BRIEFING

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

February 1991 60p

Stop Gulf war!

Labour's guilty men

As we go to press George Bush and his adjutants - chief among them John Major - are set to unleash their war machine in the Gulf. The result will be carnage on a monstrous scale.

Their loyal lieutenants throughout this obscene imperial adventure have been Neil Kinnock, Gerald Kaufman, and Martin O'Neill.

Who gains from war in the Gulf? Certainly not democracy in the Middle East. And not the working class in this or any other country, who always pay the heavy price of war. No, the only forces which can benefit from this slaughter are the multi-nationals, the oil companies, the road lobby, the arms traders and weapons manufacturers, the dictators and torturers. In short, only the rich and mighty.

Surely this is a war that Labour - the party built by and for the working class - must oppose with all its collective might.

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BRIEFING

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The obscene spectacle of pro-war bipartisanship was on display in the House of Commons of January 15th for all the world to see. Kinnock and Kaufman waffled about giving sanctions more time while Labour Whips drove MPs into the government lobby to give unconditional backing to military action.

In the Shadow Cabinet Kinnock came down heavily against any idea that Labour should put forward an amendment to the government's line on the Gulf, thus depriving Britain of the kind of democratic discussion seen in the US Congress. He and his team then connived with the Tories to carve up the Commons debate, ensuring that no substantive motion would be put before the House. When challenged from the backbenches about this Kinnock said, "people would understand".

Edwina Currie urged the Commons to emulate the unanimity for war registered in the Iraqi parliament - she seemed oblivious to any irony.

Kinnock refused to respond to backbench demands for an emergency meeting of the PLP and rejected out of hand pleas from a delegation of Labour MPs to back Mitterand's last minute peace initiative. Meanwhile, he has been attending private briefings with Defense Secretary Tom King on a Privy Council basis - something even Michael Foot refused to do during the Falklands War.

In his speech to the Commons, Kinnock disparaged peace conferences, negotiations, "linkages". He argued that Saddam represented a "perpetual threat to the security of the region and the wider world". Edward Heath pointed out the logic of this position: the conquest of Iraq itself.

By giving the government a blank cheque, Labour's leaders have helped cloak the US military adventure with the respectability of "international support". They are therefore criminally liable for blood spilled for oil in the Middle East.

Bipartisanship has allowed the media to claim consensus for war and marginalise opposing views. ITN Editor Stewart Purvis admitted in the Guardian: "The role of the opposition party in Parliament is important to our news coverage. Labour is synchronised with government policy, so that the level of debate on television matches the level of debate in Parliament."

Bipartisanship has hamstrung the anti-war movement and damaged Labour itself. But make no mistake: on this issue Labour's leaders do not speak for the majority of Party members and supporters.

From the beginning, their Gulf policy has been foisted on the rank and file. Kinnock and his private office, along with Gerald Kaufman, were alone responsible for mapping out Labour's initial response to the crisis. Back in August, Kinnock endorsed the deployment and possible use of Western forces in the Gulf before he had even consulted the NEC or Shadow Cabinet.

At the Blackpool Conference in October a majority of CLPs backed the FBU's anti-war resolution. It was only passed thanks to trade union warmongers - notably John Edmonds, who stormed to the rostrum to call for "pre-emptive" action against Iraq from the safety of his Blackpool block vote bunker.

On January 15th, 57 MPs voted against the government, the highest number yet. This hardly reflects the extent of opposition to war in the country. However, only half the Labour MPs who voted against the war were members of the Campaign Group, an indication that dissent on this issue spreads far beyond the left of the Party.

This dissent must now be voiced clearly and unequivocally - in public.

The time has passed for unattributable press briefings. **For the soft left this is the moment of truth.** Labour MPs who won't vote against a wicked war costing hundreds of thousands of lives because they don't want to "taint themselves" by association with Tony Benn are beneath contempt.

Party members must act now. We must do everything in our power to make clear that on this issue Kinnock, Kaufman and O'Neill do not speak for us. Labour should have no part in the butchery set to commence in the Gulf.

All those who support military action - MPs, MEPs, trade union leaders - must be challenged at every opportunity. From the humblest branch or shopfloor meeting to the secret conclaves of the NEC and Shadow Cabinet, the battle is on to save the Labour Party from the clutches of the warmakers.

Richard Heffernan and Mike Marqusee
Hornsey and Wood Green CLP.

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Labour Briefing **is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. We are a democratic, non-sectarian network with an elected National Editorial Board, open to all supporters. The next NEB meeting will be held on 24th February.**

Contributions are welcome - but please keep them short. Deadline for next issue - 11th February.

Why not take copies to sell at your Labour Party, trade union or campaign meeting?

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We say: Stay in and fight!

The fall of Thatcher and the explosion of the Gulf crisis have revealed as never before the utter bankruptcy of the Labour leaders. Bereft of coherent policy alternatives to the Tories and of any effective electoral strategy for defeating them, they turn again and again against their own rank and file.

Labour's long lead in the opinion polls proved all too vulnerable to a change in Tory leadership. As the prospect of a certain Labour victory in the next general election evaporated, panic gripped the Parliamentary Labour Party and despair engulfed the ranks.

Party activism, in decline since the end of the miners' strike, has sunk to a new low. With the demise of Thatcher finally at hand, you would have thought Party meetings would be packed out. Yet up and down the country wards, Women's Sections, GCs, DLPs, LGCs have been inquorate.

It's all very well telling the media that Labour has tamed its activists, but without the Party workers on the ground, Labour cannot beat the Tories in a general election, especially where it counts, in the key marginals.

The leadership's sole response to this crisis of organisation and morale is yet another clampdown on dissent. The December NEC took further action against the rank and file in Merseyside and threatened to impose council candidates on Tower Hamlets, whose crime was a desire to do something positive about the Poll Tax - the very issue which had just brought Thatcher down.

Some Shadow Cabinet members expressed unease over the Party's lack of clear alternatives to the Tories. What an indictment of the three-year Policy Review process, only just completed! However, these hints of dissent from erstwhile 'soft lefts' were, as usual, squashed by the leadership-loyalty juggernaut which they themselves helped to unleash.

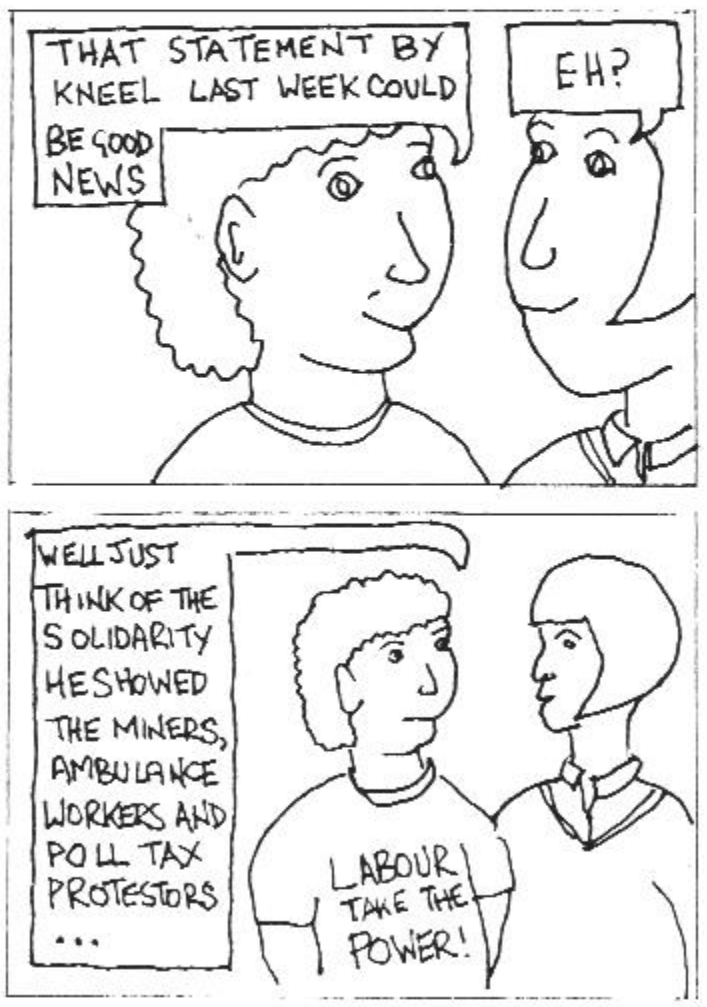
More and more Party members believe that Labour's organisation, policies and leadership are inadequate for the job ahead. Many are disheartened by the obscenity of the leadership's support for Gulf war and will be tempted to abandon the Party completely. However understandable their feelings may be, they are wrong a thousand times over.

The demise of Thatcher, the economic recession, and the continuing battle over the Poll Tax pose acute problems for both Labour and Tories. British politics are more volatile than for many years. With war in the Gulf splitting Labour open as it hasn't been since the end of the miners' strike, this is the time to stay in the Party and fight.

No one promises immediate rewards in this fight. We at *Briefing* certainly have no illusions about the scale of the tasks facing us. But outsidethe structures of the labour movement, there is simply no way of confronting the real political problems facing the working class.

This is why a diverse group of independent socialists have come together to relaunch *Labour Briefing* as a monthly magazine of, by and for left Labour activists. With the ruling class ready to plunge the world into a tailspin of destruction and the Labour leadership meekly following in its wake, our responsibilities as socialists are immense. *Briefing* will play its part in building an informed, organised and combative left capable of meeting the challenge.







Media Mendacity: all MoD Cons

***Mick Gosling** of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, writing in a personal capacity, lays bare the government's plans for winning the propaganda war at home.*

I fully expected a backing group of Desert Rats to emerge singing 'He's a macho, macho man' as John Major played pic me quick in a British tank *only* 100 miles from the Kuwaiti border.

But no, before you could blink, super leader was off, poking his head into a fighter cockpit and then cruising with our boys in the warm waters of the Gulf.

At last we know now who the man in the grey suit is - Anneka Rice in drag. I did suggest to the Ministry of Defence last week that if we dropped her on Baghdad to "Challenge Saddam" the Iraqis would withdraw from Kuwait immediately. They would probably withdraw from Baghdad.

But enough of the news. I got back to reality watching *Apocalypse Now*.

'I am thunderstruck that the British public knows so little about the potential nightmare of this war,' says Nik Gowing, diplomatic editor of Channel 4 News.

At a recent Royal Television Society symposium, Gowing's filmed commentary introduced a session called 'The Propaganda War'. After the invasion of Kuwait, he told us, we saw 'TV images of a highly geared, efficient US military machine moving into position'.

The reality was near chaos with planes arriving half full and a computerised logistic support system unable to locate military spares.

Not a lot of people know that. And they don't know that because the military machine is running the media in the Gulf.

A media circus has been created with 'the fourth estate travelling from site to site in convoys of buses'. Their pictures seen by satellite throughout the world have helped generate expectations that war is both inevitable and 'winnable'. 'The irony is', says Nik Gowing, that 'when war comes, the technology giving instant access will be shut down'.

Strict rules on what can and cannot be reported are laid down and policed by the Joint Information Bureau and its military minders.

There are fourteen categories of 'not releasable information' in the Media Ground Rules issued to reporters in the Gulf. These include 'rules of engagement' which are of particular interest because Desert Shield was originally sold as a defensive operation and because British forces, with their nuclear weapons, are now under US command.

Military control is in fact even greater than indicated by the fourteen prohibited categories. The reality is that journalists can *only* report what the military wants them to.

Point 3 of the Media Ground Rules states: 'You MUST remain with your military escort at all times, until released, and follow their instructions regarding your activities.' This is followed by a classic piece of newspeak: 'these instructions are not intended to hinder your reporting'.

Journalists' subservience to the military is underlined in Point 6: 'if you are not sure whether an action you will take will violate a ground rule, consult your escort officer PRIOR TO TAKING THAT ACTION'.

Reporters or crews wandering away from their military escorts will be warned only once; a second offence and they're out.

David Feingold, London bureau chief of Cable News Network, put it bluntly: 'the rules are there and the military run the operation. We are used as conduits of information and disinformation'.

Many journalists have been more than willing to participate in this charade. Worse yet are the newspaper and television editors who perpetuate it. They have refused even to publicise the existence of censorship let alone challenge it.

Not so long ago reports from South Africa were preceded by 'health warnings' explaining that they had been compiled under South African government restrictions. In Britain today, propaganda exercises are being presented as fact, with no 'health warnings'.

The myth of a 'free' media is maintained while its carefully vetted representatives loyally troop off to secret meetings with the Ministry of Defence. On Friday 4th and Monday 7th January, the leaders of the broadcast and print media were briefed on how the MoD will organise coverage in the event of war. The left, radical and black press was excluded.

On the ground in the gulf only two 'media response teams' will be allowed forward with the 4th and 7th armoured divisions. These will consist of one television crew, one radio reporter, two print journalists and one photographer. Their material will be pooled through a forward transmission unit where it will be censored by the military before it is transmitted to London. To ensure the home front stays firm, the MoD will also be issuing 'guidance' to editors on the release of information. Don't expect any pictures of dead or badly wounded servicemen.

A tightly controlled media machine has taken us to the brink of war, the full horror of which may only emerge after it is over.

Greens back war !

Stephen Games, Green Party PPC for Hampstead and Highgate, wrote to the local *Ham and High* paper to assure voters that he did not share the views put forward by Dawn Primarolo at a local anti-war meeting.

"The Green Party's view is that stability has to be restored, preferably without the use of weapons. We have supported United Nation's sanctions... We are aware, however, that renouncing war will also encourage Hussein in his adventure and we have also said that we are prepared to back UN military action as a last resort because we recognise that without this threat, under present, conditions, Hussein may be unstoppable."

We thought the Green Party opposed war in the Gulf. Thanks, Stephen, for setting us straight.

Thousands march against Gulf war

One hundred thousand marched in London against war in the Gulf on January 12th, with thousands more taking part in parallel marches in Manchester and Scotland.

Labour Party banners were more evident than on previous Gulf demos. Local Parties on the march included Walthamstow, Deptford, East Finchley, Bow and Poplar, Oxford and Abingdon, Quinton, Hither Green, as well as the Oxford City Labour Group. Tell the world Kinnock and Kaufman do not speak for you! Get your Labour Party to stand up now for peace in the Middle East. Pass the LPS model resolution.



Women on the march against war in the Gulf on January 12 Photo: Frank Hansen.

20 million human beings facing starvation in Africa could be fed for five months on what is currently being spent on war in the Gulf.

Sir Dick Knowles has declared war in Birmingham. At his initiative, the City Council has set up an "Emergency War Committee". "I would not rule out a madman like Saddam Hussein launching an air attack on somewhere like Birmingham," said Sir Dick, a former Royal Engineer, "so we have to be prepared."

Only NHS and **not** pay beds will be requisitioned by the government for Gulf casualties, reports London's *Evening Standard.* 65-70 beds per day will be required from each Regional Health Authority.

Women Against War in the Gulf aims to build a mass women's campaign within the anti-war movement. It has links with both the Committee and Campaign against War in the Gulf, CARDRI, the General Union of Palestinian Women, and Greenham Women.

WAWG will focus on the implications of war for women. Already, in Turkey, women are being channelled into the sex industry for off-duty GIs. Women Against War in the Gulf will be organising anti-war action on 26 January and 8 March, International Women's Day. Contact them at 63 Upper Tollington Park, London, N4. Tel: 071-272-1799.

Labour Party Socialists Model Resolutiom

"It is now more important than ever for Labour to speak with a clear, independent voice on the Gulf - against war and for those millions here and abroad who want no bloodshed in the Middle East.

This..... opposes the current military build-up (or action) in the Gulf and calls unequivocally for the withdrawal of all British, US and other external forces from the region.

While condemning the regime of Saddam Hussein and the invasion and annexation of Kuwait, we believe that the presence of US and British military forces prevents any democratic or peaceful solution to the various problems of the region.

We call for self-determination for all the peoples of the Middle East and respect for democratic rights by all regimes in the area.

We congratulate those Labour MPs who have voted against the Tory government's war policy in the House of Commons.

We are appalled by the Labour leaderhsip's support for Tory government policy in the Gulf and call on our leaders to break immediately with this bi-partisanship. Labour must speak out now."

Notify LPS, c/o 7c Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY of any labour movement bodies which pass this or similar resolutions.

