BRIEFING

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

July 1991 80p (60p unwaged)

Whose side are you on?

UCATT vs EETPU

THE EETPU has declared war on the Union of Construction and Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT) following elections to the UCATT executive which gave the left a three-to-two majority.

One of the first acts of the new executive was to suspend right-wing General Secretary Albert Williams and instigate an independent inquiry into allegations of ballot-rigging.

The undemocratic practises of the UCATT old guard had been exposed on a Dispatches feature on Channel 4. The programme showed small rooms where hundreds of members were supposed to have met to cast overwhelming votes for the union's long-time leaders. It also demonstrated massive duplication in the register of members used in union elections.

The left victory came in the first UCATT ballot to be supervised by the Electoral Reform Society. Disgust on the part of the union rank-and-file with the right-wing ballot-riggers was bolstered by increasing anger over ever-worsening conditions in the industry. Last year, there were 150 deaths on British building sites.

The Construction Safety Campaign has been toiling for years to bring to light the threat to building workers' health and safety. Its reward was media indifference, the undying hostility of Albert Williams, and growing respect among the rank-and-file. Activists claim that the CSC's groundwork helped give union members the confidence to turf out the old guard.

Twenty-eight thousand UCATT members voted in the elections, a turn-out of some 13%. In the context of a high membership turn-over, official hostility to any membership participation, and the sheer difficulty of campaigning among a membership scattered on so many sites, that's not as bad as it may seem.

The result was a shock to the ruling right-wing clique, which had grown complacent in recent years. A small group of unelected full-time officials began to move rapidly to smash the union they could no longer control.

Some officials had already been involved in secret discussions with the EETPU and GMB over various merger possibilities. Now they saw an opportunity to destroy the

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hated left-wing in its moment of triumph - and at the same time protect their salaries and privileges.

Initially the rebel officials looked to the GMB. Their plan was to split UCATT by taking themselves and their "assets" (i.e. unwary members

Mike Marqusee
Labour Briefing

and their dues) into the Edmonds empire. According to Eric Hammond, who should know, Edmonds himself "planned, plotted, conspired...with Alan Black, UCATT National Officer, to bring that group of officials and members into" the GMB. The GMB Executive voted to open its construction section to UCATT members. On television Edmonds explained: "there are no rules governing a union that is disintegrating".

This was more than the TGWU could stomach. Todd and Morris forced Norman Willis to issue a statement condemning the poaching. TUC unions were warned that any attempt to carve up UCATT would be a violation of the Bridlington Agreement governing inter-union relations - the very crime for which the EETPU was booted out of the TUC in 1988. The GMB had no interest in joining the EETPU in the wilderness. Edmonds had to back off.

The disgruntled UCATT full-timers turned to Eric Hammond, ready as always to profit from another union's distress. The EETPU set up its own "building trades section"; within two weeks at least a dozen top UCATT officials had signed on at increased salaries. Their assignment is to inveigle as many UCATT members as possible into the EETPU lair. No doubt Hammond hopes to replenish the electricians' dwindling coffers (due to dwindling membership) out of building workers' pockets.

Former UCATT Yorkshire Regional Secretary Paul Corby has become the head of the new EETPU "building trades section" and is currently circulating EETPU leaflets among UCATT members working for Leeds Council. Corby, an old associate of former Leeds Council leader George Mudie and MP Denis Healey, is chair of the Regional Labour Party - a post to which he was nominated and elected as a UCATT representative.

Alan Black, formerly UCATT National Officer for Local Government, and still a member of the London Labour Party Executive, is playing a similar role in the capital. Only a few months ago Black was dashing off letters to the NEC demanding that something be done about the Lambeth left, whom he accused of "veering wildly from one position to another".

One of the EETPU's first targets was the UCATT membership at Sellafield where 100 of the 180 UCATT members have decamped to the EETPU under the direction of former UCATT North West Regional Secretary Tony Lowe. At the insistence of the TGWU, both the Sellafield Shop Stewards Committee and BNFL management have agreed to refuse recognition to the breakaway members.

The TGWU and UCATT, which together represent the vast majoirty of unionised building workers, have now formed a "Construction Workers' Alliance" which will oppose employer recognition of the EETPU as a representative of any poached UCATT members. They have also agreed to co-operate on initiatives to improve site-safety, pay and conditions and end the "lump" system of so-called self-employment.

Edmonds' claim that UCATT is "disintegrating" is bogus. A hefty majority of the full-timers have stayed put and as yet the loss of members appears insignificant. Claims that UCATT is bankrupt are also false. The union's finances are in no worse shape than those of other unions. Total assets have grown steadily over the last ten years and the union expects to receive £6 million in members dues in 1991, which should cover all its expenditure.

Meanwhile, the Tory press has suddenly discovered the horrors of UCATT ballot-rigging - about which they showed no concern during the reign of Albert Williams. The Sun, the Star and the London Evening Standard have all run stories revealing that Paul Lineghan, who defeated sitting Labour NEC member Jack Rogers in the North West by over 3000 votes, had some petty criminal convictions in his distant past. Clearly, these stories are part of the Tory press efforts to revive the bogie of "unscrupulous trade union power" in the run-up to the general election. These people know Kinnock and just how to put him on the defensive.

All this has taken place against the background of pay negotiations with the Building Employers Confederation. The bosses have offered a measly 4.7% increase in response to union demands for "a substantial increase". Their offer means a rise in guaranteed minimum earnings for craft operatives from £148.20 per week to £155.22. Relishing the hostile publicity the union was getting and the chaos caused by deserting full-timers, the employers felt confident enough to cancel unilaterally a negotiating session fixed for June 6th.

At this year's TUC and Labour Party conference we must deal with the predatory parasitism of the EETPU once and for all. It has degenerated into an open agent of the employers and has no place within the trade union movement. We must turn the tables on Hammond with an all-out campaign to recruit EETPU members into genuine unions. If we fail to do this, the EETPU's poaching and scabbing will remain a threat to every union that tries to do its proper job.

Equally important, Hammond and his gang must be ejected from the Labour Party. After all, none of the hundreds of left-wingers expelled in recent years ever committed any violation of the Party constitution as spectacular as the conspiracy to destroy UCATT. A little over a year ago Kinnock was calling for Arthur Scargill's head on the basis of allegations in the Mirror which have now been proved false. But he has no word of criticism for the misdeeds of Hammond, Edmonds, Williams and the rest. Of course, what he really fears is the kind of upsurge from below which removed the UCATT mafia. That's only one of many good reasons for socialists in the labour movement to stand up for the integrity of UCATT and the right of its members to change their leadership as and when they please.

The Evening Standard calls *Briefing* ..."The defiant organ of the unreconstituted hard left"

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The Liverpool tragedy

The split in the Liverpool Labour Party over the Walton by-election is a tragedy for the left in the Party and for the movement as a whole.

For all its errors - and they were legion - the Militant-led left in Liverpool has been a source of strength for the Labour left nationally. The tradition of socialist activism in the Liverpool Party is an asset accumulated for us all.

How sad then to see this legacy squandered in the by-election adventure. The consequences for the Party rank and file in Merseyside and elsewhere could be dire in the extreme. We may be about to witness expulsions on a scale not seen in a generation.

The primary blame for all this lies with Kinnock and Walworth Road. In recent years the Party in Liverpool has been the victim of repeated smears, insults and attacks by the Labour leadership. Organisational fiat has replaced any attempt at rational debate. The rights of grass-roots members have been trampled on with such arrogance that it is no wonder the benediction of the NEC has lost so much authority there.

Surely any socialist can sympathise with the rage felt by working class activists at the thought of Eric Heffer's mantle falling on Peter Kilfoyle's shoulders.

Nonetheless the Liverpool Militants are *wrong a thousand times over*. They were wrong to stand for the six council seats last May, but then they could at least fairly claim that the "official Labour" tag had been hijacked by the imposed candidates; this was reflected in the results; clearly, for thousands of people in those wards, the Broad Left was the "Real Labour" party.

But that rationale cannot apply in Walton, where, despite the irregularities, Kilfoyle can legitimately claim to have been selected by the local Party under the rules.

Whatever the result on July 4th, the Broad Left's decision will stand as a tragic error. Their campaign can only serve in the long run to undercut the capacity of the local working-class to express itself through the Labour Party, to bring it under democratic control, to reclaim it for socialism. They have given Kilfoyle a blank cheque; what chance of bringing him or any of his cronies to account now?

The Liverpool Broad Left has embraced a dubious short-term palliative in preference to the long, hard fight inside the Labour Party. Whatever their intentions, this must surely be the first step on the path out of the Labour Party for Militant, which in the past has been among the harshest critics of left sects which followed this course. Given the experience of other groups which have abandoned the struggle inside the Party, even of substantial organisations like the ILP, the future looks grim for Militant.

There is simply no getting round the need for a sustained challenge to the Labour leadership from the Party's own membership - in both the constituencies and the trades unions.

It gives us no pleasure to condemn the Liverpool Broad Left and we intend to fight hard against the mass expulsions now being cooked up at Walworth Road. These will only exacerbate the split in Liverpool and weaken the Party in the run-up to the general election.

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Walton: Who dares wins?

The Liverpool Broad Left's decision to field Lesley Mahmood as a candidate against official Labour candidate Peter Kilfoyle in the Walton by-election has exposed them to yet more Walworth Road witch-hunts. Why did they do it and what are their chances? ***Jane Wells*** *investigates.*

THE DECISION of the Militant-dominated Liverpool Left to field a rival candidate to Labour is in some ways surprising, since it represents a significant change of tack by socialists who have spent many decades in the Labour Party. It smacks a little of opportunism and of a strategy arising out of a momentum of its own.

Having done remarkably well in the May local elections, when five out of six rebel left candidates were elected, the Broad Left found the prospect of a by-election victory tempting. But back in May the situation was different. The left candidates had overwhelming local Labour Party support. The official candidates imposed by Walworth Road had no local base.

In Walton, Labour's official candidate, Peter Kilfoyle, won the selection contest. True, as Regional Organiser he had a distinct (and unfair) advantage and his candidature was criticised by Eric Heffer and recently by his widow Doris. True, he only beat left challenger Lesley Mahmood by 4%. But he did win and the left, for whatever reason, was too weak to defeat him.

"The impact of the proposed council cuts and the action taken by council workers in response will be crucial"

Standing under these circumstances makes for a dodgy and dangerous strategy. The move will inevitably escalate the wave of witch-hunts against the Liverpool Left (already under attack from the Party leadership, journalists and TV dramatists) since standing candidates against Labour means automatic expulsion. The Labour leadership claims to be looking forward to a field day, "rubbing their hands with glee", sources say, at the prospect of "flushing out the Militant" in Merseyside.

But it's not clear that the official Labour Party will make all the running.

In May the Broad Left put forward candidates in six Liverpool wards, winning in five with majorities over the official Labour candidates of between ninety and nine hundred. Before the ballot, Labour's officials had dismissed the Left challenge. But the Broad Left campaign was strong and the wards were saturated with canvassers. The official Labour candidates, with no local Party machine behind them, were outflanked.

The Labour Party and the local media dismissed the left victories as the result of confusion amongst the electorate and strong-arm tactics on the doorstep. Well, they would, wouldn't they? Even if their accusations were substantiated (which they have not been) intimidation and confusion can't account for the Left's success. On the same night in May, hundreds of breakaway "Independent Labour" and "Democratic Labour" candidates were standing across the country and getting nowhere. Clearly, the arithmetic in Liverpool is different.

Only one of the wards contested by the left in May - Anfield - is in Walton. It is the left's stronghold in the constituency; all three of its councillors are now in the Broad Left "Liverpool Labour Group". Elsewhere in Walton it's more mixed. Warbreck has two Broad Left and one Liberal Democrat councillor. Fazackerly also has two Broad Left members, and one "mainstream" Labour. In the remaining three wards, all seven Labour councillors are supporters of the right-wing Labour council leader, Harry Rimmer. The impact of the current round of proposed council cuts and the industrial action taken by council workers in response will be crucial. Groups of workers across the city have been involved in strike and protest action. Liverpool's refuse collectors have been out for weeks now in opposition to competitive tendering and compulsory redundancies; mountains of rubbish are piling up in the parks. Whom the electorate blames for this mess is bound to help determine whom they vote for. Militant's media-conscious Merseyside organiser has challenged Kinnock and Kilfoyle to defend "the grotesque chaos of the right-wing Labour council scuttling round the city issuing 1,000 redundancy notices." With the lines between the two sides on the question of the budget cuts so sharply drawn, the choice for the voters would seem to be clear.

"The move will inevitably escalate the wave of witch-hunts against the Liverpool Left"

Although Kinnockism doesn't enjoy a natural base in Merseyside, many people, perhaps most, will still see Labour as the main vehicle for opposing the Tories and won't want to let in a Liberal, who might just squeeze through if there was a fairly even split in the Labour vote.

The Broad Left says it wouldn't stand an alternative candidate in a general election - but why not? The political options will be no different. Either the current campaign is based on a principled stand (and therefore applicable in a general election) or it's just an opportunity to get Militant into the limelight and boost its ratings.

The rest of the left should be wary of being dragged out of the Labour Party, where its strength and organisation is essential, into what in the long-run can only be a side show - although it's always nice to see the Kinnockites get a (metaphorical) bloody nose.

Militant: "We faced a stark choice ..."

***Richard Venton**, Merseyside **Militant** spokesperson , explains why he's backing the "Real Labour"candidate and puts the case for the Liverpool Broad Left. For **Briefing**'s view, see "We Say" on page three.*

TWO HUNDRED Liverpool Broad Left members cheered to the echo after agreeing to challenge Kinnock's yes-man, Peter Kilfoyle, with a Real Labour candidate. Lesley Mahmood, a working class militant socialist with 24 years active membership of the Labour Party, was democratically selected and endorsed by 100 Walton Broad Left members.

Militant believes the Broad Left's decision will advance the struggle to reclaim the Labour Party for the working class and socialism.

The struggles waged in Liverpool between 1983-87 have left a permanent mark on Liverpool workers' consciousness. It is the most politicised city in Britain. The polarisation created by the trial of strength between labour and capital has been reflected in extreme polarisation within the labour movement - between the overwhelmingly socialist ranks and the pro-capitalist right-wing apparatus.

Unable to defeat the left by argument (the left had a 2-1 majority on the briefly re-opened DLP) Kinnock's machine resorted to the worst Stalinist methods: expulsions, closure of the DLP, suspension of Party branches with 600 members, suspension of 29 councillors who opposed Poll Tax and rent rises, and blatant rigging of the local election panel.

All this has left the Council in the hands of a right-wing Labour-SLD coalition which is rapidly dismantling the gains won in 1983-87, eg. 1000 redundancies, privatisation of the bins (threatening a further 460 jobs), £8 rent rise, cessation of the housing programme, service cuts, and zealous implementation of the Poll Tax, complete with pit-bull bailiffs.

Walton Labour Party has a socialist, indeed Marxist tradition, stretching back at least forty years. It was only through undemocratic manoeuvres that Kilfoyle managed to hang the "Labour candidate" ticket round his own neck. As Eric Heffer made clear at the time, it was contrary to all natural justice for Kilfoyle to be able to exploit the advantages of being a regional officer in the 1990 selection contest. Walton members were disenfranchised from the ballot through expulsions and suspensions. Kilfoyle also broke the rules by canvassing amongst individual members whose addresses he alone knew. Serious questions were raised - but never answered - about how numerous votes were cast, including the vote of a union branch.

Lesley Mahmood was the REAL winner, but "lost" by 4% through methods with no place in a democratic Party.

We faced a stark choice: let the right-wing wreck forty years of socialist tradition in Walton and roll back the historic gains of 1983-87, or challenge Kilfoyle with a candidate genuinely reflecting the wishes of the living forces of the labour movement.

Tactics must take account of the views of those directly engaged in the class struggle. Hundreds if not thousands of council workers fighting for their jobs, and Poll Tax non-payers facing prosecution are outraged at the thought of Kilfoyle succeeding Eric Heffer. Even before the Broad Left made its decision, there was a groundswell among "ordinary people" for a challenge to Kinnock's yes-man.

Socialists should not give an inch to the slanderous nonsense that "intimidation" or "confusion" led to the victory of five Real Labour councillors against Kinnock's stooges in May. This victory reflected the growing consciousness of working people, OUTSIDE the organised labour movement, of the need for genuine socialism.

Of course there is a powerful loyalty to Labour. For decades, Militant has argued against other tendencies that the Labour Party will be transformed by workers who enter it at certain stages in search of political change. But how can that process by assisted in Walton? By allowing Kilfoyle to masquerade as the Labour choice? By abandoning the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Liverpool workers who are conscious of the need to organise a fightback?

The press - and it would seem even some comrades on the left - say that Militant and the Liverpool Broad Left have abandoned the Labour Party. The opposite is true! Real Labour is not just a "tag". It genuinely reflects what the Broad Left is - the DLP in exile, the functioning body of Party activists gagged and paralysed by the machinations of Kinnock and Kilfoyle. This defiant stance is designed to hold together the real Labour Party activists in Liverpool, to prevent right-wing bureaucratic centralism from driving them through demoralisation into the "side-show" of inactivity.

"Walton Labour Party has a socialist, indeed Marxist tradition"

By this principled stance, the Broad Left has the opportunity to begin building a mass workers' Labour Party in Liverpool. The real "side-show" is the right-wing rump, who are incapable of enthusing anybody.

Militant has in no way abandoned the struggle for a majority, socialist Labour government. Nor do we think the Labour Party is dead forever. The decision to stand Lesley Mahmood will organise hundreds of workers and youth, help defend Labour's socialist traditions and assist the socialist renewal of Labour by building the forces of the left.

The Walton by-election will come to be known as a decisive turning-point in the reconquest of Labour for socialism, to which Militant will contribute its full support.

War and democracy in Ethiopia

Peering through the miasma of media cynicism, ***Will Campbell*** *Secretary of the* ***Ethiopia Solidarity Campaign*** *and member of Hackney North CLP sees hope for democracy and self-determination in the Horn of Africa.*

ON MAY 28th forces of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) entered the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, to end one of the most brutal dictatorships Africa has known.

The political nature of the EPRDF has been confused by simplistic labelling and media cynicism about prospects for progressive change in the 'Dark Continent'. Consequently, the response from socialists in Britain has been subdued, to say the least.

When Mengistu Haile Mariam seized power after the 1974 coup which toppled the imperial regime of Haile Selassie, many on the left believed his regime would be a major anti-imperialist force. But Mengistu turned out to be no more than an opportunist. His administration declared itself Marxist-Leninist in 1977, but only after $2 billion's worth of arms had been airlifted from the Soviet Union to ensure Ethiopia's victory over Moscow's previous ally, Somalia.

The major source of conflict in Ethiopia has always been its many nations. Before the late nineteenth century, the area was a collection of small feudal kingdoms, the most powerful of which was Shewa. In 1889 Menelik, king of Shewa, made a deal with the European imperialists ensuring his rule over Abyssinia in return for Italy's occupation of the Red Sea province of Eritrea. Since then, Ethiopia has been ruled by the Amhara nationality, centred in Shewa province.

In this century, Britain has supported the monarchy at the expense of the oppressed nationalities. The first major rebellion against Haile Selassie's oppressive regime was crushed in 1943 when Britain sent its bombers from Aden to massacre the rebel Tigrayans.



