BRIEFING

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

May 1991 80p/60p

Free Kurdistan!

BEFORE THE eyes of the world one of the greatest massacres of our time is taking place in south Kurdistan.

Troops loyal to the Saddam regime, using weapons of mass destruction like napalm and poison gas, have killed and injured hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people. Most of the victims are women, children and old people. Millions have fled from the cities into the mountains and are now living there under indescribable conditions of misery and starvation.

The US and its imperialist allies are blind to these atrocities. There is complete agreement between the US and its puppet Turkish Republic that the present regime in Iraq must be preserved. They oppose any form of democratic government which represents the interests of Arab and Kurdish peoples.

Once again events in south Kurdistan prove the hypocrisy of imperialist propaganda about "human rights and peace". Imperialism which brought humanity to the brink of a new world war over the occupation of Kuwait with its 600,000 citizens cynically ignores the grief and agony of 6,000,000 Kurds devastated by Saddam's barbarous attacks.

ERNK

National Liberation Front of Kurdistan
European Section

The Turkish Republic is playing a duplicitous role. On the one hand it appears to support the imperialists' "humanitarian" solution to the Kurdish problem while, on the other, it indirectly assists the suppression of the uprising in south Kurdistan with military operations against the radical Kurdish national movement on the other side of the border. Recently, units of the Turkish army, protected by helicopters, crossed the Iraqi bor-

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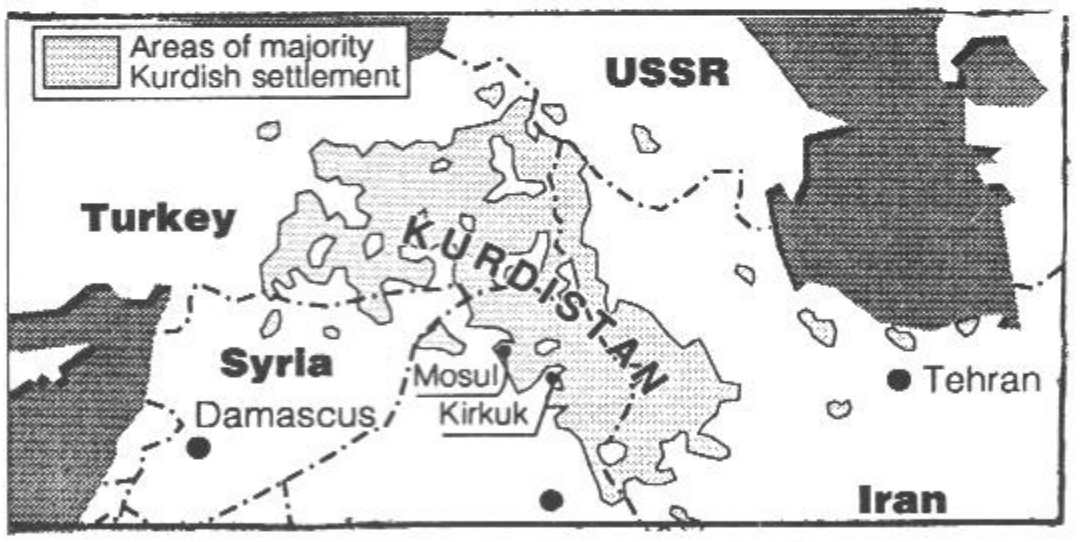
army, protected by helicopters, crossed the Iraqi border at Uludere and attacked the camps of the PKP (Kurdistan Workers Party).

The fascist Iraqi regime, with the acquiescence of US and British imperialism, is determined to drown the Kurdish peoples' rights in blood and perpetrate horrors worse than the Halabja massacre. Whole towns and villages with their occupants are being pitilessly destroyed to satisfy the blood-lust of this brutal Ba'athist dictatorship. Entire areas of Kurdistan are being depopulated and an army of refugees is flooding into Turkey and Iran. Saddam Hussein has set out to preserve and consolidate the basis of his power and the source of his vast personal fortune: the unitary Iraqi state created by British imperialism in the 1920s.

World imperialism despite its tactical difference with Saddam on Kuwait unconditionally supports him in this strategic aim. British Tory complicity in this is explicit: Douglas Hurd wrote to Sir Thomas Arnold MP on March 18th: **"The frontier line between Turkey and Iraq was laid down by 5th June 1926 Treaty between UK and Iraq, and Turkey. There can therefore be no question of our pursuing or seeking support for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state within these frontiers."**

The overthrow of this racist unitary state is a precondition for Kurdish freedom. Autonomy is not an answer but a blind alley. Only self-determination and the unification of the four occupied areas of Kurdistan and the 25 million Kurds into a separate Kurdish state can and will bring peace, harmony and stability to the region.

We therefore demand the withdrawal of all foreign occupation forces from Iraq and Kurdistan. We urge the nations of the Middle East - Arabs, Jews, Turkomans, Persians, Azeris, Baluchis and Kurds - to unite in a common struggle to destroy imperialist economic and political domination. We call on the Turkish, Iranian and Syrian governments to repeal all anti-Kurdish legislation, release all political prisoners and recognise the rights of Kurdish people to secede.



The bloody defeat of the Kurdish people's uprising in south Kurdistan cannot be blamed exclusively on the enemy. Responsibility rests equally on the Kurdish leadership in this area who pinned their hopes on imperialism. **This traditional leadership, by relying on the promises and plans of imperialism, has demonstrated its complete bankruptcy and brought another tragedy on the Kurdish people.**

This massacre and the new situation testify to the fact that the Kurdish nation can achieve its liberation from imperialism and bring about independence, democracy and socialism only in so far as it relies on its own inherent strength and the united struggle of all the peoples in the region.

Tribune calls *Labour Briefing* ..."a tyre-slasher's delight"

● *Labour Briefing* is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is produced by a democratic, anti-sectarian network of Labour and trade union activists and is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. The next NEB meeting will be held in London on May 26th.

● **All articles published in *Labour Briefing* reflect the opinions of the authors alone unless otherwise indicated.** *Briefing* welcomes criticisms and contributions. Please keep us posted on what's going on in your area. The deadline for the next issue is May 13th.

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

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We say: *Labour must speak out for Kurdish freedom*

AS WE go to press 1,000 Kurds a day are perishing in the mountain death-traps along the Turkish-Iraqi border.

The imperialist alliance which transplanted a massive modern army with all mod cons (Patriot missiles, field hospitals, etc.) to the desert of Saudi Arabia cannot now find the will or the wherewithal to make a fraction of that effort to relieve the suffering Kurds.

Britain spent £1.5 billion on the Gulf War but can now stump up only 1-2% of that amount in what is tokenistic "humanitarian aid".

The hypocrisy of Bush and Major over the invasion of Kuwait now stands exposed before the whole world. No one can now believe that this was a war fought for human rights or self-determination.

On the contrary, it was a war fought exclusively to promote the interests of Western capitalist powers in the Middle East. The reason that assistance to the Kurds has been so feeble is that those interests are incompatible with the Kurds' just demands for democratic rights, self-determination and their own nation-state.

Which explains why Neil Kinnock has remained so circumspect during this whole affair. With people all over the country enraged by the crimes being perpetrated against the Kurds by both Iraq and Turkey, you would have thought Kinnock, the avowed electoralist for whom nothing matters but "to win", would at least call for a stepping up of the relief programme.

He might also demand an opening of the Turkish border so that the entrapped Kurds could descend from the mountains into the safety and shelter of the lower valleys. He might meet publicly with Kurdish representatives and even announce that he supported their long-standing demand for Kurdish unity and independence.

Any of these actions would evoke a warm popular response - and they would be the minimum actions required by socialist standards of international solidarity.

But no, Kinnock restricts his public comments to countering Major's "safe haven" brainstorm with a crack-pot proposal for a UN investigation into "allegations" of genocide against Saddam Hussein, which may not be of any assistance to the Kurds but has the merit of preparing the ground for yet another Western aerial attack on the innocent citizens of Iraq.

The fact is that when it comes to foreign affairs Kinnock's first loyalty is to Whitehall and Washington. Their approval is clearly far more important to him than the approbation of the working class voters of Britain.

No wonder the result in the Neath by-election revealed so little enthusiasm for Labour. We have a better than even shot at winning the next general election, whenever it comes, but we can only make the most out of the Tories' disarray by staking out clear socialist alternatives now - not least on fundamental internationalist questions such as those raised by the current Kurdish tragedy.

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Reproduced courtesy of Steve Bell

Turkey's war against the Kurds

CLEARLY, the tragedy that is unfolding on the Iraqi-Turkish and Iraqi-Iranian borders is of colossal proportions and requires international aid on a massive scale. Everything must be done to alleviate immediately the devastating conditions which the Iraqi Kurds are

Aydin Bulut

now facing and prevent more and more of them from perishing.

However we should not lose sight that behind this human tragedy lies the national oppression of the Kurds and their long struggle for national liberation. On this fundamental question Western governments have turned their backs on the Kurdish people. The fact is that the West has held back from supporting the Kurds for fear of upsetting their client states in the Middle East and thereby putting at risk its control over the region's oil resources.

No one has pleaded harder with Bush not to encourage the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq than Turkish President Turgut Ozal. The Turkish state has always feared that a strong movement for Kurdish independence either in Iran or Iraq could spill over into Turkish Kurdistan and arouse the national consciousness of its 12-15 million Kurdish inhabitants.

The repression of Kurds in Turkey is intense. Kurds have spent 46 of the 70 years of the Turkish Republic under martial law. Since the last military coup in 1980, 670,000 Kurds have been arrested. But in spite of decades of brutal rule, during which even the very word Kurd has been outlawed, the Kurdish regions of Turkey have in the last year seen mass mobilisations against the military and the security forces. There is an ongoing guerilla war waged by the Kurdish Workers Party.

This partly explains why the Turkish government and its army have been extraordinarily reluctant to help the Kurdish refugees at the Turkish border. In spite of Ozal's recent conciliatory gestures toward the Kurds - he has even indicated a wish to see Turkey become the "guardian" of the Kurds in Iraq - the Turkish state cannot be a genuine ally of the Kurdish people in Iraq because of its long-standing hostility to Kurdish rights within Turkey.

This is also true for the other two countries which have annexed parts of Kurdistan, Iran and Syria. It has become quite evident, over years of national struggle, that the Kurds have no reliable international allies. Every time they have attempted to obtain support, either regionally or internationally, they have been manipulated and betrayed. All the more reason for the labour and socialist movement around the world to embrace the Kurdish cause and start serious thinking about how best to promote the Kurdish struggle for self-determination.

The recently-formed Stop the Genocide in Kurdistan Committee can help develop real solidarity with the Kurdish revolution. It calls for an end to the genocide in Kurdistan and defence of the Kurdish people's right to self-determination.

■ **The Stop the Genocide in Kurdistan Committee appeals for support from the British labour movement and can be contacted on 071 226 8647.**

ALF LOMAS MEP

Greetings

for

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Channel 4: champion of free speech?

***Mick Gosling** charges TV's self-proclaimed liberals with hypocrisy over Ireland.*

SHOULD C for Channel 4 and H for hypocrisy now be added to the A-Z of censorship which accompanied the C4 season of "banned" films and programmes?

In the preamble to the screening of *Mother Ireland* on April 11th, Channel 4 disclaimed any responsibility for the original suppression of the film in 1988. It did not explain that it had paid for the film to be made and had failed to exercise its option to screen it first.

The film which followed was not the one which won the best documentary award at the International Women's Film Festival in Paris in 1989, but a version cut at the request of Channel 4 in 1988.

Mother Ireland includes an interview with Mairead Farrell, one of three IRA members shot dead by the SAS in Gibraltar on March 6th 1988. But it was not banned, as Channel 4 suggested, as a result of the government broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein, which was announced by Douglas Hurd on October 19th 1988.

The film had been delivered to Channel 4 as early as March 2nd of that year. Even after the Gibraltar shootings, Channel 4's own legal department concluded in a three-page report that nothing needed to be cut from the programme and recommended that it be shown as a whole.

It was Channel 4 management that requested the changes, none of which involved interviews. These were reluctantly agreed to by the Derry Film and Video Workshop. Out went rare archive footage of Emma Groves being blinded by a rubber bullet in 1972, film of women marching on and surrounding a British army post, a background song by Christy Moore called Unfinished Revolution, and Italian TV footage of women sitting in a room with weapons.

It was this cut version of *Mother Ireland* which Channel 4 sent to the Independent Broadcasting Authority in mid-May 1988. It was neither banned nor approved, but sat on. Finally, on October 19th 1988, Channel 4 said it would broadcast the film if Mairead Farrell was cut out. That same day the whole exercise became academic. Hurd announced the broadcasting ban, ruling out five of the film's eleven interviews.

One is left wondering whether Channel 4, let alone the IBA, really wanted to show *Mother Ireland* at that time. The furore over Thames TV's *Death on the Rock* was at its height. De-regulation of commercial television was on the way. In those conditions a controversial film from Ireland must have been a most unwelcome hot potato.

In a season of films committed to freedom of expression and the public's right to know, it is disgraceful that Channel 4 never attempted to restore the cuts in *Mother Ireland* and sought to disguise its own role in the original censorship of the film. So long as self-censorship prevails amongst broadcasters on issues of social and political sensitivity, there is little chance of challenging the heavier hand of official secrecy and government interference.

The figure of *"Mother Ireland"* is an old symbol of nationalism, Ireland as a woman calling on her sons to fight for her. It emerged in the eighteenth century as a metaphor, a way to evade political censorship. Some things never change.

MICK GOSLING, writing here in a personal capacity, works for the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom.

The CPBF is currently screening a series of films entitled "Ireland: In Focus" in conjunction with the Connolly Association. The final film *The Irishmen: Impressions of Exile* will be shown at the Unity Club, 96 Dalston Lane, London E8, on Monday 13 May at 8pm. Made for the BBC in 1965 but never shown, the film lets migrant labourers from rural west Ireland who came to England to work on the construction of the Victoria Underground Line and the M1 tell their own story. Their lives are celebrated on the soundtrack by songs specially written by Ewan MacColl.

"This May Day remember the struggle of the Kurdish people for self determination in Turkey, Iraq and Iran. We send socialist greetings to the DKP, PKK, and the Komalla. Nationhood cannot long be delayed!"

— paid for by —
Hackney trades unionists

ISLINGTON NORTH LABOUR PARTY

May Day Greetings to the international labour movement:
For justice and equality everywhere!

Remember the Kurdish people!
Defeat the Tories!

JEREMY CORBYN MP,
OSCAR ABRAMS Chair,
KEITH VENESS Agent

Barrow's bourgeois boot-boys

As defence workers in Barrow in Cumbria face the dole, many are asking how it all went wrong. ***Hyder Prodhan,*** *Barrow and Furness CLP, puts the blame where it belongs and calls for a "workers' counter-offensive".*

THE RECENT announcement by Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd Chief Executive, Noel Davies, that over 5,500 jobs are to be axed at the Barrow shipyard has sent the town reeling.

Over half the local adult population work in the yard and many other jobs in this company town depend upon VSEL.

This, of course, is of no concern to the ruthless VSEL bosses. Announcing the redundancies, Davies said, "It's going to be uncomfortable, but I'm sure we can maintain company profitability." Then he put the boot in by stating, "If VSEL fails to broaden its shipbuilding base or significantly diversify into commercial engineering there would only be work for 5,000 and at that figure the yard would not be viable."



VSEL Chairman is Lord Chalfont, a minister in the 1964 Labour Government, who left the Party in 1974. Chalfont, a Thatcher favourite, is keen on the murderous Contras and chaired a 1987 press conference given by Contra leader, Adolfo Calero. He was also President of Freedom in Sport, a front organisation for Apartheid.

VSEL (which was privatised in 1986) recently announced pre-tax profits of £33.4 million, a 95% increase over last year. The Financial Times reports that these profits are set to rise yet further in every one of the three years in which the job cuts take effect. Such is the barbarism of capitalism.

In 1984 CND funded a Barrow alternative employment research worker, who with Trades Council support produced a report arguing for diversification and a shift away from weapons of mass destruction (including Trident submarines) to socially useful products. Needless to say, VSEL's smug bosses, backed up by their Tory friends, rubbished the report.

Local Tory MP and rabid right-winger Cecil Franks was elected in 1983 and retained the seat in 1989 solely on the basis of his pro-Trident stance. If unilateralist Labour won the election, Franks, demanded, "What'll the lads do on Monday morning?" This bourgeois boot-boy should now answer his own question. Thanks to him, his government and his friends in VSEL management, the lads (and lasses) will now be slung on to the dole.

The local paper reports "anger, bitterness and despair" at the yard. Workers are scathing about Chief Executive Davies. Many came to Barrow from some distance, lured by the promise of work for ever. They now see management as a bunch of cynical liars who don't give a damn for a workforce which has created vast profits for them.

One yard-worker described the atmosphere inside VSEL: "It's like an army camp. If you don't stand to attention when the bosses walk around they want to know what you are doing." Workers were furious that the media knew what was happening before they did.

