared to only 5% of DSOs.

Makes you think, doesn't it?

■ **(Thanks to Privatisation News - the joint NUPE/TGWU/NUCPS/NALGO bulletin - for these facts. Copies c/o 20 Grand Depot Road, SE18 6SF).**

Isle of Dogs strike

FOR FOUR months 180 Nalgo members working in the Labour- controlled Isle of Dogs neighbourhood in "decentralised" Tower Hamlets have been on strike over the sacking of the Principal Race Adviser.

Gail Ogbuehi was dismissed in October under the Liberal Council's draconian sickness rules. At the time she was suffering from post-natal depression; her case still under review by the Council's doctor when the Council moved against her.

Appalled at such behaviour from a self-professed "equal opportunities" neighbourhood, local housing staff took immediate strike action. Following the rejection of Gail's appeal by Labour councillors at a formal hearing, the housing workers were joined by other departments.

A bitter dispute has followed. Rumours have been rife. Management has succeeded in driving a wedge between the strikers and the community they serve.

Two financial packages have been rejected by the members (against official union advice) in favour of re-deployment. Workers recognise that with Tower Hamlets making £28 million cuts this year there will be fewer jobs available and ever-mounting pressure from management. If you get ill you could be out the door.

In a ballot of key sections in other neighbourhoods, 75% voted for strike action to force changes in the Council's sickness procedure. But Nalgo's NEC has refused to provide financial backing. There now seems little hope of escalating the strike and winning redeployment for Gail. In the meantime her post has been frozen and the Race Unit has been cut from five to two over the last three years.

AEU/CSEU hours campaign

THE ENGINEERING unions are now balloting for strike action at GEC in Preston and at Bush Electrical (part of Hawker Siddeley) in Loughborough as the next stage in their campaign for a shorter working week. The unions now claim that 1,400 factories covering 600,000 employees have already achieved at least two hours off the standard 39-hour working week.

GMB takes pinking shears

THE RECENT GMB takeover of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers has been a bit of a shock to rank-and-file clothing workers. The only two offices that the NUTGW had in the South of England were immediately closed (one in East London and one in Norwich) and the members, notably keen trades unionists, placed in largely moribund GMB branches. These comrades are left wondering whether merger with the TGWU may not have been a better idea.

Not all gloom and doom

TO END on a cheerful note ... not everyone is feeling the pinch of recession. A handful of workers have managed to increase their earnings. These include:

J. McGrory of meat importers Global Group (£2,400,000 from shares sold); M. Moseley of Jeyes cleaning group (£1,881,000 from shares sold); T. Newton of privatised Yorkshire Water (£1,154,000 from shares sold); N. Wray of bankers Singer and Freidlander (£1,192,000 from shares sold).

Nice to see someone is managing to keep their heads above water.

■ **(Thanks to Labour research, 78 Blackfriars Rd, SE1 for details).**

Unshackle the Unions

Pat Sikorski, *RMT member on London Underground, previews the "Unshackle the Unions" conference to be held on April 27th.*

IN RESPONSE TO unofficial stoppages in 1989 by railworkers on London Underground and steel erectors on London building sites the Tories moved to further strengthen their anti-union laws.

The new laws aim to curb "wild-cat" actions by making unions legally liable for any strike action supported by union officials unless the union explicitly "repudiates" them. The laws also allow employers to select for dismissal anyone working in a firm where unofficial action has been organised.

The unions are even denied the right to call official industrial action in support of members dismissed for taking unofficial action.

Even official action sanctioned by ballots can run foul of the Tory laws. When the NUR ballot held in 1989 resulted in a seven-to-one vote for strike action, London Underground Limited went to the High Court and got an injunction ordering another ballot, ostensibly because the wording of the original ballot hadn't been understood by the workers! The re-ballot was won four-to-one and the strikes went ahead.

The International Labour Organisation recently called on the British government to revise its employment laws to give greater protection to striking workers. The ILO had earlier ruled that the dismissal of 2,000 seafarers by P&O Ferries was in breach of international conventions.

It's worth recalling that the ILO is a UN agency and that Britain is a signatory to its conventions.

The implications of all this for trades unionists and the Labour Party will be discussed at a day conference entitled "Unshackle the Unions" organised by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee in conjunction with the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, Labour Party Socialists, the Solidarity Network and Trade Union News.

Discussion will be broken down into three main areas: the law itself, its effect on workers' struggles, and strategies for resistance.

The fact of trade union life at the moment is that any serious fightback on pay, jobs or conditions brings workers directly up against the anti-union laws.

No one should rely on the election of a Labour government to check the employers' offensive, especially as Labour's present policy is to retain the cornerstones of Thatcher's anti-working class legislation.

Compulsory balloting before strike action will stay; secondary action will be allowed where there is "a direct interest between the two groups of an occupational or professional nature". The scope for judicial interference will remain limitless. Pickets will continue to be limited to six, giving police carte blanche to herd, harass and riot against workers in struggle.

Demands for a Labour commitment to "unshackle the unions" must be coupled with support for workers currently in struggle - against both the employers and their laws.

Unshackle the Unions

Saturday, April 27th
11am-5pm

University of London Union
Malet Street, London

Speakers:
Ronnie Macdonald (OILC),
Mickey Fenn (sacked Tilbury docker),
John Hendy QC

Hackney strikes!

THE BATTLE by council unions and local community groups against Hackney Council's cuts in jobs and services (as reported in the last issue of *Briefing*) took a new turn with a half-day strike organised on March 6th by the Hackney Joint Shop Stewards Committee.

The cuts include reducing the number of teachers, closing a workshop for people with disabilities and selling off two senior citizens' homes.

Supported by every council union, including the education unions newly arrived from the recently abolished ILEA, the action began with a walk-out at noon. Schools closed and kids as well as teachers joined in. Offices and depots emptied and most of the local voluntary sector groups took part as well.

Three separate marches converged on the Town Hall in Mare Street for a rally addressed by local union secretaries and stewards and by pensioners representatives, school governors and other local activists. All three marches were led by pipers (members of the Musicians Union, naturally) and were loudly cheered and supported by the public as they proceeded through the estates and streets. Messages of support from local ambulance staff and the Dover seafarers (both of whom had been supported by our unions in the past) were read out to the demonstrators.

Tony Cordell
Secretary
Hackney Council Joint Shop Stewards

The impressive trade union unity and support from the pensioners federation and the voluntary sector creates a basis for defeating the cuts. We now intend to carry the fight into the local Labour Parties via the Hackney Borough Conference, the annual meeting of the Labour Group and the two GCs.

Hackney unions have now clearly rejected the Council's New Realist strategy. The action on March 6th was only the first stage in an all-out battle.

Biggest protection racket in history

Our resident economist ***Dave Palmer*** *lifts the lid on the Gulf War's hidden financial history.*

THE QUICK END to the most one-sided war in modern history means cash donations pledged by US allies could exceed the actual costs incurred in fighting the Gulf War.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates direct war costs at $40-45 billion. However $53.5 billion has been pledged by US allies, of which $14.9 billion has already been handed over. US Global Security Services Inc (Corporate Motto "We Promise Smart Delivery") therefore stands to make a $10 billion profit from the death of an estimated 100,000-150,000 Iraqis.