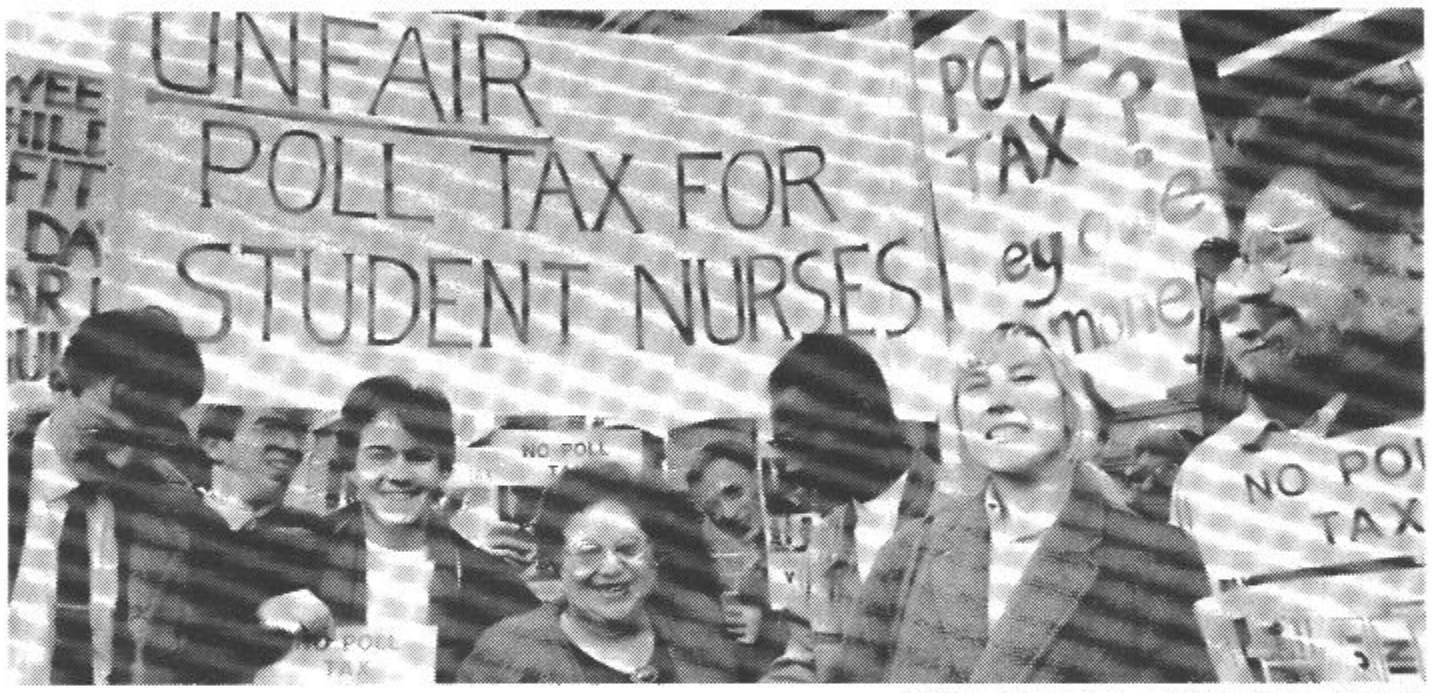
Barnet anti-Poll Tax victory

Barnet council's case against Bow and Poplar MP Mildred Gordon, a Barnet resident refusing to pay the Poll Tax, was adjourned on December 12th after nearly three hours of legal argument by barrister Andrew Nicol.

His intial challenge concerned the documents entitling Barnet council official Paul Rees to appear for the council. Rees had to come armed with a photocopy of council minutes, which was dismissed by Nicol as invalid. The court was adjourned while the baffled magistrates withdrew and a messenger rushed from the Town Hall in Hendon (four miles away) with the original documents.

When the court reconvened, Nicol maintained there was still no legal document allowing Rees to act for the council as the minutes were signed by the Chief Executive, not the presiding councillor. The magistrates retired again and the case was adjourned to January 25th.

A noisy picket of 50 kept up anti-Poll Tax chants throughout the hearing.



Mildred Gordon outside Barnet court

The picket consisted of women from Kings X Womens Centre, members of Hendon South, Finchley and Chipping Barnet CLPs, Barnet Trades Council members (with banner) and student nurses from Barnet General Hospital.

The student nurses were due to appear in the other court, but their cases were also adjourned, this time until February 6th. Student nurses have to pay the full Poll Tax - other students are asked for 20%.

There will be another picket at Barnet Court (near Barnet tube) on Friday January 25th from 1.30pm. Information from Dorothy Macedo 071-636-8000 x3451.

Nicol's case (he had a dozen further challenges to make) was based on the Poll Tax Legal Group's document "Law Notes No. 8" written by Dyfed Poll Tax Opposition available from the group at PO Box 1335 London N16 6YR. Send £2 to cover costs.

by Dorothy Macedo, Hendon South CLP.

An earthly chance of greening Labour?

Labour's new environment policy document, "An Earthly Chance", deserves one, but not two cheers.

It endorses the concept of least cost planning" which requires "energy utilities to consider whether expected demand for electricity can be satisfied more economically by investing in the consumer's energy efficiency rather than in generating new plant."

This suggests that Labour is at last backing energy conservation - at least on paper (presumably recycled).

Unfortunately, there isn't an earthly chance of these promising developments leading anywhere while the party remains in the pocket of the nuclear lobby.

Labour's new green policy fails even to commit the Party to abandoning the Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (THORP), currently under construction at Sellafield. THORP will reprocess irradiated fuel rods from Advanced Gas Cooled reactors, thereby generating additional radioactive waste and perpetuating the extremely hazardous transport of irradiated fuel to Sellafield through major cities.

Why is Labour still backing THORP?

The demand for reprocessing has all but disappeared since the project was announced. Independent analyses of the economics of THORP suggest that hundreds of millions of pounds could be saved simply by writing off all investment to date and pursuing the safer alternative of on-site dry storage of irradiated fuel.

Needless to say, still greater savings could be achieved by abandoning nuclear power altogether. Could it be that Kinnock puts Jack Cunningham and his ties to the nuclear industry ahead of the need for a rational (and popular) energy policy?

Ironically, THORP may well be killed off by the new nuclear electricity utilities - Scottish Nuclear and Nuclear Electric - for purely economic reasons. Labour's "green" policy could end up more rabidly pro-nuclear than the nuclear industry itself.

For more information read SCRAM - the safe energy journal, available from the Scottish Campaign to Resist the Atomic Menace, 11 Forth St., Edinburgh, EH1 3LE

by Jon Rogers, East Lewisham CLP.



Pergamon 23 - Kinnock under pressure

In their year on strike the Pergamon 23 have received backing from all quarters of the international labour movement, except the very top of the British Labour Party, reports a ***Briefing*** *Industrial Correspondent.*



Pergamon strikers at last year's Labour conference Photo: Martin Jenkinson

Oxford East CLP and its MP Andrew Smith have supported the Pergamon strikers throughout the long dispute, as has the local Labour council.

An Early Day Motion in support of the NUJ's demands was signed by 160 Labour MPs; over 100 CLPs and Labour Groups up and down the country have also voiced their support; and even the NEC passed a unanimous resolution condemning the sackings and calling for reinstatement and recognition for the NUJ.

YET... when a resolution reached Party Conference calling for the Labour leadership to make representations to Maxwell to help bring about a just and speedy resolution to the Pergamon dispute, the NEC voted 12-10 to ask for it to be remitted.

Conference defied the NEC to carry the resolution overwhelmingly but the NEC has made no attempt in the following months to carry out Conference's wishes.

In November, Oxford East CLP laid charges against local Party member Maxwell over his involvement in the Pergamon dispute.

The case was drawn up over a period of weeks by a 3-person committee elected by the Oxford East GC. The committee received evidence from all interested parties and this was presented to the NEC in a 28-page document. The NCC, meeting in December, decided there was no case to answer and gave no explanation for their decision. Oxford East CLP is now considering its response.

The Labour leadership has demonstrated time and again a crass opportunism when it comes to standing up to Maxwell - not least because the *Mirror* provides such an ideal platform from which to attack the left.

But the success of the determined campaign waged by the Pergamon 23 is making Kinnock and his team more and more uncomfortable.

The majority of British teaching unions - NUT, NASUWT, AUT, EIS, SFHEA - are now committed to a boycott of all Maxwell publications pending a just resolution of the dispute; in the US, America's largest teaching union, the National Educational Association, is backing the boycott, as is the United University Professions, which organises teaching staff throughout New York's colleges and universities; the AFL-CIO is now dealing with an application from the American journalists' union for an official all-union boycott of all Maxwell's publications and companies.

In Eastern Europe the Pergamon NUJ has forged strong relations with all the journalists' unions. A three-week tour in September covering Warsaw, East Berlin, Prague, Budapest and Sofia gave the Pergamon strikers the opportunity to counter the omnipresent Maxwell propaganda ("My interest is in saving this paper/TV from collapse", "I will invest", "I will train", etc).

The European Parliament has called for a report on concentration of media ownership and press freedom, with specific reference to the attack on union rights at Pergamon, and the Socialist Group of MEPs has given full backing to the Pergamon NUJ.

Here in Britain the strength of union support for the Pergamon 23 was evidenced by the number of unions which defied the NEC recommendation at Labour Party conference and voted to support the Pergamon composite - all bar the AEU and EEPTU!

The Pergamon dispute has turned up the heat on Maxwell's cosy relationship with Labour's leaders. Party and affiliated union members should demand that the Party leadership implement Composite 41.

Donations please to "NUJ Pergamon Press Chapel" and send to the address below.

For further information, contact Pergamon NUJ Chapel, 60 Cricket Rd, Oxford OX4 3DQ. Tel: 0865-60762/723450.

Jeremy Corbyn's Commonweal

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

When William Morris wrote his Commonweal he had a real vision of a society truly democratic, truly peaceful, at one with the natural world.

He combined this political vision of socialism with an artistic temperament and a spirit of sharing. He saw socialism as a goal to be striven for and was always prepared to speak of the goal when fighting the cause of the time.

Too often we fight the causes of the time and ignore the goals; but once we ignore the goals we lose the fight because we have no vision.

If Morris were alive today what would he make of the struggles of our socialist movement?

Beggars on the streets, a more divided world, and an economic system more imperialist even than in his own days.

In place of Victorian mean streets Morris would find ugliness and misery as grasping builders construct slums in the sky, motor manufacturers create the illusion of mobility and the reality of pollution, and screams for profit bear down from lavish hoardings.

The great success of the Tories in the 80s was to establish their values as the basis of society - a society dedicated to production for profit, to investment for personal reward, protected by an overbearing state.

Each time they have been challenged the pattern has been the same: in the miners' strike they mobilised police and media and used draconian laws to destroy union funds.

Yet that defeat was only possible because much of the Labour and trade union leadership abdicated from the struggle in the name of the 'rule of law' and the illusion of 'respectability'.

Those who have seriously opposed the Poll Tax by demonstrating outside town halls, by joining the huge rally in London last March 31st, and by engaging in civil disobedience have had a far greater impact than all the Labour Party adverts in the Guardian.

In so many spheres Labour now apes the Tory strategy. Our education policies are premised not on the need to provide education for the sake of knowledge itself and the ability to contribute to society, but on training for a job system geared to a 'competitive economy'.

At the 1990 Conference we were told that Labour's economic alternative was based on full support for the European Community and the monetary system that goes with it. In fact 1992 means that workers in Coventry will be told to price themselves into competition with workers in Frankfurt, who in turn will be told to beware of the productivity of workers in Zaragoza.

Western Europe's 'competitive edge' over the rest of the world relies on a trading system that exploits distant peoples and destroys distant environments.

African children starve as they watch train loads of food being exported to the industrial north; their hospitals close and their schools go without books as their economies are brought into line with 'reality'.

In the tea room of the House of Commons these days there are signs of jitters as a general election draws nearer. Oaths are sworn at John Major for stealing the policies and the image so painstakingly prepared in advertising agencies the length and breadth of Covent Garden.

From where I sit, overlooking the Seven Sisters Road in North London, grappling with the problems of no houses to rent, a Poll Tax that cannot be paid and people whose Christmas was a nightmare of disappointed children and rising debts, Labour's policies seem woefully inadequate.

It is not enough for Labour to say only that it will run things better than the Tories. Labour needs vision and courage.

The vision to describe a society not controlled by multi-national capital or in fear of poverty.

The courage to risk the wrath of the headline writers, of Murdoch and Maxwell, and stand out for the radical changes we desperately need.

Euro MPs launch PR offensive

Seventeen Labour MEPs have launched an offensive against proportional representation.

Among the campaigners are former British Labour Group leaders Barry Seal and Alf Lomas, but none of the present Group officers.

In their new document, 'The Proportional Pantomime', the MEPs make good use of their first-hand experience of PR in action in EC member states.

The Single Transferable Vote (STV) system produces monster multi-member constituencies. The transfer of votes to third, fourth and fifth preferences favours the least unacceptable candidates rather than the ones with most positive support.

The Alternative Transferable Vote (ATV), which is not proportional, has many of the drawbacks of STV.

Under the Additional Member System (AMS), half the seats would be elected first past the post and half from party lists. This would double the size of constituencies and reduce the accountablity of MPs. It gives immense power to party leaders who compile the lists and disproportionate parliamentary power to small parties.

An examination of EC voting shows PR does not lead to higher voter turnouts and increases spoilt ballots.

PR systems have allowed fascist and racist parties to establish footholds. The Front National's representation in the French Assembly was decimated when PR was abandoned, yet along with the Republikaners in Germany they enjoy strong representation in the PR-elected European Parliament. This entitles them to state funding.

Women's representation does not necessarily increase under PR; this has only happened when political par-

Shortchanged on shortlists

***Pauline Purnell** (Chair of Birmingham District Labour Party) on the travails of a socialist feminist seeking parliamentary selection.*

A visit to the House of Commons clinched it. No way can a socialist woman allow that partriarchal schoolboy elite to persist unchallenged. I decided to submit myself for parliamentary selection.

Nine parliamentary shortlists and thirty nomination meetings later, my previous convictions have been confirmed. An updated list of PPCs shows that to elect more than four new women MP's, Labour will need a huge majority. The selection process is not cheap, smooth or painless. Women on low incomes, without transport, or lacking emotional support are seriously disadvantaged.

Mailing branches and trade unions with personal details can cost between £5 - £15 per constituency. Some constituencies ask for anything up to 1,000 copies of your 600 word statement (at 5p a copy, unless, of course, you're a union organiser with access to a photocopier). Petrol averages £4 a meeting or train fares £15. I was only once given expenses - by a sisterly Women's Section. Some constituencies send out lists of union branches and even constituency profiles, but getting anything useful out of most of them is a major exercise in persistence.

By the time members arrive at selection meetings they will have read each candidate's 600 words, been lobbied by several 'camps' and have made up their minds how they will vote. The questions therefore fall into the following categories: those aimed to show up your lack of knowledge (usually of the constituency history/geography), those phrased in obscure or technical jargon, aimed to humiliate you, those of the 'I am an important person in this constituency and am going to make a speech under the pretext of asking you a question' type, and the 'we are a nice, unthreatening group of people who aren't going to vote for you anyway so we will first ask you trivial questions to fill in the time' type. You can't help but wonder just what's behind the questions like 'What do you think of halal meat?' or 'How would you defend the realm?' Inevitably the best answers pop into your mind in the car on the way home! At no time was I asked about Poll Tax, abortion, or women's organisations in the party, and just once I was asked about Ireland.

If you're putting yourself forward for selection you have to get used to being angry. Time after time you are treated differently to the male candidates. You are asked different questions. For example,'You are an active strong woman who has done a lot of things in your life; don't you think you will put off women who want to stay at home?'

When women organise and manage to draw up all-women short lists, they are hammered for conspiring to keep men off shortlists. On the other hand, it's sad when Women's Sections end up nominating men. One section which did this wrote to me to apologise. My CV had apparantly got lost, although I delivered it by hand and watched the partner of the women's section secretary pull it out of the letter box (he now happens to be the agent for the male PPC).

I stood against sitting MP's because I believe every MP should undergo reselection and that constituency members should be given a choice. MP's find such challenges painful. One pleaded with me 'This is my job!', another kissed and cuddled his wife in an exaggerated display of affection before making his speech.

Nonetheless I met many comrades, especially sisters, determined to work for feminism and socialism. But if we are to get more feminist socialists in Parliament we have to convince women that they can trust other women and should support them. In the meantime some of us have to be hurt, humiliated and misused along the way.

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have taken political decisions to enforce quotas of women candidates.

Above all, PR would remove the last shreds of MPs' accountability to local parties and constituents. Direct democracy would be destroyed. Labour would find it almost impossible to form a majority government - even in the proposed Scottish Assembly!

by Dan Carter

Speakers and copies of the MEPs' broadsheet are available from:
Alex Falconer MEP, 25 Church St, Inverkeithing, Fife



Local Labour Party members would lose the chance to hear or question potential candidates

Witchhunt update

According to the *Times*, Director of Organisation Joyce Gould will be recommending disciplinary action against supporters of Socialist Organiser to the January meeting of Labour's NEC.

Socialist Organiser was effectively banned by the NEC in July 1990. There was no notice of charges, no evidence, no hearing.

At October's Party conference, emergency resolutions challenging the ban won the backing of two-thirds of the CLP delegates present, but were defeated by the big trade union votes.

Since then, silence. The July 1990 NEC commissioned Gould to report on SO supporters in the Wirral and Nottingham East, but no one in either area has yet been questioned by her.

Members of the LCC boast of a long hit list and promise that Briefing will be next. The LCC has tried to spur the witch-hunt along with a circular carrying a predictable "my life in the snake pit" story by ex-SO supporter Rachel Pitkeathley (see right).

Some insiders at Walworth Road report that the leadership was taken aback by the effectiveness of the campaign against the ban and now plans only a few token expulsions.

"End The Ban" remains active, ready to campaign against expulsions, whenever they come. Speakers are available. Donations are needed to help pay off huge debts. Contact ETB, c/o 12a,Canonbury St., London, N1 2TD.

Who the hell is Rachel Pitkeathley?

SO has been denounced by erstwhile supporter Rachel Pitkeathley.

A paper circulated by the LCC (and quoted extensively in the Guardian - surpise us sometime, Patrick Wintour!) purports to be a "political analysis" of SO, but is nothing but the usual witch-hunting farrago of half-truths and innuendo. Its real purpose is to give the NEC the excuse it wants to take action against SO supporters around the country, particularly in Wallasey, one of the most marginal Tory seats in the country.

Pitkeathley was an SO supporter for a little over a year during which time she was an active member of its student group, Socialist Students in NOLS. Lured by the aphrodosiac of power, she abandoned socialism for the creature comforts of the LCC. Her reward has been the usual "research" job for an MP.

The paper's main evidence against SO consists of lengthy quotes from long-dead US Trotskyist James P. Cannon. It appears that Cannon advocated revolutionary change and the building of a vanguard party to achieve it. This shocking news is accompanied by the even more breathtaking revelation that SO sometimes quoted Cannon.