Barrow's big-wigs seem to be united in a common response to the disaster. The Borough Council, the County Council, Cumbria Training and Enterprise Council, Furness Business Initiative, VSEL itself, Cecil Franks and Tory Euro MP Lord Inglewood, are all looking to European community assistance. They want a special development agency to bring new jobs to the town in conjunction with assisted area status to attract new firms. This bourgeois popular front has also had the benefit of advice from Tory Trade and Industry Secretary Edward Leigh.

But should Barrow's workers just sit back and wait for the powers-that-be to sort out a mess of their own creation? Surely, a ruling class offensive must be met with a working-class counter-offensive. But the bureaucratic, right-wing leaders of the local Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions are not up to the job. Workers need to use all the tried and trusted methods: occupations, work-ins (remember UCS), and strike action.

The market means misery for Barrow. VSEL must be taken back into public ownership under real workers' control. The Labour Party in Barrow should get out of the talking shops and on to the streets. It should organise a protest march and rally on the theme of "No Nukes, No Job Cuts", and give solidarity to every action taken by VSEL workers in their fight to save jobs.

Arms and the electorate

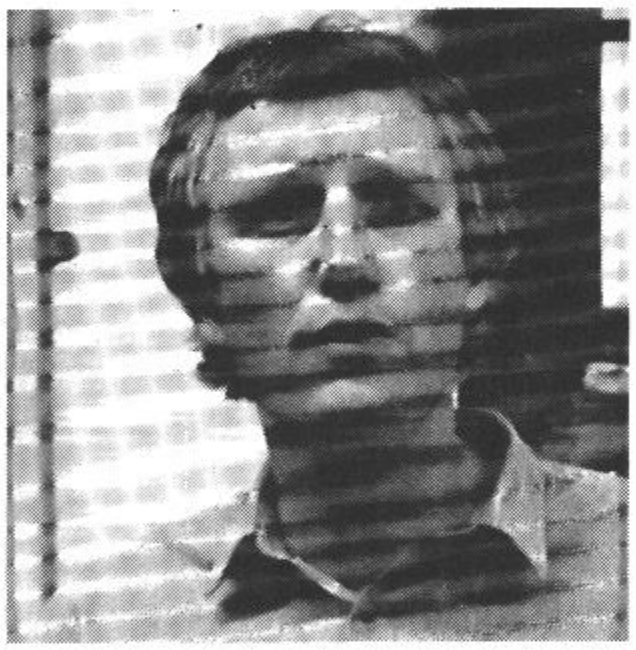
John Wilton, *Birmingham Edgbaston's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, has been on the doorstep campaigning for socialism in the local council elections.*

TWO years ago an arms fair was held at the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) in Birmingham. Of course, it wasn't called an arms fair. Its official title, straight out of the Windscale-into-Sellafield book of deception, was "Defence Components and Equipment Exhibition". Despite vocal protests, the 1989 fair went ahead. Now another one is scheduled for May 14th-16th.

The Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) group in Birmingham has been mobilising against this year's fair. Letters of protest organised by CAAT flooded into the Birmingham Council House and the office of Labour Leader, Dick Knowles.

Fortunately, an arms fair in the wake of the Gulf War was too awkward even for the Labour right. The Group leadership bowed to pressure and agreed to cancel the fair.

Unfortunately, the board which runs the NEC includes Tory Councillors and unelected representatives of "business" like Sir Adrian Cadbury and the President of the Birmingham Chamber of



Commerce. Sir Adrian decided cancelling the Arms Fair wouldn't be good for his "chocolate soldier" sales market and along with his cronies insisted that the "death business" must carry on.

Nonetheless, it was a welcome victory in the Labour Group. A pledge to terminate the exhibition contract "as soon as legally possible" was even included in our manifesto for the Council elections, though the manifesto's commitment to "world peace" is a bit difficult to swallow in the wake of the Labour Group's support for the Gulf War.

The war and its horrific aftermath, especially for the Kurds, has come up frequently on the doorstep during the local election campaign. The reality that the war had nothing to do with democracy and human rights and everything to do with US and British imperialist interests in the Middle East is being brought home to people daily on their TV screens.

Local election campaigning in Birmingham is a major effort. There are local elections in each ward three years out of four. As the wards all have around 10,000 households, canvassing is a daunting task.

Last year we lost in our ward to the Tories by only 47 votes (cutting down a Tory majority of 1,200 the year before and 2,700 the year before that). The Green took 500 plus votes to help keep the Tory in. We pride ourselves that this year our election address is printed on 100% recycled paper.

Labour's Black internationalists

MORE than a hundred Black activists from as far afield as Manchester, Bristol, and Cleveland gathered for the Labour Party Black Section's eighth annual meeting in Tottenham on the weekend of March 23rd-24th. It was reckoned to be the largest policy-making meeting of Black politicians in Europe.

Cllr. Narendra Makanji
Haringey

The weekend had a strong international emphasis. A statement from the Black Section's National Executive condemned the imperialist Gulf War, in which more than 150,000 Iraqis were killed.

The newly-elected president of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, Clarence Makwetu, sent a solidarity message to the meeting and Nat Masemola, a senior member of the African National Congress, attended personally and gave a powerful speech.

The conference backed two papers tabled by the Black Sections' National Executive. One of them sketched out an election strategy for local, national and Euopean contests. This strongly criticised the Labour Party for obstructing the selection of Black candidates, particularly in parliamentary seats like Vauxhall, Nottingham East, Bethnal Green and Stepney, Birmingham Small Heath , Perry Barr and Southall.

Black Sections are demanding all-Black shortlists in Black seats (the more than fifty parliamentary constituencies where the Black population is at least 15%). Black candidates should also be automatically shortlisted if nominated.

The second National Executive paper, which received overwhelming support, called for electoral reform. Proportional representation could be an important means of ensuring fair Black political representation. At the moment there are just four Black MPs when, proportional to our numbers, there should be more than thirty.

The meeting also backed the continued existence of local authority race units, many of which are being closed by Labour councils.

Following the success of the Black Socialist Society resolution at last year's Party Conference, Black Sections have submitted a draft constitution for the new society to the NEC. This has already received support from major unions and other affiliates. It is hoped that branches of the new society will soon be established, at last guaranteeing an independent Black voice in the Labour Party.

As always, Black Sections is well-organised to counter delaying tactics from a frightened Labour leadership.

Self-inflicted wound number 1,111

***Seven Bristol councillors** have been kicked out of the City's Labour Group for defying the Poll Tax. In the following extracts from their open letter, they defend their actions.*

THE Bristol Labour Group leadership seems intent on shooting itself in the foot. Just when the Tories have announced that the Poll Tax is about to be scrapped Labour councillors representing key wards in key parliamentary marginals are being disciplined for opposing it.

During the May 1990 elections a number of Labour candidates campaigned against the Poll Tax and stated quite clearly to voters that they were not paying their Poll Tax and would support anyone else who was doing the same. In Boston ward, where the fight was between Labour and the Liberals, non-payment was the one clear policy dividing the two parties and resulted in a rout of the Liberals and, for the first time, two Labour councillors for the ward.

How many times have we heard people on the doorstep say that what is promised during elections is forgotten after the result? At least that hasn't been said in the 1991 election campaign in Boston.

Recent figures from the Audit Commission and the Institute of Public Finance, not exactly anti-Poll Tax "fronts", show that there are 14 million non-payers, 7.5 million outstanding court cases, and £1 billion uncollected at the end of the financial year. How then can some councillors claim that those of us who support the non-payment campaign are "unrepresentative"?

We are also committed to protecting jobs and services. One of the major justifications for the leadership's proposal to set a £59.4 million budget was that it **wasn't** a cuts budget. At one point Council leader Graham Robertson even claimed it was really a £67.5 million budget - it just cost somewhat less!

However, 14% of overall spending that was to be cut from the budget was "detailed" in an amendment that struggled to fill a piece of A4 paper.

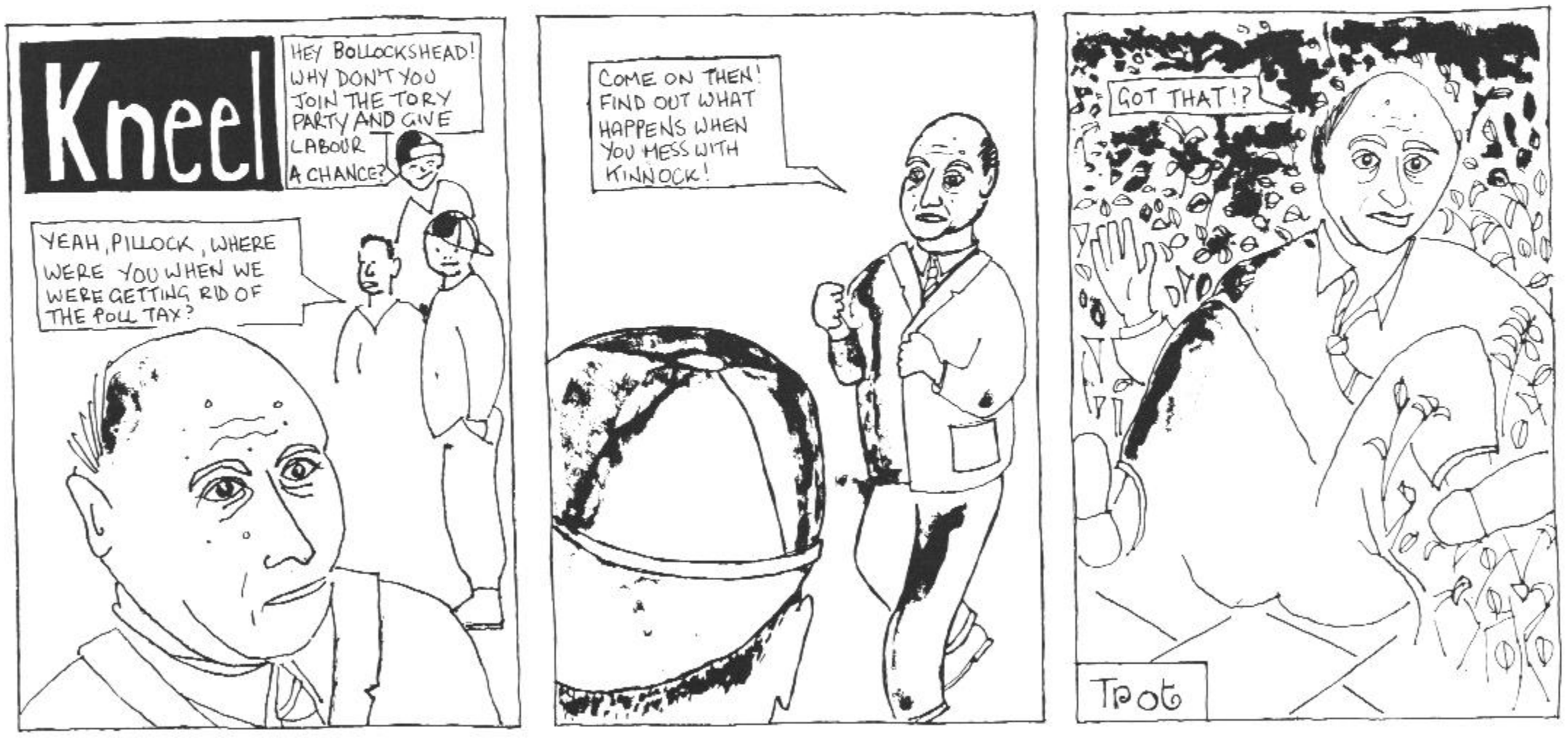
We were not able to support this budget. A memorandum from the City Treasurer to Chief Officers and Heads of Departments confirmed that cuts in jobs and services were the inevitable result of the budget, contrary to the clearly stated policy of both the Labour Group and the District Labour Party.

On too many occasions when difficult decisions had to be taken vital information was not made available and too often the Labour Group was presented with a "fait accompli". This year the "consultation" meeting with the District Labour Party was looking at a "doomsday scenario" of cuts in jobs and services that were clearly not going to be the proposals that went to full Council. The real budget was being worked out among a small clique of Labour councillors and was given to the wider Group only a few days before the final decision had to be taken. It was never discussed by the full District Labour Party and the detail necessary to make any informed decision was never provided.

It appears at times that the Group's disciplinary procedures are based more on the whims and political fancies of the Group leadership than on any set of rules. Some councillors break Group policy on any number of occasions, yet no action is taken.

Labour councillors should accept that disagreement and debate are political assets and should be seen and portrayed as such. The alternative is a sterile Labour Group, devoid of ideas, unable to serve the interests of working people in Bristol.

■ The seven suspended Labour councillors are Robin Moss, Dave Sutton, Hedley Bashforth, Pat McLaren, John Rumble, Keith Yarwood, Christina Stokes. Hedley Bashforth has been selected by Bristol West Labour Party to fight William Waldegrave at the general election.



NEC: deconstructing the Party

MONTHLY meetings of the National Executive are now almost entirely concerned with disciplinary matters and constitutional changes as the Labour leadership seeks to exert a control over the Party unparalleled in Labour's history.

Richard Heffernan
Hornsey and Wood Green CLP

Liverpool has long born the brunt of this offensive. In recent months 29 councillors, a majority of the Liverpool Labour Group, have been suspended by the NEC, which has also taken control of the candidates' panel for the local elections. Anyone associated with the left has been excluded. The March NEC took the next step by charging a number of the suspended councillors with Militant membership and referring them to the NCC for certain expulsion.

The Executive also suspended thirteen Lambeth councillors (see page 11). Its willingness to deconstruct Labour Groups from above, effectively creating hung councils and ceding real power to Liberals and Tories, is a foretaste of the kind of coalition politics we may see after the next general election.

While they were at it, the lopsided right-wing NEC majority also struck nineteen Party members in John Evans' St Helen's bailiwick off the panel, reconfirmed the suspension of Nottingham East CLP (one of Labour's key marginals), "disapproved" of the behaviour of one Notts East Party member, referred another to the NCC and resolved to further investigate a third, Steve Battlemuch, "in respect of alleged association with *Socialist Organiser*".

Not content with attacks on individual members, the NEC endorsed a major package of constitutional proposals designed to further entrench power at the Party's apex.

Yet another "consultation" paper on parliamentary selection was approved. The "trigger mechanism", a vote by all members of a constituency on whether or not to have a selection, is complemented by a proposal to replace the present A, B, C and W lists with a single list of NEC-approved candidates.

A paper laughably entitled "Democracy and Policy Making for the 1990s" was agreed. Subject to ratification by the first conference after the general election, this will establish a 194-member National Policy Forum which will usurp many of the policy-making functions of annual conference.

The 194-strong Forum will be elected every two years and will include the 29 members of the NEC, eight members of the Cabinet/ Shadow Cabinet (with observer status for all other Cabinet/Shadow Cabinet members) plus a further ten members of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Eleven seats will be given to unspecified Women's Organisations elected at regional Women's Conferences and eleven places to Black and Asian members also elected, for the time being, at regional conferences.

Only 35 of the 194 will be Constituency Party representatives, "elected" at Regional Conferences. Thirty-five trade union representatives will also be elected from the regions but it is proposed that an additional 25 places be allocated to the trade unions on a national basis. So much for the "death knell of the block vote", John Edmonds.

In addition, the Co-op, socialist societies, youth and students, councillors and MEPs are allocated a further 30 places.

The NEC is sending these proposals out for the usual charade of "consultation". Constituencies (most of which will be fighting local elections) have one month to respond.

The trade union block vote will ensure that all Policy Forum decisions are rubber-stamped by annual conference, which will become a ritualistic rally devoted to the personage of the Party leader.

Hung up on PR

IN A letter to the Guardian, Labour councillor Robert Ross of Bedfordshire writes: "Anyone wishing to study the consequences of PR/hung councils may wish to study severely hung Bedfordshire County Council...readers may conclude that there was a pre-election pact and that the leaderships of the Liberal and Labour Parties have consistently conspired to undermine the democratic process by secretly agreeing budgets, policy and strategy right down to the fine detail, and that the Liberal tail has consistently wagged the Labour dog."

Reports that Kinnock is considering the option of a referendum on PR - and no doubt toying with the idea of a coalition with the Liberals in a hung parliament - make it doubly important that we fend off this major threat to our chances of a future Labour government.

Bryn Griffiths
Tottenham CLP

Branches should pass the First Past The Post Campaign model resolution:

"Annual Conference is extremely concerned that the introduction of Proportional Representation (PR) into House of Commons elections would virtually end our chances of ever forming another Labour government, with all that this implies for working people.

Conference notes that under PR:

1. Previous Labour governments would simply not have existed; Labour has never won as much as 50% of the vote.

2. The British people would no longer be able to elect a Labour government committed to our Manifesto. Most coalitions would exclude Labour. Any coalition would exclude key Labour policies.

3. In the British context there would be a continuous succession of coalitions. Small anti-union and anti-Labour parties - whether "liberal" or racist - would needlessly be handed the balance of power and would wield influence completely disproportionate to their support. This is also the case with the Alternative Vote (AV) system which gives equal weight to the second and even third choices of voters, whenever the front-runner secures less than 50%. Under the AV system the Liberal Democrats could become the largest Parliamentary group.

4. Whichever system is opted for - large multi-member constituencies, AV or list systems - the accountability of Labour MP's to their constituency parties would end.

Conference therefore resolves to uphold the First Past the Post system."