Top of the contributors' list are local client family businesses-cum-states Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, followed by "cowardly" Germany and Japan.

Kuwait will also have to pay a still unquantified bill for reconstruction (minimum $50 billion). It might therefore be hard for them to pay their promised fee to the US as well; the US may yet let the Al Sabahs off their "debt". However, since the bulk of contracts for reconstruction (which will be overseen by the US Army Corps of Engineers) are being steered to US firms, Uncle Sam wins out anyway!

"Global cop" no longer seems a strong enough description for this kill-and-collect enterprise. In comparison, Al Capone was an amateur.

IRAQ'S ECONOMY HAS been strangled by sanctions. Allied bombing has left much of its infrastructure in ruins. The oil industry has been smashed. Pipelines, pumping stations, storage tanks and export terminals have all been bombed. 80% of refining capacity has been destroyed.

All the major power stations plus thirty bridges over the Tigris and Euphrates rivers have been taken out; factories making everything from tyres to textiles have been flattened. The main air terminal (Saddam International) no longer exists. The road network is badly damaged, telecommunications facilities have been decimated, most of the water supply system destroyed and thousands of public buildings and private houses turned to rubble.

Official Iraqi estimates of the cost of the war now stand at $200 billion. Before the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq's foreign debt was over $60 billion. Even at zero world inflation and the present level of oil prices (both unlikely prospects) Iraq's oil exports are now mortgaged for thirty years to come simply to repair the existing damage. The civil war now raging will only add to the bill.

The tragedy is that Iraq is well endowed with natural and human resources. In addition to its reserves of 100 billion barrels of oil (second only to Saudi Arabia), it has the largest amount of agricultural land per capita of any of the Arab countries apart from Sudan and Somalia. It also has the Arab world's largest water resources. With an adult literacy rate of 90% and a high educational enrolment, it should by now have become a relatively advanced developing country.

Saddam's central strategy was always to strengthen Iraq by military means. The ratio of Iraq's spending on the military to its spending on health and education is 711%, the world's worst. For the peoples of Iraq, Ba'athist dictatorship plus oil has been calamitous. Their present misery is the product both of imperialist destruction and the pathetic regional pretensions of Saddam's criminal clique.

POST-GLASNOST NATO is working on a new arms trade regime. The idea is to lower barriers on arms trade between Nato members whilst raising them on exports to non-Nato countries.

Up to now the main arms-producing nations have done the bulk of their trade not with each other but with the developing world.

But all that is set to change, though it's still hard to say by how much. Washington's permanent representative to Nato, William Taft, wants to include non-Nato allies Japan, South Korea and Australia in the new "Arms Gatt", but Europe is resisting.

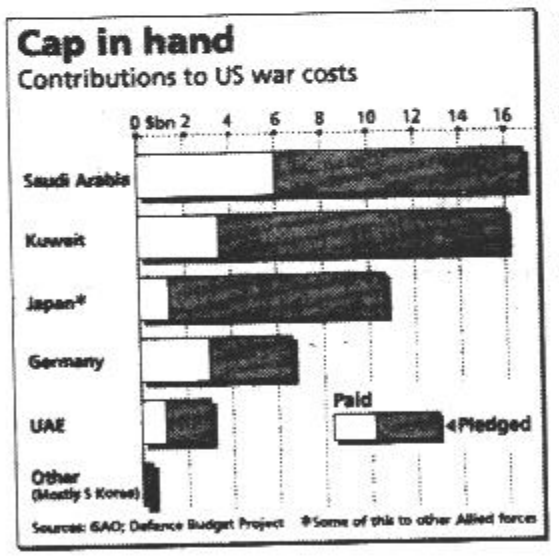
The premise is that no country can afford to develop and produce advanced weapons just for its "home market". Applying classic neo-liberal free trade theory, Taft argues that the consequence of the main arms-producers refusing to open up their own markets is that "we get more expensive weapons that are probably less capable".

A two-tier system is therefore proposed. Members of "Arms Gatt" will remove restrictive practices on arms procurement whilst restricting the types of weapons systems they export elsewhere.

The Taft initiative would lead to the replacement of CoCom - the organisation through which the West vetted sales of militarily useful products and technologies to the Warsaw Pact - with a new system with stricter controls and application to a wider range of countries.

The result would be a dual market in arms which would preserve an absolute advantage for the advanced capitalist countries in hi-tech weaponry. The rest of the world will be left to deal in low-tech death with Western and Soviet cast-offs. Nice prospect, eh? Time to add another higher stage to imperialism, Vladimir Ilyich?

Let's just hope conflicting US objectives - it's just agreed to sell $18 billion of advanced weaponry to its Arab allies - put a spanner in the works. And how will Israel fit into the new arrangement?



Who'll punish the liars of Bonn?

Workers have begun to fight back against job losses and government policy in what used to be the GDR. ***Gus Fagan*** *reports from Berlin.*

"THE BIGGEST ACTION by East German workers since the June strikes of 1953" was how one speaker at a shipworkers' demonstration in Schwerin described the mobilisation on February 27th.

In nine towns on the Baltic coast shipworkers went on strike and organised protest demonstrations: 1,000 in Schwerin, 2,000 in Stralsund, 4,000 in Wismar and 1,200 in Boizenburg. The biggest demonstration was in Rostock, where 30,000 workers gathered. In Boizenburg workers also blocked the Hamburg-Berlin motorway for two hours.

According to the main union involved, the IG Metall, 57,000 shipworkers are employed on the Baltic coast. Since unification, 10,000 of these have lost their jobs. According to the fiduciary company now responsible for the management and privatisation of East Germany's former state-owned enterprises, a further 28,000 jobs will have to go in the coming year, leaving more than half the shipworkers unemployed.

Trawlers and cold-storage vessels from the massive Fishing Combine are now being sold cheaply to Third World countries. As a result, 9,000 of the 12,000 workers will lose their jobs. Around 10,000 seamen currently employed on 120 freighters and container-ships are also under threat from plans to retain only 40 ships.

On February 27th, there were strikes and protests in all major East German towns. The biggest, in Erfurt in Thuringen, was called by the IG Metall and the factory councils in the area. Around 100,000 workers from the car, textile and microelectronics industries demonstrated. In Leipzig, centre of East Germany's "peaceful revolution" of October 1989, a workers' demonstration of over 50,000 was called by OTV, the public sector union.

"On February 27th, there were strikes and protests in all major towns."

The main demand of all the demonstrations was for job security and against the policies of the Bonn government.

In Halle, thousands of metal-workers blocked the main road through the town for an hour. There were also strikes in Berlin by workers in the metal and electronics industries. In Neuruppin 2,870 workers occupied an electronics plant threatened with closure. In Hettstedt in Saxony-Anhalt, 2,400 workers from the copper-smelting plant, also threatened with closure, blocked the main road to Magdeburg.