"Now we have our democratic rights!" Photo Will Campbell

After Italy's defeat in the Second World War Britain gave up its protectorate of Eritrea in favour of Haile Selassie, who then forcibly annexed the territory in 1962. Since then, Eritreans have opposed Ethiopian rule and demanded a referendum to determine the future status of Eritrea.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) has now set up a provisional government in Ethiopia. The media have suggested possible conflict between it and the EPRDF. This is completely unfounded. The EPRDF was established on the principle of self-determination for nationalities and has always supported the right of the Eritrean people to choose the status of their own territory, up to and including independence.

Mengistu's regime maintained Amhara domination and stepped up the military campaign against Eritrea with massive Soviet, Korean and Cuban support. At the same time, it suppressed internal opposition through the "Red Terror" of 1978, when political parties, trade unions and students were targetted as "counter-revolutionary" and thousands were murdered. Many Ethiopians can testify to the death squads which dragged dead bodies through the streets of towns to sell them back to families for burial.

In this environment the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) grew strong. Formed in 1975, the TPLF advocated regional autonomy for Tigray and democratic government for Ethiopia. Before liberating the whole of Tigray from Mengistu in 1989, the TPLF joined with another, predominantly Amhara, opposition group, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement to form the EPRDF.

A motto of Meles Zenawi, chairperson of the EPRDF and presently leader of Ethiopia, is "the proof of the policy is in the practice". This is how the EPRDF and the EPLF should be judged. Both fronts introduced participatory, democratic structures in the areas under their control. Locally elected people's councils, autonomous of the fronts, have been given responsibility for all aspects of economic, political and social life. Under the councils, land has been equally distributed to all, regardless of gender, religion or nationality. This has had a profound effect on a country whose population is 90% peasant farmers.

Many have been surprised to learn that market constraints in EPRDF areas have been lifted. The rationale of this, as Meles Zenawi explained to me in November last year, is to give a freedom to the people to express their needs and desires. Without this basic right, the people would resist any attempt to follow a socialist course. The

immediate problem is to build up its industry and infrastructure, devastated by years of conflict and failed policies. Once this has been achieved, Ethiopia can take the path towards socialism - but only if that is what the people choose.

In visits I made to the liberated areas of the EPRDF last year people were quick to inform me of their achievements. "Now we have our democratic rights!" is a common cry - and it is no empty slogan. The grassroots democratic structure has ensured that people's demands are met. It has also enabled long-overdue development projects to begin. On my first visit to Tigray, at the height of a major famine, everyone was engaged in terracing and tree-planting work. All those I spoke to were determined that these projects would help break the cycle of famine and dependence on international aid.

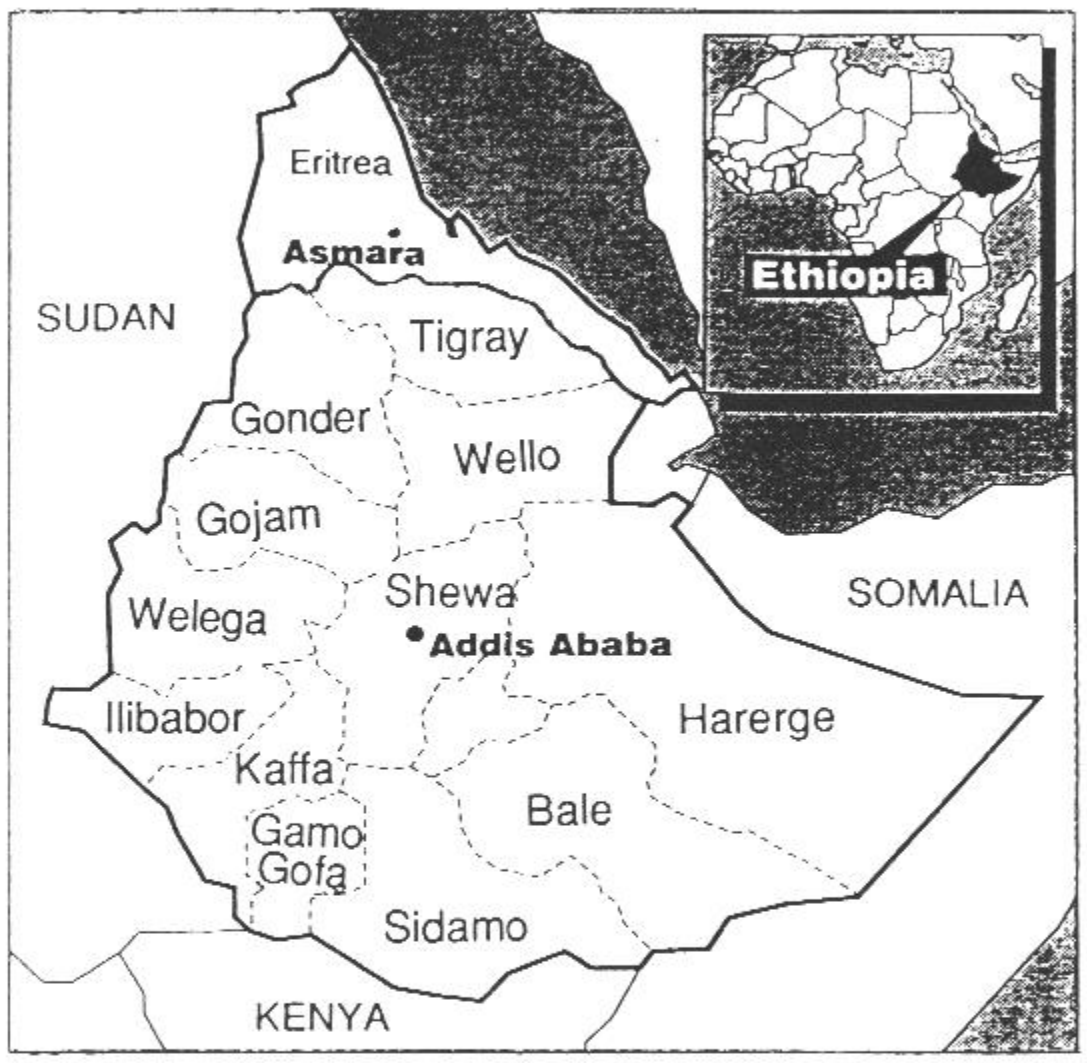
This insistence on the people's ability to overcome problems on their own is reflected in the EPRDF's anti-imperialism. Alongside the right of self-determination, this ranks as the most important principle of the revolution.

This commitment has been clouded for some by US involvement in the peace talks which culminated in the EPRDF taking power.

The motives behind US involvement in Ethiopia at this time are uncertain. The strategic significance of the Horn of Africa has declined since the height of Cold War politics in the seventies. It could be that the US simply wants to create a stable environment in the Horn to safeguard business interests.

In any case, the US has only had links with the EPRDF since the peace talks began - so any claim that the EPRDF is US-supported is nonsense. Similarly, it is a myth that Herman Cohen, who chaired the talks, "invited" the EPRDF to enter Addis Ababa; the EPRDF has stated that it took a unilateral decision to take the city in order to minimise bloodshed.

There are now prospects for establishing peace and laying down the conditions for socialism in Ethiopia. Recent news from Addis Ababa, where opposition is likely to be most vocal, is good: law and order committees have been elected to ensure a degree of stability; indications are that the people recognise the EPRDF's commitment to a peaceful transition to democratic civilian government.



Socialists and anti-imperialists in Britain should back the EPRDF to help ensure that Ethiopia is allowed to determine its own future - a future free of famine and war.

■ **More information on Ethiopia and the EPRDF can be obtained from: Ethiopia Solidarity Campaign, 211 Clapham Road, London SW9 0QH.**

Kurdish hunger strikers: "We have nothing to lose ... we are ready for anything"

A "Law to Fight Terrorism" formally came into force on April 12th by a decision of the Turkish Council of State. Ironically, the law was also defined as an "amnesty law" because it contained temporary legal requirements about suspension of sentences which provided for the release of a number of prisoners.

The Turkish government announced this law as a "democratic reform" because it abolished articles 140, 141, 142, 163 of the Turkish Criminal Code which had led to much criticism of the Turkish regime over the years. They made freedom of expression a major offence and though they have been repealed, their essential content has been re-introduced in the new law in an even more vicious form with the threat of even harsher punishments. The articles aimed against the struggle of the Kurds in Turkey were especially tightened.

The "amnesty" is a fraud. Only 500 of approximately 3000 political prisoners were released. The remaining prisoners will be seriously affected by the new regulations which effectively revoke the rights won by political prisoners through years of protest. The new law also tightens censorship and undermines the right of association, already severely restricted in Turkey.

In Kurdistan people are protesting against this law with mass hunger strikes which have involved not only the prisoners themselves but also their relatives, peasants, workers and traders. Political prisoners have organised mass hunger strikes in special prisons, often supported by actions outside the prisons. In several cities, for example Mardin and Urfa, it is the first time in ten years that such actions have taken place.

It is impossible to find out anything about the conditions of the prisoners, who are denied any contact with the outside world.

In Derik, Mardin and Diyarbakir the Turkish military attacked the hunger strikers and there were many casualties. In Derik the army temporarily closed all exit and entrance roads.

In a statement the hunger strikers declared: "We have nothing to lose. We will make this law ineffective. We want an independent Kurdistan and we don't recognise either colonialism or its laws. Tell the people abroad that we are ready for anything and that we expect them to support us."

New world odour

"Yellow-ribbon fever" stalks the US as the private sector revels in the recent reassertion of US imperialist might. ***Geoff King*** *reports from across the Atlantic.*

THE US celebrations of victory in the Gulf War came to a ghastly and self-congratulatory head in the recent parades in Washington and New York. But these parades were merely the climax of a mood that has been nourishing a booming industry across the country.

Whether tied around trees, pinned in lapels, spread over doorways, stuck on car windows or plastered across enormous hoardings at the roadside, the message and the signs of entrepreneurial endeavour are impossible to escape.

It may not compare with the billions reaped by the arms industry, but the market for playing on the hopes, fears, conscience and suppressed guilt of the nation both during and after the war has been a profitable one.

Every gas station and supermarket checkout offers a selection of goodies. Yellow ribbons, badges, car-stickers and pocket-sized flags seem to be most popular. Bookstores abound with rushed-out biographies of Schwarzkopf and fetishistic volumes full of glossy pictures of military hardware.

There are two main slogans. Each reflects a different stage in the conflict and each carries overtones that seem to reopen the old Vietnam wounds which the assault on Iraq was supposed to have closed.

"Support Our Troops", rather dated now but still very much in evidence, seems to be a demand imposed on others more than an expression of personal support on the part of whoever has it in his or her window or tee-shirt. It seems to reflect anxiety rather than to demonstrate solidarity. The unspoken subtext is that American troops should not be "let down" by the folks back home, as is alleged to have been the case in Vietnam.

"Welcome Home Troops", the message now dominant and proclaimed across the land, also has a reference to matters past, to a time when troops returned either to opposition or stony silence. Now, they are met with flag waving as they come off the plane. The gents toilets at Kennedy airport, where once servicemen might have taken the first opportunity to change out of their uniforms into anonymous civvies, are decorated with the proud graffiti of soldiers declaring their regimental loyalties and Gulf exploits.

Elsewhere, reference to the war is sometimes painfully blatant. An advert in the *Los Angeles Times* for filing cabinets says: "Hi-tech weapons made a great American victory possible. You can win in business by using these hi-tech office 'weapons'." Restaurant chains have their own generic "Welcome Home" stickers. No business, it seems, wants to be seen as any less fervently patriotic than its competitors.



Cartoon from Against the Current, a magazine of the American Left

Gulfspeak is epidemic. Everything awful is a "Scud"; anything large or impressive is the "mother of..."

There is also a more subtle seepage of smug backslapping. A car advert on the radio speaks of the present as a time in which America is regaining confidence in itself. No direct reference to the war is made, but none is necessary.

There are occasional signs of opposition, just as there were protesters alongside the giant victory parades. But it is the imperialists who have won the slogan war. "No Blood for Oil" is rarely seen, even in New York and San Francisco.

Some examples of Gulf-mania are particularly depressing. The Navajo reservation in Arizona displays as many pro-war signs as anywhere, if not more. One reads, not "Support Our Troops", but "Support Our Warriors"; the soldiers it depicts have distinctly Navajo features. There seems to be little sense, in public at least, of the obvious historical parallels between the genocide experienced by the Native Americans and the subsequent fate of non-white peoples in, for example, the Middle East.

Yet, whatever US imperialism may have gained from the war in the reassertion of its military might, the signs of success ring rather hollow back home. There is a stridency that seems less than convincing. Perhaps mounting evidence of foreign and domestic problems which will not be so easily "resolved" will alter the landscape.

■ *Geoff King is a member of Brighton Labour Party, currently suspended by the NEC.*

Still living the battle of Trafalgar Square

Thirty people are now serving "exemplary sentences" for defending their right to demonstrate at last year's great Poll Tax protest. ***Julie Boston*** *outlines their call for justice.*

THUGS,DRUNKEN lunatics, and violent troublemakers were the words used by the media to defile those who defended themselves against police attack in Trafalgar Square on March 31st, 1990.

The 100,000 strong demonstration, which had begun in a carnival atmosphere, ended as a battlefield. The Home Secretary, David Waddington, blamed the Labour Party and the organisers of the march. The Labour Party and the organisers blamed Class War, gangs of youth and anarchists. Roy Hattersley called for as many arrests as possible and "exemplary sentences". *The Sunday Mirror* and *Sunday People* printed "Eight Faces of Scotland Yard's most wanted list" urging its readers: "if you know 'em, SHOP 'EM".

As a result of this witch-hunt, thirty people are now in prison and ten are still facing charges.

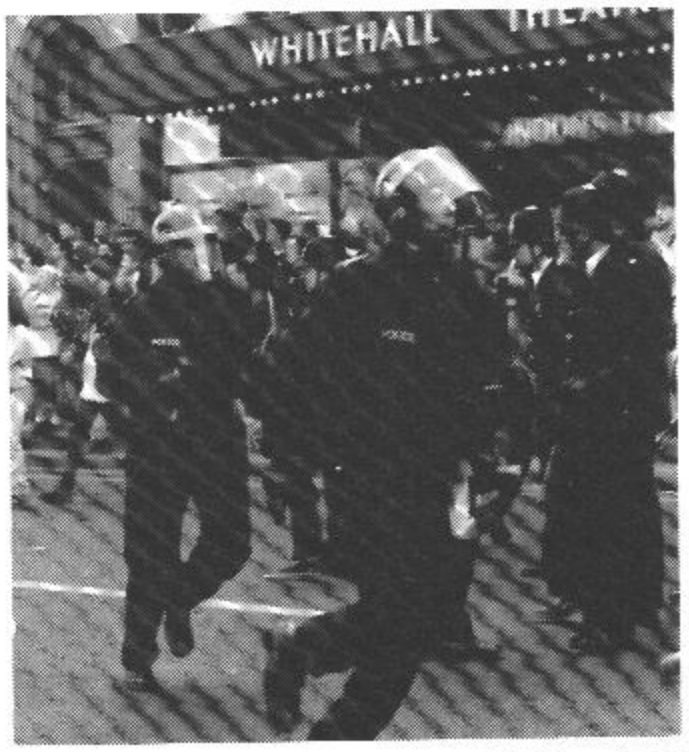
The government hoped to divert anger against the Poll Tax and criminalize protest. But its strategy did not succeed. Many people rejected the media's version of events. Those who were present could see that the conflict arose from police actions; in particular they saw that it was sparked off by the attack on a peaceful sit-down in Whitehall.

In the days that followed people gave eye-witness reports on local radio phone-in programmes and in letters to the national and local press. Several months later, Channel 4's "The Battle of Trafalgar" confirmed that people were trapped into defending themselves.

But if we won the moral argument we certainly did not win the legal one. Out of 520 people arrested 100 have been given custodial sentences. The longest sentence - four years - was imposed on a traveller, Paul Jacob, who had already spent a year on remand in Brixton.

Matt Lee, chair of Birmingham Anti-Poll Tax Federation, was seen on video calling people to push a police line to one side to create an escape route. He got two and a half years.

Three people were charged with riot for trying to stop a police van diving into a crowd. After a gruelling two-week trial at the Old Bailey, three verdicts of "not guilty" were delivered for charges under Section 1 (riot). One of the defendants, who had spent eight months in custody, walked free. Darren Healey got two-and-a-half years and Tim Donaghy three years for convictions under Section 2.



Poll tax rioters

The sentences are not only vindictive, they are racist. For example, Brian Tavares and Tim Donoghue, both mixed race, received exceptional three-year sentences. No doubt, the "exemplary" nature of some sentencing would please Hattersley: two years for kicking a van for someone with no previous convictions.

Nonetheless, some good has emerged from the government attack on a peaceful demonstration. It has inspired people to act collectively to defend themselves. For the past year the Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign (TSDC) has given unconditional moral, practical, legal and financial support to those facing trial. In many cases adjournments and "not guilty" verdicts have been won and charges dropped. The Prisoners Support Group holds weekly meetings to organize newspapers, letters and a monthly allowance of £10 for each prisoner.

This is not only essential for prisoners' morale, it has also helped expose the thug/lunatic/troublemaker image. The prisoners' own letters (printed in Stand Firm, the paper of the TSDC) show them to be exceptionally selfless, caring people. Many have a vision of fighting for a better society. No doubt in their cells they re-run the battle of Trafalgar Square each day.

The Prisoners Support Group prints up-to-date lists of prisoners so you can send them cards or letters. It aims to hold a picket outside prisons holding Poll Tax prisoners on the first Saturday of every month AFTER visiting hours (otherwise the visits will be cancelled).

There are prisoners in Arundel, Bexhill, Feltham, Hemel Hempstead, Highpoint, Newmarket, Pentonville, Thamesmead, Wandsworth, and Woking prisons. The campaign aims to win their release and full compensation.

■ **Contact TSDC, c/o 205 Panther House, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1 OAP Tel: 071-833-8958**

■ **Picket Wandsworth Prison on July 14th (Bastille Day!). Contact Sussex Poll Tax Resistors, 0273-671213.**

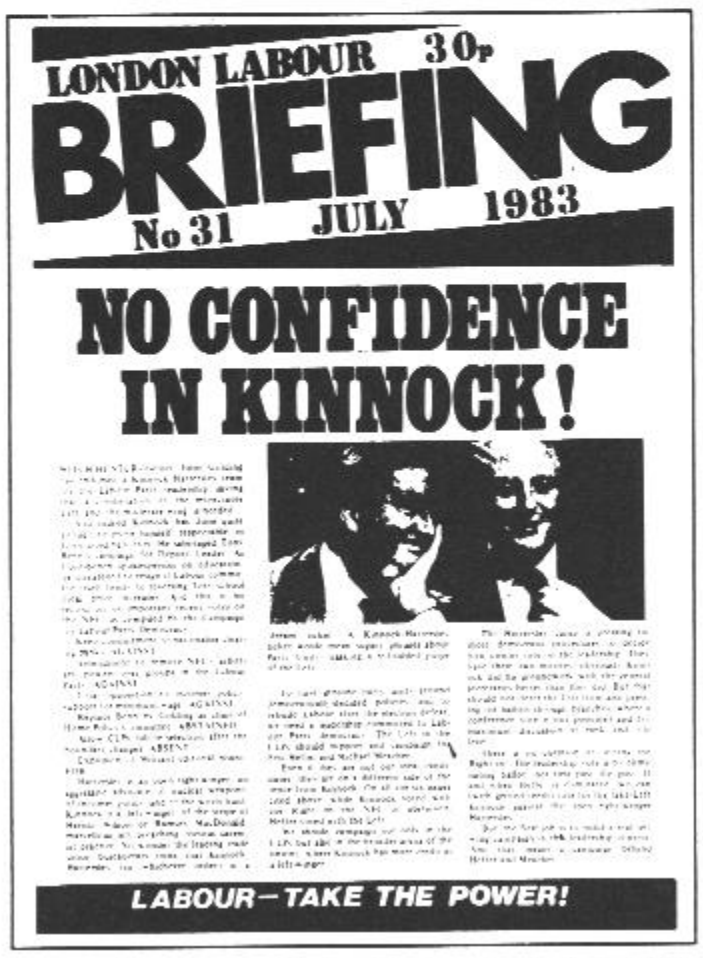
National Anti-Poll Tax Delegates Meeting Sunday, July 14th, 2-6pm Manchester Town Hall

Regional reports; strengthening our links; and preparing for a National Anti-Poll Tax Conference in the autumn - "finishing off the Poll Tax". Open to all anti-Poll Tax organisations.

