BRIEFING

December 1991 80p (60p unwaged)

"Tebbit went on to the board of British Telecom only a few years after he'd been part of the government that steered through its privatisation. I said in Parliament he was 'lining his pockets'. The speaker asked me to withdraw the remark, but I said I couldn't withdraw the truth - so I was forced to take an early bath."

- Dennis Skinner MP

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LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

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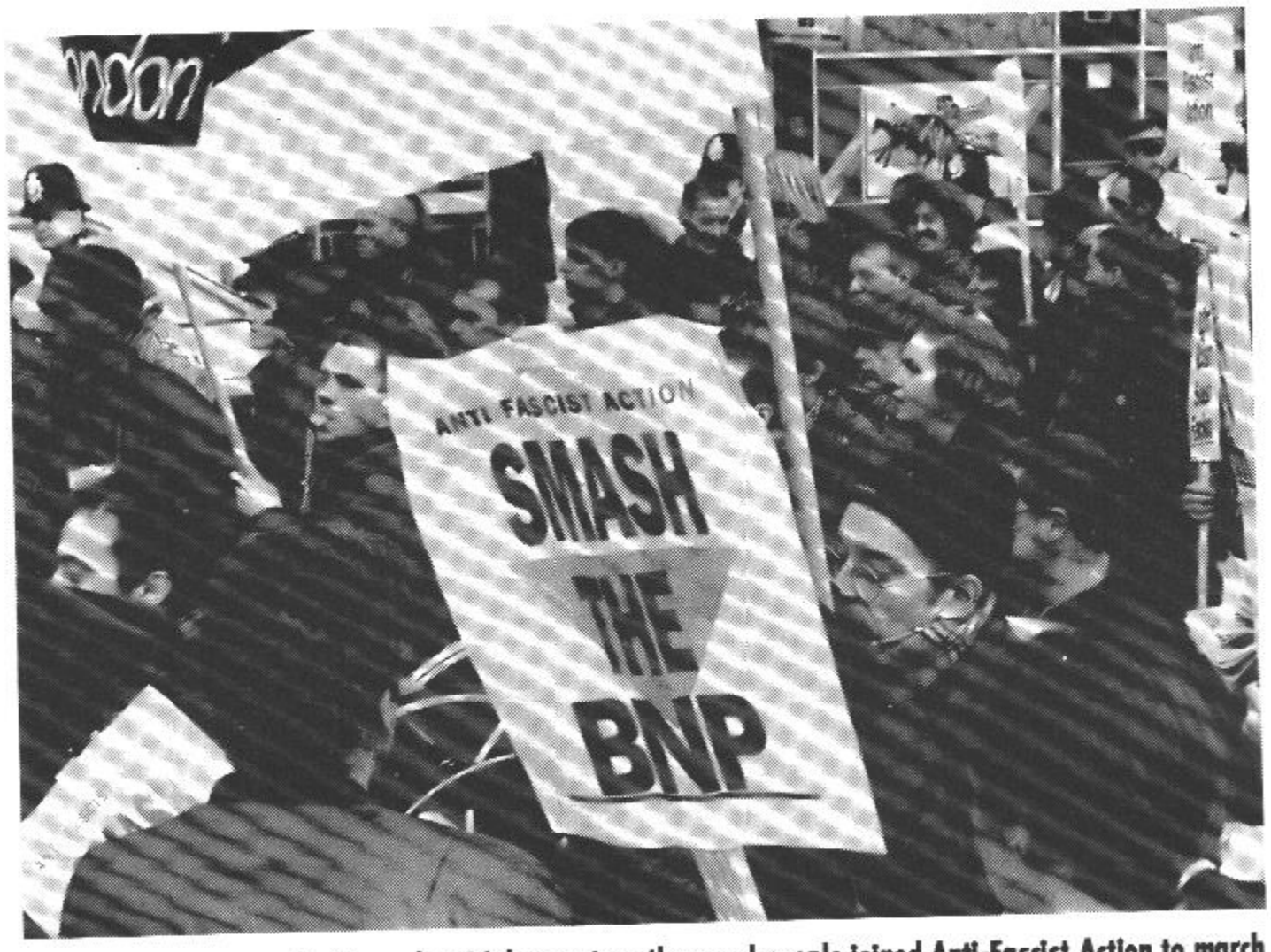
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December 1991, No. 118



On November 10th over two thousand people joined Anti-Fascist Action to march against the British National Party in an effort to roll back the rising tide of racist violence in London's East End.
Photo Bryn Griffiths

Kinnock's privatisation poser

NORMAN LAMONT'S decision to indulge in a pre-election spending spree has some troubling implications for Labour's economic strategists, eager as ever to curry favour with the City.

Lamont is funding his budget by increasing privatisation proceeds, with the sale of the government's remaining shares in BT providing the bulk of the cash.

The Labour leadership's response was to let the press know that it was unilaterally dropping the Party's long-standing commitment to bring BT back into the public sector.

It seems that Labour's unnamed "senior economic advisers" (as the *Guardian* would have it) reckon a Kinnock government will need every penny it can get from privatisation to keep the public sector borrowing requirement within the limits laid down by the European Community.

Worse yet, it seems John Smith would actually have to encourage further council house sales by means of "financial carrots"; the best stock (as we all know) has gone and an incoming Labour government will need to keep up the volume of sales if it is to balance its books.

Funny none of this was mentioned in the "visionary" speeches delivered to the cameras at Party Conference in Brighton.

Welsh Poll Tax heroes return

WALES' FIRST Poll Tax prisoners, 79-year old ex-miner Tom Hopkins and 61-year old Labour councillor and ex-steelman Ray Davies, received a heroes' welcome on their release from a fourteen day stretch at Gloucester Prison for non-payment... courtesy of Labour-controlled Rhymney Council.

On their return from Gloucester they were met by supporters at Cardiff station and later took part in a motorcade up the Rhmney Valley, cheered on by bystanders.

Both men had spent time in jail on hunger strike, until relatives fearing for their health persuaded them to relent.

In prison they were treated well and received hundreds of cards and messages from friends, all of which were much appreciated.

Ray Davies had initially been held at Stroud Police Station but was sent to Gloucester because he had "misused police equipment", i.e. a telephone via which he had organised a picket outside the station - through the medium of Welsh!

The next *Labour Briefing* comes out on January 23rd. Happy New Year!

Fighting for our rights here and now

AS WE go to press, hopes are high that the unjust convictions of the Tottenham Three will be quashed by the Court of Appeal. If that happens, it will be a tremendous triumph for working class people over a throng of home-grown human rights abusers: the police, the courts, the prisons, the media, and the Tory government.

It will owe everything to the grass-roots campaign waged against the odds by friends and family of the Three - aided by a handful of socialist supporters. As for the nation's great liberal newspapers, the Labour leadership, the intelligentsia and the likes of Charter 88, their contribution will have been negligible, as it was in the freeing of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six.

For all its democratic rhetoric, the one thing Charter 88 does not do is defend democracy in practise, in the here and now of class-divided, Tory-governed Britain. Unlike the brave Czech dissident group from which it borrows its name, Charter 88 keeps itself at a safe distance from the sort of direct clash with the powers-that-be that ensues whenever you take up the cudgels for real, individual victims of specific human rights violations.

It's always easy to oppose abuses of what are variously defined as human or democratic or civil rights in the abstract, or in somebody else's country or in the case of a popular cause blessed by the media. It's taking up the "unpopular" causes that is the real test.

In the case of the Tottenham Three, the liberal intellectuals, the "quality", newspapers, the professional politicians, the constitutional reformers were scarce on the ground when times were tough - when the ruling class was mobilising against the campaign and a hostile media suppressed the facts of the case.

This is not just a matter of begrudging credit to johnny-come-latelys to the cause. The fact is that attacks on democratic rights tend to occur at the uncomfortable cutting edge of social conflict, where battle lines between the oppressed and the oppressors are most sharply drawn. That is why the catalogue of those whose rights have been violated by the British state is full of Irish people, black people, lesbians and gays, trades unionists, and dissenters challenging the military, the security services or the nuclear industry.

Of course, none of this is an argument either for or against any of Charter 88's- specific proposals for constitutional reform. The debate about a Bill of Rights (which we cover on page 5) needs to be had not least because it brings into clearer view the key questions: whose rights? which rights? enforced how and by whom?

Whatever constitutional framework one prefers, whatever clauses are written into a Bill of Rights, in the end there is only one guarantee of democratic rights: an alert and uncompromising working class movement which will defend those rights because it is in its own interests to do so - just as, ultimately, suppressing those rights is in the interests of the minority who control our society and profit at our expense.

We cannot rely on other forces to secure our rights, least of all the European Community or the good and great of Charter 88. The British labour movement must recognise that individual and collective freedoms bolster each other. It must be willing to challenge any government or any state or private institution which abuses anybody's civil rights. It needs to fight for the election of a strong Labour government empowered by a democratic mandate and in turn empowering working class people in all spheres of life.

For the left, mobilising mass support for the defence of democratic rights is an urgent necessity if the oppressed and exploited are to have the real means to analyse and organise and gain the confidence to take on their foes. It is a way to strip bare the deeply unequal and anti-democratic architecture of capitalist society. And it is a means of demonstrating what we mean when we say that socialism is the fullest possible extension of democracy.

After the debacle of Stalinism, on these matters the left has much ground to make up.

CONGRATULATIONS TO this month's Class Heroes, Tony Benn, Bernie Grant, Jeremy Corbyn, Dennis Skinner and Bob Cryer ("the usual suspects") on the excellent timing of their Early Day Motion on the Maastricht summit, published in Hansard the day before the first of several polls showing a marked public swing against an all-powerful European Community.

The signatories of the motion declare that "while welcoming the development of closer links between all the peoples who live in Europe and the world community as a whole" they believe "that such co-operation must be based upon the recognition and entrenchment of the rights of democratic self-determination for all those involved" and are therefore "convinced that no Member of the present House has any legal or moral authority or electoral mandate from the people to transfer for all time key economic and political powers, which belong to the electors, to an unelected Commission or Central Bank or to Ministers meeting in secret..."

Everything you always wanted to know about *Labour Briefing*...

***Labour Briefing* is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is produced by a democratic, anti-sectarian network of Labour and trade union activists and is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. We are happy to offer a right of reply on the usual basis to all members of the labour movement.**

All articles published in *Labour Briefing* reflect the opinions of the authors alone unless otherwise indicated. *Briefing* welcomes criticisms and contributions. Please keep us posted on what's going on in your area. Deadline for the next issue is January 14th.

***Briefing* is the only magazine on the left which is not funded by any part of the labour hierarchy or by any organised grouping. To survive and thrive we need the support of our readers. Why not take copies to sell at your local Labour Party, trade union or campaign meeting? And while you're at it, take out a standing order - say, £5 per month - to ensure we have the funds we need to keep going. It's an easy and effective way of hitting back at the Labour misleadership!**

Contact *Briefing* at 26 Wattisfield Road, London, E5 9QH. Telephone: 081 985 6597; fax: 081 985 6785.

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Co-chairs: Liz Davies and Pauline Purnell
Editor: Mike Marqusee
Editorial Board: Graham Bash, Matin Carey, Martin Cole, Guy Daley, Liz Davies, Graham Durham, Paul Field, Kevin Flack, Paul Foley, Bryn Griffiths, Richard Hefferman, Steve King, Chris Knight, Dave Lewney, Leonora Lloyd, Dorothy Macedo, Geoff Mann, Mike Marqusee, Len Mason, Mick McKeever, Eddie Niles, Mike Phipps, Camilla Power, Dave Palmer, Hyder Prodhan, Pauline Purnell, Jon Rogers, Dave Spencer, Karl Statton, Jane Stockton, Aileen Ryder, Frank Tonner, Greg Tucker, Keith Veness, Valerie Veness, John Wilton, Richard Woolven

How Tory rich get richer

Tory MPs ensure handsome profits for their friends in Big Business - and are rewarded accordingly. ***Dennis Skinner MP*** *explains how the system works.*

WHEN PEOPLE say there are no classes in society they should come to Parliament and see the lobby at work.

Big business walks straight into every cabinet office while pensioners coming to lobby their MPs queue up outside in the rain.

Have a look at the register of members' interests and you'll see a clear divide. One hundred and seventy-nine out of 296 Tory back-benchers hold between them 390 directorships; and 160 of them hold 320 paid consultancies. And that doesn't include the sixty-one ministers who had to give up their "second jobs" when they joined the government.

In contrast, there are only sixteen Labour MPs with twenty-five directorships and consultancies between them. Twenty-five is still too many, but the numbers on our side have been diminishing in recent years, partly in response to the campaign some of us have been waging against this "moonlighting".

If Labour went to the country with a manifesto commitment to ensure that all MPs have one job and one job only (they're paid well enough for it) I'm convinced the voters would respond.

Some nineteen ex-cabinet ministers have 59 moonlighting jobs between them, including Norman Tebbit who has no less than five.

A good example of Tory priorities is the Johnson Matthey bank. When it was found to be in a state of collapse, a group of powerful Tories and City slickers met secretly on a Sunday night late in September 1984. At that clandestine meeting, held in the middle of the miners' strike, these people decided that the bank had to be saved.

Early the next morning Nigel Lawson rang up Mrs Thatcher to say, "We have to save it." She, having just been roused from her sleep, said, "You know the policy, Nigel, if it's uneconomical, it has to be closed." Lawson replied, "But Mrs Thatcher, it's not a pit, it's a bank!" "Oh, in that case, we'll have to find £100 million of taxpayers money immediately..."

That double standard typifies the class divide. No doubt the Bank of Crooks and Criminals was also protected for many years on both sides of the Atlantic. We know people were recruited to its board from the good and great of Parliament - James Callaghan and Tory MPs Risdale and Amery.

The argument the Tories put forward for saving banks is a classic: if one bank falls then the rest will follow like a pack of dominoes.

Within months of the Sheffield going down during the Falklands War and all the jingoism that went with it, the government was hatching a secret deal to cancel some Argentine debts. When I raised the matter in Parliament, asking if there wasn't a contradiction between waging war against young Argentinian soldiers and bailing out their banks, the government reply indicated that The Banking System Must be Saved. It seems that certain British banks were overstretched in their loans to Argentine banks and there was a fear that the dominoes might start falling.

Funny how when they shut a pit they don't mind about the dominoes that fall because of that: the hundreds thrown out of work, including those who supply materials to the pits. When they closed one pit recently the lack of safety precautions led to methane gas escaping from the seams below straight into the homes of people in the pit village - that's one domino effect the Tories don't worry about.

Tory privatisation has meant that the City and its friends have made a killing at the expense of the taxpayer. Twenty years ago 30% of all shares were owned by individuals. Now, despite all the talk of spreading share ownership, the figure is down to 20%. Many of the privatised shares have now been sold back to institutional owners - and this is over and above the segment reserved in most privatisation offers for institutional buyers. And the mega-profits from BT and other privatised firms now go to these same institutions and the super-rich who control them.

Tebbit went on to the board of British Telecom only a few years after he'd been part of the government that steered through its privatisation. I said in Parliament he was "lining his pockets". The speaker asked me to withdraw the remark, but I said I couldn't withdraw the truth - so I was forced to take an early bath.

Norman Fowler left the cabinet because he said he wanted to spend more time with his family; but he went almost straight on to the Board of the National Freight Corporation (which had been privatised by the government he was a member of).

Likewise, within six months of leaving the cabinet Peter Walker took seats on the board of privatised British Gas and eight other corporations, including Tate and Lyle and N.M. Rothschild (Wales).

These privatisation profits come on top of income tax cuts which handed over £26.2 billion to the richest 1% in the country in the first ten years of the Tory government. That amount would almost finance the entire NHS next year.

And since we're now in the middle of a debate about the EC, it's worth remembering that the average family in Britain pays £18 a week to support the Common Agricultural Policy and other EC expenditure. The benefits of this expenditure go mainly to agri-business and other enterprises owned by the big insurance and investment companies, whose representatives fill the Tory backbenches.

So when you're feeling extremely low as another socialist policy hits the dust and searching for reasons to vote Labour, just remember where the money goes. There is still a class divide.

BET, A GIANT firm which has contracts to provide services for the NHS, civil service and local government, gave the Tories £20,000 in 1990. Norman Tebbit sits on its board (altogether Tebbit now rakes in nearly £80,000 a year from his various directorships).

SIXTY-ONE TORY MPs - one-in-five of all Tory backbenchers - have a boardroom seat or consultancy with a City firm (bank, insurance company, building society, or finance house).

IN 1989-90, 244 companies gave the Tories £3,402,075. The top ten of these account for just over a quarter of all money going to the party; among these ten are property developers. Taylor Woodrow, weighing in with £150,000, Allied Lyons with £110,000, United Biscuits with £106,000, Hanson Trust with £80,000 and Hambros, the merchant bankers, with £52,000.

KEEP UP WITH the Tory scams - read *Labour Research*, available from 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF.

Will the Canary fly?

***John Turkie**, formerly of the Docklands Consultative Committee, examines the peculiar economics of the massive Canary Wharf development in London's Isle of Dogs, and concludes that the key to this monument to private enterprise is a state subsidy of staggering proportions.*

AT TWELVE million square feet, Canary Wharf is the largest commercial development in the world. Because it is sited in an Enterprise Zone, the developers, Olympia and York (O&Y), will be able to claw back over £1.3 billion in construction costs alone. O&Y, a private company based in Toronto and one of the biggest property developers in the world, is reputedly worth over $20 billion.

At Canary Wharf's 'marketing suite', bankers, bosses, estate agents and journalists file past 100:1 scale models of the development - models that themselves cost more than £100,000 each. Here it is: a great court ringed with post-modernist buildings, three shimmering towers, bosky trees, dinky cars, couples with briefcases touching ankles at pavement tables, paper windsurfers on plastic water.

Canary Wharf is the core of London's stillborn third business district (following the City and the West End), designed to enable London's financial services to expand and compete on a global scale. So much hangs on Canary Wharf that the bulk of the state's phenomenal support for Docklands (over £6 billion since 1981) is geared towards it.

Nevertheless, Canary Wharf's future is far from secure. The property market is facing its most severe slump since 1945 and surplus office space in London is at an all-time high. The chronic over-supply has sent vacancy rates soaring (averaging 20% in the City and 50% in Docklands) and capital values and rents plummeting (City rents are down 40% from their late 1988 peak and are expected to drop still further).

By the summer of 1991 O&Y had hoped to have let at least 80% of Phases 1 & 2 (5.2 million square feet). To date, it has only managed to let 57% - and the majority of tenants are not finance companies, who have spurned the special deals offered by O&Y, including a rent-free period, a reverse premium and a cash payment.

Canary Wharf's achilles' heel is its awkward location and inadequate transport links. Indeed, Canary Wharf's four most important tenants - Credit Suisse First Boston, Morgan Stanley International, Manufacturers Hanover Trust, and American Express - have all delayed their move until 1993 when the upgrading of the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) is supposed to be complete.

The toytown DLR, more commonly known as the 'Docklands Blight Railway' because it is so unreliable, epitomises the piecemeal development of Docklands.

Before investing at Canary Wharf, O&Y was promised an upgraded DLR and the 'Docklands Highway', a new road network. But O&Y soon realised that wasn't enough. To secure the long-term future of Canary Wharf, a high-speed rail link was needed. So, once again, O&Y went knocking on the door of 10 Downing Street.