Neither Pitkeathley nor her LCC amenuensis Alex Sczerbiak seem to have the least familiarity with history. Otheriwse they could not have reproduced so unselfconsciously every method and nuance of old time anti-Communist witch-hunts. Apart from the guilt by association number, there is this gem: "Leninist groups never change their spots." Quite right! Flay them alive!

Brighton Labour bites back

Brighton Labour Party members are dealing with the suspension of their local party by meeting (in wards and in a Brighton aggregate) as 'Friends of Brighton Labour Party'. They continue to organise as Party members around issues such as the Gulf and the Poll Tax.

At the Walworth Road hearings, which begin on 20 January, longstanding Party members will be reminding officials of the strong campaigning record of the Brighton Party, which has fought hard to gain and retain control of the council. In contrast, the Brighton Labour Group Leadership seem determined to kick the ladder away, having used it to climb safely into the Town Hall bunker.

An increasing number of Labour candidates chosen for the May local elections have expressed a willingness to confront the Tories on the Poll Tax and back Brighton's 30,000 non-payers. Imposition of compliant Kinnockites looks likely.

NEC REPORT

In November the NEC said all the Party's non-electoral work should be downgraded in preparation for a general election. But the December meeting proved that Kinnock's real priority is control of the the Party at any cost.

The NEC response to the fall of Thatcher was to launch yet more "investigations" and threaten further "disciplinary action".

The NEC is determined to ensure that the sitting MP for Birkenhead, Frank Field, remains in place, despite the fact that his CLP voted in December 1989 to deselect him. The Birkenhead selection was run in accordance with Party rules, but the NEC refused to endorse the successful candidate, Paul Davies, a TGWU official.

Field threatened to force a by-election if the leadership did not intervene to defend him. Kinnock launched an "investigation" based on a "dossier" submitted by Field containing a series of ludicrous and untruthful accusations of "intimidation". Field claimed that Birkenhead and neighbouring Wallasey had been infiltrated by "trotskyite militants".

The NEC investigation refuted all Field's charges. Nonetheless, it ordered the that the selection contest be re-run.

Field realised that in a fair contest he would lose again to Paul Davies. His response was to turn to the media to repeat his tales of "intimidation" and "infiltration" in order to force the leadership to come to his defence.

The December NEC acceded to Fields outrageous demands. By 17 to 6 it voted to defer the rerunning of the Birkenhead reselection. The clear intention is to prevent any reselection in Birkenhead until a general election is called, at which point the NEC can step in to impose Field.

*by **Richard Heffernan,** Hornsey & Wood Green CLP*

Class Traitor of the Month

In this first of a regular series, ***Briefing*** *profiles Labour's Shadow Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Secretary and leading Gulf warmonger,* ***Gerald Kaufman.***

Ambitious, ruthless, too clever by half, Gerald Kaufman had his first big break (following grammar school, Oxford and stints at the Fabian Society, the Daily Mirror and the New Statesman) in 1965 when he went to work for Harold Wilson's Press Secretary, Joe Haines.

Kaufman's salary was paid by the party, but as a member of Wilson's widely detested "Kitchen Cabinet" he was little more than the PM's errand boy.

He was selected (by one vote) to contest the safe seat of Manchester Ardwick. After being elected to the House in 1970, he went straight onto the Front Bench, where he has remained ever since.

From 74 to 79, he was a junior minister and hatchet man for Eric Varley's right-wing team at the Department of Industry, with special responsibility for the decimation of British Steel.

In 1979 the hard-right Boilermakers' union decided to sponsor him; since 1983, when the Boilermakers merged with the GMWU, he has been backed by the increasingly powerful GMB.

After several attempts, he was elected to the Shadow Cabinet in 1980. Since then he has been re-elected every year, frequently coming top of the poll and always in the first three places. This is not a tribute to any personal popularity (does anyone like this man?) but to Kaufman's skilful anti-Tory invective.

Just why he hates the Tories so much remains a mystery, given that he agrees with them on nearly everything.

From 80 to 83, as Shadow Environment Minister, Kaufman did all he could to distance the party from the new left in local government and especially the GLC. Indeed, when the Tories first announced their plans to abolish the GLC he refused to give a Labour commitment to restore it.

As Shadow Home Affairs Minister from 1983-87 he specialised in studied neutrality whenever police attacked striking miners or printworkers. The Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4 received no help from him, nor did the people of Tottenham, Handsworth or Brixton.

He strongly opposed Black Sections and a woman's right to choose on abortion.

After the 87 election defeat Kinnock snubbed the "soft left" to give Kaufman the Foreign Affairs brief. The leader's charge to the veteran Atlanticist was clear: ditch unilateralism. Kaufman personally drafted the famous "Britain in the World" section of the 1989 Policy Review. All copies of the draft were kept locked in his Commons office (even Hattersley had to read it under Kaufman's supervision). He has relished trotting the globe as Labour's putative Foreign Secretary and hobnobbing with "world statesmen", whose



names he drops almost as often as Denis Healey.

A founder in 1979 of the right-wing Solidarity Group, consistent enemy of the left, perennial candidate for NEC (where his votes increased last year, thanks partly to covert LCC support) he is nonetheless a political loner, frequently seen dining on his own in the Commons cafeteria.

He was effectively imposed as a candidate in 1983 in the redrawn Manchester Gorton constituency. The new CLP's General Committee wanted to have an open selection but other MPs who had a claim on the seat were "encouraged" not to stand.

In the 1985 reselection, four of the constituency's six wards backed local councillor Ken Strath against Kaufman, who went on to win at the Gorton GC by 60 votes to 40.

His base in Manchester is the Gorton Labour Club, a drinking club cum bastion of the old-guard right-wing which for five years in the mid-80s boasted a "No Travellers" sign.

The Gorton GC has 50 delegates from branches and 91 from trade unions and affiliated societies, including batches from the Labour Club, a local Fabian Society, the Gorton Co-op, the GMB, and the AEU.

There are also two delegates from the EETPU white collar section EESA; both purport to represent the General Office Branch based in EETPU HQ in Bromley, Kent. Their affiliation forms are personally signed by the Branch Secretary - one E.A. Hammond.

Kaufman himself is a delegate to the Gorton GC from the Newcastle upon Tyne Staff Branch of the GMB.

In the 1989 reselection John Nicholson, ex-deputy leader of Manchester City Council, was nominated by two Gorton wards, but Kaufman's supporters on the GC voted to offer local party members a shortlist of one - Gerald Kaufman.

In response to complaints from the left, Joyce Gould sent a missive to all local members telling them that a "planned campaign to canvass members to register a 'no' vote" in the affirmative ballot on the shortlist of one was "a breach of the rules...and may be a subject of further action."

Kaufman won his affirmative ballot, though the result was hardly a ringing vote of confidence. About 200 of Gorton's 1000 members bothered to participate.

Both in Manchester and in the House Kaufman is regarded as personally unpleasant and quite loathesome.

Constituency close-up

*Local activist **Hyder Prodhan** lifts the lid off **Barrow and Furness CLP** in Cumbria.*

Barrow and Furness constituency is dominated by Vickers Shipbuilding Engineering Limited, which employs some 12,000 workers at its shipyard. The company also owns Cammel Laird in Birkenhead, which has just been put up for sale, threatening thousands of jobs.

At the Barrow yard 550 jobs are to go, including 220 by compulsory redundancy, the result of VSEL management's refusal to listen to the workforce's demands to diversify production following the thaw in the Cold War.

To resist the job losses the workers will need to show the same fight as in their eleven week strike in 1988, which was sparked by a dispute over fixed vs. floating holidays but was really about management's determination to smash the unions.

Local politics changed dramatically at the 83 general election when Labour lost the parliamentary seat for the first time since the 30s to the Tories. Ex-cabinet minister Albert Booth was defeated by rabid right-winger Cecil 'Slumlord' Franks.

In 87, Franks was re-elected on a "vote Labour, they'll scrap Trident, you'll be on the dole" platform.

In the County Council elections in 89, Labour won seven out of thirteen Barrow and Furness seats.

Given Barrow's class make-up, this result is not nearly good enough.

The local party has some 300 members but only a pitiful 10-15 activists, making campaigning and elections extremely difficult.

The Borough council is dominated by a soft left/centre coalition but also has a strong right-wing presence. Though several Labour councillors are refusing to pay the £328 Poll Tax, none voted against it in council nor are any active in the Barrow Campaign Against the Poll Tax.

Last summer the Campaign met the Labour Group to demand a pledge to refuse to prosecute non-payers. Amid great confusion at Labour Group a motion to that effect was passed. Headlines in the local papers ("Poll Tax: Labour - we won't make you pay") caused consternation in the local party and resulted in a visit from Joyce Gould. She was reassured by the local party that Labour would make people pay and went away happy.

However, continued pressure did result in the Labour group passing another motion pledging not to use bailiffs.

Class collaborationist New Realism has had a debilitating effect within the CLP which has not reached its quorum of 12 in four months. Political debate of any kind is a rarity.

A number of leading party activists



are ex-CP members and extremely anti-Trotskyist. These people joined with younger Party members in the early and mid 80s to take control of the local party away from an extreme right wing clique of councillors. Later a disgruntled collection of ex-Mayors formed a breakaway "Original Labour Party" and were expelled from the Party after standing against official Labour candidates.

Production-line Kinnockite John Hutton was selected as PPC with 70% of the electoral college from a weak shortlist of two. In his selection speech Hutton delivered a vicious attack on the left and since then has alienated soft left supporters by refusing to listen to the CLP's views on (among other things) the appointment of an election agent.

Hutton is now "minded" by a Regional Officer who has been seen making notes on Barrow Party members - preparing for future expulsions?

The local trade union movement is weak, dominated by the VSEL unions which are frozen under bureaucratic right-wing control - they consider the local Labour Party too left wing!

A Trades Council does exist, dominated by the CPB and quite supportive of the anti-Poll Tax campaign. There are also active branches of Anti-Apartheid and CND, which is planning a meeting on the Gulf.

The local Tories are weak on the ground. Tory activists, ever eager to serve the ruling class, have to double up as county and borough councillors. MP Cecil Franks has described the unemployed as "the dross of society" and Poll Tax protesters as "scum". This idle lout is rarely seen in Barrow, no doubt terrified of what Barrow's working class would say to him if they ever had the misfortune to find him. His party's success in Barrow is due entirely to Labour's failures.

As recession hits Barrow and poverty and unemployment rise, the local working class will demand that the Labour Party takes up the fight for socialist answers to capitalism's crisis. They will demand that Labour councillors use their majority to defend their class - not to comply with New Realist demands for 'respectability' and 'legality'.

Marxists in Barrow need to fight inside the Labour Party and the unions to mobilise workers against the Tories and to ensure that when the working class struggles, the Labour Party struggles with it.

This is the first of a regular series focusing on Constituency Labour Parties around the country. Why not send us a pen portrait of your CLP? At least you'll be able to get your own back!

Limbering up for Labour '91

"Campaigning for socialist policies in the Labour Party is a year-round exercise," CLPD's Pete Willsman told ***Jane Wells.*** *If we want our voices heard in Brighton this autumn, we have to get stuck in now...*

With recent Labour conferences so boring and policy decisions so bad, comrades might be forgiven for thinking that once a year is more than enough. Unfortunately, Labour's leaders are only too willing to oblige - for the worst reasons - by proposing to hold conference every other year, as a prelude to doing away with it altogether.

With the Conference Arrangements Committee already laying plays for Brighton 91, the left has to be quick off the mark - and determined to make its voice heard.

The Labour Party Socialists AGM, held shortly after Labour's 1990 conference, outlined priorities for 1991, including: opposition to the witch-hunt, opposition to Tory anti-union laws, support for lesbian and gay rights and autonomous organisation for women, black people and youth in the Party, and opposition to war in the Gulf.

The key here is consistent and systematic organisation of the left within the Party, at the same time turning outwards to link up with campaigns on the Poll Tax, the Gulf, etc.

On many issues LPS will be working alongside the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. Assistant Secretary Pete Willsman told *Labour Briefing* that CLPD's immediate priorities include:

* Safeguarding the rights of CLPs against NEC proposals to restructure conference;

* Defending mandatory reselection for parliamentary candidates;

* Establishing women-only shortlists when a sitting MP retires until half of all Labour MPs are women;

* Opposing proportional representation through a broad-based, single issue campaign involving MEPs, MPs, unions, local councillors and CLPs. The Socialist Campaign Group agreed in November to support an anti-PR initiative and to approach MEPs for a joint campaign.

Pete pointed out : "Campaigning for socialist policies in the Labour Party is a year round exercise. The balance sheet of each year's conference hits and misses usually gives a good indication of what needs to be done next time round, so we start straight away.

"At the regional conferences this year we're pushing model resolutions opposing proportional representation, the 'trigger mechanism' in reselection, calling for recorded voting on the NEC, and safeguarding the right of CLPs to make direct submissions to annual conference."

Meanwhile, CLPD's sister organisations in Labour Left Liaison are also promoting their own resolutions, which mainly build on the left's gains at the 1990 conference.

Black Sections are calling for Black Socialist Societies, approved last year, to be established locally and nationally. The Women's Action Committee are arguing that quotas for women's representation need to be implemented, again throughout the movement from local to national level, and that the National Conference of Labour Women be given the right to elect the women's NEC places.

Cuts in defence spending and Irish unification are also among model resolutions being circulated.

Labour Briefing supporters, keen to see a strategy that links activists in the unions and campaigns with the fight in the Labour Party, will be playing a key role in LPS's campaigning work, joining forces with other socialists fighting in and out of the Party, building on *Briefing's* tradition of non-sectarian, class struggle politics.

Labour Party Socialists

Everyone on the Labour left agrees we need to rebuild ourselves, but just how we do that remains controversial.

Labour Party Socialists has promoted a "twin-track" approach: turning the Labour Party outwards towards campaigns and industrial struggles, linking those struggles to the fight for leadership within the Party, and thereby replenishing the Labour left.

But within LPS, there are different interpretations of the "twin-track" approach. These have surfaced in the debate around the newspaper *Socialist*.

Socialist Outlook, a key force behind *Socialist*, wants to subordinate Labour Party work to the task of creating what it calls a "class struggle left-wing", of which the Labour left is merely one component along with independent socialists and lefts in other political parties (Plaid Cymru, Greens, Scottish Socialist Party, etc.)

At its AGM in November, LPS instructed its incoming National Steering Committee to ensure that the need for the highest possible Labour vote in each and every parliamentary constituency is reflected "in all public initiatives undertaken, sponsored or supported by Labour Party Socialists".

LPS will now only sponsor *Socialist* if it gives an unequivocal commitment to backing Labour in the next general election.

Within the Labour Party itself, LPS is committed to work against the witch-hunt. "End the Ban", the campaign in defence of Socialist Organiser, should be supplemented by campaigning in defence of anti-Poll Tax councillors in Brighton and Liverpool and of dissident local parties in Tower Hamlets and the Wirral.

In addition to opposing assaults on our democratic rights we need to promote our own democratic agenda for Labour. To this end LPS has adopted a "Charter of Members' Rights" around which we should campaign in the coming year.

LPS's credibility on the Labour left (and in the unions) was strengthened by the AGM's decision to defend the block vote by fighting for its democratisation. This puts LPS alongside those fighting against the breaking of the trade union link and the "Social Democratisation" of the Labour Party.

Our stand on the block vote will undoubtedly boost our campaign to repeal all Tory anti-union laws. LPS is organising with the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee to take the issue into this year's trade union conferences.

LPS is also determined to raise socialist politics within the general election campaign. It is committed to producing a pamphlet arguing for people to "Vote Labour and Keep Up the Fight".

The key external campaigning priorities for LPS will be the Poll Tax and the Gulf. These struggles need to be given a sharp Labour Party edge and real labour movement leadership.

by Bryn Griffiths, Tottenham CLP

Inside Hodge's Islington

Our Briefing mole reports that all is not as it seems in the 'Jewel in the Crown' of New Realism, the Borough of Islington in North London, whose long-serving Council Leader, Margaret Hodge, is the darling of Fleet Street feature writers.

MYTH: ISLINGTON DELIVERS SERVICES EFFICIENTLY

This year has seen the closure of two nurseries, an old people's home, and new charges for after school care for children. Vacancies are kept open for months to save money (social services is hard hit). 'Customer-led' services are all the rage but how do you have 'customer-led' child abuse work? Money is wasted on consultants. £4,000 was spent to discover why parents who could afford it preferred to send their children to private schools.

