# BRIEFING

April 1992 80p (60p unwaged)

## NO COALITION

# LABOUR

# TAKE THE POWER!

Tony Benn
PTA, Asylum Bill
Hackney coppers

Misery of RSI
TUC cuts, Poll Tax
OutRage!

South Africa
USA
South America

Class Traitor(s)
of the
Month

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**April 1992, No. 121**

## *Labour Briefing*

Annual General Meeting

**11am-5:30pm**
**Sunday, May 10th**
**Red Rose Club**
**129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7**
**(Finsbury Park tube)**

Speakers invited: *Dennis Skinner, Martha Osamor, Billy Power, Bernie Grant, Leonora Lloyd, Jeremy Corbyn, Unmesh Desai...*

**Your first chance to assess with comrades the situation facing the labour movement and the left following the general election!**
**Plus: future plans for *Labour Briefing* and elections to the Editorial Board!**

## What the Tories say about *Labour Briefing*

IN THE CONSERVATIVE Research Department's *Campaign Guide 1992* there is a chapter entitled "Labour and the Left" within which there is a sub-section called "Extreme Left Groups" which in turn consists of three entries, one on *Militant*, one on *Socialist* Organiser and one on *Labour Briefing*. The entry on *Briefing* runs as follows:

"LABOUR BRIEFING, an independent hard left group which boasts a number of supporters in Parliament, believes in 'combining work inside and outside the Labour Party'. Before the last election, it published an alternative manifesto calling for a Labour government to: 'take over the banks and finance houses', 'introduce a punitive wealth tax', 'withdraw from the imperialist NATO alliance'. Twelve Prospective Parliamentary Candidates indicated their support for the paper before the general election and five were elected (Diane Abbott, John Battle, Paul Boateng, Mildred Gordon, Bernie Grant). Recent contibutors included Mr Jeremy Corbyn MP and Mr Tony Benn MP."

WE'RE SURE comrade Boateng, *Briefing*'s Class Traitor of the Month not so long ago, will be delighted to find himself back in such fine company. As for John Battle, we leave him in the hands of his friends on the All-Party "Pro-Life" Group of MPs.

THE CONSERVATIVE Research Department has also published "Who's Left? An index of Labour MPs and left-wing causes", a stolid work which reveals the names of 26 Labour MPs who have supported not a single one of the "seventeen prominent left-wing causes" on the Tories' checklist - causes which include "support of the Nicaraguan Communist regime", "support of the Wapping pickets", and "condemnation of SAS 'terrorism' on Gibraltar" as well as unilateralism, support for "the Scargill strike" and for "the unilateral closure of Porton Down". Among the Labour MPs given a clean bill of political health are: **Stuart Bell, John Cunningham, Donald Dewar, Roy Hattersley, Kate Hoey, Kim Howells, Peter Shore** and **John Smith**.

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# Labour must govern alone

AS WE GO to press, the end of Tory rule seems close at hand. That prospect alone will motivate thousands of Labour activists and inspire millions of working class people in the coming weeks.

But at issue in this election is not only the removal of the Tories but the installation of a majority Labour government. This is a goal that is within our grasp and deserves to be fought for without reserve, despite the retreats and betrayals of the last few years.

To begin with, it is a struggle for those minimal yet vital commitments which even the Policy Review and Kinnock's authoritarianism could not excise from Labour's programme. The pledges on the minimum wage, pensions, child benefit, nursery places, a Ministry for Women, elected authorities for Scotland and London: these are not our leaders' policies, but *our* policies, the ones even they could not wrench from the labour movement's grasp.

Then there are the conference policies already disavowed by the leadership - on defence cuts, the NHS, lesbian and gay equality, even trade union law - which we have fought for and won within our movement. These are *our* commitments to the working class and we should not be afraid to campaign on them.

Of course, a Kinnock government will do its best not to deliver even its own minimalist manifesto pledges. But however hard it tries, it will not totally succeed in reversing the rise in working class expectations, the renewed confidence, which its election will bring about. As Tony Benn points out in this month's *Briefing*, a Labour government will soon find itself squeezed between two conflicting sources of pressure: from above (the City, the EC, the civil service, the media) and from below, from the trades unions and all those other constituencies which have been patient for many years but will expect some concrete improvements from a Labour government.

A majority Labour government, seen by the working class to have the authority if not the will to act to remedy its long-held grievances, will be the focus of a new wave of struggle inside the Labour Party and the trades unions.