Of the six major rail and underground projects evaluated by the government's Central London Rail Study, the proposed extension of the Jubilee line into Docklands was found to have the least impact in easing London's chronic congestion. Nonetheless, it got the go-ahead. Having already sunk so much into Docklands, the Tories were hardly likely to pull the plug. O&Y will pay a fixed sum of £400 million towards the extension, payable over a 20-year period, but the actual cost is expected to reach £1.5 billion. The taxpayer ends up, once more, bailing out the private sector in Docklands.

Canary Wharf may or may not succeed in becoming an international financial centre. Its future lies in factors outside the control of O&Y, including how long the recession in international property lasts, whether the Isle of Dogs can establish itself as a central office location and whether London can maintain its position as Europe's dominant financial centre through the 1990s, which is by no means certain. It is a huge gamble and if it goes wrong it will ultimately rebound most heavily on the taxpayer.

Whether it succeeds or not, Canary Wharf explodes the myth that Thatcherism was non-interventionist. Effectively, the Tories have invested almost twice as much as the Department of Employment's total 1990/91 budget on a single 71-acre site. Clearly, strong state backing is necessary to show that the private market works.

Bonus for Trafalgar House plc

AT LEAST 500 families were moved to build the road to Canary Wharf, the 'Limehouse Link'.

Over three hundred of them were moved to the Timber Wharves Estate which was bought "off the peg" from Ideal Homes, part of the Trafalgar House Group, which has many connections with the Tory party and whose ex-director Nigel Broackes was at one time head of the London Docklands Development Corporation LDDC).

The estate was part of the speculative building boom in docklands which was encouraged by the LDDC. When the bubble burst and the recession struck, the estate became unsaleable and Ideal Homes was stuck with it - until the tenants were railroaded in and forced to pick up the tab.

Crafty as Fox

FORMER SALES manager and company director Marcus Fox, Tory MP for Shipley since 1970, is one of the most influential backbenchers in the House. A former vice chair of the Tory party (in charge of choosing parliamentary candidates) and member of the Commons Select Committee on Members' Salaries, for the last decade he has been a leading figure on the Executive of the 1922 Committee of Tory backbenchers.

Since 1984, he has been the chairman (sic) of the powerful House of Commons Committee of Selection, which places MPs on the standing committees which consider all legislation. He is also a paid consultant for four firms, including multi-national 3M(UK) and Westminster Communications, a major lobbying company. And he holds six directorships: including the sinisterly named Cryogenic Technology Ltd, as well as firms involved in real estate, communications, engineering, health care and McCarthy and Stone Ltd, a retirement homes developer. In 1989 a spate of complaints by elderly residents in sheltered accommodation managed by McCarthy and Stone prompted Labour MP Nigel Griffiths to take up the issue in the House. He was phoned by Fox and told, "We're not as bad as you're making us out to be... you must know that old people like to complain."

Undeterred, Griffiths introduced a bill to strengthen residents' legal rights. The bill was blocked by the government whips but if it had proceeded to the next stage the members of the standing committee considering it would have been chosen by the Selection Committee - and Marcus Fox's voice would have been well and truly heard.

For more see Mark Hollingsworth's excellent *MPs for Hire: the secret world of political lobbying*, published by Bloomsbury, £16.99.

Jury sets Dessie Ellis free

THE TRIAL of Dessie Ellis followed the pattern of previous Irish show-trials in every respect but one.

At 2:30 pm on October 30th a heavily vetted jury found Dessie NOT guilty.

Andy Parr
Shoreham CLP

From everything that had preceded we had no reason to expect such a result. Billy Power of the Birmingham Six attended the opening day and told the picket of Dessie's supporter out side the Old Bailey that it was "frighteningly reminiscent" of the opening of his own trial in 1975.

Snipers perched on the roof of the court and helicopters hovered overhead, escorting Dessie to and from it.

In an unnecessary and ludicrous attempt to curry favour, a grovelling prosecuting counsellor placed flowers on Judge Swinton Thomas' bench.

Swinton Thomas is famous for his "judgement" in the Winchester Three case (later overturned).

The prosecution took the jury through countless photos of horrific bombing incidents from the early and mid-80s in an attempt to link Dessie with these events even though it accepted that the Dubliner had never set foot in the UK before being extradited here to face trial.

The whole case hinged on double jeopardy in that the defendant was being tried for crimes for which he had already served a sentence in Portlaoise prison in the mid-80s.

It is also reasonable to believe that the Irish police provided their English counterparts with vintage unexploded bombs with Ellis' fingerprints on them to be placed with the cache allegedly found in Pangbourne Forest in 1983.

"I was amazed and didn't know which way to look," said Dessie of the jury's unexpected verdict, delivered after only three hours deliberation. "In the end I stared at the prosecution barristers who were sitting with their heads in their hands. They looked even more surprised than I felt."

He praised the support group which had worked so hard, against the odds, for his release. "It was superb that they could keep up a picket every day of a four-week trial."

The result indicates that, in the wake of the release of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six, the British public has changed - but has the British state?

Remember Bloody Sunday

On Sunday, January 30th 1972, British paratroopers shot dead fourteen unarmed demonstrators protesting against internment without trial in the North of Ireland.

The twentieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday will be commemorated in the new year by a major demonstration organised by the Committee for British Withdrawal from Ireland, which includes the Troops Out Movement, the Irish in Britain Representation Group and the Labour Committee on Ireland.

Demonstrate
Sunday, January 25th, 1992
Assemble: Hyde Park, London, noon
Rally: Quex Road, Kilburn

For transport/creche details ring 071 609 1743. For more information contact Committee for British Withdrawal from Ireland, c/o Box 353, London NW5 4NH.

Liberty launches Bill of Rights

DOES BRITAIN NEED a legally-binding Bill of Rights? Since Roy Hattersley's midsummer flip-flop on the issue - itself the result of a poll showing 72% of people (and 83% of Labour voters) in favour - the debate has been hotting up.

Liberty, formerly the NCCL, are the latest group to produce a draft Bill. They point out that Britain, despite signing the European Convention on Human Rights in 1951, is one of the very few countries not to adopt it and have it recognised by their courts.

"A People's Charter", Liberty's "consultation document" on its Bill of Rights, was launched in London by individuals who have themselves suffered human rights abuses in Britain. Clive Ponting demanded a legally-entrenched "public interest defence" for whistle-blowers. Abbas Cheblak, a Palestinian detained during the Gulf War by the British army, pointed out that as a foreigner, "you can be deported without reason or trial." A black British woman explained how her Nigerian husband had been deported and her children denied a father because of racist immigration laws; she said a Bill of rights must enshrine a right to family life. Andrew Puddephatt, Liberty general secretary, emphasised that Liberty's Bill of Rights would apply to everyone on British soil, whatever passport they might hold. Paul Gambaccini argued that any Bill of Rights must cover the right to sexual orientation. Mike Grindley, sacked GCHQ trades unionist, insisted that the right of association and the right to belong to a trade union were essential freedoms and warned against allowing "national security" to qualify any Bill of Rights.

The powerlessness of Parliament in the face of a government committed to riding roughshod over civil liberties has been one of the main arguments for a Bill of Rights. But socialists have traditionally been wary of the idea, particularly as a Bill of Rights would be interpreted and enforced by judges. Given cases like the "Fares Fair" ruling against the GLC in 1981 and the courts' notorious anti-union bias, there is a real danger that judges would use such a Bill to block legislation by a future Labour government. This is why the Society of Labour lawyers is opposed to an entrenched Bill of Rights on which the courts would adjudicate.

Liberty's solution is to give the final say to a committee of Parliament itself. This would have the merit of keeping the courts under the control of elected politicians. The alternative is to elect the judges themselves - favoured by 60% in a recent poll.

***A People's Charter*, Liberty's Bill of Rights, is available from 21 Tabard Street, London SE1 4LA for £7.99.**

Still no justice for the Guildford Four

***Ronan Bennett** reports on the increasing exasperation among supporters of the Guildford Four and the Maguire Seven with the progress of the May Inquiry, set up two years ago to investigate the miscarriages of justice.*

THE INQUIRY'S sessions have been marked by bitter exchanges after the Inquiry team, led by Sir John May, a retired High Court judge, took the controversial decision not to give lawyers representing the Maguire Seven and Guildford Four access to crucial documents.

Alastair Logan, the solicitor who represents Ann Maguire and her family, walked out of the Inquiry in protest at not being allowed to see the new material believed to relate to the way the police and the Director of Public Prosecutions prepared the cases in 1974-75.

Paul Hill, who was released in October 1989 after spending fifteen years in prison for the 1974 Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings, said: "From the start I was concerned about the Inquiry. I was not convinced it had the powers to do the job. Now I doubt if it has the will."

Errol Smalley, Hill's uncle and a long-time campaigner for the Guildford Four, linked what he describes as the "shambles of the Inquiry" with the recent dismissal of charges against three Surrey detectives for allegedly conspiring to pervert the course of justice. Freeing the Guildford Four in October 1989, Lord Chief Justice Lane said of the 1975 trial: "The Surrey police officers... seriously misled the court. In fact they must have lied" and said he hoped there would be a speedy prosecution of the guilty officers.

"In 1989 there were demands from all quarters that those responsible for framing the Guildford Four be swiftly punished," Smalley said. "But after two years the guilty have still not been brought to book, and the May Inquiry is doing deals that prevent the truth from coming out."

It is believed that the Guildford Four/Maguire Seven lawyers were prevented from seeing crucial evidence after the Inquiry, which has no power to compel evidence or witnesses to attend, struck a deal with the police.

The Inquiry still has a long way to go before it completes its investigations and it is not known when it will report.

Commenting on the length of time the Inquiry is taking, Paul Hill said: "There is no will in the legal and political establishment to see justice done here. They would like to sweep these cases under the carpet and forget about the whole thing. They can't do that, but they're doing the next best thing - dragging the whole affair out in the hope of exhausting media and public interest and lessening the pressure for reform."

The Guildford Four, the Maguire Seven, the Birmingham Six (now vindicated), and Judith Ward (whose convictions for murder are about to be quashed) have between them spent more than 200 years in prison for offences they did not commit. The system that condemned them remains unreformed and the men and women who fabricated and manipulated the evidence against them remain unpunished.

On its showing so far, there can be little hope that the May Inquiry will make any significant contribution to redressing these wrongs.





In the midst of runaway racist hysteria, whipped up by a calculating media, the Tottenham Three were wrongly convicted in 1987 of the murder of PC Keith Blakelock in the Broadwater Farm riots. While the left press, including *Labour Briefing*, mobilised support for the victimised youth, Fleet Street, in this case aided and abetted by the Labour right, had no doubt the three should stay behind bars forever.

Asylum rights campaign

Trade unions, legal, religious, refugee and human rights groups have formed the Asylum Rights Campaign to oppose the governments' new Asylum Bill.

As readers of last month's *Briefing* will know, the Bill will stop asylum seekers getting legal aid,

limit their right to appeal, prevent them from even boarding planes to Britain and, in a final indignity, subject them to fingerprinting.

The government hopes to pull in racist votes by "cracking down" on asylum seekers. If the Bill is passed, it could send countless refugees back to torture and death.

The ARC is offering speakers, detailed briefings and local campaign contacts to fight the Bill. Contact: ARC, c/o 3 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ or call the ARC Action Line, 071 592 9929.

Madrid: "process without substance"

The first phase of the Middle East Peace Conference ended in Madrid on November 2nd. Was it a public relations exercise, a real breakthrough or a failure? ***Ghada Karmi****, research associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London - and member of Hendon South CLP - suggests that the true answer may be all or none of the above.*



Ghada Karmi

THE MADRID Conference was constructed to provide a forum for several different agendas while at the same time setting no clear objectives.

The only discernible aim for the meeting was that of process, the sheer fact of delegations meeting each other and talking, whether anything substantive resulted or not. US Secretary of State James Baker's real skill lay in his ability to convince all the parties and most of the world outside that this was enough of a reason to convene a conference asked to resolve some of the most complex and intractable problems in history. Whether anything more substantial will be achieved in the next stage of bilateral talks, whenever they take place, remains to be seen.

The players in the opening act of the drama used their parts to different effect. While everyone was performing largely for their domestic constituencies, it was only the Palestinians who seemed aware that they had to satisfy an external audience as well. In this respect, the Israelis bungled it badly and emerged looking and sounding exactly as intransigent and intolerant as the Arabs always said they were. What a supreme irony that the Zionists, who traditionally have the edge over everyone else in promotion and publicity, should be upstaged by a bunch of amateurs, in the very forum where it mattered most of all!

As some of the Israeli papers wryly commented, the biggest mistake the Israeli Prime Minister made was to have excluded the PLO from the conference. How much better for Israel, they argued, if an unshaven Yasser Arafat speaking bad English had represented the Palestinians rather than the smooth and articulate Dr Abdul Shafi and Professor Hanan Ashrawi.

In public relations terms, therefore, the Palestinians won hands down, and if that were all that mattered, then the peace conference was a total success for the Palestinian cause.

But it is necessary to look at the real situation behind the euphoria. The Palestinians had to make massive concessions in order to participate in the conference at all: their representative, the PLO, was excluded altogether, and their delegation was shorn of representatives from East Jerusalem and from the Palestinian diaspora.

This had the effect of confining the Palestine problem to a local dimension only. In fact, the majority of Palestinians live in exile and are represented by the PLO and not by the delegation which went to Madrid. This means that the settlement of their problem was therefore to be shelved. Jerusalem is of crucial importance to Palestinians, both as Arabs and as Muslims and Christians, and they do not accept the Israeli contention that it is a Jewish city. To have excluded Palestinians from Jerusalem from the talks is to imply exactly that.

The Palestinians also had to submit to Israel's conference agenda in another way: they had to accept a total lack of movement on the two most urgent issues which affect them, namely Israeli settlements and Israel's military occupation. The Israelis, in contrast, were required to make one concession only: to be present at the conference. They could get away with refusing to cede land for peace, and even with bombing and shelling the south of Lebanon and establishing a new settlement on the occupied Golan Heights while the Peace Conference was in session.

Whether this complaisance towards Israel on the part of the US will continue is hard to tell, but it is the key to the ultimate success of the peace process. It is no secret that for Israel the best outcome would be a continuation of the status quo. For any change in this position, pressure will have to be applied to Israel by the US, the Jewish state's major source of revenue and support. This will be painful for both parties, but without an initial agreement on Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands, the peace process will remain just that: a process without substance.

National demonstration

● Recognise the PLO ● End the Occupation
● Stop the settlements ● For a Palestinian state
Saturday, December 7th
Assemble 12:30 pm, Embankment
Rally 3pm, Hyde Park

Called by the Joint Committee for Palestine
Contact: JCP BM 2136, London WC1N 3XX;
tel. 071 373 8414

Who can stop another Kurdish tragedy?

THE HARSH winter has arrived in the Kurdish highlands. Temperatures have already fallen below zero. There is little food to eat and virtually no shelter from rain and wind. The old and the young, the weakest, are dying of cold and hunger. Their numbers will increase day by day.

Ihsan Qadir
Kurdistan Focus

This proud nation of 25 million is dying, disappearing in front of our eyes. The Iraqi government has now imposed economic sanctions and encircled Kurdish areas with a tight blockade. Shortages of food, medicine, oil, building materials, tools, and basic essentials for living are now becoming critical.

Saddam Hussein's regime, we are told, is weak and cannot pose a threat. It is certainly true that the Iraqi army cannot wage a war against the interests of the imperialist West and disturb the unequal status quo. After the "precision" bombing, most of Iraq's power centres, factories, chemical plants and economic supply lines are damaged. Its army is tamed and crippled. So, yes, Iraq does not present a real danger to its neighbours, for the time being.

But this does not mean that the Iraqi army cannot mount an attack on the lightly armed Kurdish forces and most importantly against Kurdish civilians. The latest news from Kurdistan is that this army has begun its march on Kurdistan. It is not yet known whether this latest offensive will turn into a full war, yet the very fact that the Iraqi army is moving again is enough to send a wave of panic and chaos through Kurdistan.

Once again the Kurdish people are to be forced to live amongst ruins, cold, misery and death. Another long march to the mountains looms.

It looks as if the United Nations, the European Parliament, and other international organisations are all powerless to free the Kurdish people from their long imprisonment. After the mass exodus of last March-April, there seemed at last to be a dim light of hope at the end of the dark tunnel in which the Kurds have lived since the western powers divided their nation amongst Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey in 1923. Many Kurds and non-Kurds hoped that this would be their last ordeal. Thousands of people died at that time and many are still haunted by the experience.

The "safe haven" policy of John Major was seen by many as the first step towards Britain's involvement in rescuing the Kurds. For the first time in the history of the Kurdish national liberation movement, the plight of our people was taken on board by the UN and European Parliament.

But six months later, what has been achieved? The present situation in Iraqi Kurdistan is so tense and delicate that at any moment the uneasy relations between the Kurdish Peshmergas and Iraqi army can turn into a bloody nightmare. The British government is aware of this as is the leadership of the Labour Party, but no one is willing to come forward and accept the fact, that charitable actions, aid packages and sympathy, however desirable, cannot solve the dilemma of the Kurdish people. A political solution is required.

This is the most essential demand of the Kurdish people. But Turkey, for one, objects to any solution of the Kurdish problem.

Within the last three months, Turkey has mounted three assaults on Kurdish areas of Iraq, killing many civilians and causing damage to property and livestock. No public condemnation of the Turkish raids came from either the White House or 10 Downing Street.

It is time that the British labour movement seized this high moral issue. Without a mass public outcry, without all-round pressure on the Conservative government, the just demands of the Kurdish people will not be heard.

A few weeks ago, Jeremy Corbyn, Stan Newens and I spoke at a meeting in the Kurdish Cultural Centre in London. More than 70 people, mostly Kurds, attended. The audience was frustrated and angry and wanted to know: "What should the Kurds do so that they can live in peace, free from oppression and slavery?"; "What can be done by the Kurds to make Saddam sign an agreement?"; "Who is responsible for the disappointment of Kurdish hopes?"; "What is to be done about it?"

We answered them in our personal capacities. But I believe these questions were not just directed to us. I think the whole of the British labour movement, above all, the rank and file activists, should also seek to answer them.

For speakers for your Labour Party or trade union meetings, contact Kurdistan Focus, c/o 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7.

Vic Williams: prisoner of conscience

VIC WILLIAMS, jailed for fourteen months for refusing to serve with Britain's armed forces in the Gulf War, has become the first British soldier to be adopted by Amnesty International as a "prisoner of conscience".

Since Vic was imprisoned, he has received huge support. The governor at Colchester Prison complained recently that it took four hours a day to read all Vic's mail!

Vic has now been moved to a civilian prison. Send him a birthday card on December 2nd: write to Vic Williams, LE 3363, HMP Highpoint, Stradishall, Newmarket CB8 9YG.

Demonstrate
12 noon, Sunday,
December 1st
St Martins-in-the-Field
Trafalgar Square
London

For more information, contact the Vic Williams Defence Campaign, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4.