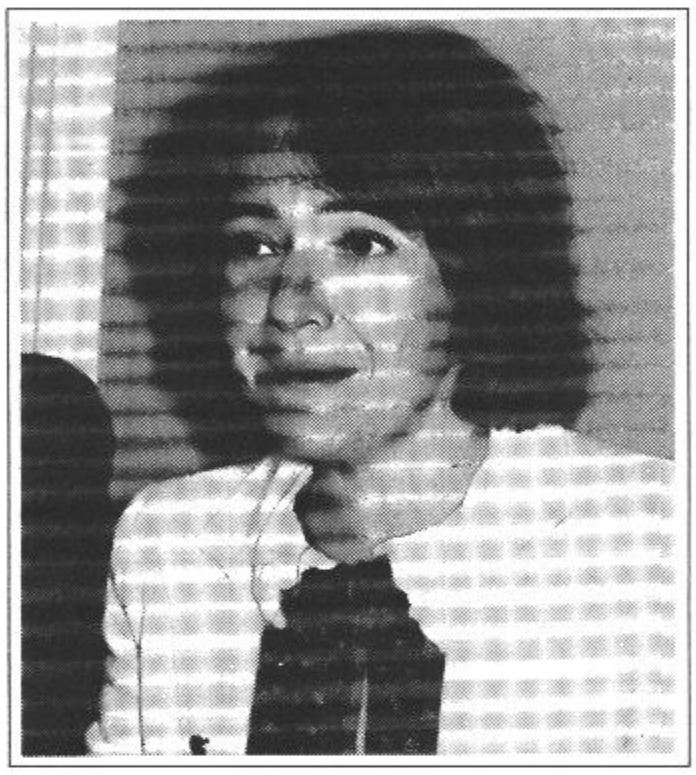
MYTH: ISLINGTON HAS DECENTRALISED SERVICES

Neighbourhood offices are being reduced from 24 to 20, and may be further reduced to 16. The sole reason for this cut is financial, but as always in Islington, it is presented as a means of delivering services better. It is supposed to save £250,000 per year, but the cost of relocating the services will be between £400,000 and £800,000 next year. Meanwhile, real power remains at the Town Hall. Neighbourhood forums have no power and therefore nobody takes them seriously.

MYTH: ISLINGTON'S BUDGET IS UNDER CONTROL

The 1990/91 budget deliberately underestimated the numbers of homeless families and the inflation rate in order to avoid Poll Tax capping. Islington was still Poll Tax capped, and had to cut £3.7 million from its budget as a result - then had to find another £5 million cuts to compensate for the under-estimates. Now the capital programme is £9m overspent so all spending has been frozen. That is not careful, planned budgeting.

Each year, Islington Council predicts financial disaster due to the Tory cuts, and each year survives by shaving a little more from its budget. The voters are told one day that the situation is disastrous and the next that the Council delivers efficient services.



MYTH: HODGE RUNS A DEMOCRATIC, OPEN COUNCIL AND PARTY

Islington is effectively a one-party state. That should give Labour the freedom to air differences in public. Yet whenever the left attempts to put resolutions or ask questions in Council, it is silenced. In July a resolution on compulsory redundancies was deemed illegal and therefore out of order (backed up by a barrister's opinion costing thousands). Questions on the Poll Tax asked by non-paying councillors have been deemed not to be objective, and the councillors threatened with criminal proceedings. Disciplinary action is threatened whenever anyone succeeds in getting a resolution onto the council order paper that has not been approved by the leadership.

Islington South CLP supports the Council leadership. Islington North is critical and has passed motions supporting Poll Tax non-payment. Islington North recently invited Hodge to discuss the Council's financial policy. She decided she could only spare five minutes for the party and the invitation was therefore withdrawn. Hodge cannot abide criticism and smears opponents in the local press.

MYTH: ISLINGTON IS A MERITOCRACY

Hodge has been leader of Islington Council for eight years. She has therefore personally appointed most of the senior officers. They owe their jobs to her. Many of the newly-elected councillors regard the Council as a stepping stone to somewhere else. They are all desperate for the right job to put on their CV's; Hodge rewards anyone who is loyal to her with such a job. Patronage rules.

MYTH: ISLINGTON KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE STAFF RELATIONS

There has been a strike in Islington each year since the cuts began. The Council leadership categorise any group of workers striking for better pay or conditions as saboteurs, out to destroy socialist Islington. NALGO is portrayed as anti-Labour because it is not nationally affiliated; the leadership prefer the more docile NUPE.

MYTH: ISLINGTON SUPPORTS EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Islington is committed to its Women's Unit and Women's Committee and Margaret Hodge has fought hard to defend those against new right-wing male Councillors who want to abolish them. However, she regards all other equal opportunities as a threat. She disparages the Race Relations Committee and the black councillors. The Lesbian and Gay Committee, with no unit to back it up, is mere tokenism. Hodge cannot cope with people from working-class backgrounds. The left on the council consists mainly of working-class or black councillors, people with real experience of struggle. The right portray them as dupes of some mysterious left conspiracy, and as being slightly stupid.

MYTH: ISLINGTON CARES FOR PEOPLE WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO PAY THE POLL TAX

Islington Council is one of the most enthusiastic collectors of the Poll Tax in the country. The Council is requesting £75 costs from everyone who appears in Court to contest the Poll Tax summons. Hodge pronounced herself "delighted" that costs were imposed.

MYTH: MARGARET HODGE IS A 'LITTLE PERSON'

Hodge has been Leader of the ALA since it was set up in 1985. Since 1986 she has been a key 'strategist' in all Labour's electoral efforts in London (always escaping blame for poor results). Her ambitions reach beyond Islington - she wants to be London supremo. Her excellent links with Walworth Rd and the Leader's office should help her on her way.

Labour abstains on Ealing rent rise

On November 27th, the day that John Major effectively became Prime Minister, Ealing's Tory council raised its rents by 38.6%. Last May, Labour lost every seat in Northolt, which is almost exclusively made up of council estates. They also lost seats in the other wards with concentrations of council housing, leaving the Tories with a majority of ten.

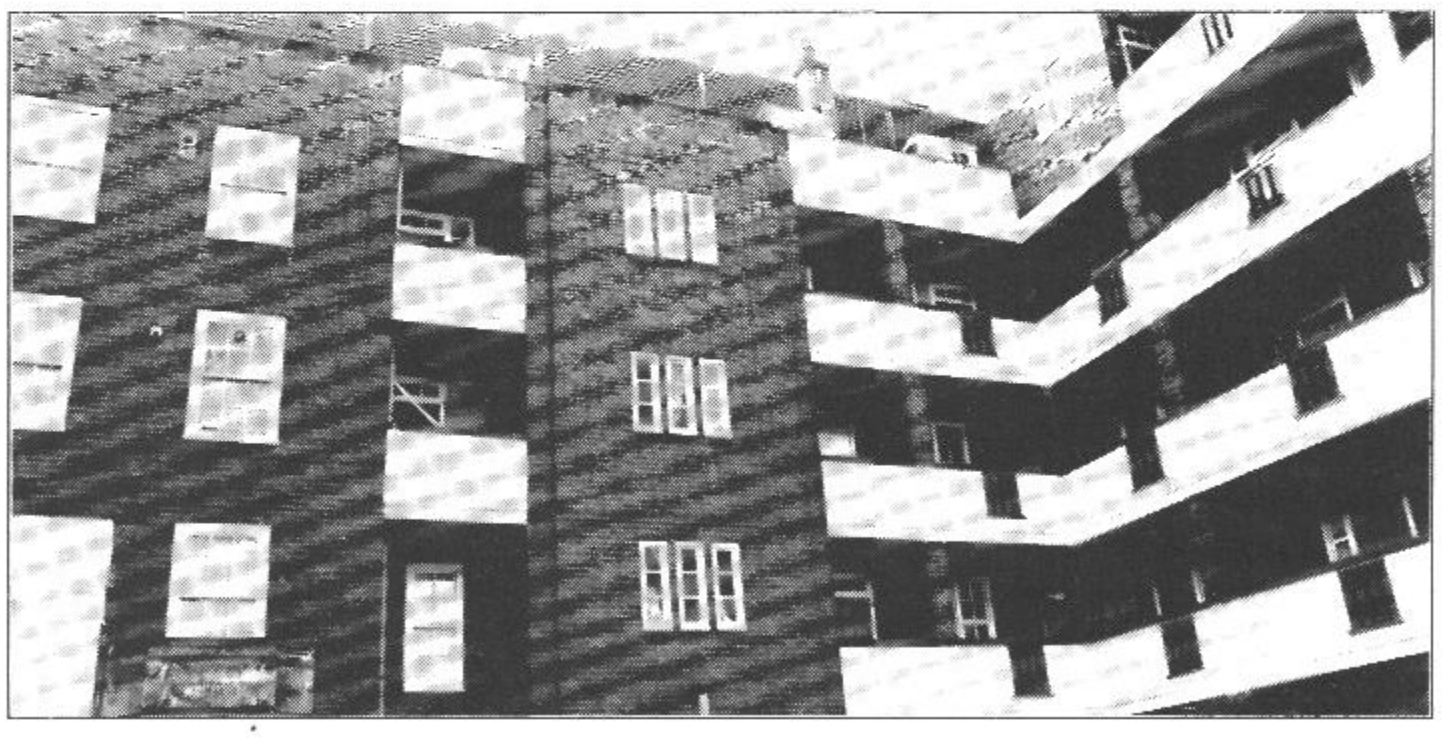
The Tories claim the massive rent rise was due to the council housing budget facing an £11 million deficit. They said that they could only balance the H.R.A. by inflicting rent rises of £17 a week and more on council tenants, with an additional rise due in April.

What was Labour's response? Did they have a field day? Did they shout Con trick? Did they win the debate by pointing out that the budget was projected to balance when Labour were running the council and it was only the Tories' incompetence or hatred of council housing that was responsible for the rent rises?

Did they point out that by stopping private leasing for the homeless, the Tories have thrown away £7 million? Did the Ealing Labour councillors even realise that the Tory rent rise would go nowhere near balancing the 1991 budget? Did they hell! These comrades, these friends of council tenants, decided to *abstain* .

Why? It seems they thought they would be breaking the law if they voted against the rent rise. Their advice was that they could be surcharged for not voting for a legal budget. Where did they get this advice? From the Tories - in the shape of the Deputy Chief Executive Gillian Guy.

by our Ealing mole, Tim Radford



London councils: Major concessions?

The Tories are waking up to the reality that the Poll Tax is proving impossible to collect in Inner London.

Recently announced figures for Rate Support Grant, the government's contribution to Town Hall budgets, give dramatic increases to Inner London boroughs.

In Hackney, the government has increased RSG by £292 per adult, and by £234 in neighbouring Islington.

These are real concessions to the Poll Tax non-payment campaigns.

Yet the bitter irony is that Labour London will be faced with higher Poll Tax bills and 'no-growth' or cuts budgets for 1991/2.

Government spending limits will mean cuts, varying from an estimated 6% in Greenwich to 1% in Hackney.

Only Newham, of Labour's London town halls, has been given a spending limit above the rate of inflation.

Poll Tax bills will rise steeply, possibly to £560 in Haringey.

Tory London will fare much better. Most Tory councils will set growth budgets and lower Poll Tax bills.

Westminster's budget could be up by 21% with Poll Tax bills reduced to £44!

The majority of Tory MPs want to abolish the Poll Tax but fear that announcement of abolition will fuel the non-payment campaign.

In the short term their strategy is to project a "caring image", dishing out money to hard pressed inner-city boroughs.

They will also continue to blame high Poll Tax bills on "inefficient" and "wasteful" Labour authorities. Hence, the political importance of heavy subsidies to Wandsworth and Westminster.

Meanwhile, the right wing Labour leaderships in London's town halls continue to comply with Tory diktats. Their twin objectives are to collect the Poll Tax at all costs and to avoid the Poll Tax cap next year.

The zeal of Labour authorities in collecting the Poll Tax is astonishing. In the courts, they insist on bailiffs to enforce liability orders, rather than distraint of earnings or benefit or any other softer options. The residents of Shoreditch in East London are witness to the surreal spectacle of Securicor vans in the streets trying to collect Poll Tax from passing pedestrians.

David Blunkett's appeal to Labour Councils to go back to the Tories and ask them where cuts can be made is falling on deaf ears. The Labour right's sole concern is to keep political control of ever-shrinking Town Hall budgets. Anything which jeopardizes that control is dismissed as gesture politics.

Of course they ritually denounce the Poll Tax and Tory cuts. Yet they exhort everybody to cough up, accept cuts, and sleep it off until a general election returns a Labour government.

They haven't noticed that millions of Poll Tax non-payers are abolishing the Poll Tax without waiting for Neil to arrive at No. 10.

by Paul Foley, Hackney Councillor.

Bailiffs

The National Consumer Council has called for stricter controls over bailiffs. It has produced a report documenting abuses by bailiffs, including charging £100 to collect a debt of £40 and telling neighbours about people's unpaid Court fines. One Council sent bailiffs to collect rate arrears from a psychiatric patient just discharged from hospital living on invalidity income of £52.80 per week and waiting to get her housing benefit which would cover the arrears.

Bailiffs are not only an inhumane means of collecting debts; they are also inefficient. Labour Councils should realise that the financial and social costs of bailiffs are much higher than the small amounts of Poll Tax they will recover.

My day in court

By Keith Veness, Agent, Islington North CLP

Our Constituency must hold some sort of record in Poll Tax defiance - our non-payers include the MP, the Mayor, a dozen councillors and most of the CLP officers - myself included.

The fickle finger of fate determined that I was one of the first recipients of a summons to explain myself at Highbury Magistrates Court. I duly rolled up scarcely knowing what a hilarious afternoon lay in store.

Magistrates courts on Poll Tax days resemble the first day of the Oxford Street 'sales' or the rush to get into Centre Court at Wimbledon. Hundreds of people mill around without any idea of who to speak to or what is going on. Activists from the anti-Poll Tax group tried to make speeches but were swept away in the tide of humanity engulfing the lobby in front of the courts.

When some sort of order was restored by a ferocious looking female court usher bellowing names, we realised that everyone was to be dealt with in batches.

Point to remember - Get into the second batch so you can see what happens to batch one.

Included in the first batch was Talal Karim, non-paying councillor and Black Section activist. Talal was nervous but wanted to be dealt with early as he had a NUPE meeting later in the afternoon.

The first hysterical moment was the entry of the woman magistrate - the spitting image of Margaret Hodge, down to glasses and hairstyle. It was only after her name was read out that we were reassured our Council Leader was not 'moonlighting'.

Point to remember - Always call the beak 'Ma'am' or 'Sir' - this allows you to make outrageous points without being in contempt.

Faced with an Asian man in his 30s, the magistrate assumed he was an illiterate shopkeeper and, like all English people confronted with foreigners, decided the best way to communicate with Talal was to bellow at the top of her voice!

The Council's barrister blew it by pointedly referring to Talal as 'Councillor Karim'. The attitude of the bench changed. No longer the kindly 'District Commissioner' talking to a backward local, she interrupted Talal repeatedly with the refrain of 'No Political Speeches!'.



Anti-Poll Tax demo, March 31st, 1990. Photo: Dan Carter

Point to remember - This is a civil court. You are judged on 'balance of probabilities', which means you'll get a liability order.

Waiting outside for my big moment, I met some old friends. A very large Scots bloke called George, who was into heavy drinking and GBH, whom I hadn't seen for ten years, was in my batch. So was a young black kid, William, who I knew from my days as a housing caretaker when his specialities were lift vandalism and stolen hair-driers. He made my day by saying 'Cha - you here? I thought you were respectable!'.

On being herded into court, we were sorted into 'can't pay' and 'won't pay' categories. The 'can't pays' were ushered out to see 'the nice rebate people from the Council' but not before being given liability orders.

Point to remember - Don't plead poverty - you'll get an order anyway!

The hard core were invited to speak. A student objected to the 'mass trial' nature of the proceedings and drew a parallel with medieval assizes where twelve peasants had to testify to carry weight against one Lord or Squire! The magistrate said there were precedents - so I asked her to read them out.

Point to remember - Challenge all rulings - you won't win most of them but it wastes an inordinate amount of time!

I hung my own case on the mispelling of my name. I was listed as D.VENNESS. I spoke of my Lombard and Venetian ancestry, of how the only spelling in the phone book was with one 'N' and not two, etc. This sort of defence is useful as the court can hardly make a liability order against someone who does not exist. Later I was able to resort to demagoguery by threatening that if an order was given against D.Venness and a bailiff appeared at my place, I would be free to allow my rottweiler to tear his leg off. The beak, unaware that we have seven cats and no rottweilers, seemed most concerned.

We were asked whether we wished to make any other points before judgement. You can either give evidence on oath or make a statement. You can be cross-examined on the former but not the latter. Most people therefore opted to make a statement. However, if you do that you are stopped from making political points. A white South African woman started to say that even her

own repressive government in the Transvaal had abolished the 'hut-tax' and 'head-tax' after riots in 1938, but she was not allowed to finish. In contrast, by 'going into the box', I was allowed to speak for 45 minutes and covered everything.

Point to remember - Always give evidence on oath. It's your chance to hit back!

What about 'McKenzie Friends'? The law states you may be advised by a 'quiet friend' in Court. There is currently a lot of debate about this. A 'McKenzie' cannot represent you or speak for you but she or he can be quite useful.

Our magistrate's rule-of-thumb was that you could have a McKenzie if you looked worried or nervous. Talal Karim was refused one as soon as it was made clear he was a councillor. I was curtly told I was doing alright on my own. I argued for twenty minutes that I was entitled to a McKenzie Friend. I cited a case in Leicester that has gone to appeal. The magistrate backed down. Initially she tried to say we all had to have the same one who'd already acted for someone else. I objected, using the argument that I didn't know the man - he might be a mass murderer for all I knew!

I won my point and was allowed to have Liz Davies in court. Liz is a local councillor (and Co-Chair of Briefing!) and is as quiet and thoughtful as I am noisy and impetuous. Her advice was invaluable. It is useful to have someone to restrain as well as encourage. Liz was also able to draft my 'speech from the dock' whilst I was cross-examining befuddled council bureaucrats and arguing with the magistrate.

Point to remember - Get a good 'McKenzie Friend' to advise - and argue like mad to get her/him into court with you.

We kept the court sitting until 8.20pm. Is this a record? The magistrate looked totally shattered but the outcome was never in doubt. On the 'balance of probabilities', you cannot win. I was told that 'K.VENESS' and 'D.VENNESS' were 'probably' the same person and a new (correct) demand was to be issued at the same time as my liability order.