Called by: Haringey APTU, Yorkshire 3D, North West Anti-Poll Tax Forum, South West Anti-Poll Tax Federation; Anti-Poll Tax Action Network (Scotland), Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign, Sheffield APT, and others.

Contact: 081 802 9804 or 061 707 1584.

Eric Heffer: democrat, intellectual and principled socialist


LONDON LABOUR 30p
BRIEFING
No 31 JULY 1983

NO CONFIDENCE IN KINNOCK!

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Briefing backs Eric for Leader in July 1983

***Reg Race** pays tribute to the late Eric Heffer - and in particular his principled campaign for the leadership of the Party in 1983.*

THE DEATH of Eric Heffer deprives the labour movement of one of the most substantial figures in its post-war history.

The son of a Regimental Sergeant Major, Eric left school at 14, worked on Merseyside during the war and quickly became immersed in its political and trade union life. He was active in the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers and was a member of the Communist Party until he was expelled for opposing the dictatorial tendencies of its leaders.

After the CP, he formed the breakaway Socialist Workers Federation, doomed to early collapse in the context of 1940s Britain, and thereafter joined the Labour Party, becoming a city councillor and President of Liverpool Trades Council. He worked as a team with his wife Doris, who was consulted on every issue and who was a formative influence on his opinions.

In 1964 Eric was elected to the Commons in the previously Tory seat of Walton by the slim margin of 2,906 votes. It is a mark of the esteem in which he was held in Liverpool that when he was last returned to Westminster in 1987 by the same constituency, his majority had grown to 23,253.

In 1974, Harold Wilson made Eric Minister of State at the Department of Industry under Tony Benn. Eric produced a first draft of the Industry Bill, designed to implement Labour's manifesto commitments to compulsory planning agreements, a radical National Enterprise Board with sweeping powers, and public ownership of a number of key industries. These plans were swiftly undermined by No. 10, working with Whitehall top brass to discredit Benn, Heffer and Meacher through a splenetic press campaign.

During his brief period in government, Heffer discovered that the Cabinet was about to sanction the sale of warships to the Chilean dictatorship of General Pinochet. This was a clear breach of the manifesto, and Eric used every available means - including public speeches - to get the policy reversed. The final break with office came when he was sacked by Wilson for speaking in a Commons debate in support of a "no" vote in the Common Market Referendum of 1975, even though the Cabinet had agreed that collective responsibility would not apply during the referendum campaign. Eric's compensation was to be elected to the NEC at that year's conference.


London Labour Briefing August 1983

The years between 1975 and 1986 showed him at his most determined on the National Executive: constantly arguing for constitutional change, left policies, and tolerance of dissent. He was anti-Stalinist before it was popular to be so, and for his pains was denounced as a CIA agent by some of the more febrile minds on the NEC.

Some writers have stated that Heffer was "conned by the Bennite left" into standing for the leadership in 1983

"Eric was not sorry for standing for leader in 1983; he regarded it to his dying day as the most principled action he had taken in political life"

against Kinnock, Hattersley and Shore. On the contrary, Eric needed no persuading. He issued a manifesto for the election in which he made it clear that he supported accountable leadership, the popularising of socialism, the support of workers in struggle, public ownership of the financial institutions, positive action to support women and black people, radical action to eliminate poverty - and no fudging by the Party's leaders. He was also the only candidate to publish a Women's Manifesto.

Most of the Party was, unfortunately, taken in by the brazen statements of

Never a yes man

In the last year of his enormously productive life, ***Eric Heffer*** *completed several books. Below we print an exclusive extract from his autobiography,* ***Never a Yes Man****, to be published by Verso in September.*

"I HAVE BECOME used to betrayals. In a long political life they are inevitable. Some have been minor but one cut so deeply into my socialist beliefs that the wound has never healed.

On that fateful Tuesday afternoon at the 1985 Labour Party Conference I listened with great care to Neil Kinnock's Parliamentary report. As an attack on the Tories I thought it effective. It was when he gave the impression that Liverpool Council was dominated and run by the Militant Tendency that I took exception. Certainly Militants were on the Council but they were a small minority.

I knew the Council had built houses - good houses; it had built sports centres to keep the youth off the streets. It had kept council rents down and the price of school dinners down. It had effected a long overdue reorganisation of education and put a race relations officer in each school. It had created a new park and cleared slums which should have been cleared years before. It made tactical errors but those who do positive things do make mistakes.

Kinnock began his attack: 'You start with far-fetched resolutions. They are then pickled into a rigid dogma, a code, and you go through the years sticking to that, outdated, misplaced, irresponsive to the real needs, and you end in the grotesque chaos...' his face red with anger as he spat out the words '...the grotesque chaos of a Labour Council - a Labour Council - hiring taxis to scuttle round a City handing out redundancy notices to its own workers'.

It was too much to bear. I walked off...

After my abrupt exit I was chased round the hall by TV, political and other journalists. I refused to speak and tried to get out of their way as delegates surrounded me and endeavoured to protect me. An old friend, Jerry Bree, brought me a cup of tea but was so emotional he spilt it over me.

I wondered where Doris had gone.

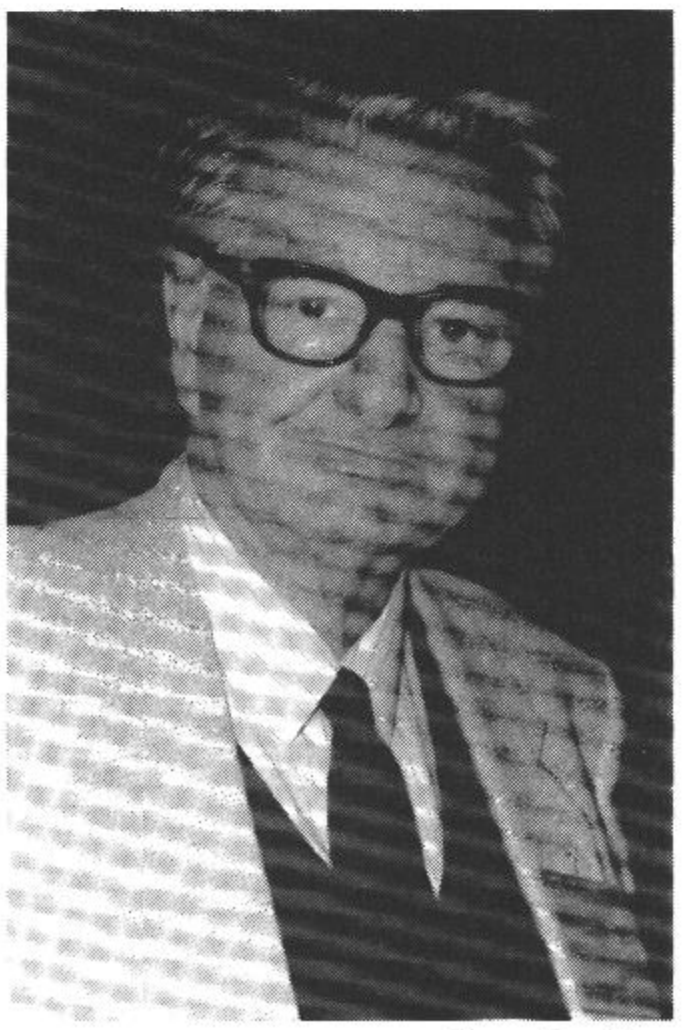


Photo Newsfocus

As I walked from the platform I had looked for her but her seat was empty. I learned later that she too had walked out when Kinnock made his attack and was surprised, when she looked back, to see me walking off. When I arrived in the outer hall John Hamilton, the Council Leader, shook me warmly by the hand. I found Doris and we went back to our hotel.

It was there I gave an interview to Elinor Goodman, the political editor of Channel 4, the best, most balanced and meticulous of her kind. Later I gave some more interviews to other networks. I told them I could not sit there and listen to good working people being attacked in such a way by the Party Leader...

Bob Parry's response was clear and to the point: 'Kinnock showed today that he is the biggest traitor since Ramsay MacDonald. He is the man who kicked Liverpool in the teeth when it was down on the ground'.

I say Amen to that. That is why I said I would never forgive him for what he did to my City and my Party."

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the Kinnock campaign, the most breathtaking of which was: "I do not believe that our current body of policies needs major addition" (Kinnock's Manifesto, Guardian, July 18th 1983).

Eric was not sorry for standing for leader in 1983; he regarded it to his dying day as the most principled action he had taken in political life.

He was Chair of the Party during the first six months of the Miners' Strike and worked tirelessly to provide the solidarity that the Parliamentary leadership withheld.

In 1986, after a vicious whispering campaign orchestrated by the Labour leadership and the LCC, he was thrown off the constituency section of the NEC. In particular, he was attacked for standing up for Liverpool and his constituents when Kinnock attacked them from the platform at the 1985 Party conference.

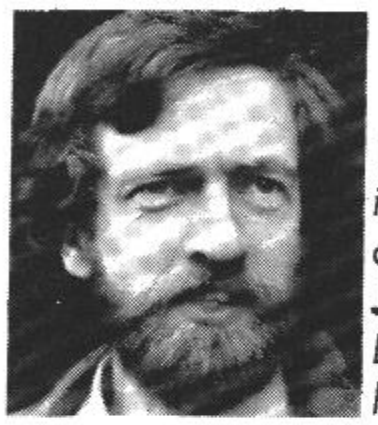
When it became clear that his life was drawing to a close, he decided to speak to the future by writing books on the Gulf War, Christianity and politics, socialism and his own autobiography.

He was incensed at the wholesale distortion of the historical record perpetrated by the Kinnockites, Marxism Today, and the PLP right - distortions which sought to lay the blame for Thatcherism and the defeats of 1979, 1983, and 1987 on the left.

He was determined to show that it was the abandonment of radicalism and the espousal of monetarism by the Callaghan/Healey axis and later the illusions of post-Fordism that undermined the drive and determination of the labour movement.

It is a great pity that people failed to listen to his campaign warnings in 1983; but illusions are sometimes very comforting.

Tribute to Eric - and a call to action.



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

ERIC HEFFER *was a wonderful man and socialist, as so many of his obituaries made clear. An exception was a vituperative piece by Anthony Bevins in the Independent.*

Could it be that this "newspaper of record" was irked by and wanted to deflate the widespread respect which Eric won by the power of his political message?

I first came across Eric in the mid-seventies as a Shropshire schoolboy trying to oppose the Vietnam War. He was the most consistent voter against the Wilson government's connivance with the US.

Twenty years later Eric pointed to the benches where the SLD sit and said, "They were the 'Vietcong benches' then!".

I will always admire Eric's real internationalism. He was not afraid of making criticisms of regimes that had gone off the rails but he refused to join the emigre groups hankering for new monarchies in Eastern Europe.

As an early supporter of the Popular Unity Government in Chile he met Allende in 1972 in Santiago. Only a year later British built planes bombed the Presidential Palace. His bold protest against Labour's collaboration in the arms trade was one of his finest moments.

Missing from most of the obituaries was his deep commitment to animal rights and the abolition of blood sports.

Eric and his wife Doris formed a potent team. She shared in all his achievements.

Humanitarian, class warrior, internationalist and incorruptible socialist - Eric, we miss you.

ON JULY 13TH *the leaders of the richest seven industrial countries will meet in London in an atmosphere of crisis. How do they cope with the creation of market capitalism in the east of Europe, the changing role of the Soviet Union and the decline of their own manufacturing economies?*

They will all be agreed on one thing. The new world order will be like the old one: the poorest in the poor countries will continue to pay for the banks and investment companies of the north through the twin evils of punitive interest rates and fixed commodity prices.

The closure of hospitals in Peru, the sale of state companies in Argentina and the introduction of agribusiness in Africa are some of the results of this order.

There is an alternative. Cancel the debt - it is unpayable and morally wrong - and trade on a basis that is fair to the poor. These demands will be raised at the "Cancel the Debt" rally in Trafalgar Square on July 13th. It deserves the support of the whole of the left.

MUCH HAS HAPPENED *in the Labour Party since the 1979 election defeat.*

That election was lost in the wake of the Winter of Discontent and the impact of IMF demands on the working class. Yet only three years later the leadership of the Party decided that the real obstacles to a Labour victory were precisely those activists who had opposed the follies of 1974-79.

The witch-hunt of 1982 led to the register of Party groups, the re-introduction of bans and prescriptions, the establishment of the National Constitutional Committee, the closing down of local Parties and the imposition of local government and parliamentary candidates. It has been a disaster for the Labour Party.

I HAVE NEVER *believed that opinion polls in 1891 would have shown mass support for socialism. Had the pioneers of the modern labour movement had the "advantage" of detailed polling they would, therefore (if they followed current practices) have jettisoned their commitments on health, housing, education and popular control of industry - in favour of the Boer War and Empire Trade!*

Cancel the Debt!
Saturday, July 13th

Assemble 12 noon at Geraldine Harmsworth Park; march to Trafalgar Square for rally at 2:30 pm with Bernie Grant, Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott, representatives of French and Belgian campaigns and many others.

The demonstration will call for:

- **Unconditional cancellation of Third World debt;**
- **Opposition to the policies of the IMF and the World Bank;**
- **Action to prevent the reappearance of debt.**

"It's not the system, it's the backlog"

Keith Veness,Agent
Islington North CLP

Some years ago the NEC and Party Conference were prevailed upon to agree to the establishment of a "modern", centralised, national membership scheme which would be serviced by state-of-the art computers at Walworth Road.

No more old fuddy-duddies "doing the rounds", collecting subs on pushbikes. This was the era of mailshots and direct debits.

Two years ago the embryonic national scheme began processing applications from people who were impressed by party political broadcasts or adverts in the Guardian and wrote in to HQ pleading to join.

1991 was designated as the year of the "big bang". All members would now join the Party and/or renew their subs solely through the national scheme. All money was to be paid in full to Walworth Road which would then refund the constituency's share after processing the details through its computer.

Dealing with membership lists from the CLPs was difficult because they use so many different methods of keeping membership - from card indexes through notebooks to computer discs.

The first real balls-up occurred when most of the "new national members" (people who signed up during the two year trial period) were found to be entered on the computer twice - once from the CLP list and once because they were already there! A lot of people are still double-listed and have two national membership numbers.

However, this was only an overture to the colossal disaster that unfolded at Walworth Road earlier this year.

Mailshots went astray, some people got three or four invitations to rejoin and others didn't get any. Members were allocated to wrong CLPs; others thought the renewals were begging letters and threw them in the bin.

The crowning fiasco was the discovery that in spite of all the careful preparation the scale of the manual inputting required was simply too great for the existing staff. It took from January to March to deal with the first week's renewals.

As a result most constituencies had no idea whether their members had renewed or not. The monies needed to keep branches and constituencies going did not appear. Some had to borrow money to function. And not a few members got fed up being reminded to pay subs they had already paid three months before!

To date, only two "monthly" updates have emerged from Walworth Road. A sorry letter has been sent out that has the unbelievably daft quote placed at the head of this article.

The people employed to work this idiocy are NOT to blame. Marian Nicholls, who is in charge of running the scheme, seems a pleasant woman and she shows the patience of Job in explaining and apologising to Party members who ring up in desperation. The computer seems to be more than capable of dealing with the job. CLPs have struggled valiantly to do what was asked of them.

The fault lies in the shoddy politics which gave birth to the membership scheme and the lack of political trust between the membership and the leadership. No real consultation took place. Certainly membership secretaries were never asked what sort of system would help them.

There was also a distaste for the usual way of recruiting. People often join in response to local campaigns, when they see Party activists, councillors or trades unionists opposing rent rises, fighting the Poll Tax, stopping the ring road being built or supporting anti-racist action. However, our leaders do not appear to want this kind of member.

You cannot sustain a large passive membership in Britain based on the German or Scandinavian models; the feeble logic of the national scheme broke down when faced with this fact.

So what is to be done?

Local collection (which is still allowed by the rules) and local deduction of ward and constituency cash shares (which is not) should be encouraged. Constituencies should be assisted via new technology to run the system locally with updates from Walworth Road, not vice versa.

"Trust the people" is usually a good slogan and particularly apposite in this case. We're not "luddites"! We welcome the use of computers and word processors (such as the one that produces this journal) and look forward to their dissemination across the whole labour movement. However, we also support decentralisation of power and control. Records and resources should be kept as local as practicable.



Selly Oak: *life in a target marginal*

IF LABOUR is to form a majority government at the next general election, then we have to win Birmingham Selly Oak. The constituency has only once had a Labour MP, Tom Litterick, from 1974 to 1979.

Selly Oak Labour Party is dominated by councillors (including the author) and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates. Prior to the 1987 election, it was almost impossible to get a word in at GCs - due to the presence of no less than five PPCs at the meetings. Thankfully with the start of the election campaign they all disappeared, apart from one Cllr. Albert Bore, Selly Oak's own candidate in 1987.

Though Bore himself did not actually disappear during the campaign he did manage to "invisiblise" all the active women members of the constituency. Before the 87 election, Bore was seen by the predominantly soft left Selly Oak members as one of their own. However, even then he had virtually sold out to the right in the Labour Group - and was duly awarded with the Chair of the Economic Development Committee. He is now heir-apparent to Sir Dick Knowles, leader of the Labour Group and City Council.

In the week before the start of the 1987 campaign, Bore joined right-wing Labour colleagues to scrap the Women's Committee and kick all the soft-left councillors out of their Council positions. As a result, the GC's official meeting to endorse Bore as Parliamentary candidate, normally a formality, became a touch-and-go affair. Once Bore was endorsed, most of the active women voted with their feet. The rallying cry for most of the rest of the active constituency members was: "let's get him elected and shifted down to London as soon as possible!".

Even so, the result was not too bad. Bore lost to the Tory MP (Anthony Beaumont-Dark) but there was a swing to Labour of 2.8% (as compared with the average of 2.5%). It should be remembered that Beaumont-Dark is a wily political operator. He is a wealthy stock-broker and ex-City Councillor who sells himself as a stubborn independent and has a sharp nose for publicity. He remains difficult to unseat.

Since 87, there have been significant gains in the local elections. The constituency is made up of four wards: Selly Oak, Bournville, King's Norton, and Moseley/King's Heath. In 87 there were only three Labour councillors out of a total of twelve seats in the constituency. Now Labour has ten and the Tories are left with only two, and even these only barely held onto their seats in May.

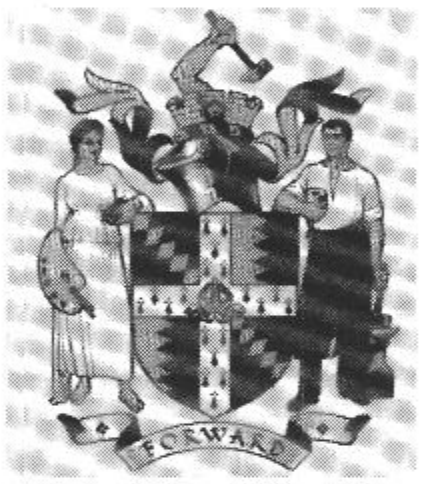
"Walworth Road stunts and pictures of Kinnock won't do the trick."