Strikes and protests by workers are increasing from week to week as the scale of the economic crisis becomes clear. By the end of the year experts are predicting over 4 million unemployed in East Germany out of a workforce of 9 million. This is a higher proportion of unemployed than at the height of the depression in Germany in 1932.

Production figures also show the scale of the crisis. Gross social production in Germany declined by 35.9% between 1929 and 1932. According to the German Institute for Economic Research, gross social production in East Germany will have fallen by at least 40% between November 1989 and the end of this year. In the industrial sector the destruction of productive potential is enormous. It is estimated that only 20% of East Germany's industrial capacity will remain at the end of 1991.

The decline in gross national product has been greater in what used to be East Germany than in any other eastern European country.



Striking workers in Wisman: "We demand: no closure of the docks."

Disillusionment with the social and economic consequences of unification has fostered a sense of resignation and helplessness among the population.

The workers' actions at the end of February may be largely born of desperation. But they do represent the beginning of a fightback.

Up to now Bonn has blamed the bad state of affairs on "the mismanagement of the old SED" but when the Prime Minister of Thuringen told the demonstrating workers in Erfurt that "the social and financial misery is a product, not of the 100 days of CDU government in Thuringen but of the 40 years of SED dictatorship", he was loudly booed.

A popular slogan at the protest was "The thief of Baghdad is being punished, but who will punish the liars of Bonn?".

Mass action, democracy and COSATU

__Chris Dlamini__ is a vice-president of the 1.3 million member Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and president of the 129,000 strong Sweet, Food and Allied workers. He is a leading member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and treasurer of the Transvaal Civic Association, an independent community body with affiliates in 38 townships. He is still employed by cereal-manufacturers Kellogg's as a stock worker. Briefing interviewed him last month in London.

B: *What's the current relationship between COSATU, the ANC and the SACP?*

CD: This relationship has been born out of struggle. Each organisation has its own objectives but now they have a common purpose: the removal of apartheid and its replacement by a non-racial democracy. Decisions attri-partite level are reached only by consensus. There has been some question of people wearing three caps at the same time. Who really represents whom? It's a continuing debate. Meanwhile, the tri-partite alliance is preparing for mass action. On February 1st we had a successful stay-away to demand a constituent assembly, which remains our minimum demand. We are also demanding an interim government to supervise elections for the assembly; this would be made up of representatives of all major parties and organisations that intend to participate in the elections.

"Masked men have come to my home and told me they would kill me."

B: *What about talks with the present government?*

CD: Negotiations can only be fruitful if they relate to the demands of people on the ground. Talks should not take place outside the masses. We have to keep the pressure on the government. De Klerk has said so many things that have not been translated into action. He wants to remain on the centre stage of change, to determine its pace. He's refusing to dismantle the CCBs (state paramilitaries) and intends to maintain control on behalf of the white bourgeoisie.



B: *Our readers will be interested in hearing about COSATU's activities and structures.*

CD: One of COSATU's roles is to organise the unorganised. We're concentrating on organising farmworkers, domestics and the public sector, as well as the unemployed. We also want to strengthen existing organisations. We have drawn up a Workers' Charter and are now asking other organisations to respond and develop it further. COSATU has affiliates in metals, mining, textiles, construction, food, commercial, transport, government, telecommunications, education, paper, chemicals, even the police. We have a national conference every two years with one delegate for every 250 members. The central executive council has four representatives from each affiliate, two of whom must be workers. Our executive committee has two from each affiliate, one of whom must be a worker. Our regional and local structures are built on similar lines. We have shop stewards' councils which all local stewards from affiliates can attend. The only requirement is the presence of an elected shop stewards committee in the workplace. Our local COSATU bodies are represented on the regional bodies which are in turn represented in all our national structures except the national conference. The chain is unbroken. COSATU sets the pace for its affiliates on democracy and accountability. If the affiliates don't report back to their members, the workers demand it because of their experience in COSATU. The local and regional structures bring all the unions together and promote real mass communication. Any attempt to block that communication will be perceived by the workers.

B: *What about your own physical safety in South Africa?*

CD: I've had death threats since 1984 and I've had to leave home to avoid the massacre of my family. Masked men have come to my home and told me they would kill me. I once received a small coffin in an envelope. Men with balaclavas and guns have come to COSATU's regional offices. I'm followed everywhere and I don't go anywhere alone. The level of repression is actually worse than before. COSATU has taken a decision to form defence committees but how you defend yourself without weapons is a difficult question. Any interim administration must investigate the hit squads. The present government cannot and will not.

B: *What's your message to socialists in Britain?*

CD: Support our demands for a constituent assembly and an interim government. Keep up the pressure for sanctions. It is not for governments to decide independently of us to drop sanctions, especially as they only imposed sanctions in the first place under pressure from their local communities.

Revolution or bust?

Socialists need to know their own history. In this first of a "backward looking" series, ***Ken Jones*** *reviews* A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988, *by Paul Ginsborg (Penguin, £7.99).*

ITALY IN 1943 was a war torn, agrarian, clerical society. By the late 1980s - urbanised and secular - it was competing with Britain for the position of the western world's fifth largest industrial nation.

Paul Ginsborg's thorough, rigorous, sober and committed history is written, in large part, out of a concern with the issues faced by the Italian working class and peasantry during this extraordinary period of transition. The range and energy of the popular struggles depicted by Ginsborg are breathtaking, from the guerrilla warfare and urban insurrection of the resistance to the mass action in the factories and housing estates in the 1970s.

The price paid by the Italian people for modernisation is itemised in full: nine million internal migrants; brutal work discipline in the northern cities; patriarchal patterns of authority dominating small-scale industry in Emilia-Romagna (often acclaimed as a model for "post-Fordist" development).

But the voices of those who have struggled against these deprivations are vividly present throughout.

Politically, Ginsborg is drawn to the magnitude of repeated struggles. Socially, he is extremely good at showing the depth of capitalist hegemony. Hence his judgement on the generation of 68: "As Italy became more urban and secular, it did not...move further towards the values which surfaced in 1968, but further away from them... Italy's modernisation...was not based on... collective action but on the opportunities it afforded individual families to transform their lives."

But Ginsborg is not heading towards fashionable conclusions about the death of the working class as an agent of social transformation. On the contrary, his emphasis on the difficulties of change is the basis of an absorbing discussion of socialist strategy. This discussion revolves around a central pair of questions.

"Berlinguer's insistence on an historic compromise with Christian Democracy disabled the working class at one of its strongest post-war moments."

Was there ever a moment in post-war history when a significant move towards the socialist transformation of a major west European society was possible? Or were the political and economic resources of capital simply too great and the underlying drift of popular aspirations towards consumerism too strong?

In addressing these questions, Ginsborg rejects what could be called a "revolution or bust" approach. He criticises the two million strong Communist party of the 1940s, not because it failed to make the revolution, but because, fixated on an alliance with Christian Democracy, it did not mobilise its base to achieve something more modest: "a shift in the balance of forces between capital and labour".