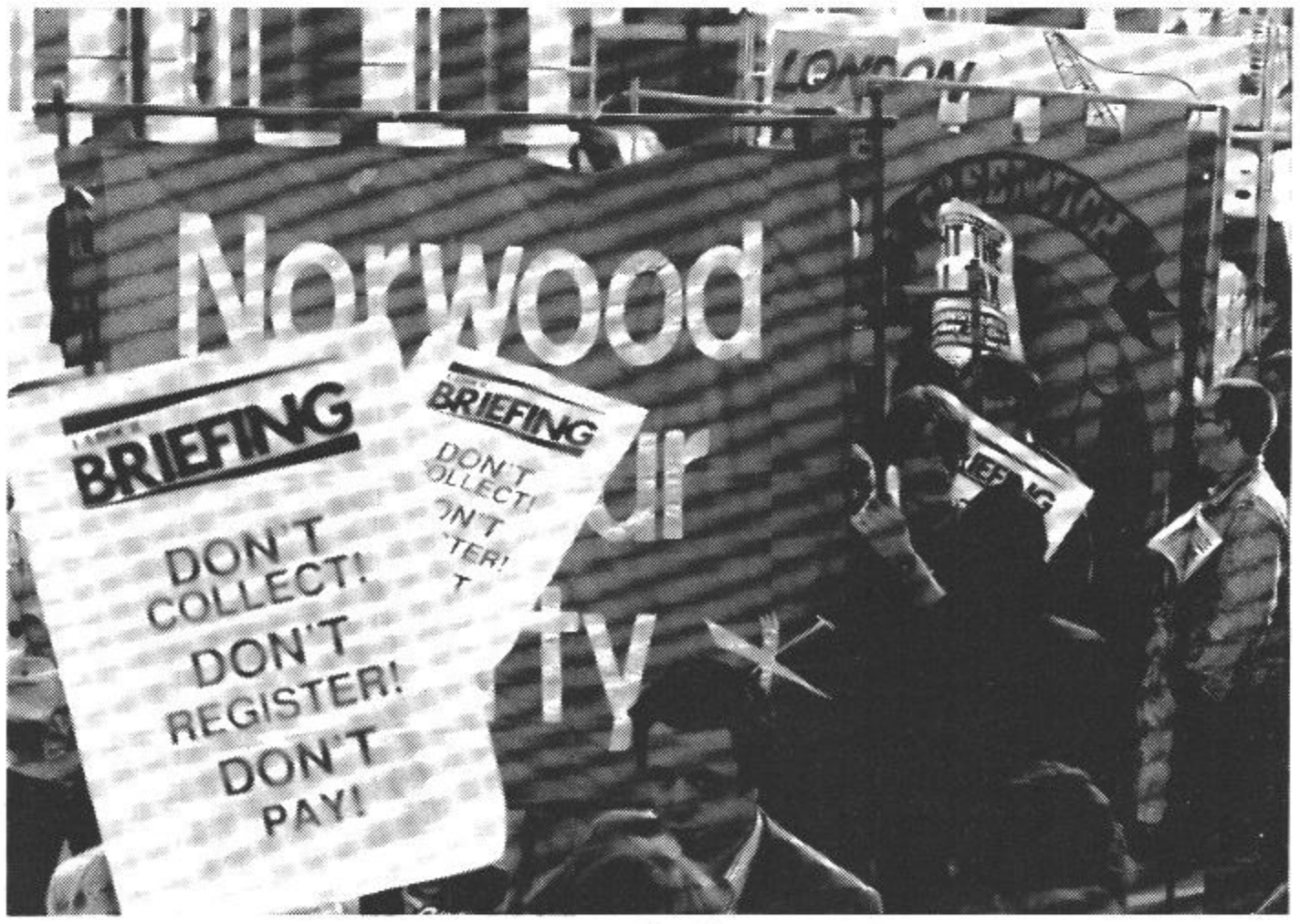
If every case took the same time as mine it would be 1998 before Islington got all its liability orders. Turn up and argue your case. This is only the start of the battle and delaying tactics pay off. Islington Council (to its shame) is one of only two councils to use a barrister to up the cost. The other is Labour Newham!

However, they can only add the cost to your bill - which you aren't paying anyway! Interestingly enough even the magistrate and the parasite acting for Islington Council called it a 'Poll Tax' rather than 'Community Charge'.

My little escapade, I like to think, helped put another small nail in its coffin!

COUNCILLORS AGAINST THE POLL TAX

MODEL RESOLUTION:
This Council believes:
1.That the poll tax can and should be abolished within 3 months;
2.That there should be an immediate amnesty for all those who have not paid the tax;
3.That bailiffs will not be used to enforce non-payment of the tax.'
For more infomation:
Councillor Liz Davies, Islington Town Hall, Upper St, London N1
071 359 3043



Marching against Poll Tax. Photo Nick Hazlewood

When in court remember...

*** The more time it takes the court to deal with you, the more someone else's case will be delayed.**
*** Always turn up. If you don't appear, a liability order will definitely be made against you.**
*** Make sure you cross-examine the council witnesses. If you will be presenting questions of fact in your defence, such as that the council got your name wrong, you must put them to the council witnesses in cross-examination, eg. 'I suggest to you my name is in fact Irene Bloggs'...**
*** You have the opportunity to give evidence in the witness box *and* to sum up your case. It may sound as though you have to choose one or the other; in fact, you have a right to give evidence first and then sum up, making any points you wish. But if you are raising questions of fact in your defence, you must give them in evidence.**
*** If you contest the case, you will be charged additional costs, varying from £8 to £70. You will be given the opportunity to make representations on costs. Charging £70 for contesting is designed to deter people from exercising their legal rights and you should say so.**
*** Don't be scared; enjoy your day in court!**

NALGO Christmas cop out

NALGO's National Local Government Committee played Bob Cratchitt to the employers' Ebenezer Scrooge in a pantomime version of the annual non-dispute over London Weighting last month.

After months of bluster about a claim for a general London Weighting of £3,000, a settlement was agreed which leaves Inner London with £1884 and Outer London with £999. On top of the NALGO NEC's move away from a flat-rate national pay claim, the paltry settlement on London Weighting represents yet another blow to low-paid members.

This is, however, no simple tale of union leadership sell-out. Their sorry performance was matched by the equally sorry results of a canvass of London branches to determine the level of support for industrial action.

In spite of the carrot of full strike pay for workers taking selective action, NALGO members seem so fixated by the threats posed by Poll Tax capping and cuts that they have hardly even noticed the need for a fight around London Weighting.

Building struggles around "bread and butter" issues in conjunction with forging links to the Anti-Poll Tax movement is the best way to strengthen opposition to the pusillanimity of NALGO's national leaders.

by Jon Rogers
Chair, Lambeth NALGO



Nalgo members take action Photo: Bryan James

Oil Workers In London

The Offshore Industries Liason Committee (OILC), which brings together workers in the seven trades unions fighting to organise the North Sea oil platforms, toured workplaces in London and the Home Counties in December. The speakers addressed meetings in Oxford, Slough and Crawley as well as dozens of union branches, trades councils and factory-gate meetings in London. One of the union reps told BRIEFING: "Three things are crucial now to win the fight for recognition: forcing the TUC to hold the recognition ballot earlier than April, raising sufficient funds to keep the victimised unionists in the battle and exerting pressure on the oil companies (particularly Shell) to settle." For more details, contact OILC, c/o 52 Guild Street, Aberdeen, Scotland, AB1 2NB.

TUC attacks trades councils.

The TUC unveiled a cuts package in the autumn that had right wing Labour councils drooling with envy. In an attempt to protect the budgets of various largely ineffective 'departments' at Congress House, the General Council agreed to abolish the Annual Conference of Trades Councils and all regional trades council organisations and to cease funding a number of unemployed centres and union support units. Although the TGWU, MSF, UCATT and NALGO voted against the cuts, the package was agreed by 24 to 15. No union had any mandate for these cuts which are simply an attack on rank-and-file organisations meeting locally outside the control of bureaucrats. The wretched Norman Willis justified this outrage by wimpering, 'Most trades councils are run by left wing organisations'. A conference of trades council delegates was held in Manchester in December to organise a fightback - details soon.

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Engineers gear up for battle - maybe

The AEU has voted to establish a strike fund of up to £1,000,000 from a levy of its 750,000 members in order to back up action for a 35 hour week. Gavin Laird, General Secretary (and a Governor of the Bank of England), said, "We intend to build up our financial strength by 1995 to prepare for disputes". The following day he announced that he had become a "non-executive director" of GEC Scotland Ltd. Let's hope this isn't one of the companies selected for early action!

150 building workers killed a year.

John Dickens *(UCATT member and Chair of Hackney Council's Joint Shop Stewards Committee) reviews "Slaughter on Britain's Building Sites" by Conor Foley, published by Connolly Publications, December 1990.*

Every trades unionist and Labour Party member should read this booklet, which catalogues the appalling loss of life and massive injuries and accidents now occuring in building and construction. Most are avoidable and are products of poor training, shoddy safety standards and private greed.

Tory legislation and economic policy and cuts have given the"cowboys" of the industry virtual "carte blanche" . Only organised trades union sites with elected safety reps can begin to turn this around. Sadly, at present, most union activity goes into fighting for compensation from employers as tight-fisted as they are careless.

Over 150 building workers are killed on site and thousands more die from work-related diseases every year. Union activists involved in the Construction Safety Campaign from UCATT, TGWU , EPIU and a number of other unions have fought gamely to expose these outrages and get action to put them right. They deserve our support . Reading this pamphlet is a good place to start.

Copies of the pamphlet are available from: CSC, c/o Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Centre, Unit D, Great Eastern Enterprise, Mill Harbour, London E.14 9XP.

NUPE Recall Conference - The receiver cometh !

NUPE's membership has held up better than most (now down from a high of 700,000 to just over 600,000) but the union has contrived to get itself into a financial mess anyway. Last year's National Conference in Scarborough was confronted with a leadership package that would have resulted in a massive "hike" in subscriptions whilst cutting money for shop stewards and lay officials. There were few equivalent cuts in HQ and certainly none for brothers Bickerstaffe and Sawyer. An outraged rank-and-file slung out the proposals and voted in a more modest subs increase and no cuts in monies to branches. Now the leadership have decided to resubmit the original rejected proposals to a special "Recall Conference" in London on 9th February. Branches submitting motions comdemning this manoeuvre have had them ruled out of order as a panicky leadership gears up to try to steamroller through its proposals. Watch this space!

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Spanish Socialists break union link

Labour's Spanish 'sister' party, Felipe Gonzalez' PSOE, has dropped its rule that party members should also be members of trade unions. Never again, says Gonzalez, will unions and party decide jointly the programme of government. He says he is merely"following the example of the British Labour Party." Y Viva Espana.

NUR + NUS = RMT?

Last autumn saw two "men" leave the trade union movement - Seamen and Railwaymen - and the emergence of a new hybrid, the RMT - the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers.

Aside from keeping Jimmy Knapp on the TUC General Council, has it made any difference?

In practice rail and sea rank-and-file have been kept separate. The TUC and Labour Party Conferences saw separate delegations based on the old unions, with RMT officials doing their best to poison seafarers against railworker delegates. RMT district structures do not include seafarer branches.

Only at National Executive level do any links exist. There, the merger exposed the scandal of racist "no strike" deals being struck by NUS officials in return for payments to the union. "Pay us and we will keep our British members happy and won't organise the majority of (Asian) seafarers," seemed to be the union's appeal to employers.

The left in the NUR argued that merger should be supported - but with no illusions. Now the left must go on the offensive to make merger a positive development for the membership.

If we fail, the bureaucracy is lined up to impose the worst traditions of each of the old unions on the new merged one. In particular, there is a threat to scrap the healthy NUR tradition of limited-term full-time NEC members (3 years full-time, then back to the workplace) with "life" term part-time members. The latter will not have enough time to really do the job, but will be around the office just enough to get cosy with the full-time officials.

We should press for full integration at rank-and-file level. In particular, seafarers should be brought into the District Council structures and participate there in all decisions from day to day organisation to the election of AGM delegates.

by an RMT activist

New York printers defy cops, scabs

Police and scabs have been mobilised to bust a strike by 2600 printworkers at New York's *Daily News*. Management provoked the strike in October in blatant attempt to deunionise the firm; NYC Mayor Dinkins has mobilised police to escort scabs (among them many of New York's legion of homeless) and attack picketers. Union backing for the strike is solid across the city. A fight to the finish is expected.

On November 1st over 10,000 city and other employees came out in solidarity and joined a picket-line rally. Meanwhile, *Daily News* owners, Hoge and Co., have invested $40 million to recruit scabs and new management personnel.

'Fortress Europe' - white man's world

1992 will bring the 'free movement' of capital, goods and labour to the European Community. What are its implications for black people? ***Eddie Niles*** *of Labour Party Black Sections outlines the dangers.*



1992: More attacks on black people. Photo Tim Nolan

The EC has yet to introduce legislation outlawing racial discrimination. The draft European Charter of Social Rights is silent on the right to equality of treatment regardless of race, colour, or religion.

Increased freedom of movement for EC nationals will be in stark contrast to increasingly restrictive immigration controls for citizens of non-EC countries, asylum-seekers and the 15 million 'third-country' nationals resident in the EC. Already a picture of a nationalistic, defensive "Fortress Europe" is beginning to emerge.

The development of a common European immigration and refugee policy, based on the the most restrictive of current policies, will make it more and more difficult for non-EC nationals to enter any EC country. A 'Eurovisa' for nationals of non-EC countries may be introduced ; harmonisation of work permit regulations may lead to the spread of the guest-worker system with greater insecurity for all non-EC nationals; refugees and asylum seekers will face even greater problems in entering and settling in European countries.

Immigration checks at workplaces, schools, social security offices and by police in the street could become common, accompanied by identity cards and spot checks on people assumed to be illegal immigrants (which already happens in some European countries).

These measures will affect not only black visitors, refugees and asylum seekers, guest-workers and migrants, but also black people permanently settled in the EC who may even be EC citizens: as Sivanandan says , 'racism cannot tell one black from another, a citizen from an immigrant, an immigrant from a refugee, and views all Third World people as immigrants and all refugees as terrorists and drug dealers'.

The economic effects of 1992 will include higher unemployment, bound to hit black people hard. Many industries in which black people are concentrated are likely to face mergers, plant closures, takeovers and widespread restructuring.

Two European Directives have been issued requiring tendering for public sector works valued over £3 million to be opened to all European firms, without regard to any equal opportunities or contract compliance considerations.

DLOs employing relatively high numbers of black people will have to compete with European firms using underpaid migrant labour. UK contractors will import low-paid 'Euro-labour', leading to job losses or levelling down of wages in the UK.

Current proposals on harmonisation and mutual recognition of EC professional and vocational qualifications also raise race equality issues. Holders of qualifications in one EC country will be able to apply to have their qualifications recognised in another EC country by completion of an application to the 'competent authority' in the state in which the applicant intends to practice.

Holders of non-EC qualifications will have to submit evidence of three- year professional experience, certified by the EC state which first recognised the third country diploma.

This will discriminate against people educated and trained in non-EC countries. Following recent events in Eastern Europe, a new cheap labour pool has emerged which will once again be at the expense of black workers.

Black people view 1992 with trepidation and fear. We have to develop wider awareness of these issues, and campaign for institutional changes at European, national and local levels to deal with them.

Remember: the 1976 Race Relations Act may be inadequate, but there is still no equivalent law in any other European country.

Solidarity with Turkish miners

Hundreds of Kurdish and Turkish workers in Hackney took action in solidarity with the two million strong general strike held in Turkey on 3rd January.

48,000 miners have been on strike in the biggest industrial action since the installation of the military junta in 1980. Despite being declared illegal by the regime, the general strike was the most effective action seen in the country in the last decade. The implications for the Turkish government in the build-up to war in the Gulf (the Iraqi-Turkish border and oil pipeline links are of considerable strategic importance) are immense.

The strike action by Kurdish and Turkish workers in Hackney was brutally attacked by the local police. Sixty strikers were arrested and eight hospitalised. The arrests took place outside the Halkevi Community Centre and again outside the notorious Stoke Newington Police Station where strikers were demanding the release of those arrested earlier in the day.

A Solidarity Committee With Striking Miners in Turkey has been established. "I believe *Labour Briefing* can contribute to the committee's activities in many ways," Ali Ece [one of its activists] told us, "since what we need is to get in touch with the labour movement and trade unions."

Already resolutions have been passed by the Hackney Trades Union Council and by local NUPE and TGWU organisations donating cash and electing delegates to the committee. Peter Heathfield from the NUM has written expressing his support for the struggle of the Turkish mineworkers. Kurdish and Turkish workers and their organisations in Britain have a history of support for labour movement activities and *Briefing* urges its readers to take immediate action in solidarity with both the miners in Turkey and the Kurdish and Turkish organisations in the UK.

Phone the Solidarity Committee on 071-241-0943 or write c/o 489 Kingsland Road, Dalston, London E.8 4AU. Fax messages of solidarity urgently to "Genel Maden Is", Sendikasi, Zonguldak, Turkey on 010-90-381-36635. Donations may be made direct to "SCWSMT", Halifax Building Society, 81 Kingsland Road, London E.8 [Sort code : 11-02-26 A/c number 00184847].

Ghana

The military dictatorship in Ghana has unleashed a war of repression against organised labour.

The most recent example is the mass dismissal of all unionised workers at the Ghanaian-Italian Petroleum Refinery in Tema. Workers at the factory had been protesting against mismanagement and corruption.

According to the factory's Chief Executive, a World Bank consultant had recommended "restructuring" and 50% cuts in the workforce as the conditions for a loan to rehabilitate the refinery.