● The First Past the Post Campaign is circulating a statement entitled "Victory for Labour - oppose PR" for sponsorship by Labour Party affiliates (rates: national & regional organisations £25; CLPs, Labour Party branches, Co-op parties, etc. £10; individuals £10.) Copies are available from: Bob Cryer MP, First Past the Post Campaign, 22 Edmund Street, Bradford, West Yorks BD5 OB0H. ●

Campaigning councillors...not company directors

Currently suspended from Party membership by Labour's National Executive, ***Lesley Hammond*** *is one of London's longest serving Labour councillors. She was first elected to Lambeth Council in 1974 and served as chair of the Social Services Committee. As a GLC councillor she was vice-chair of the Housing Committee and for eight years until abolition was ILEA Chief Whip. Now in her second stint as a Lambeth councillor, she has voted against cuts in the Council Chamber, still hasn't paid her Poll Tax and faces possible expulsion from the Party.* ***Briefing*** *interviewed Lesley at Lambeth Town Hall.*

Briefing: ***After ten years in leadership positions, you have now resigned as Chair of Lambeth's Education Committee. Why?***
LH: People just didn't believe the cuts would happen - they're so horrendous. They affect everyone - middle class and working class alike. Some of the youth centres I started as chair of Social Services and which we took over under ILEA are now being cut. You see things you built up being destroyed. We couldn't just play around with the amounts of money involved; the scale of cuts was simply too great. Last year my Constituency Labour Party, Norwood, asked us to stay in power and vote for cuts, which were at that time much smaller than in other London boroughs, especially in education. But this year I argued in Norwood that we should oppose cuts and the local Party agreed.

B: ***How do you see your role as councillor?***
LH: Soon after I first went on the council I became involved in a local campaign to set up a kids' playspace on empty land which the council wanted to fill with council dustcarts! That's the sort of campaigning role I saw for councillors. You should be on the council to be an enabler of local people, to let them have a say in how their lives are run, while providing the money for services.

B: ***But you've been a councillor through difficult times before - the abolition first of the GLC and then of the ILEA and cuts in Lambeth in the early 80s. What's different now?***
LH: Central government has cut off the money and you can no longer provide services either directly or indirectly. Because of legislation - Care in the Community, Competitive Tendering, Local Management of Schools - it's not like serving on a council any more. You're overseeing small companies which have to make a profit. You can't even plough any profits back into the community because they all go to cover council debts. The council is like a business and you're just a company director.

B: ***Should leader Joan Twelves and other chairs follow your example and resign their positions?***
LH: I think Joan should have resigned as leader. If we'd all resigned and formed a majority opposition it might have been possible to harness local support. That way we could have worked with the community.

B: ***Joan Twelves has said that she was acting similarly to Ted Knight in office, with a "dented shield" policy. Do you agree?***
LH: I wasn't on Lambeth council from 81 to 86 so I can't comment in detail. However, I do know that Ted had the unions, community groups and tenants associations all working together. That doesn't happen now. I do think it is still possible to involve people in decision-making and work through difficult situations together. But the elected members are building up walls between themselves and the community.

B: ***So how do you see your future over the next few months?***
LH: As a backbencher I hope to return to the 1974 days, campaigning with local community groups and TAs, though it must be said the community itself has changed since then. One of my local TAs, for example, is now campaigning to form its own management company to run the estate.

B: ***And the witch-hunt?***
LH: I find it ironic. National union leaders including Alan Black, joint secretary of UCATT, asked the NEC to get rid of us because, they said, we'd lose the next election for Lambeth. But on Whitley Council, the national negotiating machinery for council unions, where I'm the only woman councillor, Alan Black is always asking me as a left-winger to defend his members against the bosses!

DEFEND DEMOCRACY IN LAMBETH!
Lift the suspensions!

PUBLIC MEETING:
TUESDAY, APRIL 30th, 7.30 pm,
LAMBETH TOWN HALL

Speakers include: TONY BENN, DENNIS SKINNER, JOAN TWELVES, ALISON HIGGS, TED KNIGHT and SHARON ATKIN.

AFFILIATE TO LAMBETH AGAINST THE WITCH-HUNT

■ Suggested amounts: £10 CLPs/unions; £5 wards/sections; £3 or more (£1 unwaged) individuals. Contact: Lambeth Against the Witch-hunt, c/o 264 Rosendale Road, London SE24 9DL; telephone 081-769-6803.

Bound, gagged...and suspended

***Greg Tucker**, one of thirteen Lambeth councillors recently suspended by Labour's National Executive, reports the latest moves in the South London witch-hunt.*

IN A well-advertised but unprecedented move Labour's National Executive decided at its March meeting to suspend thirteen Lambeth councillors along with two other local Party members.

A further investigation is likely to result in charges against the fifteen being brought before the National Constitutional Committee, which could decide to expel any or all of us.

At the time of writing, the Lambeth Labour Group is defying the NEC. It voted, with only five against, to ignore the suspensions and keep the thirteen councillors in the Group.

Among those suspended are the leader, deputy leader, chief whip and mayor, along with the nine councillors who voted against cuts in March. The two others are anti-Poll Tax activists Steve Nally and Kevin Fernandes.

In an exercise of which the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad would be proud, the names of the "guilty" were found first - and the "evidence" against them invented afterwards.

The central allegation against council leader Joan Twelves reads: "That over the last two years there has been a lack of decisive leadership from... the leader...who has on many occasions been in breach of the decisions and policies of Group".

In fact for the last two years the Group has endorsed virtually every one of Joan Twelves' proposals, making it rather difficult for her to be in breach of anything.

It is clear from the tenor of Joyce Gould's report that "a lack of decisive leadership" means simply not making more cuts than the government required (as demanded by the LCC) and "advocating a strategy of confrontation with central government".

As evidence against the Birmingham Six the West Midlands police used a faulty smear test; in Lambeth we just got the smear. The NEC decided that there had been "intimidation" of moderate councillors, though it admits there is no evidence on this count. Gould's report says: "Although there may be no connection it cannot be proven - one woman councillor had her door daubed and another her car tyre slashed" (sic). If no connection can be proven - and it cannot because there is none - why include the allegation in the first place?

The litany of crimes I am supposed to have committed includes: **"April 1988 - opposed cuts; September 1989 - article in Briefing opposing views of Group; Summer 1989 - statement in NALGO journal opposing all aspects of Poll Tax; July 1990 - moved to invite Sinn Fein councillors".**

It's clear, however, what the NEC regards as our most heinous offenses: **"February 1991 - voted for resolution on Gulf; February 1991 - voted against use of bailiffs".**

On both these issues all thirteen of us voted in line with Group policy, as did most of the rest of the Labour councillors. Only the LCC gang broke the whip.

Lambeth Against the Witch-hunt is now backed by a majority of local ward branches. Its strength is that it is not led by the suspended councillors but by local party and trade union activists. Its first meeting after the NEC decision attracted over eighty people.

All thirteen of us have been banned from holding any Party office, serving as GC delegates, or even attending meetings of the wards we represent as councillors (unless we also live in the ward). For the moment the two affected GCs, Vauxhall and Norwood, are abiding by this rule. We do not want to provoke the closure of the local Parties, which have overwhelmingly supported us.

At the Group meeting following the NEC decision, Joyce Gould was present to see we did as we were told. But all her veiled and not-so-veiled threats failed to impress the Group, which agreed to continue meeting as a group of forty. In a desperate effort to save face Gould was reduced to counting votes as if the thirteen were not present — the resulting 17-5 majority was just another slap in the face for the NEC.

Cuts bite deep but resistance grows

LABOUR'S NEC joins with the Tory government to attack Lambeth Council. Council leader Joan Twelves and the Labour Group majority pass the attack on to the council workforce and community.

Hundreds of workers have been sent redundancy notices. Voluntary groups, advice, youth, play and other projects are being closed down. Childcare services, adult and further education are being devastated.

Cllr. Greg Tucker
Lambeth

But resistance is growing.The Lambeth Anti-Cuts Campaign is bringing together Council trades unionists, voluntary groups, and councillors opposed to the cuts.

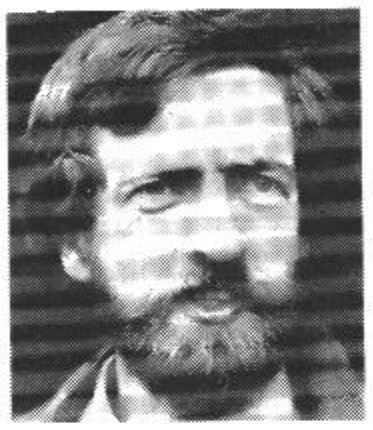
Council committees are being lobbied. One meeting was abandoned and turned into a public rally discussing how to oppose the cuts when over one hundred angry workers and community activists turned up.

The government's capping of Lambeth could lead to another £8 million in cuts. NALGO is to ballot for a mandate for all-out strike action if any member is made compulsorily redundant.

NATFHE is calling a strike across inner London on May Day, with a march to Parliament from Kennington Park in Lambeth. We hope all Lambeth council trades unions will strike against the cuts on that day and that community groups will join with them to march from Brixton Oval at 10.30am to join up with NATFHE in Kennington Park.

■ **Lambeth Anti-Cuts Campaign, c/o 12-14 Thornton Street, SW9; tel. 071 733 5135**

New found freedom



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

A COUPLE OF DAYS *after the dramatic release of the Birmingham Six I phoned Richard McIlkenny. He sounded tired from all the celebrations and talked about the Tottenham Three, the Carl Bridgewater Four, and Judith Ward. I asked what was the best thing about getting out. He talked of his family and then said "You know, this morning I walked by the river and saw ducks, swans and a heron. I had forgotten how beautiful they all were."*

Perhaps the conspirators who kept the Six inside for a total of 96 years of human life should reflect on what the denial of liberty really means.

OVER THE EASTER *weekend I was invited to speak to pensioners in Newport, Shropshire, the town where I grew up.*

The small shops where, as a child, I knew all the shopkeepers, are now the usual boring chain stores and what used to be the Audley Engineering Company is now a pile of rubble - having been asset-stripped by BTR.

I walked through this changed landscape to the British Legion Club, where the meeting was being held. The ferocity of the attacks on the Tories over health and pensions took me by surprise. After all, this had always been a Tory town. I explained the Elimination of Poverty in Retirement Bill, which is designed to introduce a charter for pensioners and to raise a couple's state pension to half average earnings. The pensioners raised a number of pertinant questions, but then asked suspiciously if Labour would support the Bill and why it had not done more to support the pensioners' struggle.

None of them seemed impressed by Labour's image-builders or applauded its "presentational success".

THE CONSEQUENCES *of the Sandinista's election defeat were graphically described to me by Edgardo Garcia, from the Association de Trabajadores del Campo, when I met him recently in London. The UNO government is using all available foreign credits to try to sell off the state farms, promote tourism and remove employment quotas. In some places, unemployment is now over 50%. The country's agriculture is being sold to US agri-businesses for export crops. Meanwhile, Nicaraguan children go hungry.*

The "new world order" is trying to impose itself on the country, but is being halted at the gate. Strikes, demonstrations and massive rural organisations are defending the gains of the revolution.

I cannot help but note the contrast between the lectures now regularly delivered by Europe's socialist "leaders" on the need to abide by market forces and the fight-back against those forces in a remote and poor place, without the benefits of Marxism Today, Tribune or New Realism.

A LETTER FROM *Dr Kamal Mirawdali, Chair of the Kurdish Information and Education Project at the Kurdish Cultural Centre in London, outlines the plight of the Kurdish people:*

"We have become foreigners in our own land, oppressed minorities. Our question has become an internal one to each of four `sovereign' states, Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran.

This has effectively meant and still means that the state, always dictatorial and chauvinist, has legitimate rights to rule you, oppress you, assimilate you, imprison and torture you, usurp all your individual freedoms, deprive you of the right to speak in your language or to manifest your culture, and, from time to time, to conduct mass genocide against you.

If your human instincts of freedom and dignity incite you to resist from your powerless, disadvantaged position, through armed struggle or otherwise, you are a rebel, a traitor. More than that, you are a destabilising element threatening the security of many nations in a very strategic region where, until recently, the red menace of Communism was thought to cast its shadow over the rich oilfields of the Gulf.

Thus, the despotic regimes are supported, respected and armed to the teeth. Killing the Kurds is an internal affair which sanguineous murderers like Saddam can enjoy as a fox-hunt. No one, not even the humanitarian organisations, has the right to rescue the victims of the game. This is the old principle on which Mr Bush is determined to base his New World Order."

The Kurds need all humanitarian aid possible without delay, but the political answer has to be the right of self-determination. The other "solutions" on offer bear a close resemblance to the horror of Palestinians being held prisoner in their own land.

I do not expect the Tories to concede this, but will Labour come out now in support of this basic demand of the Kurdish people?

Labour's vote-winner

Labour's Ministry of Women got a rough ride from the sexist press last month. ***Leonora Lloyd,*** *Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Hendon South, counter-attacks.*

LABOUR'S proposal to establish a Ministry of Women is popular with voters, particularly women. But the publication of the Party's manifesto statement on the planned Ministry met with ridicule from all sections of the national press.

The Ministry would be nothing but a new bureaucracy, the papers claimed, and would enable other ministers (assumed to be all male) to evade their responsibilities to women.

These charges were repudiated at a seminar held by the Party a few days before the manifesto was launched. The Ministry is designed to be small and accessible to ordinary women. Jo Richardson, who introduced the seminar, called for ideas on how to change the civil service and felt the Ministry of Women could blaze new paths. Far from allowing other ministers to overlook women, one of the Ministry's main functions would be to ensure that all legislation, from whichever department, was drafted to take into account its effects on women.

The Ministry will not seek to replace the Equal Opportunities Commission, but to promote legislation to give it real teeth. The manifesto recognises that current statutes do nothing like enough to help ordinary women get equality of training, promotion or pay. Above all, it recognises that good child care, for children of all ages, is the key to ensuring that all women who want to work can do so.

Around 150 women from around the country attended the seminar, including many trade union delegates. Discussions were lively and positive. But the manifesto came in for some criticism.

In particular, its cover was roundly slated. Like the "Looking to the Future" cover, it portrays a white, thirty-something professional woman. Worse yet, she has been carefully posed so as to show her left hand, folded across her body, displaying a wedding ring and expensive diamond engagement ring. It bore a striking resemblance to recent ads for jewellery.

Jo Richardson explained that the Ministry of Women team had not chosen the picture and had been told that the sort of photograph we might want was "very difficult to get".

Delegates did not think the cover - which presents exactly the wrong image - was an accident on the part of Labour's campaign managers.

The manifesto also fails to say anything about reproductive rights, although Jo assured the meeting that for her this subject would be a priority.

The Ministry is a vote-winner for Labour. Plans to promote it include a party political broadcast and at least one leaflet specifically devoted to it during the general election.

The proposals for the Ministry are welcome. How they will be implemented, and what priority they will have, within the overall programme of the next Labour government is a matter that the seminar did not even begin to consider.

New Ground bites dust

A BULLETIN from the Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA) informs us of the untimely death of its quarterly journal *New Ground*.

Bryn Griffiths
Tottenham CLP

When SERA voted by a narrow margin to affiliate to the Labour Party, my enthusiasm was tempered by fear that the British equivalents of the German "realos", such as SERA President Robin Cook, would see Party affiliation as a means of curtailing extra-parliamentary action and reducing SERA to a parliamentary lobby. *New Ground's* demise has confirmed that fear.



The SERA bulletin claims that *New Ground* has become too expensive. But SERA has well over a thousand members. Most pay £12 a throw. The cheap rate for reduced members is more than made up by organisations affiliating at £18 to £50.

Sources inside SERA suggest that the Labour Party's requirement that SERA pay its first year's affiliation fees up front on the standard minimum affiliation of one thousand members hasn't helped. Not all SERA's paid-up members are in the Labour Party.

New Ground is to be replaced by policy discussion pamphlets and a modest bulletin aimed at SERA members and Labour Party organisations. The latter's first issue contains much useful information but it is hardly the stuff of a green-socialist current poised to knock the socks off the Green Party.

SERA says that it is the "green wing of the labour movement and the socialist wing of the green movement" and that is precisely what it should be. If you are in the Labour Party you will probably still come across SERA whispering in some important person's ear, but if you're in the green movement it's about to become all but invisible. And anyone outside either movement will be lucky to guess that Labour even has a green-socialist wing.

Banbury: *bleak but never barren*

AS FAR as I know, Banbury CLP has never been closed down, suspended or even investigated. Alas, there's been no need! Political activity is virtually non-existent: a campaigning party we are not.

Banbury is a very safe Tory seat. Barrister MP Tony Baldry, who inherited it from Neil Martin in 1983, was previously employed in Thatcher's office. In 1987 Labour came third with the SDP's Concorde-flying David Rowland in second place.

This massive Tory majority helps keep the local Labour Party united, with both right and left seeing a common enemy. There was some hostility at the launch of the North Oxfordshire Campaign Group. Following our first public meeting in October 1987, one Graham Bash, answering a question on the quality of the Party's current leadership, stated that we currently had the worst leader since Gaitskell. When that got out we were hauled over the coals. But the left fended off that attack and have had no trouble since, even managing to get a Constituency delegate sent to the Socialist Conference in 1988, as well as winning CLP support for resolutions critical of the leadership on the Mandy Mudd witchhunt and the failure to support various strikers, including the Dover seafarers.