The same kind of criticism is made of the Socialist Party of the 60s, and most severely, of the Communist Party of the late 70s. Berlinguer's insistence on an "historic compromise" with Christian Democracy disabled the working class at one of its strongest post-war moments. At every level from factory to local government to national politics, the search for the grand alliance demobilised Communist support. It actually stimulated the terrorism which the Communists, supporting draconian restrictions on civil liberties, furiously opposed. Ginsborg's verdict on this period is a damning one: "Was it possible for the economy to recover and thrive without destroying the victories of the working class movement? From the experience of 1976-79 in Italy, the answer...was simply no."

Italians are still living in the aftermath of this historic failure. Ginsborg offers no panaceas for socialist recovery, but his account will provoke serious thought about the means of bringing it about - in Italy and, by extension, in Britain.

BNP in Bexley

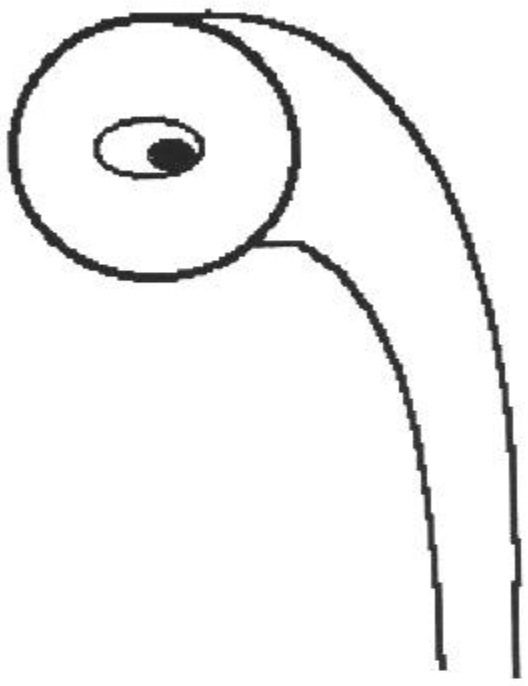
The British National Party (BNP) has its national HQ at 154 Upper Wickham Lane, Welling, Kent. Deputations and petitions protesting its presence have been made to Bexley Council over the last two years, but to no effect.

During this period the area has seen an increase in racial attacks. Bexley schoolchildren have been handed fascist leaflets. Racist graffitti is becoming common. When local residents organised a meeting in Welling Library to discuss the BNP's presence in their community, BNP members openly attacked them, injuring several people. Two of the attackers were identified, convicted and jailed. But even this incident had no effect on Bexley Council.

In a BNP publication issued after the attack on the Welling Library meeting, the fascists congratulated their "boys" on their success in hospitalising local people who oppose them!

Ealing's Tory council has launched an attack Southall Black Sisters, one of the black community's most valuable autonomous organisations. The Council has threatened drastic cuts at a time when the organisation is expanding in influence and activity. Readers are urged to support the campaign to defend SBS. Write to 52 Norwood Road, Southall, Middx.

PERISCOPE



Who the hell is Ben Lucas?

A few facts about the life and times of one **Ben Lucas**, LCC Executive member and author of the LCC "briefing" which fingered Lambeth Council - and Briefing itself - for the NEC.

Like so many of his co-conspirators, Lucas is a veteran of student politics.

As a loyal member of the grossly misnamed Democratic Left (DL) faction he got himself made National Secretary of the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) while a student at Liverpool University.

During his tenure no mailings were sent out to colleges and Labour Student, the NOLS official publication was closed down.

When left-winger **Dave Brennan** was elected a NOLS auditor in 1985 he was refused access to the NOLS books and even to the NOLS office when he asked to see receipts for the (all-important) NOLS work in NUS.

Brennan refused to sign the end of year balance sheet but the Democratic Left majority passed the books anyway and wouldn't even allow Brennan to speak to the NOLS conference on the matter.

With the support of the DL Lucas was elected Chair of NOLS for 1986-87 during which time the NOLS membership continued to plummet.

That year's NOLS Student Council met at Lambeth Town Hall (scene of later Lucas triumphs, at least in absentia - see front page).

The Student Council determines the official Labour nominations for NUS sabbatical posts - the glittering prizes for student politicos and especially for the careerists-in-training who make up the DL cadre.

People registered for the Council as usual but the next morning a change in the rules was announced. Members of NUS Local Areas would not be allowed to vote - although they had been allowed to register without protest and had always voted at Council meetings in the past.

It seems that Lucas and his comrades had done some sums.

The manoeuvre reduced the left's voting strength by eleven, thus assuring a DL majority of five. The result was that **Vicky Phillips** received the NOLS nomination for NUS president and duly ascended the throne. She is now Labour Party National Women's Officer performing many useful tasks at Walworth Road.

A high point of Lucas's tenure as NOLS Chair was his appearance at a meeting of the Manchester University Labour Club bearing a letter from then LP Student Officer **Sally Morgan** (another DLer, now heading up Labour's "target seats" operation).

The letter ruled out of order a number of left-wing candidates. The chair of the meeting was actually a member of the Liberal Party brought in to keep the embittered Labour Club factions from each other's throats. He told Lucas his manoeuvre was "mad" and ruled it out of order.

After this apprenticeship Lucas moved on to the big time, working first for the GMB and now for UCATT as a "researcher".

We're watching you, Roy...

Could there be any more sickening sight than that of **Roy Hattersley** slobbering all over our TV screens when the Birmingham Six went free? As if he had ever lifted a finger for them!

Just for the record, Roy was a member of the government under which the six were jailed and which rushed through the Prevention of Terrorism Act in a concession to the same anti-Irish feeling to which the Six fell victim.

He refused to visit the two of the Six who were his own Sparkbrook constituents for their first ten years in prison, failed to criticise the notorious Lord Lane verdict in the 1988 appeal and has yet to speak out on the Tottenham Three.

Willis wage cut?

Norman Willis has warned British workers that under the Single European Market they will have to restrain their wage claims to the levels of other European workers. Willis laid down the law in an interview in his local rag, the *Ham and High*, which was boring even by Snoreman's standards. The TUC General Secretary's counterparts in Greece and Portugal are paid around £12,000 a year. Equity demands at least a half-year's salary cut for Our Norm.

Labouring the point

This month's Aristotle prize for logic goes to **Crouch End Branch** of Hornsey and Wood Green Labour Party, which has come up with a unique solution to the vexing problem of inquorate General Committee meetings. The bright idea is to reduce the total size of the GC! Meetings are thus more likely to be quorate and this crucial marginal seat will suddenly appear a hive of activity. Keep an eye on this one before it disappears up its own agenda.

Peter Shore sees the white

In a move that astonished even bitter-and-twisted *Briefing* supporters, **Peter Shore MP** has persuaded a Foreign Affairs Select Committee to open discussions with the US on granting South Africa access to the IMF. Ignoring the warnings of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the African National Congress, Shore appears to have swallowed De Klerk's cosmetic reforms hook, line and sinker.

