BRIEFING

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

March 1991 60p

Labour must say:

Get out now!

The US and its allies are conducting an imperialist and racist war in the Gulf. It is clear that they have one aim: control of the Middle East. This is the first of what may be a series of North vs. South wars. And the Labour leadership is colluding in it.

Bernie Grant MP

The Labour leadership seems prepared to sacrifice everything for what it thinks may be an electoral advantage. Unfortunately, they don't know their history. They've learned nothing from the Falklands. One speaker at a recent Parliamentary Labour Party meeting correctly pointed out that if the war is won quickly the government will get the credit and if it is long and bloody we will share the blame.

What hurts me, as a Black Labour MP, more than anything else, is the way the Party leadership has been prepared to sell out Third World countries. I am amazed that our leadership can sit back and accept the bombing of innocent civilians. The bombing of the Baghdad bunker was an horrific act and Labour cannot distance itself from responsibility for this atrocity.

I am amazed that Labour's leaders remain unmoved by the massive opposition to the war in Arab and other Third World countries. This is neither internationalism nor socialism.

The soft left, many of whom made their reputations in the peace movement, have ended up as supporters of war. Most of them voted with the government. When the chips are down, these

Continued on page 2

•INSIDE• 4 **Tabloid warriors**

•INSIDE• 5 **US anti-war movement**

•INSIDE• 13 **Wirral Brighton**

•INSIDE• 18 **Poll Tax defiance**

Get out now!

(Continued from page 1)

people abandon principles in order to cuddle up to the leadership. They have a great deal to answer for; they've given the Tory and Labour Front Benches legitimacy in continuing the war.

Iraqis and Palestinians are now being detained and deported at the whim of the Home Secretary, who is not required to provide any reasons for his actions other than "national security". This is being done under the normal, racist immigration laws that operate in peace time, laws which I oppose but some of which Labour supports. Roy Hattersley is the only Labour MP who can make representations about these cases to the Home Secretary. Every case has to be referred through him because he is a Privy Councillor and Shadow Home Secretary. Hattersley seems quite happy to go along with this farce and not kick up a fuss about the civil rights of Iraqi or Palestinian people in this country. This is symptomatic of the kind of coalition govenrment we now have in Britain.

"We've got to use every ingenious method we can find for putting the War at the top of the agenda of each and every Labour Party meeting ."

Originally I supported sanctions but when I went to Baghdad before war broke out I saw that sanctions were just slow-acting bombs. The weaker members of society were being killed by the US blockade of food and medicines; even before the war started, up to 2500 children had died in Iraq from lack of vaccines for diseases such as tetanus and polio. It is hard to see why sanctions should be imposed on Iraq and not on Israel. We must have some consistency.

Meanwhile the war has already inflamed racism at home. So far six mosques have been firebombed. Schoolchildren have been singled out in classrooms - in some cases by teachers - and Arabs have been attacked by fascists in the streets. I fear that when the body bags start coming home we'll see an even sharper increase in racist attacks.

My own constituency office was attacked shortly after the vote in the House on the war. The office was daubed with phrases about "our boys in the Gulf", "kill the Iraqis", and National Front slogans. The place was smashed up and the computer with my casework were stolen. Of course, none of this will deter me in the least from speaking out against the war.

Socialists in the Labour Party must raise the question of the Gulf War in wards, General Committees, Women's Sections, trade unions and everywhere else. No matter how often we don't win we've got to keep raising it.

We've got to put pressure on MPs and at every opportunity embarass those who oppose peace and support war. By lining up with the Tory government they have invited attack from their own Party members.

We also have to work with the widest possible group of people opposed to the war. The Committee to Stop War in the Gulf is a broad-based organisation which has so far done very well. However, it has taken some actions with which I cannot agee. Some of the CND people on it are trying to exclude a number of left wing and other groups, which is unacceptable. Anyone who wants to be part of the Committee, who is opposed to the war and prepared to pay the affiliation fee should be allowed to join and have representation.

■ ***Bernie Grant*** *is Labour MP for Tottenham and Chair of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs.*

In this month's *Labour Briefing*

New pornocracy	4	Poll Tax	18
US anti-war movement	5	Trade Union Notebook	19
UN - a flagship of convenience	6	Eastern Europe	23
Ruddock on the rack	8	Economic Notebook	24
Soft left dance of death	9	Streetlife	25
Labour and the war	10	Periscope	26
Corbyn's Commonweal	12	Sport	27
Wirral	13	Reviews	28
Brighton	14	Letters	30
Class Traitor	15	Action dates	31

We say: *Liberate Labour from the warmakers*

Allied atrocities in Iraq and the shower of double-talk that accompanied them are the inevitable consequences of allied war aims.

Any lingering pretence that this war is about "liberating" anyone or upholding "international law" has been stripped away. The panic which grips the allies at the very mention of a negotiated settlement proves that Bush and Major have only one real interest: imposing an oppressive Pax Americana on the Middle East. In the process they hope to send a warning signal to the whole of the developing world. If you challenge US interests, mechanised death will rain down upon you until you relent once and for all.

It is impossible for the allies to pursue their political agenda without mass killings and mass destruction. The inexorable logic of imperialism is at work.

Tragically it is a logic which the Labour leadership have been only too willing to endorse. It was Kinnock, not Major, Hurd or King, who first promulgated the expansion of the West's war aims to include the destruction of Saddam's "war machine". This could only mean the occupation of Iraq and a permanent Western military presence in the Gulf.

Such notions are incompatible with negotiations, which is why Kinnock and Kaufman have spurned them. It is also why they have shown such contempt for the dreaded "linkage". This "linkage" is not a bargaining chip for Saddam but an expression of the deep-seated injustices wrought in the Middle East by Western domination. And the masses of the region are fully aware of it.

Britain is now governed by an informal coalition and Labour is hampered by all the restrictive etiquette which goes with it. The effects of the war at home - censorship, racism, violations of civil liberties - are raised only by intrepid backbenchers. The glaring insult of billions spent on weaponry and wages in the desert while schools, hospitals and homes crumble and jobs are slashed cannot be highlighted by Labour as long as it backs the war. When workers in this country are asked, as they will be, to bear the exorbitant costs of "Desert Storm", Labour will not be able to complain.

For the Tories, the Labour leadership's support for the war has been indispensable. Without it, selling the war to the public would have been immensely more difficult. Public debate and dissent would have taken on entirely different dimensions. For this reason Tribune and others have got it all wrong when they say that the position of the Labour leadership is not an issue for the anti-war movement. On the contrary, shifting the leadership - and indeed the Party as a whole - is an unavoidable and urgent task for that movement.

The recent launch of Labour Against the War is an enormous boost. Building this initiative should be our top priority. Through its national petition, rally, and other activities, LAW offers us the chance to mobilise Labour Party opinion against the war in all its depth and breadth. Labour Against the War has been welcomed by and will offer a platform to the full spectrum of anti-war Labour MPs. Tony Benn and the rest have had the guts and integrity to stand up to Kinnock, the Tories, the media and the war juggernaut. Millions now look to them as beacons of sanity in a world gone mad.

In Britain today, they are the real leaders of the opposition.



The new pornocracy

Mick Gosling *surveys the tabloid response to the carnage in Baghdad.*

AS EVERY school kid knows, the Roman Empire collapsed under the weight of its own corruption. By the 10th century its government was practically run by prostitutes, to the extent that historians dubbed it a pornocracy'.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines prostitute as a *"person given over to infamous practices; an abandoned person; especially a base hireling; a corrupt and venal politician"*. Substitute journalist for politician and there is no better description of the tabloid press in the wake of the Baghdad shelter bombing. They are the new pornocracy.

Not one tabloid newspaper had a reporter in Baghdad. But via Riyadh, Washington and London, they all know the truth. *"Ten facts to damn Saddam"* headlined the **Sun**, the paper that killed off 500 Iraqis in Khafji while the Saudis only managed 30. Once again, the **Sun** knew things even the US military didn't. Among its list of *"facts"*: *"The bunker had been camouflaged to make it look like a building site"; "Laser guided 'smart bombs' would not have caused the inferno seen on TV. Last night it was suggested that Saddam's men had started fires AFTER the initial blast and before the TV cameras arrived"* (not even the Pentagon suggested that); *"The lines of charred bodies could have been anyone. The hidden 'civilian' casualties may have been Iraqi military casualties"*. Significantly there were no pictures. Instead, the **Sun** raged: it was *"high time all British TV reporters were PULLED OUT of Baghdad"* and *"about time the BBC understood whose side they were on"*.

The **Sport** headlined *"Con-trick riddle of 500 corpses"* above a picture captioned: *"carnage: bodies littered the street outside the bomb-blasted bunker"*. Unlike the **Sun**, the **Sport** did manage one paragraph on the horror of the bombing - on page four. Sharing that page (and half the front cover) was an all-colour *"sizzling"* Fiona Wright who *"helps our boys keep it up"*.

The following day, 15 February, the **Sport** (which is running a *"Bump Off Mad Sad and Win a Metro"* contest) had a full colour centrespread on the workings of the electric chair headlined *"Saddam must fry"*. A sick joke? Compared to the soaraway **Sun**'s four million copies, the Sunday version of the **Sport** manages a meagre 400,000.

The **Daily Star** (circulation 900,000) headlined "SACRIFICED" followed by *"Saddam herds his people to die in military bunker"*. No journalist had the guts to put his or her name to this story (which referred to *"grief-stricken" "relatives"* - in inverted commas!). The **Star** also has difficulty counting: *"fewer than 40 bodies were seen being removed on stretchers"*. The **Star's** editor knew who the guilty parties were: Saddam and *"American and British TV cameramen being on the spot to act as his PR men"*.

The **Daily Express** (circulation 1.5. million) agreed. *"Outrage over BBC war bias"* screamed its front page over a story which spread on to and across page 2. And the victims of the bombing? A three inch square poor quality black and white picture at the bottom of page 3 captioned: *"GRIEF: Iraqi TV scenes of alleged victims"*. Presumably the blanket-covered remains might have been London's homeless getting an early night.

Today (circulation 500,000) headlined *"Entombed by Saddam"*, followed by an inside spread titled *"400 hundred human sacrifices...Saddam's vilest weapons"*. An aptly-named Nick Craven claimed part credit for the story.

The **Daily Mail** (circulation 1.7 million) spent three pages following the headline *"Victims of Saddam's war"* with a fourth attacking the BBC and ITN; *"outrage as TV's bunker bomb bulletins 'show the bias to Saddam'"*. By bias, the **Mail** seems to mean pictures of any civilian casualties of this previously sanitised war - unless, of course, they happen to be in Tel Aviv. The **Mirror** chose, curiously, to lead on Kirk Douglas fighting for his life after an aircrash.

Prior to the Baghdad shelter bombing the *'surgical', 'precise'* and *'smart'* reporting of 80,000 allied air raids might have led the British public to believe that the Iraqi masses should be grateful for having a greater tonnage of bombs dropped on their heads in three weeks than were dropped on Germany and Japan in all of World War II. After the Baghdad bombing, the mass circulation tabloids worked overtime relaying and embroidering allied propaganda and attacking the camera crews as bearers of bad news, calling for still tighter censorship.

The *'quality'* broadsheets repeated US claims that the shelter was a military target. Yet reality intruded via correspondents on the spot. A moving despatch from Marie Colvin in Baghdad, in the **Times**, contained some real facts. *"There was no evidence on the ground that this structure had a military purpose,"* she wrote. *"If it was a command centre...there was no antennae or radar on the roof, merely some flowerpots. The shelter was one of four buildings in a neighbourhood complex containing a local supermarket, the Mallouki mosque, and the Jeenan primary school, all built around 1984. On the corner of the main road was a sign that one had seen around Baghdad since the war with Iran: white, with green lettering in Arabic and English which said 'shelter' and a green stick figure running for cover. The sign was weathered and rusty at the bottom and was obviously not new. And it would have been hard to make hundreds of grief-stricken people tell the same story, either in overheard conversation or in answer to journalists that their women and children had gone there every night to sleep."* Our tabloid warriors should hang their heads in shame.

■ *Mick Gosling, writing here in a personal capacity, works for the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. The latest issue of* ***Free Press,*** *the journal of the CPBF, is devoted to media censorship of the Gulf War. Single copies 40p plus large SAE from 96 Dalston Lane, London E8 1NG. Six or more copies 25p each.*

US anti-war movement

***Paul Wilcox** reports from New York.*

THE ANTI-WAR movement in the United States is strong and growing, despite the media propaganda blitz and the censorship of news coverage of anti-war activities, both in the United States and abroad.

On January 19th, over 100,000 people demonstrated in Washington DC against the war; 200,000 marched in San Francisco. One week later, 250,000 marched in Washington and 200,000 more in San Francisco. These major demonstrations were the culmination of many weeks of local marches, rallies and local organising. The big business-controlled media reduced these figures to less than one-fifth their actual size. Often they simply did not report them at all, while giving front-page coverage to relatively small, government-orchestrated pro-war activities.

Through this censorship, the US government and the Pentagon are trying to keep the truth from the people, creating the false impression that there is overwhelming pro-war sentiment. But anti-war organisers know that the government cannot forever keep a lid on the growing anger; they know that these massive demonstrations are only a foretaste of even larger protests in the future.

Two major anti-war coalitions have developed: the National Coalition to Stop US Intervention in the Middle East and the National Campaign for Peace in the Middle East.

The Coalition puts the responsibility for the war on the Bush administration and the Pentagon and recognises that the dispute between Iraq and Kuwait is a matter that the Arab countries should solve without the intervention of the Western imperialist countries.

The Campaign, whilst condemning US intervention, has also condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and has supported UN sanctions as an alternative to war.

The Campaign and Coalition have co-ordinated a number of their anti-war activities.

According to the Amsterdam News, a large Black newspaper based in New York City, "the Coalition has joined Blacks, Latinos, union members, lesbian and gay people, and a host of individuals and organisations not traditionally in the forefront of the peace movement... This new presence is vital precisely because of its working class and minority support."

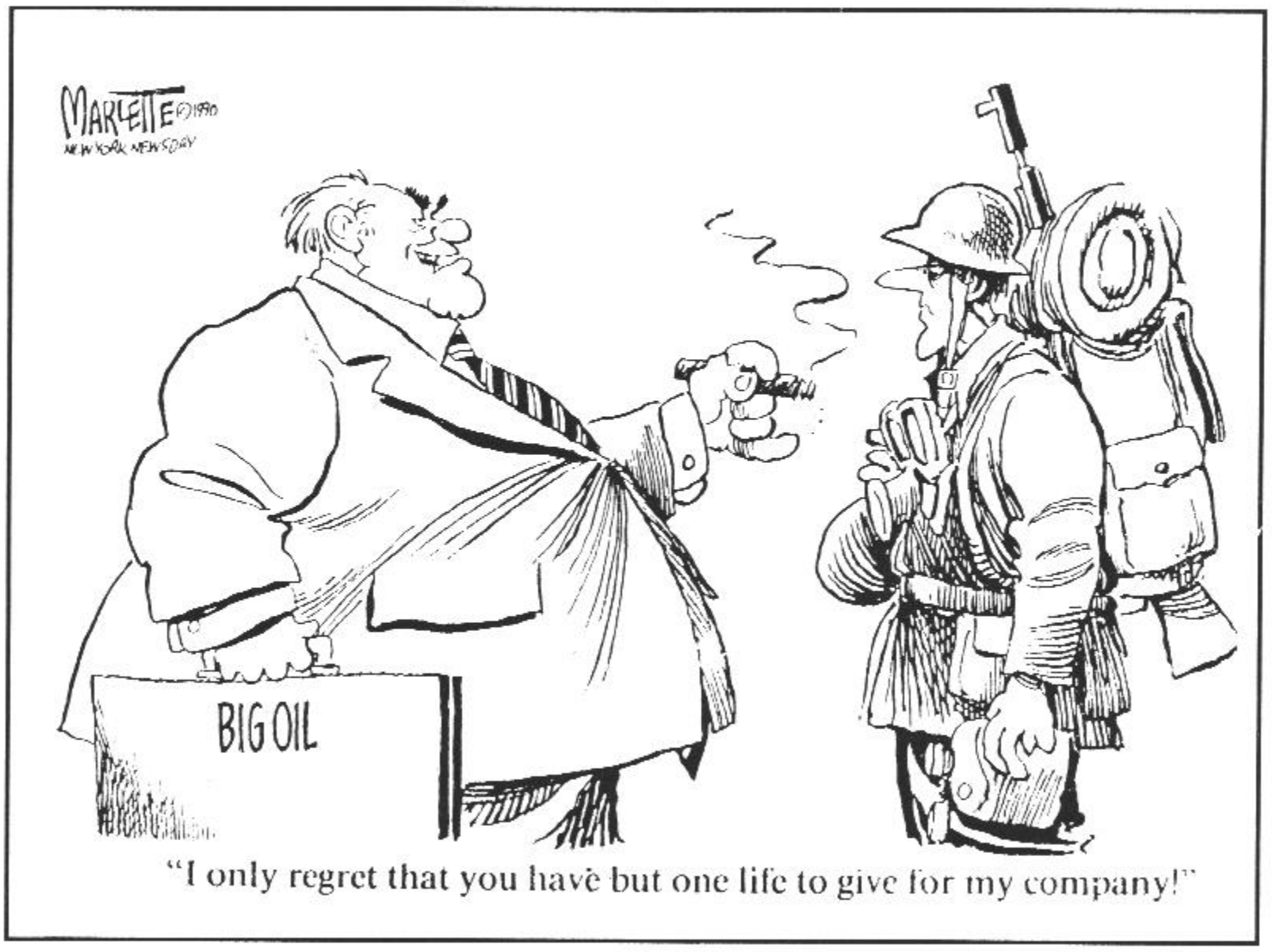
Both the Coalition and the Campaign are now actively planning future actions, local and national. The censorship of news by the government, far from being a sign of strength, is really an admission of its great fear of the potential of the anti-war, anti-imperialist movement, both in the United States and around the world.