So the political map has clearly changed. But the results in May did not bode well for a Labour gain at the general election. The total votes for each party were: Labour - 13,886, Tory - 14,205, Liberals - 3,605, and Greens - 1,596.

Though the opinion polls have improved since May 2nd, Labour still has plenty of work to do here to make sure it wins the seat.

Our PPC is Lynne Jones, a soft-left councillor for King's Norton ward. She was Chair of the Council's Housing Committee until the right-wing "night of the long knives" despatched her and her co-thinkers to the backbenches.

In King's Norton the Labour majority has slipped in the last couple of elections; this year we only won by 221 votes. This is in part due to the small ward membership. It is also due to the ward's Walworth Road style of campaigning which has avoided dealing with real local political issues.



Birmingham City Crest: Forward ? !

In one of the ward leaflets, a cartoon showed a couple with child on a balcony of a high-rise council flat with one of the adults saying to the other: "if only we'd been able to keep up with the mortgage!". A strange message for the many council tenants in King's Norton and Selly Oak!

In contrast, in neighbouring Bournville ward, the last three local elections have seen two out of the three Tories defeated by hard left campaigns.

In 1989, Labour defeated the Tories in Bournville for the first time by fighting on a "no cuts and no job losses" platform. In 1990, a second Tory was defeated by a Labour campaign calling for Poll Tax non-payment. Both candidates, Richard Evans (in 1989) and myself (in 1990) stood on a platform that emphasised working-class issues and criticised the right-wing Labour Council. And these victories were won in "comfortable" Bournville - famous for Cadbury's chocolate and the idyllic Bournville Village Trust, a Tory-designed ward if ever there was one.

Selly Oak can be won through a campaign addressed directly to the constituency's working-class electorate. Walworth Road stunts and pictures of Kinnock won't do the trick.

■ *This month's constituency close-up is written by Birmingham City councillor* ***Guy Daly****, who represents Bournville ward in the Selly Oak constituency.*



Hard heart, closed mind, soft left

Ever eager to be perceived as "forward-looking" and "unorthodox", fond of proclaiming his political "independence" to journalists in off-the-record briefings, yet at heart reactionary, philistine and timid - yes, it's ***David Blunkett,*** *MP for Sheffield Brightside and our* ***Class Traitor of the Month.***

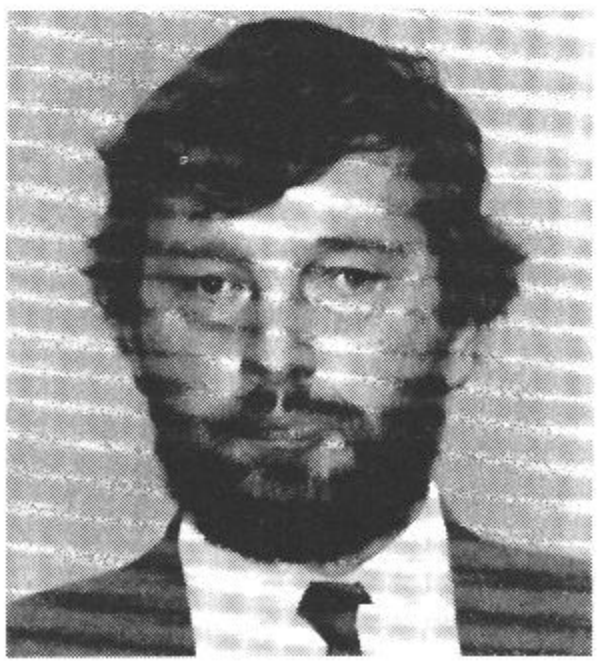
BLUNKETT WAS a 23-year-old student when he was first elected to Sheffield City Council in 1970. He spent the next ten years building a base in the local Labour Party and Trades Council and in 1980 was elevated to the leadership of the Council, ultimately steering it from Bennite rebellion to Kinnockite respectability.

In the early eighties Sheffield, along with the GLC, was the most famous exemplar of what was then called "municipal socialism" (later demonised as "loony leftism"). In fact, even in its left-wing heyday, Sheffield was never the radical innovator it was made out to be. In contrast to the GLC, it made no effort to reach out to women, black people and other dispossessed groups.

The limelight then flooding on to the previously obscure local government stage turned Blunkett into a national figure. In 1983 he became the first non-MP to be elected to the NEC since Harold Laski in the 1940s, filling the vacancy left by Kinnock's elevation to the leadership.

In his early years on the NEC Blunkett backed the left. He became Chair of the newly established NEC Local Government Sub-Committee and an influential founding figure in what was then the Local Government Campaign Unit. As such, he was a key player in the ratecapping struggle. Along with the rest of the NEC and virtually every Labour Council leader in the country he fully endorsed the proposal that Councils challenge the government by refusing to set a rate. When the strategy imploded, he manoeuvred successfully on the Sheffield Labour Group to engineer a discreet climbdown. He then moved rapidly to distance himself from the "politics of confrontation" in local government and joined in the swelling chorus of ex-left voices blaming their erstwhile comrades for the disaster of a campaign which they themselves had devised.

Along with Tom Sawyer and Michael Meacher, Blunkett soon became a pivotal figure in the farce of "realignment" - a polite term for the sudden discovery of the personal advantages of toadying to the leadership. A turning-point was his support for expelling the Liverpool Militants in 1986.



Despite his addiction to the rhetoric of participation and decentralisation, in recent years Blunkett has backed every one of the leadership's proposals to centralise power in the Party; he has consistently voted for suspensions and expulsions and seems untroubled by the finer points of due process and natural justice.

Meanwhile, Blunkett had got himself selected by the unexpectedly narrow margin of 33-25 to succeed retiring left-winger Joan Maynard in the rock solid Sheffield Brightside seat (1987 majority: 24,000).

Although he likes expressing his "concerns" and "reservations" about the leadership in private to Fleet Street hacks, in the end Blunkett always accepts the dictates of the leadership. Nonetheless, "Neil" (as Blunkett always calls him in public) is said to dislike and mistrust Blunkett, who is regarded as not quite "one of us" by Mandelson, Clarke and Byrne, who have alternately built him up and rubbished him in the media.

Since 1985 Blunkett has topped the poll in the CLP section of the NEC. He seems obsessed with maintaining this distinction (perhaps because of his failures in the Shadow Cabinet ballots) and a few years ago even took the trouble of sending a letter to every CLP which had failed to back him asking them to explain their position.

Within weeks of his election to Parliament Blunkett was touting himself around the Tribune Group for a place on its slate for the Shadow Cabinet. Rebuffed, he decided not to stand. But in later years, even with Tribune backing, he has attracted only derisory support.

Kinnock made him a front bench spokesperson on the Environment in 1988, probably because of the role he played on the NEC. He has done little with the brief other than to criticise the Tories on the Poll Tax inside the House while denouncing those who refuse to pay it outside. He uses the Local Government Information Unit (successor to the Campaign Unit) as a kind of personal think-tank and publicity machine. Earlier this year he got the NEC to agree that Labour councils should set budgets above the government's "capping" level in order to make the Tories take the blame for the Poll Tax. Labour council leaders spurned the decree, which was given a discreet burial by Walworth Road.

A once-passionate unilateralist, in 1989 he submitted to Kinnock on nuclear weapons without a whisper of protest. During the Gulf War, he could not even be bothered to join the therapy sessions for conscience-troubled ex-lefts known as the "supper club".

Blunkett has let it be known that he regards homosexuality with distaste; he has said he finds "the idea of two men kissing physically repugnant". In the Commons debate on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill he spoke in favour of the prohibition of AID to lesbians on the grounds that women and children need males to be "complete". Later he backed Mary Whitehouse in complaining about a late-night Channel 4 broadcast of a highly stylised dance-drama depiction of gay sexuality.

Brent's defectors: who's to blame?

Colin Adams
Brent East CLP
(personal capacity)

FOLLOWING THE defection of three Labour councillors, the previously hung Brent Council is now under effective Tory control. At its Annual Meeting two councillors, Nkechi Amalu-Johnson and Poline Nyaga, announced that they were leaving Labour to set up their own "Democratic Labour" group. They also announced that they would support Tory candidates for Chairs of Committees, Mayor, etc. In return, the Tories backed the two defectors for the Chairs of Housing and Development. The local newspapers are now full of stories about the Tories turning Brent into another Wandsworth.

Since then, yet another Labour councillor, Harshod Barot, has left the Labour Group to sit on his own. There are rumours of further defections.

Allegations of assault have been made and both women councillors say they have been ignored and undervalued by their colleagues.

Clearly, personal ambition played its part. After the last election it was clear that some Labour councillors, keen to form an administration, take Chairs, etc., wanted an agreement with the Liberals. It was argued that the outgoing Labour administration had got its act together and we shouldn't let the Tories and Liberals take all the credit!

The Local Government Committee has decided to set up a working party to look into the defections. There is all-round condemnation of them, although a few party members think attempts should be made to woo back the defectors.

Much attention has been directed to the vetting and selection procedures prior to the elections. Some Party officers responsible for that process are trying to blame the Left (predictably), although by no stretch of the imagination can any of the defecting councillors be described as left-wing. Some are trying to blame the debacle on attempts to introduce positive action into the selection procedure. There is even talk that the defectors are the last vestige of a so-called "Red/Black Alliance".

The vetting procedure in Brent actually began with the expulsion from the Group of several sitting left councillors for refusing to vote for cuts. This automatically excluded them from standing again. The vetting procedure for new candidates saw the exclusion of yet more left comrades, usually because of their response to questions about whether they would always vote with the Labour Whip.

The end result was a panel of candidates almost totally loyal to the controlling officers of the Borough Labour Party, who were confident there would be "no problems" with the new Labour Group.

All three defecting councillors cleared this vetting process. Harshad Barot was at that time secretary of the Local Government Committee. His candidature aroused controversy when it was revealed just before the election that he had been involved in court action over Council grants. This led the Tories and Liberals voting to keep him off all committees.

Some of the Party officers responsible for the vetting procedure have come up with extremely dubious excuses for their own failure. At the May Brent East GC we heard that the two women were "naive" and not capable of reading complex documents. We heard that they did not fully understand the British system of local government. Suggestions were made that candidates in future should have five or six years Party membership before being allowed on the panel.

The next few months could prove a dangerous time for the left. Several local right-wingers would relish a Lambeth-style inquiry. One thing is certain: those responsible for the vetting and selection process, who were concerned only with weeding out the left, will resist attempts by local Party members to hold them to account.

Why I'm standing for the NEC

Pauline Purnell, Chair, Birmingham District Labour Party

IF SOCIALIST women don't put themselves forward for the NEC and other Party positions, the male leadership will have no opposition in turning the Party into something safe enough even for the City and the Tory press.

It was the energy of working-class women like my grandmother - who fought Tory landlords for indoor toilets and campaigned for decent schools and boots for her children - that helped create the Labour Party.

The NEC needs women who are active in branches and constituencies, who can use grass root practices and experience to challenge the rosy head office view of the world, who can give the Party credibility with working people. It needs women who canvass regularly and can say from experience what issues concern people's everyday lives.

Women in Birmingham are concerned about low wages, home-working conditions, housing, homelessness, transport, NHS, schools, daycare for adults and children, and pensions. They want to know what the Labour Party is going to do about these things; they want detailed commitments and reassurance that their lives will be better with a Labour government.

Last year's membership survey showed women are more committed to nuclear disarmament than men. Last week in Edgbaston, most of the three hundred who within the space of three hours signed a petition against back-door NHS privatisation were women. These are the women who need and deserve socialist representation on the NEC.

The politicians currently filling the women's section of the NEC have colluded with the leadership in stifling Party democracy - including women's right to organise and represent themselves within the Party - and remaking our policies to please the very people who exploit working-class women.

As a member of the NEC, I would vote for socialist policies, against all witch-hunts, and to support workers and women in struggle.



Pauline Purnell at the Anti-Poll Tax Demo

Shock factional wrangle in House of Commons smoke-filled room!

ALTHOUGH THIS year's Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) slate for the NEC is superior to many in the past - it has certainly rid itself of the dodgy characters who change sides at the drop of the leader's hat - it has not been universally acclaimed on the left.

Keith Veness
Islington North CLP

The major problem, recognised by *Briefing* as well as other currents on the left, was its lack of balance: only two women and no non-MPs. In addition, as usual, Party activists were largely not consulted.

To overcome these problems the SCG invited various interested groups and individuals to the House of Commons to discuss ways of "widening the franchise" in the future. To kick off the debate, Jeremy Corbyn and I circulated a paper outlining ways of creating a more democratic, more balanced and more acceptable process for choosing the left slate.

Unfortunately it became apparent early on in the meeting that a small group of venerable sectarians loosely organised around the *Campaign for Labour Party Democracy* (CLPD) were not in the least interested in sorting anything out and preferred to spend the entire meeting attacking every other left group, including the SCG itself.

One woman pompously informed us that she was here "on behalf of the oppressed". Vladimir Derer of CLPD introduced the novel idea that our demands for accountability only applied to the leadership - not to our own organisations! Redmond O'Neil of *Socialist Action* (fresh from its triumph in splitting, immobilising and discrediting the anti-Gulf War campaign) said that along with positive discrimination for blacks and women opposing PR was the single most vital test for anyone on the slate. A mischievous *Briefing* supporter pointed out that Ken Livingstone (SA's fave MP) actually supported PR, leaving Redmond to lapse into a sulky silence for the rest of the evening.

At one stage these antics became just too much for Bernie Grant, who exploded and threatened to walk out if the woman representing the "oppressed" claimed one more time that she was speaking on behalf of black people!

In contrast, comrades from *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Outlook*, who had their own beefs about the SCG slate, played a useful role in suggesting ways of improving consultation and slate selection. Both Dennis Skinner and Bernie indicated that the SCG would be willing to accept some form of "electoral college" which would at least rationalise the choice of candidates for the slate.

All this was too much for the CLPD/*Socialist Action* clique who kept proclaiming that they and they alone represented the left and should be the only people consulted on the make-up of the SCG slate.

Sadly, CLPD, once a movement of thousands, is now a rump of sectarians unlikely to play a positive role in the future.

NEC Campaign: an appeal to the left

THIS YEAR'S elections for the constituency section of the National Executive Committee will be the first to be conducted under the so-called one-member-one-vote system within each CLP.

We need to pull out the stops to build the biggest possible vote for the Socialist Campaign Group slate. A strong showing for the left is vital in what will be the last Party conference before the general election.

We have little time to contact the thousands of Party members who will vote in these elections but we must ensure that Front Bench spokespersons with high media profiles are not the only Labour voices they hear between now and Party Conference. We need to get organised - fast - to get our message out to all Party members and motivate them to participate in the ballot.

If you have a local left caucus, it should be discussing now how best to use the NEC campaign to build the local left and win the arguments for socialism in the Labour Party; if you don't have a caucus the campaign is an excellent excuse for initiating one.

A series of regional rallies with the candidates is being planned, along with a press campaign and a brochure with political details about all the candidates on the slate.

We need:

- **Contacts in every CLP to distribute leaflets and other material and to ensure that all potential supporters of the Socialist Campaign Group slate turn out to vote.**
- **Help with organising the regional events.**
- **Donations from CLPs, branches, unions and individuals.**
- **Assistance with mailing and telephoning activists around the country.**
- **Any useful mailing lists you may have.**

If you can offer any of the above or want to find out more about the campaign, contact Valerie Veness on 071 254 5582 or Jeremy Corbyn on 071 263 9450 or drop us a line at the *Briefing* office.

Let's make 1991 the year the right-wing came to rue the day they dreamed up OMOV!

A CAMPAIGN AGAINST the Witch-hunt newsletter, with details of all the latest purges from Liverpool to Brighton, stopping off in Sheffield, Nottingham, Lambeth and Tower Hamlets, is now available from CAW, 10b Windsor Road, London N7 6JG.

Socialist Campaign Group Slate for the NEC

- **Diane Abbott**
- **Tony Benn**
- **Jeremy Corbyn**
- **Ken Livingstone**
- **Alice Mahon**
- **Dave Nellist**
- **Denis Skinner**

Dead as a parrot?

Continuing our debate on the way forward for Irish solidarity activists, ***Padraic Finn*** *of Brent LCI argues that the Labour Committee on Ireland is creeping up a cul-de-sac.*

SOME YEARS ago, a Maoist of my acquaintance used to argue that the numbers on a demonstration didn't really matter. After all, he maintained, you could have very militant demonstrations with only small numbers. On this criterion, the thirty-five people (mostly from London) at the last Labour Committee on Ireland AGM constitute a major threat to the British ruling class.

Some of the LCI leadership didn't even turn up, while the constitution was "cleaned up" politically under the direction of individuals not known for their activity on Ireland. Out went the commitment to self-determination. No resolutions from the floor will be accepted at future AGMs and, if you should happen to be expelled from the Labour Party, you must forfeit your LCI membership as well.

The LCI grew with the Left in the early 1980s and declined as the Party was Kinnockised in following years. Circumstances dictate tactics and in the past (but not this year) there has been a debate at the AGM about resolutions to Party conference. Contrary to what the LCI leadership argues, Irish self-determination as an aim did not prevent us in the past from putting forward resolutions worded to win wider support.

Time to Go (barely mentioned at the AGM) was an example. It got us a hearing in some unions where we hadn't been before. So the debate over self-determination is not really about tactics. It is about the ruthless squeeze on the left in Time to Go and within the LCI itself; it is about the manoeuvres that have pulled the LCI steadily to the right.

The change in the aims of the organisation (from "withdrawal and self-determination" to simple "withdrawal") was passed off as a minor tactical adjustment. Self-determination without Britain getting out is, of course, impossible. However, it would be possible for Britain to withdraw without conceding self-determination. In fact, it could be argued that a long series of British initiatives, of which Peter Brooke's is the latest, have been attempts to do just that.

Some of the LCI leadership seem to believe that British withdrawal can be achieved by a series of tactical coups within the labour bureaucracy. But the decline of the LCI over the past few years demonstrates the ineffectiveness of this approach. Excluding the left while making "tactical" bureaucratic alliances has meant, in the end, becoming prisoners of the bureaucracy.

The only way in which Britain can be forced out of Ireland is a mass movement - of which the LCI could be part.

The resolutions to this year's Party Conference demand, correctly, that Labour implement its commitments. But demands on their own mean nothing. There is no serious force within the Party to back them up, nor regrettably, is there a prospect of building the LCI into that force in the near future. The tight hold of the present leadership is designed to keep activity to a minimum and restrict it within safe channels.

There is no mention in the Conference resolution of the Brooke initiative. It may well be that nothing will come from these talks - but we cannot be certain.

The worrying thing is that we could have some move towards a new British settlement before October and the left in the Party will have no clear view of it to offer Conference. Worse still, soft lefts such as Clare Short might promote a new British-sponsored deal by arguing that it is a stepping stone to Irish unity.

So the LCI is for all practical purposes dead. But the rest of the withdrawal movement is not in great shape either. Those who say leave the LCI for the Troops Out Movement might be better advised to stay put and work for the day when we begin to go forward again.