One thing over which the left has no control is the number of inquorate General Committee meetings - indeed every once since last November. The low attendance made it impossible to discuss resolutions from two branches on the Gulf. Anyone in the Party wanting to engage in political debate has to rely on the single-issue groups, which seem to be more attractive. The local Anti-Apartheid Movement is strong, as is the Banbury Peace Forum. In the past two years each of these organisations has held more public meetings than the CLP. The same goes for the Anti-Poll Tax Union, although activity there has died down somewhat. A Labour Party meeting was held in April, when that standard-bearer of British Marxism, Margaret Hodge, graced us with her presence. She was quite appalling.

Another mystery is the case of the disappearing Trades Council. It peaked during the miners' strike of 1984-85 and sank without trace immediately afterwards. Attempts were made to relaunch it at the start of the P&O Strike. Out of that effort sprang the Banbury Strike Support Group, which did a lot of work around P&O, Pergamon, the ambulance and the dockers' disputes. Sadly, the Strike Support Group has now gone the way of so many other local campaigning bodies.

A bleak picture. We're hoping the general election will provide the spark we so badly need. Our Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Angela Billingham, may not be a Briefing supporter but she deserves our help. Since being selected in April 1990 she has worked phenomenally hard. The constituency certainly needs a change from Carlton Club member Baldry.

A change on the local Council would also be appreciated. The sizeable Tory Group boasts some splendid specimens. They have told Poll Tax non-payers that they're "no better than thieves", homeless people that they're the "dregs of society", and the Woodcraft Folk that they're a "subversive organisation". Recently there were moves by one Tory to remove non-payers' names from the Council's housing list.

Some members of the Labour Group have also behaved, shall we say, questionably. Some have opposed the building of a mosque and one has on several occasions voted with the Tories against Group policy.

Yes, a bleak picture, but following a large split in the Tory ranks a few months ago (some councillors are now sitting as independents) there may well be a Briefing supporter on the Council after the May elections.

■ *This month's constituency close-up is by* ***Karl Statton,*** *Chair of Banbury Constituency Labour Party and Secretary of the North Oxfordshire Campaign Group.*

"Recently there were moves by one Tory to remove non-payers' names from the Council's housing list"

Leader's attack as new poll tax is fixed . . .

'NON-PAYERS NO BETTER THAN THIEVES'

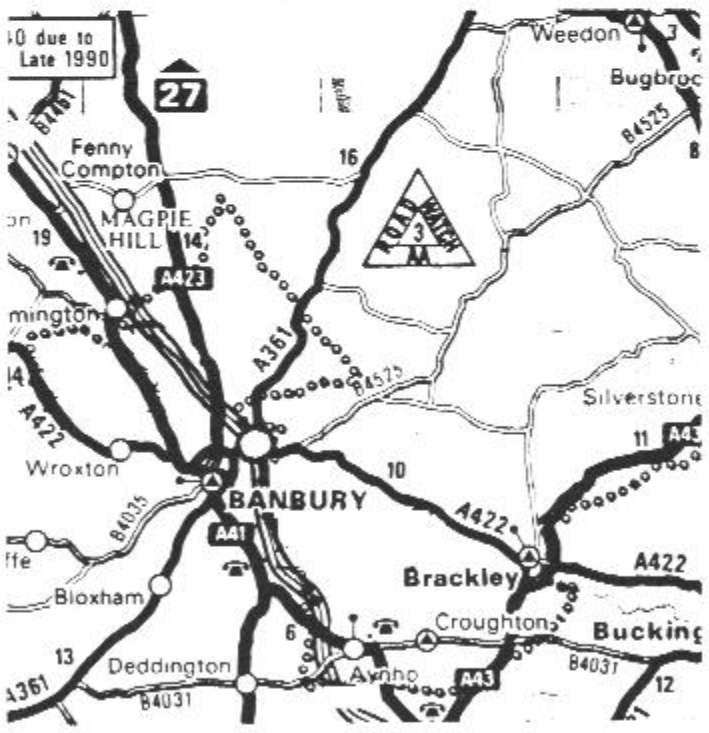
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Only a cog in the Kinnock machine

*Our class traitor of the month for May 1991 is hatchet-man **John Evans MP,** a politician on whom the leadership can rely to do what needs to be done.*

EVANS GOT his political training in the hard, grey school of North East Labourism. For over twenty years he was active in local party politics (serving as leader of Hepburn Urban District for five years) before being elected as MP for Newton in February 1974. In 1983 the constituency was redrawn and rechristened St Helen's North, a safe Labour seat with a 14,000 majority.

Evans was a member of the National Executive when it decided to suspend the St Helen's North CLP in 1985 following disciplinary action against local members who just happened to be critics of the sitting MP. The constituency remains suspended and the NEC has now twice imposed Evans as its parliamentary candidate. In March of this year nineteen members of the St Helen's party were barred by the NEC from standing as Labour candidates in the local elections. Evans always makes a point of not casting any votes on these matters. But with the NEC's comfortable right wing majority he has no need to worry.

Evans served as an assistant whip in the last dismal year of the Callaghan government, scurrying about the House of Commons at all hours looking for stray MPs of any and all parties to keep the government in office.

He became Parliamentary Private Secretary to Michael Foot during the latter's dismal tenure as Party leader from 1980 to 1983, acting as Foot's eyes and ear in the Party and the PLP.

After Foot's departure, Evans attached himself to Kinnock, who gave him a place on the front bench employment team, which he left after the 87 election.

An uninspiring Parliamentary performer and quintessential backroom boy, Evans for many years harboured a burning ambition to be the Party's Chief Whip. In October 1983, when it was widely rumoured that he was Kinnock's preferred candidate, Evans lost to the sitting Chief Whip - the detested Michael Cocks - by 38 to 83. In 1985 Evans stood again, but this time garnered only 16 votes. In his single forlorn tilt at a place in the Shadow Cabinet in 1984 he stormed to 22nd place with 43 votes - as a member of the Tribune slate.



But Parliament was never Evans' preferred theatre of action. Over the years he has cultivated a strong personal political base outside the House as Political Secretary to the National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs.

From this base Evans won his seat on the NEC in 1982, defeating sitting member Les Huckfield for the sole spot in the socialist societies division and becoming a key member of the emergent right-wing NEC majority.

In the early years of the Kinnock's regime the leader often used Evans as a surrogate spokesperson in internal Party affairs. For example, it was Evans who was given the task, in 1984, of pushing Kinnock's first, unsuccessful attempt to introduce so-called "one member one vote" for parliamentary selections. The "Evans Amendment", as the proposal became known, had in fact been drawn up in Kinnock's private office and was typed and circulated by members of Kinnock's staff. All Evans did was move it at the NEC, where he was seen by all as acting on Kinnock's behalf.

At that year's Blackpool conference, Evans' incomprehensible speech proposing the amendment did little to secure its passage.

Similarly, in Brighton in 1987 Evans' speech proposing the electoral college for selection contests left delegates completely bewildered as to what the proposed scheme was and how it would work.

In December 1988 Evens made a rare and nearly disastrous departure from his usual strict obedience to leadership dictates. He proposed in an article in the Guardian that Labour and the remnants of the Alliance should agree to stand aside for one another in 60 key seats at the next general election.

This defeatist proposal to abandon the fight for a Labour majority was opposed by the Labour left and the majority of the right on the NEC and - crucially - rejected by the Kinnock leadership, which simply could not afford to be associated with talk of an electoral pact. Tom Sawyer made it clear to Evans at the Executive that he had overstepped his remit. After all, it was only the fact that Evans was seen as a Kinnock mouthpiece that led the Guardian to publish his article in the first place.

However, it would be wrong to see this as some kind of independent outburst on Evans' part. He was simply serving a different set of masters: the AEU leadership, which sponsors him as an MP, and which regards PR, pacts and coalitions as the perfect political complements to its business unionism.

As chair of the NEC's powerful Finance and General Purposes Committee Evans must accept responsibility for the party's appalling financial state, for the debacle of the national membership scheme, and for poor staff relations within Walworth Road. No doubt he would claim he was only acting on orders from above. And no doubt that would be true.



His master's voice

Bye-bye LCI?

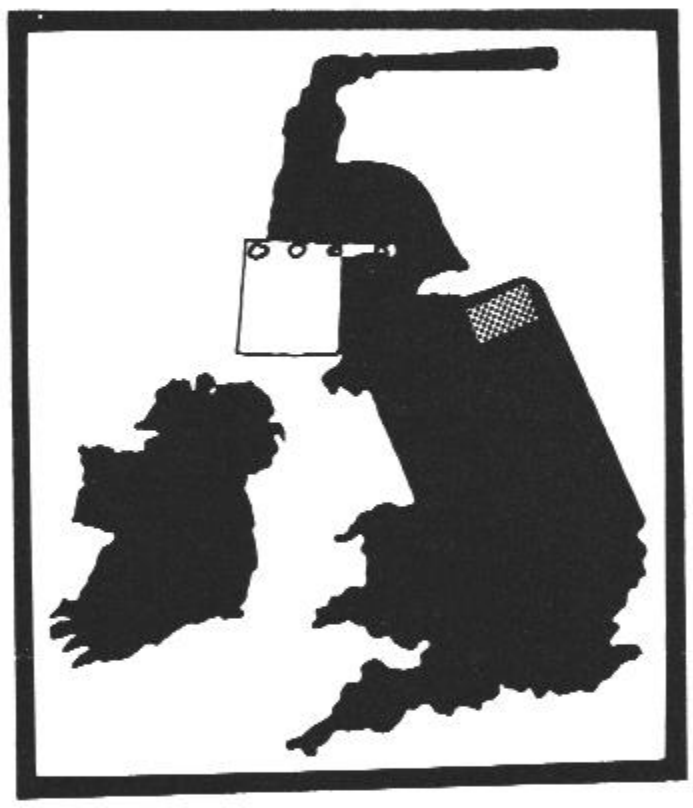
Gerry Downing
Brent East CLP

AT ITS recent Annual General Meeting, the Labour Committee on Ireland (LCI) completed its metamorphosis from an Irish solidarity campaign based in the labour movement to a political front for the British Labour Party bureaucracy.

The political content of the new constitution, the resolutions adopted, and above all the almost total inactivity over the past year made this clear, as did the contemptuous manner with which all left arguments were dismissed.

The LCI leadership, an unholy alliance of *Socialist Action* and the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, aims to turn the organisation into an officially recognised society within the Labour Party, like Poale Zion, restricting itself to minor, tactical criticisms of the Labour hierarchy's pro-imperialist policies. It will function as a group lobbying Labour front benchers and trade union general secretaries, not as a campaigning body.

The new LCI constitution abandons Irish self-determination and unconditional withdrawal, and excludes from membership all individuals not members of and all organisations not affiliated to the Labour Party. This rule bars branches in unions like NALGO and the NUJ as well as the National Union of Students, not to mention individuals expelled from the Labour Party or young Irish immigrant workers who might be less than impressed by the record of past Labour governments on Ireland.



Clearly, a crisis has arisen in Irish solidarity work. It is necessary, therefore to set out principles and guidelines for a way forward.

First, any Irish solidarity movement must be based on self-determination for the Irish people as a whole and unconditional withdrawal of British troops. This is a minimum position. Having abandoned these positions the LCI can no longer be regarded as an Irish solidarity movement. Secondly, the main (though not exclusive) orientation of this movement has to be towards the labour movement.

The oldest solidarity organisation is the Troops Out Movement (TOM). Its magazine is the best on Ireland and its coverage of Irish events is extensive. It continues to call for "troops out now" and Irish self-determination. It has now begun to develop trade union work and has indicated a willingness to engage in Labour Party work in response to the political collapse of the LCI.

However, some of TOM's policies are weak. For a long period it collaborated with the Time To Go campaign and only made late and half-hearted criticisms of the pro-imperialist leanings of that movement.

There are therefore two options for the left. We can develop a left caucus within the LCI and, as an autonomous group, initiate action to by-pass the bureaucratic leadership.

Or we can join TOM and pursue the fight against the Labour bureaucracy by that means.

I would favour the second option. Those who wish to win back the LCI should discuss the first. The debate should begin with a series of local meetings of left LCI branches and members to which speakers from the existing solidarity movements should be invited. The aim should be a national conference later in the year to decide the way forward. Without a plan of action of this type many Irish solidarity activists may drop out for lack of a clear and effective focus.



Which way forward for Irish Solidarity? Photo: Martina Stead

The return of the Six!

HAVING recovered from the euphoria of the release of the Birmingham Six, I was surprised to be phoned early one morning by Billy Power,

Valerie Veness
Islington North CLP

one of the Six, who invited me back to the Law Courts to hear the judge read out in full the reasons for the release of the Six.

Duly pleased, I set off and met the men and their supporters outside in the Strand. The Six were happy; the coppers were decidedly dejected. For the first time in court the Six were addressed as "Mr" rather than the "the prisoners".

No one in the judiciary could quite manage to say sorry - a word quite outside the lexicon of the bewigged Lords sitting presiding in state. A great deal of nonsense was read out about the differences between "unsafe" convictions and "unsatisfactory" ones - after which the noble Lords decided there was no real distinction anyway.

There is now a clear attempt to blame it all on a few "bent coppers" in the West Midlands Police Force seventeen years ago whilst sweeping under the carpet all the viciousness of the PTA, the prison system and the anti-Irish feeling whipped up by the media.

The clamour for Lord Lane to resign over his outrageous decision in the first appeal in 1987 should not be allowed to subside. The myth that startling new evidence came to light only since then is nonsense. The full facts proving the men's innocence were already available then. No prisoner can seriously expect a fair hearing from Lane. He should depart in disgrace and infamy NOW.

The various reactions of the Six were interesting. Hugh Callaghan seemed cynical and simply said, "It's about what we expected". Paddy Hill was more forthright (see quote).

"What can you expect from a pig except a few grunts!" - Paddy Joe Hill on the mealy-mouthed explanations offered by the Appeal Judges

The story of the Six is only the tip of the iceberg. Judith Ward is still in Holloway for a bombing she did not commit. Winston Silcott, Engin Raghip and Mark Braithwaite, the Tottenham Three, are still waiting for appeals against their outrageous convictions and the Carl Bridgewater prisoners languish in prison and hospital waiting endlessly for some sort of justice. The British legal system still has a lot more "mistakes" to correct. It's up to us to keep up the pressure.

HITHER GREEN BRIEFING SUPPORTERS SAY . . .

"Send the Witch-hunters back to Salem".

Defend socialist councillors in Lewisham from disciplinary action for voting against cuts in jobs and services.



Britain's abuses

FROM official assassination (the infamous "Shoot to Kill" policy) through house raids to political vetting, the catalogue of human rights abuses perpetrated by British government forces in the north of Ireland adds up to what the Troops Out Movement describes as "a damning indictment of British injustice". Speaking at a London press conference to launch TOM's new human rights campaign, Mary Nellis, a women's co-op member from Derry, pointed out that 75% of all homes had been searched and 85,000 arrested since the early 1970s.

The Casement Relatives Accused Committee has been set up by relatives and friends of all those arrested in connection with the killing of the two British soldiers who drove, armed, into the funeral procession of Caomhin MacBrodaigh in 1988. MacBrodaigh had been killed by a loyalist gunman a few days before, while attending the funeral of the three republicans murdered by the SAS in Gibraltrar.

No fewer than 37 people have been charged in connection with the killing of the two soldiers. Five have been sentenced to life imprisonment despite the fact that the Crown Prosecution admits that none of those sentenced were in possession of firearms or had fired the fatal shots.

● *Without Consent - Britain's abuse of human rights in Ireland is available from the* ***Troops Out Movement*** *at PO Box 353, London NW5 4NH.*

■ **The Casement Relatives can be contacted c/o Jim Neeson, Jim and Brid Kelly, 5-7 Conway St, Belfast.**

POLL TAX

Poll Tax verdict: "uncollectable"!

***Paul Field,** chair of the Anti-Poll Tax Union in Dartford, Kent, spells out the tactics that led to victory over the Poll Tax and the tasks that remain.*

THE TORIES' climbdown over the Poll Tax is the result of sustained pressure from the biggest campaign of civil disobedience Britain has ever seen.

It is a vindication of the thirty Labour MPs who supported non-payment and the hundreds of Labour councillors who, in solidarity with the poorest sections of the working class, insisted on opposing the pernicious Tax both inside and outside the Council Chamber.