As a US soldier in Saudi Arabia recently stated in a letter to the Coalition: "...I no longer trust the very people that I'm supposed to work for and support. None of us are told any real news about what is going on... I just hope that someone, anyone, will help us get out of here, before the US government and the oil companies get us killed."

■ *Paul Wilcox is a high school teacher in New York City, an anti-war activist for many years, and a staff member of the Coalition office in New York City.*

GIs resist Gulf war

US servicemen and women are refusing to fight the Gulf War. The War Resisters' League reports that over 1000 soldiers are currently confined to barracks pending conscientious objection or disciplinary hearings. San Francisco has declared the city a "sanctuary" for military resisters. Alex Molnar, whose son is a marine in the Gulf and who is co-chair of the Military Families Support Network (which supports US troops by organising for withdrawal from the Gulf) wrote to Bush: through the 80's the Reagan-Bush administration "diluted gas mileage requirements for cars and dismantled federal energy policy. And now you have ordered my son to the Middle East. For what, cheap gas?"



"I only regret that you have but one life to give for my company!"

UN - flagship of convenience

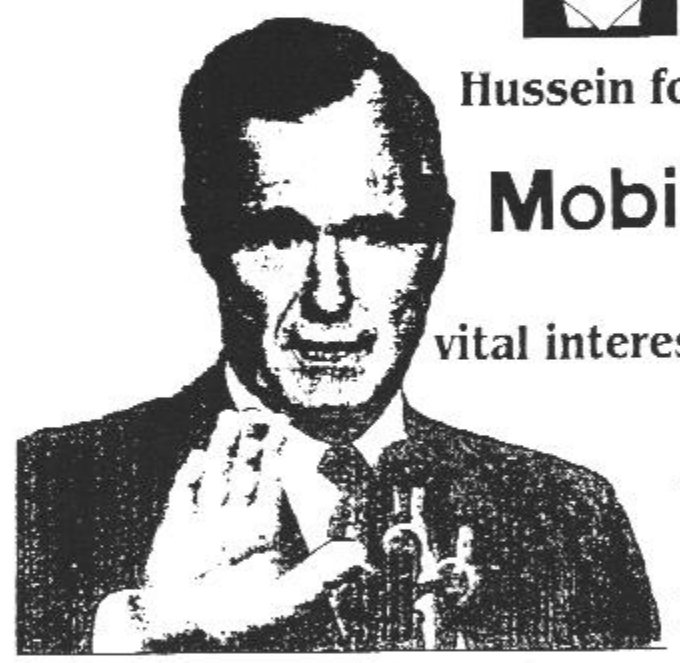
Congratulations to an ex-Tory Prime Minister for using the correct word to describe the US-UK war in the Gulf:"imperialism". Why do Labour's leaders not speak in the same language? Instead they claim the war is justified by the need "to implement the decisions of the United Nations".One

Ron Huzzard, Secretary, Labour Action for Peace

wonders if Gerald Kaufman has read the UN Charter. Its aim is clear: "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". Article 2 says "all members shall resolve their disputes by peaceful means". Article 32 sets out the techniques for UN peace-making, including negotiation, conciliation and regional solutions. Security Council resolution 660 passed on August 2nd called upon Kuwait and Iraq to begin "immediate negotiations".These never took place. The US set the pace with a massive military build-up which doubled after the mid-term elections in November.The UN's response to the brutal aggression against Kuwait was tough economic sanctions enforced on land, sea and air. All evidence, including CIA reports, indicated the effectiveness of sanctions. However, these were not backed up by diplomacy.Resolution 678 (stipulating the January 15th deadline) did not,as required under Article 27, receive the concurring votes of all five permanent UN Security Council members; China abstained.

There is evidence of US dollar bribes to Security Council members to secure the vote Bush and Baker wanted.The UN Secretary General finally arrived in Baghdad on the day the US Congress voted for war. No resolution has ever been passed by the UN stating that sanctions have failed and that war is the only option.On January 16th Bush unilaterally went to war, launching the massive air onslaught on Iraq. The UN Secretary General was informed after the event.The US has used the UN as a flagship of convenience. The war is run by the Pentagon. Article 46 states that military operations authorised by the UN must be conducted by a UN Military Staff Committee; this too has been ignored.Iran, India, Algeria, Jordan and other states have called upon the UN to try to end the war. The US-UK position is clear; they will veto peace moves in the Security Council.Labour's leaders should recognise that the UN has been cynically used to give respectability to an unnecessary and increasingly brutal war. The real aims are to impose a Pax Americana on the Middle East, prop up undemocratic regimes in the oil-rich Gulf states and destroy Iraq. War will devastate not liberate Kuwait and its population.The alternative is an immediate ceasefire, troop withdrawals on both sides and an early Middle East peace conference to deal with the Kuwait and Palestinian issues.

"We SHELL not EXXONerate Saddam Hussein for his actions. We will Mobilize to meet this threat to our vital interests in the Persian Gulf until an AMOCOble solution is reached."



From People's Daily World, published in New York City.

Shah's Annexation

The contest for the least remembered illegal annexation of modern times has been won by the late Shah of Iran, who seized the islands of Tumbs an Abu Musa in the lower Gulf in November, 1971, the day before Britain formally withdrew from the Gulf.

The United Arab Emirates (from one of whose member Emirs the islands were taken) officially came into being two days after the annexation. British Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas Home explained,"Once the decision to withdraw our forces from the Gulf and our special treaty relationship with the Gulf stares was ended, it was inevitable that these long dormant disputes would come into the open."

Deeply concerned at the Shah's obvious ambitions, the Iraqi government broke off diplomatic relations with both Iran and Britain, which it accused of collusion in the Iranian "aggression".

Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre will be hosting its annual Arms Fair in May. Missile and ordnance components will be on display plus tank and armoured vehicle components, rifles and machine guns.

Birmingham councillors are directors of the NEC and lay down policy for the nominally independent Board. Labour Cllr. Pat Sever's excuse for not cancelling this year's exhibition is that such action would incur a financial penalty. With a trading surplus of over £5.6 million last year, the Exhibition Centre can afford to dispense with this obscene exhibition of death. Protests against the Arms Fair are being coordinated on behalf of the Campaign Against the Arms Trade by West Midlands CND, 54 Allison Street, Birmingham, B5 5TH, 021 643 4617.

Peter Ford
Erdington CLP

Gulf war round- up

NEARLY 1,000 demonstrators marched through the quiet Cotswold village of Fairford on Sunday February 27th against the deployment of American B52 bombers at the previously mothballed airbase. "Support our Boys" posters were amended with "Bring them back alive". During Bruce Kent's speech an old man climbed onto the platform with a banner proclaiming "No Wingeing Benns Here". A case of mistaken identity? At the end of the rally, as John Lennon's 'Imagine' played on the PA, four B52s took off. An attempt to demoralise the protesters? It made us feel sick, but it won't deter us.

Karl Statton
Banbury CLP

THERE are liars, damned liars and journalists. But some have redeemed their profession via Media Workers Against the War; others have produced *War Report*, with all the news the national papers refuse to print.

Proving that censorship is the responsibility of British editors, *War Report* tells the truth about civilian deaths, opposition movements in Iraq, and the real strength of anti-war opinion.

War Report costs 50p plus stamped addressed envelope from 52 South Park Rd, London, SW19 8SZ (081-543-1569), or add it to your *Briefing* subscription and we will send you a copy.

"The Gulf war could be decided within three weeks."Today Newspaper 14.1.91

40% of "smart bombs" will fail to arrive at their specified targets, according to their manufacturer.

BLACK People Against War in the Gulf, a broad based grouping of Black organisations, have held a public meeting and picket of the Home Office to protest at anti-Arab, anti-Muslim hysteria generated by the government and the media.

Already, mosques have been petrol-bombed, homes vandalised, families attacked and school children racially abused. Meanwhile the government has set about criminalising the Arab community through detentions, internments and deportations. These attacks are only a foretaste of what is to come when the land war begins.

BPAWG is sponsored by Camden Black Workers Group, Labour Party Black Sections, National Black Caucus, Newham Monitoring Project, National Black Students Alliance, South Asia Solidarity Group, Refugee Forum. Contact: PO Box 273, Forest Gate, London E7 (tel: 081-552-7412).

Women's peace vigil

ASTRID ANDJUSAN, a Buddhist nun from the Milton Keynes Peace Pagoda, was arrested on February 12th for kneeling on the pavement in Whitehall. Astrid has been lending her support to the Women's Vigil by chanting for peace outside the foreign office.

At least five police officers were deployed in carrying Astrid to the waiting van. They took up most of the space on the 20-foot wide pavement, forcing passers-by into the slushy gutter. Astrid has been charged with obstruction. She will be tried at Bow Street on March 20 at 2pm.

Astrid's is the latest in a series of trials of women from the Vigil on obstruction charges. Other trial dates are March 6th, March 11th and March 13th, all at Bow Street at 2pm.

Four women in court on February 5th refused to stand up in court and were sent to Holloway for ten days for contempt.

Since the IRA mortar-bomb attack on Downing Street, police harassment of the Women's Vigil has reached new heights of paranoia with women being told they cannot rest banner poles on the ground. Despite the efforts of the police and the weather, the Vigil continues. For more details contact Anne (eves) on 071 828 8244 or Jan (Women Against War in the Gulf) on 071 272 7649.

Camilla Power

Women Against War in the Gulf is growing rapidly with local groups all round the country. Major events are planned for International Women's Day. On the evening of Friday, March 8th, a rally with anti-war women from around the world will be held at Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC1. The following day, Saturday March 8th, there will be a women's march for peace from Lincoln's InnFields.



Photo:Tim Nolan

ON Friday January 18th, we had a half hour protest against the Gulf war at Hornsey School for Girls in North London. We had spent the previous two days putting up posters (which were promptly taken down by the authorities) and handing out leaflets printed on our Apple Macs. We were very surprised by the massive turnout of just under 200 pupils. We stood in the street chanting "US out of the Gulf", singing "Give Peace a Chance", and holding banners up asking cars to "beep for peace". We got a lot of support from cars beeping, from pedestrians and from the local squatters who came out to join in. The best slogan was made up by three second-years: "Blood is thicker than oil". *Natasha Shallice*

Ruddock on the rack



Photo:NEWSFOCUS

JOAN RUDDOCK, ex-Chair of CND, now MP for Deptford in South East London, has been having difficulties over the war. Surely, anyone who has agitated for so long for the removal of weapons of mass destruction and the peaceful resolution of conflict could not be silent in the face of the present madness in the Middle East?

Apparently not. Joan, who has abstained in all the Commons votes on the Gulf crisis, explained her position to her local Constituency General Committee (GC) after the crucial vote on the war itself on January 21st.

She could not vote 'for' and she could not vote 'against'. After all, Saddam Hussein is a dictator and Joan is, as we all know, doing a sterling job as Shadow Junior Minister for Transport. Would we really want her to jeopardise this position? In traditional Labour Party style we had a friendly chat about the whole thing. Joan explained her tactics: persuade from within. She told us that there may come a time when her principles would force her to give up her job. In answer to the obvious question...if not now, when?... she could only say that she was sorry we felt like that.

At our next encounter with Joan some of us felt we should, perhaps, be a little more forceful. We issued a press release and waited for her outside the GC with placards. Joan turned up late and we had, reluctantly, already joined the meeting. We did, however, leave some of our placards in the hall in clear view of the MP.

She was, she told us, very hurt by this display of aggression. As for communicating with the right-wing press...

Those of you who saw 'Newsnight' on February 4th will know that Joan is not adverse to a bit of media coverage as long as she is not confronted with any opposition. She followed up this apearance with an article in the local paper in which she outlined her position to the masses. "Efforts ... should be aimed at achieving a negotiated ceasefire alongside Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait".

The mood of the Deptford Party was clear. Speaker after speaker gave the same message. Joan had a duty to stand up against the war and the Labour leadership. Joan answered with talk of "supper parties". Didn't we know the Leader's position would be even worse if it weren't for the persuasive powers of this valiant group dining behind the scenes? Didn't we understand the pressure she was under to avoid "splitting the Party which would so damage our electoral chances".

As one delegate put it, "the split in the Labour Party is between the leadership and the members". According to Joan, we are the only constituency opposing the leadership line ... (well, perhaps not quite, she admitted later). More importantly, her constituents were in favour of the war. She told us twice, at least, that she had only received 40 letters about it. She claimed she had not abandoned any of her principles, while later referring to problems with her conscience. Did you know she considers resignation every day?

Anyway, just in case we had any doubts, she made her position clear at the end. When she signed on the line as our prospective MP she had agreed to follow National Executive decisions. Painful though it was, she would follow the Party line!

Labour Against the War Deptford

■ *Some Deptford Labour Party members have set up a local "Labour Against the War" group. Contact us c/o Lewisham Labour Club, Limes Grove, London, SE13.*

Labour Against the War

CLPs, MPs, MEPs, councillors and activists came together to launch Labour Against the War at a meeting held in Camden Town hall on February 12th.

The meeting, addressed by Gavin Strnag, Dawn Primarolo, Alice Mahon, Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn, agreed that a drive to mobilise the maximum possible oppsition to the Front Bench war policy was a top priority.

A national Labour Party petition against the war is now being circulated to all CLPs. Individual Party members, CLPs, branches, women's sections, affiliated trades union branches, MPs, MEPs, councillors, and individual Party members are all urged to sign the petition and make a donation towards the costs of listing all the signatories in a major advertisement in the national press. A national rally will be held in Westminster Central Hall in London on Thursday, March 14th at 7:30pm. The organisers hope to present the broadest possible swathe of Party anti-war opinion on the night. Why not get your local Party to send greetings and a delegation to the rally?

Fringe meetings at trade union conferences and a major lobby of annual conference in the autumn are also planned, as is the regular publication of a Labour Against the War bulletin.

This initiative deserves the active support of all socialists in the Labour Party. Contact Labour Against the War immediately for copies of the petition and leaflets for your local Party , trade union or anti-war group.

An open organising committee has been set up. All Labour Party bodies are welcome to affiliate and send representatives. The next full meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 6th.

■ *Labour Against the War, c/o Basement Office, 92 Ladbroke Grove, London W11 2HE; tel. 071 272 7217.*

Soft left dance of death

WHILE WAR RAGES, the soft left and the Labour leadership have been dancing a ghastly jig to the media's tune.

Prescott drops heavy hints that he's not happy with Labour's pro-war policy, is publicly carpeted by Kinnock, then insists at the NEC that he never intended to criticise the leadership; the leadership in turn expresses full confidence in Prescott, then briefs reporters to the effect that Prescott will be denied a job in a future Kinnock cabinet, and then denies the briefing ever took place. Meanwhile, Prescott continues to tell reporters that he and his "supper club" chums are working "inside" to change Labour's war policy.

Mike Marqusee
Hornsey CLP

The existence of the soft left "supper club" has been an open secret for some years and has nothing to do with the Gulf War. The confusing counterpoint of unattributable press briefings (the famous "minutes left by a photocopier" is nothing but a euphemism for a calculated leak) has two purposes. First, it enables soft left careerists to reassure anxious Party members that they are really against the war and are trying to do something about changing Labour's loathesome position on it. Second,it enables Kinnock to pose once again as the fire-breathing authoritarian tough enough to tame his own Party in time of war and therefore worthy of ruling class confidence.