There are also political motives for the action. The refinery workers are among the most militant and class conscious in Ghana and are strongly opposed to the regime's economic policies.

The refinery management, obviously directed by the government, has responded to the workers' peaceful demands with aggression, the only language the government knows.

What kind of regime is it that will not only callously dismiss workers, but then go on to order the workers' dependents to leave the company clinic at gunpoint?

The Ghana Solidarity Campaign calls on all progressive forces to demand the reinstatement of the dismissed workers and the resumption of negotiations over the workers' grievances. Send protest letters to the Ghana High Commission in London, 13 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PR. Contact the Ghana Solidarity Campaign at Box 5, 124 Vassall Road, London SW9 6BJ.

Karanjit

Kiranjit Ahluwalia is an Asian woman systematically beaten and tortured by a violently psychotic husband. In desperation she killed him.

She received a life sentence and is currently in prison. Yet husbands who kill their wives often plead mitigation and get reduced sentences. The "Free Kiranjit Ahluwalia Campaign" needs cash and political support. Contact the Campaign for Kiranjit, c/o Southall Black Sisters, 52 Norwood Road, Southall, Middx. Tel 081-571-9595.

Bacton 4

The campaign to organise London's sweatshops received a boost with the acquittal of four Kurdish TGWU members arrested last year at a picket of Bacton Fashions in Stoke Newington in North London. The four, Serdar Guccuk, Haydar Guccuk, Rizvan Sakar and Tekin Kartel, were among a number of Turkish and Kurdish workers who joined the TGWU 1/1312 North London Textiles branch determined to put an end to super-exploitation in the garment industry.

The four were accused by the notorious Stoke Newington police of violent behaviour towards scabs going in to work in the course of a dispute over union recognition at the factory. After their acquittal at Snaresbrook Crown Court, the four announced they will sue police for wrongful arrest and injuries received.

If you can help with the "Organise the Sweatshops" Campaign, contact Hackney TUSU, 489 Kingsland Rd., Dalston, London E8, Tel 071-249-8086.

Tottenham three must go free

***Shaun Waterman** reports the latest moves in the long struggle to free the three innocent men convicted of killing PC Blakelock in the aftermath of the Broadwater Farm disturbances.*

On Tuesday, December 4th, the Home Secretary provided a written answer to a question put down by Michael Irvine, Tory MP for Ipswich. The subject was the conviction, on confessional evidence alone, of Mark Braithwaite, Engin Raghip and Winston Silcott for the killing of PC Keith Blakelock during the 1985 Broadwater Farm disturbances.

Irvine's sudden interest in the welfare of the Tottenham Three is easily explained; his question was merely a device to enable the Home Secretary to announce as quietly as possible his decision to refer Engin Raghip's case back to the Court of Appeal.

This decision is the first official acknowledgement that any of the convictions are unsound. It is the fruit of years of hard campaigning by the convicted men, their families and supporters.

The Home Secretary said that he was sendng Engin's case back to the Appeal Court so that it could consider 'fresh material': namely, psychological evidence regarding Engin's state of mind under interrogation. This 'fresh material', however, only confirms evidence which the Law Lords refused to consider in 1988 when they turned down the original application for leave to appeal.

Quite how the courts will deal with this embarrassment may be clearer when we have seen their response to the collapse of the Crown's case against the Birmingham Six.

When the Home Secretary made the announcement about Engin he knew that before the week was out Mark Braithwaite's lawyers would be submitting similar 'new' evidence about Mark's state of mind under interrogation.

Mark is a claustrophobe. His symptoms in custody were so severe that at one point he was taken to hospital. The records of that hospital visit and of a recent examination in prison by a leading expert are now with the Home Office.

Winston is different. There never was any evidence against him, not even the 'confessions' that the police bullied out of Mark and Engin. The whole case against him would have taken less than ten minutes to present had he been tried on his own.

The 'record' of the interview in which he allegedly 'adopted a guilty posture' was never signed. Paradoxically, undermining the case against him is harder precisely because it is so insubstantial.

The Tottenham Three were sent to prison in 1987 following one of the most highly publicised criminal trials of the century. Re-opening their convictions means putting on trial the system that secured them. It will reveal to the public the prejudice and dishonesty of the media and the racism and arrogance of the judiciary.

The Law Lords may refuse Engin's Appeal. The Home Secretary may refuse to re-open Mark's case. Whatever happens, the families will go on fighting. In the words of Sharon Raghip, 'This is a campaign for three innocent men, and it is going on, I am going on, until all three of them are out of prison'.

What you can do:

* Find out more about the cases from the Families Campaign
* Write to the Home Secretary/ your MP/the men in prison;
* Support the Families Cam paign: affiliate/ donate/ in vite a speaker;
* Start a support group in your community/college/union;
* Contact the Tottenham Three Families Campaign, 247a West Green Road, Tottenham, London N15 5ED. Tel: 081-809-6483.

Danny McNamee

Last month, Danny McNamee applied for leave to appeal against his conviction on a charge of conspiracy to cause explosions and his sentence of 25 years.

The conspiracy was alleged to have taken place among three named "terrorists" along with others unknown, at times unknown, between January 1982 and January 1984, somewhere in Britain or perhaps elsewhere.

At the original trial, the dates of the conspiracy were altered days before the hearing and the places altered after the final speeches had been given. Defence protests and appeals for adjournments were denied.

Evidence admitted at the trial was often at the very edge of acceptability.

McNamee was shown a Sinn Fein leaflet and asked if he recognised it as one. He was asked about an offence of which he had been acquitted in the Republic. Defence witnesses were asked to explain how McNamee's family could possibly afford to hire expert witnesses from the United States.

No link was proved between Danny and any co-conspirator or any explosion, except for three fingerprints found at arms caches and at one controlled explosion. The prints were found on pieces of tape and battery of the type that Danny used every day in his work in an electrical repair shop. He insists these materials must have been used *subsequently* by bomb-makers.

At the hearing in December, the fingerprint evidence was discussed extensively. What emerged was that the third print was of a very poor quality and only barely resembled Danny's. The judges went through the motions of giving the case a fair hearing, but the mask slipped on a number of occasions. Most significantly, Richard Ferguson QC, who recently defended Terry Marsh and Guiness executive Ernest Saunders, was accused of over-identifying with his client because he himself is Irish.

Judgement is expected soon, but the family emerged from the hearing less than hopeful. A number of American, Irish, and British observers (some of whom also observed the first trial) were unhappy with the proceedings and have pledged to continue to fight Danny's wrongful conviction.

Danny himself has decided to read for a law degree in prison so he can better understand the system that has deprived him of his liberty and his youth.

by Nadine Finch

Lesbian and gay rights under attack

***Peter Tatchell** profiles the latest attacks on lesbian and gay rights and urges us to "Get up! Get out! Get even!"*

Clause 25 of the Tories' Criminal Justice Bill is the biggest attack on homosexuals' human rights since the mid-50s.

Even more dangerous than Section 28, Clause 25 will make more than 2,500 men a year liable to higher fines and longer prison sentences for victimless homosexual behaviour.

According to Home Office minister John Patten homosexual soliciting, procuring and indecency are 'serious' sex crimes which require severe sentences. All these so-called offences involve consensual behaviour and neither soliciting nor procuring involves any actual sexual behaviour.

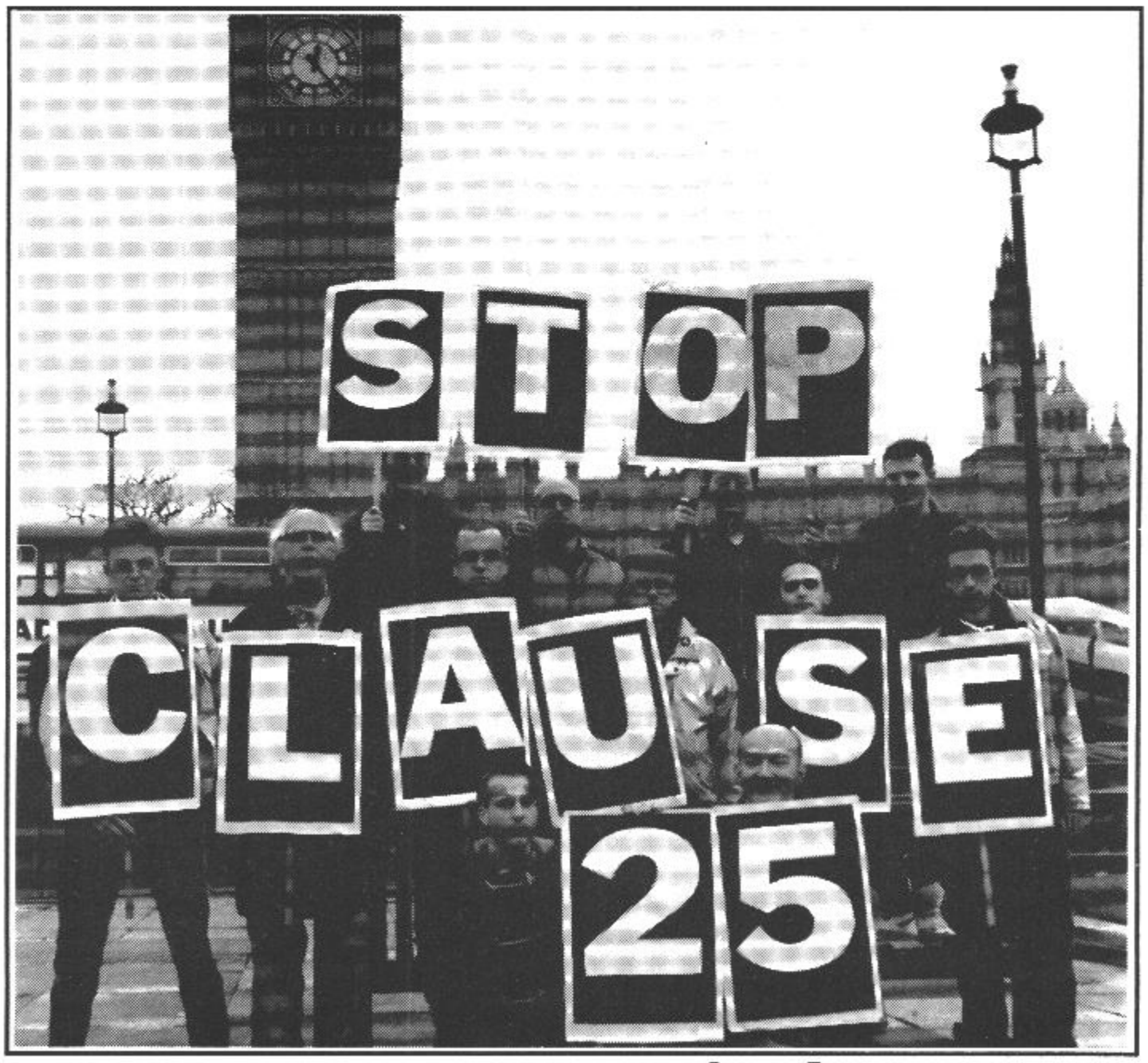
'Soliciting' can include anything from smiling and winking at other men in the streets to chatting up or exchanging phone numbers. 'Procuring' could mean allowing two adult male friends to stay together overnight in your house or introducing two men who fancy each other at a party or disco. As for 'indecency', it can be used to penalise kissing, caressing or hugging.

The government claims that the men who perpetrate these acts are dangerous sex criminals who must be given tougher sentences to 'protect the public from serious harm'. What makes Clause 25 so outrageous is the government's lumping together consenting homosexual behaviour with serious sex crimes such as indecent assault, incitement to incest and indecency towards children. To equate consensual gay sex with sexual violence and attacks on children is monstrous.

This legislation amounts to a back door recriminalisation of gay sexuality.

The lesbian and gay direct action group, OutRage, is calling on everyone opposed to Clause 25 to write urgently to the Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker MP, urging him to delete the three consenting homosexual 'offences' from Clause 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill. We are also protesting against the new guidelines to the Children's Act which outlaw fostering by lesbians and gay men.

Join the mass demonstration in London on Saturday, February 16th at noon. Assemble at Embankment tube and march to Downing Street and Parliament. Our slogan will be: "Get up! Get out! Get even! Lesbian and gay rights now!" Contact OutRage at 071-490- 7153.



Outrage Protest *Photo: Gordon Rainsford*

From binbags to bills of rights

In Blackpool residents are forbidden to leave more than one bag of rubbish a week for the privatised collectors. All rubbish must be placed in distinctive bags which residents must pay for.

Resistance to this Tory regime is individualistic. Some people dump their rubbish in (non-regulation) black bags in neighbours' gardens; others sort through dumped bags to identify the offending 'dumper'. As yet no collective action has been taken by residents to demand their rights to a decent bin collection...

This story, recounted by Pam Giddy,the Charter 88 speaker at the Convention for Democratic Rights organised by the Socialist Movement on January 12th/13th, summed up the problem facing democratic rights activists: how to move beyond a focus on the individual to a mass movement reflecting the concerns of working class people and oppressed groups.

Tony Benn outlined the Bill of Rights he intends to present in Parliament; others stressed that without vigorous campaigning on specific demands, bills of rights or charters of demands would get nowhere.

All agreed on the need to create a democractic and egalitarian culture.

Attendance at the Convention was small due to the clash with the Gulf demonstration. But the response was positive. In workshops people really could discuss ideas and raise questions. We heard the day to day experiences of people up against the state. These included Fred Holroyd, stitched up by the British secret state in Ireland, a speaker from the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign who described new the police's new digital scanning techniques, and Orlando Gomez from the FSLN .

The conference dealt with areas on which the left has done little - animal abuse, Clause 25, thorough-going changes in the judicial system, as well as beginning to get to grips with the continuing debate on the role of a bill of rights or written constitution.

The organising group agreed to issue a pamphlet on topics covered at the Convention and to maintain a network of interested groups and individuals. Hilda Kean, 21 Clapton Square, London, E5 8HP can provide further details (but not extra bin bags for the frustrated of Blackpool...)

Pensioners say: restore the link!

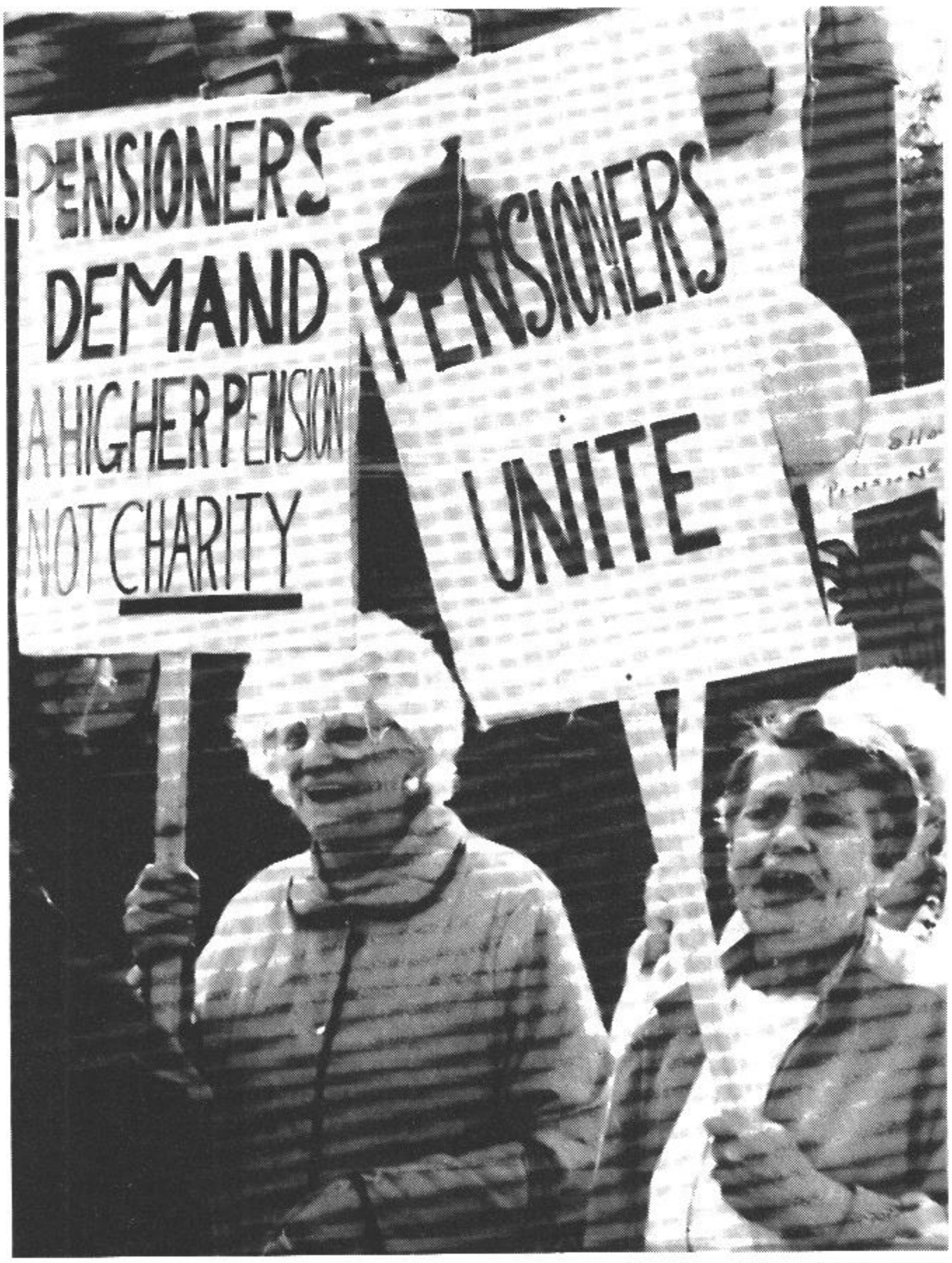
British pensions are amongst the worst in Europe. Pensioners in Germany, France and Luxembourg are entitled to nearly twice as much. British pensioners also get a worse deal on TV licenses, travel passes, fuel bills, telephone charges, entertainment and leisure facilities.