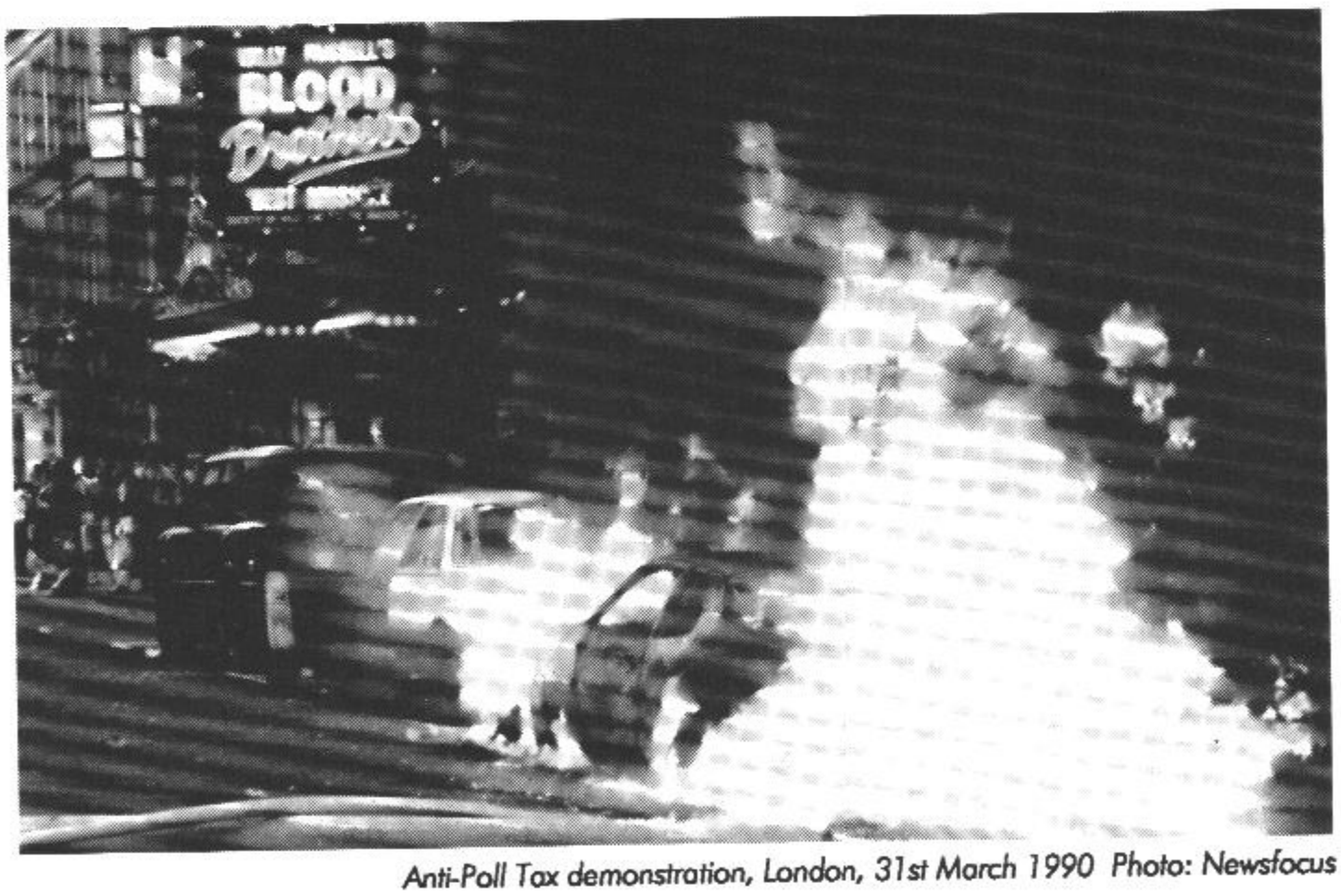
Above all, it is a triumph for the hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who were provoked by the sheer injustice of the Tories' attack to undertake a long-term campaign of defiance, building anti-Poll Tax unions, blocking magistrates' courts, picketing council meetings and physically defending the right to demonstrate when the state tried to beat us off the streets as part of its attempt to criminalise the entire anti-Poll Tax movement.

In this it was assisted by Neil Kinnock, who now tries to claim credit for the defeat of the Tax. Activists will not forget his attacks on the mass movement, not least his attempt to brand it a "Militant front". He did everything in his power to stifle the non-payment campaign and failed to organise so much as a single public demonstration of even token opposition to the Tax.

John Major gave credit where it was due when he said that the Poll Tax had proved "uncollectable". There can be no doubt: non- payment has won. Two years after the campaign began in Scotland, mass civil disobedience by some fourteen million people has forced the most intransigent government since 1945 to make the biggest political reversal in modern British history.

The campaign was also instrumental in toppling the politician who epitomised the reactionary politics of the Poll Tax - Margaret Thatcher.

If the labour movement had thrown its weight behind the non-payment campaign, if it had built on the 21% lead it enjoyed in the opinion polls last spring, if it had seized the opportunity to take advantage of the deep resentment of the government felt throughout the country, the whole Tory edifice would have crumbled, not just its figurehead. Labour would now be set for a decisive victory in the next general election.



Anti-Poll Tax demonstration, London, 31st March 1990 Photo: Newsfocus

"Pressure should be brought to bear against any Labour councillors supporting the use of bailiffs "

Instead, the Labour leadership has decided to step up its witch-hunt of anti-Poll Tax activists. The movement should disregard this latest attack. It still has much to do.

Now is the time to intensify the campaign of non-payment. More and more people will now refuse to pay a tax that is in the process of being scrapped and is discredited in all quarters. Pressure should be brought to bear against any Labour councillors supporting the use of bailiffs to terrorise non-payers. We must demand an amnesty for all non-payers. We should also call for the immediate release of people imprisoned following the police attacks on anti-Poll Tax demonstrators in Trafalgar Square and outside Brixton prison last year.

The mass movement against the Poll Tax has much to celebrate, but its work is not yet done.

MATT LEE, Chair of the Birmingham Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions, has been jailed for two and a half years. On last year's Trafalgar Square demonstration, Matt defended himself and the movement from police attack. He was charged with violent disorder and, like more than a dozen others now in jail, given one of the "exemplary sentences" called for by Roy Hattersley the day after the demo. Celebrate the death of the Poll Tax by standing by all the comrades persecuted and imprisoned in the course of the campaign. Contact the Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign, 205 Panther House, Mount Pleasant, London WC1.

HOME OFFICE MINISTER John Patten has stated that the cost of taking Poll Tax non-payers to court in 1990-1 has already reached £7 million.

Next target: "Son of Poll Tax"

Have the Tories really abolished the Poll Tax? What's next for local anti-Poll Tax groups? The ***North West Anti-Poll Tax Forum*** *issues some warnings.*

AFTER TWELVE months of mass resistance in England and Wales and two years in Scotland, the people of Britain have seen off Mrs Thatcher and forced the government to bury the Poll Tax.

But don't be fooled, we have only won the first round. We have to go on the offensive to take advantage of the Tories' disarray.

The government now proposes: to increase VAT by 2.5% and reduce some bills for next year's Poll Tax by £140; to replace the Poll Tax with a new tax based on property values and the number of individuals in each household; and to delay changes until 1993/94.

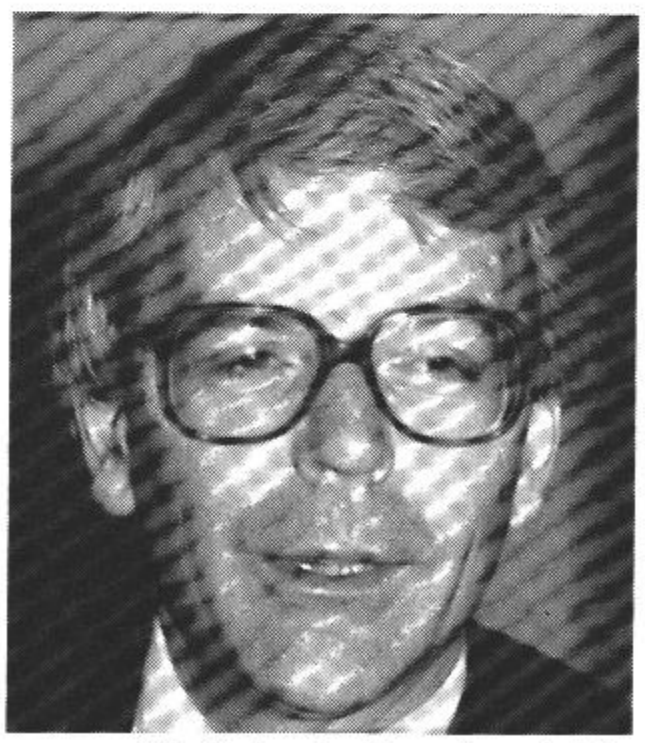
Increases in VAT will hit the poor far harder than the rich. Those on full Poll Tax rebate will only get a £28 reduction in their bills. But they will have to pay much more than £28 in increased VAT. They will be even worse off than they were under Poll Tax Mark I.

"Don't be fooled, we have only won the first round"

In fact less than 50% of eligible charge payers will receive the full £140 reduction. In Rochdale 35,000 people on benefit will only get £28 off this year's bill; 80,000 will only get £35 because of transitional relief. People living in areas which receive low government grants, such as Lambeth, Edinburgh and Bristol, will still be faced with extremely high bills.

The £140 is only a one-off subsidy, an attempt to buy time to deflate the anti-Poll Tax movement and hostility towards the government.

Will the Tories' new tax be based mainly on property values or mainly the number of adults in each household? The government has not come clean. If the burden falls on the number of adults in each household rather than the value of the property then nothing has really changed. For example, a man in a mansion could still be paying a lot less than a family in a council house.



John Major about to make a decision
Photo: Newsfocus

For all these reasons the fight is still on. We have to force the government to introduce a new tax based solely on the ability to pay. The rich - wealthy individuals and big businesses - must pay more for local public services.

What we have achieved so far has come about by mass resistance, by non-payment, by defending all local services. We must keep mobilising until the Poll Tax is fully abolished and not replaced with a Poll Tax Mark II.

Heseltine said that the new tax would "enhance the quality of services". But no extra money has been ear-marked for these services, which are being decimated. Derbyshire County Council is cutting £1 million off the fire service alone; Salford Council is axing libraries and community centres; Lambeth is closing eight out of ten old peoples' homes.

The fight against "son of Poll Tax" is on. Unless the campaign is stepped up the Tories will continue their attacks on non-payers and on council services and change the Poll Tax in name only.

CONGRATULATIONS TO Islington councillors Bob Crossman, George Durack and Bob Mowle who defeated an attempt by the Labour Group leadership to discipline them for voting against the Poll Tax in the Council Chamber. George Durack, who is refusing to pay his Poll Tax, commented: "We have to remove the Poll Tax now rather than wait for a Labour government to spend vast sums of money putting things right".

MAY DAY GREETINGS FROM

BIRMINGHAM LABOUR BRIEFING

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

HACKNEY TRADES UNION COUNCIL

Sends May Day Greetings to all trades unionists: keep up the fight for a living wage, union rights and a decent retirement pension.

Erik Rechnitz (President)
Peter Shields (Secretary)
Keith Veness (Treasurer)

Tube bosses aim for bust

London Underground workers are poised to take action against massive job cuts. An activist from the ***National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT)*** *lifts the lid on management's plans to break the union.*

DEFYING a management campaign of intimidation, RMT members look likely to back strike action against plans by London Underground Ltd (LUL) to cut up to 2,000 jobs and undermine conditions, safety, and potential earnings.

Since balloting began on April 8th new plans have come to light for mass sackings of union members supporting union decisions or respecting picket lines.



But judging from the comments made by workers filling in the ballot papers, the number of votes against the RMT's recommendation in some sections will be counted on the fingers of one hand.

The ballot will close on April 26th and will be counted by the Electoral Reform Society on April 29th. The National Executive Committee will then meet to set a date for action, which will consist initially of one-day strikes.

On the eve of the first day of balloting every LUL worker was handed a letter from Passenger Services Director Ian Arthurton. The letter included the following:

"As you are being asked to vote for action I have an obligation to advise you that should any disruption take place, even if it is supported by your trade union, those who participate will be subject to the disciplinary process; this provides for suspension without pay and ultimately dismissal."

The letter is riddled with lies and half truths. It claims that the RMT has "refused discussions with us". In fact, management itself refused to place its plans into the official negotiating machinery. Instead, they offered "working parties" whose sole aim was finding ways of implementing decisions already made by management.

TSSA, the booking clerk's union, went into the working party and on hearing more details ordered a full ballot of its membership. Only ASLEF, the train driver's union, has fully complied with management.

Leaked management documents reveal that anyone supporting strike action will be presented on his or her return to work with a letter demanding an undertaking not to take strike action in the future. Refusal to give such an undertaking will lead to immediate suspension pending dismissal. Anyone who takes further strike action after giving this undertaking will be dismissed and then "allowed" to reapply for the vacancy.

The purpose of this plan is to intimidate workers, victimise activists, and bust the unions - thus eliminating resistance to management's drive to prepare London Underground for privatisation.

Contractors collapse

NEWS of another crop of failures among private contractors. Churchwise Limited has pulled out of running the catering and bars at the Spa Royal Hall, Bridlington. Also throwing in the towel are Town and Country (their parent company Hekla Holdings has decided not to undertake any more public sector work) and Crossland Leisure, who gave up the sports contracts in Aberdeen as a result of not being able to work out any of the figures correctly. Private companies simply cannot deliver public services; Labour should commit itself to the immediate abolition of this particular bit of failed Tory legislation.

■ **Further details from Public Service Action, c/o SCAT, 1 Sidney Street, Sheffield, S1 4RG.**

"We're not getting there"

RMT has branded British Rail's offer of a 6.5% pay rise as "totally unacceptable". Activists report strong support for industrial action among the membership, but will the new union (an amalgamation of the NUR and NUS) give real backing to the rank-and-file mobilisation that brought success last year?

Help wanted

FOR the past few months Carolyn Vale, an ex-lorry driver, has been working on photographs documenting women lorry drivers at work and highlighting the lack of facilities in this male dominated industry.

She would like to contact any other women drivers, particularly in the North of England, who would be interested in helping with the project.

■ **Tel: 091-258-7411.**

NUPE HACKNEY OFFICERS SAY:

NO CUTS IN JOBS AND CONDITIONS!
SAVE OUR SERVICES!

Terry Sims (Chair)
Keith Veness (Secretary)
Tony Cordell (Treasurer)

Wright is wrong

Kevin Flack, *Treasurer of TGWU 1/427 Branch, explains why socialists in the Transport and General Workers Union should back Bill Morris against George Wright to succeed Ron Todd.*

FOR SOME years the TGWU has been the only serious restraint on the rightward drift of Labour's Annual Conference. True, it has never really tried to reverse that drift and Eddie Haigh, its NEC representative, has backed Kinnock on nearly every issue - often in opposition to his own union's policy.

But under Ron Todd's leadership, the TGWU has at least offered some opposition to Kinnock on the miners' strike, unilateralism, anti-union laws, training, etc.

In the current elections for General Secretary, TGWU members are being offered a clear choice between the continuation of Todd's policies under the current Deputy General Secretary Bill Morris or a massive turn towards the AEU/EETPU-style right under George Wright (currently the TGWU's Welsh Regional Secretary).

Wright has a remarkably consistent record of witch-hunting the left, selling out his members in local disputes, and generally running his own region (and the Wales Labour Party, of which he is Chair) with a rod of iron. He has always taken a political position on the old-fashioned hard right of the Labour Party but has recently started talking about the need for the TGWU to become "independent" of party politics, i.e. to abandon any kind of collective, class-based activity in favour of crass business unionism.

Of course, Ron Todd has never been the champion of the left which the Tory press make him out to be. Morris is even less likely to assume this role. The current "left" majority on the TGWU General Executive Council has also performed poorly. In the 1988 Party leadership contest it voted unanimously for Kinnock and Hattersley - Executive members explained that "tactically" they had to back Todd, who had come out publicly for the existing leadership.

Again and again, the left on the Executive has failed to coalesce around a clear alternative to New Realism in the workplace or in the Labour Party.



Ron Todd and Bill Morris at Blackpool Photo: Leesa Herbert

They have failed to organise a real rank-and-file left current in the union. The TGWU's great potential strength - its wide base in virtually every industry in the country - has also made it difficult for the left to organise. The day-to-day struggles of dockers have little in common with those of voluntary sector office staff, bus drivers or bar staff. Finding industrial (as opposed to political) issues around which to organise across the union is difficult.

Yet the sheer diversity could be an asset for the left and the union as a whole and should be seen as such. Action by transport workers, for example, in support of fellow union members in the NHS or the Town Halls could help win major disputes. And the resources belonging to a million plus membership organisation when put behind struggles against apartheid or in defence of abortion rights, can make a real political impact.

Ron Todd's support for his own members in struggle has been limited, as dockers and car workers can testify. And Bill Morris's record of supporting workers in dispute during his days as a Region 5 official was dismal, to say the least. But the alternative offered by George Wright is far worse.

Wright operates from a hard-right base in Wales and is backed by the TGWU's right wing Regional Secretaries. Every reactionary, racist, anti-Labour, pro-management element in the union is working flat out for him. The Tory newspapers are also doing their bit for "their man". This is because they know that under Wright the TGWU would shift from being a restraint on the worst excesses of Kinnockism to a plaything in the hands of the Tories and the employers.

Wright's supporters have tried to characterise Morris as a pillar of "outmoded", "old guard" traditional left-wing trade unionism. This is the usual bogus rhetoric of New Realism, backed up in this case by a coded appeal to sections of the membership to reject Morris because he is black.

This election is therefore a major test for all anti-racist trade unionists. For a black person to lead the largest trade union in Britain would make a stronger statement than a thousand worthy policy papers. British trade unionism has a history of disproportionately high black membership at rank-and-file level - and disproportionately low black involvement at any higher levels. Morris' election will be a positive boost to all those fighting racism in the unions.