In that struggle, we will raise an elementary democratic demand: that the Labour government does what it was elected to do, that it governs in the interests of and in co-operation with the majority. We will not let the minority, the extra-Parliamentary wing of the Tory Party in the boardrooms and the bureaucracies, stand in our way. After all, *they* lost the election! Why should a majority Labour government pay them any heed?

If, however Labour fails to win an overall majority in Parliament, Party and trades union activists will have to mobilise rapidly to block all attempts at a deal with the Liberal Democrats. Such a coalition has already found advocates not only at the *Guardian* and *Independent*, but also at *Tribune* and *New Left Review* (see page 16). But it has nothing to offer the working class or its organisations, the Labour Party and the trades unions.

A coalition would provide just the excuse Kinnock would like to do nothing for the people who put him in Number 10. Any deal with the Liberals, a gang of free-lance politicians accountable to social interests utterly opposed to those which Labour represents, would drive a wedge between the labour movement and its government. With its lifeline to the organised working class severed, it would be buffeted by every passing political breeze, stumble from stitch-up to stitch-up, and turn in the end against the very people it claimed to serve. As economic crises mounted, it would act in what would be called the "national interest" and engage in authoritarian attacks on trades unions and other dissenters. It would pave the way for a return to Tory rule in short order.

There is a clear and realistic alternative to coalition. If Labour is the largest single party it must present a positive, specific programme, based on conference policies, in the Queen's Speech and dare the Liberals or the Tories to vote it down. We can, in any case, do nothing without a popular mandate. A coalition can never embody such a mandate because absolutely no one has voted for it; it can only be a consolation prize for careerists.

All the polls reflect a wide-spread hunger for change, for an end to the era of market forces and public service cuts, for a more egalitarian and just society. A coalition government will have neither the will nor the means to satisfy that hunger. A Labour government, even a minority one, that showed itself fearless in defence of working class interests and determined to implement a basic programme to enhance living standards, could tap unsuspected reserves of public support and lay the foundations not only for electoral triumph but real social change.

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

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

**All articles published in *Labour Briefing* reflect the opinions of the authors alone unless otherwise indicated. *Briefing* welcomes criticisms and contributions. Please keep us posted on what's going on in your area. Deadline for the next issue is April 20th.**

***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?**

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

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# Pressures from above and below: the challenges facing a new Labour government

Labour Briefing *caught up with* ***Tony Benn*** *in his London lair, just before he left town to hit the hustings in Chesterfield. Entering his thirteenth general election campaign as a Labour candidate, Tony shared with us his hopes and fears for the next Labour government.*

"THE FIRST THING to recognise is that there is a real possibility of a majority Labour government. The anti-Tory feeling is much stronger than the polls pick up or the media want us to know. They want a hung Parliament, a paralysed Parliament; they want PR so the civil service can run the country. But I detect a real sea-change in public opinion and that may well be reflected on polling day.

Now what will happen when the new Labour Cabinet first meets round the table? The first point to make is that the Permanent Secretaries have all been appointed by Mrs Thatcher. It would be a great mistake to think that they will welcome any reversal of her policies. At this very moment, the civil servants are doing what they always do before elections - preparing one brief for an incoming Labour government and one for an incoming Tory government. What they are doing is taking what they want to do and turning it into two sorts of language: the language of the Tory manifesto and the language of the Labour manifesto. The deal they will offer all incoming Labour ministers is this: if you do what we want you to do, we will help you to pretend that you are doing what you said you would do.

But at the same time, regardless of what the civil servants want, the truth of the economic situation, the true extent of the deficit and the run-down of industry, will emerge. And it will be worse than we have been led to believe.

You have to recognise that the world financial community, which has allowed Thatcher and Major to get away with all sorts of things - like the £30 billion borrowing limit to finance a pre-election budget - will not be so tolerant of a Labour government. They know that a Labour government, whatever its leaders may have said at lunches in the City, represents an interest that will be pressing it and pressing it to do all sorts of things: improve the health service, build homes, repair schools, pay teachers better, invest in public transport. etc. Therefore the international financial community will require, as a condition for conferring confidence on the new government, that it repay the pre-election boom - plus a little bit more because it is a Labour government and it must prove how tough it is with its own supporters.