Pensioners in Britain are the same people who for years accepted pay freezes, pay restraints and the 'Pay Pause' so that the country could create the Welfare State and the NHS. In Germany the pensioners' movement has formed itself into a political party, but here pensioners are looked on as some sort of charity. Much is said about the North/South divide but little about the divide between young and old.

Every week I queue at a draughty post office with a lot of other pensioners. None of them were tax evaders or tax exiles; they'd all had their income tax taken out of their wage packets every week. And after all these years this was their reward. The Tory government ended the link between pensions and earnings in 1980. This has now left single pensioners £12 worse off and couples at least £20 worse off each week.

A Labour government must restore the link between pensions and earnings. Remember the pensioners' saying: "*Us today - you tomorrow*".

by Len Mason, Birmingham Labour Briefing.



Pensioners' Day of Action 1990

`Waiter there's a pensioner in my soup !'

On November 7th 1990 ('Pensioners' Action Day') 80 pensioners and retired trades unionists stormed the Savoy Hotel in the heart of London's posh West End. Brushing aside an outraged doorkeeper, the battling senior citizens proceeded to harangue the diners about what it's like to try to live on £46.90p a week.

'I bet you paid more for that meal than we get for a week,' was one popular refrain. The outraged clientele spluttered and sent for the management but it took a considerable time before the protestors with their placards were ejected into the Strand.

Harry Mundy, secretary of the Hackney Pensioners Forum, told us: `Our comrades who died in the Second World War did not die so that their generation living on could eke out their days on a miserly pension and see their grandchildren living in cardboard cities'.

Danny Silver, a retired but still active member of the Tailor and Garment Workers Union, added: `You should have seen the looks on the faces of the diners when we told them a few home truths'. The battle for a decent pension goes on - and it 's about time that the rest of our movement got involved in the fight.

DA still hungry!

The vampire (alias the District Auditor) has risen from the grave to suck more blood from the surcharged Lambeth councillors. Fined over £200,000 and disqualified from office for putting jobs and services before compliance with the law, these comrades had nearly paid off their fines and finished thier disqualification when ...the District Auditor decided to impose another £200,000 fine and threatened to disqualify the 29 remaining ex-councillors for a further period.

Money is needed urgently. Send donations to `The Lambeth Fighting Fund', 171 Clapham Road, London SW9. For more information call 081-670-1454.

Other people's children

Nothing caused such a stir (on the left as well as the right) in the old ***Briefing*** *as the `Streetlife Supplement'. Now it's back - your chance to speak about the unspeakable!* ***Pauline Purnell,*** *Birmingham Edgbaston CLP, kicks off.*

Looking after the children of someone you're emotionally involved with is not easy. The situation is fraught with emotional landmines that can be set off unexpectedly by some apparently trivial event.

For example, your partner's children sit in your bed upstairs eating biscuits. Your own (now adult) children stare at you with the unspoken message: `We weren't allowed food upstairs!'

For a group of part-time parents in Birmingham, talking and sharing such experiences has helped. We've learned to laugh or cry at ourselves for behaving or thinking the way we do about our partner's children - or her/his previous partner!

We plan to become organised enough to provide support for people about to enter a relationship with a `ready-made' family.

If another person's child or children lives with you or comes into your life for short periods of time, you will probably benefit from talking about your experiences with others.

Contact the Birmingham Group, c/o Pauline Purnell, 021-422-1366, or write a contribution for **Streetlife**. The list of issues is endless: levels of maintenance, who pays for what, sharing responsibilities, school parents' evenings, etc.

Canary Wharf: monument to intervention

Canary Wharf, the Tories' inner city flagship, is benefitting from a phenomenal £6,000 million public subsidy, but its future is still not secure.

The current surplus of London office space (set to get much worse) is already having severe effects. Rents and capital values are plummeting, with awesome losses looming for some developments.

Canary Wharf is being developed by Olympia & York (O&Y), possibly the world's richest property company, reputedly worth $20 billion. A massive `Wall Street on Water' is being built on the Thames. 12million sq. ft. of office space - 2 million more than O&Y's World Trade Centre in New York.

Before O&Y agreed to develop Canary Wharf, they insisted the government provide adequate transport links. They were promised an upgraded Docklands Light Railway 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 they went knocking on the door of 10 Downing Street, again.

Although the Government's Central London Rail Study showed that of the six major rail and underground projects evaluated, an extension of the Jubilee line into Docklands would have the least impact in easing London's chronic congestion, it was precisely this project, the `Canary Wharf line' that got the go-ahead.

O&Y will contribute a fixed sum of £400 million towards the extension, payable over a 20-year period. The total cost will be between £1.5 and £2 billion. Once more, the taxpayer is bailing out the private sector in Docklands.

Dreadful planning of London office space has saddled the market with chronic over-supply; it now faces its worse slump in 15 years. Canary Wharf couldn't arrive at a worse time.

Canary Wharf certainly explodes the myth that "Thatcherism" was non-interventionist. Effectively, the Tories will have invested 3% of next year's total government expenditure of £200 billion, and twice as much as next year's health budget, on a 71-acre site. Clearly, strong state backing is necessary to show that the free market works!

by John Turkie, Hackney North CLP

Imagine...

Jeremy Corbyn, *Labour MP Islington North, has been speaking against war in the Gulf at meetings across the country. In his travels, he couldn't help but wonder aloud how things* ***might*** *be...*

Courage has been in short supply on the Labour Front Bench over the Gulf.

I meet thousands of people all over the country who tell me the war is about oil and that the whole thing is a cynical manoeuvre by the US to show that the dollar is still king.

Imagine how different it would be if the anti-war movement was fully backed by the Labour party and the unions; would the Tories have been so keen on war?

How many bodies have got to come home before people in leading positions in our movement put principles before expediency?

`Thatcherism' in crisis

Two veteran sponsors of the spurious concept of 'Thatcherism' appear in almost as much trouble as the 'lady' herself.

New Statesman & Society have made five redundancies with more to follow. Former editor **Stuart Weir** had been running the magazine beyond its means (and pushing it to the right) for some time. Replacement **Steve Platt** says he'll try to save the mag by adding more (intentional) humour.

Meanwhile *Marxism Today* creeps further towards the brink of bankruptcy (financial, that is; political bancruptcy was declared long ago). It seems there's just no market out there for the bold new ideas of 1985.

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God's gift to Small Heath

Apparently some Party members in Birmingham Small Heath had not been told that the GMB had bought the seat for its right-wing Research Officer, **Roger Godsiff** (whose old APEX boss **Denis Howell** is standing down as the constituency's MP at the next election).Some are even objecting to the EETPU packing the union section of the local electoral college with fake delegates. An embarrassed GMB has already had to reduce its 'over-representation' (to avoid being renamed Generally More Bogus).

John Spellar, EETPU political officer, has no such qualms. His reward for backing Godsiff in Small Heath was GMB support in the safe seat of Warley West.

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Remember Eastbourne?

While we were away, the 'vote-catching' candidate Labour's NEC imposed on Eastbourne, **Charlotte Atkins**, was trounced so badly she only saved her deposit by three votes. Ms Atkins is an LCC member, press officer for CoHSE, and co-author of the famous pamphlet *How to Select or Reselect your MP* - she's obviously found the easiest way is to get yourself imposed.

The democratically-chosen candidate replaced by Atkins was a local Poll Tax non-payer.

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Temple of doom

The Communist Party is still refusing to allow its life support machine to be switched off, though it has long since been proved brain dead, most recently by stating 'this is a party which no longer considers Neil Kinnock to be a class traitor.'

Presumably no one has noticed that its General Secretary's name, **Nina Temple**, is an anagram of 'Pat Me Lenin'. We think he's more likely to be turning in his tomb.

Barmy in Blackpool

Some *Briefing* supporters have strange ideas of a fun time.

At last year's Blackpool conference our Promotions Manager **Bryn Griffiths** was quoted in the *Independent on Sunday* as saying 'I love conference. I take holiday from work in order to come.' This year the Briefing Editorial Board are clubbing together to send Bryn to Margate for the week while we get to work in Brighton.

Kinnock, arghhh!

In a speech to the 1984 Party Conference **Neil Kinnock**, admonishing striking miners for throwing stones at police, declared: "I condemn violence. I abominate violence. I damn violence. All violence. All violence (emphasied with gusto). Without fear or favour ..."

Now of course Kinnock appears to be very much in favour of violence - as long as it's committed not by a handful of striking miners equipped with stones but by half a million troops armed to the teeth with state-of-the art military hardware.

Dregsy

Would you buy **anything** from this man?

In a piece of time-honoured capitalist trickery, **Derek Hatton** has liquidated his PR firm Settleside while collecting a 'telephone number' sized fee for advertising Sekonda watches. The irrepressible Hatton is also trying to hustle himself into a starring role in a situation comedy. His reaction to the collapse of his company? 'I'm getting the fuck out of PR'.

That'll be the day.

Gouldrush

Election work comes first according to **Joyce Gould's** paper to the December NEC, but...

"All attempts are being made to ensure that other aspects of work such as Regional Conferences and the National Women and Youth Conferences are either **not** held or directed towards promoting our campaign for the election. Similarly, although often seen as a negative aspect of our work, disciplinary matters are having to be continued with, the aim being to develop those parties that have been and are subject to disruption and diversion from the only goal of winning the General Election."

Sic!

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Fletters

Our thanks to **Keith Flett,** ubiquitous socialist correspondent, for his letter to Tribune upbraiding its "diarist" (the non-existent John Street) for labelling Briefing "daft" and "mad".

As a gesture of comradely appreciation, we hereby declare our letters page open to Keith whenever he feels the urge.

Incidentally, *Tribune* is still published as a weekly newspaper and is sometimes on sale in some places, though certainly not at your local Labour Party or trade union meeting.

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

Policing football

***From the terraces... Arthur Chandler's** monthly plunge into the politics of sport.*

In March, the Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee publishes the results of its inquiry into the policing of football hooliganism. Of the 21 organisations which submitted evidence to the inquiry, only the Football Supporters' Association, and possibly the Federation of Supporters' Clubs, represented the people being policed. The others represented primarily the policers, including eight police bodies, the Home Office and the Scottish Office.

A survey quoted by the FSA suggests that at least 90% of supporters have some criticism of the police. Many feel that all supporters are treated by the police as potential hooligans.

The FSA approach to the hooligan problem, which puts the positive role of supporters at the heart of a multi-faceted strategy, gets support from some surprising places. The Association of Chief Police Officers, for example, is sending a circular to all police forces advising them to liaise with the FSA. They are also now supporting the FSA view that inside football grounds more emphasis should be placed on trained stewards rather than police officers.

The Scottish Office states that the rise in supporters' self-stewarding is one of the main reasons why violence has fallen, particularly among supporters of the Scottish national team, none of whom were arrested during the World Cup.

The prize for the most offensive evidence has to be shared between the Football Writers' Association and the Police Superintendents' Association.

The writers dismiss criticisms of the police made by Lord Justice Taylor in his inquiry into the Hillsborough disaster. 'It was not they who chose to storm the gates, probably without tickets, possibly under the influence of alcohol,' declared the scribes, who had clearly not read their own newspapers. These reported that video evidence shows supporters at Hillsborough did not storm the gates, which were opened by police to relieve the crush outside the ground. There is also no evidence of numbers of people without tickets.

FWA members are ignorant idiots whose contribution to safety at football matches is to come up with inflammatory headlines like 'Dutch Threat to Bomb English Fans' prior to the World Cup and '2000 England Fans Riot' during it.

The Police Superintendents' Association used the inquiry to push its scheme to make football fans pay the full cost of policing matches. The logic here is that if supporters realised how much it cost to police matches they would behave better. This must be the most ineffective anti-hooligan measure ever dreamt of.

It also confirms that the attitude of the PSA towards its members' jobs is precisely the one so heavily criticised in the Taylor report: namely, that the policing of football is purely a public order problem.

One can only hope that the Committee will reject this nonsense and come up with a new approach to the problem. One that puts football supporters, i.e. people, first. Other countries' have found supporter-based initiatives highly effective. Just what is the British state afraid of?

Punishing the punters

The financial crisis at Tottenham Hotspur has led to an unprecedented mid-season hike in admission prices. In the end, it seems the working class punter must always pay for the errors of the millionaire bosses.

The club's 1988-89 audited accounts showed a net profit of £18,000, a big reduction on the £1.27 million profit the previous year. Worse yet, the club (or is it company?) is so deeply in debt that all its activities are dictated by the needs of economic survival.

Overall debts of around £10 million accrued through off-field business ventures have been further compounded by the £1.1 million borrowed indirectly from Robert Maxwell to secure the registrations of Lineker and Nayim. This enabled the club to avoid the embarrasment of the two players being reclaimed by Barcelona, their former club, in the same way that a finance company confiscates hire purchase goods if the instalment payments are not met.

The club's assets has two types of assets. Tangible assets (bricks and mortar, mainly the stadium) whose value is dictated by the property market and intangible assets, primarily the potential transfer value of the players. The latter is dictated by a series of factors which bear little relation to economic reality. Any system of valuation which owes so much to the hype of the tabloid press can only be unstable.

The size of the debt causes two major problems for the club. First, the burden of repayment takes away finance which could be used elsewhere. Secondly, because the club is mortgaged to the limit, expansion, the purchase of new players, etc. is ruled out. Maxwell has offered £12 million to underwrite the club's debts, but a host of problems have arisen over this - including breaches of stock exchange regulations, not to mention the whims of the Mirror boss himself.

Meanwhile the cost of getting into White Hart Lane is higher than anywhere else in London. It's now £8 to stand; seat prices have all gone up by £2. Much of the game's income is from occasional supporters; this latest increase will be the final straw for many of them. As for regular supporters, many simply cannot afford a season ticket, which at Tottenham can cost anything up to the best part of £300.

Who's responsible for the mess at Spurs? The Board of Directors took the decisions about stadium rebuilding, about spending on transfers, about diversifying the company into ill-fated business ventures. They have to take the rap. The fans should not be penalised for the mistakes of the game's rulers.

by Spurs supporter Tony Cordell,
Secretary of Hackney Council
Joint Shop Stewards Committee

Behind the Drug Menace

***Don Rocinante** reviews Agency of Fear by Edward Jay Epstein (revised edition, Verso 1990)*

This is the story of how a ruthless US President invented the idea of a drug epidemic in order to increase police powers, justify belligerance abroad and centralise his own administration.

Edward Jay Epstein's study of the politics of drug enforcement under Nixon retains all its force 13 years after its first publication. In a new introduction the author emphasises the continuing relevance of his conclusions.

Anyone who has seen the film Reefer Madness will know that the US government's attitude to drugs in the past had more to with propaganda than reality. After the witch-hunt against Communism - which took him to the vice-presidency - had gone stale, Nixon turned to the 'drug menace', an issue which he hoped would catapult him back to the top from mid-60s obscurity.

A 'heroin plague' enslaving unwilling innocents was presented as the cause of inner-city poverty and urban decay - not the fact that the Vietnam war was draining away all public spending.

By talking up the idea of a national emergency, Nixon justified greater concentration of state power and increased police illegality. By presenting drugs as an evil plague inflicted on hapless America, attention could be switched to an external scapegoat.

"The result", records Epstein, was "the search for a magic bullet solution in far-away land - Colombia, Peru, Panama, Afghanistan and the Golden Triangle of South East Asia - for the endemic race, social and economic problems in the United States".

The consequences of this policy are with us today. Under the guise of its 'war on drugs', America "invades Panama, burns peasants" crops in Bolivia, attempts to unleash cocaine-eating butterflies in Peru, kidnaps Mexican citizens, and hoists a ghostly army of giant radar blimps over the Caribbean".

If the US government wanted to tackle the issue of drugs as a social problem, it might look into the reasons for the growing demand for drugs. Instead, its policy of attempting to limit the supply has actually made the drug industry more efficient and helped to bring down the price of cocaine fourfold in the last five years.

According to Epstein, the entire cocaine market in the US could be supplied by a single cargo plane. With 20,000 planes and 17,000 ships available on the cocaine route, the occasional well-publicised drug seizure is unlikely to have the slightest effect on usage within the US.

Theatre : Edgar tries to square circle

*Hackney councillor **Paul Foley** reviews David Edgar's new play, **The Shape of the Table,** at the Cottesloe Theatre in London until March 21st.*

"I'm constantly aware of the ridiculousness and absurdity of the situation", said Vaclav Havel in November 1989. "The situation" being his election as President of Czechoslovakia.

The Shape of the Table is loosely based on the events that led to this "absurd situation" and explores the transfer of state power from a discredited Stalinist bureaucracy to an unlikely amalgam of political prisoners, disgraced professors, banned writers and purged party members.

All the action takes place in a committee room. The audience observes the various committees, caucuses, plenaries and negotiations from a gallery that surrounds the stage on three sides. Those well-versed in the subtextual meanings of draft agendas, position papers and committee reports will nod knowingly at Edgar's skill and wit in portraying politics behind closed doors.

The play penetrates stereotypes and develops characters who are not simple mouthpieces for political positions. In doing this, Edgar manages to evoke sympathy for the most unlikely figures. The abominable Lutz, party first secretary and representative of the Stalinist old guard, is a witty bully with principles and vision forged in Hitler's concentration camps and Stalin's gulags. Stratford Johns is brilliantly belligerent in the role. Outstanding too, for its understated self-mockery, is Karl Johnson's portrayal of Prus, the leader of the reform movement and Lutz' adversary.