Yeltsin's crash course

Why is Yeltsin risking all on hazardous high-speed economic reform? And what are its likely consequences for the Russian people? ***Gus Fagan*** *investigates.*

TOWARDS THE end of October, Russian president Boris Yeltsin announced an unprecedented stepping-up of market reform. State-controlled prices would be freed by the end of this year, state subsidies would be slashed to reduce budget deficits to zero by the end of next, a new tax would be introduced (VAT), 50% of enterprises would be privatised within three months and loss-making collectives and state farms would close.

Whether Yeltsin will actually succeed in implementing such drastic measures, which would plunge the Russian economy into depression and wreak havoc in the lives of millions, remains to be seen.

No one pretends that these measures have any degree of popular support. In fact, Yeltsin thinks he'll need to suspend elections and parliamentary control in order to carry them out.

The economic results of this strategy are already clear in the rest of eastern Europe. Take Czechoslovakia, for instance, which (alongside East Germany) was one of the most advanced countries in eastern Europe, supplying machine tools and other industrial products to the USSR and other countries in the eastern bloc. Under the new regime, with finance minister Vaclav Klaus implementing an economic strategy dictated by the G7 (the seven leading capitalist nations), the EC, the IMF and the World Bank, the country's Gross National Product has declined in the past year by a staggering 25%. Industrial production has fallen by 30% and wages by 27% while consumer prices have risen by 70% and unemployment has increased by over half a million.

The social consequences are even worse than the statistics suggest. Previously in these countries wages were spent almost entirely on food and essential commodities (housing, energy and transport were heavily subsidised). In that context price liberalisation has a drastic and immediate effect on living standards.

A few weeks ago, a Financial Times special report on Hungary (heralded as the marketising success story of eastern Europe) suggested that while 10% of the population was enriching itself, 60% were struggling to get by and 30% were sinking into poverty. In the past eight months Hungary also saw a further decline in its industrial output of over 18%. Last year unemployment increased by 9%.

The political consequences are more difficult to estimate. If Poland is an example of things to come, then Yeltsin was wise in wanting to ban elections. In the recent Polish elections the government party won only 7% of the popular vote and most people simply refused to vote at all. Even before the election the minister for privatisation, Janusz Lewandowski, admitted that the government was cutting back its privatisation plan in the face of popular opposition.

The IMF response to Polish faint-heartedness was to freeze the next stage of credits. Negotiations on restructuring of foreign debt were also suspended.

It's clear that breakneck privatisation and marketisation are the West's preconditions for allowing the eastern European countries to participate, even partially, in the world capitalist economy.

The overriding priority of the West's top political leaders (implemented through the IMF, World Bank, European Commission, etc.) is to destroy the old planned economies and ensure the total dominance of capitalist free enterprise. Only then will economic relations be normalised. As far as the West is concerned, the question of democracy in these countries is of secondary importance.

Now that the Soviet Union is breaking up, the West will impose its conditions on each of the separate republics, granting its favours to the best performers. Reform now, money later. As the US magazine Business Week argued quite bluntly last week: "Economic assistance only gives these governments breathing space to postpone such measures as privatisation, cuts to import barriers and misguided economic controls." Yeltsin's radical programme and his willingness to risk all its social and political consequences is his response to this Western ultimatum.

Polish elections

POLAND'S FIRST genuinely democratic elections since the 1930s were disappointing for the left but they did indicate widespread discontent with the transition to capitalism.

Dave Osler
Leyton CLP

None of the twenty parties winning parliamentary representation on October 27th polled more than 13%. Well under half of the electorate even bothered to turn out.

At the time of writing, all attempts to patch together a coalition government have failed, raising the prospect of direct rule by President Lech Walesa.

Labour Solidarity, the main nationwide radical slate, picked up just 2.0% of the vote. This secured three seats, down from the five it held in the outgoing parliament.

Supporters of the Socialist Political Centre, led by Trotskyist Josef Pinior, stood as Labour Solidarity candidates in Wroclaw. They totalled around 10,000 votes, 2,000 short of the number needed to win a seat. Lezek Nowak, a Marxist critic during the martial law period following 1981 of both Solidarity and the then-ruling Communist Party, became a Labour Solidarity deputy for Poznan.

There was surprisingly strong support for the Democratic Left Alliance, the remnants of the former Stalinists, and its allied Peasants' Party. Together they polled 21%, taking most of the protest vote against the so-called Balcerowicz plan - the out-going government's IMF-dictated austerity package.

Unfortunately, the right-wing Catholic Action and anti-semitic far right Confederation for an Independent Poland together picked up almost 18%, indicating the potential social base for a Walesa dictatorship.

Adroit centre politicians like Tadeusz Mazowiecki may exploit the fragile state of Polish democracy to bounce the Democratic Left into supporting their Democratic Union party. But because this would entail backing the Balcerowicz plan, any deal could cost Democratic Left much of its electoral following and even sections of its activists, which, Josef Pinior argues, might open up possibilities for left regroupment.

Czechoslovakia: a socialist exile returns

***Jan Schling** was a Czech dissident during the Prague Spring of 1968. After its suppression he joined the socialist opposition and was arrested in January 1972. He was expelled eight months later and sought asylum in Britain. He has never lost his belief in the validity of socialism and is now an active trades unionist in the GMPU and treasurer of Islington North Constituency Labour Party.*

Jan recently visited Czechoslovakia for the first time in two decades. He spoke to Keith Veness about what he found there.

KV: The collapse of Stalinism and the accession of Vaclav Havel was reported here as a "Velvet Revolution". Was that a fair description?

JS: It was peaceful at the time but the opposition is now paying the price for the narrowness and small numbers of people involved. What is now starting is the politics of greed and revenge. Racism and anti-semitic violence is on the increase and old scores are being settled.

KV: How has socialism survived as a practical idea?

JS: There are a number of socialist parties operating - but that depends on how you count them! There are now "social-democrats", "communists" and "left democrats" but none of them offer any alternative to privatisation and "market economics". Most of the crimes of Stalinism are blamed on socialism and socialists are currently at a real disadvantage. Instead we are treated to the "three privatisations": "restitution" (giving small shops and housing to former owners); "small privatisation" (restaurants, workshops and factories being sold at auction); "big privatisation" (selling off major enterprises to foreign companies and issuing token vouchers as shares). It is so bad that even visiting Thatcherites have to point out that capitalism doesn't work if you haven't got any capital!

This is clearly a counter-revolution - but only if you think Stalinism was somehow a revolution. In fact what we are witnessing is a relapse into nineteenth century capitalism.

KV: Despite all this, which parties seem the best hope for the left?

JS: It is a real mess. There are now three social-democratic groups, an ex-emigre one, an ex-underground one and a newly set-up one. The Democratic Left Alternative seems the best in terms of discussing and formulating ideas.

> ***"I have taken heart from the fact that despite Stalinism, socialism has not been killed"***

KV: What about the trades unions?

JS: This area is much more encouraging - and interesting. The unions are now forging international links and adopting a more "traditional" role, defending wages and opposing the government's "free market" philosophy. There is also now a united federation - a "Confederation of Bohemia and Moravia" - linked via an umbrella grouping to the "Confederation of Slovakia".

KV: What were your overall impressions of your return to Czechoslovakia?

JS: A real mixture. I was personally elated to return to a land I never thought I would see again but this was mixed with a deep political sadness. One of my socialist friends summed it up for me by saying, "This is not what we fought for!"

I could only agree.

KV: What should the labour movement in Britain be doing about this?

JS: We need to organise practically and forge real links. Since 1989 only the reactionary right has done any work on this level. Prague is now full of young "Thatcherites" expounding the way forward. We are paying the price for the left not taking international issues seriously and doing real solidarity work.

KV: How do you think things will develop in the future?

JS: We will probably see a repeat of Poland. The right will win the election but the left vote will be reasonable. It is very confused with over eighty parties now in existence but no one bloc has even 20% in the polls. A sinister development is the growth of the Republicans, a fascist grouping. They have nearly 20% support in parts of Northern Bohemia. There is also a separatist Slovak grouping who are funded from Germany and by ex-Nazi Slovaks in the USA and Canada. In Czechoslovakia Stalinism screwed the lid down on old ethnic hatreds but solved none of them.

However, I have taken heart from the fact that despite Stalinism, socialism has not been killed. It needs time to regroup and fight back - but most of all it needs real support from us.

Moscow unions march

FORTY THOUSAND workers took to the streets of Moscow on October 23rd to protest against the Russian government's crash programme of market reforms, including huge price rises and the privatisation of 50% of businesses within three months.

The march, organised by the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions and backed by the organising committee for the Party of Labour, was the first big working class demonstration since the old regime collapsed in August.

Has the left got it right on Yugoslavia?

"The first European war since 1945 broke out a few months ago," writes ***John Turkie****, Hackney North CLP, "yet* Briefing *hasn't said a word about it!" Clearly, the conflict raging in Yugoslavia is problematic for the left, used - as we are - to taking sides. But just which side should we be supporting here? We asked John to give his views.*

HISTORY TELLS us to support the Serbian position; current events, the Croatian one. Politics, I would venture, tells us to support neither. Yet the nature and outcome of the war is of immense importance, both to "Yugoslavia" and its many peoples, and to the future of Europe.

This is a dirty, brutal war, in which Serbs (mostly from outside Serbia) are being used to spearhead the campaign for a "Greater Serbia" by nationalist leaders claiming to want to keep Yugoslavia together. This Serbian expansionism is taking place under the thinly-veiled guise of protecting the Serbian minority in Croatia. The tragedy is that the position of this minority has been made infinitely worse by the actions of Serbia's hard-line leaders,

"Croatia's struggle attracts fascists from all over Europe"

President Slobodan Milosevic and General Veljko Kadijevic.

Croatia's equally nationalist President, Franjo Tudjiman, made a huge political blunder in initially failing to safeguard the rights of the Serbian minority in a new independent Croatia. Serbs say that for some time now they have been discriminated against in employment in Croatia. And few forget the massacre of over half a million Serbs during World War II at the hands of Croatia's puppet fascist regime.

To compound this blunder, Tudjiman under-estimated Serbia's reaction (despite the precedents of both Kosovo and Slovenia) and failed to prepare the Croatian people for the inevitable war. This failure has led to a frightening rise in the fortunes of the neo-fascist HOS, which along with other far-right organisations following in the tradition of the fascist Ustashe, now have over 5,000 fighters in the field. They are completely out of the control of Zagreb and are in effect running large parts of Croatia's war with a free hand.

The balance of forces is shifting steadily. At the start, the Serbs had tanks, aircraft and big guns; the Croats had game rifles and armoured milk floats. But the Serb generals had not reckoned on either the astonishing heroism of ordinary Croats or the attitude of many Serbs who have seen through this pointless war. The Federal army is falling apart, reduced mainly to Serbs; there is also now little will to fight among the population of Serbia proper. The dream of a "Greater Serbia", which also takes in large parts of Bosnia Herzegovina (which has an explosive ethnic mix) and Kosovo, remains nothing but a dream.

The tragedy is that in this conflict the worst, most reactionary elements have come to the fore among all the nationalities; genuine democratic opposition voices are not heard.

The reason Western leaders appear to have their heads in the sand is because they want to maintain the status quo, just as they have a vested interest in keeping the Soviet Union from falling apart. This is so for a variety of reasons, not least because of the destabilising effect the break up of Yugoslavia will have on the surrounding Central and Southern European countries. But the artificially-created Yugoslav state is no longer a political reality. And the ineffective stance taken by European leaders has only exacerbated the war.

"This Serbian expansionism is taking place under the thinly-veiled guise of protecting the Serbian minority in Croatia"

What should we be advocating? When we witness the horrors of Serbia's aggression, it is easy to side with Croatia. Yet when Thatcher declares that Croatia is fighting for democracy against communism (a myth, of course), and when Croatia's struggle attracts fascists from all over Europe, it is tempting to support Serbia.

Indeed, many Serbs, thinking of the role their people played in defeating fascism in the Second World War, cannot understand their international isolation, nor the worldwide sympathy with "plucky little Croatia".

The reality is that European leaders, led by Douglas Hurd, have ceded ground to Serbia's Milosevic since the start of hostilities. There was no recognition of Slovenia and Croatia - in order to retain the status quo and not to offend the Serbs. Yet it is plain that Serbia's leaders are responsible for this unnecessary and bloody war and have cynically used the Serbs of Croatia and Bosnia to further their expansionist ambitions.

Europe's reluctance to accept the break-up of Yugoslavia and recognise Slovenia and Croatia before hostilities began gave the green light to Serbia's aggression. Both Slovenia and Croatia must be recognised immediately, but only within a framework that safeguards the rights of minorities. Serbia could then be isolated politically and economically and it would not be long before harsh realities caught up even with the generals in Belgrade.

Is this a reformist line? Of course. But in the real world thousands are being killed and large areas of Croatia are devastated, with hundreds of thousands cut off from water and essential services. Epidemics are reported to be raging in the besieged Croatian towns of Dubrovnic and Vukovar. The longer the war goes on, the worse future relations between Serbs and Croats will be. And if it engulfs Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, then all hell will break loose in south-eastern and central Europe.

So what *is* the meaning of August 1991?

The contrasting assessments by Chris Knight and Boris Kagarlitsky of recent events in Russia in the October Labour Briefing *have provoked much debate. In particular, responses to Chris' article have ranged from allegations that the author was "living on another planet" to praise for his "thoughtful, original analysis". **Frank Hansen**, Brent East CLP, argues the toss.*

SO WAS it "the Second Great Russian Revolution" (Chris K) or "No Triumph for democracy" (Boris K)?

Despite the apparent contradiction, both viewpoints make a valuable contribution to the key question facing socialists today: what is the future for world socialism following the collapse of the USSR and the eastern bloc?

To describe the August days in Moscow as a "great revolution" on a par with 1640, 1789 and 1917, as Chris does, is obviously extravagant. Had the "masses from the inside" really smashed the state then the term would be more apposite.

While Yeltsin undoubtedly enjoyed popular support - at least in so far as people did not want the resurrection of the old system - there was (as Kagarlitsky points out) little active mass support and Yeltsin's demand for a general strike fell on deaf ears. In reality the coup collapsed without the need for much resistance.

While I agree with Kagarlitsky that what took place was a "power play among the leaders", it was a very different kind of power play from the ones that had occurred before. This time it did lead to a "revolution" - in the sense of a transfer of power within the elite sections of society - which does mark, as Chris Knight argues, a decisive change in world history.

The failed coup was the culmination of a process of differentiation and disintegration within the Soviet bureaucracy. The assumption of power by the Yeltsin camp and the break-up of the USSR marks the failure of Gorbachev's attempt to reform and modernise the system in the interests of the bureaucracy as a whole - i.e. to ensure its survival. Gorbachev's programme proved to be utopian. The bureaucracy could not be reformed - since whole sections were not prepared to abolish themselves. Limited democracy led to the development of independent working class action and demands for self-determination from the nationalities. These conflicts opened the road to yet more democracy and yet more tearing apart of the system.

As the economy ground to a halt the radical wing of the bureaucracy began to advocate openly capitalist solutions and polarisation among the ruling elite proceeded apace. The August coup was a last, feeble attempt to restore some semblance of the old order. It lacked any real support not only within society at large, but even within the bureaucracy itself.

In August 1991 the Soviet bureaucracy outlived its historical role both in the USSR and internationally. It finally fulfilled its destiny as the gravedigger of the Russian Revolution. The state was overthrown neither by the masses nor by imperialist intervention. Hence it is equally incorrect to speak either of a "political revolution" or "the greatest defeat for the working class this century".

What occurred was the toppling over and transformation of the Soviet bureaucratic state, as the openly capitalist section of the former bureaucracy absorbed most state institutions and banned the Communist Party itself.

A "bourgeois" restoration (without an actual bourgeoisie to restore) has taken place on a state level; the Yeltsin section of the former bureaucracy (along with many others) aspires to become the new Russian bourgeois class. Given the relative weakness and instability of this new bourgeoisie, capitalist relations of production can only be introduced in conjunction with international capital. To implement this economic counter-revolution will involve the sort of massive attack on the working class already seen in parts of eastern Europe. It is highly unlikely that this process can be realised under conditions of political democracy.

> **"In August 1991 the Soviet bureaucracy outlived its historical role both in the USSR and internationally"**

In this context to speak of Yeltsin's "bourgeois revolution against Stalin's counter-revolution" as being "massively liberating" ignores the fact that the most likely Kornilov threatening Russia's new democracy (largely established under Gorbachev) is Yeltsin himself.

His assumption of rule by decree, the banning of the Communist Party and now the threatened use of force and emergency powers all point in this direction. Kagarlitsky is right to stress that democracy has not triumphed in Russia and that the immediate task will be the defense of present democratic gains against attempts by Russia's new capitalists to establish a strong state.

However, I do agree with Chris that the break-up of the post-war order will lead to a period of instability with revolutionary implications. The basis of that system was the political-military division of the world between US imperialism and the Soviet bureaucracy - with the latter acting as junior partners. While contradictions between the two superpowers did allow some space for the success of colonial revolutions (although for every Cuba there were many Chiles), the overall balance of power was reactionary and guaranteed the domination of imperialism on a global level.

Ironically the demise of Stalinism also marks the end - or at least the beginning of the end - of US global hegemony. We are entering a period in which the economic decline of the US will result in the development of new power blocs and inter-imperialist rivalries. This "new world order" clearly poses great dangers to humanity.

Nevertheless, history has demonstrated that the "Eastern Bloc" offered the world no escape from these dangers.

It is both pathetic and ironic that the only people who seem to lament the collapse of Stalinism are some Western Trotskyists. "If only the Berlin Wall was still up we could have a proper political revolution" seems to be the attitude. Unfortunately, comrades, the remnants of the Fourth International weren't up to that task and history has now ruled the option out! Like it or not - and the conditions are not exactly favourable - the ball now really is in our court.

Twisted logic of Poll Tax jailings

Unreported in the media, over 120 people have been jailed in recent months for not paying their Poll Tax. Hundreds more have faced committal proceedings and they will be joined by thousands and possibly tens of thousands in the coming year. This is an issue that could in theory affect any of the 14 million people now in major Poll Tax arrears - but Labour's leaders refuse even to discuss it. Councillor ***Liz Davies****, among the first non-payers in the London Borough of Islington to be threatened with committal, argues the case against jailings.*

ISLINGTON COUNCIL, Kinnock's flagship, has become the twenty-seventh Labour council to seek to jail non-payers. I was telephoned early in the morning by a court official who informed me that a warrant had been issued for my arrest for non-payment. Others have been visited by police. Many more have received letters to the same effect.

We are told that the warrants were issued after a court hearing which took place in September. No one attended the hearing because, it appears, no one was summonsed to it.

It is the duty of the council not the court to issue these summonses. The council seems to have deliberately manipulated the court system to intimidate non-payers.

Imprisoning non-payers means jailing people who cannot afford to or will not pay the Poll Tax - jailing people either for their poverty or their politics. Neither is acceptable in a civilised society.

Dickens wrote eloquently about the barbarity of imprisonment for debt. Even Roy Hattersley has pledged that the next Labour government will abolish imprisonment for debt. Apart from everything else it is inefficient. It costs the public purse over £300 a week to keep a non-payer in jail, far more than the person actually owes in unpaid Poll Tax.