Brent LCI is circulating the following model resolution for Labour Party Conference

1. This Party believes:

a) that any solution to the problems of Northern Ireland must involve all the parties to the conflict. The exclusion of Sinn Fein from the Brooke talks means that a significant part of the Nationalist population is not represented;

b) that no discussions which rule out, in advance, such options as Irish unity have any chance of securing a long term solution to the conflict;

c) that no solution based on what Charles Haughey has called "that failed political entity", the six north-eastern counties of Ireland, is possible;

d) that the Unionist minority on the island of Ireland does not have the right of permanent veto on political progress.

2. The policy of the Labour Party is for a united Ireland. We call on an incoming Labour government to:

a) repudiate any attempted settlement which is based on strengthening or maintaining the undemocratic Northern Ireland statelet;

b) to recognise that no British-imposed solution can bring peace;

c) to recognise the right of the people of Ireland as a whole to self-determination;

d) to bring about British withdrawal from Ireland;

e) to repeal all the restrictions on civil and political rights (such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Broadcasting Ban) which have resulted from Britain's attempt to maintain its presence in Ireland.

The BNP and the Thamesmead killings

FOR THE second time in two months more than 1200 people took to the streets of Thamesmead to demonstrate their opposition to the fascist British National Party (BNP).

David Lee
Greenwich and Bexley Anti-Apartheid

Ignoring pleas from local councillors and community leaders, the Home Secretary refused to ban a BNP "rights for whites" march through an area where there have been two racist murders this year. The BNP managed to attract only just over 100 footsoldiers to its "national" demonstration - compared to a counter-demonstration at least ten times that size.

The Police turned out in strength to protect their co-thinkers with horses, riot gear and a helicopter. Although the police were largely successful in keeping us away from the fascists, to do so they had to reroute the BNP march through a series of back streets to end up at a recycling depot in the middle of nowhere.

Many local residents, appalled to find fascist literature stuffed in their letter boxes, turned out to support the counter-demonstration called by local black campaigners and Greenwich Action Campaign Against Racist Attacks (GACARA). The counter-demonstration managed to break free from the police for a short while but was soon hemmed in by reinforcements dressed in riot gear. A small bunch of counter-demonstrators (50 or so) did evade the police road blocks and manage to attack the BNP from a field, throwing rocks and briefly disrupting the march, but riot police soon moved in with a vengeance.

The Thamesmead area, a 1960s town planning nightmare, has recently been a prime target for the BNP, which has its national headquarters just three miles away in Bexley. A couple of months ago Rolan Adams, a black schoolboy, was attacked by a gang of white racists while waiting at a bus stop and stabbed to death. More recently Orville Blair was stabbed to death in broad daylight outside his front door. The local police have consistently failed to acknowledge the racist overtones of these two deaths and have put the second down to "an argument amongst thieves". This was also the view of journalist Jocelyn Targett, who wrote a



specious article in the Guardian on May 25th claiming that there was no link between the presence of the BNP in the area and the gangs of white racists and that only GACARA and other anti-racist groups saw any connection between the organised fascists and the killings.

This is far from the truth. Local activists have monitored a steady increase in the activity of the BNP on the Thamesmead Estate. At the same time, local black residents have experienced an increase in racist attacks and intimidation, with racist graffiti being sprayed all around the area.

For nearly a year a locally-based campaign has been waged to get Tory-run Bexley Council to evict the BNP from its so-called bookshop. Despite numerous protests, the Tories have refused to move against the BNP.

All members of the ruling Tory Group recently received a letter from the BNP thanking them for their continued support. This was suppressed by the leadership but came out at a committee meeting. The campaign must continue to press Bexley Council to close the BNP headquarters, but it should also build on the solid local support that exists in Thamesmead to drive the fascists from the streets of South East London.

QUESTIONS KEEP CROPPING up about police handling of the fascist attack on a crowd at Friends Meeting House in London on May 1st.

500 people, mostly black, packed into the hall to hear Al Sharpton. Police were present in large numbers and after a bomb threat began to evacuate the hall. Nonetheless, a thirteen-strong BNP gang managed to pass through police lines and into the hall. One of them punched a steward in the face and hurled a smoke bomb into the crowd. It failed to ignite. The fascists fled, chased by black youth. Most of them escaped in a transit van driven away under the noses of police, who made no effort to follow the offenders or even to check the vans number plates.

Although police were shown BNP literature dropped by the men in flight they declined to search BNP HQ in Welling for evidence. Police also failed to take any witness statements, even from the steward who was punched. The single arrested BNP member was later released without charge. Indeed, despite the numerous witnesses, including a police contingent, no one has been charged or looks likely to be charged for this violent attack on a peaceful meeting.

However, the police did arrest and charge one man on the night: Sultan Mohammed, race equality officer, with assault and threatening behaviour. The first charge has already been dismissed by magistrates and campaigners are hoping to see the second dropped soon. Contact CARF for more information: BM Box 8784, London WC1N 3XX.

ANTI-FASCIST ACTION, backed by Jeremy Corbyn MP, Hackney Trades Council and Hackney Joint Shop Stewards Committee, is organising a "Unity Carnival" in London Fields, Hackney, on September 8th as part of its continuing campaign against racist violence.

The Carnival organisers need money and help. Contact AFA, Box BM1734, London WC1N 3XY.

THE SOUTHALL MONITORING Group has launched an appeal for £15,000 to continue its excellent work on racial harassment, policing, domestic violence and immigration.

The appeal follows the withdrawal of the SMG's grant by the Tory administration in Ealing, which overturned a Labour majority last year with the help of a racist campaign in the borough's white areas. SMG has been operating since 1979 and runs a priceless service for one of Britain's largest black communities, including a 24-hour emergency service. Make a donation today to: SMG, 43 West End Road, Southall, Middlesex UB1 1JQ. Tel: 081 843 2333.

Shop stewards' corner:

MSF: pious words on paper

***Leonora Lloyd** reports from the recent annual conference of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union.*

THE MSF conference began with the announcement of the results of the election for General Secretary Designate. Roger Lyons had won by 2-to-1 in an election in which less than a quarter of the membership had voted. It was clear that, apart from London, voting had been largely along the old ASTMS/TASS divide.

The real argument, however, was not about the relative merits of the candidates. There is not a lot of difference in practice, despite the way in which Barbara Switzer has been slated by the press. It was about the way the election was started by the National Executive Committee months before it was necessary, thus closing the door to other contestants and taking the process out of the members' control.

The various resolutions and amendments on the issue were eventually all withdrawn in the interest of unity, but the NEC was left in no doubt about the feelings of many delegates.

Ken Gill - who told conference, to the obvious annoyance of Roger Lyons, that he was staying on until his retirement was due - accepted that the NEC was wrong to have reduced conference from five to three-and-a-half days without first consulting the membership. It was the only real apology the delegates received after a year of division and rancour.

Although conference finished within the three-and-a-half days, important resolutions were rushed through with little debate.

One issue on which conference was united was opposition to the use of the courts to prevent members using the internal appeals machinery of the union. Presumably the NEC member who had taken the union to court (at our expense) did not agree!

We passed a lot of worthy resolutions, which in theory will guide the work of the union over the next year, but we failed to tackle the real problems now facing us.

It was the first conference attended by the members of the Health Visitors Association. This latest merger makes MSF a major union within the NHS. Yet we failed to find time to discuss how we were going to fight NHS cutbacks and hospital opt-outs.

As for Rolls Royce, we merely deplored the situation and pledged our "full support" for the workforce.

On electoral reform, conference voted to support fixed-term Parliaments, restrictions on election expenditure, making election day a public holiday, restrictions on public opinion polling before election day, and the alternative vote system in dual member constituencies (one male and one female) for the Scottish Parliament and regional assemblies.

It was clear that everywhere branches are suffering from inquorate meetings and difficulty in carrying out basic tasks.

Unless we can tackle the underlying problems - too much bureaucracy, a constitution that in practice prevents new or unconfident members from playing a full role, the overwhelming dullness of much of what passes for trade union activity - then the excellent policies we pass will remain pious words on paper.

● *Leonora Lloyd was a delegate to the MSF conference. She is Secretary of the National Abortion Campaign and Labour's Prospective Parliamentary candidate for the Hendon South constituency in London.*

London buses "win" tender - but what a price!

Tony Cordell, Secretary, Hackney Council Joint Shop Stewards Committee (and 48 bus user)

LONDON FOREST Buses (a division of London Regional Transport) has become the first "in-house" bidder to win a tender for bus services against private competition.

The price for this "victory" is a massive cut in pay and working conditions. In addition to cuts of £70 or more in weekly pay packets at least one bus garage (Leyton) will close and numerous routes may be redirected in an effort to reduce costs.

Drivers on one-person-operated buses will see their pay cut by 26%, from £280.90 to £208 per week. Entitlement to sick pay will be reduced and enhancements for unsocial hours will be lost. Annual leave for starting workers will be cut to fifteen days. All this adds up to an invitation to industrial action - precisely what bus the crews are now debating. Mass meetings are now being organised to consider all options. An all-out strike seems the likely outcome.

Forest District covers northeast London, including key approach roads and notorious traffic snarl-ups at Lea Bridge Road, Hoe Street and the Eastway (the only routes into East London from Essex). Industrial action here would lead to total chaos.

● **STOP PRESS:** Strike Action Vote.

Bus workers in East London have voted overwhelmingly for strike action against the attempts to cut wages and lengthen working hours.

The vote was 689 to 20 in a 70% turnout from garages at Walthamstow, Leyton, Hackney and Ashgrove.

A mass meeting later in the week will decide on a further programme of action if management fail to meet workers' demands.

After the pay climbdown: why BR workers need a "big bang"

*As the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union prepares for its Annual General Meeting, an **RMT member** lays bare the union's latest climbdown over pay and warns of BR's privatisation plans.*

WITH ONLY hours to go before a strike ballot the RMT Executive accepted a British Rail pay offer of only 7.75%. This is a major climbdown - for months the union leadership had been calling for a settlement above inflation, which was then standing at over 8%. The demoralisation it has caused paves the way for further sell-outs over BR plans to restructure the rail industry.

Following decisions at last year's RMT AGM, the union's Council of Executives was supposed to bring all disputes together into one "big bang" - a tactic which worked in 1989. The issues of pay, restructuring, changes in negotiating machinery, and cuts in London Underground (LUL) were all to be united in a single campaign in which the majority of union members would take action together.

Instead, the sell-out over pay was presaged by a retreat on LUL jobs and a refusal to fight over the imposition of new conditions for signal and telecom staff.

Officials gave two reasons for the unanimous Executive vote: acceptance of the deal by the other rail unions and grass-roots apathy.

The former was always likely and would not have been an insurmountable obstacle. The latter, the usual bureaucrat's excuse, is just not true.

All the evidence is that members wanted to fight. So late was the decision to call off the ballot that some branches balloted their members anyway. Reports from those branches indicate a two-to-one majority in favour of action against the 7.75% offer.

With the 'big bang' strategy now in tatters the way is open for BR to impose its restructuring plans sector by sector - in signal and telecom, on P/way, with Red Star, senior conductors, drivers, platform staff and workshop depot - destroying hard-won conditions and preparing the way for privatisation.

Whilst BR is clearly acting according to an overall strategy, RMT members are left fighting each struggle separately. Inevitably, RMT members are drawing a negative lessons from the pay ballot and do not believe the union will fight. Once again rank-and-file activists will have to work doubly hard to recover ground lost by their leadership's weakness.

RMT AGM preview

FOR TWO WEEKS from June 26th, 97 delegates will debate union policy at the RMT Annual General Meeting. The recent sell-out over pay comes too late to figure on the final agenda but no doubt will find a place in the conference itself. No doubt delegates will also want to know from the General Secretary why resolutions agreed the year before - such as balloting against more Driver Only Operation on Southern Region - have not been implemented.

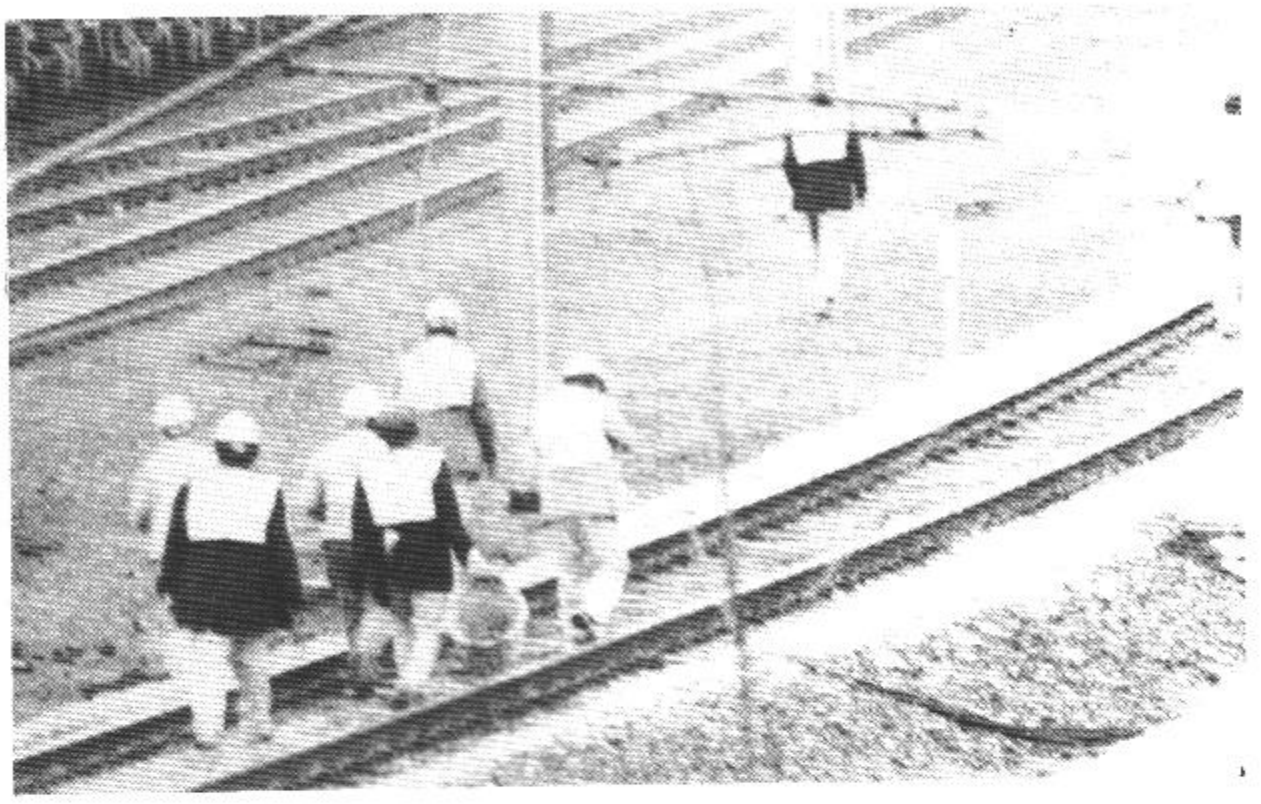
The key issue at the AGM will be last year's NUR/NUS merger and the financial crisis it has caused. Currently running a £2.5 million deficit for this year, the RMT leadership is proposing major cuts in its full-time apparatus. But as usual with trade union cutbacks, they will hit the services and democratic rights enjoyed by the rank-and-file more than the bureaucrats themselves.

More and more ex-NUR members feel they were conned in the merger with the NUS. Whilst activists maintain that the principle of merger was correct, in practice it seems more about keeping a seat on the TUC General Council than anything else. Cynicism was strengthened when it became clear that even after the cuts ex-NUS members will still receive over twenty times more full-time official support than ex-NUR members.

The new financial crisis lies behind the first resolution on the agenda, an Executive recommendation to accept government cash to cover postal ballot costs. Next come resolutions from Southern District and London Transport District calling for repeal of all Tory anti-union laws. On economic policy a statutory minimum wage allied to strong opposition to wage restraint is demanded.

For some time the Executive has been trying to centralise control over union delegations to regional Labour Party conferences. At last year's AGM the Executive was overruled on the issue - so the Executive thought again - and decided to overrule the AGM. This year Manchester District is appealing to the AGM to get the 1990 AGM decision upheld.

RMT democracy in action is revealed by the strange fate of an amendment from Waterloo Branch on the Lambeth witch-hunt. The amendment did not appear on the final agenda. "Never received it," said the bureaucrats. After threats by activists to cause a stink on the floor of conference, the amendment suddenly reappeared - under a pile of correspondence in the General Secretary's office. Keith Hill - Labour's parliamentary candidate in Streatham and Lambeth witch-hunter - is a full-time RMT official responsible for political matters.



BR: On the track to nowhere

Lambeth after Joan Twelves

"APRÉS NOUS, le deluge" may well be the epitaph for the Lambeth Council administration led by former leftwinger Joan Twelves.

Jon Rogers, Chair Lambeth Nalgo

The partial government climbdown on Lambeth's Poll Tax capping helped the council to avoid additional cuts on top of the £25 million agreed, along with 800 job losses, in March. This was clearly a factor in the disappointing three-to-one "no" vote (on a turn-out of less than 50%) in the Lambeth Nalgo strike ballot.

However, both the Council and the unions have been taken aback by the rapid take-up of voluntary redundancy offers which accounted for almost all the Council's required job losses in the space of just a few weeks. The morale of Council workers, reflected in the ballot result, is without doubt at an all-time low.

Pockets of resistance include an eight-week occupation of two threatened advice centres, now joined in occupation by three youth centres, and a month-long strike by Trading Standards staff fighting the dismissal of a long-serving temporary worker.

Although the LCC-backed administration now headed by Cllr. Steve Whalley offers no hope of respite for Council workers, most Lambeth trade unionists wonder if anything could be worse than the past few months.

This has been a sorry end for an administration which came to power with a left-wing record and brave promises to the workforce and the community. The defence of council jobs and services now rests with a minority of councillors and trade unionists.