The prevarications of Robin Cook fit into the same category. In "a speech to his Livingstone constituency" (i.e. a press release) Cook expressed concern about civilian casualties, but was then quick to assure curious journalists that his remarks had been cleared by Kinnock's office, which then reminded Cook (again via the newspapers) that it was not his business to pronounce on Labour's war policy, which lies "outside his portfolio".

Clare Short, too, has been playing the grim game. First she abstained in the Commons vote on January 14th; then she joined the pro-war lobby for the key January 21st vote, and was heard muttering about the need to support our troops; she voted (with Cook, Prescott, Gould, Richardson, and Beckett) for Kinnock's NEC motion expanding Labour's war aims and then used a Commons question to Tom King to publicise her support for "the destruction of Saddam Hussein and his war machine". Days later, she surprised everyone by resigning from the Front Bench, only to assure reporters on the morrow that she had no disagreements with the leaderhsip over the war and only wanted to be able to "speak her mind".

In contrast to the principled stand taken by a handful of non-Campaign Group MPs (mainly Scottish MPs, including Maria Fyfe, John MacAllion, and Gavin Strang) the war record of the leading soft lefts has been utterly reprehensible. Beckett, Blunkett, Clwyd, Cook, Dobson, Fisher, Gould, Chris Smith, Meacher, and Richardson have all voted consistently for war.

The LCC has been silent. Clearly, a number of long-standing members are unhappy with the war but the apparatchiks who now call the shots there are too closely tied to the leadership to challenge it on anything as fundamental as the Gulf War.

As for *Tribune*, week after week it has tied itself in knots trying to come up with a position against the war - but not too against. It waffled about the initial military build-up and only came out against the use of force on the eve of hostilities. It now claims to oppose the war but strongly supports the maintenance of the US-British military presence in the area.

Editor Phil Kelly has sought to escape the contradictions of his own position by waging a nasty witch-hunt against the real anti-war movement, attacking "Trotskyists" (anyone to the left of Kelly) who call for troops out, demanding their expulsion from the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf, disseminating disinformation about Labour Against the War.

In a nauseating article (headlined "Doves swooping too low") Co-op hack Shaun Spiers attacked the Committee for its links with Tony Benn, "one of Labour's most distrusted and divisive polticians".

Tribune went so far as to blame Benn for leading the anti-war movement in Parliament. His high visibility, it was claimed, was putting off other, more "respectable" MPs who could not be seen "going into the lobby with Tony Benn". Evidently, it is preferable to go into the lobby with Major, Hurd, King and Ian Paisley.

Kelly's McCarthyite campaign against those whom he deems to have been "premature" opponents of the war is a classic. His basic problem is that he opposes the consequences but not the causes of the war. *Tribune* and others who praise the tactical wisdom of abstaining on what are literally life and death votes in the Commons should remember that such abstentions are only possible because others, like Tony Benn, insist on dividing the house and voting against war.

Euro MPs stand firm on war

LABOUR EURO MPs have taken a strong stand against the Gulf War. Stan Newens MEP organised an immediate statement from members of the five socialist and progressive groupings in the European Parliament when war broke out. Labour Euro MPs from left, centre and right of the Party backed sanctions rather than war in a move that must have infuriated Neil Kinnock. In the final Strasbourg vote, the majority of Labour MEPs actually voted for peace and against the national Party line. Only one Scottish Labour MEP (and all but one Scottish MEP is Labour - the other is SNP) voted in favour.

Following this the NEC statement was put to a vote at the next meeting of the European Labour Party. It was defeated by 19 votes to 13. The future of the Eurogroup leadership (Glyn Ford and Carole Tongue) must now lie in doubt.

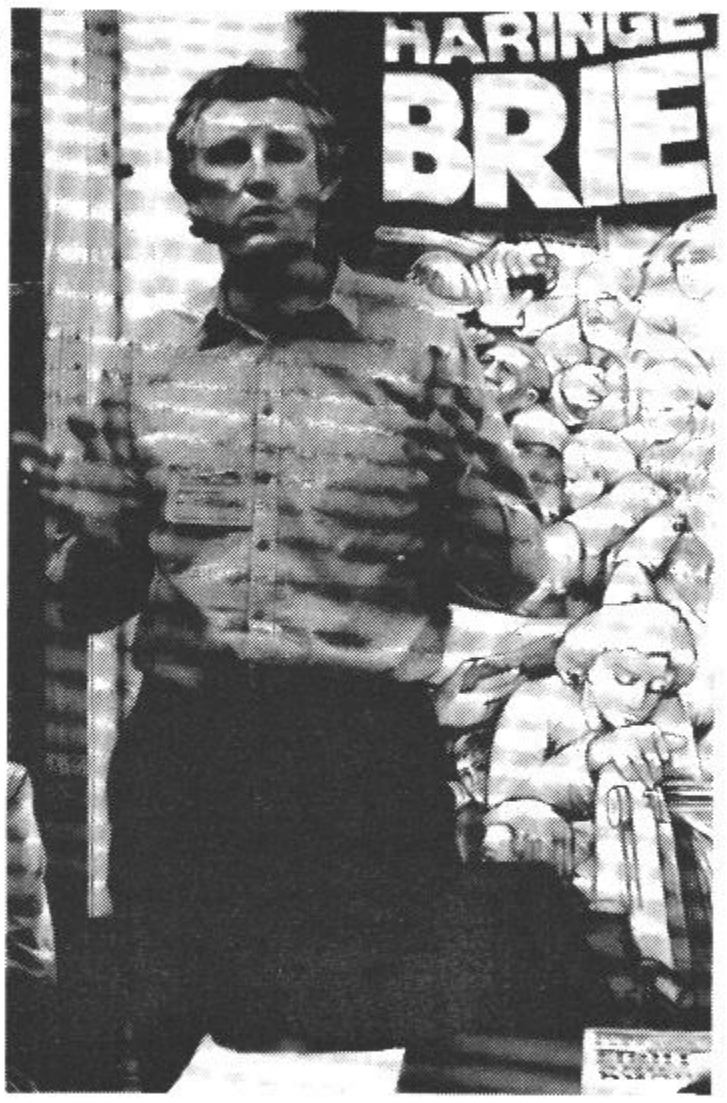
Birmingham Labour war-jaw

ON THE evening that US bombs killed hundreds in Baghdad, Birmingham Briefing supporters tried to get an emergency resolution on the war taken at the District Labour Party. The resolution was talked out - not by the hard right, but by a combination of soft left

John Wilton
PPC Edgbaston

and centre with the help of the Assistant Regional Organiser. Rather than discuss the deaths in Baghdad, these people chose to talk at length about rule changes, standing orders, and by-election insurance funds. One Labour councillor, who is also secretary of the Trades Council, preferred to tell us that he'd had a dream about Joyce Gould and had written a poem about it.

The resolution which these "comrades" refused to debate criticised the Labour Group amendment to the Tory "God speed to our troops" resolution at the Council meeting on February 13th. The Labour amendment talked of "our pride, admiration and good wishes" to our troops, backed the war, and called for the disarming of Iraq. The Tories were happy to accept the amendment and the substantive motion was supported by all but a handful of Labour councillors, who were therefore embarrassed by the DLP emergency resolution, which called for an immediate ceasefire, withdrawal of troops, and a peace conference to stop the killing of thousands of civilians. After all what are a few thousand deaths compared to the political careers of centre and soft left Labour councillors and the Assistant Regional Organiser.



John Wilton Photo: Leesa Herbert

Opposing war on the shopfloor

I'VE BEEN doing my best to argue the case for peace with my workmates. From day one, I've been accused of being unpatriotic, pro-Saddam, naive,

A GMB member

out of touch . . . I've been told, "This country loves war"; "We need a good blood-let"; "Everyone out there is a volunteer" (i.e. they knew what they were letting themselves in for so let 'em die). One colleague tells me he's just waiting for Saddam to use chemical weapons on Israel so they have an excuse to "nuke" Baghdad.Another source of amusement for my workmates is the turn-out at the demos. Even the biggest one, they say, "only attracted 150,000 or so". Only? Their logic is that it's not much out of a country of sixty million. I pointed out that I was still waiting for a 150,000 strong pro-war demo. They weren't impressed. They say the peace demos are full of long-haired students and dolies, in other words, parasites. Apparently such people aren't entitled to an opinion.When the fighting started some of them were delighted. "Flatten Baghdad"; "Nuke the bastards". There are sections of the workforce at my factory who make the tabloid press seem level headed.The war goes on. We on the left will continue to oppose it. I will not let my workmates grind me down. If they start to get to me I remind them (and myself) of what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. once said: "All wars are popular for the first 30 days".

Pssss...

FRONT BENCHER Chris Smith is in trouble over his public support for the war. Islington South, his local CLP, usually highly supportive of its MP, voted overwhelmingly against the war; Smith hinted that he was sympathetic with its position but...

On the record...

"WHAT I'M saying is I agree with Douglas Hurd... the liberation of Kuwait cannot simply be reclaiming Kuwait... any sane person will agree... that our forces cannot stop fighting until the other side stops fighting... you can be fighting on territory of Iraq but that's very different from occupying Iraq... what I'm saying is that I agree with Douglas Hurd..."

• ***Gerald Kaufman,*** *February 10th.*



Labour and the War

AT A STORMY meeting Lambeth Council declared itself opposed to war in the Gulf and demanded "an immediate ceasefire, withdrawal of US and British troops and a solution based on the Arab people as a whole".

Despite barracking from Tory councillors and physical attacks by pro-war supporters on peace activists in the gallery, councillors voted 26-25 in favour of peace after hearing from Iraqi and Kurdish refugees and from NUT Secretary Dick North representing Council trade unions. In taking the decision Labour members had to withstand threats from the gutter press (the Daily Star called them "rats") and also from Walworth Road. Although the Labour Group had agreed its policy with only two votes against, and had the support of the local Labour Parties, LCCers ran off to Joyce Gould, who immediately responded with a letter to all Group members demanding the meeting be cancelled and granting pro-war councillors a free hand to vote against the Whip if it wasn't.

Those councillors who have been disciplined around the country for merely abstaining on the Poll Tax may be surprised to find it is in order to exercise one's conscience by voting with the Tories for war. Lambeth's Chief Whip has asked Joyce Gould under which rule this new dispensation was granted. She has yet to reply.

The Council's stand has helped initiate a real debate in the borough, despite gross misrepresentation in the media. A poll by the local newspaper has found, much to its embarrassment, a 55% majority against the war. Other Labour Groups, including Islington and Greenwich, have passed anti-war resolutions in private. Now they should be pressed to make their voice heard in public.

• **STOP PRESS • SEE PAGE 31**

IN RESPONSE TO pressure from local CLP members, Paul Boateng MP revealed that his support for the war was based not on leadership loyalty but on his "personal opinion". He refused to take part in a local debate on the war with Ken Livingstone and Rhodes Boyson, the two other Brent MPs.

ON JANUARY 21ST the Commons divided on the question of support for the Gulf War. Only 34 MPs, all Labour, voted against: Abbott, Banks, Barnes, Benn, Brown, Clay, Cohen, Corbyn, Dalyell, Fields, Fyfe, Galloway, Gordon, Grant, Hinchcliffe, Hood, Hughes, Kambie, Lamond, Livingstone, Loyden, McAllion, McFall, McKelvey, Madden, Mahon, Mullin, Nellist, Parry, Primarolo, Skinner, Strang, Wise, Wray, Cryer, Canavan.

The Plaid Cymru MPs who voted against war in earlier debates abstained on this one, as did Labour MPs Bennett, Bidwell, Terry Davis, Faulds, Hoyle, Litherland, and Redmond. A number of Labour MPs who had previously voted against war turned around completely and voted for it on the 21st: Cousins, Cummngs, Eadie, Ewing, Godman, Lewis, Marshall, Michie, Sedgemore, Vaz, Watson, Alan Williams.

KINNOCK'S OFFICE STAFF have decided that no letters from Party members protesting about the leader's Gulf War line will be answered.

ISLINGTON LABOUR GROUP has voted overwhelmingly to call for the withdrawal of US and British troops from the Gulf; an amendment moved by Tribune editor Phil Kelly (an Islington councillor) was defeated. Council leader Margaret Hodge at first tried to talk out the motion (proposed by *Briefing* supporter Liz Davies) but stuck her hand up for it in the end.

BROMLEY COUNCIL WAS turned into a mini-Reichstag of the Nazi era on January 28th. The Tories moved an emergency resolution backing the war; Labour tabled a mild amendment calling for a swift end to hostilities and a Middle East peace conference to deal with the Palestinian issue, which was voted down by the Tories. Labour Cllr Dyer then rose to speak against the pro-war substantive motion, but the Tory Deputy Leader objected to his opening remarks. Another Tory moved that "this member be not heard", which was carried.Amid protest, Cllr Dyer was removed from the chamber, his speech was undelivered. Two other Labour councillors walked out in protest. So far two of the four CLPs in the borough have declared their opposition to the war and the attitude of the

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CONSTITUENCY LABOUR PARTIES opposed to the Gulf War: Leeds North East, Manchester Withington, Daveyhulme, Ashton-under-Lyme, Brent South, Norwood, Islington North, Islington South, Tottenham, Hampstead and Highgate, Battersea, Hull North, Sheffield Hallam, Sheffield Heeley, Hackney North, Vauxhall, Mid-Sussex, Kensington, Richmond and Barnes, Bristol South, Birmingham Selly Oak, Birmingham Edgbaston, Deptford, Finchley, Southgate, Bow and Poplar, Walthamstow, Oxford and Abingdon, Chipping Barnet, Liverpool Riverside...and many more. Please let us know if your CLP, branch, women's section, trade union passes any kind of anti-war resolution.



Tony Benn addresses anti-war rally Photo: Tim Nolan

At last the true face of war

AT LAST we are seeing the true face of war. The bodies dragged from the shelter in Baghdad are what it's really all about.

Those who accepted the government's line that the Gulf war is being waged through a pin-point bombing without civilian casualties must now realise the truth. Only 5% of bombs being dropped on Iraq or Kuwait are pin-point - the rest wreak indiscriminate carnage.

All who voted for war in Parliament should remember the mutilated bodies and screaming children. And the land war has not yet started.

To those who argue that only fighting will resolve the conflict our retort must be:

- Will it bring the Palestinians a homeland?
- Will it get women the right to vote in Saudi Arabia?
- Will it end the Sabah family's dictatorial control of Kuwait?
- Will it redress the grievances of the Kurdish people?
- Will it end the disputes over the Tigris and Euphrates?

In each case, the answer is a resounding no.

John Major tells us, "the aggressor must never be rewarded for his aggression." This slogan now seems to be the sole basis of US and allied war aims.

I have often pondered this gem from the Prime Minister as I look at all the straight lines on the map of the Middle East and the way successive empires have moved boundaries and people and ignored the needs or rights of anyone who got in the way of oil or military or trading interests.

Children throughout the world are being conditioned into "glorious war". They play at "patriot missiles". Meanwhile, children in the war zones will bear psychological scars for life. In the disturbing drawings and paintings produced by Kurdish children you can already see the deep scars of people subject to terrible repression.

"All who voted for war in Parliament should remember the mutilated bodies and screaming children."

So beware of any ideas of "pacification" of the region by "great" powers. From the time of Saladdin (who was armed by the British and French) the presence of foreign forces has brought only grief to the Middle East.

No peace can be brought by Bush and Major; only the people of the region, through self-determination, can bring peace about. As socialists - who must also, by definition, be internationalists - we ought to oppose any foreign forces remaining in the area for any reason.

Since January the House of Commons has had one actual vote on the war itself. Those who claim to oppose the war but supported the 'United Nations parts of the resolution', may wish to present it otherwise, but this vote was a key opportunity to say 'for or against' war.

In the end only thirty-six Labour MPs and no others voted against war.

The effect in the Labour Party and on public opinion is interesting; we are living in a time of tight censorship and media control and the anti-war message can only be put over with great effort and some difficulty. But the support is there.

Public meetings are full. MPs' postbags are full of anti-war messages. In the Party there is a deep unease at the way we have been dragged into supporting a military adventure launched by George Bush, former boss of the CIA.

This has meant that only anti-war MPs have exploited Parliamentary opportunities to challenge the government. The front bench have been silent. They prefer to talk only about the economy. At last the establishment has noticed that there are deep problems with the British economy. We have a new ever-deepening recession. Service and high tech industries in the South East are screaming. Many of the new victims are the very people who sat by complacently as the Tories decimated British Industry. The service sector and the City 'money-go-round' may now have to acknowledge that they too need a manufacturing and industrial base to lean on.