The council leaders here as elsewhere argue that there is nothing they can do about the jailings. They say that if elected Labour councillors refuse to start imprisonment proceedings, council officers will do so anyway because it is their legal duty. This is an insidious argument, designed to pass the buck.

If officers have a legal duty to commence jailing proceedings, let them do so. They cannot do it in a worse or more intimidating fashion than the methods councillors are currently employing. At least, then, the Labour Party would not be so compromised; it could say to the electorate that it had made real efforts to oppose intimidatory methods of collection.

We are also told that elected councillors cannot fetter council officers' discretion in advance by making blanket policy against jailings. In that case why not instruct officers that in all cases where jailings are recommended final decisions should be made by councillors? Councillors could then consider each case - in theory on its individual merits - and then - in practise - decide that in each case jailing is not appropriate.

No council has yet tried to impose a blanket ban on jailings, let alone had that policy tested and fought through the courts. Shouldn't Labour councils at least push the law as far it will go? It would be many months before a court would come to a decision and in the meantime people would be spared the misery of committal proceedings. And in the unlikely event that the courts ruled a no jailings policy to be lawful, a great victory would have been won for all of us.

Labour council leaders argue that the point isn't to jail people but to get them to pay up by alarming them with the prospect of prison. Sounds plausible, except when it is directed at people on such low incomes that they simply cannot afford to pay the Tax. Frightening them into paying will just force them to borrow, urgently and no doubt at prohibitive rates, and sink them ever deeper into the poverty trap.

There is no evidence that imprisonment proceedings have significantly increased payment of the Tax.

For many Labour councillors jailing is justified because if people don't pay their Poll Tax councils will have to cut services. In fact, Poll Tax revenue is roughly a quarter of each council's income; the remaining three-quarters comes from central government.

In any case, the argument about non-payment leading to cuts would be more persuasive if it was not put by the very same people who have been cutting services in many authorities for some time now, regardless of the ups and downs in Poll Tax collection. It is the "pay up or go to jail" brigade who are now imposing big rent rises, which owe nothing to Poll Tax non-payment and everything to government policy.

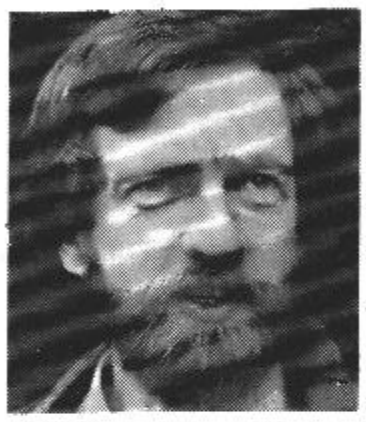
In Islington, we have faced a vicious campaign to blame non-payers, not just for cuts, but also for the level of Poll Tax itself. A so-called surcharge to cover non-payment was included in this year's Poll Tax bills. Many people have protested about having to pay other people's Tax. We have encouraged them not to pay the surcharge, which was a cynical manoeuvre designed to scapegoat non-payers for the council's financial crisis. It has only succeeded in setting poor people who just manage to pay the Tax against even poorer people who cannot afford to pay it at all.


GO TO JAIL!

Labour poll tax rebel told: 'IT'S THE END OF THE ROAD'

Islington Gazette

From Maastricht to the Archway Tower



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

THE "EURO-ARGUMENT" *has come round again as John Major heads for Maastricht. Will he capitulate to the Euro-federalist capitalists or to the old imperialists? While the decision he takes has consequences for all of us we should be careful. Neither of these two camps have the interests of the Labour Party, trades unions or working class at heart.*

Our National Executive, ever anxious to present Europe as "a good thing" and Jacques Delors as our saviour, has stumbled into a series of quite catastrophic policies.

We have embraced the Social Charter, which severely restricts workers' rights, at the expense of genuine free trade unionism. We have embraced a single currency and a European central bank and ignored the fact that the new arrangements would restrict a Labour government's control of the level of public borrowing. EC intervention in industrial policy would make necessary actions by Labour illegal. Indeed, the spirit of the Treaty of Rome rules out anything other than a free market economy.

A European foreign policy might appear to be preferable to a pro-United States one, and on those terms I suppose it is, but where does it lead? Whose interests will it serve? Certainly not those of the world's majority, living in countries historically exploited by Europe.

A socialist approach to Europe has to examine both the democracy of its institutions and its implications for our relations with the rest of the world.

As for democracy, the EC has little to offer. The Council of Ministers appoints a commission which can impose legislation on national parliaments. The central bank will be accountable only to itself. The elected Assembly has few real powers. In Britain, with its unaccountable executive exercising "Royal Prerogative" powers, the impact of federalism will be to place decision-making even further out of the hands of working people.

As for the rest of the world, Euro-federalism will mean the gap between the poorest and the richest will continue to widen at an alarming rate through debt repayments, profit repatriation by multi-national companies and under-payment for basic products. This in turn creates the conditions under which oppressive elites force the poor of the poorest countries to acquiesce to the wishes of the EC, World Bank and International Monetary Fund. EC aid is now tied to "economic reform" or "freeing" of the "market".

The ugly underside of the EC reveals itself in the refusal of asylum, restrictions on immigration and controls on Europe's black residents. Nazis on the streets of Germany and France are encouraged by the official xenophobia of Europe.

HISTORY DOES REPEAT *itself; the tone of Europe today is reminiscent of the thirties when the Nazis were appeased or the Berlin Conference of 1888 which carved up Africa amongst the colonial powers. This time trade blocs with eastern Europe provide the skilled industrial workers and Africa and Asia the raw materials.*

A real internationalism, embracing Europe and beyond, would mean cuts in arms across the continent. It would mean the removal of all nuclear weapons and a new, egalitarian relationship with the rest of the world, not an attempt to maintain domination.

The debate on Europe should not be left to the two wings of the Tory party and the federalist fanatics within our own Party. We need a strong left voice speaking up for democracy and internationalism.

BUTSKELLISM IS BACK. *John Major has outlined his concept of NATO, armed, political, operating "out of area" and in control of eastern Europe. Neil Kinnock has chimed in with support for "the political role of NATO in a changing world".*

British participation in NATO was the product of Labour's heavy US borrowing in 1947 and Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin's avid belief in the Cold War. We made progress, once, to the extent of agreeing to "mutual dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact", but now we are firmly back in the US camp.

It simply will not do. Labour is committed to a vast level of arms spending (about £20 billion a year) as well as to keeping Trident nuclear weapons.

But for what? To fight another Gulf War as the battle for resources intensifies?

A LITTLE BIT *of success at the Commons Select Committee on Social Security. An intensive campaign by a claimants' group called Towerwatch around the appalling level of service at our DSS office at Archway Tower in north London succeeded in exposing the delayed claims, wrong payments, dire conditions, inefficiency and under-staffing of a local service vainly trying to liaise with an office four hundred miles away in Glasgow, where much of the claim processing is done.*

The Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, Michael Bichard, visited the Archway office the day before the Select Committee and, in public, admitted many of its shortcomings. Improvements are still a long way off but the campaign showed what determination and action can do.

CLASS TRAITOR OF THE MONTH

"Today Brent South, tomorrow the Front Bench..."

BOATENG WAS a star of the London Labour left of the early 1980s. As a radical lawyer he made a name for himself fighting police racism and in 1981 was elected to the Greater London Council. He soon became a prominent figure in Ken Livingstone's radical administration. As chair of the GLC's notorious Police Committee (the first of its kind) he was in the forefront of the campaign for police accountability.

He was also one of the founders of Black Sections and throughout the mid-80s a high-profile and effective spokesperson for it; he drafted the Black Sections' submission to the NEC's first working party on black representation.

Interviewed in *Socialist Action* in 1984, Boateng denounced the domination of the Party by "the white middle class male" and proclaimed "the struggles against racism and capitalism are inextricably linked". Asked about the danger of "black careerists" using Black Sections, he scoffed at "anyone who believes that Black Sections are no more than a means of getting Black people elected to certain positions..."

In fact, he was already an aspiring parliamentarian. In 1981 he had failed to win the Labour nomination for Norwood in Lambeth from John Fraser, the sitting MP; he also tried ousting Syd Bidwell in Ealing Southall and had a go at one of the Islington seats but finally succeeded in marginal Hemel Hempstead, defeating Robin Corbett, who had held the seat from 1974-79.

Unfortunately for Boateng, Hemel Hempstead was abolished by the boundary commission and in 1983 he was forced to contest the new and unwinnable seat of West Hertfordshire. He came third behind the SDP-Liberal Alliance.

Next time around Boateng set his sights on safe-as-houses Brent South, where sitting MP Laurie Pavitt was due to retire. He cultivated the left-wing constituency activists, emphasising his commitment to Black Sections and local accountability. As a result, in early 1985, he was included on an all-Black short-list with Sharon Atkin and Keith Vaz.

In the midst of this the GLC rate-capping crisis broke. Boateng split from Livingstone and along with nine other left councillors voted against setting a rate. This was a principled stand which also, three months later, helped secure Boateng the Brent South nomination.

Actually, it was "tomorrow Soweto..." Even by the standards of today's Parliamentary Labour Party, ***Paul Boateng****'s trajectory since that night in 1987 when he was elected MP for Brent South is a particularly crass example of abject careerism, making him an eminent candidate for Class Traitor of* any *Month.*



At the general election in 1987 he won the seat with a 7,931 majority (a drop of some 2,500). He was 36 years old. Television coverage of his famous victory speech (see above) convinced many that here was a man whose ego was seriously out of control.

In an interview with *Labour Briefing* shortly afterwards, Boateng restated his left-wing commitments and declared, "There can be no rational basis for any purge inside the Labour Party." He promised to work "to ground our action here in the Commons in the struggle and experience of local communities".

He joined both the Campaign Group and the Tribune Group but never played any role in the former and within a year had quietly renounced his membership.

Although he was prepared to be photographed with his three Black parliamentary colleagues at the 1987 Party conference Boateng refused to join the new Parliamentary Black Caucus and later went out of his way to denounce it. He explained that he did not want to be seen as a black MP but as an MP who "happened to be" black. He declined an invitation to attend a Black Sections Conference in Manchester in March 1988 and dismissed the campaign which had brought him into Parliament as "needlessly divisive". A place on the "Democracy for the Individual and the Community" Policy Review Group (chaired by Roy Hattersley) followed; he was the only member of any of the Review Groups not to sit on either the NEC, the Front Bench or the TUC General Council.

His big breakthrough came in 1989, following the Vauxhall by-election scandal. Within days of the NEC's decision to impose an all-white short-list on the strongly multi-racial constituency, Boateng appeared on the Mandelson-designed platform for the media launch of the latest instalment of the Policy Review. In shamelessly assuming the role of Kinnock's token black, Boateng made it clear that he was quite prepared to scab on the black community and was soon rewarded with a place on Labour's swollen front benches.

As the most junior member of the Treasury and Economic Affairs team (ranking fifth of five), he appears to do little other than display his sartorial splendour as a mostly silent stage prop sitting behind Smith and Beckett during Commons' Treasury questions.

Boateng carries no weight within the PLP on economic policy. Undoubtedly he has the intellectual capacity to make a serious contribution, but has preferred instead to turn himself into just another politically catatonic recipient of the leader's patronage.

Boateng is now sponsored by the almighty GMB - the ultimate seal-of-approval for every ex-left Kinnockite lickspittle. Despite the £600 per annum this brings in, his constituency party has declined alarmingly since 1987. Several branches are defunct and General Committee meetings are down to twenty delegates. This is not surprising since Boateng fills his Parliamentary report with details of his encounters with the great and the good to the exclusion of any political comment. His support for the Gulf War angered his GC (he told delegates his first loyalty had to be to the PLP) and some Brent South Party members even staged a picket of his surgery.

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"Briefing is wrong..."

*So says **Vladimir Derer**, secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, replying to last month's* Briefing *editorial on left Labour unity.*

Women and blacks - no sell out

BRIEFING'S NOVEMBER editorial dismissed the failure to agree a joint left slate for the National Executive as the product of "heated rivalry" between "the nationally organised left groups". Nevertheless *Briefing* is to be congratulated for opening a debate.

The slate issue cannot be treated in isolation. Disagreements reflect different political priorities. CLPD/Labour Left Liaison (LLL) disagree with the position of the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG), *Labour Briefing* (LB) and Labour Party Socialists (LPS) on positive discrimination, as well as on strategy.

In CLPD's view, in a socialist party, discrimination against women and black people is intolerable. The party leadership and the PLP are dragging its feet, giving the left the opportunity to gain this ground. But it cannot do so as long as left groups restrict themselves to lip-service. The left's support for positive discrimination must be reflected in its slate, hence our refusal to accept the SCG slate of five men and two women. Left unity is, of course, desirable. But divisions arise from differences about socialist politics and cannot just be dismissed as "internecine squabbling" as *Briefing* does.

The slate is not the only bone of contention between us. CLPD believes that socialists can only advance if in pursuing routine local Party work they also attempt to win Labour members to their demands. To do this they must work within Party and trade union channels and the socialist press. Critiques of the Party leadership from outside alienate the loyalist majority.

Of course socialists as individuals must also participate in movements engaged in industrial and political struggle. Wherever possible they should take Labour and trade union organisations with them.

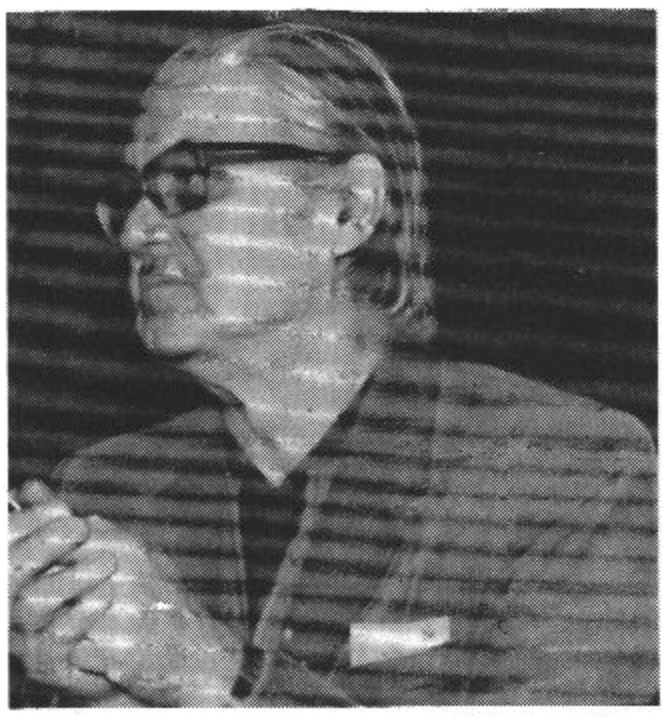
Twin-track or wrong track?

LB/LPS/SCG opt for a different approach. They favour the so-called twin-track strategy, based on the conviction that socialists can influence politics within the Party by organising outside it - prize examples being the Socialist Movement and public campaigns for left candidates in internal elections. The fantasy is that support for the left can be won by by-passing Party channels. This is a reaction against the constraints of the existing political framework. Unfortunately, it takes a form of an infantile regression which copes with difficulties by making a lot of noise. But the left has no loving parents and there is no longer an Uncle Joe. *Briefing* seems to be looking to the SCG to fill this parental role. There are "no supreme saviours, no emperor", no Campaign Group - apologies to "The International".

An obsequious Left

BRIEFING CLAIMS that the SCG is the one group which "has the authority to unite the left" and asserts that the majority of left activists "with reason" look to it for "initiative and co-ordination". In as far as this is true, the 'reason' they do so - given the record of the SCG and its predecessors - can only be subservience to an irrational authority. The SCG has shown itself singularly inept at co-ordinating anything. They pushed a slate unacceptable to every rank and file left group except *Briefing*. Then, despite the much-acclaimed SCG/*Briefing* campaign for their slate, only seven CLPs voted for it. In 1990 53 CLPs supported an agreed slate and in 1989, 63.

SCG's alleged "exemplary leadership" in opposing the witch-hunt and the Gulf war was not reflected in votes at Conference.



Vladimir Derer

Left MPs - a saga of mistakes

THE *BRIEFING* editorial eulogises the SCG's role. Yet when the left was most united and when it achieved results - in the years 1979-81 - the Parliamentary left played only a minor part. Patrick Seyd 'eulogises' CLPD's role at this time (*The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*) claiming that CLPD was "the most successful of all Labour left groups in achieving its...objectives" and that it "masterminded" the campaign for the electoral college.

Whatever else, he is 100% correct in stating that "CLPD has never been an organisation of left-wing parliamentary 'superstars'." Fortunately - because disagreements over tactics during this period invariably showed their judgement to be mistaken.

In 1979 mandatory reselection was won even though the left NEC members failed to ensure it was on the Conference Agenda. In 1980/81 the NEC's left favoured the 1/3 CLPs, 1/3 TUs, 1/3 MPs formula for the electoral college. Had the Left adopted it, rather than CLPD's alternative, it would have been defeated.

In 1982 they blundered again over the NEC's register of non-affiliated organisations. Unlike CLPD, they promoted no alternative acceptable to the trade unions. At that time the right's advance could have been halted. More recently, in relation to the disciplinary action against *Socialist Organiser*, the SCG limited itself to a pious protest resolution. It refused to join the editorial board of the newspaper, thus depriving the campaign against this witch-hunt of the credibility it needed.

The left's priorities

THE LEFT can regain the leadership of the Party only if it prioritises issues which are potentially acceptable to Party members. These may not coincide with those which left activists feel most strongly about. This does not mean dropping 'unpopular' issues. They must remain part of ongoing propaganda.

Briefing criticises CLPD for "too often" asking activists "to survive on a diet" of resolutions on "constitutional issues". In fact CLPD does not limit itself to constitutional issues but it hasn't the resources to present a complete alternative platform. In any case this would open us to the charge of being a party within the Party. Moveover Labour Party members can be won over only gradually, on the basis of prioritising issues they will support. Briefing's comment, however, reveals its reluctance to accept the arena in which political battles are fought out.

Welfare, warfare and the general election

LABOUR'S ATTITUDE to so-called defence cannot be divorced from the Party's economic and social commitments, despite the efforts of the front bench to keep the two as far apart as possible.

Labour's leaders seem hostile even to the minuscule cuts in military spending envisaged by Tory Defence Secretary Tom King.

Ron Huzzard
Secretary
Labour Action for Peace

Britain remains top of the west European arms spending league with 4% of our Gross Domestic Product going to the military. This is 50% higher than the west European average, double that of NATO members Italy and Denmark and four times greater than Japan.

In sharp contrast, UK government spending on facilities for children under five, pensions, health provision, industrial training and subsidies to public transport and the arts is the meanest in western Europe. Government funding for research and development is economically crucial, yet over 50% of all Britain's spending on R&D goes to the military. The figures for Japan and Germany are 3% and 13% respectively.

This continuing waste of UK resources on war preparations has been the pattern since the early 1950s. Ninety-five per cent of this is accounted for by NATO commitments and our mania to remain a world military power.

With the end of the US-Soviet arms race and the Cold War, it is economic lunacy that Britain is this year allocating £24.3 billion to the Ministry of Defence. The Tories refuse to talk about the peace dividend or arms conversion. Their defence review goes no further than merging regiments and prolonging NATO's life with an "out of area" remit, i.e. Gulf-type wars in the Third World under US command and control.