The play begins with Prus' release from jail where he has been imprisoned for writing a pamphlet about fairy stories. Of course, the fairy tale world is Stalinist Eastern Europe where everything is possible because nothing is what it seems. Satirical references are made to a 'command economy' which produces a glut of tangerines and critical shortages of basic necessities then explains them away as "contradictions" in social development.

Grimy reality intrudes through the unwashed committee room windows. Outside, hundreds of thousands of striking workers are demanding an end to Stalinist rule. Inside their demands are articulated by Prus and others in the form of a "New Dawn" political programme. Its slogan is "Back to Normal" - back to the normality of everyday living. This involves establishing the norms of western European liberal democracy and calling the Stalinists to account. Beyond that it is based on ideals of decency, almost in the British sense. Edgar uses the music of the Jefferson Airplane and Jimi Hendrix to make explicit connections between hippy life-style politics and Prus' aspirations.

Unfortunately, Edgar puts the criticisms of "New Dawn" into the mouths of the discredited Stalinists. It is Lutz who points to the dangers of capitalist restoration - material insecurity for the masses, unemployment, exploitation, racism. Yet Lutz represents a past which cannot be restored. Prus represents the future. So the play ends with a finality which may be inappropriate to the real political situation in Eastern Europe.

Troops Out Now - the Movie

Ken Loach's new film thriller, ***Hidden Agenda*** *(now on general release), draws together the worst excesses of British rule in the North of Ireland.*

The film is a fictionalised account of the operation of RUC death squads, the Stalker Affair, arbitrary arrests, army disinformation as well as whistleblowers like Colin Wallace and Fred Holroyd. It also covers the smear campaign against Wilson and Heath in the 1970s, linking MI5 to Airey Neave and Thatcher.

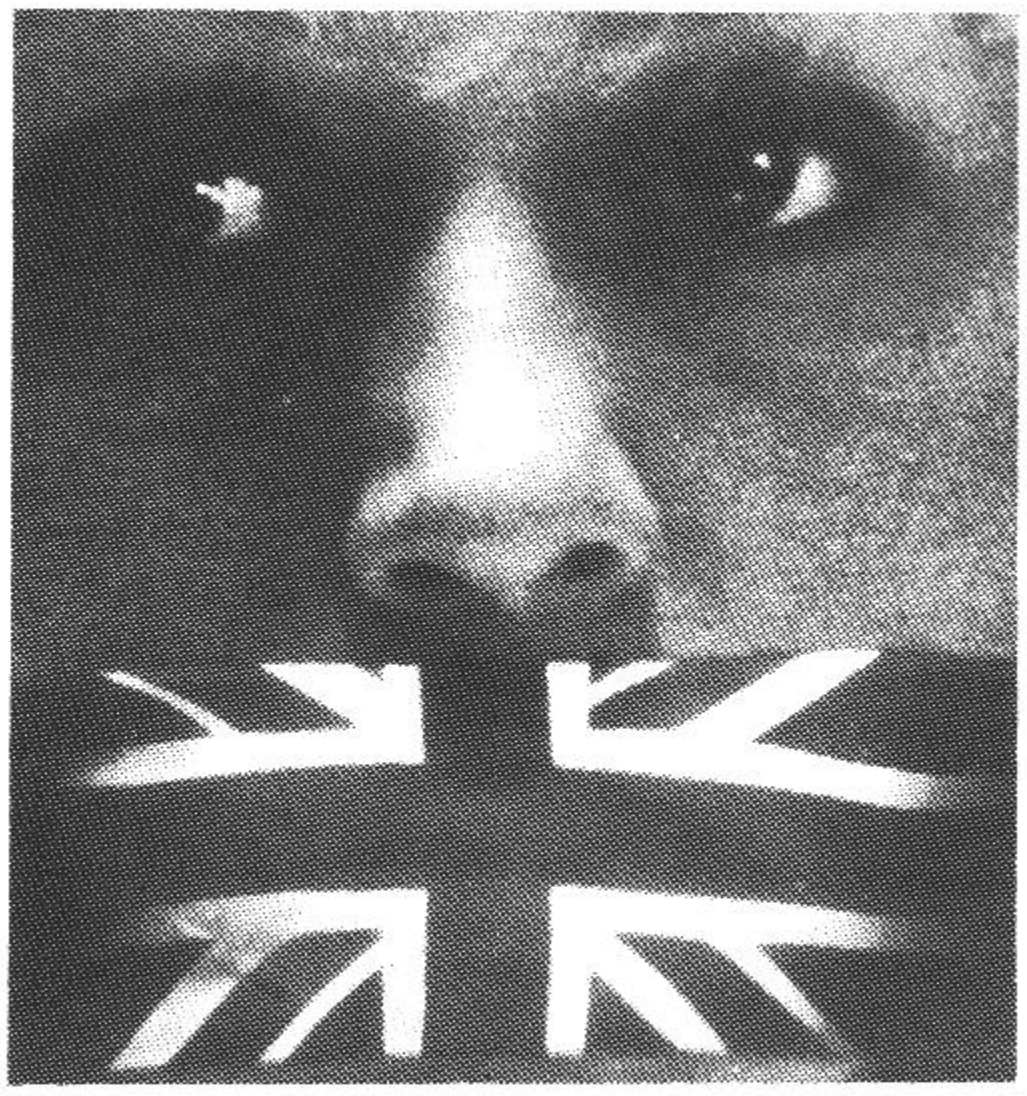
The plot revolves around the killing of an American human rights lawyer on a delegation to the North of Ireland. He is trying to discover the truth behind a tape given to him by Captain Harris, a composite of Wallace and Holroyd. The tape is of a Tory/MI5 meeting in the seventies, attended by a Tory spokesperson on Northern Ireland (Airey Neave alias Alec Neville). The meeting discusses a smear campaign to destabilise the Labour government.

Hidden Agenda is driven by the old joke that Northern Ireland is like Latin America without the weather. Early in the film Ingrid comments that 'Belfast reminds me of Chile - killings, torture and death squads.' But her partner replies that there is 'no comparison'. Interviews with torture victims and the depiction of arbitrary arrests of Republicans by the security forces give a vivid impression of the brutal nature of the British military presence. The night arrest of a *Republican News* journalist is particularly shocking, conveying a real sense of the arbitrary power of the security forces in the province.

If anything, the film suffers dramatically from trying to include all the dirty tricks practiced by the British in Ireland. The viewer is almost overloaded by the extent of repression.

However, the film does expose the media's role in keeping us ignorant of the truth about Ireland, for example showing the shooting of the American lawyer immediately followed by the official version on television - the usual cover-up.

by Paul Simon



Inside the killing machine

Dave Hammond *reviews* ***Shoot to Kill*** *by Michael Asher (Guild Publishers, 1990)*

In this fascinating book Michael Asher admits to the shame of enlisting in Britain's elite killing machine. He gives a vivid account of two tours of duty in Northern Ireland with 2nd Paras before joining the Special Patrol Group of the RUC after a stint with 23rd SAS.

Asher takes the reader through the de-humanising process that is called Para training, during which he witnesses the death of his closest comrade.

The purpose of the training is to strip an individual of his old personality and give him a new one. This is not about training idiots, but manipulating intelligent people. The ability to kill is in all of us, but the Paras have perfected the technique of bringing that ability out and making it work for the state. The result is a group of highly strung people itching for action. When there is none they simply invent it, often to the detriment of comrades or other soldiers (craphats in Para parlance).

In 1972 Asher was posted to Belfast. He talks of the frustration of not being allowed to 'take out' known loyalist thugs and of the extreme oppression facing Catholics. Nonetheless, everybody in the Battalion wanted to get in on the act when it came to riot control, even the chefs and clerks. Even this was more desirable than being cooped up in the small rooms that passed for accomodation.

After three years Asher realised that the adventure he sought could not be found in daily confrontations on the streets of Belfast, so he left the army, only to re-join shortly after by signing on with the 23rd SAS, a Territorial Army unit. Here he could test himself to the limit in a battle with the elements without the nuisance of a real enemy.

After going through college Asher joined the RUC Special Patrol Group for, it would seem, no other reason than the fact that his girlfriend, a trainee WPC, jilted him for a police detective. He returned to Belfast but saw his mistake immediately. The SPG's membership was no better than the B-specials. The only two Catholics that he served with were fitted up by their colleagues. He realised that it was only a matter of time before he too was fitted up or worse still handed over to the UDA. He also realised that he had no right to attempt to police the Irish people of behalf of the British State. He got out.

This book is written by a man who experienced the de-humanisation of Army training, yet remained human.

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,*

From the relative isolation of Derwentside District Council in County Durham (North Durham CLP) Labour Briefing has been a veritable font of information and a cheering contact with the outside world . The Labour Left has not shrunk here - has it ever existed? So yes, a Socialist Movement paper is needed but it couldn't replace Labour Briefing .

Best wishes,

Thea Khamis (Stanley, County Durham)

Dear *Briefing,*

One of the low points of last year's Labour Party Conference was the way elements on the left forced principled opposition to war in the Gulf off the agenda in favour of a half- hearted resolution from the FBU calling for limited war only (with UN approval).

This, it was argued, was necessary to pull in the "soft left", including the FBU, who would not vote for anything harder. Imagine my surprise when, at a recent public meeting in Lambeth, Ken Cameron from the FBU admitted that he did not support the resolution he himself put at the Labour Party Conference - because it was too soft on the UN!

Admittedly he was on the defensive, havng to reply to a previous platform speech from Council leader Joan Twelves which attacked the UN as a fig leaf for the US.

But it does beg one question: just who did actually agree with the FBU resolution? Did everyone on the left vote for it reluctantly because they had been conned into believing someone else to their right was voting for it as well?

Yours,

Greg Tucker

GREETINGS

Martha Osamor: "Welcome to the new look Labour Briefing, which is especially needed at a time like this. With Thatcher gone, we have to have a radical alternative because people cannot tell the difference between Major and Kinnock! *Briefing* has to go on telling people the truth and covering the stories that the rest of the press want to hush up."

TONY BENN MP: "The new *Labour Briefing* has a central role to play in the
re building of the left following the defeat of Thatcher and inthe run-up to (and after) the General Election. The rejection of Thatcher was the work of the grassroots campaigns, especially the campaign against the Poll Tax. It has left a vacuum which the left must fill to win support for peace, social justice and democracy. "

Mildred Gordon , MP:"The new *Briefing* will be like a breath of fresh air. A hard hitting , uncompromising and readable and above all SOCIALIST magazine has been sorely lacking".

JEREMY CORBYN MP: "As a founder member of London Labour Briefing, I greet the new launch with pleasure. Whilst the leadership of the Labour Party took a conscious decision to move the party to the right, and accept the values of the media, others did not. Briefing stood with the printers, the miners, the homeless, the peace campaigners, against the Poll Tax and with all the others fighting the Tories. Once again we are monthly and will be all the stronger for it to support, condemn, expose, oppose and above all INFORM."

A long time in politics

London *Labour Briefing* of February 1981 was packed with articles on how the GLC should be run if Labour won control in May.

'Target 82' was established to take up the political fight for control of the London Borough Councils. Contributors included one Jeremy Corbyn, a mere Haringey councillor, and Ted Knight as Leader of Lambeth Council.

In the aftermath of the hunger strikes, Labour's shameful record on Ireland was condemned. Most interesting of all, Andrew McIntosh, right-wing leader of the then opposition Labour Group on the GLC, warned 'clearly the left will have to watch Ken Livingstone very carefully'. Three months later, our Ken ousted McIntosh as Leader of the GLC; four years later he gave us good reason to recall McIntosh's words.

Stop press

Nominations for Greater London Labour Party officers have just been published. It looks like right-wing hack Glenys Thornton will be ditched as Chair in favour of FBU official Jim Fitzpatrick. As usual, Briefing's ticket of Jeremy Corbyn and Joan Twelves for chair and vice-chair has the most CLP nominations but the block vote has been carved up to ensure their defeat. Nevertheless, the Executive looks to be slightly more
left-wing than last year - which is good news for London Labour , wilting under NEC attacks.

Gulf emergency action update.

There will be a demonstration in central London on the first Saturday after hostilities break out. Assemble at the Embankment at noon and march to Hyde Park. If hostilities do not break out, there will be a demonstration in any case on Saturday, January 26th, same time, same place.

Women Against War in the Gulf is holding a non-stop vigil outside the Foreign Office in Whitehall. Women have already been arrested and need support in Bow Street Magistrates Court on January 29th at 11 am. Call 071 272 7649.

Committee to Stop War in the Gulf benefit at the Red Rose Club,Seven Sisters Road, London N4 (Finsbury Park tube) on January 30th.Call the Committee on 071 923 2110 for updates.

Also call CND's "Stop War in the Gulf Action Line" on 0898 202077 for a recorded messsge. Also: why not ring up the MoD (071 218 9000) or the US Embassy (071 499 9000) and let them know what you think?

Please send details of events to Action! Labour Briefing, 26 Wattisfield Rd, London, E5 9QH

London Labour Party Socialists Launch Conference Saturday 16th February: "Developing a strategy for the Labour Left in the 1990s" with Ken Livingstone MP, Martha Osamor and Dorothy Macedo. Plus workshops on: organising in the GLLP; the Poll Tax and Labour Councils; general election strategy; the Gulf; racism; and many more. For more information contact 126b St Pauls Rd, London, N1 2LR, tel: 071-359-3043.

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Failing to collect the Tax in South London

Greenwich, Lewisham and Southwark all tell the same story. Poll Tax non-payment levels of around 50% and council cuts that make your eyes water. "Reluctantly", all these councils are now dragging their electors through the courts. Happily they're making a mess of it!

The award must go to Lewisham, whose 500 cases were adjourned because officers had forgotten to bring along proof of posting final reminders! No doubt they will get the hang of these court things but at the current rate the final court appearances for non-payment of the 1990 Tax will be some time well into the next century.

Experience from Scotland indicates that non-payment rates actually rise in the second year. This is even more likely now that the government has found it expedient to admit that the Poll Tax was Maggie's idea and a bad one at that.

Wandsworth and Sutton are at least six months ahead of other, more "backward" London boroughs.

Wandsworth still has a non-payment level of 10%, despite having the lowest Poll Tax in the land. They have taken about 3,000 through the courts. Over the summer months the bailiffs visited 30 or so families and were met, in most cases, by members of the local campaigns.

Despite the gallant defence, bailiffs managed to get into some homes. The Croseby family was one. Apparently, the bailiffs, Gaunts, were helped in by the police and then took goods that were on hire purchase. The family managed to get the council prosecuted for carrying out distraint unlawfully. After that Wandsworth ceased using bailiffs.

Sutton is more interesting still. To date the council has served 15,000 people with summonses, got 11,500 liability orders and passed 2,500 of these onto the bailiffs. Despite all this, it still admits to 25% non-payment.

Perhaps Lewisham, Greenwich and Southwark should contact Sutton to hear from the horse's mouth just what a complete waste of time taking half the population to court can be!

by Iris Jay

Next month: the shame, the degradation, the utter futility of trying to collect the Poll Tax - a Council Finance Director talks frankly and openly to *Labour Briefing*.

Poll Tax protest latest

LEWISHAM

For the second time in four weeks, Lewisham Council had five hundred summonses for Poll Tax non-payment thrown out of court. The council, which has spent more on its Town Hall Extension than many other councils spend on libraries or housing repairs, again failed to prove that bills had actually been sent to those summonsed.

The current 100,000 non-payers (50% of the adult population), including those not registered, are backed by an all-Lewisham Union incorporating thirteen local estate and area-based groups, the Trades Council, concerned trade unions, and the students union at Lewisham College. In November, the Lewisham Labour Party's Local Government Conference took a stand against the use of bailiffs.

by Kevin Flack, Press Officer, Lewisham Anti-Poll Tax Union

HARINGEY

Haringey council made little headway in its first attempt to use the courts against the borough's 51,000 non-payers.

140 of the first batch of 1200 summonsees turned up on January 9th to contest the council's case. An attempt to process them in groups of six was seen off, with the result that most cases were adjourned to April. Council officials told some non-payers to go home because their cases would not be heard, then rushed into court to demand liability orders against them. The first 7000 summonses intimidated less than 150 people into paying.

The council is already in deep financial crisis. £10 million emergency cuts will be made in the last two months of this financial year and at least another £10 million more next year (plus 600 job losses). On top of that, the council will have to set an even more astronomical Tax than last year's £500 plus. In attempt to persuade people to pay the unpayable, Haringey's Labour rulers have plastered the borough with "Your Poll Tax Pays for Education" posters. At least they've come out of the closet: they're *for* the Poll Tax!

by Mike Marqusee, Hornsey and Wood Green Labour Party

BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham Labour Council has begun its campaign of intimidation against Poll Tax non-payers. Despite an incredible 90,000 rebate applications remaining unprocessed, summonses have been issued against those the council leader claims "could afford the full amount but had paid nothing." Just how he knows who can and can't afford to pay we leave to the NCCL. The Birmingham courts are full of people who have applied for rebates but heard nothing from the council until receiving a summons. ('Birmingham Labour Briefing' is available from 3, Epsom Court, Abdon Avenue, Weoley Castle, B29 4PQ.)

SHEFFIELD

South Yorkshire's Chief Constable has warned that his officers may refuse to arrest Poll Tax defaulters as "it is essentially a civil rather than a criminal matter". Sheffield Council leader Clive Betts commented: "the Chief Constable's statement is very unhelpful. Arresting people who do not turn up at court is a police responsibility." Betts is Labour PPC for Sheffield Hillsborough.

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