Whoever else he's trying to please, it can't be his constituents in Bethnal Green and Stepney.

Flimsy

Worst excuse from a Labour councillor for paying his Poll Tax: "When you're a freedom fighter in the jungle, sometimes you have to hide behind a tree to avoid the bullets..."

Glenda in political comment shock

Glenda Jackson, Prospective Labour Candidate for Hampstead and Highgate, has said all empty properties - no matter who owns them - should be requisitioned for the homeless. Or at least that was how it was reported in the local paper. We suggest that as Minister for Housing in the next Labour government she starts with Windsor Castle and Balmoral, before moving on to Chequers.

The only question: has John Smith been told? Watch out, Glenda, these radical ideas could get you in trouble.

Send snippets, gossip, abuse to our new Periscope Editor, Ivor Grudge (Bitter and Twisted CLP), c/o 26 Wattisfield Road, London E5.

The all-seater spectator sell-out

From the terraces (while they're still there), ***Arthur Chandler's*** *monthly survey of the politics of sport.*

DOES THE QUALITY of stadium facilities affect the behaviour of spectators at sporting events? Lord Justice Taylor in his report on Hillsborough said that it does. Football grounds are "squalid" and their lavatories "primitive"; according to Taylor, this "directly lowers standards of conduct".

A bold assertion, but is it true? There is very little evidence. No one has yet managed to correlate incidents of crowd misbehaviour with the standard of ground facilities; those who support Taylor's assertion tend to rely on comparisons with the USA.

But there, the cost of admission to a major game tends to exclude the social classes from which a large proportion of trouble-makers in England come. This argument can also be countered by making another comparison, perhaps more relevant, with Rugby League. Facilities here are rock bottom, yet crowd disorder is minimal.

Despite its shaky foundations, this assumption about the cause of crowd trouble is having profound effects on British sports grounds. To many, improved facilities means seats and nothing else: at the Sports Council's RECMAN exhibition in Birmingham last month, the usual exhibitors of sports equipment and artificial surfaces were joined by seat manufacturers, several of whom had also exhibited at Stadia '90 last year and will exhibit again at Eurostadia '91 in September.

The seat industry may be booming, but those who believe that putting seats in areas formerly reserved for standing is going to lead to an end to crowd misbehaviour are sadly mistaken. The architecture of the stadium is far more important. Traditional policies of segregation, of putting large groups of rival supporters in close proximity to each other while still keeping them separate and distinct, creates the hostile atmosphere on which hooliganism thrives.

For many young people, attending your first football match is an introduction to an adrenalin-pumping adversarial experience as much as to the thrills of a live sporting event.

At RECMAN Ted Croker, former Secretary of the Football Association, was spotted staffing a seat company exhibit; clearly, at the moment, there's plenty of money in seats.

Although many of us want to preserve standing facilities, that does not mean we don't want improvements. Sports fans deserve decent facilities as of right, not simply as a means of sociological control.

Finally, a word about American football. Don't you just hate it? Ritualised violence on a sports field! And they have the nerve to call it "football"! The bad news is that it is coming over here. To some extent it has been here already for some time. There are many amateur American football teams in England, but no-one bothers to watch them. Those who do, under the misapprehension that it will be similar to the game they see on TV, are soon disillusioned.

But now we have the real thing. The London Monarchs play their first match at Wembley stadium in the "World League" on Easter Sunday. Featuring a bizarre mixture of NFL has-beens and never-will-be's, the Monarchs hope to take on the World, or rather they hope to take on a bizarre selection of NFL has-beens and never-will-be's exported from the USA to other cities around the world. Do we really need this? The London Monarchs also have the dubious honour of having signed up some Rugby League players, all desperate, no doubt, to play in better quality stadia than the "squalid" and "primitive" ones they are used to.

The way we live now

THE GOVERNMENT, which spent £6 billion to float the privatised water companies, has now conceded that water bills will rise at up to twice the rate of inflation for the foreseeable future. The industry is also pushing for water metering in order to establish a more "commercial relationship" with customers. More affluent households will be able to buy equipment to regulate and reduce water consumption (and water bills) whilst poorer households are forced to pay more and more.

Metering will force millions of working class households to ration use of water, with obvious ill effects on personal and public health. Hikes in water bills are already leading water companies to seek far more summonses for non-payment than ever before. Disconnections are also set to rise.

Will Labour demand that the water companies give back the public's £6 billion - in rebates for poorer customers?

LATEST FIGURES FOR congestion and pollution show that around one-third of the cars going into central London are company cars, which also emit one-fifth of the carbon dioxide and other common pollutants breathed on British roads.

The non-taxing of these "perk vehicles" costs the country £2-8 billion in lost revenue - money which could be much better spent on subsidising public transport.

As usual, the rich benefit at the cost of everyone else's health.

ONE OF THE worst legacies of eleven years of Thatcher's rule - alongside homelessness and economic collapse - has been the imprisonment of sections of the working class in so-called home ownership. Court actions for mortgage arrears have jumped 63% in the last year, mainly as a result of high interest rates. A massive 53,000 mortgage payers have had to face the courts, most of them in the south west and London. At the same time, the construction industry has collapsed - 100,000 jobs lost during the current recession.

A night at the opera

Is opera the preserve of our class enemies or should we claim it as our own? ***Deborah Knight*** *argues the case for Mozart.*

IF I HAD a fiver for every time I've been called a "closet bourgeois" because I enjoy opera I could buy myself a lifetime ticket to Covent Garden. Why do socialists (many of whom enjoy music and theatre) react this way to opera, the natural combination of the two?

Partly, it's sheer ignorance, an ill-informed assumption that tickets cost a fortune and audiences are made up of women in tiaras and men in dinner jackets. In reality a seat in the balcony costs no more than a West End cinema ticket (for a live performance more than twice the length) and there are more DMs than DJs on display.

But this isn't the whole story. Many on the left reject all forms of "high" culture in a manner that is worryingly self-oppressive. Why does the British left largely dismiss poetry when in the rest of Europe poets are respected as major political commentators?

The problem must surely be that our agenda is still hopelessly macho, dominated by the sacred workerist tenet that only "working class" culture has any merit. The British left ends up doing exactly what the ruling class wants it to do. They say: "This is our culture, not yours" and we reply: "That's their culture, not ours". In short, we acquiesce to the bourgeoisie, instead of seizing their cultural wealth and making it our own.

" The problem must surely be that our agenda is still hopelessly macho ..."

So where does one begin? Despite all the current hype, Mozart is as good a place as any. Although born the son of a court musician, ostensibly an elevated social position, he grew up accustomed to wearing livery and eating with the servants. He spent his adult life as a working musician, frequently in debt and fond of wine, snuff and billiards. His enthusiasm for Freemasonry should be viewed in the light of his time, when the movement was frowned upon by both church and crown as hostile to their interests. His last opera, *The Magic Flute*, can be interpreted as the triumph of Masonic liberalism over Catholic dogma and royal absolutism.