Labour's leaders refuse to seize the initiative and exploit this Tory weakness by making "welfare not warfare" a major plank in the Party's campaigning.

In 1989, 1990 and again this year Labour's conference has called for big cuts in UK military spending - not least because it makes sound economic sense. Composite motion 57, carried in Brighton by a two thirds majority on a card vote, should automatically form part of Labour's election programme, at least according to the Party constitution. But no. Neil Kinnock, Gerald Kaufman and Martin O'Neill immediately repudiated this democratic decision and



made it clear they did not consider themselves bound by it in any way.

Just for the record, what annual conference called for was a reduction in defence spending to the west European average, freeing £7 to £8 billion a year for real social needs. This is a modest policy measured against the scale of the problems people face both here and abroad.

With determined government planning and an arms conversion strategy Britain could redirect £100 billion from military to civil spending by the year 2000. Already potential Labour voters are asking, "Where will the money come from to pay for better schools, health care, pensions and other services?"

They know there are limits to government borrowing and to the amount of taxation you can levy on ordinary working people. They also know that economic growth, on which the Shadow Treasury team pin their hopes, may be a long time arriving.

Socialism is about priorities, particularly in public spending. And those priorities must place the needs of the poor and above those of the rich and the military establishment.

The Labour leaders' continuing rejection of their own Party's policy on arms cuts is a major blunder, a hangover from the years when they accepted Atlanticism and Cold War assumptions.

All of us in the Labour Party, not least the trade unions, must insist that the peace dividend and arms conversion feature prominently in Labour's election manifesto.

Leeds' leader's loose screw

JON TRICKETT, Labour leader of Leeds Council, has launched an attack on University Ward Labour Party, one of the most active, left branches in the city, on the front page of the generally pro-Tory Yorkshire Evening Post.

Cllr. Garth Frankland
Leeds

In a prepared statement, in which he had the nerve to say he did not comment publicly on the inside workings of the Labour Party, he expressed his hope that anybody selling the Militant newspaper would leave the Labour Party. Jon's own ward, Beeston, has already called for a constituency inquiry into the alleged selling of the Militant in University meetings. As nobody in the ward, including the several Kinnock loyalists in it, has ever complained about any newspaper sales, to the constituency or anywhere else, the allegations made from the other side of the city look pretty thin.

The public attack by Trickett was so convoluted that it convinced many observers that massive strain is now telling on the leader only eighteen months after he took office, following George Mudie's shock resignation.

Trickett has suffered a number of setbacks inside the Labour Group; instead of offering a lead he has allowed different councillors to manoeuvre and argue against each other in the most non-political way.

The attacks on the left may be an attempt to divert attention from the disgraceful exclusion of Patrick Hall, a left gay activist, from the council panel. Many people who voted to exclude Patrick from the panel are now admitting privately that it was probably wrong - but then they had to help out their friends, didn't they?

Come off it, Neil!

An open letter to the Labour leader from Yorkshire Area Chair and NUM vice-president ***Roy Cave***.

FOR SOME months now, we have been on the receiving end of a series of snubs and insults from the Party's leadership and Walworth Road headquarters.

Labour leaders like Attlee, Wilson and Callaghan never missed the Durham miners' gala - even when in office with all the pressures of state business.

Your failure to attend three of the last six Durham galas culminated this year in a failure even to reply to our invitation.

Our colleagues in the North East understandably described this as "a snub, not only to the miners' union, but to their families, their communities and all traditional Labour supporters."

Our Area Secretary Ken Homer has already written to you to express the condemnation of our Area Council over your public association with the three Daily Mirror reporters responsible for smears and attacks on our union and our leaders.

You will know that those reporters' serious allegations have since been entirely discredited. You must also know that your public association with and support for the press campaign caused great distress and anger among our members.

In what has all the markings of an anti-NUM vendetta emanating from Walworth Road, our Area Secretary was ousted this year from the Party's Conference Arrangements Committee, on which he had served with loyalty and dedication for many years.

Finally, the Walworth Road Flying Circus intervened to prevent our nominee Ken Capstick from being selected as Labour PPC for Hemsworth.

This intervention flew in the face of his overwhelming local popularity, as evidenced by the number of his nominations and the weight of the vote to reject the short-list from which he was excluded. Remarks in the press from senior Walworth Road officers - to the effect that our nominee had no record of activity for the party - could not have been further from the truth and added insult to injury.

Walworth Road has also stated that there are only 800 miners remaining in the constituency. This is based on the false assumption that the workforce at Frickley Colliery are the constituency's only miners, which ignores the fact that there are hundreds of constituents working at pits outside its boundaries as well as thousands of former miners.

Our own compensation department is currently processing several thousand industrial deafness claims from addresses in the constituency.

You will also know that miners' families identify strongly with the industry and the union - loyalty to the NUM is strong and widespread throughout the Hemsworth area, as it is throughout our coalfield.

Our members had the loyalty and discipline to work for a Labour victory in Hemsworth - despite their intense anger over the imposition of a candidate.

No section of the population has a record of support for the Labour Party which surpasses that of the miners - and we deserve better than the contemptuous attitude which the party leadership has recently displayed.

Tory mine madness

Question: what's worse than the "scare mongering" predictions of Arthur Scargill during the miners' strike?

Answer: the reality of Tory plans for the coal industry, revealed in a leaked report prepared for the government by merchant bankers Rothschild.

In 1984-85 miners, many of them fifty or sixty years old, came out on strike, as Scargill has said, "not for higher wages or better conditions, but to win the right for their sons and daughters to have jobs in our industry."

How right they were. By June 1989, no less than 86 pits had closed or merged with other collieries. Another twenty have been closed since then.

The Rothschild report outlines plans threatening 47 more of the 61 remaining deep mines. Seven Yorkshire and 4 Notts pits are threatened by privatisation; seventeen Yorkshire and 11 Notts pits are threatened by closure. If the Tories have their way, there could be only fourteen pits left by 1994 and 44,000 miners would be out of work.

A key part of the plan involves privatised electricity generators doubling oil consumption and importing as much as 20 million tonnes of foreign coal a year using heavily subsidised freight facilities. It's clear the campaign by Labour leftwingers in Bristol and the NUM to stop the privatisation of Royal Portbury docks - earmarked by its new owners to receive coal imports from South Africa - is just what's needed.

Don't forget sacked miners

Sixty NUM members remain sacked because of their role in the 1984-85 miners strike.

They and their families need your support as they enter their seventh Christmas without a wage. Every year, the solidarity of those who backed the strike has made sure the miners' children get the same presents as their friends, neighbours and schoolmates. Remember, 200 miners served time in prison or custody; 966 in total were sacked; and 20,000 were injured or hospitalised during the strike.

The National Justice for Mineworkers Campaign is asking its supporters to dig deep - yet again - to keep up one of the best traditions of the movement. Send donations to: NJMC, c/o North East NUM, P.O. Box 6, Red Hill, Durham DH1 4BB.

Another mine closes in South Wales

Penallta Colliery, Rhymney Valley, closed recently with 320 redundancies, the twenty-fifth pit in South Wales to close since the end of the 1984-85 strike.

Now the area has only three pits left. Penallta Colliery at its height in the 1930s employed some 3,500 miners - more than are employed in the entire South Wales coalfield today.

British Backwards Corporation

Remember Orgreave?

The BBC showed pictures of miners throwing stones at the police during a mass picket; then mounted police, apparently acting in self-defence, charged them. Only it didn't happen that way.

The BBC, seven years too late, have at last admitted that they reversed the sequence of events. They claim it was "an accident" but Tony Benn has been told by BBC workers that instructions to reverse the footage came from on high.

A Channel 4 programme entitled "Orgreave - the Sequel" tells all. Video copies available for £5 from *Labour Briefing*.

TUC locks-out dissident staff



Congress House: Moncks not visible photo: Newsfocus

TUC GENERAL Secretary Norman Willis and Deputy General Secretary John Moncks (who really calls the shots at Congress House) have joined the elite ranks of Britain's union-bashers.

When the TUC's nine Regional Education Officers (REOs) had the temerity to take token industrial action in support of a long-standing regrading claim they were promptly suspended without pay by their Congress House bosses.

Although nearly all TUC employees are members of TUC-affiliated unions, the TUC itself does not recognise any union to represent its workers.

The REOs are seeking elevation from Grade 3 to Grade 4, which would mean an extra £2500 per year. But more important than the money to the REOs is the principle: they want the importance of their work to be recognised; they see their claim as part of an effort to get the TUC to acknowledge the value of workers' education. After all, this is one of the few services which the TUC offers direct to rank and file trades unionists and REOs are among the very few TUC officers who work directly with non-trade union bodies and members of the public.

The REOs' formal claim had been on hold since it was first submitted in 1989 but the issue itself goes back at least eight years. Management's tactics in dealing with the REOs and other discontent staff are based on old assumptions about Civil Service-like loyalty of staff to their employer - assumptions which have come under increasing stress as workloads escalate and resources and scope for initiative by staff dwindle.

In October the REOs decided to deal with the continued failure of management to respond to their claim by agreeing to take action: they voted unanimously to refuse to send certain financial information to Congress House (this information was in any case available elsewhere), to refuse to conduct course inspections and to refuse to attend the monthly meeting for REOs in London.

It was only the last of these decisions which they actually got a chance to put into effect.

On October 24th they failed to turn up for the London meeting and instead worked all day as normal in their regional offices.

Within hours they received a fax from Norman Willis informing them that because they appeared to be taking "selective industrial action" their pay would cease immediately.

In effect, they were locked out as a punishment for a minimal, token exercise of the most basic of workers' rights.

That same day an angry meeting of the Staff Office Committee (SOC), the body which represents all TUC employees in the absence of proper trade union recognition, voted overwhelmingly to back the REOs. The SOC proposed a meeting under the auspices of ACAS - a proposal which John Moncks had no choice but to accept. But when they got to ACAS the aggrieved staff found that Moncks had no intention of backing down. He offered them nothing, much to the ACAS officer's astonishment.

In response the REOs dug in their heels; the SOC held another meeting which voted to hold a ballot on industrial action. In the past management had threatened loss of pay to any members of staff trying to "pick and choose" (management's phrase) the work they do. Nonetheless, there was little doubt that a substantial majority of staff would have risked the punishment to back the SOC proposal for "action including strike action". The day before the ballot was to be held, management climbed down. The REOs were asked to return to work and offered back pay for all the days they were locked out except the day on which they had taken the offending action; they were also promised negotiations on the regrading claim, which have now started.

Though the SOC believes the REOs should be paid for the day they boycotted the London meeting, it was felt that management's new stance represented a major concession; the SOC decided to abandon its ballot.

Moncks and friends were clearly seeking nothing less than the complete humiliation of the REOs as a lesson to other TUC staff. A renegotiation of the REOs' grading will affect other TUC staff, many of whom are already unhappy with their terms and conditions of employment.

A recent survey of TUC staff undertaken by the SOC revealed widespread demoralisation and frustration with management's style (see September *Briefing*).

What's behind the TUC climbdown?

Clearly, Moncks underestimated the resolve of the REOs and the support they would get from other staff. In addition, the nine REOs belong to three different unions - MSF, TGWU, and GMB - all with heavyweight representation on the General Council. Telephone calls to the TUC bosses' offices from the likes of Roy Grantham and Margaret Prosser must have made them think twice about pursuing a collision course with the REOs. Moncks must have realised that members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, usually considered a "graveyard" for staff grievances, would have had difficulty supporting a management line that involved suspension without pay for taking legitimate industrial action.

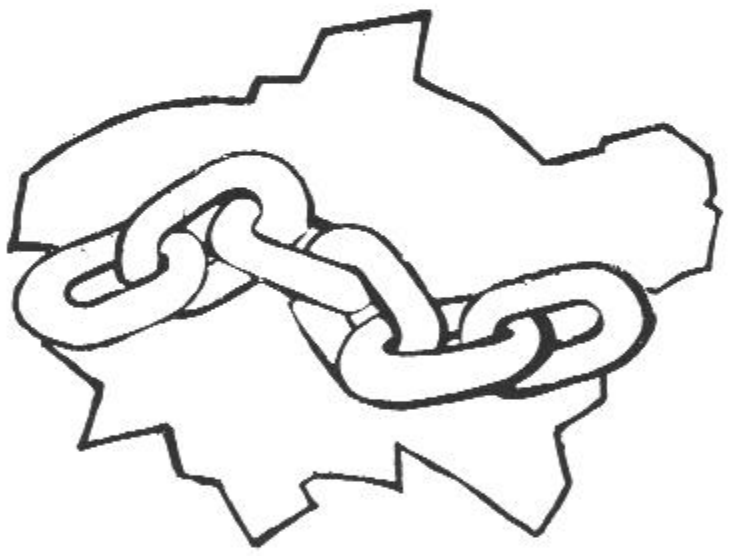
The TUC also feared the embarrassing publicity which would certainly follow any industrial action by its own staff.

The background to all of this is the TUC's long-brewing financial crisis. Moncks and his friends want to demoralise staff now so that they can push through big cuts next year when the full extent of the TUC's deficit becomes clearer.

Crisis in London: an answer to New Realism

FIFTY PEOPLE, including delegates from seven trades councils and branches of six different public sector unions, met in Holborn Library on Saturday November 9th to launch "Crisis in London", a new campaigning organisation dedicated to the defence of public services in London.

Jon Rogers
Lambeth Nalgo



The initiative came from activists previously involved in the "London Bridge" joint shop stewards group in the mid-1980s. However, Liz Leicester of Camden NALGO, on behalf of the organisers stressed that "Crisis in London" won't just be a defensive anti-cuts alliance, but a positive campaign for the local services working class people in London want and need.

To underline this point, the inaugural meeting heard speakers from London Health Emergency, the Capital Transport campaign and the Homelessness Monitoring Group. The meeting went on to agree that the first annual general meeting of "Crisis in London" would be held on Saturday February 1st, 1992. The AGM will consider amendments to the draft policy statement and constitution circulated at the inaugural meeting.

One weakness of the meeting (reflected in the draft policy statement) was the virtual absence of black people and the related invisibility of racism as a way in which cuts in local services are both made and experienced.

The organisers have made it clear that the draft statement is intended primarily to stimulate discussion. Copies and further information are available from Lambeth NALGO, 6a Acre Lane, London SW2.

For the Labour left, "Crisis in London" offers an opportunity to tackle the so-called "London Effect" and begin to articulate a socialist alternative to the New Realism of London Labour councils, a positive vision of democratic local services to set against their market-orientated consumerism. Why not raise these issues in your local Labour Party, trade union or community organisation and get delegated to the AGM, which will discuss proposals for action - including a lobby of the Greater London Labour Party AGM in March.

AEU + EETPU = BOSS UNION

The AEU-EETPU merger now being pushed by the far right leaderships of both unions is a recipe for the scab electricians' backdoor re-entry to labour movement respectability and must be stopped at all costs.

The proposals backed by AEU misleaders Jordan and Laird will destroy what remains of the engineering union's internal democracy and shop-steward-based structure. This is why the gruesome twosome are trying to circumvent the union's elected national council, which rejected the proposals in the past, by rushing directly into a media-backed ballot.

The new million-strong merged union would be a major voice for the bosses within both the TUC and the Labour Party.

Notts NUM in knots

Beleaguered but undaunted NUM members in Nottinghamshire, where the majority UDM works hand in glove with British Coal, have to put up with all kinds of absurd harassment from management.
At the Miners' Welfare in Bilsthrope you can wear an "I Support Arthur Scargill" sticker - but don't bother trying to book the club room for an NUM meeting!

Ollerton/Bevercotes will let you hold a meeting - but you'll be in trouble if you wear that sticker! And if you sing "You'll Never Walk Alone", you'll be told to stop because it's "political" (even if you're a Liverpool fan).

"If the intimidation was consistent, we could work out an area strategy against it," observed Notts NUM Chair Stan Crawford, "but they do one thing at one pit and another thing at another, always trying to undermine our members".

Toyota beauty contest

After an unseemly scramble with the GMB, TGWU, EETPU and MSF, Bill Jordan's AEU emerged as the successful bidder for the "single union deal" at Toyota's new plants in Derbyshire and North Wales.

David Bookbinder (Idiosyncratic leader of Derbyshire County Council) had set the pattern for the "beauty contest" when he declared he would sell his proverbial grand-mother to get the Japanese multi-national into his bailiwick.

Now the banner of self-abasement has passed to "brother" Jordan who has signed a package which includes forced arbitration and excludes all other unions from the plant. Jordan lamely defended his action by saying he had received a promise of "job security" in return - though whether he meant for his members or himself was not entirely clear.

Skillcentre scandal

The government's Skillcentres privatisation scheme has collapsed, leaving egg on high-up faces at the Department of Employment. The four centres (at Accrington, Ipswich, Maryport and St Helens) were sold to TICC LTD - over union objections - in order to "ensure good prospects of viability". Now TICC has gone bankrupt, leaving staff without either wages or redundancy pay. The government has had to stump up £250,000 to make good these commitments. Another triumph for the free market!

COHSE elections

Elections for the London places on the COHSE National Executive take place soon.

There are three left and one middle-of-the-road candidate contesting the two place. Labour left candidates George Nazer and Chris Hart should win but Barbara MacLean of Ealing, an SWP sympathiser, may run them close. Elsewhere, Militant supporter Adrian O'Malley has been re-elected onto the COHSE NEC. The left remains the largest organised group on the NEC but middle-of-the-road members hold the balance of power.

P&O sinks in West Berkshire

Just what we mean when we say the Tories are "privatising" the NHS is revealed in recent antics in West Berkshire.
The local Health Authority awarded a "consultancy" contract to corporate giant P&O, which took the money and in return delivered a report recommending massive cuts and closures - and, inevitably, the hiving off of services to P&O subsidiaries. The Chair of P&O is of course Jeffrey "Lord" Stirling, who was acquitted of corporate manslaughter over the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster. Stirling clearly believes his annual £100,000 donation to the Tory Party entitles him to carve out a hefty slice of the privatisation action.

The powder-keg

Briefing *spoke to* ***Salim Vally****, a leader of the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action, when he visited London in November.*

LB: Let's start with the current situation in South Africa.

SV: The economic and social situation is a powder-keg: six million unemployed, seven million homeless. In the face of severe retrenchment, the trade unions, which organise about 15% of the workforce, are trying to maintain their position by productivity deals. COSATU leaders talk about a Swedish model of partnership between unions and the state: a social contract. In current conditions, this is fantasy.

Added to this there is the violence. It is often portrayed as simply between the ANC and Inkatha, but it is more. The indiscriminate shooting of people on trains is part of a pogrom against the working class. The idea is to create a climate of fear to keep people out of activity and away from meetings. There is a strong suspicion that some of those involved are Renamo supporters from Mozambique, although Inkatha are clearly the main force.

The Peace Accords are being used to the same purpose. They are a basis for the state controlling the mass movement, banning demonstrations, etc.

LB: What's your attitude to the newly formed Patriotic Front?