However, the Labour Party cannot continue to back the war and hold the moral high ground over the economy, education, and the health service. We cannot secure the resources to invest in these areas without releasing it from defence spending. The economy may be the Achilles' heel of the Tories but this war could cost Labour the next election.

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

Win with Wilton

The general election campaign in Birmingham Edgbaston started as soon as John Wilton was re-selected as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate in July 1990. John is a Poll Tax non-payer, opponent of the Gulf War, long-standing *Briefing* supporter - and has a real chance of taking the seat from right-wing Tory, Jill Knight.

Jeremy Corbyn MP visited the constituency twice and spoke at public meetings on housing and pensions. Mark Fisher MP spoke at a meeting on 'Labour and the Arts'; his contribution also touched on the coverage of the Gulf War by the media.

Unemployment in Edgbaston is higher than in the neighbouring marginal seats of Northfield and Selly Oak.

In last year's local government elections the Tories led Labour across the constituency by only 58 votes.

■ *If you want to help in a socialist campaign ring **Pauline Purnell** on 021 422 1366.*

Tory Field-day in Wirral

The Frank Field saga seems set to wreck all attempts by the Wirral Labour Party to retain and extend the gains it has made in record years over the local Tories. No sacrifice is too great for Kinnock and the NEC majority in their attempts to appease Field, who has threatened to resign and fight a by-election if he is de-selected.

The latest victims are eight members of Birkenhead CLP and the Deputy Leader of the Wirral Labour Group, Geoff Barker. These comrades are alleged to have committed the heinous crime of having "been seen" buying, reading or (god forbid!) selling a copy of Militant. For the Tories and the local press, it's a field day (pardon the pun).

A meeting of the Labour Group on 4th February was presented with a terse five line letter, delivered by hand to the Labour Leader the previous day, informing us that Geoff Barker had been suspended pending investigations by the ill-named 'National Constitutional Committee'. Geoff was therefore no longer entitled to hold office or to attend Labour Group meetings. It did not escape the notice of Group members that Geoff is due to stand for re-election in May, having been overwhelmingly re-selected by his ward. Wirral has 33 Labour councillors out of 66 Council seats; the NEC has now seen fit to reduce our numbers by removing the Whip from the Deputy Leader, who is also the Chair of Housing. In fact, we should have 36 Labour councillors, but three Field supporters elected as Labour councillors repeatedly broke the Whip and eventually formed an 'Independent Labour Group', which usually votes with the Tories. Their 'leader' recently abandoned them to join the SLD.

Cllr Colin Penfold
Wirral Council

Most members of the Labour Group were outraged by the NEC letter and the Stalinist attempt to neutralise one of the Group's most dedicated members. A number of Group members, including one of 40 years standing, wondered aloud whether they ought to be in a Party that was prepared to sacrifice good socialists on the altar of Kinnock's cult of mediocrity.

A resolution was moved by the Group Leader refusing to accept the instruction of the NEC on the grounds that it contradicted natural justice and that it might, in the light of recent legislation re-defining political groups within councils, constitute an illegal interference in local government. The resolution was passed with 23 in favour, 4 against and 2 abstentions. Geoff Barker remains Deputy Leader and Chair of Housing with the overwhelming support of the Group and the local Party. Watch this space for future developments.

PS: I must "confess" that I too buy the Militant and have even "been seen" (publicly) reading it!

Dear Briefing...

It's encouraging that the new Briefing team are giving attention to the threat posed by proportional representation (PR). Many on the Labour left are, as yet, unaware of the seriousness of this threat and some are misguided enough even to support it. In part the fault is ours. We have allowed the PR fanatics to make all the running. The socialist case for the existing class-based electoral system has not been put across strongly enough.

As Jane Wells exclusively revealed last month, a one-issue campaign is at last being pulled together South of the Border, consisting of CLP activists, trade unionists and MPs/MEPs. This has the somewhat unwieldy, but theoretically correct, title of 'The First Past the Post Campaign - For Majority Labour Governments'. Bob Cryer MP is the acting Chair, Vladimir Derer the acting Secretary and Dorothy Macedo the acting Treasurer. Once the organisation is off the ground there will be full elections for all office holders.

We are now preparing in-depth material that will be sent to every CLP, trade union, Labour Council Leader, Labour MP and MEP.Briefing supporters can play a significant role in this broad-based campaign. Our opponents may have the CBI, the SLD and the mass media on their side but what is this compared to the power of the rank and file! Send your support (and money) to FPTP, 22 Edmund Street, Bradfrod, BD5.

This is your chance to become 'Class warrior of the month'!.

Pete Willsman
CLPD

I wish to sponsor the First Past the Post Campaign - For a Majority Labour Government

I enclose.....£5 minimum.
Name.....
.....
Address.....
.....
.....
Phone.....
CLP.....
Trade Union.....
Return to 22 Edmund Street, Bradford BD5

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Barnet Co-op Party
PR and the Labour Party

Speakers:
Bryn Griffiths (First Past the Post Campaign)
RichardKuper(LabourCampaign for Electoral Reform)
Thursday
28 February
Blue Bottle Hall, Hendon Lane, Finchley, London

All Labour Party members welcome

Constituency close-up: *Brighton*



IN SEPTEMBER of last year, Brighton Labour Party was suspended by the NEC pending an 'investigation'. This 'investigation' is now underway, with members giving 'evidence' at the offices of neighbouring Hove Labour Party. Silent vigils are being held outside the offices by a wide range of supporters from a determined and united Brighton Labour Party.

Brighton meets as one Labour Party, but consists of two parliamentary constituencies, Kemptown and Pavilion. Both seats are currently held by the Tories, but are considered unwinnable.

Since 1986 the Borough Council has been Labour controlled. Despite its location in the heart of the affluent South, Brighton has all of the socio-economic problems faced by other, more obviously deprived, urban areas. Contrasts within the town are stark.

Brighton has a strong radical left tradition both inside and outside the Labour Party. Pitched battles were fought against the police and the local gentry during the General Strike in1926. In the 1930's the local anti-fascist movement sabotaged Mosley's meetings and forced the fascists off the streets. After the war, the fore-runners of the squatter's movement requisitioned large, empty properties. More recently the Anti-Nazi League, support for miners, ambulance workers and others involved in industrial struggles, and campaigns around such issues as the Poll Tax, Lesbian and Gay Rights, the NHS, and CND have dominated the political scene. In all of these campaigns, the Labour left featured strongly. What has been more remarkable, in the light of current developments, has been the degree of co-operation and sense of shared purpose brought to many of the campaigns (Poll Tax being an exception) by nearly all active members of the Party. These campaigns all drew new members into the Labour Party and contributed to the growth of a broad-based and electorally successful radical Party.

All this helped Labour to win control of Brighton Council in 1986, bringing to an end a hundred years of Tory domination. The sense of optimism this created in a traditional Tory town was exhilarating, both for Labour Party members and the wider labour movement. Unfortunately it was not very long before differences emerged between a Council leadership rapidly embracing 'New Realism' and a still radical Party.

The suspension can be traced back to the differences over the Poll Tax. Brighton has a thriving anti-Poll Tax movement with many local groups affiliated to the Sussex Anti-Poll Tax Federation. The left of the Labour Party has been heavily involved and supportive of the 'Don't Collect, Don't Pay' strategy. After successful local demonstrations things came to a head at the 1990 Budget-setting meeting. At this meeting, seven anti-Poll Tax Labour councillors, acting in line with local Party policy, broke the Whip and voted against the setting of a Poll Tax.

Since then, the local right wing, spearheaded by LCC activists, has launched a ruthless attack against loyal, hard-working members of the Party. Despite repeated votes by the General Committee disapproving of disciplinary action against the anti- Poll Tax councillors, the Labour Group expelled them. They followed that up by getting the local Party itself suspended, to the outrage of active and non-active members alike.

Since the closure of the Party, many members, not simply those on the left, have been meeting in `Friends of Brighton Labour Party' groups, both in wards and across the town. Many people who had not previously been active have now been drawn in, angered by this attack on their democratic rights. This will ensure that something can be salvaged from the wrecking operation of the Brighton Labour right. It is essential that the Party is made operative again, with no expulsions before a General Election. Both Brighton seats are winnable if we are allowed to unite and fight the Tories, instead of being under attack from within.

According to our older members, a wide spectrum of views has always flourished in Brighton Labour Party. The present short- run and short-sighted attack will come and go. Our radical left- wing traditions will live on in Brighton.

■ *This month's Constituency close-up was written by* ***Jill Arnold/Richard Woolven*** *of the Friends of Brighton Labour Party.*



Photo: A silent vigil outside an investigation meeting.

Class traitor of the month

This month's bloodsucking parasite is Labour's Defence spokesperson and Gulf War hardware fetishist, ***Martin O'Neill.***

O'NEILL, ONE of Labour's long line of anonymous Parliamentary hacks, got his start in Scottish student politics in the late 60s. He was elected to Parliament in 1979 for Clackmannan and West Sterling, a Labour gain from the SNP. He joined the Tribune Group and received his first Front Bench appointment, as Junior Spokesperson on Scottish affairs, soon after.

In March 1981, while still a member of the Tribune Group he sponsored the launch of Labour Solidarity, a home for hard right wingers who preferred a fightback against the Labour left to defection to the SDP.

Within weeks of its launch Solidarity threw itself behind Denis Healey's deputy leadership campaign against Tony Benn. O'Neill resigned, claiming the Group was nothing more than a "fan club" for Healey. O'Neill then followed Neil Kinnock's lead and became one of the handful of Tribune Group abstainers who blocked Benn at the 1981 Conference.

A Kinnockite avant la lettre, O'Neill nominated Kinnock for both leader and deputy leader in 1983.

Appointed by Neil to the Front Bench defence team in 1984, O'Neill succeeded the frustrated Denzil Davies as Defence spokesperson in June 1988. Kinnock wanted no more mavericks to get their hands on the sensitive defence portfolio. What was required, if unilateralism was to be ditched as Kinnock wished, was a lightweight, compliant cypher, personally loyal to the leadership and willing to do its bidding without question. Step forward, Martin O'Neill!

O'Neill will not open his mouth on any issue without the express permission of his master Kinnock or Kinnock's hatchet-man Charles Clarke. It is rumoured that many Shadow Cabinet members refer to him as Kinnock's "research assistant with responsibility for defence matters".

Within the Parliamentary Party O'Neill is regarded as an unimpressive performer who owes everything to Kinnock and nothing to his modest personal abilities. This is demonstrated by his poor showing in successive Shadow Cabinet elections. Despite the strong personal backing of Kinnock he always fails to win election and his vote has fallen year after year.

In 1988, O'Neill was on the Tribune Group slate but managed only 77 votes, 9 behind the total of the lowest elected member, Jo Richardson. In 89, still on the Tribune slate, he got 86 votes, but fell 14 short of equalling the total of the lowest elected member, John Cunningham. Last year, there was no Tribune Group slate; O'Neill's total plummeted to 65, 20 behind the lowest elected member, John Prescott.



Each year Kinnock shows his contempt for PLP opinion by reappointing O'Neill to his senior Front Bench post while seasoned, competent (but not trusted) Parliamentary performers such as Meacher and Prescott are given lesser appointments.

O'Neill's insignificance was highlighted by his minimal role in the Policy Review. While other Front Benchers favoured by the leadership were given the chance to write their own policy, for example Smith and Brown on the economy, Cook on health and even Prescott on transport, defence was not written by O'Neill but by Gerald Kaufman. Kaufman and not O'Neill was personally charged with the task by Kinnock.

O'Neill's feverish support for the Gulf War - and his visible keenness to get on with the show in the months between August 2nd and January 17th - betrayed not only his poodle-like loyalty to Kinnock but a schoolboy excitement at the prospect of being involved in some real killing. He relished inspecting the troops in Saudi Arabia and mounting a Chieftain tank for the photographers. Again and again his delight in militarist rhetoric has exceeded even that of his opposite number, public school rugby scrum bully Tom King. At the dispatch box, he has steadfastly refused to question anything said or done by MoD officials.

Despite his enthusiasm for military jargon and high tech warfare, he has been an embarrassment to the Labour leadership. While Front Benchers like to tell people that "Gerald has had a good war", Martin has yet to be mentioned in dispatches.

While Tom King is actually running government war policy with Major and Hurd, O'Neill's inability to sustain an argument has ensured that he remains in the background. The Guardian reported that Kaufman had had O'Neill pulled from a television programme in order to allow him, Kaufman, to present the Front Bench position. The story was quickly denied, but it remains obvious that Kinnock and Kaufman call the shots, leaving O'Neill to late night television appearances where he can bully journalists and berate Edward Heath.

■ ***Contest:*** *Nominations now open for our next three Class traitors of the month. Prize for winning names, a copy of Noam Chomsky's new book.*

Class struggle in Cornwall

Mark Jeffery, a Labour councillor representing Camborne West ward on Cornwall County Council, reports from the West Country.

It was quite unheard of. Last summer over 1000 anti-Poll Tax protesters marched through Camborne town centre in Cornwall's Kerrier District. This was about one in five of the population - more in fact than the local Labour vote.

More recently, the first 280 summonses for non-payment went out. Eighteen turned up to face the court, with a number of others present in support. When many of us failed to stand up for the magistrates (and one old boy refused to take off his hat) there was a big song and dance. Now they've moved the next batch of hearings to Truro in an attempt to split us up and make protests more difficult.

Only a few local Labour Party members have been involved in the campaign. Most of the local anti-Poll Tax people have never been involved in anything before. The local Labour Parties have taken their lead from the NEC and tried to use the Militant scare against us, though we've never seen Militant or any other left groups in the area.

Our Party Branch in Camborne has over 100 members but we are lucky to get ten to a meeting. We have no money and do little outside elections. The old Constituency office has been sold off and the Labour Club in Falmouth is purely a social institution.

There are, of course, no Labour MPs in Cornwall and only 9 out of 79 councillors on the County Council, which is a hung council split between Tories, SLD and independents. As Labour councillors we are able to use this situation to exercise some influence and also have some fun and games - especially since you're never sure which way some of the independents are going to vote. They're a strange crowd, a mixture of landed gentry and freemasons. Most of the Labour councillors are working class.

On Kerrier District Council we have only three out of 44 councillors. Since Poll Tax non-payers number more than Labour voters, Labour should be particularly careful in this area not to neglect or reject popular campaigns.

Meanwhile, unemployment in Cornwall is high; in Camborne it's officially 11%. Much of the available work is for low pay, in bad conditions. There's a lot of seasonal work because of the tourist trade servicing the "emmits" as we call them. The tin mines are all closed and English China Clay has laid off a lot of workers in the St. Austell area. The biggest local engineering works, Compair-Holman, has also been laying people off steadily. The old Holman main plant is now a Tescos.

As for the County Council, it is interested only in grabbing whatever grants are available and building more and more roads and by-passes, mainly paid for by government grants. Theme parks and leisure centres are also favourites.

Peter de Savery's now got permission to develop Hayle Harbour. If his Falmouth development is anything to go by, his first step will be to build yuppie houses overlooking the harbour at £99,000 each (he call them "cabins"). The problem is that opposition in Hayle has collapsed because people can't see any other way of reviving the local economy.

Snow Capping

Delegates who made it to Labour's Local Government Conference in Nottingham despite the snow were in for a sorry display. Even the Front Bench is now to the left of nearly all the Labour authorities.

Workshops on 'Fair but Firm' implementation of the Poll Tax (training bailiffs to smile as they kick down your front door) failed to satisfy Council leaders who were visibly upset to be told that they should consider setting budgets above the government's capping criteria: "Wot, we can't make cuts yet?"

A lacklustre conference spent most of its time fantasising about how nice a Labour government might be. No Treasury opposition spokesperson was there to tell them the nasty truth ("Money for local government? Sorry, it's all gone on invading Iraq"). Highpoint of the weekend was a hundred-strong fringe meeting, biggest of conference, called by Nottingham anti-war activists, which heard councillors from across the country denounce the war, the effects it is already having on local services, and the whipping up of racist violence.

London Labour AGM - kiss Kinnockism goodbye

Two issues will dominate this year's Greater London Labour Party AGM: the battle over London's election organisation and the war in the Gulf. Key to both will be the outcome of manoeuvring currently underway within London's trade union bureaucracy.

Election 'supremo' John Cunningham aided by London Chair Glenys Thornton is trying to blame GLLP Secretary Terry Ashton for failures in last year's local elections. But as the GLLP Annual Report points out, (cheekily highlighted in boxes) '...the planning and strategy during the election was the responsibility of Head Office.'