■ **All members of the TGWU should cast their ballots for Bill Morris before the May 31st deadline.**

Shop stewards' corner: The perils of merger-mania

***Keith Veness**, Hackney NUPE Officers Branch Secretary, believes the proposed merger of NUPE, NALGO and COHSE is a potential disaster for the labour movement.*



OUR NUPE branch is strongly opposed to the merger and has been campaigning for the last twelve months to stop it.

We believe, first, that the merger is a threat to the link with the Labour Party. NUPE and COHSE are affiliated to the Labour Party and have strong political ties. NALGO does not and ballots for affiliating have been heavily defeated. NALGO's political fund cannot be used to support candidates and there is a danger that this will become the norm in the new union. The proposal for two political funds - one "Labour" and one "non-Labour"- is daft. Faced with a choice most members will opt not to bother with either. This is yet another attempt by the New Realists to sever the connection between Labour and the unions.

Secondly, we believe the merger is a threat to rank-and-file control. NUPE is a shop-steward based union. Most of the merger proposals would weaken this. Certainly, "mega-branches" of 6-8000 members (meeting quarterly) will result in a loss of member input.

Thirdly, the merger exposes us to the predatory GMB, which has grown in recent years by taking over small unions and passing itself off as an alternative to the more militant NUPE and NALGO. If the merger goes ahead the GMB is bound to gain some members who do not wish to be part of the new set-up. Far from assisting recruitment, the merger will result in a loss of membership.

Fourthly, the merger is predicated on the assumption that we are all public sector workers and do not want anything to do with the private sector. Yet the reality is very different. As a result of privatisation, all three unions have had to try and organise workers in private contracting businesses and NALGO has a substantial membership within the old gas boards which are now private companies quoted on the Stock Exchange. The water industry has also passed out of public hands and is trying to derecognise unions associated only with the public sector.

NUPE will have to face up to the fact that the old divisions are no longer relevant and should start looking at a merger in an area where similar unions recruit from both private and public sectors.

Fifthly, we fear that the merger is all about jobs for the boys. Its most enthusiastic supporters are the clique of top NUPE officials who envy the salaries and perks enjoyed by their counterparts in NALGO. One thing is certain - any merger will result in higher salaries and more perks for the top officials at the expense of money to the branches and shop stewards.

For all these reasons and more we are determined to thwart this insane attempt to cobble together radically different set-ups.

There is nothing in this merger for the left except danger. Most of the left-wing currents within NUPE are slowly waking up to this fact and beginning to campaign to stop it.

We are certainly not against unity but we are against a contrived and dangerous amalgamation solely for the benefit of the union hierarchy.

MAY DAY GREETINGS
FROM
LABOUR PARTY — SOCIALISTS
CAMPAIGNING FOR SOCIALISM IN THE LABOUR PARTY.
JOIN US NOW!
Write to: 40 Coniston Road, London, N10 2BP with your name, address and CLP. Waged £8, unwaged £4, CLPs £16.

Tollington Ward Labour Party in Islington wishes everyone a happy May Day. Let's make 1991 the year we get rid of the Tories.

EDDIE NILES Secretary
LIZ DAVIES, MARTIN McCLOGHRY and SUE SOUTHGATE Councillors

NUT Executive flunks test

AT this year's National Union of Teachers conference in Scarborough, the National Executive's strategy of relying on media advertising to resist Tory attacks on state education and teachers' pay and conditions was exposed as bankrupt.

Karen Abse
President, Islington NUT

The most important debate, on the first morning of conference, was on a resolution calling for a boycott of standard assessment tests (SATs) for seven year olds.

The incoming president sketched the background in her opening address, which concentrated on the educational damage caused by the SATs. The whole conference was agreed on the undesirability of these tests, which will undermine comprehensive education. The real debate was on strategy. Despite constant reminders from the Executive that a boycott would be illegal, conference voted for an amendment from Islington and Central Nottinghamshire which demanded a boycott and instructed the executive to give full backing to members who, on educational grounds, refused to administer, mark or publish the results of SATs for seven year olds.

Winning parents' support will be vital for the success of this campaign. At a well-attended fringe meeting a speaker from the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Scottish teachers' union, described how teachers and parents had worked together to boycott the SATs in Scotland. However, many delegates were appalled when representatives of the Socialist Education Association argued that a boycott of SATs would be irresponsible.

The Executive was unhappy with the conference decision on the boycott and continued to issue advice that it was illegal. This attempted sabotage indicates that the NUT Executive is unlikely to organise the boycott, which will be left to local NUT associations.

The left also won a significant victory on conditions of service. A successful motion called on the NUT to "sanction action in divisions/schools where the union fails to secure satisfactory agreements...with employers." The motion also called for immediate strike action over compulsory redundancies. In the current climate, with Local Management of Schools and Poll Tax capping leading to savage cuts in education, such action will be essential for teachers to defend jobs and working conditions.

Unfortunately, the national executive looks determined to water down conference demands. Classroom teachers will have to show resolution and determination. The left's successes at conference show that they are ready for the struggle.

AS A RESULT of pressure from the Construction Safety Campaign, the Crown Prosecution Service is considering prosecuting a private company for negligence in the deaths of three young men in a sewer in Aldgate, East London, last autumn.

The three inexperienced workers were sent down the sewer without proper equipment or training. They were overcome by fumes, despite a rescue attempt by Fire Brigade members wearing breathing apparatus. The cause of death is suspected hydrogen sulphide poisoning. Tower Hamlets council and the Health and Safety Executive must share responsibility for this avoidable tragedy.

■ **Construction Safety Campaign, c/o Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Centre, Unit D, Great Eastern Enterprise, Mill Harbour, London E14 9XP.**

THIS YEAR'S TGWU pay claim from Safeways Plc includes a demand for a new maternity agreement. This would be a big breakthrough in private sector retailing and the TGWU is preparing a campaign to back up the demand. Maternity agreements ensure that many more workers (80% in this field are women) return to their jobs after childbirth thus ensuring greater continuity in an area notorious for high turnover.

IN A NEW addition to the rash of trade unions mergers which has seen the SOGAT/NGA marriage, the launch of RMT and the planned NUPE/COHSE/NALGO link-up, the UCW and the NCU are presently discussing terms.

This is one of the more logical amalgamations as both organise large numbers of workers in the Post Office and British Telecom.

The NCU traditionally organised engineering staff but also has a large white-collar membership (some of it formerly in the CPSA before being handed over en bloc to the NCU at the time of privatisation).

The UCW has organised-postal delivery, sorting workers and telephonists. The 1992 conferences of both unions will make the final recommendation before members are balloted.

Safe money is on a single new communications union - which might then be tempted to start talks with the new GMPU (ex-SOGAT/NGA).

IN THE LAST issue of *Briefing*, we reported a settlement in the making in the long running dispute at Pergamon Press. Suddenly, "Captain Bob" Maxwell has decided to sell the firm to Dutch publishing giant Elsevier for a cool £440 million! How this will affect the dispute is not yet clear but it does seem that Maxwell was worried about the massive adverse publicity and keen to rid himself of this embarrassment. In a parallel move he is stepping down as Chief Executive of Maxwell Communications Corporation and handing it over to his son Kev. He has also employed former Tory cabinet minister Peter Walker in the position of non-executive Chairman.

AEU GENERAL SECRETARY Gavin Laird has announced that the union has now won 1,425 agreements cutting the working week from 39 to 37 hours. The agreements cover 600,000 workers, leaving the original campaign's aim of a 35-hour week for 2,000,000 workers in engineering still a long way off. The AEU's piecemeal strategy seems a very limited success.

TRADES UNIONS OFTEN lose interest in members when they retire but the fact is that persons over 65 now make up 20%-25% of the population. The labour movement has to be seen to campaign strongly for their needs. The Manchester Pensioners and Trades Unionists Group is publishing a quarterly magazine that covers a wide range of lobbying and other activities on behalf of senior citizens. A year's subscription only costs £2.00.

■ **Copies from Wilf Charles, 63 Ballbrook Court, Didsbury, Manchester, M20 9GT.**

Lamont gets lucky; Lech's at a loss

Briefing's resident economist, ***Dave Palmer,*** *admits he got one wrong... and so did everyone else.*

CHANGING INTERNATIONAL economic conditions may have brought the Tories a respite.

In February I reported how divergences in interest rates between the US (where they were going down) and Germany (where they were going up) were squeezing the pound towards the bottom of its ERM band and would therefore restrict the Tories' room for manoeuvre.

Well, things didn't work out that way (at least I'm not the only one who got it wrong - see below). The dollar has surged by 14% since bottoming out in mid-February, when it reached a record trading low of Dm1.44. Six weeks ago the G7 central banks were trying to hold the dollar up. Now they're going flat out to hold it down.

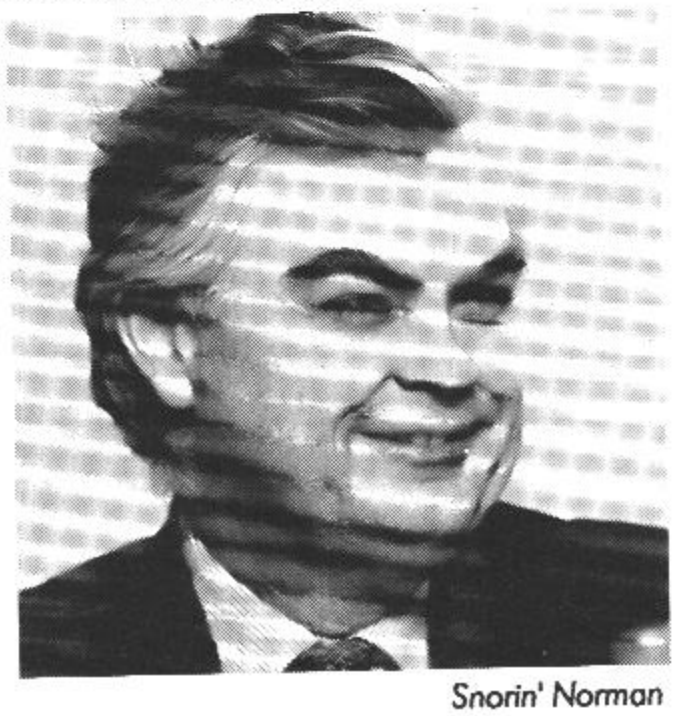
Confidence in the dollar returned in the wake of the Gulf victory and growing Wall Street belief that the recession will end soon (this remains to be seen). In any case, dollar denominated assets will now become more attractive. The US trade deficit is set to fall.

The end of the dollar's six year decline coincides with bad times for the once almighty D-mark, plagued by the worst set of trade figures for eight years. A surge in imports of consumer goods caused by unification, along with pressure on exports, particularly of capital goods, stemming from recession in the other Western economies, is melting Germany's traditional surplus.

An additional factor is the sizable increase in international holdings of the D-mark, which has left the currency exposed to adverse movements on the capital markets. D-mark holdings now make up 20% of currency reserves held by foreign central banks.

A major factor here is the D-mark's "anchor" role in the EMS. A weaker D-mark will make it easier for Germany's EMS partners to reduce interest rates. Sterling is now the second strongest currency in the system and is consistently trading above its central EMS parity of Dm2.95. This makes it much easier for Major and Lamont to cut UK interest rates, as they did when the March retail price index showed a fall in the "headline" rate of inflation.

However, the underlying rate of inflation (without Poll Tax or mortgage rates) remains resilient, so the Tories will have to proceed with caution. Nonetheless, the unexpected changes in the international situation have allowed the Tories to respond to domestic economic and political pressures. They will be hoping to get the interest rates down by another 3% or so in time for an October election. Mind you, real UK interest rates will still be running at around three times their historic average.



Snorin' Norman

☐ **COCKING UP** on the dollar cost Allied-Lyons some £150 million and has led to an unexpected redundancy. Assuming that the dollar would continue to fall, it speculated on the exchange markets by writing - that is selling - futures "call" options (contracts to sell dollars at a certain price at a future date) without "hedging" (buying in the spot market to cover against a rise in the dollar). Finance Director and Harvard MBA Clifford Hatch - tipped for Chief Executive - was forced to resign. Hard cheese Clifford!

☐ **DETLEV RODWEDDER**, head of Germany's Treuhand, the agency supervising the privatisation or liquidation of 8,000 public enterprises in what used to be East Germany, was recently assassinated by the Red Army Fraction. Suddenly, all eyes are fixed on the collapse of the east German economy in the transition to capitalism. Bundesbank president Otto Pohl has gone so far as to describe reunification as a "disaster". A recent poll revealed that only 2% of easterners feel their economic situation is good and 90% feel like second-class citizens. A third of East Germany's workforce is now either unemployed or on short-time; this is expected to reach at least 50% by the end of the year.

Much of the blame for the collapse has been placed on the decision to set the conversion rate for monetary union at parity - one Deutschmark to one Ostmark. But the central problem is the gap in labour productivity between east and west which can only be closed by huge levels of investment. Instead of productivity rising as firms shed labour it has fallen with the collapse of output.

The capital required to raise productivity has yet to arrive. On the most optimistic estimates there will only be Dm25 billion (£8.3 billion) in domestic private investment in the east this year. Compare that to last year's Dm335 billion (£112 billion) investment in west Germany. A recent IMF study estimates that to reach west German levels of productivity by 2001 the east will require Dm1.7 trillion (£570 billion) in investment.

No wonder Christian Democrat triumph has proved so short-lived. Clearly there is a long way to go before the east shows a profit for the capitalist class.

Meanwhile, across the Polish border, the East European followers of Hayek are desperately trying to reintroduce private ownership of the main means of production - without much success. Their problem is that neither Western capital nor the Polish public (which lacks both the funds and the inclination) is prepared to take the risk.

This June, Poland's Minister for Ownership Changes, Janusz Lewandowski, plans to hand out shares in a selection of companies to every Pole. Citizens will get a "voucher" representing a stake worth a (highly) nominal $1,000 in 100 of the 500 companies to be privatised. The new property owning democrats will, in effect, be taking pot-luck.

Meanwhile another little snag has emerged for Lech and Co. The Polish government offered to provide compensation for private property nationalised by those nasty Communists. Unfortunately, no one seems to have considered just where the money to pay out this vast "debt" would come from. Already more than half a million claims have been received and it has now been admitted that even partial compensation would break the back of the Polish economy. Any more bright ideas, Mr Lewandowski?

Cancel the debt!

ONE OF the most remarkable things about the debt crisis is that so few people in Western countries know about it. How many Britons sporting red noses for Comic Relief or stumping up for charities like Oxfam have any idea that every year the Third World pays back many hundreds of millions of dollars more in interest charges to Western governments and banks than it receives in aid? According to OECD figures, the net flow of money from rich to poor countries between 1982 and 1986 was a staggering $219.7 billions!

In the 1970s Western banks and governments with surplus cash made irresponsible loans to the governments of many African and Latin American countries. These loans, intended to fund rapid industrialisation, expansion of commercial agriculture and exploitation of natural resources, did little to encourage economic development or environmental protection. Indeed, they frequently resulted in greater inequalities in the distribution of wealth, the displacement of peasant farmers from their land and an acceleration in the destruction of rainforest.

Since that time, interest rates and oil prices have risen whilst the values of many Third World exports have fallen. With their economies in crisis, debtor countries have been forced to seek further loans from the IMF and World Bank, which have demanded harsh "structural adjustments" in return. The result has been unemployment and cuts in environmental, health and education programmes for the poor.

***Ruth Clarke,** national secretary of Labour Party Socialists, profiles plans by a new campaign to confront the world's biggest parasites at the G7 summit in London this July.*



Like most other European and US banks, the four major UK banks have made provisions against over half of their Third World debt exposure; they have put aside (in return for tax relief) part of their profits in case debtor countries default on their loans.

When representatives of the world's richest nations meet at the annual G7 summit in London this July, they will be confronted by Cancel the Debt, a new coalition of campaigning groups which aims to highlight the injustice of the drain of Third World resources to service Western creditors.

As well as demanding unconditional cancellation of Third World debt, the Cancel the Debt campaign opposes the "structural adjustment" policies of the IMF and World Bank and argues for a new international economic order to prevent the reappearance of debt.

A major demonstration will take place in London on July 13th, the Saturday before the G7 meeting; we hope to generate a carnival atmosphere with inflatables, national music and costumes. Events will also take place on July 15th and 17th, to "receive" and "send off" summit participants. Sister campaigns in France, Belgium and Germany will send delegations and Third World countries will be well represented.

An open and very informal campaign working group is now meeting regularly in London. It is hoped that similar groups will soon develop in other parts of the country. An appeal letter, education pack and publicity leaflets are currently being produced. New sponsors and participants are welcome!

The Socialist Campaign Group, Labour Party Black Sections, Labour Party Socialists and several CLPs are already involved. Labour Party Black Sections passed a resolution last month calling for the total cancellation of the debt and will be writing to Constituency Parties urging support at Annual Conference. At the moment, Labour's commitments on aid and trade are alarmingly vague. Socialists have a responsibility to ensure that Third World debt is at the top of the Party's agenda.

■ **Contact Ruth Clarke, 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY. Telephone: 081 992 0945.**

The National Sickness Service?