SV: WOSA wanted a national united front, excluding homeland leaders and capitalist parties. We want a fighting alliance on issues such as VAT, housing, etc. But the Patriotic Front has turned out very different. The committee setting it up excluded WOSA despite the PAC and AZAPO arguing for us to be included. Then AZAPO were expelled for having written to homeland leaders, the Democratic Party and people who participate in government structures saying they should resign if they wanted to be in the Patriotic Front.



VIVA SOCIALISM !!! - NO COMPROMISE! - SIFUNA KONKE!!

So the Patriotic Front is the ANC and PAC. For the ANC it is a pressure group towards an all-party conference which would lay the framework for an interim government which would lay the basis for a constituent assembly...

LB: What is the strength of the main tendencies and movements in South Africa?

SV: The ANC are overwhelmingly the largest. The PAC has grown considerably. The South African Communist Party has 20-30 thousand supporters but very little presence on the ground. The NACTU union federation has maintained its strength, although it is much smaller than COSATU. Its executive is PAC-dominated but it takes independent positions. For example, it defended AZAPO when it was expelled from the Patriotic Front.

WOSA is growing rapidly throughout the country. We are nationally known, on TV, and debated in the national press. We are at every national march and strike. The membership now is 90% working class and youth.

On November 4th and 5th we backed the "Moving Picket" against VAT which was widely supported. We wanted to make it a general strike against the government, but the COSATU leadership limited it to a one-day stay-away purely on the economic issue of VAT.

Massive stay-away in South Africa

MORE THAN 3.5 million workers joined the general strike in South Africa on November 4th-5th, making it the biggest strike action in the continent's history.

The strike was called by the two biggest trade union federations, COSATU and NACTU, as well as twelve unaffiliated unions, in protest against the government's imposition of VAT on a wide range of essential goods. It was supported by a wide range of political and community organisations.

Despite dire predictions from the apartheid state and its media minions (and violent provocations by police and vigilantes), the strike was marked by discipline and unity. Nor was it a passive stay-away: rallies and marches in towns and cities across the country drew hundreds of thousands of workers.

Participation in the strike was higher on the second day than on the first. The unions ensured that school and health services were maintained. COSATU and NACTU issued the following statement on November 4th: "A referendum was held in the streets of our country today.

The result was a devastating vote of no confidence in this government, its handling of the VAT crisis and its insistence on unilateral restructuring of the economy. The success of the strike shows decisively that this government has no legitimacy to take decisions on behalf of the people of this country on any issue, let alone VAT. "

The strike also exposed the hollowness of Inkatha's claim that when it opposed the action against VAT it was speaking on behalf of the 'silent majority'.

"There was no part of the country where we failed to attract massive support," said COSATU, "we are therefore forced to ask, who are these organisations representing, apart from the dying apartheid order?"

A number of COSATU activists believe the lesson of the strike is that Inkatha can be isolated and exposed for what it is only by unity in action, by mass mobilisations of black workers around clear demands.

IMF's man for Zambia

Zambia's new president, Freddie Chiluba, is the ex-president of the 400,000 strong Zambia Congress of Trades Unions, in which capacity he won a reputation among trades unionists as the AFL-CIO's best friend in Africa.

He defeated Kenneth Kaunda by a landslide in both rural and urban areas at the head of a cross-class alliance called the Movement for Multi-party Democracy, which contested the elections on a programme that combined democratic reforms with Thatcherite, pro-IMF economic policies.

Chiluba knows his proposed economic direction will place strains on the MMD coalition; he has taken steps to secure workers' acquiescence to his austerity policies by giving key trades unionists ministerial portfolios.

Free Mordechai Vanunu!

Amnesty International should change its rules, which bar the organisation from adopting convicted "spies" as "prisoners of conscience", in order to take up the case of Mordechai Vanunu, says Amnesty founder Peter Berenson.

Vanunu was jailed for eighteen years in 1986 for divulging Israel's nuclear secrets. He is kept in solitary confinement which is damaging his health. His plight has been highlighted recently by Seymour Hersh's book *The Sampson Option* which includes allegations regarding the role of the Daily Mirror in Vanunu's kidnapping by Israeli secret service agents.

The campaign to free Mordechai Vanunu and for a nuclear-free Middle East can be contacted at PO Box 1328, London NW6.

Mass protests in Nepal

Nepal has been swept by a wave of strikes and protests. Thousands of striking junior civil servants are demanding the implementation of previously-agreed pay awards as well as better housing, health and transport allowances.

The civil servants have been backed by tens of thousands of students, teachers, hospital workers and women workers' groups, which have organised demonstrations and even hunger strikes.

The government has arrested and detained over 1,000 public employees and suspended 1,000 more. At least one demonstrator was shot dead during the protests.

Amnesty International have protested against the arrests. Clearly Nepal's limited democratic reforms fall a long way short of full trade union and civil rights.

Source: *Asia Monitor Resource Centre.*

Canada moves left

Bucking a world trend, the left-leaning New Democratic Party is scoring success after success in Canada.

Following its recent landslide win in Saskatchewan it controls powerful provincial ministries covering 52% of the population, including the largest, Ontario which it took last year in a surprise victory - advancing from below 20% to above 70% in a single election. It also controls British Columbia.

The NDP advocates social democratic policies and has a strong trade union base. It now looks set to smash up the national duopoly of the Liberal and Conservative Parties whenever discredited Prime Minister Mulroney gets around to calling an election.

Brazil Network

Three weeks before he spoke to a meeting in London, Ivanir dos Santos's car was machine-gunned in a Brazilian street by men in police uniform.

Ivanir is Executive Secretary of the Liaison Centre for Marginalised People. He was speaking at a Brazil Network meeting on the struggle of black people in his country against slavery, exploitation and extermination.

In Brazil there is a war to the death against blacks and the poor. One hundred and sixteen street children have been murdered in Rio in the last six months. One-quarter of these were girls.

Doctors perform unnecessary Caesarian operations on pregnant black women and sterilise them against their will. Levels of sterilisation in different Brazilian states correspond almost exactly to those states' percentages of black women.

The meeting was also addressed by Albert Tucker from the Black Caucus and Bernie Grant MP.

Join the Brazil Network. Send £10 (organisations, individuals on good wages), £5 low waged or £2 unwaged to PO Box 1325, London SW9 0RA.

Repression in Thailand



Thanony Po-Arn

One of Thailand's top trade unionists is missing, feared dead, as repression intensifies following last February's coup.

Thanony Po-Arn, President of the Labour Congress of Thailand, one of the country's six union federations, disappeared on June 19th. Protests by transport workers have failed to produce information on his whereabouts.

The regime's banning of unions in state enterprises has resulted in a halving of union membership in Thailand as the government tries to substitute tame "employee associations" for real unions. Now the government is planning to remove workers' social security cover and drive down living standards.

Demand action on the case of Thanony Po-Arn: write to the prime Minister, Government House, Pra-Nakron, Bangkok, Thailand.

Source: *Asia Monitor Resource Centre*

WOSA statement on the Patriotic Front

"The joint statement by the ANC and the PAC shows clearly that both of these parties see the Patriotic Front as a consultative forum to be used to promote the negotiating process. In taking this position, both parties have formally relinquished the centrality of mass action in our struggle for liberation WOSA commits itself to building a genuine National United Front from below for the attainment of the Constituent Assembly. Such a Front can only be the result of the mobilisation of our people around all the major social questions which plague the urban and rural poor, such as land, housing, unemployment, wages, health care, education, recreation, etc. The road along which we are prepared to march is exemplified in the current movement against the imposition of VAT and the general strike on the 4th and 5th of November."

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Maxwell's empire of debt

THE SINGLE most tantalising aspect of Robert Maxwell's death (at least for conspiracy buffs) is its extraordinary timing.

When he departed on his ill-fated cruise, the publishing tycoon was facing imminent financial freefall. His media empire, saddled with debts of £2.4 billion, was on the verge of collapse.

Dave Palmer
Economics Correspondent

Maxwell was chairman of two public companies, Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN) and Maxwell Communication Corporation (MCC). The Maxwell family controls 51% of MGN and 68% of MCC through a complex of private trusts, foundations and holding companies based in the secretive tax havens of Liechtenstein and Gibraltar. As no less an authority than the *Economist* put it, "Anybody who needs to base his holding company in Liechtenstein has things to hide".

A clue to Maxwell's final crisis and mysterious demise may be found in the previous major crisis of his career when he first lost then regained control of Pergamon Press in the early 70s.

In 1969 American entrepreneur Saul Steinberg opened talks with Maxwell with a view to making a bid for Pergamon. In the course of negotiations, Maxwell falsely represented the profitability of one of the company's subsidiaries. Steinberg withdrew from the deal and the DTI investigated. DTI inspectors (see box) found that Maxwell had used transactions between his private companies to inflate Pergamon's share price. As a result he was voted off the Pergamon board.

Amazingly, within a few years Maxwell had regained control of Pergamon and Steinberg settled out of court for $6.25 million. The full story of how Maxwell got back control of Pergamon, who backed him and where he got the money to pay off Steinberg, remains a mystery.

When Maxwell took over the printing firm BPCC in 1981 he had planned to turn it into the world's biggest printing business. But after acquiring the Mirror in 1984, he shifted course, resolving instead to turn himself into the world's biggest publisher.

He shed most of his printing businesses and, in 1988, completed the metamorphosis of Maxwell Communications Corporation with two huge deals: paying £436 million for the Official Airline Guide (OAG) and taking over Macmillan, the US publisher, for £1.45 billion.

To pay for OAG and Macmillan, Maxwell borrowed some £3 billion. At the time of his death, MCC had debts of around £1.4 billion and MGN about £300 million; other Maxwell firms, privately owned, were at least another £750 million in debt. To secure these loans, Maxwell had used his shares in MCC and MGN as collateral (he also used the assets of his private companies: property, jets, etc.).

This means that the share price of MGN and MCC is critical.

When their value drops below a specified percentage of the loans they secure - in Maxwell's case, it was 145% - then the loans must be repaid or more collateral provided. Recently Maxwell appears to have been up to his old tricks, using his private companies to force up the MCC share price artificially so as to avoid default. The DTI was supposed to be investigating, but this will probably now be dropped.

When Maxwell was reported missing, MGN shares were trading at their lowest level since they were floated in April; MCC shares, at an eight year low, had fallen below the required 145% of the value of the loans for which they were pledged as collateral.

US investment bankers Goldman Sachs, close Maxwell allies for years, had been holding up to 5% of MCC and 10% of MGN as security for personal loans to Maxwell totalling just under £100 million. After Maxwell repeatedly failed to repay the loans when requested, they "called in the collateral" and sold 2.2 million MCC shares on the Thursday before the publisher's death.

Under the Stock Exchange's three day disclosure rule, Goldman Sachs only revealed the sale the following Tuesday, within hours of the announcement of Maxwell's disappearance and the suspension of trading in MCC and MGN shares.

> *"Not withstanding Mr Maxwell's acknowledged abilities and energy, he is not in our opinion a person who can be relied upon to exercise proper stewardship of a publicly quoted company."*
>
> - Department of Trade and Industry inspectors' report on Maxwell's management of Pergamon Press, 1970.

> *"I shall not answer your scurrilous and ignorant questions about the indebtedness of my private interests. If you print such things I shall sue. My private affairs are no one's business but my own."*
>
> - Robert Maxwell in an interview with *The Economist*, early 1991.

Had Goldman Sachs continued selling, as word in the City suggested it would, other bankers might have followed suit. One default would have triggered another. In fact, the Maxwell empire was teetering on the edge of financial meltdown when his disappearance intervened and all dealings were suspended.

A mega-collapse would have left Maxwell's tangled affairs exposed to extensive investigation by a host of agencies in various countries. His world-wide web of political and intelligence contacts - in Russia and eastern Europe, Israel and the middle east, Washington and New York - would then also be vulnerable to exposure. And with his back to the corner, the ego-maniacal Maxwell would have been a "loose cannon", eager to spill the beans (selectively) to a waiting world.

Most of the big Maxwell loans are held by the major British clearing banks; NatWest, Barclays, Lloyds and Midland are all exposed by at least £100 million each. They will be doing everything in their power to avoid a "fire sale" of Maxwell's assets but any further falls in MCC's share price could shatter their informal agreement not to sell the shares they hold as collateral.

The star may be dead but the show is far from over.

CLASS WAR

talks to

LABOUR BRIEFING

And why not? The publication of Class War: a Decade of Disorder, *a delightful selection of words and images from the anarchist journal's first ten years, seemed just the right time for* Labour Briefing *to interview* **Ian Bone**, *one of the book's editors and a long-time* Class War *supporter.*

LB: *Class War*'s circulation is now over 20,000 an issue. What's the secret of your success?

IB: Our sense of humour, our layout, our punchy style, our no-nonsense analysis. Compared to the rest of the left, we stand out a mile. We're now printing hundreds of thousands of general election posters featuring Kinnock and Major with the headline "wankers". You can go into any pub in the country with these and people will snap them up!

LB: Do you consider yourselves part of the left? Sometimes you seem to attack it as much as the right.

IB: There are different opinions within *Class War* about this. At the start, most of us came from non-political backgrounds. Recently, especially since the Poll Tax riot, we've attracted a lot of ex-Militants and that's made a difference. Our basic class analysis is orthodox Marxist; what we're doing is reasserting its relevance today. We look at different areas from the rest of the left for new manifestations of this class politics. The SWP and the rest are always worried about the downturn, always saying you can't do this or that because of objective conditions. We say we can make our own history.

LB: One of the themes that emerges from the book is that working class politics has shifted from the workplace to "the streets". Do you see any role for trades unions now?

IB: It's not an either-or question. It's not "community" vs. "industrial" struggle. There will continue to be struggle in the workplace but the industrial terrain has changed. The big workplaces where a collective, shared experience was common to thousands of workers are no more. Instead you have much smaller units of production. So there will be workplace struggles but tactics like the general strike are not relevant any more. *Class War*'s constituency might be working, but it's likely to be casual work, black market work, in which trades unions play no role. Also, we don't share the traditional trade union attitude toward the "dignity of labour". We want *not* to go to work!

LB: You take the piss out of "Nicaraguan coffee drinkers" and "trendy lefties" going on about "the third world". Don't you think international solidarity has to remain a basic part of any working class politics?

IB: We've changed a lot on this. In the early days, we said it was no good to object to oppression abroad when you ignored it in the street where you lived. We believed then and still do that only a powerful movement here can really help the struggle worldwide. Lately, with the collapse of communism and the rise of both anarchism and fascism in Europe, we've felt the need to expand our international links. In fact, contacts from abroad are pouring in; we've had to develop a wider view because so many people from around the world get in touch with us!

LB: You celebrate street-fighting and your book is dedicated to the "ram raiders and rioters of September 1991". There's also, however, some thoughtful writing about how we sort out the anti-social, racist, and sexist behaviour which does occur during riots. Does the presence of racism in some of the recent riots make a difference to your assessment of them?

IB: Kids who are rioting have loads of contradictory ideas in their heads. In *Class War* we try to emphasise the positive elements in what people are doing but we also have to have a go at the difficulties. Community defence is the core of our politics. In the end, only we can deal with burglary and racism in our own communities. Not every working class upheaval is wonderful but you have to be in there, part of it, to make a difference, not standing to one side and telling people what they should think and do. We want the mass of people on the estates to take over the running and the policing of the estates themselves, which will give us a base for some real class power.

LB: And what's your line on the general election?

IB: Unlike the SWP, who spend five years slagging off the Labour Party and then say, go out and vote for them, we don't believe you have to take the working class through the experience of a Labour government; they've had more than enough of that experience already. Our main struggle over the next year will be around housing, against repossessions, homelessness, evictions. We're going to mount a big campaign, seizing accommodation (office blocks, hotels, etc.) and redistributing it. Whoever wins the election, there will be opportunities for us. It'll be clear that whoever you vote for, you can't win; the only alternative is to get out on the streets and change it yourself. Young people have seen Rumania and East Germany on television and they know that you don't have to wait fifty years to make a revolution...revolutions can happen in the most unexpected circumstances.

***Class War: a Decade of Disorder*, edited by Ian Bone, Alan Pullen and Tim Scargill, published by Verso, £7.95.**

Holiday book choice: politics, people and poetry

CHRISTMAS IS a "family" time. So what better seasonal book than the latest *Granta*, entitled "They Fuck You Up" (it's a Philip Larkin quotation) devoted specially to the family.

This is absorbing but cheerless stuff. There's Mikal Gilmore's account of the rise, fall and 1977 execution (by televised firing squad) of his famous brother Gary, at that time the first death sentence carried out in America in ten years. Or the Journals of Sappho Durrell in which the daughter of author Laurence attempts to come to terms through psychiatry and introspection with the imprint of her dominant and obsessive father; she committed suicide in January 1985. Or William Wharton's story about the death of an entire family in a car crash. All grim - but Granta continues to maintain its reputation for the best of short contemporary writing.

A heavier - and no less gloomy - read is Janette Habel's *Cuba: the Revolution in Peril*. For a book written from a Trotskyist standpoint it shows a surprising lack of theoretical perspective: the result is a pretty dull surface-view of contemporary Cuba based far too much on interpretations of official data and what the Cuban leadership says about itself.

Habel explores the contradictory politics of Fidel Castro, who congratulated Brezhnev on his 70th birthday: "You have dedicated your life to the noble and just cause of the peoples of the Soviet Union and the whole of humanity." She also probes the systemic bureaucratisation in Cuba which the 'rectification campaign' hardly touched.

The absence of any regional context or assessment of the concrete achievements of the revolution leaves Habel's remedy - "Yes to glasnost, no to perestroika" - sounding both derivative and simplistic.

More uplifting is Malcolm MacEwen's autobiography, *The Greening of a Red*. MacEwen lost a leg as a young man in a motorbike accident, but this tragedy is eclipsed by the book's optimistic vitality.

MacEwen joined the Young Communist League in 1935 and worked as an industrial organiser in the northeast and Daily Worker journalist, covering the royalist terror against Communist partisans in post-war Greece and the reconstruction of Yugoslavia under Tito.

Like many intellectuals he broke with the Communist Party after the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary, although his critique of Stalinism is not thorough enough to stop him offering defences of Stalinist policy on Spain, Poland and the Baltic states in this book.

Out of the CP, MacEwen began a new career in architecture and conservation, fusing a socialist and green perspective.

He would no doubt agree with the conclusions of Kate Soper and Ted Benton in two of the more interesting essays in *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism*, edited by Peter Osborne.

Benton explores socialists' traditional hostility to green politics and roots it in an environmental fatalism that owes much to the pseudo-scientific theories of Malthus, against which Marx polemicised.

But while socialists are right to criticise any view that assigns poverty, disease and famine to natural causes, they cannot simply dismiss green issues by re-running Marx's 130-year-old attack on Malthus, which could not take into account today's levels of resource depletion.

Marxists have to move on, argues Benton. To recognise the challenge of ecological destruction does not invalidate the need for socialist transformation: it strengthens it.

Another new Verso release is *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*. This ambitious overview is vast in scope, covering areas as diverse as folk-music, popular religion, TV soaps and football. I enjoyed the section on Nicaragua, which looks at the way the revolution incorporated rather than excluded religious themes and symbols into its pluralist discourse. But overall the book covers too many countries too superficially and is rather indigestible.