Schikaneder, who provided the libretto (the words) for *The Magic Flute*, was the self-educated manager and director of a "suburban" theatre whose productions were aimed at the masses, not the elite. Mozart also frequented the popular theatre, numbered many of its actors and singers among his friends, and wrote songs and arias for them. *The Magic Flute* itself was a huge hit with the "common people", though Mozart did not live to reap the financial rewards.

The libretti for Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro* were written by Da Ponte, the son of a Jewish tanner. Class and sex are the twin themes of both operas. The original *Figaro*, a play by Beaumarchais, was banned by royal decree in both Paris and Vienna. Dealing with the traditional right of the male aristocrat to have sex with his wife's maid before her marriage to his manservant, the play recounts how a Count is outwitted and denied this "right" by his two servants. Not surprisingly, the story struck a chord with the lower classes in the France of the 1780s. The official reason for banning the original play was "licentiousness", so in the libretto Da Ponte toned down the sex, kept the class dimension, and somehow managed to secure royal assent for the opera's premiere in Vienna, where it was tremendously popular.

" The Magic Flute itself was a huge hit with the "common people", though Mozart did not live to reap the financial rewards."

Figaro contains some of the most accessible music ever written and revels in its exposure of ruling class hypocrisy. A recent US production set it in the late twentieth century; the Count became a wife-beater and child-molester and the character of Cherubino - an adolescent boy, suddenly aware of the attraction of women, besotted by the Countess, and sung by a soprano - played as a positive out lesbian. Purists were outraged, feminists delighted.

The Don of *Don Giovanni* is a full-time seducer and libertine; if any woman resists his demands he rapes her. His come-uppance is spectacular. Hunted down by Donna Elvira, whom he has promised to marry, he ends by being plunged into hell. In the current English National Opera production his cast-off conquests surround him like a bevy of Hammer horror living dead and drag him to his doom.

" The great operas satisfy the brain as well as the senses..."

Mozart's operas, along with those of Verdi, Puccini,and Bizet, should be seen as the best musicals of their day. Like all real entertainment, the great operas satisfy the brain as well as the senses and can thrill every bit as much as a perfect goal or a dazzling speech (political or theatrical). Certainly, it makes a change from a night in the pub or wishing away the minutes in a dreary meeting.

And as added incentives for die-hard pub-and-politics addicts, there's always a bar and a guaranteed hidden agenda.

BOOKS

Whose humanity?

Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science by Donna Haraway *(London Routledge, £40.00).*

David Attenborough's wildlife documentary, The Trials of Life, may seem a far remove from the Gulf War. A killer-whale playing volleyball with a young seal; bull elephants wrestling for a receptive female; a band of chimps consuming the innards of a still-living, bawling monkey. Surely this wholesome imagery can't be propaganda in the service of Western imperialism's drive to dominate the planet?

If you want to relax and enjoy your nature films this book is not for you. Some chapter headings will convey an idea of the contents: "Monkeys and Monopoly Capitalism"; "Women's Place is in the Jungle"; "Apes in Eden; Apes in Space". Haraway shows how every twist and turn of primate research since the 1890s has performed mythic functions in the service of contemporary power-struggles over gender, race and class. Did you think National Geographic was just a well-illustrated guide to species, peoples and places? Think again. Do you enjoy T.V. documentaries in which anthropologists dub bits of fossilised bone as "our oldest ancestor" or "the first man"? Be careful: in whose interests is this claim on inside knowledge of humanity's "original" way of life being made? Haraway shows that in the science of human evolution there are no "facts" other than those released by courtesy of fiercely contested theories which are in turn packed with political dynamite. The author takes us behind the scenes, interviewing the stage-managers and producers, interrogating the researchers, digging up here a censored photograph, there a video-sequence which just "happened" to get lost.

There are some light-hearted interludes. Did you know, for example, that the nature reserve at Gombe Stream, Tanzania has long been populated by twice as many resident scientists as chimpanzees? Or - less amusingly - did you know of the animal liberationist film for a mass audience produced with the most callous disregard for the health and lives of the chimpanzees who played the star roles? Perhaps most funny and yet also most profound is Haraway's demonstration of how primatologists project their own political priorities directly onto the lives of the monkeys and apes they are studying. Until feminism appeared on the scene, scientists saw ape social structure almost entirely in terms of active dominant males herding around passive groups of females.

This book also offers a survey and radical critique of some of the most influential human origins theories of recent times. When paleoanthropologists wrestle with one another over what it means to be human and over how it was that human life emerged, they are articulating deep-seated cultural longings whilst simultaneously promoting powerful vested interests. As they argue over the meaning of a grooming-bout between baboons or an enigmatic scratch on a fossilised molar or over some vestigial Middle Palaeolithic lunch what is really being contested is the debate about human potentiality - and the future of our planet.

CHRIS KNIGHT

Split world

The Red Box by Farhana Sheikh *(Women's Press, £6.95).*



Raisa was born in Lahore but grew up in the London of Biba, the Roundhouse and the Vietnam demos. Now she is researching problems of "identity" among Asian girls and women in Britain.

In a dusty classroom in an East London comprehensive, Tahira and Nasreen discuss their lives with her. The two teenagers struggle, often reluctantly, to give voice to their experiences as Muslim girls in a country that is both home and not home.

All the conflicts are explored - class, religion, family, race. Above all, the girls try to make sense of the obligations placed upon them by the ideals of Muslim womanhood. In secular, permissive England, these duties sometimes seem unbearable. The girls cope in different ways. Tahira is truculent, pragmatic, without ambition; Nasreen is dutiful, withdrawn, academic. Both have their secrets. Nasreen seeks escape in romantic fantasies; Tahira weaves webs of deception so that she can go off on escapades with her mates.

As Raisa gets to know the girls and meets their families, memories of her own adolescent conflicts are aroused. The girls think Raisa is not really one of them. She is well-off, independent, educated. But in a letter to the girls at the end of the book she reveals the cultural clashes of her own family life, and the secrets and deceptions of her past. Raisa, after all, shares the pain of their split world.

The book is compelling when dealing with the lives of the girls' mothers, particularly Tahira's divorced mother who struggles to maintain her family and her honour as a sweatshop worker. There is a moving portrait of Raisa's own mother, a woman hemmed in by personal tragedy. And Tahira, a stroppy, energetic and angry character, is engagingly believable.

This journey of exploration into cultural identity is slow and expansive. The reader is drawn into the characters' lives and thoughts and into a sympathy with the difficult path that these women have to travel. The book is very much alive to the complexities of the girls' situation and while it may lack narrative drive or suspense it does offer the pleasures of insight and information.

P.S. Infuriatingly, the book's glossary of Urdu/Punjabi words ends at 'i'!

KAY SHEEHY

LETTERS

Your letters are welcome, but please keep them short. Write to Briefing at 26 Wattisfield Road, London E5. Or fax to 081-985-6785

Dear Briefing...

I thought your "Class Traitor of the Month" for March was very personalised and nasty - until I heard Martin O'Neill grovelling in front of Tom King in Parliament. These Kinnockites really are quite nauseating. If you want another for this series there's any number of obvious candidates, Jack Cunningham maybe?