Ashton now faces disciplinary action for, of all crimes, giving the Regional Executive a report on London's key marginals. His real crime, is that he has not witch-hunted the left fast enough to suit the LCC, who want to move in one of their own.

London trade union `leaders' who have counter-attacked with a 'Dump Thornton' campaign standing FBU official Jim Fitzpatrick for London Party Chair. With Jeremy Corbyn also repeating his challenge for Chair on behalf of the left, the result is not predictable.

Whilst the rest of the agenda is flat (nearly everything controversial is ruled out), the Gulf War may yet bring surprises. A number of major trade unions could swing behind a 'Stop the

Labour's national crime force

IN ITS obsessive pursuit of the 'law and order' vote, the Labour Front Bench has come out for a new national "crime force".

Liz Davies
Islington North CLP



The implications for civil liberties are disturbing. A national police force, like the FBI in the US, will certainly end up keeping files on political, trade union and peace activists.

Our long-standing aim of local control of police by local authorities, who have some real experience of the effects of policing on the ground, goes out the window. Power will pass to a remote national police authority, consisting of the chairs of local police authorities.

The Police Complaints Authority will become independent of the police, a long awaited reform, but there seem to be no proposals to extend its powers to include proper compensation for victims and suspension of police officers. However, allowing class actions against senior police officers and reducing the burden of proof are welcome reforms.

Evidence obtained by illegal methods will not be automatically excluded in court. Police powers to stop and search and enter homes under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 will be restricted, but there is no mention of repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act or of maintaining the right to silence or reinstating it in Northern Ireland.

The proposals will create a police force that is more liberal and accessible in appearance, but retains immense powers to investigate and harrass any person or group to whom they take a dislike.

War' position if given the chance.

Last year at least one union changed its vote on the Chair at the last moment after pressure from Kinnock's office. This year similar pressure will undoubtedly be applied to get a pro-War vote. But after all the shenanigans over Ashton, this might not be so easy. Too often the 'left' leadership of a number of London's unions have voted for 'unity with Kinnock'. Now they have a chance to make a break and stand by their own local union positions, which are mostly against the war.

Greater London Labour Party
AGM
March 1st

Vote:
Jeremy Corbyn - Chair
Joan Twelves - Vice Chair

NEC

When it could spare a few moments from backing the Gulf War, the last National Executive Committee gave the go ahead for an elitist fundraising scheme of American-style dinners where punters pay Labour hundreds of pounds to mix with the great and the good.

The NEC also voted to restart the re-run Birkenhead selection while the witch-hunt of Militant and Socialist Organiser supporters in the area continues. It was also decided to count the votes in the disputed Small Heath selection (see February Briefing). Even Roy Hattersley described the process as unfair from the start and voted for Skinner's amendment to re-run the whole thing. The seat has been ear marked for GMB official Roger Godsiff for some time, and Godsiff's masters are said to be impatient to sew the whole thing up.

Eric's message

Dear Neil,

"This is the hypocrites' war for oil and if allowed to continue could engulf the whole of the Middle East, destroy the environment and cause massive carnage and bloodshed, killing thousands of innocent men, women and children. And all because of imperialist policies pursued by President Bush, egged on originally by Mrs Thatcher.

I want our party to be calling for a ceasefire, so that serious talks can take place urgently. You may believe that by pursuing your current path over the Gulf, this will bring electoral advantage.

That may or may not be the case, but for once could we not put Labour's principles of working for peace before considerations of electoral gain?"

Eric Heffer

Know your enemy

*Local government bureaucrats have set about administering the Poll Tax with gusto. In order to beat them we need to understand their mentality. Hence this candid encounter with one of the "faceless ones"; **Iris Jay** interviews a Director of Finance in a Tory-controlled South London borough.*

Briefing : What have been the problems with setting up the Community Charge System?

Director of Finance: Horrendous! It is a very unusual activity, changing the whole basis of local government finance. We have tinkered in the past but the Poll.... Community Charge is like inventing the wheel. The DOE really gave us very little guidance. In fact, every time we complained they assumed it was a political attack on their flagship.

B: It seemed to us in the Anti-Poll Tax Campaign, that you were making it up as you went along.

DoF: We were! All we had was the bare bones of a system. We had to construct a practical scheme that made sense to us and could be easily understood by the public.

B: Isn't that like having to argue black is white?

DoF: Absolutely. The Layfield Report was quite correct. The Poll Tax is a system of byzantine complexity. What made it worse was that due to the Tax's unpopularity, so far there have been twelve major alterations, all of which were more complex than the Tax itself.

B: Is this all in the past?

DoF: No. We have now moved onto the collection phase, which is pure experimentation. Our aim is to collect as much as is technically possible, making full use of the recovery powers available to us.

B: What is the most effective means of collecting unpaid Poll Tax?

DoF: Distress is the most effective method for the majority of cases.

B: You are quite happy about using baliffs?

DoF: Yes, many people have no intention of paying unless pressure is bought to bear.

B: What about political considerations from elected councillors?

DoF: Poll Tax recovery is a difficult task and the discretion of officers should not be fettered by members' worries.

B: Did you have much problem getting Liability Orders?

DoF: No. If the amount outstanding is actually owed and the registration and billing proceedures have been correctly followed, the magistrates are bound in law to make a Liability Order.

B: You said earlier that the bailiffs were your preferred method. Why?

DoF: The advantage to the Council of distress is that it is a simple and effective method of collecting debts that would otherwise be difficult to recover. In nearly all cases the threat of distress is sufficient to produce the sums owed and seizure of goods does not take place. Experience with rates defaulters was that only one percent of cases referred to the bailiffs ultimately involved distraint of goods.

B: What is this procedure?

DoF: The bailiff calls to interview and either makes an arrangement for payment or leaves a letter. Failure to make an arrangement means that the bailiff visits again and "seizes and restrains" the goods specified in an inventory. Usually "walking possession" is granted, ie the debtors can keep the goods where they are for the interim until they are auctioned, provided the debtor promises not to sell or remove them.

B: What happens if the bailiffs can't obtain access?

DoF: The bailiffs cannot force entry on the first visit. If an arrangement is made and walking possession is agreed, they can use locksmiths to gain entry.

B: So the best policy is just not to open your door to them at all?

DoF: I am not here to give your campaign advice!

B: OK. What happens in the totally unlikely circumstances that the bailiffs fail?

DoF: A letter is sent to the debtor saying that the order has been returned "for commencement of proceedings under the legislation for committal to prison for failure to pay the arrears". The letter is not a legal requirement but it increases the chances of payment at this stage.

B: Then what?

DoF: The debtor is then summoned again to Court. This time the hearing must be in his or her presence. If on hearing the evidence the magistrates are of the opinion that failure to pay was due to the debtor's wilful refusal or culpable neglect, they may commit the chargepayer for a maximum of three months; they may also remit part or all of the charge. The more usual outcome is what is effectively a suspended sentence, to give the debtor time to make payment. The threat of possible imprisonment is usually sufficient to ensure the debtor makes the required payments.

B: If someone is imprisoned, what happens to their Poll Tax?

DoF: The Authority has no alternative but to write off the debt.

The right to demonstrate

Following his conviction on public order offences, Briefing's Secretary ***Kevin Flack*** *(East Lewisham CLP) has good reason to thank the Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign.*

POLICE attacks on Poll Tax demonstrators throughout 1990 - from riot squads in Trafalgar Square, through police horses in Colchester to the planned 'rematch' in Brixton on 20th October - have been met by a new movement of self-defence. The Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign (TSDC), representing some 700 people arrested on the streets, and in police raids on Hackney estates, is a grassroots response to one of the biggest concerted attacks on the right to demonstrate in many years.

The TSDC has provided legal back-up and video and film footage, for vital witnesses, and above all helped break down the isolation most people feel when confronted with the weight of police and judiciary. The legal liaison volunteers who monitored the Brixton Poll Tax demonstration, along with the phone-line, solicitors and pre-planned defendents' meeting, the following day represented a model which ought to be followed on any serious future march and rally.

I was arrested outside Brixton Prison on 20th October. I hadn't done anything; I was punched by a copper and dropped to the ground. I was charged originally with "violent disorder" - an almost certain prison sentence if convicted. Worried by the ridiculous numbers charged with serious offences and opting for jury trials, the police reduced the charges against 20 of us. This meant we lost the right to a jury trial and were faced with hostile magistrates; several people were sent down. My case was finally heard on 17th January, after police had failed to appear for the first hearing, and my barrister wiped the floor with them. You should have seen the look on one of the policemen's face when the video started. The scene he had so diligently described was unfurled before the court - but without me lunging at anyone with a banner in the manner of a medieval pikeman that he had just graphically demonstrated. The magistrate had already acquitted one demonstrator that day so I stood little chance. Quite frankly, I was past caring. We'd made our point in court.

If he'd really thought I was guilty I'd have received a lot worse than a £150 fine. After all, this same magistrate had sent someone down for 28 days the previous month for trying to smash a shop window! The prosecuting solicitor appeared to give up halfway through and even forgot at the end to ask for the destruction of "Exhibit A" our branch banner! The funny thing is, our lawyers just couldn't understand why we all expected to get convicted, why we have so much contempt for the judicial system, and why we weren't upset when they didn't get us off!

Throughout my case I was provided with advice and support by the TSDC, which is also providing back-up for prisoners, two of whom are still on remand. Observers turned up to all three of my court appearances which would have been invaluable if I had been on my own and not received such overwhelming support from members of my Labour Party (and of course many Briefing supporters!).

I urge everyone to keep in contact with the TSDC; affiliate and publicise its events: TSDC has become an essential part of the anti-Poll Tax movement and a much-needed activist contrast to the dead weight of the 'official' All-Britain Federation. You never know when you might need them.

■ *Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign can be contacted at 205 Panther House, Mount Pleasant, London WC1. Newsletter 50p. Affiliation £5.*

On behalf of my sisters

Pauline Purnell
Chair, Birmingham DLP

They herded us into the Court fifty at a time (in alphabetical order), then left us alone for 10 minutes while the magistrates had coffee. We soon got to know each other. We even had a genuine (Mr) McKenzie friend amongst us. I had a namesake, who had the Court in stitches explaining how his girlfriend had left him and he had trusted her to pay his Poll Tax.

The woman next to me (obviously used to Courts) told me to pull a hair from up my nostril so I would appear to cry in the dock. When told to slide along the bench everytime a person's case was heard, we protested by not moving. Nobody hurried when getting up to stand before the bench or moving back afterwards.

When my turn came, I said I was not Mrs Purnell; the City Treasurer's Department had to agree to change the register to Ms Purnell. When asked if I had anything else to say I explained that I had come "on behalf of my sisters".

The Magistrate thought I meant my family and let me carry on. I pointed to the back of the Court and spoke: " My sisters who have no income whatsoever rely on their relatives, husbands or friends to provide the needs of everyday living. Many are caring for elderly or sick relatives. Some are full-time mothers. These women can only pay their Poll Tax if they beg or curry favours from their male partners. No sisters should be humiliated in that way in a society that talks about rights and people standing on their own feet!"

The magistrates were not impressed. They issued a Liability Order plus £16 costs. Still, it took up Court time!

Shop Stewards Corner:

The EETPU is different

In this, the first of a regular column by and for shop stewards and union activists, ***Pat Waylett*** *argues that the EETPU is no place for socialists.*

In London Electricity the EETPU has a large membership. I was myself an EETPU steward for eight years and for most of that time I was on the London and National Industrial Committees. Within days of the EETPU being expelled from the TUC, I left and took most of my shop with me. I am not arguing that people should leave the EETPU because it is marginally less inclined to fight for workers' interests than other unions. Its expulsion from the TUC is only significant in that it places the EETPU outside the Bridlington Agreement, and therefore allows open season on EETPU members. What made me first refuse to stand again for the London and National Committees, and leave as soon as the expulsion made it possible, was the EETPU's action during the Wapping dispute.

The EETPU is different from other unions, (except the UDM), because it colluded with an employer to train a scab work force, provoke a strike and sack 5,000 workers. For no better reason than extending its influence in the industry, the EETPU smashed the lives of 5,000 workers. That act of betrayal goes far beyond the usual sell-outs and dodgy deals most unions have carried out and can never be forgotten or forgiven. The task of every socialist in a workplace where the EETPU exists is therefore to recruit its members and reduce its influence.

Some organisations, notably the SWP and Militant, have argued that socialists should not abandon workers still in the EETPU, but fight from the inside to change it. The argument is based on the desire of both organisations to preserve their own cadres in the union, and limit their loss of influence over associated militants; it can be dismissed as sectarian in motivation. They simply aid the case of EETPU Stewards who rightly point out that poaching members and no-strike deals are not peculiar to the EETPU and that the EETPU is no worse than any other union. Far from abandoning workers still in the EETPU, socialists in my industry work every day to get them out; we constantly put forward the real issue: that the EETPU is different from other unions and that its actions in the print dispute shows how destructive that difference can be. You can't abandon people you work with every day, but you can lead them into a blind alley when you put the interests of sectarian groups above the interests of socialism.

■ *Pat Waylett, Secretary, London Electricity South East, Joint Stewards Committee (Personal Capacity)*

■ If you are a shop steward or union representative with something to say to socialists in the labour movement write to Shop Stewards Corner, Briefing, 26 Wattisfield Road, London, E5 9QH

Purley crash - ASLEF vindicated

The official British Rail Report into the Purley train crash, which killed five and injured 88, upheld the view of the train drivers's union ASLEF that the accident would have been prevented if trains had been fitted with the Automatic Train Protection System.

When ASLEF originally made this point in 1988 it was dismissed by government ministers prefering to blame driver error. Now the results of the investigation have been published, the media are strangely quiet!

Which planet is he living on?

Two days before he launched his candidacy in next year's TGWU General Secretary elections, Bill Morris found himself addressing the Labour Local Government Conference in Nottingham. Amongst the gems to which he treated the assembly was "We share with you a new relationship of integrity built on mutual trust". This in the same week Labour local authorities up and down the country closed services and cut jobs in an unprecedented attack on, amongst others, Brother Morris's members.

Become a "Friend of the Pensioner"

Retired trades unionists have called on all those still working to join a campaign for decent pensions. "Friends of the Pensioner" is backed by USDAW and NUPE. *Briefing* readers are urged to join it by sending £1 to 28a, Highgate Road, London NW5 INS.

NUPE faces the receivers

The special NUPE Conference to hike up the subs and stave off bankruptcy, scheduled for February 9th in London, was called off at the last minute due to bad weather. Rodney Bickerstaffe and Roger Poole (the new whizzkid) stood at the door apologising to delegates who turned up after battling through the snow. "Bick" offered each frostbitten arrival a glass of scotch and a plea to vote for the subs increase at the reconvened gathering on March 2nd.

■ Help us keep an eye on the bureaucrats. Send your articles to *Briefing* at 26 Wattisfield Road, London E5.

Education workers insulted

Tony Cordell
Assistant Secretary
Hackney NUPE Officers.

MOST OF Hackney's schools and colleges came to a standstill on January 25th in a dispute over a pay award owed to nearly 1,000 workers.

The 1990 APT&C award, which has already been paid to other Council staff, was due to have been paid to education staff on January 15th, but the Council failed to deliver. Angered by this latest insult the workers decided that enough was enough and withdrew their labour. Most are low paid, many are part time, and the majority have not been paid their correct wages since they transferred over to Hackney after the abolition of ILEA, nearly a year ago.

Agreement was reached in December that the pay award would be made in January on condition that previous threats of industrial action would be withdrawn. This was agreed by the unions who were satisfied that the strings the Council had previously attached to the award were now removed. However, the Council did not keep its part of the agreement and the award was not made in January.

This was the final straw and workers in the education directorate voted unanimously to take one day action. Again the Council was given an opportunity to avert the strike (the workers' concern for the education service obviously being far greater than the authority's) but failed to take it. A reasonable request for a special pay run was denied and talks on compensating workers for their previous pay losses were treated with little respect by management.

All the Council was prepared to offer was the difference between receiving the back pay in January and in February. This was reckoned to be worth around £6-£7 per person. At a mass meeting held on the day of action it was agreed to ballot members for further action, on or soon after February 15th, if the Council fails to keep its word a second time.

Co-operation between the unions involved was encouraging. The three branches, NALGO, NUPE Officers and GMB/APEX worked closely together. Tremendous support from the NUT and the NAS/UWT will also stand us in good stead for the future. Many workers not directly involved gave great support. A word of thanks here for local parents who backed the workers. Obviously we hope there will be no future disputes but with Hackney's record and the poor quality of management at the top, the future is uncertain.