A far more exciting introduction to popular culture is Peter Wright's translation of *The Peasant Poets of Solentiname*. Solentiname is a remote group of islands in shark-infested Lake Nicaragua. When priest and poet Ernesto Cardenal, later Sandinista Minister of Culture, came here in 1966, there were no schools or doctors, 96% illiteracy and the lowest life expectancy in Nicaragua.

All the more remarkable, then, that the peasants of this impoverished area, who in the ten years Cardenal worked here forged themselves into a community which played an active part in the Sandinista Revolution, should produce this fine collection of poems.

Mike Phipps

To My Four Sons in the Mountains

Up there in the mountains
they have no bedding -
with their comrades together
they sleep on the earth.
In the winter nights the wet grass
soaks their weary bodies.
No breakfast is served to them
by helicopter
as it is to the National Guard.
But with their lives
they will bring to others in Nicaragua
both bedding and breakfast.

Olivia Silva
from *The Peasant Poets of Solentiname*

Books reviewed:

Granta 37: They Fuck you Up, Penguin, £6.99 paperback.

Cuba, the Revolution in Peril, Janette Habel, Verso, £19.95 hardback.

The Greening of a Red, Malcolm MacEwen, Pluto, £8.95 paperback.

Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism, edited by Peter Osborne, Verso, £10.95, paperback.

Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America, William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, Verso.

The Peasant Poets of Solentiname, translated by Peter Wright, Katabasis.

A rare glimpse into hidden treasure

***Don Rocinante** revels in the glories of "The Queen's Pictures", currently on show at the National Gallery in London.*

AS IF THE taxpayer didn't bankroll the monarchy enough already, we have to fork out £4 to see "The Queen's Pictures". Anything less than free admission for all to this exhibition (which is sponsored by Coutts and Nat West) is an insult.

"Generously lent by Her Majesty the Queen," grovels the catalogue, but in fact it's a national scandal: the Windsors are sitting on some of the finest art treasures in Britain and rarely allow the public to see even a fraction of them.

To add insult to injury, the philistines in charge of the show have crowded the paintings one on top of another on grey leaden walls in dim, cramped rooms in the basement of the new Sainsbury Wing. A rare self-portrait by Artemesia Genteleschi is hung twelve feet up above a doorway forcing viewers to stand several yards away if they want to see anything more than glare.

The pictures themselves - apart from a roomful of maudlin Victoriana - are remarkable. Works by Rubens, Breughel, Lorrain and Rembrandt are all the more spectacular as they have so rarely been reproduced.

I would single out three works for special comment. Vermeer's "Lady at the Virginals with a Gentleman" seems effortlessly accomplished, perfect in tone, inspiring in the viewer the feeling of being a privileged observer of an intimate domestic scene - a sensation created by Vermeer's familiar devise of placing a table between the viewer and characters to heighten the distance and sense of discovery.

Equally arresting is Parmigianino's mannerist "Palas Athene", goddess of both artistic wisdom and war. In this apparently simple picture the artist successfully captures these contradictory attributes in the subject's face.

But the real surprise for me was Van Dyck's "Cupid and Psyche". Normally I'm not a fan of Van Dyck's often formal portraiture, but this was a revelation. A huge picture, almost rococo in style, it is a dazzling celebration of sensuality."The Queen's Pictures" shows that paintings collected by elitists can be enjoyed by everyone. Borrow a UB40 and go!

The Queen's Pictures,
National Gallery, London,
until January 19th, 1992.
£4 waged, £2 concessions,
10-6 daily.

Book review

Mao II,
by Don DeLillo, published by Jonathan Cape, £14.99.

IN HIS LAST novel, Libra, Don DeLillo suggested that the assassination of President Kennedy created a kind of black hole in the production of cultural meaning, devouring a vast network of plots and conspiracies spun in the pages of alleged documentary and fiction - including DeLillo's own contribution - leaving little hope of arriving at any certainty about what exactly happened on November 22nd, 1963.

Now, DeLillo suggests, that vacuum is being filled by the imagery and reporting of acts of terrorism and disaster, which he sees as having replaced the art of the novel in the creation of a narrative order which appears to give meaning to our everyday lives. The wielders of guns and bombs "make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated."

The central figure in Mao II, DeLillo's new novel, is a writer who attempts to resist incorporation. A recluse, he has for years refused to enter the domain of images; no picture of his face has ever been released to an eager readership. His current work undergoes constant, obsessive revision, but it is destined never to reach publication as he becomes drawn away from the pages of fiction and into the real-life world of a Beirut hostage drama.

The world DeLillo depicts is one haunted by the fragmentary detritus of a media-dominated culture and the masses on which it acts. Images of the Hillsborough tragedy, the funeral of Ayatollah Khomeni and a mass wedding of moonie couples form part of the backdrop.

The future, he informs us, belongs to crowds. But little prospect is offered of collective action or effective agency of any kind. Politically, the point is encapsulated in the figure of the Warhol print from which the title is drawn: the transformation of a revolutionary icon into the defused blandness of an infinitely repeatable image shorn of any radical specificity.

Geoff King

She never stopped shining

Flashes in her soul - the life of Jabu Ndlovu
by Jean Fairburn, Natal Worker History Project.

THE "FLASHES" of the title precisely describe the short life of this strong and gifted woman. As a woman and a trade unionist she was bold, confident and honest about what she believed was right. She never stopped shining though she knew that her life was in danger.

Jabu died of "a sophisticated device" which was used to set her house alight. Her commitment is illustrated by the hatred her enemies - the apartheid regime and its Inkatha stooges - bore for her.

From 1974 Jabu worked at the Prestige factory owned by BTR. Joining the union in 1981 opened up new horizons for her. This was a tough period for the workers who were struggling for union recognition amidst intense exploitation. Even more difficult was that some workers were so used to being exploited that it was hard to educate them to fight against it.

Imbali township where Jabu lived is controlled by the KwaZulu Government. The councillors are automatically members of the Inkatha organisation. Jabu, her husband and children are among the many union and community activists who have died at the hands of Inkatha warlords.

As a senior shop-steward at Prestige, Jabu helped people organise themselves and their families. She started by making her own family members aware that her commitment to the community, her responsibility as a leader, also involved them. On her death bed she said,"I haven't done anything bad, that's why, if I get well again, I will go forward with the struggle."

Mathejwase Mbanjwa (a South African colleague who knew Jabu Ndlovu and her family)

PERISCOPE

SERA's wings clipped

Well, we warned you.

Briefing has been keeping its beady eyes on the progress of the **Socialist Environment and Resources Association** since it affiliated to the Labour Party last year.

First, its magazine *New Ground* was closed.

Now, creeping Kinnockism has even obliterated its very name.

According to a report in a recent issue of **Municipal Journal**:

"In keeping with the new, voter-friendly principles adopted by Labour, the Socialist Environment and Resources Association has done the decent thing and dropped the term 'socialist'. Now it's called the Labour Environment Campaign."

Stoned

"Historian" **Norman Stone** took to the pages of the *Guardian* to thunder against the Serbian shelling of Dubrovnik.

"What the Serbs are now doing is straightforwardly criminal," the pompous Thatcherite declared, "so much so as to make their army commanders liable for war crimes trials...there could be nothing more barbarous than to subject women, children and old men to these ceaseless bombardments..."

This from a man who argued that the US war against Iraq represented an advance for civilisation.

Fuck off, Joe!

Speaking in the Commons on why the Tories' proposals for a new law against squatters should be extended to cover travellers, **Joe Ashton**, Labour MP for Bassetlaw, explained the perils that face his constituents:

"They have to live next door to these gypsies, with their generators going every night, with their horses, their health problems, their dogs and their threats of violence..."

Surely **MSF**, which sponsors Ashton, and which has a strict anti-racist policy, will want to protest.

Piss poor press

Much as it goes against the grain to give a platform to a Tory MP, **Richard Shepherd**'s contribution to the NUJ's recent "Censors and Secrets" conference deserves a wider audience.

"Our national press, by and large, is piss poor. What we have is the self-censorship of people who think they know better than us."

Shepherd was particularly annoyed with the *Guardian* and *Independent* which had declined to publish the secret draft of the Maastricht treaty which he had leaked to them.

"You have **Peter Preston**, who published the revelations of a young civil servant and is prepared to let her go to prison, but he won't publish revelations he doesn't like. Not a word..."

And as for the government's broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein: "They wanted to inhibit their freedom of expression but much more fundamental is your right and mine to hear what they have to say and judge it accordingly. It is your right and mine they took away and that is wrong."

Chartists turn in graves

Over 500 people joined the now annual pilgrimage to commemorate the Chartist uprising of 1839 at Pontllanfraith, Gwent.

This year's speakers included class fighters **Neil Kinnock**, Margaret Beckett, Harriet Harman and Jack Dromey.

Neil praised the heroic stand of the Chartists and compared it to that of the people who had resisted the attempted coup in the Soviet Union and went on to deliver a paean to "people power" everywhere (which left many in the crowd wondering aloud about the Poll Tax). He then spoiled everything by saying how sad and sorry he was that **Jack Dromey** had not been elected as the Deputy General Secretary of the TGWU. After all Dromey, according to Kinnock, is "the man who won Grunwick".

Yes, that's right: WON!

Dromey returned the compliment with a witch-hunting speech in which he attacked his own members for not delivering a good enough service to the public. He went on to congratulate Kinnock for "outing" the left from the Labour Party and came up with the extraordinary assertion that "only Neil knew what a general election defeat in 1987 would mean to the people of Britain".

As for **Margaret Beckett**'s speech, it was quite simply the worst Periscope has heard for many a year. It sent people sleep walking out into the cold wet night air.

So farewell then

After 34 years of not living up to its name, *Marxism Today* has ceased publication.

Negotiations with the *Guardian* over plans for a relaunch with the more suitably innocuous title of "Agenda" collapsed and now fifteen employees, many of them part-timers, have lost their jobs.

Managing editor **Julian Turner** admitted that the magazine had to close "rather than carry on into an era when we would be totally anachronistic."

Turner went on to admit that the magazine had "struggled after the events of 1989 to persuade the outside world it was something with a future..."

Former editor **Martin Jacques** has also been struggling with this task but, undaunted, is pushing himself assiduously in all corners of media-land.

The biggest obstacle standing in the way of Jacques' new career, far greater than his association with Stalinism, is his complete lack of talent or knowledge in any field. This handicap was somewhat disguised by media favouritism in the years when *Marxism Today* was "rescuing" the Labour Party from the likes of us but may become rather glaring now that (in the eyes of the bourgeoisie) it has served its purpose.

Did you know...

That last year the city of Los Angeles paid out $8,699,431 in settling policy brutality suits?

That it has been four years since the mostly black and working class city of East St. Louis has been able to afford to collect its residents' refuse?

That 7% of all **Americans** say time moves "too slowly"?

Shoot the messenger

Rumour has it that this is to be **Sam McLuskie**'s last year as Labour Party Treasurer.

Under Sam's regime, the Party has slid into £2 million debt. But at the October NEC, he vented his fury on the absent **David Hopper**, the Party's elected auditor, who had the audacity to give delegates at the Brighton conference a real picture of the state of the Party's finances.

McLuskie denounced what he called Hopper's "attack on the Party" and said something should be done about him.

Clearly, a case of shooting the messenger.

Lining up to succeed McLuskie as Treasurer is **John Evans**, who as Finance and General Purposes supremo must take credit for the highly successful national membership scheme.

We remember Robert Maxwell ...by a Pergamon 23 striker

MAXWELL THE colossus, the publisher, the patriot, the tyrant, the fraud, the bankrupt, the spy.

We've had it all, thanks to the national press, from the critics, the admirers and most pathetically from the fawning courtiers, still licking the Maxwell arse long after it was hauled stone cold dead out of the waters of the Atlantic.

Money bought Maxwell power. It gave him political influence he would otherwise never have had. It bought him newspapers to promote himself and his opinions. It bought him football teams to advertise his love of the common man. It allowed him to mimic the lifestyles of world statesmen.

But we should not remember Maxwell by what his money bought him, but by the thousands of people who paid the real price for the creation of the Maxwell empire.

We should remember the printworkers at one-time printing-giant BPCC who were told that longer hours, less pay, shorter holidays and worse conditions was the price they had to pay for saving the near-bankrupt company, bought by Maxwell for peanuts in 1981. Many of these workers were rewarded with redundancy and a wave of plant closures as Maxwell asset-stripped the company whose profits had laid the basis for his famous spending sprees, first on the *Mirror* and its sister papers, and later on the American companies Macmillan and Official Airline Guides.

We should remember the workers at the threatened *Scottish Daily News* who were persuaded to sink their redundancy money into a Maxwell-led rescue bid. Desperate to save the paper and their jobs they trusted their savings to Maxwell, who ditched the operation soon after. Declaring the *Daily News* co-operative bankrupt, he walked away, leaving the workers with nothing.

We should remember the workers at the *Mirror* who paid the real price of the "miraculous" turnaround in that paper's fortunes after Maxwell bought it from Reed publishing in 1984. They saw the strength of their unions smashed as jobs were lost, pay and holidays were cut, conditions were degraded and collective bargaining was terminated. All this, even before a similar fate was visited on their colleagues on the Murdoch papers.

We should remember the workers at the New York *Daily News* who fell gratefully into the arms of Maxwell following a bitter one-year strike against massive job cuts - only to find Maxwell imposing even greater redundancies when he took charge.

We should remember the workers at the Agence Centrale de Press whose company was closed down as a punishment for their insistence that a proposed Maxwell "rescue package" must be negotiated and not imposed.

We should remember the printers in two Maxwell plants in France and one in Belgium, locked out from their workplaces for almost a year, and now facing redundancy.

And of course we should remember the many workers who did not take it lying down: the printworkers who occupied the Park Royal plant in West London; the SOGAT clerical strike at the Mirror in defence of jobs and conditions; skirmishes at the Manchester Mirror and at the Sun/Odhams printworks in Watford; and the long guerilla warfare at Purnells near Bristol.

And then of course the Pergamon chapel, which has taken on Maxwell so often and is still battling today, two-and-a-half years after being sacked by Maxwell for standing up for basic union rights .

Maxwell went to his grave never having managed, try as he might, to bully the Pergamon 23 into submission or force them to compromise their principles. Maxwell is dead now, but the 23 carry on flying the flag of resistance to his style of management. It is by their struggle - and the struggles of others like them - that we should remember Robert Maxwell.

The Pergamon Press strikers are entirely reliant on donations to keep going. Money is needed urgently.

Please take collections and send cheques made out to "Pergamon NUJ Chapel" to Pergamon NUJ, 60 Cricket Road, Oxford, OX4 3DQ.

Famous last words...

Ten years ago, the Law Lords ruled the GLC's Fares Fair policy - which slashed the cost of public transport across the capital - illegal. *Briefing*'s front-page article said the judges' decision "poses the question of power point blank". Reg Race denounced "Michael Foot's decision to go completely over to the right" and Tariq Ali put the case for all socialists to get into the Labour Party. The left had taken control of Southwark and Peter Tatchell had been selected as PPC for Bermondsey to succeed the astonished Bob Mellish. Tatchell announced his "intention to demystify and deglamourise the role of MP". Meanwhile Heseltine, with Mellish's help, was launching the yuppification of Docklands - and *Briefing* was calling for community resistance to stop it.

The Labour Party was promoting (sort of) a "woman's right to work" campaign and CND mobilised 250,000 for a demo in London. Jon Lansman reported gloomily, "There is much cause for concern in the state of LCC" and Tony Banks described the SDP (at that time leading both Labour and Tories in the polls) as a "motley crew of careerists, elitists and deadbeats" who "will need all the media support they can get".

Jeff Rooker MP wrote in to congratulate *Briefing* on printing a funny cartoon and Jeremy Corbyn issued a call for like-minded socialists to establish *Briefing*-type journals outside London. The New Year will see results in Brighton and Merseyside.



LONDON LABOUR 20p
BRIEFING
No 16 DECEMBER 1981

JUDGES—KEEP OUT!

The extra-parliamentary power of the judiciary has now become a grave and immediate threat to Labour Local Government. The mere fact that Lord Denning could have ruled the G.L.C.'s fares reduction policy "unreasonable" in the Court of Appeal — regardless of the House of Lords' subsequent decision — is of enormous significance and can have only one meaning. From now on, every progressive manifesto policy and every defence of jobs and services is in danger of falling foul of the Judges' Law. If this threat from the Tories' state machine succeeds, local government will have become unworkable and local democracy will have been crushed.

The battle for London — for a quasi-efficient, pollution-free city fit for its inhabitants to live, work and travel in — is now on. Much of the future of the labour movement nationally is being decided in London here and now. The "Fares Fair" policy, moderate a reform though it is, is power in embryo: all the essential issues of socialist planning versus capitalist chaos are only for London but for the country as a whole.

And it poses the question of power point-blank. Is the electoral and parliamentary road to socialism possible? Or will we be driven to seeking alternative routes? If the ruling class and its courts can threaten an moderate and socially necessary a reform as this on the grounds that it challenges capitalist principles of commercial profitability — on purposes pronouncements which completely ignore the social costs and benefits involved — then what would they stop at in crushing an elected Labour Government with a mandate to implement full employment, withdrawal from the EEC, nuclear disarmament and the abolition of the House of Lords? Would they stop at civil disobedience, or such arrangements as inviting the Crown to refuse the Royal Assent to a Labour Government's bills? Or would they — as did this very "English" and "civilised" counterparts in Chile in 1973 — move in the troops and the tanks to drown it in a sea of blood?

Briefing
SPECIAL LONDON LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE
DEC. 12th
CRUCIAL FRINGE MEETING
THE BATTLE FOR POWER
12.30pm
CAMDEN TOWN HALL
Speakers:
TONY BENN
JO RICHARDSON
KEN LIVINGSTONE
Chair: Jeremy Corbyn
Admittance 50p
london labour briefing

Let's be clear. There are two systems of law, not one. There is one law for the rich, another for the poor. So it's not some abstract search for "legality" that we are involved in. It's our law, or theirs. We need to understand that with crystal clarity and act accordingly. The Judges and their Courts are part of the extra-parliamentary reserve forces of the Tory Party. The Tories will not hesitate to use their extra-parliamentary powers whenever they feel under threat. We must be equally resolute in mobilising every resource at our disposal to defend our manifesto commitments. And if and when it becomes clear that we can no longer continue to operate local government within the legal and financial constraints imposed upon us, whether these constraints stem from Heseltine's legislation or from outside judgements, the time will have come to downgrade from office and resort to other means.

If they declare our law — the law of the elected G.L.C. — to be "illegal" then we have no choice but to answer in kind. By labour movement standards it is illegal for judges to make their views on the political process and thwart the results of elections. It is illegal for them to allow their prejudices concerning commercial profitability and the necessities of capitalism to influence the judicial rulings they make. It is illegal for them to usurp a political role when no-one elected them at all and they cannot be dismissed or removed. And let them all be warned when Courts and Judges with all their magisterial splendour, render themselves illegal in the eyes of the people, then they stand up — the moment we are strong enough — to sweep them away.

Labour—Take the Power!

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* ...

In your November issues Alf Lomas blames the EC for our "massive balance of payments deficits, hugh exports of capital, and an inability to control the flood of imports" as well as "at least one million unemployed."