THE cost of visiting the doctor or dentist has gone beyond the reach of many people following the government's latest above-inflation increases in prescription and dental charges.

Each prescribed item is now £3.40, compared to 20p when the Tories came into office in 1979: a seventeen-fold increase. The maximum cost of a course of treatment at the dentist is now £200 (an increase of £50 on last year's maximum). These increases (11% and 33% respectively) are further proof of

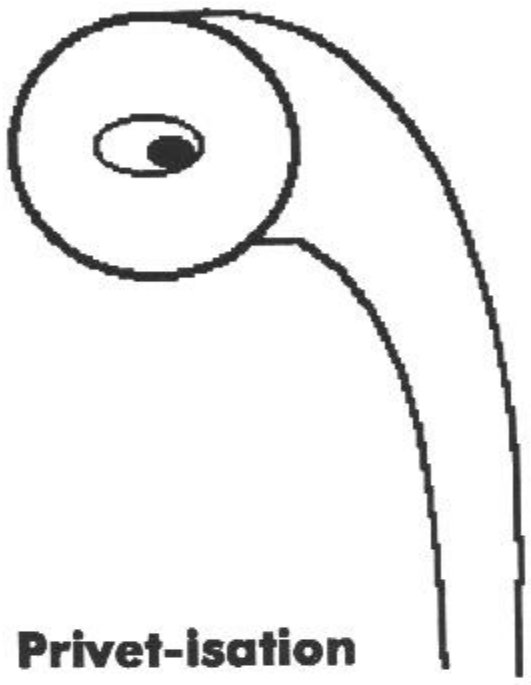
Tony Cordell
Hackney NUPE

the government's continuing commitment to destroy the National Health Service.

The government likes to remind people that eligible punters can claim benefits and will not have to pay the charges, but this is little comfort to those whose total income is just above the benefit threshold.

Millions of people in this position will no longer be able to afford a visit to the doctor or dentist. There will be more untreated illnesses. The health divide between the wealthy and the rest of us will yawn ever wider.

The cuts in income tax since 1979 have been paid for in the blood of the poor. What Labour will actually do to reverse this calamity remains to be seen. The Policy Review is full of nice phrases but no firm financial pledges.



Privet-isation

Periscope has learned from authoritative Walworth Road sources that **Neil Kinnock's** much-publicised encounter with three youths and an Ealing privet hedge was in fact an audacious photo opportunity brilliantly stage-managed by Charles Clarke and Peter Mandelson.

It is a follow-up to the 1985 incident in which Neil manhandled a college student after a tomato had been thrown in his vicinity and builds upon the remarkable success of the much-covered fracas involving an Indian restaurant and a rolled-up newspaper in 1986.

The privet hedge scene was conceived as a means of projecting to floating voters the remarkabe strength and courage of the Labour leader. Based on extensive market research, it's another triumph for the Shadow Communications Agency, who are said to have selected the three youths from amongst thousands auditioned in west London schools.

Such is the interest shown by the Labour leader in the pugilistic arts that some Party members, on scanning the monthly post-NEC headlines declaring that Kinnock has either "hammered" or "heavily defeated Benn", have mistakenly assumed that the Benn in question is not in fact the Right Honourable Tony but none other than the much feared boxer, Nigel...of course, Kinnock, as the (political) lightweight champion of the world is not in the same division as either Benn.

No *Tribune* - No Comment

Paul Anderson, newly appointed editor of *Tribune*, at the Socialist Society AGM: "I've spent years of my life outside the Labour Party. Frankly, I'd still be there if I wasn't editor of *Tribune*."

If you read *Tribune* as avidly as we do, you'll know that their gossip column referred to the last issue of *Briefing* as "a tyre-slashers' delight". Praise indeed. Further and welcome insight came in the editorial, which says we shouldn't be disciplined by the Labour leadership as "there is no evidence to suggest that *Labour Briefing*, which many of the (Lambeth) councillors support, has been operating as a party within a party."

Class wart

The March 23rd Poll Tax demo. ***Class War*** seller to *Briefing* seller: "You've pinched our front page!" *Briefing* seller: "Property is theft, comrade!" *Class War* seller: "Property is also liberty!" *Briefing* seller: "Huh?"

Just deserts

Congratulations to our comrades at Verso, recently named Sunday Times Small Publishers of the Year. The £1000 in filthy Murdoch lucre could not have found a better home. Managing Director **Colin Robinson**, whose attire at the awards ceremony provoked a superior sniff in the columns of the Sunday Times itself, commented that the last time he had been a News International guest was at an al fresco affair in Wapping.

Certainly Verso can pride itself on having the financial and political acumen to steer clear of Ronald Reagan's "memoir", An American Life, which lost publishers Hutchinson some £210,000, a small but contributing factor in the redundancies now being made at the firm.

Revolving door

Labour's newly-appointed Broadcasting Officer, **Sally-Anne Lomas,** has walked out after less than a month in the job.

Shortly after her appointment, Lomas had explained to PR Week magazine that she hoped to "have a say on overall communications strategy" along with Campaigns and Communications Director **John Underwood**.

Her enthusiasm waned in record time. Could it be something to do with "Senior Press and Broadcasting Officer" **Colin Byrne**, still smarting because the NEC passed him over when it chose Underwood as Peter Mandelson's successor? Byrne, ex-NUS Press Officer, is seen as Mandelson's surrogate at Walworth Road. He has just wed Kinnock's personal press officer, **Julie Hall**. The well-meaning Underwood doesn't stand a chance.

Blame the masses

In a move which would have brought tears to Brecht's eyes, **MP Ken Livingstone** told Brent East Labour Party's General Committee that his decision to pay the Poll Tax was prompted by "the ebb and flow of the class on which I am tossed and turned". Under attack for this betrayal, Ken issued a "back me or sack me" plea and was supported 17-13 by right-wing delegates.

Levels of non-payment still exceed 40% in Brent and Brent Against the Poll Tax reports increased determination to resist the Tax by those still being summonsed for 1990-91 bills. July looks the earliest date for issue of the 1991-92 bills. Brent's legendary incompetence is fuelling massive non-payment.

Sit. vac.

"Situation vacant: Brighton Labour councillor. No previous Labour Movement experience necessary. Successful candidates will lack imagination and display no inclination to fight the Tories. Apply to **Joyce Gould**, Walworth Road."

This advert didn't actually appear in the *Brighton Evening Argus*, but it could have. The candidates imposed on the local party for next month's Borough elections are breathtaking. One of them has not been to a ward meeting for eight years and indeed was voted off the panel at the final GC before the Party was suspended last September. In marginal Regency ward the imposed candidate boasts up to eighteen month's Party membershipl

Of course, the main requirement has been unquestioning loyalty to the Party Leadership. The motto is: cross your fingers and hope the Tories "dither" their way out of office.

On the positive side, Brighton Council must be near the relegation zone in the Thatcher Poll Tax Implementation League. 29,000 have not paid anything and another 28,000 are at least one month in arrears.

LONDON LABOUR 30p
BRIEFING

Famous last words...

TEN years ago *Briefing* didn't appear. That May heralded the famous GLC elections in which Ken Livingstone stood down from a safe seat to fight a marginal Labour needed to win to take control. Did he win? Did Labour take control? What happened next? Find out next month!

Power struggle in football's inner sanctum

The Football Association (FA) has announced a "blueprint" for the transformation of the professional game in England. From the terraces, ***Arthur Chandler*** *casts a wary eye over manoeuvring at the top of "the people's game".*

THE Football Association is making an unprecedented power bid. Its solution to the division between itself and the Football League - a division which has bedevilled English football - is to bite the League's head off by inviting its five top clubs to join a new "super league" under the aegis of the FA, which would thereby become English football's supreme body.

There is a logic to the FA's proposals. Three times in the past six years ideas for a super league have been floated. The FA, believing in the ultimate inevitability of such a league, has simply decided to take matters into its own hands.

The debate about unifying English football has turned into a naked power struggle. But should we care? The fact is that both the FA and the League have shown little respect for supporters over the years and both are thoroughly undemocratic.

The League regularly makes a laughing stock of itself by throwing any dissenters off its Management Committee. John Smith of Luton, Ken Bates of Chelsea and Philip Carter of Everton have all bitten the dust in recent years. In contrast the FA's ruling councillors are elected on a buggin's turn basis and come from a variety of affiliated organisations, including the public schools and the armed forces.

Not much to choose between them, you'll say. But we should care, not about the power struggle, but about its end product.

The FA is proposing to create an artificial elite. English football does not have a natural "super league". There are five big clubs and about five or six others not quite as big. But beyond that there are twenty or so, from equally large urban areas, which have yo-yoed between the first and second divisions for years.

Why should those teams which happen to be doing well at the moment be privileged for all eternity? Clubs with first division traditions like Wolverhampton and Stoke City could find themselves with the impossible task of getting into the new league and then surviving against teams with the advantage of several years of enhanced TV revenue, which will be restricted to the "super league" clubs.

The FA says that the "super league" will benefit the England national team and will eliminate fixture congestion arising from success in European competitions. But the World Cup apart, international football is nowhere near as popular as the domestic game. With fewer professional clubs (which even some supporters of the FA proposals are saying is inevitable), it will be increasingly difficult to nurture the talents of people such as David Platt, who used to play for Crewe, David Seaman, who used to play for Birmingham, and Paul Parker, who used to play for Fulham.

With clubs in desperate need of funds to redevelop grounds, any restructuring which cuts off a large part of the League from access to big money is simply stupid.

The FA's "blueprint" was published shortly after the Coroner's verdict on the Hillsborough disaster, which he declared to be an "accident". The coroner himself complained that the range of legal options open to him was inadequate. In any case, there can be no doubt that the disaster was actually caused by poor architecture, poor safety standards and, above all, appalling crowd management by the police.

The flawed Taylor report, which tried to chart a way out of the mire, has led to discontent and confusion.

Taylor condemned the lack of leadership within football. It now seems this problem will be resolved by a fight to the death. Taylor's criticisms of the police have fallen on deaf ears. None of those responsible for match day planning at Hillsborough are to be prosecuted.

Taylor's proposals for the development of football grounds have led to a desperate scramble by the rich and powerful within the game to cream off all available outside funding.

And the FA talks about "taking football into the 21st century"!

BRIEFING'S **January Constituency Close-Up has hit the headlines in Barrow. Author (and council candidate) Hyder Prodhan was branded "silly" by local Kinnockite PPC John Hutton. The *Briefing* Editorial Board has agonised for many hours over how best to describe our unique journal; no such problems for the *North-West Evening Mail*, for whom *Briefing* is simply "a national publication of the Trotskyist far left". "No part of the traditional labour movement escapes scathing criticism," reports the paper. We hope so.**



LEFT HOOK AT 'VICIOUS' HUTTON

By BILL MYERS

A FIERCELY outspoken attack has been launched on Furness Labour Party's parliamentary hope John Hutton by a leading local activist.

He's upset party claims Hyder

CRITICISM

"Reporting the news - and making it".
North-West Evening Maiil, Friday April 5th

Bitter humour of history

Stalinist terror bred a grim humour. ***Paul Marsh*** *surveys seventy years of Soviet jokes.*

THE SOVIET people have commented on the twists and turns of political life since the Bolshevik revolution through the *anekdot* or political joke. For much of that period telling jokes was a secret and dangerous activity, sometimes a death certificate. It's not surprising that people risk their lives for survival or even for a principle; but it says something strange and heartening when people risk death for the right to laugh.

One important sourcebook for these jokes is a diary which the writer Natalya Sokolova began keeping when she was a school student in the 1920s. In it she noted and dated all the latest political stories. As time went by, it became, in Stalinist terms, a capital offence to possess such material, to tell or to listen to jokes. But somehow or other her jokes remained in circulation, in spite of Stalin's best efforts, and I heard many of them in the 1960s from a young Soviet acquaintance.

There's only one excuse for writing about humour, and that is the humour itself. Still, I've tried to assemble a bit of political history in what follows.

The "Extraordinary Commission" or Cheka, set up soon after the revolution, gave rise to this tale:

A hare goes belting through the forest. "What's up?" he's asked. "They're rounding up camels and shooting them," he says. "But what's that got to do with you?" "You try proving to the Cheka that you're not a camel!"

During the Civil War the burden of farmwork fell on women:

A woman telegraphs her man at the front: MUST PLANT POTATOES STOP NO ONE TO PLOUGH FIELDS PLEASE ADVISE. He replies: DON'T STOP GUNS BURIED UNDER FIELD. She telegraphs again: SECRET POLICE PLOUGHED UP FIELD GUNS NOT FOUND. Husband: SO NOW PLANT POTATOES.

In the earliest jokes, Lenin and Trotsky are the most important characters.

Why was the RSFSR so called? Because the name reads the same if you move from left to right, like Lenin, or from right to left, like Trotsky.

Political struggles are reflected with blunt accuracy, but those who look for revolutionary enthusiasm will be disappointed:

"Bolshevism has two wings now: a left wing and a right wing. So when will it use them, rise into the sky, and fuck off out of it?"

Civil War veterans got places in the *rabfak* or "Worker's Faculty" - a kind of access course.

Two students on an access course. One is trying to look up Kautsky's name in a reference book. "It's not where it should be," she says, "under T." "Why on earth would it be under T?" - "T for 'That bastard Kautsky', of course."

Soon it was Trotsky's turn to be the object of vilification. The joke-makers couldn't believe that a Zinoviev could oust him definitively:

Any day now we'll be getting
Trotsky's portrait back
To hang up on the wall instead
of Zinoviev, the hack.

They hadn't yet realised who pulled Zinoviev's strings. Four-liners like this, called *chastushki*, were very popular in those days, especially among the anarchist followers of Makhno.

The next joke carries a health warning: although it's directed at the *rvach*, the get-rich-quick merchants of the New Economic Policy - right on! - it is adapted from a nasty old anti-Semitic story:

A rvach is dying. He checks carefully. Is my wife here? My son? Daughter? All here? Then who's minding the shop?

As Stalin's power grew the jokes became more bitter:

Outside the Kremlin: "What's that wall for, daddy?" "So thieves can't climb over." "Which way, daddy?"

The next one is hardly a joke at all; it sums up Stalin's cynicism in a few words:

President Kalinin: "You know, Joe, people complain I'm inaccessible. I think I'll move out and get a flat in town." Stalin: "I wouldn't. I hear there's terrible food shortages out there."

Too late, the jokers realised that the only person who might stop Stalin is exiled in authoritarian Turkey:

Trotsky is dictating his will: "Pickle my brain in alcohol and send it to Moscow." "What for?" "Stalin needs the brain, Kalinin needs the alcohol."

VERSO

Deterring Democracy

by

NoamChomsky

Coming soon from

Verso

BOOKS

Darker writing from Latin America

Hard Rain *by Ariel Dorfman, Readers International, £11.95;* ***Triste's History*** *by Horatio Vazquez Rial, Readers International, £11.95*

Readers International has done an immeasurable service by publishing these two remarkable novels in English.

Triste's History is the simply-told story of Triste, a child of the Peron era in Argentina, who grows up into the poverty and hunger of Buenos Aires to become a hired killer for the death squads in the 1970's.

The genius of the author lies in making Triste a faultlessly observed three-dimensional figure, even a person with whom the reader may empathise. This is not achieved by deterministically dwelling on his early brutalisation. The terse narrative leaves no room for that.

The feat lies in contrasting the amoral detachment of Triste, the paid assassin, with the empty disillusionment of Chaves, the priest who procured him, and the barbaric but almost aimless inhumanity of his paymaster. The book's desolate ending is as powerful as it is inevitable. Triste's History is a disturbing tale on big themes and reveals a darker tradition of Latin American writing than the voguish magic realism of recent years.

Ariel Dorfman's Hard Rain couldn't be more diferent. Revolutionary in form and content, it is a Dos Passos-like portrayal of the turbulent period of the Popular Unity government in Chile from 1970-73.

Hard Rain captures both the meaning and the potential of this period in a series of literary snapshots. The book uses letters, book reviews, vignettes, fragments of stories, even exam papers not only to bring to life a turning point in Chilean history but also to suggest a new way of thinking about reality.

The novel first appeared in Spanish in 1973. After Pinochet's coup, the author took refuge in the Argentinian embassy in Santiago, but was refused safe conduct out of the country by the Chilean military. Only the prize-winning success of Hard Rain abroad forced the generals to allow the author to join many of his compatriots in what was to be a long exile.

DON ROCINANTE

Post-marxists dislocated

New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time *by Ernesto Laclau, Verso, £11.95 paperback.*

In this book Ernesto Laclau claims to look "beyond the theoretical and political horizon of Marxism". The left, he says, needs a fresh start in the light of the "most important epochal mutation that the world has experienced since the end of the Second World War". For Laclau, crumbling Stalinism means socialism must be replaced by "radical democracy".

There is much in this book that will confirm the hostility of the activist left towards Laclau and his ilk. Terms like "floating signifier", "articulatory practices" and "rationalist transparency" flit about like rabid bats. Trotskyists are the "last Stalinists". Does this make Methodists the last Catholics? The "old left", we're told, was wedded to "class based politics". Depends what you mean. I can't recall "old leftists" like Michael Foot ever putting class before the "national interest".