Rich rats desert sinking council ships

BASIC GRADE Residential Social Workers earn £8,000 to £12,000 a year out of London. A qualified Officer-in-Charge in the London Borough of Hillingdon earns £13,344 - £14,613. But according to the May edition of Social Work Today:

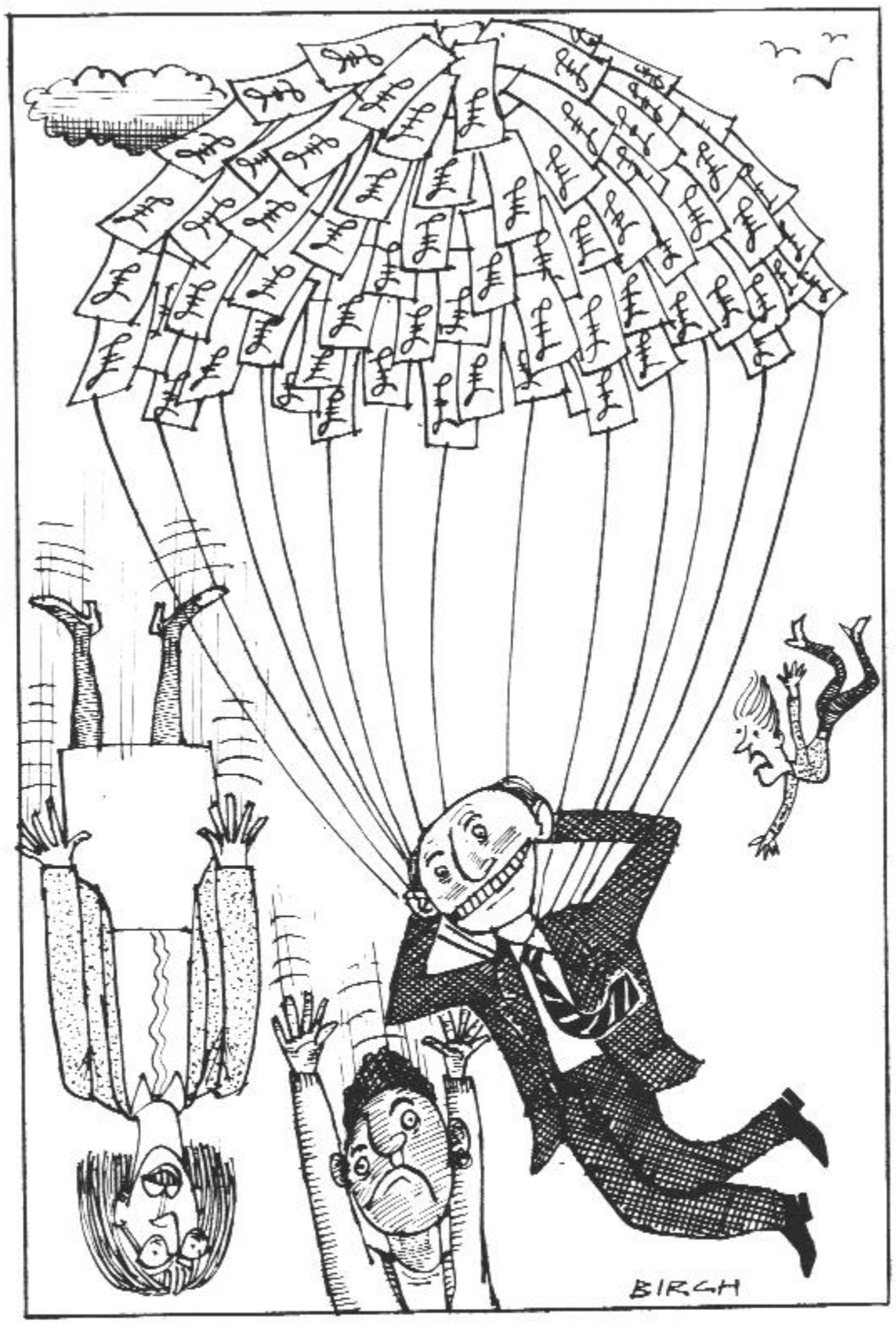
Pauline Purnell Birmingham Labour Briefing

"Some ousted Social Services chiefs are laughing all the way to the bank... One ex-Director says his current annual income is £75,500. This comprises a £27,500 local government pension, inflation proofed for life; £8,000 a year interest on his carefully invested £80.000 council pay off and the £40,000 from his new job outside local government."

For residential workers, working in shabby conditions for long hours with demanding and difficult young people, the system is less generous. For someone earning £15,000, the severance pay could be just £2,000.

The usual source of largesse for the big pay-offs to top officers is a council's pension fund surplus - which really belongs to the low-paid bulk of council workers.

According to a City expert quoted by *Social Work Today*: "People don't realise that if the Stock Market performs badly and the pension fund goes into deficit, in extremis it could lead to pensions actually being cut out."



More on UCATT

ONE OF THE least lamented casualties of the left victory in the UCATT elections (see front page story) must be Jack Rogers, who lost his executive seat in the north west to left-winger Paul Lineghan by 3000 votes. Rogers will not now be renominated for the Labour Party NEC - where, rumour has it, his sole contribution was sticking his hand up for every witch-hunt and reactionary policy change the Party leader could think of. Lineghan may well replace him as the UCATT nominee for the trade union section of the NEC, but will find it difficult to secure enough support from other unions to get elected. In any case, UCATT's 180,000 strong block vote will not be going all Kinnock's way at this year's conference, and that's a step in the right direction.

Meanwhile the Economic League has got itself into the UCATT act, denouncing the "partiality" of the Dispatches expose which did so much to discredit suspended UCATT General Secretary Albert Williams and friends. In particular, the League complains bitterly in a recent issue of its "Two-Minute Briefing" about the programme makers' failure to point out to viewers that one of the people interviewed, solicitor Louise Christian, "has been connected with anti-police groups and such left-wing pressure groups in the Labour Party as *Labour Briefing* and *Socialist Organiser*..."

Nalgo in Glasgow

THE MESSAGE from the top table at Nalgo's annual conference in Glasgow was "don't rock Kinnock's boat". This was punctuated only briefly by opposition to a pay policy and rejection of the 6% offer from local authority employers.

While tens of thousands of Nalgo members' jobs disappear in the current round of Poll Tax-inspired council cuts, Nalgo's national leadership does nothing. Ballots around the union's political fund and the 1989 pay dispute were won when the leadership committed itself to a campaign, but no similar attempt has been made to generate support for members facing redundancy.

After reports of struggles in Camden, Liverpool and Lambeth, the Local Government Group meeting agreed a resolution from Strathclyde region calling for a national delegate meeting to review Nalgo's threadbare strategy on job cuts.

A full account of the conference will be carried in the next *Briefing*.



The changing of the guard Photo: Leesa Herbert

BILL MORRIS HAS defeated George wright in the election to succeed Ron Todd as TGWU General Secretary. Morris's victory was decisive: he secured 118,206 votes to Wright's 83,059. Food, Drink and Tobacco National Secretary Bob Harrison got 29,882 votes and London dairy worker Pat Reilly 12,994.

The turn-out for the ballot (supervised by the electoral Reform Society) was 22.5%.

Morris commented: "TGWU members have demonstrated that colour or race are no barriers to anyone seeking to serve the union at the highest level. That is a fact of historic importance not just for the TGWU but for the wider labour movement and British society as a whole."

Despite the usual pious appeals to unity by Todd, Morris and the defeated candidates, the TGWU is likely to remain a battleground for warring bureaucratic factions. Morris's election ensures that the union will remain left-of-centre (just) but resolves none of the urgent questions facing TGWU members squeezed by the recession.

THE TUC HAS published figures showing another drop in total union membership. For the last full year for which figures are available, 1989, the drop was from 10,387,000 to 10,044,000 - a 3.3% fall. This is largely attributable to the increase in unemployment and loss of "in house" tenders in various industries. However, it is also clear that certain widely-publicised recruitment initiatives (the "credit-cards and balloons" strategy) have been less than spectacular successes. The best way to build membership remains aggressive pay bargaining and a willingness to take action.

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THE LARGEST CIVIL service union, the CPSA, which covers mainly clerical and junior grades of staff, has advised its members to reject merger with the second largest union, NUCPS, which takes in mainly executive and "middle management" grades. There has been considerable hostility from CPSA activists who do not want their senior managers present at union meetings. Their view seems to have "carried the day" on the CPSA Executive.

FIVE WOMEN HAVE been elected to the Executive of the National Communications Unions (NCU) for the first time. Five were successful in winning seats on the NCU's 35-member ruling body in a recent first-past-the post ballot.

A SURVEY CONDUCTED by AEU full-time officials shows that over 90,000 manufacturing jobs were lost between January 1st and May 15th this year. That's an average of 670 jobs lost each day. These include substantial cutbacks by VSEL in Barrow, by BAe in Bristol, Hatfield and Preston, by Rolls Royce in Derby and Watford, by Brtish Steel at Ravenscraig and Scunthorpe, by Jaguar in Coventry and Birmingham, and by Ford at Halewood. Over the last year the number of employees in manufacturing has dropped by 210,000 and output has declined by 5.1%.

THE "RICHMOND SCHEME" (the London Boroughs Grants Scheme administered by Richmond Council but financed by all 32 London Boroughs) set up after GLC abolition to ensure funding for London-wide voluntary and community groups is deadlocked on this year's budget. It is a "hung authority" with a small number of Liberal councils holding the balance of power. As a result of the deadlock, numerous groups have had either to close or curtail their activities. Jobs have gone and support for women, black and ethnic minority groups and advice agencies has ceased. So much for the virtues of "balanced" government!

MOVES TO BOUNCE Labour into accepting some form of proportional representation were dealt a hard blow by NUPE at is annual conference in Blackpool. A resolution (backed by Briefing and CLPD supporters) was passed re-affirming support for "first past the post" and calling on NUPE to vote that way at TUC and Labour Party conferences in the autumn. A counter proposal to support STV was heavily defeated.

German left in turmoil

Unification has ushered in a period of crisis for German social democracy and its rivals on the left. ***Gus Fagan*** *reports from Berlin.*

THE LAST two years have been ones of intense turmoil for the German left - caught unprepared by the momentous popular uprising in the old GDR, deeply divided on unification, on the defensive against an emerging new "intellectual" right, disorientated by the "capitalist triumph" in the east. Most articles in Germany's left press nowadays begin with the recognition that there is a "crisis of the left". One paper expressed the fear that Germany might become, like the USA, a country without a left.

Over the past few years, the German social democratic party, the SPD, has been carrying out a programmatic review. With a weak base in the new sectors of the working class and having suffered a significant loss to the ecological left, the party had embarked on the review in an attempt to take on board the language of "post-industrial values", while at the same time extending its support to the right among middle-class voters.

Unification severely disrupted this strategy. Moderate middle-class consensus offers no solution to the hard-pressed nine million workers in the east, half of whom face the dole queue.

"The Green Party is now clearly under the control of its 'capitalist modernisation' wing"

If the SPD fails to respond to their crisis because it fears a loss of middle-class support in the west, many of these workers could be lost to the right or to the PDS (see below). And without strong support in the east, the SPD's electoral base will remain too small to win an election. Meanwhile, there is no significant left-wing in the SPD to offer even a symbolic challenge to the leadership's policy.

The formation of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in late 1989, out of the ruins of the old Stalinist SED, and its self-description as "a modern socialist party to the left of social democracy" aroused many hopes. A mass party of 250,000 members, firmly located on the left, with a real base in society and a voice in parliament, offered the prospect of renewal to a German left which has been in decline since the mid-seventies.

But the PDS is a contradictory phenomenon. Roughly half of its members are over 65, all from the old SED. Twenty per cent are functionaries from the old party and state apparatus; a further 20% are intellectuals. Only 9% are below the age of 30 and only around 10% are workers. With this social composition it is hard for the PDS to become an active, creative force. It has no base in the working class or in the social movements. Although it won 10% of the vote in the east in the last elections, its support in the west (where it now has only a few hundred members) was only 0.3%. The electoral alliance of which it is a part (PDS/Linke Liste) has eighteen members in parliament.

The intellectuals that lead the PDS are latter-day converts to the market, parliamentary democracy and gradual reform. Nonetheless, the PDS does stand to the left of the Greens and the SPD on most political issues and is democratically structured, allowing revolutionary Marxist currents to organise political tendencies and use the party media.

The SPD is ferociously hostile to the PDS, while the Marxist left is divided in its attitudes. Some (supporters of the Fourth International and Workers' Power) have organised tendencies within the PDS; others (in West Germany) have a regroupment strategy orientating towards the party without being in it; still others denounce it as social-democratic.

The Green Party is now clearly under the control of its "capitalist modernisation" wing. Its failure to win seats in parliament in the 1990 elections accelerated its move to the right. In the past month the radical ecological ("fundamentalist") wing split away to form an independent group, but its base of support appears to be quite small. Hopes for a red-green coalition in Bonn are a thing of the past, especially since the new SPD leader, Engholm, made it clear that he is only interested in a coalition with the liberals, the FDP. The Greens will probably get back into parliament but on the left they are no longer seen as a force for change.

"...there is no significant left-wing in the SPD to offer even a symbolic challenge to the leadership's policy."

The groups that emerged in East Germany during the 1989 revolution (New Forum, Democracy Now, etc) now only have a shadow existence. New Forum, the biggest of the citizens' movements, which claimed over 100,000 members in late 1989, now has only a few thousand. At its conference in May it was unable to reach agreement on whether to become a political party.

In 1988 a number of West German left groups came together in a loose unity initiative, the Radikale Linke (RL). But the revolution in the east and the formation of the PDS/Linke Liste provoked deep divisions in the RL. Everyone accepts the need for some radical new approach to left unity but the differences over unification, exacerbated by differences over the Gulf War, have made this more difficult than ever.

The social crisis in the east has created a space in Germany for a modern socialist party to the left of the SPD. Whether the PDS or any other formation will be able to respond to this challenge is an open question.

Adventures in the secondhand book trade

Books may be weapons but selling them for a living is far cry from the arms trade, certainly when it comes to profits. ***Steve King****, former Haringey Council leader and member of the* ***Briefing*** *National Editorial Board, spends more hours than he cares to contemplate running a secondhand bookshop and stall in deepest Clerkenwell. Here he reflects on the travails of the trade and discovers an all-too-familiar gender bias.*

I KNOW HOW attractive the idea of being surrounded by books is to many socialists, but it has to be said that a job is a job and however wonderful books are, after turning up every morning in all weathers and humours to sell them, you find their attractions begin to pall. It soon becomes apparent that there are an awful lot more books than you ever imagined and that most of the ones you have to sell are of no interest to you nor, unfortunately, to anyone else!

Whatever you do, don't go into secondhand books to make money.

Just occasionally, something may turn up that you like and want to keep. This usually happens when the business is in one of its regular slumps and you need to sell the thing for money. So don't go into secondhand books if you want to collect books, either.

When you do manage to sell a large number of books at one go or one particularly expensive volume that has somehow fallen into your hands, chances are high that the buyer will turn out to be "trade" and expect a discount. You can't help but wonder: who actually buys expensive books? Your buyer will probably catalogue the stuff you've sold him and then put it on sale to the rest of the trade, who pay the marked-up price (less 10%) and then try to sell it to someone else, also in the trade, and so on.

The lesson: most books over £50 simply go round and round on an increasing price spiral within the Trade. Ever so rarely (and to everyone's surprise) one finds its way into the hands of the public.

If your buyer isn't trade, then he might be a collector. I say "he" advisedly - after long observation of the gender of book buyers. My partner, Clive Boutle, and I have run a secondhand bookstall now for four years and recently opened a shop as well. In all



"Karl Marx-lookalike" Steve King not selling books Photo: Jon Kempster

that time, I would estimate that in excess of two-thirds of our customers (including browsers) have been men.

Women in the trade are even scarcer. Only in one area of our business is this disparity not evident: the purchase of paperbacks. Here, the number of women customers is equal to if not greater than the number of men. I have discussed this disparity with all kinds of people - in and out of the trade - and the reasons given for it are the obvious ones. Women have less disposable income, less time, less access to education. One comment was "Men are collectors, women are readers". Hence the preference for paperbacks.

On the tubes or the buses, women are seen reading books; men are reading newspapers.

There are few sights in the business more depressing (and common) than that of a woman and man approaching the stall and the woman standing by and waiting while the man dives in.

Though some men's motives in collecting or buying books may be questionable and it may well be more advisable to buy only what you yourself can read, I still believe we will all be better off if this particular imbalance between men and women were corrected, and my reasons for saying this are not (only) to increase my own takings.

Boutle and King booksellers

23 Arlington Way, London EC1R 1UY. Tel 071-278 4497

Dylan at 50 ... minus 25?

__Briefing__ may have missed its chance to mark Bob Dylan's 50th birthday with an in-depth analysis, but we will be one of the few publications commemorating the 25th anniversary of Dylan's near-fatal motorcycle accident - which, __Don Rocinante__ argues, changed the course of his song-writing and brought to an end his most creative period.

WITHOUT WHOLLY writing off the last twenty-five years, I'm sure I'm not alone in believing that Dylan produced his most interesting work between the years 1962 and 1966 - roughly from *The Freewheelin'* to *Blonde on Blonde*. Volumes have been written about what Dylan did to song-writing in this period - the imagery, the electrification, the sheer length of some of the songs.

In a recent interview Joni Mitchell suggested that Dylan's great innovation was to write about emotions (hatred, resentment, rage) that had previously been kept out of this form of popular music.

In the space available, it's impossible to make an overall evaluation of Dylan's music. But I would like to make some observations about how it intersected with politics - and helped widen the definition of the political.

This is slippery ground. There is much that is negative in Dylan's music. Sexism is almost too mild a word to capture the sneering vituperation against women contained in many of his songs. What follows is not meant to downplay any of that.

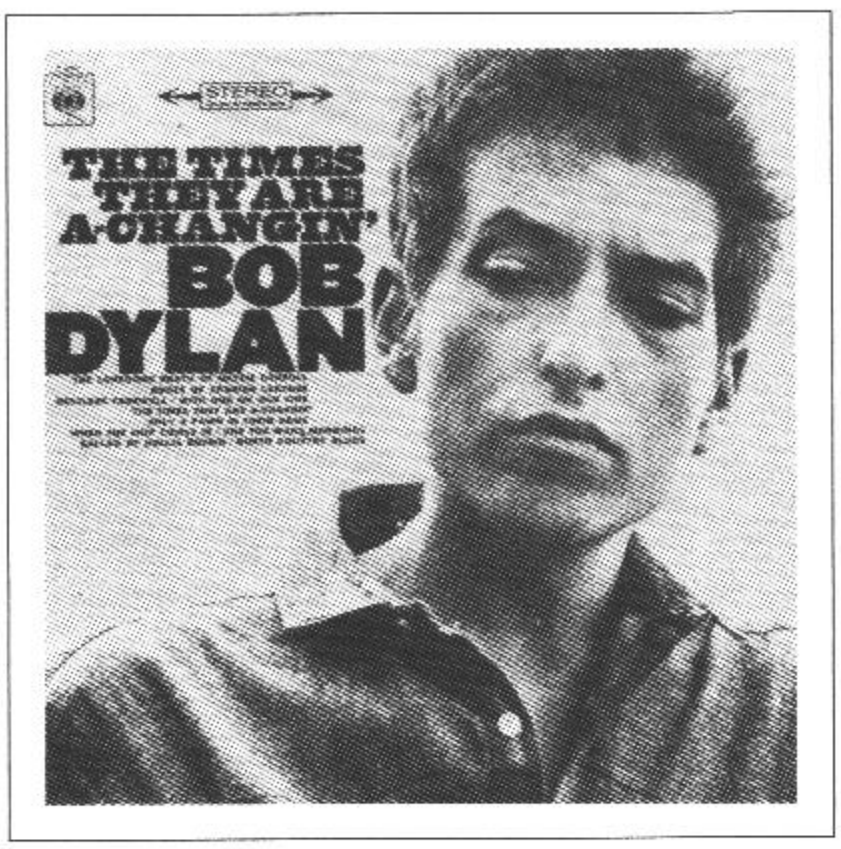
Re-listening to Dylan's early political songs ("Blowin' in the Wind", "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall", "Masters of War") two things struck me: the anger in the delivery and the quality of the

"Dylan's great innovation was to write about emotions - hatred, resentment, rage"

writing. Despite the raw acoustic thrash, these are thoughtful songs, full of striking phrases and original metaphors.

This is especially true of "Pawn in their Game" (from *The Times They Are A-Changin'*) written after the murder of black civil rights worker, Medgar Evers. Whilst other "protest singers" would respond with the musical equivalent of "Oh my God, how terrible...", Dylan coolly analyses the role of impoverished white racists in the oppression of blacks in America's South. He does not hate the racists; that would be an emotional attachment. Rather, he despises them. They are pathetic, tools in their own oppression and pauperisation. The song clinically lays bare who is using them, whose "pawns" they are, and why.

The Times They Are A-Changin' is usually viewed as Dylan's most political album. When his fourth, *Another Side*, came out in 1964, many saw it as a retreat into more personal song-writing. But this was a mis-reading. "My Back Pages", a key song on the album, was widely seen as a turning away from politics and a criticism of former allies ("I become my enemy in the instant that I preach").



Dylan's most political album?