Hardly any of the 300 people at the mass meeting on the day of action had ever been involved in industrial action before, or ever thought they would be. Hackney Council has succeeded in turning this group of peaceful, hard working, low paid people - school secretaries and admin workers, school meals supervisors, kitchen supervisors, etc.- into angry, hardened trade unionists. These are the kind of people this Council has repeatedly insulted.

The Council has promised payment in February. Whether they deliver or not is another matter. Somehow I don't think this dispute is over!

Unions and pensioners unite to save Council home

Keith Veness
NUPE Branch Secretary

ONE WEEK before Christmas Hackney Council handed two groups of senior citizens a 'present' by shutting down their homes. Despite appeals from NUPE branch officers, pensioners groups and other community organisations, the six councillors present at the Social Services Committee voted for closure of the Marsh Hill Home in Homerton and the Amhurst Home in Stoke Newington.



A long campaign had been waged by NUPE and its allies to stave off closure; the final vote came as a blow, especially to the elderly residents who had struggled out on a cold night only to be told their homes were to be sold out from under them.

Staff and relatives of people in the Marsh Hill home, due for closure on 1st April, have resolved to fight. They organised a public meeting on 30th January and secured the backing of NUPE and the Council Joint Shop Stewards Committee. At the meeting pledges were made to support an occupation of the home. UCATT and EPIU stewards promised that Council electricians, carpenters and plumbers would undertake repairs.

Support was also pledged by the Hackney Pensioners Convention and by local tenants groups on neighbouring estates.

The staff - all NUPE members - subsequently voted 22-9 to support occupation in a secret ballot, despite attempts by senior managers to harass staff into accepting closure.

■ *Messages of support to: Marsh Hill Home, 40 Marsh Hill, Homerton, London E9.*

Casement trials: justice needed



Falls Road, Belfast

ON MARCH 16TH 1988, loyalist gunmen attacked the funeral cortege of the Gibraltar Three in Belfast. Three days later, at the Casement Park funeral of one of those killed in this attack, mourners again came under attack, this time by armed men later identified as British soldiers. The crowd defended itself. The soldiers were taken from the park and killed.

Thirty seven mourners were subsequently charged with offences arising out of these incidents. Five were sentenced to life imprisonment for their alleged involvement in the deaths of the soldiers, whose presence and purpose at Casement Park have yet to be fully explained.

At the trial, the prosecution admitted that none of the accused were armed, nor did any fire the fatal shots. They also admitted that Sean Kelly, one of the accused, was nowhere near the scene at the time of the execution.

One man, accused of opening the soldiers' car door, was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment. Ten of the defendants are still awaiting trial.

As we go to press the appeal of Sean Kelly, Pat Kane and Michael Timmons against their life sentences is being heard in a Belfast court.

The Casement Relatives Accused Committee (CRAC) has been set up to demand "justice for all those accused in connection with the incidents in and around Casement Park on March 19th, 1988".

■ Send messages of support to CRAC, 5-7 Conway St, Belfast 12.

News from COSATU

THERE WAS widespread support for COSATU's February 1st mass day of action in favour of a Constituent Assembly. Stay-aways called in the Eastern Cape, PWV, and Western Transvaal involved over one and a half million workers. Employers have been reluctant to take disciplinary action, evidence of workers growing orgnisational strength.

Responding to De Klerk's "democracy" speech, COSATU have denounced his continuing rejection of the majority's call for a democratically-elected Constituent Assembly and an interim government. The fate of political prisoners, exiles, security legislation, ongoing trials, the role of the security forces, death squads and vigilantes were not addressed. COSATU has demanded that trade unions are included in discussions over the

economy and that the government recognise the need for public sector funding. As the EC and the British government fall over themselves to welcome De Klerk's minor reforms and reinstate everything from economic ties to cricket matches, the message from the black majority is clear. Keep up the pressure!

■ *Briefing* will be carrying regular direct reports from the South Africa's biggest trade union confederation.

FOLLOWING an appeal in the last *Briefing*, representatives of Hackney Council unions and Hackney Trades Council have written to the Turkish Embassy in support of striking Turkish miners and against government repression of trades unions.

The Embassy replied with the usual pitiful excuses, but the letter does contain one revealing comment. "Workers would continue to enjoy the right to strike subject to the conclusion of hostilities in the Gulf."

Apparently, restriction of union rights is necessary because Turkey has responsibilities as a member of the UN coalition against Saddam and "the couutry's economy is being heavily damaged by the government's strict application of sanctions".

CARF

The CAMPAIGN AGAINST Racism and Fascism has launched a new bi-monthly magazine. CARF is produced by a voluntary, politically independent collective active in the anti-racist, anti-fascist movement for thirteen years.

CARF has broken its links with Searchlight because of the latter's tendency to subsume the fight against racism within the fight against fascism and fascist organisations. CARF is determined to oppose anti-Arab racism and recognises that, in the here and now, anti-fascist perspectives need to be broadened beyond anti-semitism. The new magazine covers the recent rise in fascist activity in East London, black self-defence and international stories. Above all, it is a campaigning journal.

■ Available from CARF, BM Box 8784, London WC1 3XX.

Eastern Europe: left whistling in the dark?

***Gus Fagan** examines the prospects for socialist change in the former Stalinist states and urges the left to keep its hopes in perspective - but also to keep them alive.*



THE COLLAPSE of the Eastern European regimes has produced what many perceive as a 'crisis of socialism'. Although what collapsed in Eastern Europe was certainly not socialism, it would be ridiculous to deny the profound crisis of orientation on the left.

This disorientation is not caused simply by the rapid collapse of the Stalinist regimes, but by the almost complete absence of any significant socialist opposition or of any mass movement with socialist aspirations. Four decades of Stalinist control, the repression of all attempts at independent articulation of working class interests, combined with profound disillusionment (especially among the intellectuals) of the many failed attempts at reform (Gomulka and Gierek in Poland, Kadar in Hungary, the 'new economic system' in the GDR) took their toll.

So what are the prospects for socialist ideas in post-Stalinist Europe? We must resist any temptation to whistle in the dark. There are many questions which only the experience of the next decade will begin to answer.

Any belief that there will be an adequate flow of capital into these countries, capable of resolving their social and economic problems (a new 'economic miracle'), is ill-founded. Private capital is attracted to those places with good access to markets, cheap labour, and the necessary infrastructure. In no country of Eastern Europe do all of these conditions exist. In Eastern Germany, for instance, the political decision by the Kohl government to go for rapid monetary, social and political unification (opposed by the representatives of German capital) meant that both unemployment and wages increased. The combination of high wages and inadequate infrastructure resulted in a refusal by German private capital to invest. Of the 8000 state companies placed in the hands of a fiduciary for sale on the private market only a few hundred, mostly small service enterprises, have been privatised so far. By the end of 1990, the German state had spent 6.5 billion DM in subsidies to East German firms. Without this outlay of public money, unemployment would be much higher.

In other countries, such as Poland an Hungary, the absence of massive (public) infrastructure investment means private capital investment will be limited and will be accompanied by low wages and high unemployment.

A leading right-wing economist in Germany, Lutz Hoffmann, president of the German Institute for Economic Research in Berlin, summed up the contradiction facing Western capital when it looks towards Eastern Europe: "The willingness of the population to accept deteriorating living conditions is temporally limited. Once it becomes clear that rapid improvements are not on the cards, then particular interests will begin to organise to put political pressure on government. If these groups can enforce their will then the government will give in and alter its plans, which puts a question mark over the successful outcome of such plans."

The only way that social struggles can be avoided, according to Hoffmann, is if reform can be introduced rapidly and with demonstrable success, an unlikely scenario. Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe will be the scene of developing conflict as the social and ecomonic consequences of capitalist restoration become evident.

Even in Eastern Germany, the workers' initial welcoming of privatisation has turned into a sceptical 'wait-and-see' attitude. A recent survey showed that 95% of East German workers feel insecure about their future. There have been strikes in the mines, on the railways, in transport, the banking sector, rubbish collection, etc. Resistance is weak, but it has begun to take shape.

The ideological strength of capitalism today in Eastern Europe (most East German workers voted for Kohl) is mainly a reflection of the ideological vacuum on the left, Stalinism has devalued the language of socialism for millions of workers. But the neo-liberal ideology of the new political elites offers little to workers in struggle against unemployment and poverty. Socialism with its basic ideas of social equality and fairness, remains the only ideology capable of giving sense to workers' resistance. The absence of any overall social alternative to capitalism at the present moment weakens the workers' ability to resist the austerity. But the reappropriation of socialist tradition by the workers of Eastern Europe, whatever new forms it may take, remains a genuine possibility.

Sell it to them, blow it up and pay for it

THE GULF War is expected to add around £1 billion to UK public spending in this financial year. A total war cost of around £2-3 billion is forecast - depending on the length of the war. One little extra expense that's gone unmentioned is that borne by the Export Credit Guarantees Department, which effectively insures British exporters to high-risk countries. Under the scheme, the taxpayer picks up the tab if the purchasing country fails to pay for the goods it ordered.

Dave Palmer
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

One high-risk country is Iraq, with which until recently Britain had its second largest trade surplus. Around £1.2 billion is outstanding in export credits to Iraq and it seems unlikely that Saddam will fork out now. So as well as paying for the planes being used to bomb Iraq, the UK taxpayer is also going to have to pay for the projects that the planes are blowing up!

German growth, British slump

IN SPITE of the recession the government has to maintain high interest rates in order to preserve the pound's parity in the ERM against the Deutschmark (DM). The trouble is the business cycles in the two economies are out of sync. In 87-88 when Nigel Lawson shadowed the DM (behind Thatcher's back) the German economy was recovering after three years in which growth averaged only 1%. The Germans lowered interest rates and growth accelerated to 4.5%. Lawson followed suit but Britain was already booming (with growth at 6%) and inflation leapt up. The economy overheated and in 1989 UK base rates soared to 15%. The rest is history.

Post-unification Germany is booming. However, restructuring the East has created a large Federal budget deficit (6% of GNP) and currency union has caused rapid growth in the money supply. To restrain inflation the Bundesbank is pursuing an obsessively stringent monetary policy (high interest rates) to which Britain is tied by virtue of the ERM. Yet the UK recession makes cuts in interest rates here an urgent necessity. Keeping 'in step' with the Germans (please ignore any nationalistic connotations) will take years of 'pain' - for guess whom?

Caught between a rock and a hard place

DIVERGENCE IN the performance of the major economies is causing a breakdown in international economic co-ordination. The widening rift between the US and Germany over interest rate policy reflects the increasing predomination of domsetic political considerations among the 'big 3' (Germany, US, Japan) who are also at odds over the Gulf.

Last autumn the Bundesbank raised interest rates to 6.5% in defiance of pressure from the US and France. Next day, the US Federal Reserve unexpectedly dropped interest rates to 6%.

The twin moves immediately made the DM more attractive to investors than the dollar. Vast flows of capital flooded the exchange markets. For the Bush administration, a fall in the dollar (which has declined by 10% since last August) is a way of stimulating exports and softening the impact of recession. But if the dollar falls too far and too fast cheap imports could cause a rise in US inflation. The US Federal Reserve was forced to act to coordinate intervention by ten central banks to stabilise the dollar, which had reached a record low against the DM by the end of the week following the changes.

A weak dollar is a greater threat to Britain and France than to Germany. Recently, the pound breached the $2 mark for the first time in a decade. Since Britain sends 12.3% of its exports to the US it is particularly exposed to dollar weakness, which reduces the value of thsoe exports. Britain and France sell a larger proportion of their exports to the non-industrial countries (where trade is in dollars) than does Germany. Both have large aerospace industries, a sector with strong US competition and in which all trade is transacted in dollars. The decline of the dollar and strengthening of the DM has thus caused downwards pressure on the franc and pound.

The French are now trying to get the Germans to realign the DM to a higher ERM rate rather than devalue the franc. The Tories would also prefer to pursue this way out of their ERM quandary and are pleased to see the EC Franco-German axis coming under strain. So far the Germans have refused to play ball but divergence within the ERM could force a realignment some time this summer. Stay tuned for 'bloc wars'.

Gulf War opening?

A POST-PERESTROIKA, Gulf-inspired business opportunity spotted in the pages of the Financial Times: '1 million Gas Masks Russian Made - Rock Bottom Price'. A killing in the offing for some Middle East-orientated entrepreneur? Buy now, price rise certain if Saddam lets off his chemical arsenal. Where there's death, there's a market.

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Transnationals love low-wage UK

BRITAIN IS now the most favoured site for multi-national investment in the EC, where 45.8% of direct overseas investment by transnationals now takes place. Britain accounts for 39% of the EC total, with second place France getting only 14.4%. Some 49% of US overseas investment now goes into the EC; 62% of this is ploughed into Britain. 21% of Japanese overseas investment goes to the EC; 42% of this to Britain.

By investing within the EC, Japanese and US companies can get barrier-free access to its markets. But what do they get from investing in Britain in particular? Simple. The chief attraction is Britain's low wages.

Breaking old patterns

In this month's contribution to streetlife, ***Mick McKeever*** *looks back to some of the traps laid for us all in childhood - and forward to a better future.*

CHILDHOOD TEACHES most of us to hide our true desires. With parents who seem embarrassed by too much directness, many of us become conditioned to avoid stating our needs honestly and openly. Instead, we learn to confuse the signals, resorting to emotionally-manipulative techniques such as crying, sulking or tantrums when we don't get what we want.

I now realise how much this childhood pattern governed my behaviour during a relationship which recently broke up. Intellectually, I knew the pitfalls of dependency in a relationship and had no intention of being exploitative. Yet although we both had our own careers, my whole life revolved around my partner. If anything, more of the housework was done by me than by her. But I was using this to say, in effect, "Look what I do for you!". It was part of a strategy of control.

Instead of stating what I wanted out of the relationship, I acted as I had done in childhood, letting others dictate the terms whilst fighting back in emotionally manipulative ways. I have no doubt that this behaviour must have made me very unattractive! As someone else began to be involved with my partner, I had feelings of anger, jealousy and anxiety, driving me further down the victim spiral.

Then one day I took control over my behaviour at last. I decided to leave. It was the first real decision I had taken for myself in a long time.

Over the past year, I have benefitted from a course in teaching and training "assertiveness". This has taught me to identify my feelings so as to deal with them, to build my independence and self-esteem and to recognise those things which I am personally responsible for. All this has helped me to bury the old passive/aggressive "tapes" inherited from childhood. One gain has been the adoption of a list of "personal rights", both for myself and for others. I am convinced that it is only by allowing others these "rights" that I have justification in taking them for myself.

The only person whose behaviour I am now responsible for is me. Despite setbacks, I am now more relaxed and actually beginning to quite like myself! Of course, there is a lot more about me that I would still like to change.

Clause 25

"WE SAY safe sex, they say no sex," was the chant from the 7000 who demonstrated against Clause 25 of the Tories' new Criminal Justice bill in London on February 16th.

The lively demonstration made its way from Embankment to Hyde Park, where two men embraced each other and offered themselves for arrest under the new legislation, which will make more than 2500 men a year liable to higher fines and longer prison sentences for victimless homosexual behaviour.

According to Home Office Minister John Patten, homosexual soliciting, procuring and indecency are "serious" sex crimes requiring severe sentences.

The new legislation is a back door re-criminalisation of gay sexuality. The existing offenses of soliciting, indecency and procuring already carry sentences of up to two years imprisonment. In 1989 nearly one hundred men were jailed for these consenting homosexual acts - eighteen times the number jailed in 1988. Men facing charges for consenting homosexual behaviour are at least 10% more likely to be convicted than people charged with similar heterosexual offences.

On December 15th, fifteen gay men were convicted at the Old Bailey for consenting "S&M" behaviour. The sentences for their victimless "crimes" ranged from a £2000 fine to four years imprisonment. This is the first time since 1967 that consenting sexual acts between men over 21 have been declared illegal. The judge rejected consent as a legitimate defence.

In the wake of the Old Bailey ruling comes another alarming development. The Department of Health recently issued guidelines to the Children's Act under which lesbian and gay men are described as "unfit" to foster children because of their "lifestyles". Paragraph 16 of the guidelines states: "The chosen way of life of some adults may mean they would not be able to provide a suitable environment for the care and nurture of a child...'equal rights' and' gay rights' have no place in fostering services..."