However, with the rumours of "left" criticism within the Kinnockite camp how about using nice Robin Cook, thus illustrating our differences of policy and method with the "soft left"?

Another possibility might be Edward Heath as a guest 'Class Traitor of the Month' in order to examine just how significant his opposition to the war really was and how we should see it in class terms. Just how divided is their class as to the way forward nationally and internationally?

I vividly remember Heath's contribution to the debate on the Libyan bombings when with undisguised contempt he asked the Thatcherites: "Is that seriously how you think you can fight terrorism, by killing children?"

Can decency rise above class or does Heath simply have a different strategy from Bush, etc?

Incidentally, it is worth recalling Ron Brown's contribution to that debate: "Gaddaffi can't be all that bad. After all, he doesn't smoke, he doesn't drink, he's not a womaniser - and he does support national liberation struggles."

Keep up the good work, comrades. However, my own slogans are now "No vote for Labour's murderers" and "Left MPs must break with Labour and launch a mass centrist regroupment (based on the Socialist Movement and anyone else who cares to come along), open and democratic but with positive discrimination against parasitic sects".

I feel the latter slogan is somewhat unwieldy. Any ideas for something more punchy?

Keith White
Fife

Your March issue makes a good shot at opposing the Gulf War and exposing the role of the soft left in supporting Kinnock and Kaufman's calls for yet more blood to be spilt for oil. There has, of course, been a small but determined group of Labour MP's who have opposed the war, who did good work in helping to build the campaign against the war. But it must be said that they made not the slightest difference to Kinnock's position. Even at the end of the war the NEC was still voting happily to support American imperialism.

It might be argued that those of us outside the Labour Party did not make much difference either. But at least in our case the fight against the war has been allied with the argument about the need for a new and genuine socialist party. I suspect that this point is clearer now to many Labour supporters than it was. It is also clear that such a party is not and never can be the Labour Party. The Gulf is far from the first time that Labour's leaders have supported an imperialist war and unless something is done now, about replacing the Labour Party on the left, it will not be the last either. Because, make no mistake Bush's victory in the Gulf has made the world a far more dangerous place.

Keith Flett
Tottenham

John Wilton implies that I am more interested in reading poetry than campaigning for peace in the Gulf.

By the same token any human activity other than campaigning for peace in the Gulf could be criticised.

The truth is that the District Party Executive set an overlong agenda. The world is not made up of conspirators anxious to talk out John's emergency motions.

I was unable to recite my poem, in response to a letter from Joyce Gould, at the CLP meeting as the Chair, a Briefing supporter, ruled me out of order.

I have attached a copy which you may publish if you wish. Be careful though in case guilt-tripper-in-chief Wilton criticises you for not using the space to campaign for peace in the Gulf.

I have sat through many a boring Labour Party meeting, sometimes listening to John, and believe that the time is ripe to establish the Labour Campaign for Interesting Meetings. John Wilton will have to brush up his song and dance routine if he wishes to join. A bit less of the moralising righteousness wouldn't go amiss.

Cllr Mike Rice
Birmingham

● **Cllr. Rice's poem will appear in a future Labour Briefing - ed.**

Famous last words...


LONDON LABOUR 30p
BRIEFING

A WEEK may be a long time in politics, but a decade needn't be! Ten years ago, Briefing's front page headline condemned a "Panic retreat" and massive cuts package imposed by Lambeth Council. Our editorial statement is as true today as it was then: "It is the staunchness of Lambeth's stand in the past which makes the present retreat so painful and indeed unacceptable".

Authors of articles included one Councillor Chris Smith, at that time Treasurer of Islington South Labour Party, obviously in training for his present Front Bench job understudying John Smith.

The death of thirteen black youngsters in New Cross was a theme running through the magazine. A proposed march by fascists in Deptford was stopped. The tide was running to the left in the constituency parties and riding the waves was a new breed of socialist councillors, prepared to fight the Tories to the bitter end (or so they said).


LONDON LABOUR 15p
BRIEFING
No 10 APRIL 1981

LAMBETH: TORY RATEPAYERS' ARMY PROMPTS
PANIC RETREAT !

Labour—Take the Power!

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

***Labour Briefing*, April 1991, No. 111.**

***Labour Briefing* is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. We are a democratic, anti-sectarian network with an elected National Editorial Board, open to all supporters. The next NEB meeting will be held on April 21st in Birmingham.**

Contributions are most welcome - but please keep them short. Deadline for the next issue is April 8th. All articles reflect the opinions of the author alone unless otherwise stated.

Please take copies to sell - on sale or return - at your local Labour Party, Trade Union or campaign meeting. Write to: Labour Briefing, 26 Wattisfield Road, London, E5 9QH. Tel: 081 985-6597. Fax: 081 985-6785.

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DIARY

Monday April 1st: CND Easter March and Rally. 12.30, the Park, Barrow in Furness. March against Furness.
Thursday April 4th: Labour Against the War meeting, London. Details: Cate Murphy.
Saturday April 13th-14th: National Labour Women's Conference, Wolverhampton.
Saturday April 27th: Unshackle the Unions Conference. 11.00-5.00, ULU, Malet St, london. Speakers include John Hendy QC, Ronnie McDonald (OILC), Micky Fenn (sacked Tilbury Docker).
Sunday April 28th: Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom AGM. 9.30-4.30, University of London Union, Malet St, London, WC1. (Details: 071- 923-3671).
Wednesday May 1st: SE Region TUC Festival. Congress House, Great Russell St, London.
Saturday May 11th: Socialist Movement Education Conference.
Sunday May 12th: James Connolly, Bobby Sands Rally. Details from Wolfe Tone Society, BM Box 6191, London, WC1N 3XX.
Friday May 17th-18th: Labour Party Wales Conference, Llandudno.
Saturday June 1st: Socialist Movement AGM.

■ *Send details of events to Action, Briefing, 26 Wattisfield Road, London E5.*

May day greetings

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Stop Press: Brighton Labour Party, suspended by the NEC and "under investigation", was not represented at this year's Southern Region Labour Party Conference. However, at a packed fringe meeting on Saturday lunchtime, former Regional Executive member Clive Walder put the case for the Friends of Brighton Labour Party. He called for support for resolutions submitted by Oxford East, Mid Sussex and Eastbourne against the investigation. "Witchhunts and Stalinism have no place in a democratic party," he said.

Return of the Barrow bailiffs

LAST MONTH, *Briefing* reported how Barrow Labour Council had voted against using bailiffs. This vote prompted the right wing Chair and Vice-Chair of the Finance and Policy Committee to tender their resignations. An extra-ordinary full Council meeting was then convened to reconsider the issue.

Hyder Prodhan
Barrow and Furness CLP

Prior to the Council meeting the Labour Group met to hear reports from three senior Town Hall officers. The officers were adamant that a continued "no bailiff" position could result in a Section 114 notice. This would mean that the Director of Finance would be required to make a report to the District Auditor claiming the Council had neglected its "fiduciary duty to the chargepayer" by not using all available means to collect the Poll Tax. Councillors voting against bailiffs would therefore be liable to surcharge. The officers also predicted that without the use of bailiffs the Council could be bankrupt by the summer.