Apart from the fact that most people would say that the Conservative Party has, during its disastrous period of office, contributed significantly to the ills that Alf lists, it is also the contention of some of us that the failure of European socialists to work effectively together and their pathetic attachment, in some cases, to an outmoded nationalism has not helped.

Certainly progress towards full economic and monetary union would prevent a Labour Chancellor ever again being faced with a run on the pound. It is worth remembering that every Labour government from 1924 onwards has been derailed due to a sterling crisis.

Progress towards a pooling of our defence resources will also lead to there being slightly calmer and more restraining hands on the more military aspects of Britain's foreign policy.

Finally, with one of the worst aid records and a very imperialist foreign office surely a move towards a common foreign policy would also, in its turn, lead not only to a higher aid project but also to better co-ordination and a less extreme foreign policy than that pursued by the present government.

Even the Social Charter, weak though it may be, is not past redemption. Indeed a move towards more majority voting within the European Community would instantly free a number of directives which have been blocked by the British government; once these were freed the way would clearly be open to implement much tougher measures if it were no longer possible for one reactionary government to block them.

My own feeling is that it is now vitally important that we debate our future within Europe and stop trying to pretend that there is any way out of the European Community. British socialism has never rested too happily alongside notions of sovereignty; it is now time for us to leave them firmly behind.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Balfe MEP

A number of the points made in Pete Willsman's letter in the November *Briefing* cannot go unchallenged.

First, it is an undeniable fact that some left groups, and the left as a whole, are stronger in some regions (including London) than in others, and analysis of the results of the NEC election confirms this. In such circumstances, it may be necessary for the left to concentrate on nationally-known figures when considering future slates for NEC elections (at least in the CLP section, where one-member-one-vote ballots apply) in order to strengthen its position in "weak" areas.

Secondly, I would not have thought that a situation in which a candidate, backed by several left groups, receives the support of just fifteen CLPs (no matter how diverse), out of over 500 who took part in the NEC elections, is an occasion for boasting, in the pages of *Briefing* or any other publication. Instead, it shows just how marginalised those groups have become.

Finally, having witnessed the farce at Brighton in which important rule-changes were rushed through "on the nod", I do not consider attempts to change the current system as being necessarily "a massive backward step" or "a reactionary proposal". It seems to me that opportunities for greater debate on rule changes should be welcomed by the left, as we would be far more likely to win arguments in this way.

Cllr. Colin Hall
Leicester

I was appalled to read the piece by Chris Knight in the October *Briefing*. "We Trotskyists" detected a "Second Great Russian Revolution" in August 1991, did we? Well this Trotskyist wishes to disown and reject this piece of right wing reaction.

Ernest Mandel used to have a "blunted instrument" theory where the likes of Tito, Mao, Ho and Castro had led so-called socialist revolutions as "unconscious Marxists" (an obvious contradiction in terms) which he substituted for conscious revolutionary Trotskyism. At least Mandel capitulated to leftist Stalinist and national leaderships who had inflicted some blows on imperialism, albeit in their own interests. How the bloody hell could a right wing, populist, proto-fascist demagogue like Boris Yeltsin lead a revolution? Trotskyists call the movement Yeltsin is leading "counter-revolutionary". To speak of the August events as a "revolution" shows the ravings of a disturbed petty bourgeois who takes his politics directly from the *Guardian* and ITN's News at Ten.

Boris Kargarlitsky, though no Trotskyist, at least has a healthy regard for the real situation on the ground before drawing any conclusions. He says, in the same issue of Briefing, correctly: "The trade unions condemned the coup, but failed to support Yeltsin and that, I think, is a very encouraging sign for everyone who wants an independent labour movement to emerge in this country".

In my view Kargarlitsky wishes only to institute a social democratic regime in which workers would be enabled to examine revolutionary ideas in order to decide if this is what they want at some time in the indefinite future i.e. the position of social democracy in its idealised, primitive form before the facts of life under capitalism had brutally made themselves known. But how much more preferable is this to the cynical reaction that compares Lenin to Christ as a revolutionary and tells us that Lenin and Trotsky are as irrelevant today as the Essene mystic of that obscure Roman provence.

Comradely,
Gerry Downing
Brent East CLP

Chris Knight's thoughtful article on events in the Soviet Union (October *Briefing*) raises important themes for the way ahead.

But Chris will have to rid himself of any belief that Trotskyism has any replies to the questions facing us. From his fusion with Bolshevism in 1917, Trotsky became a part of the problem, and by the time he realised what was afoot it was too late. It wasn't until the mid-30s that he accepted the right of other socialist parties to exist in the USSR.

However, there is another Marxism, which criticised this development from the start, that of Rosa Luxemburg, whose critical essay on the Russian Revolution opposed the destruction of all democracy carried out by Lenin and Trotsky under the false label of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. What is more, Chris, she opposed the foundation of the Third International, knowing what type of enterprise it would turn out to be when run by the Russians.

Trotsky is the enigma: how he who had an elaborated critique of Bolshevism in 1903 could in 1917 believe that it had changed its spots and thereafter never admit his error is incomprehensible.

With revolutionary greetings,
Mike Jones, Chester

Class Traitor (from page 16)

In 1989 Boateng turned up at a local affair organised by right-wing Hindu fundamentalists who were raising money in support of the inflammatory campaign to replace an ancient Islamic mosque with a Hindu temple in the north Indian town of Ayodhya; in so doing he associated himself with some of the most violently reactionary elements on the subcontinent.

Recently he spoke in the Commons in support of attempts by backbench Tories to persuade the government to bail out members of Lloyds unable to pay this year's unusually high premiums. His sudden sympathy for the richest of the rich reflected his increasingly evident pride in being a member in good standing of the select House of Commons club; one left-wing MP has reported that it is now common to see him strolling through Westminster arm in arm with Tory MPs.

In the last register of members' interest Boateng declared receiving funds for two overseas trips: one to Moscow, financed by the Student Campaign for Soviet Jewry, and one to Poland, sponsored by a London-based insurance company, to give a lecture to something called the "Anglo-Polish Seminar on Marine Insurance". A far cry, indeed, from "Soweto".

With Jeffery Archer, Boateng was chosen by the BBC to co-host "Behind the Headlines", billed as an "iconoclastic political discussion programme". But by this time Boateng had turned himself into such a boring mainstream Labour politician that the BBC was forced to replace him with the livelier Tony Banks.

Boateng now describes the whole GLC experience as "immature gesture politics". When he was approached recently by an academic researching into the London Labour left of that period his secretary replied on his behalf, explaining that "Mr Boateng no longer gives interviews on this subject..."

Can you blame him?

Class Traitor of the Year

a special Labour Briefing competition for the season of good will

Yes, you might be the lucky winner of a free copy of the new Class War anthology *Decade of Disorder*!

Just rank your top three Class Traitors of the last twelve Months in order of odiousness and tell us in not more than twenty-five words what makes your candidate for Class Traitor of the Year such an outstanding figure in the recent annals of labour movement perfidy.

Nominate anyone you like, but just to nudge your memory here's a list of *Briefing*'s Class Traitors of the Month for the past year:

Gerald Kaufman, Martin O'Neill, John Evans, John Edmonds, Margaret Beckett, David Blunkett, Margaret Hodge, Peter Mandelson, Tom Sawyer, Paul Boateng.

The Class War book plus three runner-up prizes (and, of course, publication in *Briefing*) will go to whichever entries most startle, enlighten or amuse the judges, whose verdict shall be final.

So get out your quill, dip it in socialist venom and send the result to *Labour Briefing*, 26 Wattisfield Road, London E5 9QH. Entries must be received before midnight, December 31st, 1991.

N.B. Members of the Briefing Editorial Board, along with their friends, families and creditors may not take part in the competition.

Stop press:
NUM ballot result

"I AM disappointed but not surprised," said Arthur Scargill announcing that NUM members had rejected an overtime ban intended to force British Coal to negotiate pay with the majority union in the industry.

In a 50% turn-out miners voted by 18,806 to 11,016 against the Executive's proposal for action.

"The result is a reflection of the blackmail tactics deployed by British Coal, the low morale, frustration and despair felt by miners after a decade of seeing their industry butchered and mining communities destroyed.

"I predict that sooner rather than later Britain's miners will recognise there is no alternative to taking industrial action to stop the slaughter of the industry, protect wages, conditions and hours of work, and bring to an end the continuing harassment and intimidation which is being inflicted daily upon our members by British Coal."

IT IS WITH the profoundest regret that the *Briefing* production team has to announce that there is no crossword this month; the compiler's on holiday.

Clue: 'E then skives (anag)

HUMAN ORIGINS
EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION?

A one day conference to be held at
The Polytechnic of East London
Duncan House Conference Centre
Stratford High Street, Stratford, London E15
on Saturday, 7 December 1991
10am-5.30pm

Morning:

"The Aquatic Ape—Fact or Fiction?"

A debate between **Elaine Morgan** (author of *The Aquatic Ape and The Scars of Evolution* and **Pete Wheeler** (Liverpool Polytechnic)
Introduced by **Graham Richards** (Polytechnic of East London)
Chair: **Professor Leslie Aiello**

Afternoon:

"Blood, Ideology and Earliest Society"

A debate between **Chris Knight** (author of *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture* and **Alain Testart** (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris)
Introduced by **Clive Gamble** (University of Southampton)
Chair: **Professor Mary Douglas**

Advance tickets (seating limited)
Admission £10 (students £8); Lunch and refreshments ticket £7
Cheques payable to Lionel Sims, Department of Sociology
Polytechnic of East London
Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS
Tel: 081-590 7722, ext 2784

Organised by Lionel Sims (Sec, *Radical Anthropology Group*) in association with the Human Evolution Interdisciplinary Research Unit and the Department of Sociology, PEL

Where Tories and Nazis meet

In part three of his series on the far right, journalist ***Ed Daley*** *uncovers further links between Britain's "respectable" and not-so-respectable fascists.*

THE LAST few years have witnessed a phenomenal growth throughout Europe of both paramilitary, openly Nazi organisations and covertly Nazi parties of the "respectable" racist right. The latter keeps its Nazism carefully hidden, in contrast to the men of violence on the streets, and seeks power through the ballot box. But it is strategically connected to the former.

Although they publicly distance and disassociate themselves from one another, consistently declare they have no connection and often publicly condemns each other, the two strands of the far right are closely connected and operate in tandem.

The League of St George (LOSG) is an openly Nazi organisation whose first article is "to spread National Socialist ideology". One of its main objectives is to foster the idea of European and international co-operation between neo-Nazi groups and it functions as an international umbrella organisation for fascists from across the globe.

Western Goals (WG), ostensibly a right-wing pressure group within the Tory Party, performs a similar function for the respectable, covert Nazis with its "European Network" of which, WG said last year, Le Pen would be "the natural leader".

Though the LOSG and WG operate in different spheres, they are linked in a number of ways.

On their headed notepaper both WG and the LOSG give their official address as 27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX.

Lucy Roberts, whose real name is Ludmilla Baack, is one of the most senior and respected leaders of the LOSG. She has been an officer of her trade union branch, NALGO, and works for the North West Thames Area Health Authority.

Gregory Lauder-Frost, one of the leaders of WG, is also an officer in his NALGO branch and works for the Riverside Area Health Authority.

Lucy Roberts appears to be on good terms with "Count" Nicolai Tolstoy who chairs the committee that puts on the annual "War and Peace Ball", a shindig for Russian emigres exiled in Britain. Dress is period 1812 and tickets £50 per head.

The treasurer of the "War and Peace Ball" committee is Gregory Lauder-Frost.

David Irving, who appeared at a meeting organised by Lauder Frost, is also no stranger to the LOSG. He has addressed meetings of the Clarendon Club where those present have included Mike Griffin, leader of the LOSG and LOSG activists Steve Brady and Lucy Roberts.

Stuart Northolt, another WG leader, was once editor of Dreadnought, then the paper of the Uxbridge Young Conservatives. Like the later European Dawn (a Western Goal-sponsored journal) it included the sunwheel (a fascist symbol) in its masthead and during the famine in Ethiopia argued in an editorial that "letting Ethiopia starve may well be the best way to end the Communist government in Addis Ababa."

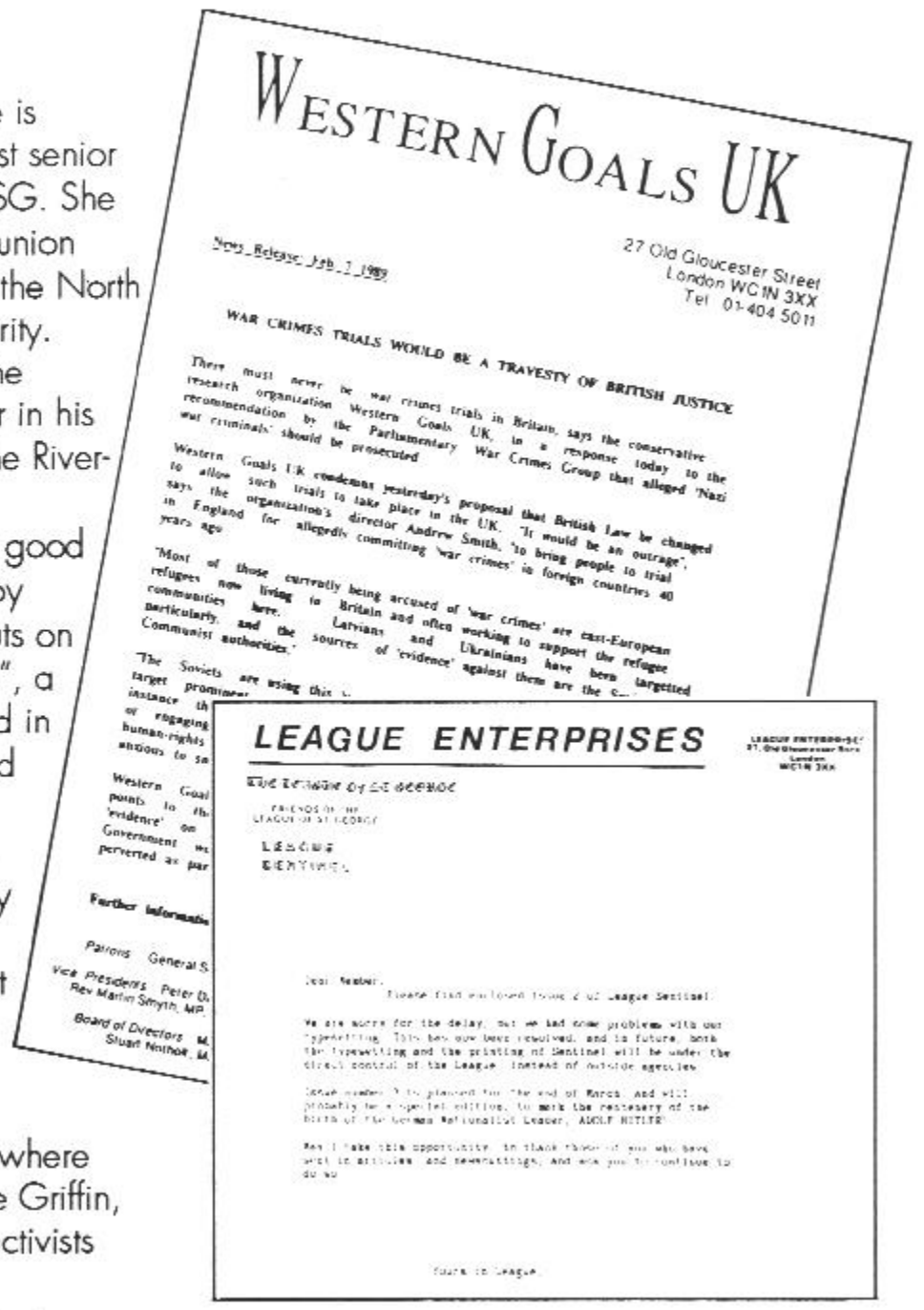
Under Northolt's editorship Dreadnought carried articles from the anti-semite Dr Kitty Little and, significantly, contributions from the LOSG.

More recently the investigative journal Lobster has reported: "according to two sources there was at least one meeting between the pan-Europeanist fascist League of St George and Northolt and Smith."

When challenged both WG leader A.V.R. Smith and Keith Thompson of the LOSG denied any such meeting had taken place. However Thompson admitted he admired the work of WG, commenting, "I've seen their stuff and I think its great."

Finally, Marc Gordon, at one time a close friend of Smith and Northolt and with the same pedigree, but now a leader in the rival "International Freedom Foundation" has been quoted as saying: "Western Goals seems increasingly obsessed with the ideas of racial superiority, a strong state and Jewish conspiracies."

These are also the obsessions of the LOSG and core themes of Nazism itself.



WESTERN GOALS UK

27 Old Gloucester Street
London WC1N 3XX
Tel 01-404 5011

News Release: Feb 2 1989

WAR CRIMES TRIALS WOULD BE A TRAVESTY OF BRITISH JUSTICE

There must never be war crimes trials in Britain, says the conservative research organisation Western Goals UK, in a response today to the recommendation by the Parliamentary War Crimes Group that alleged 'Nazi war criminals' should be prosecuted.

Western Goals UK condemns yesterday's proposal that British Law be changed to allow such trials to take place in the UK. "It would be an outrage", says the organisation's director Andrew Smith, "to bring people to trial in England for allegedly committing 'war crimes' in foreign countries 40 years ago.

"Most of those currently being accused of 'war crimes' are east-European refugees now living in Britain and often working to support the refugee communities here. Latvians and Ukrainians have been targetted particularly, and the sources of 'evidence' against them are the c... Communist authorities.

"The Soviets are using this ... target prominent ... instance th... or engaging ... human-rights ... anxious to se...

Western Goal... points to th... 'evidence' on ... Government ... perverted as par...

Further information ...

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THE ENTRANCE BY THE DEESIDE

FRIENDS OF THE LEAGUE OF ST GEORGE

LESSING
DENTURIST

Dear Member,

Please find enclosed issue 2 of League Sentinel.

We are sorry for the delay, but we had some problems with our typesetting. This has now been resolved, and in future, both the typesetting and the printing of Sentinel will be under the direct control of the League, instead of outside agencies.

Issue number 3 is planned for the end of March, and will probably be a special edition, to mark the necessary of the birth of the German Nationalist Leader, ADOLF HITLER.

May I take this opportunity, to thank those of you who have sent in articles and newscuttings, and ask you to continue to do so.

Yours in League.

Stop Le Pen's visit

FRENCH FASCIST LEADER Jean Marie Le Pen plans to visit Britain early in December to link up with the British wing of a burgeoning far right international network.

He has been invited by Western Goals (see *Labour Briefing*, October and November), a well-connected group on the extreme right of the Tory Party. The date and venue of his visit are not yet known.

In 1987 Le Pen was invited to address a fringe meeting at Conservative Party conference, but a large scale mobilisation was prepared by Anti-Fascist Action, and the visit was cancelled.

An Ad-Hoc Committee to Stop Le Pen's Visit, involving the Campaign Against Fascism in France, the NUS, Searchlight, the Newham Monitoring Project, Anti-Fascist Action and the Southall Monitoring Group as well as several Labour MPs and MEPs, is now meeting regularly.

Contact the Ad Hoc Committee at PO Box 273, Forest Gate, London E7; tel. 071 277 0817.

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