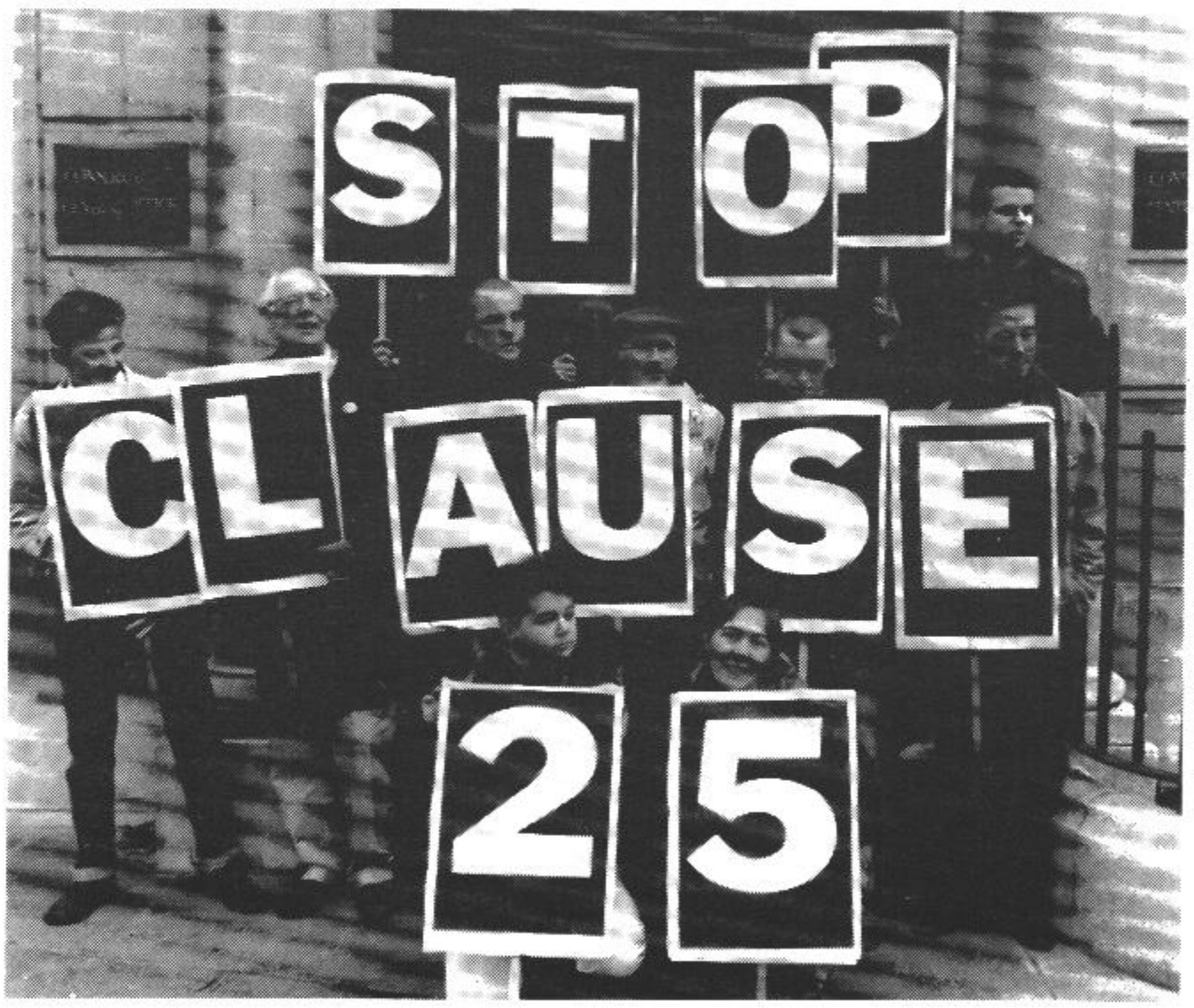
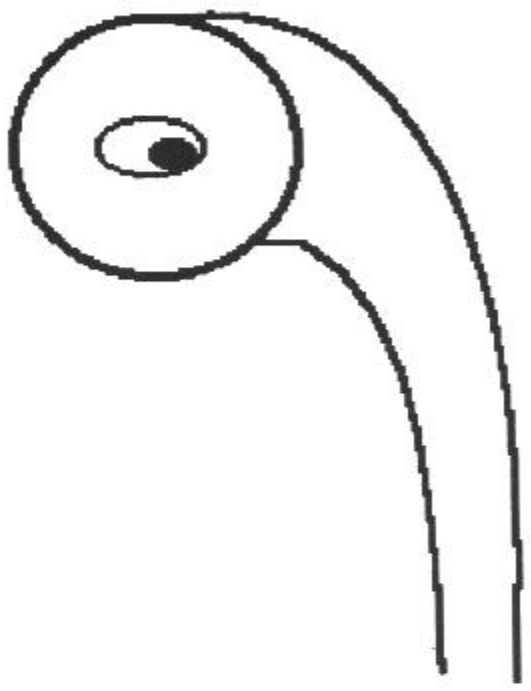


Photo: G. Rainsford



Ignatibore

WHITE supremacist Michael Ignatieff has renewed his jihad against Islam in the columns of the Observer and the studios of the Late Show.

Last year Ignatieff, who likes to dignify the portmanteau of prejudices which makes up his world view with the title of"Western values", took up the cudgels against the illiberal Eastern hordes on behalf of the ungrateful Salman Rushdie. In the course of his investigations Ignatieff revealed to astonished late night tv viewers that Muslims born in Keighley speak with Yorkshire accents.

His latest crusade was pursued in a Late Show dialogue with Egyptian feminist Nawal El Sadaawi, whose cogent critique of Western hypocrisy and neo-colonialism he brushed aside as "anachronistic". He was most unsettled by pictures of Arab demonstrators holding placards of Saddam Hussein but unperturbed by the slaughter of civilians in Baghdad.

A real intellectual, our Ignatibore. Didn't he write a book once?

Our Ken's a red Ken

EMPLOYERS should beware of the crass inaccuracy of Economic League reports.

How dare they state (in their March 1990 News Review) that "Ken Livingstone... is now connected with Labour Briefing, a grouping which provides a bridge from the far left in the Labour Party to those outside." Sue them, Ken, before we do!

O Captain, My Captain

HAVING been read the riot act by Kinnock for daring to step out of line on the Gulf, John Prescott donned sackcloth and ashes at the January NEC. Seasoned NEC-ers were said to be shocked at thesight of tough guy "Johnny" reading from a prepared statement and groveling to Kinnock to protect his political future. For falling on his sword so publicly Prescott's reward was to be an article in the Sunday Times which alleged that he would not be given the Transport brief in the event of a Labour election victory and a Kinnock cabinet. It would appear that the self-styled bull-like, rotweiller Prescott had had more than his horns pulled in the privacy of Kinnock's Westminister office.

"Those who are about to die plead to salute you"

SOFT left sources have denied rumours that the infamous "Last Supper Club" was so named because its members knew that they were soon to be crucified by the Labour leadership. Stories that members of the club fought to kiss one another on the cheek to save themselves from "disciplinary action" were also described as false, although many were clearly unprepared to await the third crow of the cock before denying all knowledge of the notorious group. Having dispatched the lamb-like John Prescott with ease, Pontius Pillock is said to be keen to "deal" once and for all with other repentant soft left non-martyrs, in addition to throwing yet more socialists to the lions and continuing to wash his hands of any remaining progressive policies.

Tragic defeat for Mandelson

NO, not Hartlepool! Labour's media guru suffered a humiliating defeat in recent elections for the Fabian Society Executive Committee. Among others who managed the incredible feat of losing to the likes of Diane Hayter, Austin Mitchell and Oonagh McDonald were PR-supremo Jenny Jeger, ultra-right Euro-MP Carole Tongue, and Guardian hack Martin Linton.

Briefing quiz no. 94: Can you name an election Peter Mandelson has won?

Page Three

BRIEFING's relaunch made page 3! of the Islington Chronicle, that is. Our attack on Margaret Hodge's model local authority was reported in full, from lack of internal democracy to attacks on strikers. After eleven years Briefing is still "reporting Labour's News - and making it?"

Coming out . . .

INTELLECTUALS coming out for Gulf war: Fred Halliday, Neal Ascherson, Margaret Drabble, Michael Ignatieff, Amos Oz, Hans Magnus Enszenberger . . .

Against: Woody Harrelson (bartender Woody in "Cheers").

Lemmings

DOES your council have problems? Difficulties in collecting rubbish? Don't worry! Your concerns will be dealt with at a Fabian Society Meeting on "Current problems of a progressive local authority" with Haringey Council leader Toby Harris.

Toby will share his experience of creating a reliable right-wing majority by excluding left-wingers from selection, how to decimate the workforce, and how to close libraries, send kids home from school, and set the highest Poll Tax in the land.

NB: Oxford Dictionary defines "progressive" as "making continuous forward movement." Sounds a bit like a lemming .

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

Olympian incompetents

*From the terraces ...**Arthur Chandler** on the politics of sport*

IN EARLY February, when the Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee produced a report on 'Policing Football Hooliganism', the national press were caught on the hop. In contrast Briefing readers were well prepared, thanks to my preview of the report in the last issue.

Most of the press decided to play safe and lead on the proposed legislation to create new offences inside grounds. However, as the report itself stated, this was not particularly controversial; the press led on it because it enable them to run 'MPs crack down on thugs' headlines. The real story was the fact that the report, produced by an all-party group chaired by Tory Sir John Wheeler, is calling for the exact opposite of everything that the Government sought to impose on football during the Thatcher years.

The report says that there should be no bans on away fans, terraces at smaller clubs should remain, police should treat fans with dignity, fans should be involved in the management of clubs and plans should be made for the long-term desegregation of football crowds. All staggering stuff and all taken directly from the evidence submitted by the Football Supporters Association. Just over a year ago over half the MPs on the Committee were enthusiastically voting for ID cards, so the reason for the turnaround is difficult to fathom. Maybe the evidence from the FSA came as a shock. Maybe they were genuinely surprised to find out what it's really like to attend a football match in Britain.

Despite a governing structure with more than a passing resemblance to the hydra of Greek mythology, British football has at least managed to put together a coherent bid for the 1998 World Cup. This, along with the rush to develop football grounds following the publication of the Taylor report, should raise at least an eyebrow or two among building workers. Amongst all the statistics so readily available during the 1990 World Cup the figure for the number of building workers who died in rushing to get the grounds ready in time is nowhere to be found. Word of mouth reports implied a horrific loss of life.

To many people, the idea of England hosting the World Cup seems something of a joke. The likelihood of any British Government stumping up the kind of money that the Italians did seems remote. Even the Hillsborough disaster and the Tories' endorsement of the Taylor report led to only minor tinkering with the pools betting levy, and any future Labour government with a £100 million to spare will probably decide that there are more important things to spend it on.

The British olympic bid seems even more of an outsider. The Birmingham bid for 1996 Olympics failed abysmally, despite the backing of the Shadow Sports Minister and the local Council. For the 2000 Olympics Britain will but forward wither Manchester or London, but the London bid has been dogged by conflict between the London Council for Sport and Recreation and the Central Council for Physical Recreation. After acrimony, both sides have now come together behind prospective Tory MP, Sebastian Coe. But a city the size of London, with no city-wide Council to pull its infrastructure together would be hard pressed to host the biggest sporting event in the world, and of course, without a city-wide council, the people of London have no chance to say what they think about staging the Olympics.

Famous last words.....

LABOUR BRIEFING

TEN YEARS ago, *Briefing's* bold headline was "For a Socialist London!" Looking forward to Labour seizing control of the GLC, the Chair of the London Labour Party, Arthur Latham, punctuated his lead article with phrases like "socialist programme", "armed with a clear authority from the voters" and "attacking the housing scandal". An ordinary member of Tooting CLP, one Tony Banks, pilloried the newly-formed Social Democratic Alliance for favouring the mixed economy and NATO, policies which he has accepted as (until his recent departure) a Labour Front Bencher. The CIA's links with the Labour right, and the antics of the has-beens on the Council for Social Democracy, were exposed by Tony in his article with his usual wit. Yet he failed to detect in all this the obvious embryo of the SDP.

Other features of the March 1981 issue were a call from the Leader of Stirling Labour Group for "Accountability in Action", a piece on organising in support of workers in Poland, and coverage of racist attacks in Hackney. Both Merle Amory, then the youngest black councillor in the country, and the Asian Labour Party Alliance (a forerunner of Black Sections) tackled racism in the Party. Oh yes and , guess what? "Camden Council Caves In". Some things never change.

BIRMINGHAM LABOUR BRIEFING published names and addresses of 26 bailiffs poised to act against local Poll Tax non-payers. The Birmingham Post reported the horrified reactions of local worthies. Cllr. Ken Barton, Deputy Leader of the Labour-controlled Council said Briefing was "nothing to do with respectable members of the Labour Party" and described the publication of the bailiff's details as "crypto-fascism". Reg Hales, Tory leader, described the move as a "deplorable" attempt "to encourage people to intimidate the bailiffs". Poor old bailiffs.

Arts funding in crisis

***Joy Farmer** reveals the new Tory arts strategy: if you can't privatise it, centralise it.*

SUCCESSIVE TORY governments have railed against pathetic arts workers who expect the state to support their activities. They promote incentive schemes, sponsorship, business in the arts, etc. as alternatives. But by 1988, the Tories had to admit this strategy had failed. Even before the recession, there was neither the money nor the interest from industry to make a significant reduction in the need for public subsidy. Faced with the spectre of yet another rise in the price of tickets at their favourite opera houses, the politicians called for a radical overhaul of arts funding. A report compiled by Richard Wilding and released in early 1989, suggested a "unification" of the arts funding system, with the Regional Arts Associations (RAAs) becoming more accountable to the Arts Council in return for greater funding.

RAAs have different structures and objectives and cover some strange geographical areas, said to be based on wartime defence boundaries! Up till now, the Arts Council has exercised its control over them by providing around 80% of their funds, but they have retained democratic structures, with local authority representation, and some are also open to arts workers and other interested people.

Wilding suggested that apart from a few "national" institutions (the Royal Shakespeare Company, etc) and some touring companies, all arts funding should be handed over to the regions. This caused a huge rumpus. The major orchestras felt they were being demoted. The Director General of the Arts Council resigned.

Nonetheless, plans proceeded until Arts Minister Richard Luce resigned and was replaced by David Mellor. As a member of the board of a London orchestra (and owner of the largest collection of compact disks in Putney), Mellor was easy prey to the lobbying of the affronted orchestras. His response was to impose an NHS-like undemocratic framework on the new structure, with the majority of the members of the new Regional Arts Boards (RABs) to be nominated by the Arts Council and the Chairs by the Minister. The largest and most political RAA, Greater London Arts, was shut down overnight and redundancy notices issued.

Leadership changes intervened, Mellor was promoted, and the third arts minister in a year, Tim Renton, took over. He has watered down the central control and delayed the proposals to devolve organisations, leaving the arts in a state of confusion. However, the new RABs will not be as open to control by local people as the old RAAs, and the "arms length" principle in arts funding is totally gone if the Minister has the right to approve (and therefore not to approve) RAB chairs. Arts bureaucrats considering the staffing of the new RABs are stipulating that staff must be of the right "calibre" for dealing with "major" clients. What price equal opportunities? What price the jobs of the 400 people currently employed in the regional system who have no idea whether or not they will be absorbed into the new structures?

In all this the government and the Arts Council have been guided by an assumption that the major performing arts are more crucial to the cultural life of the nation than other arts activities. This is reflected in the way the new National Arts Strategy is being constructed. While various papers are being written on art forms and approaches, Peter Palumbo, Arts Council Chairman (sic), is contributing by having a series of lunches with the great, the good and the prominent. It is hard to see how what Simon Rattle said to Judi Dench over the sorbet could inform serious strategies for arts development in Britain.

Meanwhile the real major arts funders, the local authorities (which provide something like three quarters of the nation's arts funding) are struggling to keep any money going into the arts. Arts funding is discretionary and therefore under pressure. In addition, arts subjects are downgraded in the National Curriculum, lumped together with other subjects (eg dance with PE) or not compulsory beyond 14 (eg art and music).

The clock is being turned back. Arts funding is increasingly controlled by the few for the pleasure of themselves and their peers. In order to counteract this, it is vital that the major partners in arts funding, the local authorities, not only maintain their contribution, but increase it, shout about what they are doing, and assert their right to be heard in national and regional debates.

The Ghetto Fights

On September 1st 1939, the Nazi reich invaded Poland, home to 3.5 million Jews, Warsaw, with over 1 million Jews, capitulated on September 28th. A policy of resettlement and ejection of Jews throughout Poland commenced. The main Jewish area of Warsaw was enclosed with barbed wire. In November, Jews were ordered to wear yellow Stars of David outside the ghetto. Within two years the daily food ration was down to 184 calories. Typhus was causing 15% of all deaths.