In redefining socialism Laclau wanders off through a new world of "democratic conflict" that is so full of "contingencies" that the reader ends up baffled. In essence, his argument is that multiple "antagonisms" (sexual, racial, class, ecological, consumerist) have fractured forever the "privileged" place of the working class in progressive politics. Laclau claims his "new radical democracy" can embrace these multiform realities.

But is the world really the dazzling, fragmented domain Laclau imagines it to be? In Britain, for example, the Tories have pursued a clear and coherent set of policies and objectives over the last decade. With the state and government at their command they have aimed to restrict democracy and workers' rights in favour of the market. The working class, sited within that market, has tried to defend its interests. These interests have a permanent basis: work.

Pressure group politics or new social movements are shifting sands around these stark, central facts. Laclau provides no evidence to suggest otherwise; indeed he shuns empirical evidence of any kind. He merely asserts that the workers' movement is dying, that political representation is in "dislocation" with those who are meant to be represented.

This simply ignores the argument that activists, including activists in social movements, are best situated to challenge the Tories at the core of their class's project - the economy. To Laclau, our efforts to transform the labour movement and base the struggle for socialism on forces with weight and permanence are invisible.

ANDREW COATES

Trotskyists are the "last Stalinists". Does this make Methodists the last Catholics?

FILM

Chocolate and jam

Life is Sweet, *directed by Mike Leigh.*

Set in an upper working class suburban wasteland somewhere in north east London, *Life is Sweet* is the usual Leigh mixture of annoying caricatures and accurate social and class observation. Alison Steadman is brilliant as the mum of the film's central family. Her mannerisms and language are spot on.

At the film's heart is Leigh's analysis of working class hopes and dreams - mostly centred on doomed money-making schemes. The family father hates his job in catering and is susceptible to being ripped off in pursuit of setting up his own business. Friend-of-the-family Aubrey is badly overdone as an overweight prole pretending to be a cool musician and restaurateur. But Leigh's depiction of Aubrey's incompetence is still very funny. He attempts to launch a new "upmarket" bistro - the "Regret Rien". His menu is a bizarre perversion of nouvelle cuisine; choices include a single King Prawn with jam sauce!

The family daughters - twins Nicola and Natasha - are emblems of working class ambitions and despair. Natasha, the sensible one, has worked to become a plumber and she has saved up to go on holiday to the States. Her sister is unemployed, "political", awkward and a bulimia binger. She's a feminist but she's turned on by being tied up and having chocolate licked off her tits by a youth she just wants for sex.

Near the end the film makes a slightly abrupt switch from funny caricature to pain and sadness in a scene where mum finally has a talk with Nicola and tries to help her find some hope in Leigh's bleak universe.

ALICK BRIDGER

LETTERS

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

Dear Briefing...

In the last issue of *Briefing* Mike Marqusee wrote about Haringey Council which has recently set a budget involving massive cuts of £22m and over 1,000 job losses. In his article Mike referred to "the dismal performance of the Labour Group - not a single Labour councillor voted against or abstained on the cuts/Poll Tax package".

In case this misleads your readers I should point out that on every key question councillors on the left wing of the Labour Group opposed such policies within the Group. We opposed the use of bailiffs and we attempted to commit the Group to avoiding compulsory redundancies where possible. We challenged the leadership's idea of a "core council" and the setting of a budget below the government's capping limit, arguing instead that a budget should be set above the cap and that Labour should campaign against the Tories. We also voted against the leadership's estimate of a 92.5% Poll Tax collection rate for 1991-92 which may lead to further cuts if it's not achieved.

Presumably Mike Marqusee is referring to the fact that left-wing councillors voted for the cuts/Poll Tax package in the Council Chamber after our opposition to it had been outvoted in the Labour Group. He should have said this clearly and not given the impression that we favoured such policies. Has *Briefing* elevated the breaking of the Labour Whip to a matter of principle?

In your relaunch issue of January you say, "*Briefing* will play its part in building an informed, organised and combative left..." I suggest that you check your articles to see that they are informing rather than misleading your readers in future.

Cllr. Aly Mir
Haringey

I bought *Briefing* at the Labour Against the War meeting in Westminster Hall and thought your readers would be interested in the resolution we passed at our recent Women's Section Meeting:

"Wanstead and Woodford Labour Party Women's Section sincerely hope that the Labour Party will refuse to take part in any victory ceremonies to mark the end of the Gulf War in view of the appallingly high number of deaths and casualties, the deliberate destruction of Iraq and Kuwait's infra-structures and the continuing consequences of the ecological disasters".

Indifference seems to be the order of the day, but I will keep insisting that our Party is GOING DOWN THE WRONG ROAD in not taking a principled stand.

In hope,

Sylvia Ayling
Wanstead and Woodford CLP

Keith Flett should be given space to outline his offer of building a genuine socialist party.

Briefing addresses many issues but the fact that it is based in the Labour Party presents problems. The Labour Party makes little attempt to involve its members; activists have to waste time with expulsions and opposition at all levels.

A genuine socialist party involves its members by holding weekly meetings and selling a weekly paper.

Bristol's anti-Poll Tax campaign has been helped in different ways by two genuine socialist parties: Militant and the Socialist Workers Party. The fact that they were pulling in different directions has not helped the people of Bristol.

Keith Flett is renowned for his letter writing. Give him space to argue his case.

Julie Boston
Bristol

It would be a bit shoddy if at least one member of the Briefing Editorial Board did not reply to Keith Flett's missive. After all, it's always a pleasure to be honoured by correspondence from the SWP's answer to Tolstoy. Just what did various bits of the left achieve in relation to the Gulf War?

In my local area, Islington, there were three major public meetings against the war. The first, called by Islington Labour Party Socialists, was chaired by Labour Mayor Maureen Leigh and featured Dawn Primarolo, Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn as well as *Briefing* supporter councillor Liz Davies and Kurdish Activist Ihsan Quadir.

The second was called by the shadowy Islington Committee Against War in the Gulf and was organised by half a dozen *Socialist Action* Labour Party members and a fairly right wing Labour councillor.

The last and largest meeting was called by our constituency Labour Party and featured Dennis Skinner and Alice Mahon as well as Jeremy Corbyn and local Kurdish and Turkish socialists.

The SWP branch turned up at all three and, to their credit, supported the Labour Party speakers and agreed with everything they said!

So, sure, we didn't force Kinnock to change his line on the Gulf. On the other hand, we did rally hundreds of local people to oppose the war, and united local Black, Asian and Turkish/Kurdish organisations with councillors and trades unionists in a campaign that spoke out loudly against the war. The local papers reported the opposition to the war by the Labour MP, councillors and Constituency Party officers.

Keith Flett's organisation managed one leaflet and sold a few papers. Apparently this is their idea of arguing for "a new and genuine socialist party"!

The disgust felt by most left-wingers at the Labour leaders' supine support for US imperialism is best channelled into fighting and confronting these people in the Labour Party and the unions - not waffling away in small groups and emerging occasionally with a leaflet. Come on in Keith! The water's not exactly lovely but you can swim in it, which is more than can be said for the desert of left sectarianism.

Keith Veness
Agent, Islington North CLP

I gave up being a regular reader of *Briefing* when it sold out in 1982. However, starved of any socialist alternative, I began reading *Briefing* again after its recent relaunch. I have to say that I'm totally appalled by the complete lack of class analysis, most glaringly in the column of Jeremy Corbyn.

In any real Marxist paper bourgeois Corbyn would surely be a candidate for "Class Traitor of the Month". Let's have some genuine working class fighters writing for *Briefing*, people able to speak with real conviction about the totally Bonapartist imperialism of Kinnock and the other murdering warmongers on the Front Bench.

Now is the time for the Real Left to stand up and be counted as the struggle against the Tories, the Poll Tax, and, most urgently, the totally sickening soft left/right-wing Labour leadership enters the critical stage.

Keith Dunlop
Oldham

Labour Briefing AGM
Saturday 29th June 1991
Durham Road Community Centre, Durham Road, off Seven Sisters Road, London
Nearest tube: Finsbury Park
Speakers, election of a new Editorial Board, appraisal of the new magazine, discussion of Labour Party Conference, the general election and future propects for socialists in the Labour Party.

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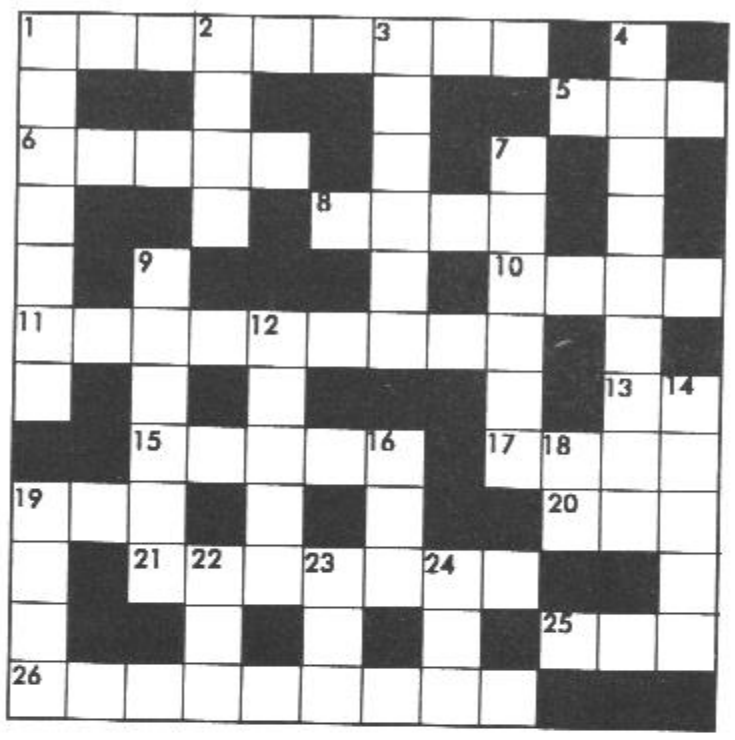
STOP PRESS: Left-winger Richard Hanford has stepped down after five-years as Secretary of Mid-Sussex Labour Party.

Hanford stood twice for the county council, increasing Labour's vote by 50% each time. Last year he stood for the District Council in a by-election on a platform of Poll Tax non-payment. He was accused by Walworth Road of seeking to damage the Party and told he shouldn't be a candidate. He succeeded in increasing the Labour vote by 400% and missed beating the Liberal victor by a single vote.

STOP PRESS: The annual Labour Women's Conference, held this year in Wolverhampton on April 13th-14th, was a predictable affair with few challenges to the leadership. There was, however, one bright moment when a resolution calling on Labour to support Kurdish autonomy and to back the Committee for a Just Peace in the Middle East (which grew out of the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf) was passed on a show of hands, despite Clare Short warning against it from the platform.

Briefing Crossword

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



Across

1. Kurdish militia
5. He led 3 down
6. Dosh
8. Worzel - MP!
10. Swiss resistance leader
11. This designed a horse - now bactrian
13. Hardly relevant (abbr.)
15. Comrade Ulyanov
17. Agitate
19. French fascist
20. Armenian capital
25. They take a dim view of *Briefing*
26. "Red Rosa"

Down

1. Glasgow constituency
2. Birmingham + Guildford prisoner
3. Poll Tax caused this in 1381
4. Blair's homage
7. Makes a sound
9. 14 across' 1917 base
14. Juggernaut?
16. Dutch trades union
18. Message or medium
19. Sway or influence
20. Lamont used instead of Poll Tax
22. Out living in cardboard city
23. Kinnock's support in polls?
24. Not yet privatised!

DIARY

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.
Sunday April 28th/Monday April 29th: Southall Monitoring Group International Festival Against Racism. Watermans Art Centre, High Street, Brentford, Middlesex. Details: 081-843-2333.
Tuesday April 30th: Lambeth Against the Witch-Hunt Rally, 7:30pm, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton, London.
Friday May 17th/Saturday May 18th: Labour Party Wales Conference, Llandudno.
Wednesday May 1st: NATFHE strike, London.
Wednesday May 1st: Prospects for Peace in the Gulf, 8.00pm, St Matthias Centre, Church Rd, Richmond. Discussion with Jeremy Corbyn MP, Sabah Jawad (Independent Democratic Party of Iraq), Reem Abdelhadi (Palestinian member of NUS Executive). Organised by Richmond CND.
Wednesday May 1st: South East Region TUC Festival, Congress House, Great Russell St, London WC1.
Saturday May 11th: Socialist Movement Education Conference, "Education After the Tories", 10:30am-5pm, Sir William Collins School, Charrington Street, London NW1. Details: SMEC, 21 Clapton Sqaure, London E5.
Saturday May 11th: After the Gulf War, public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Banbury, Oxon. With Jeremy Corbyn MP, Mike Marqusee, CARDRI. Details: 0295-251831.
Saturday May 11th: Women's Participation in Social Movements in Brazil, 2.00pm, Lambeth Trade Union Resource Centre, 12-14 Thornton Street, London, SW9.
Sunday May 12th: James Connolly/Bobby Sands Rally. Details: Wolfe Tone Society, BM Box 6191, London, WC1N 3XX.
Saturday May 18th: Levellers Day, Burford, Oxon. Speakers: Tony Benn, Hilary Wainwright, music by Peggy Seeger.
Saturday May 25th/Sunday May 26th: Conference on South Asia organised by International Forum on Asia and Southall Monitoring Group. 3rd Floor, University of London Union, Malet St, London, WC1. Details: 081-843-2333.
Saturday June 1st: Socialist Movement AGM, Leeds.
Saturday June 8th/Sunday June 9th: Red-Green Economics Conference, Kingsway Princeton College, London, WC1. Details: Ken Barker 0222-220309.
July 13th: Cancel the Debt, demonstration to mark the G7 summit meeting in London.

Fascists chased out of Lewisham - again!

IF ANY one required a clear illustration of why "the main enemy is always at home", then the Gulf War provided it.

Dave Hammond
Secretary
Lewisham Anti-Poll Tax Federation

Day in, day out people were invited to believe that Britain was playing a righteous role in an altogether unsavoury world. No wonder the far right saw an opportunity to take to the streets.

Lewisham was the scene of a famous battle with the fascists in 1977. But the last time fascists tried to sell their papers in public here was in 1985. They were kicked out then by local people taking the kind of swift and direct action which even simpleton fascists can understand.

At the time we thought we had seen the last of them, but six years on, thanks to the Gulf War, they're back. For the Fascists, it was a simple equation: Victorious British Troops = patriotic pride = feeling of national superiority = chance to sell nationalistic papers. Bingo! Out they crawled.



When it happened, only a handful of *Militant* and SWP sellers were around, plus two people giving out anti-Poll Tax leaflets. Four fascists made a show of being paper-sellers while others harassed the Militants or just hung around waiting for a fight.

Even at such short notice enough people gathered around to defy the fascists and the police had to move them on. The whisper in Lewisham was that they wanted a re-match on Saturday March 23rd, presumably because they thought everybody would be on the Poll Tax demo.

The response to this threat was excellent. From 8am until 11am there were up to forty anti-fascists in place, waiting for the boot-boys to turn up. Blacks, Asians, Vietnamese and whites mingled with one purpose - to kick the fascists off our streets.

Using the network set up by anti-Poll Tax activists, a cross-section of the community was mobilised. There was even a contingent of Charlton supporters!

If the fascists are stupid enough to turn up again they will find the going rough.

Lewisham now has its own Anti-Fascist Action group, determined that the disease of fascism does not become an epidemic.

Rolan Adams

A BLACK fifteen year old schoolboy, Rolan Adams, was killed in Thamesmead on February 21st after spending the evening at the local Hawksmoor Youth Club. A nineteen year old white man has been charged with the murder and eight others involved in the incident, four of them juveniles, have been charged under the Public Order Act at Woolwich Magistrates' Court. The juveniles have been granted bail and banned from Thamesmead.

The area, with its long history of violence and racist attacks involving gangs of white youths, is fertile ground for the fascist British National Party, whose headquarters is in nearby Welling. BNP members have been seen hanging out with the gangs which congregate outside the local pub.

At the Bexley Council meeting the night before Rolan's murder, the Tories cynically blocked discussion and a vote on a Labour motion (supported by the Liberals) calling for the eviction of the BNP from Welling.

On the night after the murder, over one hundred people meeting at the Hawksmoor Youth Club, criticised police for their failure to take action against increasing racist attacks. According to local anti-racists many of those attacks are the work of the police themselves.

About two hundred pupils and teachers marched from Rolan's school to put a wreath at the spot where he died. Later, seventy people picketed Thamesmead Town Corporation. The Rolan Adams Family Support Campaign was launched with backing from thirty local groups.

The Campaign organised a second meeting at the Hawksmoor Youth Club. It was packed and very angry. The police were accused of racism and told to leave. SDP councillor Terry Malone suffered a similar fate when he tried to defend Thamesmead Town Corporation's failure to take any action to stop racist attacks. A picket of the local pub took place on March 23rd and a march against the BNP is planned for the beginning of May.

Rolan's funeral, the day after the meeting, was attended by hundreds of people, both black and white. Music composed by Rolan himself was played during the service.

■ **Contact the Rolan Adams Family Support Campaign. C/o GACARA, 115-123 Powis Street, London SE18; tel: 081 855 4343.**

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