Closer listening suggests that the song was really a rejection of a certain kind of politics, narrowly defined in terms of traditional liberal "issues". It is not that the concerns of 1963 were simplistic, but that the approach was restrictive. Dylan criticises himself for having "spouted out that liberty was just equality in schools", a reference to the contemporary agitation for desegregation in education. The refrain, "I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now" suggests not so much a shift away from politics but the need to locate the political in one's own life and relocate the human, personal dimension within the political sphere.

"He does not hate the racists; that would be an emotional attachment. Rather, he despises them. They are pathetic, tools in their own oppression and pauperisation."

None of Dylan's songs in the next two years could be defined as political, in the limited sense usually associated with "protest" music of the time. But what makes so many of his songs from "Gates of Eden" to "Stuck Inside of Mobile..." (not to mention "Maggie's Farm") so memorable is precisely the way in which personal feeling is fused with a political outlook.

Black Panther Bobby Seale recognised the potency of this combination when he included several pages of analysis of Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man" ("Something is happening but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr Jones?") in his book *Seize the Time*.

Twenty-five years ago Dylan fell off his bike and broke his neck. This brought to an end his most fiercely and frighteningly creative period. In his absence from stage and recording studio over the next two (explosive) years, the Dylan legend mushroomed.

Whatever the merits of his later songs, none of them recaptured the heroic contempt with which Dylan flayed the political and social establishment in those early years: "If my thought-dreams could be seen, they'd probably put my head in a guillotine..."

Book review

Wonderful Life - the Story of the Burgess Shale, *by Stephen J. Gould, Penguin, £6.99*

STEPHEN J. Gould may not consider himself a "Marxist" but he has done more to encourage a dialectical approach to nature than any other scientist in years. And he has done valiant battle with the morons and quacks who have championed religious "creationism" by being prepared to debate and defeat their ideas in public and before large audiences.

"an irrefutable case against the Book of Genesis"

Wonderful Life chronicles the investigations into the fossils found in a layer of shale in British Colombia, Canada. The fossils date back 530 million years to the Middle Cambrian period and what they reveal is quite staggering. These creatures were living only 40 million years after the first multi-celled, hard-bodied life appeared (the "Cambrian Explosion") but they comprise far more major types than exist today. Apparently, life is not a stately progression by gradual evolution through simple "Darwinian natural selection "; it is probably more accurate to view it as a series of major disasters after which the few survivors begin to diversify again.

Thus our very survival as a species, genus and phylum seems to owe much to chance and luck. There can obviously be no place for religion in such a cosmos and - to contradict Einstein - any "God" certainly would appear to play dice quite a lot!

The fossil record shows many arthropods (the giant phylum of "segmented animals" that today comprises crustaceans, insects, spiders and many other invertebrates), including ancestors of all four main groups of existing arthropods. However, it also contains sixteen other groups of arthropods with no living counterparts.

Even more astounding is the discovery of phyla of animals that have no counterparts at all on the earth today. Dubbed "weird wonders", these animals show that life was far more varied and had greater evolutionary possibilities than anyone would suspect from surveying the creatures populating the planet now. Nothing in the record indicates that these creatures were any less adaptive or fit than the ones that survived. There is even one fossil that appears to be our direct ancestor as a chordate - the class of animals that includes us and all other vertebrates (animals with backbones).

All this supports the work of Luis Alvarez showing natural history as a series of "mass extinctions", the most famous being the Cretaceous/Tertiary one that did for the dinosaurs. The "Permian extinction" which probably ended most of the burgess Shale creatures appears to have wiped out 96% of all animal species. The explanation of these cycles of time, millions of years of steady development followed by a "great dying", may not be biological or geological but astronomical.

Wonderful Life makes an irrefutable case against the Book of Genesis and is a splendid vindication of materialism as a method. As a sideline it also debunks the racist nonsense about various types of humans being "top of the evolutionary tree" and shows that evolution as a contradictory and complex dialectical process. This is a gripping read and a must for any socialist interested in biology, evolution or science in general.

Keith Veness
Hackney NUPE

TV review

GBH,
written by Alan Bleasedale for Channel Four.

A POWER-HUNGRY, ruthless and cynical hard left councillor gains control of an unnamed northern city. As he sets about stamping his imprint on everything that has previously been beyond his control only one man seems to stand in his way, an amiable headmaster whose only apparent concern is for the good of his pupils.

So begins Alan Bleasedale's much-awaited series - and a great disappointment it is. Gone are the subtleties, cross-currents and ironies that made *Boys from the Blackstuff* so complex and memorable. Instead, we have a crude, simplistic portrait of good versus evil which might have been penned by the Campaigns and Communications Directorate at Walworth Road.

At the centre of *GBH* lurks Michael Murray, in public a sharp-suited and charismatic opponent of the right, behind the scenes a menacing manipulator. The opening episodes seem to suggest that the worst excesses of his personality can be traced to childhood sexual dabblings - a dose of hackneyed dramatic psychoanalysis which seems to owe more to Dennis Potter than Bleasedale.

The context, of course, is Liverpool and Derek Hatton. But any exploration of the real issues raised by the less happy aspects of Militant or the tactics pursued by Hatton is obliterated by the narrow and stereotypical focus which drives the narrative.

Bleasedale may protest that, after all, this is fiction. But the author of *Boys from the Blackstuff* ought to be more aware than most of the role which fiction can play in real political debates. *Blackstuff* offered an understanding of the plight of the unemployed which gained wide currency in its time and was a powerful counter to Tory ideology.

Bleasedale's new play will also play a political role, but of a very different kind. For the Labour leadership, *GBH* could hardly have come at a more opportune moment, whatever the author's intentions. It reasserts old images of a Trotskyism which can be equated only with thuggery, which re-enforce the current press campaign against the Liverpool Broad Left.

At the climax of the first episode Murray's thugs

"... might have been penned by the Campaigns and Communications Directorate at Walworth Road."

terrorize the school of headmaster Jim Nelson. The detail here is important. It is a special school. The children have a particular vulnerability, a fact stressed by their appearing with faces innocently made-up as animals - as the (animal-like) Trots stamp on the roof. This is precisely the kind of scenario the Tory tabloids would love to have invented.

Similarly, the eccentric hypochondria of the headmaster is used by the author to establish quickly the quirkiness and appeal of the character.

GBH is, without doubt, a highly polished piece of television. As Murray, Robert Lindsay is magnificent; as the headmaster, Michael Palin is perfect. It all works well enough in its own terms, but - unless some radical qualification is to come in future episodes -the dramatic dice are heavily weighted to serve a dubious end.

Geoff King
Brighton Labour Party

PERISCOPE

New York en-Gulfed

On June 11th, **New York police** solemnly claimed that 4.5 million people had attended that day's Gulf War victory parade through the financial district in lower Manhattan. Most of the media reported the claim as fact.

Periscope's eyewitnesses report no more than a few hundred thousand joined the hideous dance of death.

The side streets were empty and half an hour before the parade began you could still get a seat on the Lexington Avenue Local stopping at City Hall!

The New York Times suggested an attendance of 500,000, but seemed to think the police exaggerations were a quite acceptable expression of the spirit of the occasion.

In any case, half a million people work in the financial district and the choice of a Monday lunchtime by the parade organisers suggests that they are aware that Gulf War fever may not be all its cracked up to.

As it turned out, more ticker-tape (mostly shredded telephone directories provided by the organisers) was dropped on the victorious New York Mets baseball team a few years back than on the Gulf War "heroes".

New York Mayor **David Dinkins**, a black Democrat who defeated the loathsome **Ed Koch** in 1989 with the help of **Jesse Jackson**, presented the keys of the City to **Schwarzkopf** and his bosses, **Cheney** and **Powell**.

Only days before, Dinkins' cops had violently evicted a large number of homeless people from a park on the Lower East Side. He is now making budget cuts and laying off city workers.

Ick!

The priorities of Birmingham's Labour Council were demonstrated last month with the official opening by the **Queen** of the £160 million International Convention Centre.

How ironic that the richest pensioner in the land was asked to open the Convention Centre at the very time when pensioners in Birmingham are fighting to retain free bus passes!

The **ICC** (or "ick" as it is known to most Brummies) is a "prestigious, world leading first for Birmingham", according to local Labour leaders but people in Birmingham, hounded by Poll Tax bailiffs are sceptical, not least because of the £10 million annual interest charges on loans taken out to build the damn thing.

In the "people's palace" that is the ICC, coffee is 80p a cup and an ice cream over £1.

The District Party opposed the ICC for many years, but at its 1986 Policy Conference so-called left councillors moved that "no vote" be taken on resolutions dealing with the ICC.

They argued that if the ICC was not built it would make the Labour Council look stupid and become an electoral liability. Their manoeuvre

enabled the Group leadership to proceed with the monstrosity.

Inevitably, it is the ICC itself - a monument to municipal vainglory - that has turned out to be the real "electoral liability". Attendance at the opening was modest, despite the presence of Liz "Windsor".

Particularly unpopular is a £200,000 statue outside the ICC in Centenary Square; because of its ill-chosen colour it has been dubbed the "turd in the Square" by observant Brummies.

Congrats!

To **Claudia** and **Jeremy Corbyn** on the birth of their second child.

No congrats!

To "Sir" **Pat Duffy**, made a Knight Bachelor by **John Major** in the Birthday Honours list. Duffy becomes the first knight to sit on the Labour benches since **Harold Wilson** retired in 1983.

He has been rewarded for his services to the North Atlantic Assembly, which was once rumoured to have something to do with the boys from the Pentagon backrooms.

"The Prime Minister is saying thank you," said Duffy, "and I am deeply grateful."

Quayludes

The following gem from America's Vice-President courtesy of the indispensable *Quayle Quarterly*:

On the Gulf War: "a stirring victory for the forces of aggression against lawlessness"

The dedicated **Quayle** watchers report that the excitable Veep shook **Prince Charles** so vigorously that it put back the old hippie's recovery from a polo injury by two weeks.

Hardened atheists on the US left are now offering up daily prayers for the President's health.

Sequels

Latest offer in *Class War's* hot line of anarchist merchandise: "umbrella (golfing type)".

Last month's *Briefing* scoop on the TUC's banned *Women's Workbook* was picked up by *Gùardian* industrial correspondent **Keith Harper**, without acknowledgment, of course.

Briefing's Coventry correspondent **Dave Spencer** copped plenty of flak over his portrait of the city's labour movement in last month's *Constituency Close-up*; the local rag quoted Dave's response: "It does come across a bit bleak..."

And may we remind readers that back in April, *Periscope* predicted that Labour's director of Campaigns and Communications **John Underwood** would be squeezed out by the **Mandelson-Byrne-Julie Hall** axis. Remember, you read it first in *Labour Briefing*.

And finally...

Len Clark, mentioned in last month's *Periscope* following his defection to the Tories, was not only **John Spellar's** 1987 election agent in Northfield but a former West Midlands County Councillor. Indeed, Clark was Chief Whip and Chair of Highways on that august body until its abolition - and prime mover in disciplining left Labour councillors who voted against increasing bus fares.



Who wants to be in the MCC anyway?

From the terraces... ***Arthur Chandler*** *blasts the sexist oligarchy at Lord's and takes a swipe at the government's latest moves to police football crowds.*

FOLLOWING THE failure of her much publicised attempt to be accepted as a member of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), Rachel Heyhoe Flint will not be taking legal advice, nor will she be embarking on any form of campaigning against this flagrant injustice. "I don't want to offend them," she said.

Here is an anachronism in the heart of British society, an institution that has just deliberately offended over half the population through its insistence on sexual apartheid, and SHE doesn't want to offend THEM! Well, I do!

There is only one real benefit to being a member of the MCC: you get to sit in the Pavilion at Lord's to watch Middlesex or England play. This may not, however, be as much of a benefit as it seems because if the house is full you will have to have another MCC member sitting next to you. It might even be the one who said that he didn't want to let women in because he didn't want to see knitting in the pavilion.

The only other "benefits" of membership are the day-glo tie and the honour of being a member.

Not everyone thinks it's such an honour, but John Major certainly did and gratefully accepted an accelerated entry, jumping a queue of 9,000.

In contrast, Sunil Gavaskar, one of the world's greatest ever batsmen, not only turned down his honorary membership, but proudly announced his decision to the world. He explained that as a player he had once been refused admission to the Pavilion.

The only way that the MCC will ever step into the twentieth century is if a Test player refuses to play in front of an all-male pavilion or if a few more famous people refuse honourary membership. But I'm not holding my breath.

Meanwhile, the final chapter of the story of the Home Affairs Committee Inquiry into Policing Football has now been written. As regular readers will know, the Committee published a surprisingly radical report calling for more supporter involvement in the planning of police strategies and a switch to the use of stewards rather than police inside the ground.

The government response, finally issued in May, rejected two key recommendations: that the abolition of standing areas at football grounds be reconsidered and that policing costs be linked to attendances.

The first rejection was no surprise; the introduction of all-seater stadia was the government's way of getting out of the ID card fiasco.

The rejection of the recommendation on pricing is perhaps more serious. The government wants clubs to bear the "full cost" of policing matches including "training, accommodation, transport, communications and administration".

The Committee said that a football club was vital to the identity of a community and should not be forced out of business because of police charges; the government says "tough". The police will decide both the level of policing and the charge for this policing.

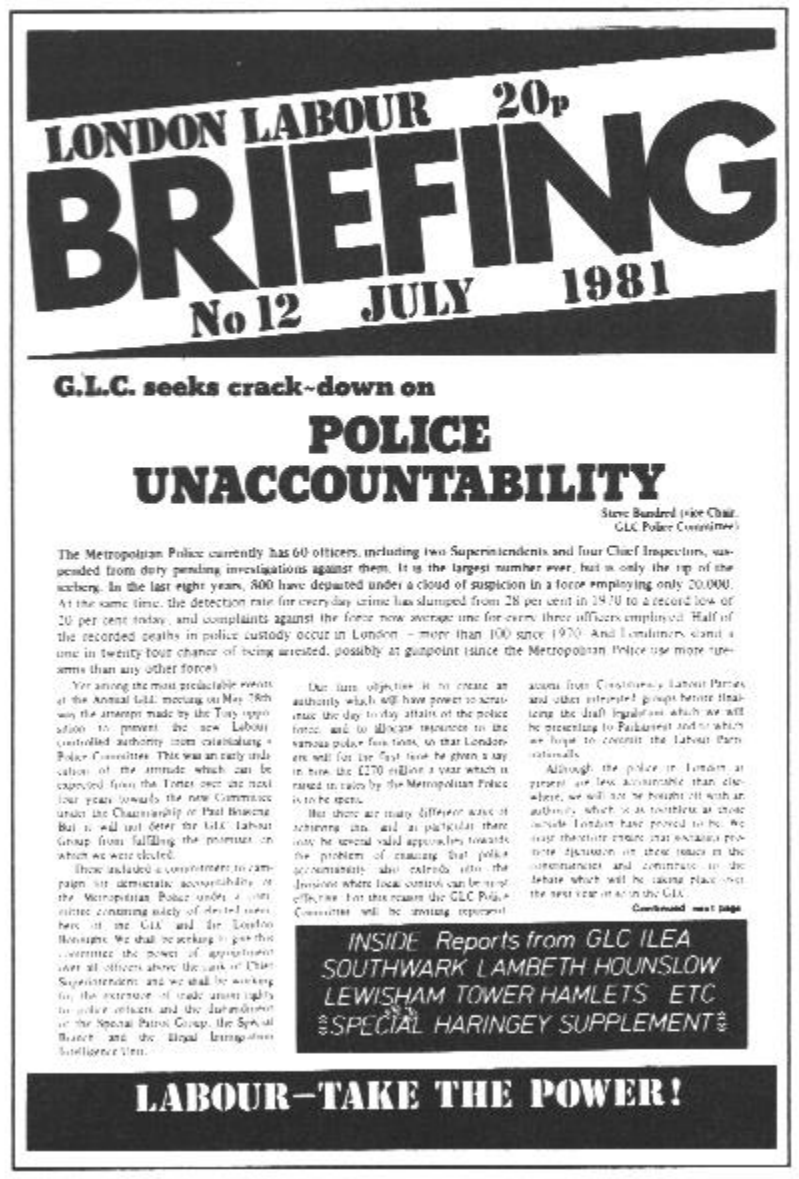
The majority of clubs now face the burdens of implementing all-seater stadia, increased police charges, and a cut in income threatened by the FA's superleague proposal. The future of football is not looking rosy - the lives of millions will be affected - and the silence from the Labour Party is deafening.

Famous last words...

Ten year's ago this month, flushed with its GLC success, *London Labour Briefing* launched its Target 82 Campaign to organise the left for the following year's borough council elections. Ken Livingstone called for "industrial action" and "parliamentary disruption" to defend the GLC and Steve Bundred, vice-chair of the GLC's new Police Committee, threatened an all-out assault on the Met.

Nigel Williamson (now a Murdoch employee) unfurled his latest hit-list of deselectable MPs and Toby Harris, today's mad axeman of Haringey, railed against "dire" cuts and redundancies. Showing more consistency than either, Chris Knight explained "Why - 'Labour Take the Power'?"

In a pathbreaking article Bernie Grant, then a Haringey councillor, urged Labour to heed the demands of black members and warned that "unless the Labour Party changes its present structure, blacks and disadvantaged groups will organise unofficial sections within the Party..." Remember, you read it first in *Labour Briefing*!



LONDON LABOUR 20p
BRIEFING
No 12 JULY 1981

G.L.C. seeks crack-down on

POLICE UNACCOUNTABILITY

Steve Bundred (vice Chair, GLC Police Committee)

The Metropolitan Police currently has 60 officers, including two Superintendents and four Chief Inspectors, suspended from duty pending investigations against them. It is the largest number ever, but is only the tip of the iceberg. In the last eight years, 800 have departed under a cloud of suspicion in a force employing only 20,000. At the same time, the detection rate for everyday crime has slumped from 28 per cent in 1970 to a record low of 20 per cent today, and complaints against the force now average one for every three officers employed. Half of the recorded deaths in police custody occur in London - more than 100 since 1970. And Londoners stand a one in twenty-four chance of being arrested, possibly at gunpoint (since the Metropolitan Police use more gun-arms than any other force).

Yet among the most predictable events of the Annual GLC meeting on May 28th was the attempt made by the Tory opposition to prevent the new Labour controlled authority from establishing a Police Committee. This was an early indication of the attitude which can be expected from the Tories over the next four years towards the new Committee under the Chairmanship of Paul Boateng. But it will not deter the GLC Labour Group from fulfilling the promises on which we were elected.

These included a commitment to campaign for democratic accountability of the Metropolitan Police under a committee consisting solely of elected members of the GLC and the London Boroughs. We shall be seeking to give this committee the power of appointment over all officers above the rank of Chief Superintendent, and we shall be working for the extension of trade union rights to police officers and the dismantling of the Special Patrol Group, the Special Branch and the Illegal Immigration Intelligence Unit.

Our first objective is to create an authority which will have power to scrutinise the day to day affairs of the police force, and to allocate resources to the various police functions, so that Londoners will for the first time be given a say in how the £270 million a year which is raised in rates by the Metropolitan Police is to be spent.

But there are many different ways of achieving this, and in particular there may be several valid approaches towards the problem of ensuring that police accountability also extends into the division where local control can be most effective. For this reason the GLC Police Committee will be inviting representations from Constituency Labour Parties and other interested groups before finalising the draft legislation which we will be presenting to Parliament next year which we hope to commit the Labour Party nationally.