Mass deportations from the ghetto began in July 1942. The Germans said that all Jews were to be resettled in the East, except for employees of the Judenrat (Jewish councils set up by the Nazis) and German workshops, Jewish police, Jewish hospital staff and their immediate families. The deporations continued until September; most of these people ended their days at Treblinka.

By the time the Ghetto was "awarded" the status of a workcamp in September 1942, the number of inhabi-

***Adelaide Leslie** reviews **The ghetto fights** by Marek Edelman (Bookmarks 1990 £3.95) and I **remember nothing more** by Adina Blady Szwajger (Collins*

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final attempt to liquidate the population of the Ghetto was met by resistance.

The Warsaw Ghetto uprising lasted for three weeks. By the end 7,000 Jews had been killed in the fighting and 6,000 had been burnt to death in their hideouts. 56,000 were transported to Treblinka. A few surviving fighters escaped through the sewers and were taken by lorry into the forests. Marek Edelman was one of these escapees.

After the war he published this account of the underground resistance which was rediscovered by an SWP member who came across the book (in Polish) in his grandmother's attic. Marek Edelman was found to be alive and well, practising as a heart surgeon in Lodz, and still a (non-Stalinist) socialist. As John Rose points out in his introduction, recent events in Eastern Europe compel us to pay attention once again to the forces of nationalism and anti-semitism in these countries.

Edelman's book is written in snatches. It gives an insight into how a sociaist activist group responded to an unimaginable circumstance: duplicating leaflets, issuing a newspaper against all odds.This was a world of arbitary terror. Nazi sentries thought nothing of shooting children who slipped out of the ghetto on foraging expeditions. It took exceptional bravery to live an ordinary life.

What shines out of this book is the individual heroism of people, Jews and non-Jews alike.They took astounding risks to serve their cause, whether they saw it as the cause, whether it was socialism or simple humanity.

ZOB knew their fight was not exclusively a Jewish struggle; their internationalism remained intact. During the uprising ZOB issued a "Manifesto to the Poles" calling on their compatriots to continue the struggle against their mutual enemy.

Adina Blady Szwajger's book describes the same events from a slightly different perspective. She too was a member of ZOB and Marek appears in her memories (as, indeed, she does in his). Adina, too, was a doctor, practising at a children's hospital. She could pass herself off as a non-Jewish Pole and therefore undertook courier work, carrying money and arranging safe houses. It has taken her 45 years to write this book - and who can blame her?

"What shines out of this book is the individual heroism of people, Jews and non-Jews alike."

Sivanandan

Sivanandan is writing in dangerous times. He sees vast changes, upheavals in the world economic system. He sees the deepening misery of a great army of international workers - the oppressed of the Third World. And when he looks around he encounters the self-serving misrecognitions of 'progressive' forces in the West. An intellectual left which bids 'farewell to the working class', while rendering invisible both the workers of the world and the underclass of its own country.

So much of socialism - its commitment to the oppressed and exploited, its morality - is in danger of being forgotten. So much of the new situation is not being understood. Sivanandan wants to retain the old truths of militant socialism, but to face the new world of internationalised production and new technology without the comforts of illusion or nostalgia. And he wants to argue. This collection of articles is full of arguments: confrontations with sections of the left, with multicultural orthodoxies of 'race', with a starry-eyed Europeanism that ignores "a common market racism". He argues in a way that is rare on the left: uniting immediate issues with a grasp of deep, underlying trends; linking journalistic sharpness and moral commitment. If there were more like him perhaps the populist right wouldn't have been so effective.

In attacking the despair of intellectuals, Sivanandan highlights not only the sufferings of an underclass but also its struggles. His extended criticism of Marxism Today's 'New Times' ends with an evocation of the `communities of resistance' which that magazine overlooks: the campaigns against exploitation, racist violence and state repression that have sustained black struggles in the eighties. Here, he says, is a movement `unrelenting in its struggle against Capital'. Yet it is also, he writes, a movement capable of "opening sensibilities to the oppression of others... the injustices and inequalities and unfreedoms meted out to others."

***Farhana Sheikh** reviews **Communities of Resistance - Writings on Black Struggles for Socialism** by A. Sivanandan (Verso 1990).*

There is much to take heart from in this book, but there is, I think, one question which Sivanandan lets pass too easily. For all the fierceness of his polemic against Marxism Today, he concedes to it one crucial point. In the West, he claims, capital has emancipated itself from labour. Technology and the internationalisation of production have made negligible the political and economic weight of the 'core' sections of the working class. Even worse, the'new' working class has few progressive inclinations. Here, Sivanandan seems to accept at least the partial validity of a Kinnock line. If he is right, then we are in a more dangerous situation than even Sivanandan thinks, for this analysis leaves the majority of the population with no strong political or economic motives for opposing capital. It can 'live' politically only through expressing solidarity with others. Socialism, I hope, has more to say to it than that.

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

Dear Briefing...

I am very pleased to hear that *Labour Briefing* is going to continue as the paper of the real left in the Labour Party. I was very sorry to hear that many of the comrades from Socialist Outlook no longer wish to help Briefing.
I would like to take this opportunity to express my continued support for the ideas and policies advocated by *Labour Briefing*. I believe that Briefing still has a key role to play in rebuilding the left in the Labour Party. I am frankly not very sure what the new proposed paper *Socialist* is going to achieve and what its real object is.

Wishing the relaunched *Labour Briefing* all the best.

John Ford
Hamilton, Lanarkshire

Congratulations on a successful relaunch. Now, more than ever, we need the strong voice of *Labour Briefing* to reaffirm the principles of Labour's 'unrepentant left'. Regarding the 'twin track' debate. This seems to run and run! I back the concept of activity inside and outside the Party to the hilt. But when political reality comes and hits us, as it did during the Gulf War parliamentary discussion, the fact isthat only the Labour Party exists as a vehicle for expressing dissent from a socialist stance. Feeble sniping against Kinnock from supporters of Militant and the Green Party can never replace the effective action taken by people like Tony Benn. 'Stay in and fight' is the only response that has any practical chance of concrete results.

There are possibilities that activists are so demoralised by Labour's turn to the right that they will sink into despair or yearn after the illusions of 'green politics' or the empty rhetoric of groups such as Militant. By raising the standard of genuine socialism inside the Party *Labour Briefing* stands as an alternative to these false reactions. With imperialist carnage all around us that vision is more important than ever.

Andrew Coates
Ipswich

As you well know, the Green Party has always opposed war in the Gulf, and has said so consistently and clearly. Your 'Greens back war' piece is just plain silly. The fact that one Green PPC disagrees with the party's position is hardly a major event.

Your anti-Green comments read simply as sour grapes that in the Green Party pro-war sentiments are in the tiniest minority whilst in the Labour Party they are firmly in charge. Fortunately, the Labour MPs on the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf have had a more constructive attitude to working together with Greens and others to stop the war. At least some people recognise this issue as being above party politics.

Mallen Baker
Green Party Peace & Defence Speaker
Sheffield

Congratulations on the first issue of the revamped Briefing. It's proving very popular in Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham, judging by the fact that I shifted over 20 copies in five days.

I note that one Keith Veness (no relation), has refused to pay the Poll Tax on several grounds - including the fact that LB Islington insisted on referring to him as D Venness. Keith V was told that D Venness and K Veness were 'probably' the same person. If that is the case, can I look forward to D Venness paying my Poll Tax for me? And can I borrow his rottweiler?

By the way, I see you have listed Keith Veness (no relation) as Keith Venness (2n's) in your list of personnel. Be careful - in case Mr Veness (one n) decides not to pay you for his copies of *Briefing*. Still, you could always bill D Venness, I suppose! While we're on the subject, my father tells me that I'm of Norman (as in Bill the Conqueror) and Scottish extraction. I suppose Keith Veness (no relation) could be a Tuscan but it all sounds like a load of Lombards to me!

Kevin Veness
(no Poll Tax here!)

Your report that the Green Party is backing military action is simply wrong. Basing your article on the comments of one Prospective Parliamentary Candidate is hardly well-researched journalism. I therefore hope you will print a correction in your next edition.

The Green Party, unlike the vast bulk of the Labour Party, is against the war. The Green Party doesn't impose a centralised discipline on its members; it will be up to the local party to decide what action to take.

As a past subscriber to and a member of the Labour Party for eight years, I'm really glad I left. It's so much nicer being in a party that sticks to its principles and has proper democratic structures.

Trying to turn the Labour Party into a radical, campaigning organisation is a lost cause. Why not do something positive and stop propping up what can only be described as a part of the establishment?

Ian Wingrove
London

The front page article of the new *Briefing* does not regard the war as one of imperialist aggression against a semi-colony. It complains that Kinnock was 'depriving Britain of the kind of democratic discussion seen in the US Congress' but fails to tell us that this discussion was on imperialism's tactics, ie how best to plunder the world? It refers to the FBU motion being supported by a majority of CLPs and that 57 MPs voted against the Government but does not tell us that the motion and the MPs supported sanctions, ie they wanted to achieve the war aims by starving theIraqi masses into surrender.

If *Briefing* makes no difference between revolution and reform, the failed 'left of the left' strategy, then anti-imperialist speeches will not substitute for a principled socialist struggle in the anti-war committees and will leave the running to the SWP, who have now descended to the most pathetic pacifist positions to pander to the pro-imperialism of their allies in CND and the Greens.

Whilst socialists must be for the defeat of imperialism and the victory of Iraq, as the SWP and the ISG are WITHIN THEIR OWN ORGANISATIONS, revolutionary socialists must fight openly for that position within the working class, anti-war committees, etc.

This is not a 'pedagogic' slogan, but the cutting edge: for or against imperialism not just for or against war.

If we can stand fast against imperialist propaganda we will make common cause with the wave of anti-imperialist sentiment sweeping the Middle East; we will establish ourselves as those who truly opposed the British ruling class (more important for British socialists than opposing the US ruling class, Mr Livingstone) when it led the nation into war and recession.

I would suggest that this is the moment of truth for the HARD left.

Gerry Downing
Brent East CLP

DIARY

Friday March 1st: Benefit for family of Dessie Ellis. Music, late bar and speakers Martha Ellis, Paul Hill & Gerry Conlon. Haringey Irish Centre, Pretoria Rd, White Hart Lane, London.

Saturday March 2nd: National Demonstration Against War in the Gulf. 12.00, Embankment, London.

Saturday March 2nd: March against the Poll Tax in Lewisham. 11.00 Goldsmiths College, Lewisham Way, SE14. Lewisham Anti-Poll Tax Union.

Monday March 4th: Media Workers Against the War National Rally. 7.00pm, Central Hall, Westminster. Speakers include John Pilger, Edward Pearce, Paul Foot, Bobby Muller (Vietnam Veterans of America). MWAW can be contacted c/o NUJ, 314 Grays Inn Rd, London, WC1.

Friday March 8th: Women Against War in the Gulf public meeting. 7.30pm Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London, WC1.

Friday March 8-Sunday March 10th: Scottish Labour Party Conference, Aberdeen.

Saturday March 9th: International Women's Day March against the Gulf War. 12.00, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London.

Thursday, March 14th: Labour Against the War. National Rally at Central Hall, Westminster, London.

Thursday March 21st: National Day of Action in support of Poll Tax prisoners. Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign (details: TSDC 071-833-8958).

Saturday March 23rd: All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation March. 12.00, Embankment, London, through Trafalgar Square to Hyde Park.

Monday April 1st: CND Easter March and Rally. 12.30, the Park, Barrow in Furness. March against Trident.

Saturday April 27th: Unshackle the Unions Conference. 11.00-5.00, ULU, Malet St, London. Speakers include John Hendy QC, Ronnie McDonald (OILC), Micky Fenn (sacked Tilbury Docker).

Sunday April 28th: Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom AGM. 9.30-4.30, University of London Union, Malet St, London, WC1. (Details: 071-923-3671).

Wednesday May 1st: SE Region TUC Festival. Congress House, Great Russell St.

Sunday May 12th: James Connolly, Bobby Sands Rally. Details from Wolfe Tone Society, BM Box 6191, London, WC1N 3XX.

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

Briefing business

Labour Briefing, March 1991, No. 110.
Labour Briefing is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. We are a democratic, non-sectarian network with an elected National Editorial Board, open to all supporters. The next NEB meeting will be held on March 24th.
Contributions are welcome - but please keep them short. Deadline for the next issue is March 11th. All articles reflect the opinions of the author alone unless otherwise stated.
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STOP PRESS: Labour's Organisation Sub-Committee has voted to ask the NEC to investigate **Lambeth Labour Group.** The Group's alleged sins appear to be twofold. First, it had the temerity to oppose the Gulf War. Second, it is alleged that right wing Labour councillors who voted with the Tories and against their own Group over the use of bailiffs against Poll Tax non-payers were "intimidated". Surely the first time anyone will have been disciplined for trying to uphold the Labour Whip!

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Barrow bailiffs

The great "will they or won't they use the bailiffs" debate in Barrow continues. Firstly, the Labour Group met with the new Director of Finance to discuss problems with poll tax collection. Pointing to a £1.8 million shortfall, and a downturn in payments over the last three months, the Director urged the Councillors to use bailiffs to collect the outstanding amounts.

Hyder Prodhan
Barrow and Furness CLP

Before the vote was taken the meeting broke up amidst rowdy scenes, partly bought about by a Briefing-inspired intervention criticising Labour councillors lack of attendance at non-payers' Court cases. With no vote taken, the naive believed existing policy (no bailiffs) would stand. Socialists, however, knew the Finance and Policy Committee would bend before the "all-powerful" Director and vote for bailiffs. We were right; they did!

But at the next Labour Group meeting, despite the recommendation of Finance and Policy, a move to refer back the decision on bailiffs was carried and then approved at full Council. Once again Barrow Labour Council had a no-bailiffs policy.

Non-use of bailiffs is a victory for the local working-class and the Barrow Campaign Against The Poll Tax, but the Council are still using wage/benefit arrestments. Local Labour Councillors' horizons are strictly limited by the need to stay "legal" at all costs.

As Barrow's Labour councillors prepare the 1991 Poll Tax budget, socialists must demand "No cuts! No Poll Tax! For a mass campaign of non-payment and non-implementation! Don't let class-collaborating Labour Councillors off the hook!

Poll Tax briefing

Birmingham's Poll Tax next year will be £406, the same as this year. However, the £69 that Birmingham Poll Tax payers had to cough up as part of the "safety net" is no longer required, so the £406 is an increase in real terms of 17 per cent.

Both the Tories and Labour Leader Dick Knowles blame local non-payers, whom they claim are responsible for £25 out of the £406.

The City Treasurer estimated non-payment of the Poll Tax for 1990-91 at 2.5 per cent. He now says it will be between 7 and 8 per cent, a shortfall in collection of £21.7 million. However the real percentage of non-payment for this year must be 30-40 per cent, since the actual amount collected so far in Poll Tax and Business Rate is £280 million, a shortfall of £90.3 million or 25 per cent.

70,000 summonses for non-payment have been issued in Leeds, where Courts have dealt with most cases in a few seconds. Cllr Garth Frankland argued that the Tax was unconstitutional. He lasted four and a half minutes! Two special courts are kept in constant session. The local Anti-Poll Tax Union is trying to help people in confusing conditions.

Cllr Frankland received notification of deduction from wages within a couple of days of his appearance in Court - without having to fill in any forms. This gives some idea of the kind of records the Council now holds on local people.

Leeds Council is now publicly threatening non-payers with gaol. After much hesitation the Labour Group accepted a code of practice for bailiffs; on the ground, however, there does not seem any evidence of this. The gaol threats have never been discussed in the Labour Group and even ex-left Leader Jon Trickett seemed unaware of them.

The Poll Tax claimed a welcome victim in York last month. A £10,000 "uniform business rate" increase on the old local business rate forced the closure of the local Conservative Club. Time, gentlemen, please.

Official figure - over 1.2 million summary warrants (liability orders) have been sent out in Scotland.

Lothian Anti-Poll Tax Union used their hot-line and telephone tree network to muster support for an anti-war demo outside the US Consulate in Edinburgh. 500-600 turned up.

For the third year running, the Lothian Council meeting to set the Poll Tax was disrupted by independent anti-Poll Tax activists. Four anti-Poll Tax speakers were allowed to address the meeting. The last speaker said " We are here to blow the whistle on you and give your Council the Red Card... ". On this cue 15 demonstrators got up blowing whistles and brandishing red cards. The gallery was cleared by the Police; four were arrested;two were charged. The 1991/2 level was set at £584 for Edinburgh - after £20 million of cuts.

Lothian has over 200,000 non-payers and 45 sheriff officers. At this rate of work it will take them 15 years to deal with all the non-payers.

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