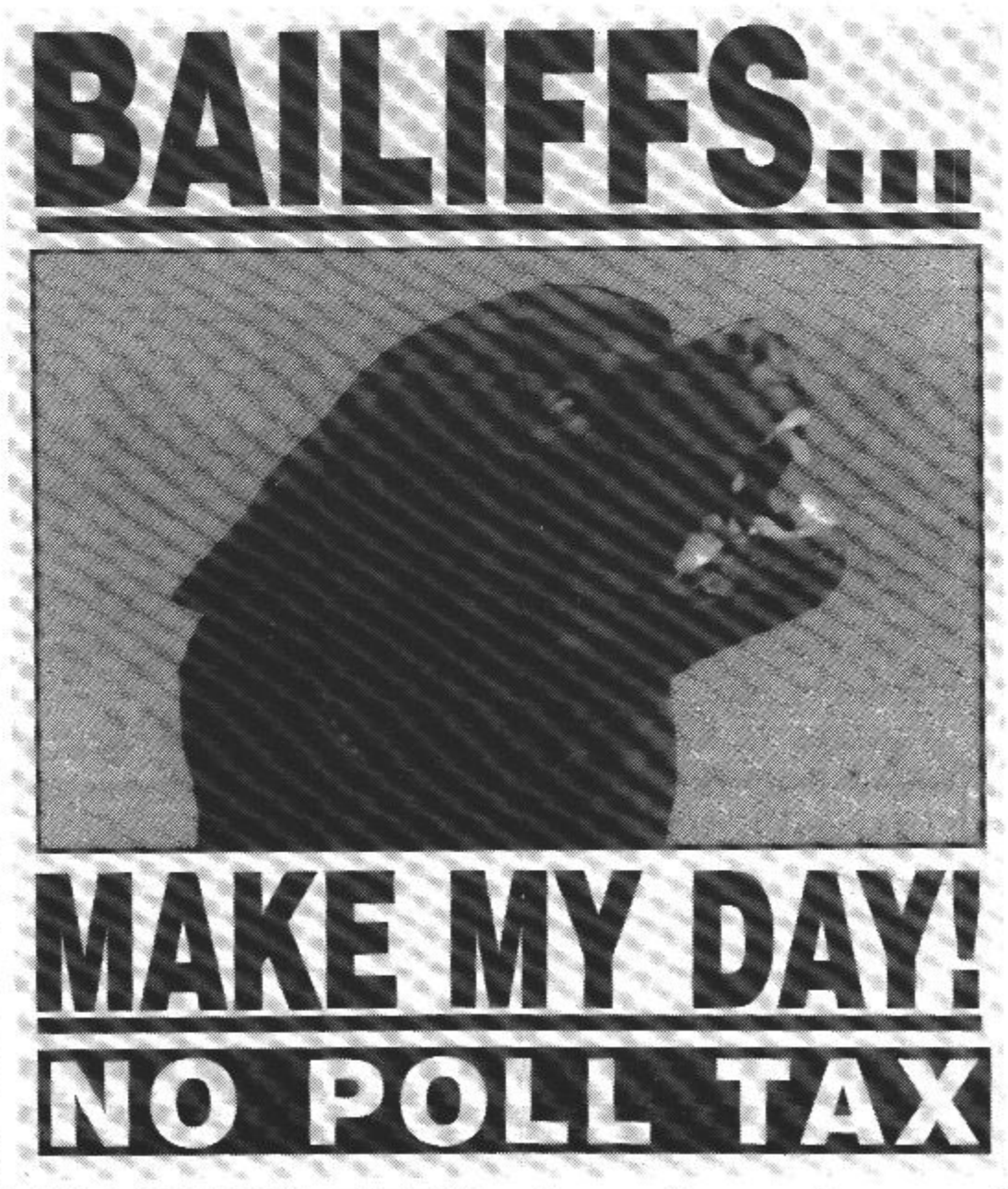
The pro-bailiffs in the Labour Group were a motley crew of hard rights and ever rightward-moving "soft lefts". The anti-bailiffs reflected a broad spectrum of local Party opinion. The hard right's attempt to obtain a free vote on the issue in full Council was defeated. The vote on the bailiffs was then taken: nine for and nine against.

For a moment confusion reigned, but the right-wing Group Chair used his casting vote to rescue the class-traitor bloc. Some councillors voiced their anger at this betrayal and vowed to speak out and vote against the bailiffs in full Council.

Just before the Council meeting the following evening our local anti-Poll Tax Group entered the chamber and started sticking up anti-Poll Tax posters. Town Hall bureaucrats were bemused.

When we then staged an impromptu sit-down protest, a policeman warned us "move or we'll arrest you". Deciding that it was vital to hear (and heckle) the debate, we moved to the public gallery. During a two hour debate the parasites who make up the Tory Group had little to say, but pro-bailiff "soft lefts" were in full cry, emphasising the need to "get the full Poll Tax in", "avoid financial crisis", etc.

One anti-bailiff Labour Councillor correctly pointed out that the code of conduct for bailiffs simply would not work. "Bailiffs," he said, "are not nice people". Other anti-bailiff councillors made strong speeches attacking the Tories, not the non-payers, in contrast to the pro-bailiff mob. Throughout the debate Labour's Tory fifth-columnists were jeered, booed and heckled. One "soft left" attacked the demonstrators as being "an unrepresentative minority", the standard reaction of a class traitor caught by the working class in the act of selling out and grovelling to the Tories! In the end seven Labour councillors voted against bailiffs and twelve sided with the Tories to back a policy that will mean even greater misery and hardship for the people who put them in office in the first place.



THE LONDON FEDERATION, the official city-wide umbrella group for local anti-Poll Tax unions, seems to be struggling to survive.

First Steve Nally, that Scarlet Pimpernel of the anti-Poll Tax campaign, resigns his post as London Secretary due to his massive work as National Secretary. Then, much more seriously, the Annual Conference due to be held on February 23rd is cancelled because "people are too busy organising for the national demo".

This conference could have seen elections for new London officers of the Fed. At the time of writing it has yet to be rescheduled. Rumour has it that the real reason it was cancelled was that only fourteen groups had affiliated. This will come as no surprise to anyone who has attended Fed meetings. It never performed what should have been its primary function: to inform people about what's happening on the ground across the capital. A more useful job has been done by London Fight the Poll Tax, an independent association of individuals and local APTUs, which puts out an informative newsletter. Maybe groups should save on their sub to the Fed and donate cash instead to: London Fight the Poll Tax, c/o BM CRL London WC1N 3XX (or phone John on 081 692 9181).

Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign

TSDC, the national defence campaign for those arrested as a result of anti-poll tax demonstrations, is in the forefront of the campaign for the right to demonstrate. Affiliation £5, TSDC, Room 205, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1 Tel. 071 833 8958.

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