Although the police in London at present are less accountable than elsewhere, we will not be happy with an authority which is as toothless as those outside London have proved to be. We must therefore create real executive responsibility on these issues in the commissioner and committee in the debate which will be taking place over the next year or so in the GLC.

Continued next page

INSIDE Reports from GLC ILEA SOUTHWARK LAMBETH HOUNSLOW LEWISHAM TOWER HAMLETS ETC SPECIAL HARINGEY SUPPLEMENT

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

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* ...

Keith Veness in his reply to Keith Flett paints a picture of a Labour Party-monopolised anti-Gulf War movement which might fit in Islington, but few places elsewhere.

In many more areas the Labour Left was shackled by their support for economic sanctions against Iraq - starving rather than bombing the Iraqis - or when they took a good anti-imperialist position they were held back by local Labour leaderships, many of them ex-left.

In Bristol the priorities of many Labour Party left-wingers lay more in the internal ructions of the Labour Group than in building an anti-war movement that put 7,000 people on the streets of Bristol in demonstrations on three separate days. Such was the anger at the Labour Party that one of these demonstrations visited first the Tory Party HQ and then the Labour Party HQ with the BBC in between.

Having spent 10 years swimming in the Labour Party waters that Keith Veness is so keen to see socialists diving into, I can only argue back with my own experience of the anti-war movement. Having left the Labour Party to join the SWP in early 1990 I was spared the embarrassment of Labour Party members who had to explain continually that they didn't support their Party's policy or leadership. It was great to be part of an organisation committing its resources unreservedly to building the anti-war movement.

The force for change is in people who want to fight, not in the elected left MPs or councillors who say they will fight for them.

In the Labour Party in Bristol many socialists learnt their lesson about trusting left MPs to do their fighting for them; Dawn Primarolo (whom many of us spent a lot of time getting selected over Michael Cocks) has now paid her Poll Tax!

Phil Smith
Bristol

P.S. Ironically your magazine was passed to me by a left-wing Bristol councillor who found it left in his cubby hole in the Council House. He has since left the Council and has not renewed his Labour Party membership.

We the undersigned women would like to nominate *Briefing* as Traitor of the Month.

In its superior wisdom the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs has decided to replace two women by two men on its slate for the Constituency Section of the NEC. Thus the SCG is well in line with the current widespread "anti-woman" mood prevailing, and not just in this country.

Nevertheless, *Briefing* is the only left rank-and-file organisation purporting to support positive discrimination which has endorsed this decision. *Briefing* therefore surely deserves nomination.

Sophie Nicol, Yvonne Bonnamy, Margot Clegg, Kiki Cliff, Vera Derer, Deirdre Duncan, Anni Marjoram, Kanta Patel, Christine Shawcroft, Anne Thomas, Anne Tennant

In last month's *Briefing* Cllr. Liz Davies criticises me for voting against various cuts, bailiffs and compulsory redundancies in the Labour Group but not in open Council. Liz Davies' view ignores the fact that real power in local government does not lie in full Council meetings, but with the government, Chief Officers and leading Councillors. By the time of full Council meetings the real decisions have usually already been made in committees. Furthermore, voting against Group decisions in full Council undermines your position in the Party. Why argue for leadership accountability and for left policies if you're going to ignore the decisions that are made anyway?

Of course this is not a new debate, and I accept that some on the left don't share my view. What I won't accept is the hypocrisy behind Liz Davies' letter.

First, Liz Davies has been a Councillor for one year. Not once in this time has she voted against such policies in full Council meetings. All she has done is abstain on two occasions. "Why not vote against them in open Council?" Liz Davies says to me. Why don't you do it yourself? seems the obvious reply.

Secondly, I laughed at the lecture about building support for action against cuts. Besides being a Haringey Councillor I also work for Islington Council's libraries department. Liz Davies is a member of the committee that libraries come under. Last autumn our union struck against cuts and lobbied Liz Davies' committee. Not only did she not bother to attend the committee, or the lobby of the Town Hall we organised, but she has never spoken to our departmental representatives in all her time on the Council.

Cllr. Aly Mir
Haringey

As a resident of Islington and Council employee, I read with interest the contributions from Cllr. Liz Davies in last month's *Briefing*. Her open opposition to cuts, as spelt out on the front page and in the letters column, made it clear (at least on paper) where she stands on this issue. But has her opposition been as coherent outside the pages of your journal? I only ask, because, unless I am mistaken, I am sure I witnessed the same Liz Davies at a Labour Group meeting in Islington last year speaking on the matter of re-billing and re-funding the borough's Poll Tax payers.

I hope my memory isn't letting me down when I recall that the only mention Liz made of cuts was not to oppose them but to comment on the level of cuts the Council should make in response to this particular round of capping.

Granted, Liz argued for lower level cuts than those put forward by the leadership, but was Liz sticking to her self-proclaimed principles or pursuing a tactical line? As the saying goes, I think we should be told.

Where I and many other workers in local government would agree with Liz, is on the need to build links between the workforce, community groups and councillors. Workers in this department have always believed this and at different junctures have campaigned (not always successfully) against cuts in our own and other areas.

I believe we would have had more success if, for instance, councillors such as Liz actually attended committees like Leisure Services when they are addressed by workers from a department such as ours who have taken strike action to attend in order to protest at cuts plans.

Anti-cuts councillors would be seen and respected by workers if they declared their opposition at such meetings and a vote against cuts would be viewed as far more valuable than any laudable sentiments expressed in a journal such as yours.

Workers in this department are looking forward to joining forces with Liz the next time Leisure Services meets to implement its programme of 6% cuts in our front line service.

Terence Patrick Luke
Islington Libraries Joint Shop Stewards Committee (personal capacity)

Labour Briefing Annual General Meeting Saturday, July 20th 10:30am-5pm

Durham Road Community Centre
Durham Road
London N.4
Finsbury Park tube

* **Out of the ghetto** - panel discussion with Ken Livingstone, Dorothy Macedo, Narendra Makanji, Liz Davies, speaker from Liverpool Broad Left (invited), Chair: Pauline Purnell.
* **Action** - Conference (Pete Willsman), general election (John Wilton), witch-hunt (Jean Calder, Greg Tucker), NEC campaign (Bryn Griffiths).
* **The new magazine** - with Jeremy Corbyn and Mike Marqusee, *Briefing* editor.

Plus: elections to the National Editorial Board, resolutions

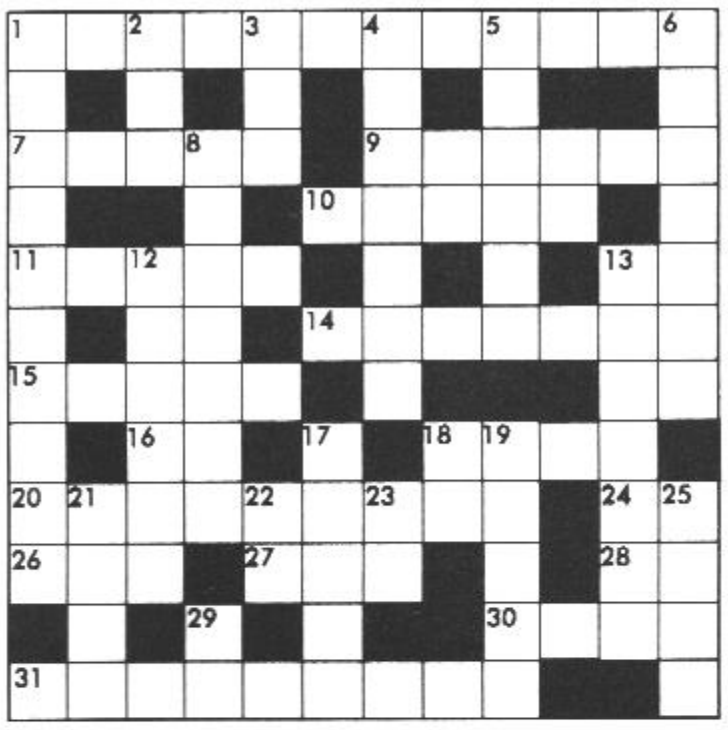
Admission: £4 waged; £2 unwaged; free to comrades from outside London.
Ring the Briefing office if you need accommodation in London; creche will be arranged but please inform us in advance of your creche needs.

Socialist strategy in the 1990s

The left and:
...the recession
...the rise of North-South conflict
...the threat of incomes policy
...UK recession and socialist economic policy

Speakers include: Diane Abbott MP, George Anthony (AEU), Jeremy Corbyn MP, Megan Dobney (NGA), Ken Livingstone MP, Alan Meale MP, Jim Mortimer, Seaumus Milne, Julian Saurin, Marjorie Thompson.

Organised by
Socialist Economic Bulletin
Conway Hall London 29 June
11am-5pm
Admission £4/£2
Tickets from Socialist Economic Bulletin, c/o Ken Livingstone MP,
House of Commons, London SW11
(All speakers appear in personal capacity)



Briefing Crossword No. 3

First person to post the correct solution will be reported to the National Constitutional Committee and dealt with accordingly! Answer in next month's issue of Briefing.

Last month's solutions:
Across: 1. Republican 7. Managua 9. LLL 10. Del 11. Tactics 13. IRA 14. NUS 15. Shelter 17. Tie 18. Earth 20. Error 21. Cut 22. Nixon 24. GATT 25. Millenium

Down: 1. Remit 2. Pinochet 3. Bug 4. IPA 5. Nellist 6. Welfare State 8. Unclear 12. Internal 15. Swing 16. RRO 19. Try 21. Clam 23. UN

Across

1. Actor in "Bedtime for Bonzo"
7. Labour is only source of this
9. Irish County
10. "Rights of Man"
11. Out to ----- !
13. Vietnamese Uncle
14. Russian jeweller - not Ratners!
15. Karl Marx's birthplace
16. Californian city
18. Home of Taj Mahal
20. 1 dn. does this to system
26. Yorkshire river
27. Welsh or Scottish river
28. French gold
30. Peruvian ocean current
31. Haitian Liberator

Down

1. 1641, 1789 or 1917
2. Kinnock's socialist ideals
3. Robert E.?
4. Slum landlord
5. Old Bill does this!
6. 1839 Chartist Rising
8. NEC's programme!
12. Did this to lies
13. Six sided snooker hall
17 Greek Island - Santori
21. "Red Biddy" or plonk
22. Irish MP.
23. God's indoctrination in schools!
25 Ferrous metal
29. SWP forerunner

DIARY

Friday June 21st: Nothing to Celebrate, candle-lit vigil on the eve of the Gulf War "Victory Parade", organised by Women Against War in the Gulf; Trafalgar Square, London, 9pm-midnight.
Saturday June 22nd: "What Future for Ethiopia?" conference organised by Ethiopia Solidarity Campaign, Conway Hall, London.
Saturday June 22nd: Auction for *Labour Briefing*, Lewisham Labour Club, Limes Grove, London SE13; 7pm.
Sunday, June 30th: Anti-Apartheid Freedom Run in Brockwell Park, Brixton; all day. Details: 071 387 9186.
Saturday July 6th/Sunday July 7th: Marxist Forum Discussion Weekend on "Has Trotksyism any future after the collapse of Stalinism?", with Al Richardson, editor, *Revolutionary History*; Derby; phone Bish on 0332 362997 for details.
Saturday July 13th: Cancel the Debt, demonstration to mark the G7 summit meeting in London. Assemble noon, Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park; march to Trafalgar Square for rally at 2:30pm with Bernie Grant, Diane Abbott, Jeremy Corbyn, plus speakers from green, peace and international solidarity movements. Details: 071 281 8148.
Sunday, July 14th: National Anti-Poll Tax Delegates' Conference, Manchester Town Hall, 2-6pm; contact HAPTU 081 802 9804 or North West APT forum 061 707 1584.
Monday July 15th/Tuesday July 16th: The Other Economic Summit, Central Hall Westminster.
Saturday July 20th: *Labour Briefing* AGM, Durham Road Community Centre, London; 10:30-5pm.
Saturday September 7th/Sunday September 8th: Hazards Conference organised by Hazards Education Society and Lothian TUCRC; Pollok Halls, Edinburgh University; 031 556 7318.
Saturday September 21st: National Campaign Against the Witch-hunt meeting, Manchester.
Sunday September 29th/Friday October 4th: Labour Party Annual Conference, Brighton.
Saturday November 23rd: Labour Party Socialists AGM.

Black activists challenge *Searchlight*

An impressive list of black organisations has issued a powerful indictment of the anti-fascist magazine, ***Searchlight****. The following is an edited version.*

A NUMBER OF disagreements between black people and *Searchlight* have occurred over recent years, the latest and most extreme manifestation being the racist treatment of black people at an anti-fascist meeting in an Ilford synagogue, during which black people were banned, searched and physically intimidated by security guards.

Despite claims to the contrary, our main difference with *Searchlight* has not been over the Middle East but rather over its multicultural approach to anti-racist issues. The "white left" of the anti-fascist movement (whom we see as ultra-left) are still living in the 1970s, with a class reductionist position and a chauvinist attitude towards black struggles. *Searchlight's* position (which we define as the right-wing tendency within anti-fascism) is equally ignorant of the dynamics of race and class and is based on a loose multiculturalism, taking us back to the "racial harmony" approach of the community relations councils of the 1950s and 60s.

Searchlight portrays the National Front and the British National Party as the baddies and all other agencies as goodies with whom we should seek alliances. In particular, *Searchlight* downplays the significance of police racism, both in Britain and abroad. In many instances, police racism poses a far greater problem for black communities than even the extreme right. We, as black people, fight fascism and racism on all fronts - racist violence, police racism, immigration controls, the racist legislation of both the Labour and Tory parties - and cannot create artificial divisions between these tasks.

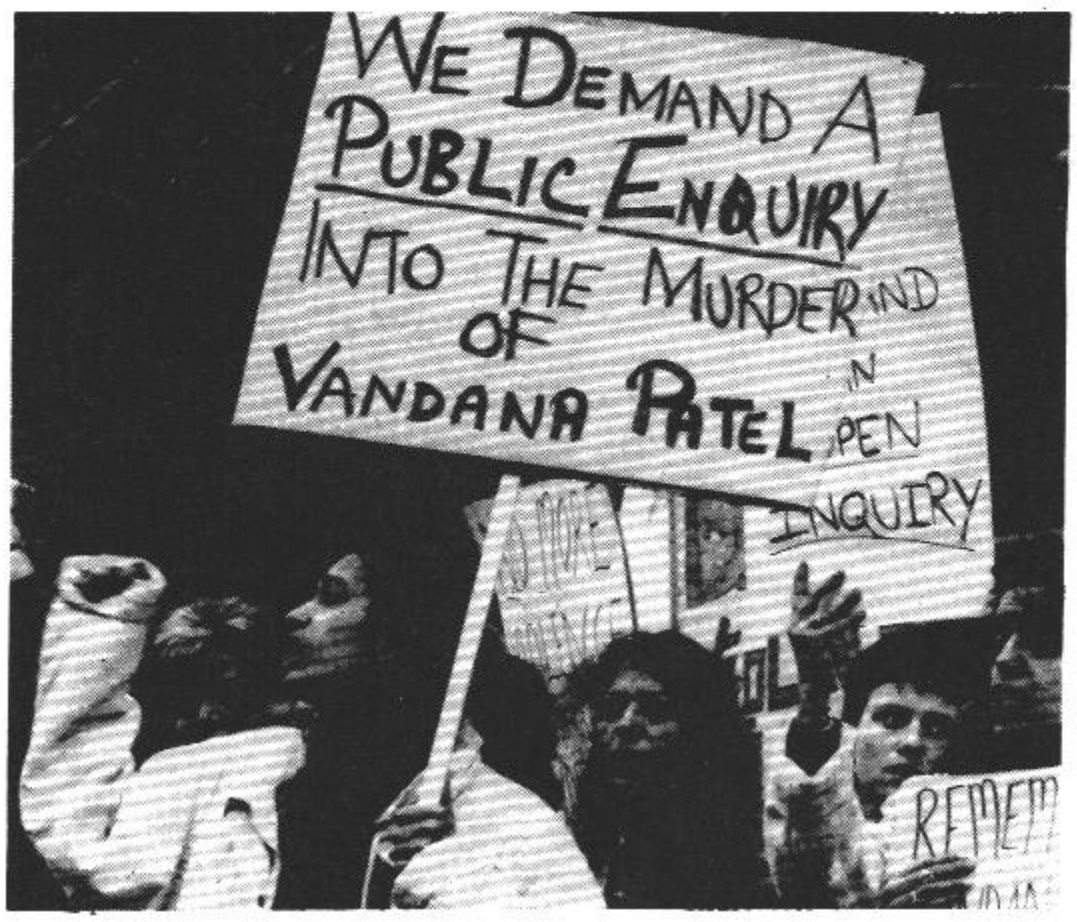
In addition, *Searchlight* is increasingly prioritising the fight against anti-Semitism over other aspects of the anti-racist, anti-fascist fight. As black people, we have always seen the fight against anti-Semitism and anti-black racism as complementary. But this approach, where both issues are tackled side by side, increasingly seems to cause problems for *Searchlight*. And in creating a hierarchical approach to what should be complementary struggles, *Searchlight* has represented itself to black people as yet another group of whites who want to subsume the black struggle to some other struggle, in this case the struggle against anti-Semitism.

Searchlight now seems to be seeking alliances against fascism built at the lowest common denominator. Hence its recent association with the Jewish Awareness Group which equates anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism and includes members of Israel's ultra-nationalist, far right Herut Party.

Let us also put on the record that we, as black people, have not forced the issue of the Middle East onto the anti-fascist agenda. In fact, we have bent over backwards on this issue. One black activist who was excluded from the Ilford meeting and who is now slandered as an anti-Semite led the debate in the National Black Students Alliance against the banning of Zionist societies in the colleges as a misuse of the "No Platform" policy. A magazine that attacks the Labour Council in Dundee for flying the Palestinian flag, equates anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism and attacks Palestinian causes loses all credibility within black communities.

We will continue to support all struggles which advance the anti-racist, anti-fascist cause, whilst at the same time seeing our central role as organising within the black communities to co-ordinate resistance and ensure that the black dimension and perspective on national and international affairs finds its rightful place on the political agenda.

■ **Among those signing the statement are: Camden Black Workers Group, National Black Caucus, Newham Monitoring Project, Refugee Forum, Sheffield Defence Campaign, Southall Monitoring Group, Greenwich Action Committee Against Racist Attacks, Merseyside Immigration Aid Unit, National Black Students Alliance, Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, Newham Asian Women's Project, five branches of the Indian Workers Association, Andrew Yunge Gordon and Narendra Makanji.**



On 29th April, Vandana Patel was murdered by her husband - in the domestic violence unit at Stoke Newington Police Station in London. It appears that the 21- year old woman's husband was allowed into the station and escorted to an interview room where he was left alone with his wife. He produced a knife and stabbed her to death. The Newham Asian Women's Project has picketed the police station and is demanding a public inquiry into the murder. Contact: Remember Vandana Patel Campaign, PO Box 225, London E7 9AA.

TORY MEPS HAVE voted to strip more than a million Commonwealth citizens of the right to vote or stand in European elections.

The vote came at a meeting of the European Parliament Committee on Institutional Affairs. A report was tabled which said that any other EC citizen of over 18 years of age could vote and stand in Euro-elections in any EC country in which they have lived for at least one year.

Labour MEP Glyn Ford tabled an amendment to extend this right to citizens of non-EC countries already granted such rights by their host EC government, for example Commonwealth citizens in Britain. The Tories and their right-wing allies defeated the amendment, thereby denying people rights which they have enjoyed in this country for many years.

The Socialist Group will challenge the decision in the full European Parliament.

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