But the expectations of the labour movement will go through the roof. You can be as cautious as you like in the manifesto but after thirteen years, there will be bonfires and dancing in the streets when the Tories go. The low paid, the pensioners, the trades unions, and many others will feel: now it's our turn. An incoming government will therefore not only be squeezed by international capital and frowned on by the Permanent Secretaries, it will also be buffeted by the waves of optimism welling up from below.

The Tory Party will be in total disarray. Ashdown lives in the hope that in a hung Parliament, he could bring a minority Labour government down at any time. It's a complete illusion. Once the Tories are out, there's going to be the most enormous bloodletting in their party. Who will take the blame for defeat: Thatcher, Heseltine, Major, the pro-Europeans, the anti-Europeans? It could take them eighteen months to sort themselves out. So even if it was a hung Parliament, the Tories will not vote to bring it down, because they won't want an election until they are ready.

This gives you at least eighteen months and probably two years, in which - even with a small majority, even with a hung Parliament - Labour can do what it likes in the House of Commons. Of course, what you can do in the House of Commons is now severely restricted by the EC. What this means is that a new Labour government will become a fulcrum between the pressure coming from a more hopeful electorate and the pressure from the ERM and the EC.

When that Labour Cabinet meets round the table, it will also soon find that maintaining the present level of defence expenditure is unsustainable. Who is going to sit there and say we have got to continue with NHS waiting-lists and crumbling schools because we have got to have the fourth Trident? Reality will take over.

There is one residual fear I have to admit to. When people are frightened they swing to the right, not the left. That is why it is so important that in everything we do we give people real hope. And you cannot do that when you are not offering to deal with their immediate problems. Of course it's difficult. But if the Labour Party is confident in power, doing what everyone knows has to be done, there would be a Labour landslide at the following general election. That's what we should aim for.

***"there will be bonfires and dancing in the streets when the Tories go."***

For the moment, it is absolutely vital to beat the Tories. Whatever may be said about electoralism among socialists, we all are electoralists on polling day. What's becoming clear, for two reasons, is that the Labour Party hasn't really changed: it represents an economic interest which is now suffering and a political aspiration which is now growing. However cautious the Labour leadership may be at any one time, those are the actual facts that bind us together."

# Roy plays the race card

***Sue Jones** digs into the disgust and anger provoked by Roy Hattersley's offer to the Tories to support a revised Asylum Bill.*

TO GRASP JUST how obnoxious Hattersley's abortive deal with the Tories on the Asylum Bill was you have to remember that the campaign against the Bill waged by refugee groups and their supporters had ALREADY WON.

The Bill had been effectively buried because of the strength of feeling against it - only for Hattersley to dig it up and breathe political life back into the corpse.

The "concessions" Hattersley demanded from the government in return for Labour help with getting the Bill through Parliament would have represented no real gain at all.

The Bill proposed to remove the right of appeal now held by those who apply for refugee status from inside the UK and replace it with a system where officials "took another look" at refused cases. Hattersley proposed allowing greater time limits for requests for these and changing the rules governing them - concessions the government had already signalled it might make.

While Hattersley continued to oppose the provision to fingerprint all asylum seekers (including children) on arrival or application, he accepted without comment the proposal to remove the rights of homeless refugee families to permanent and in some cases even temporary accommodation. This section was denounced by the Commission for Racial Equality as racially discriminatory; it would introduce immigration checks on all those applying to local councils as homeless people.

Hattersley opposed the idea of widening the carriers' liability provisions, which impose fines on airlines carrying passengers without proper visas or passports (to encourage them not to allow potential refugees even to board planes out of the country). But his deal would have left intact the draconian new rules which would make it extremely difficult for anyone to get recognised as a refugee (for example, by counting the fact that they had travelled on false papers against them).

Hattersley's demands would have left the gist of the Bill intact and in practise would have made little difference to refugees - as any of the various groups campaigning against the Bill could have told him had he asked.

Throughout the passage of the Bill, the Labour front bench vacillated, unable to decide whether it should oppose the entire attempt to criminalise human beings fleeing oppressive regimes and war, or seek to amend odd clauses and try its best not to be seen as "soft" on immigration. Meanwhile, outside Westminster, the physical attacks on refugees and all black people escalated, egged on by a carefully planned press campaign against migrants.

Local authorities played a dubious role. Their offensive talk of "the burden" imposed by refugees was echoed by Labour MPs in committee. While Labour authorities formally opposed the Bill, they continued to argue that refugees cost local councils money, seeming to confirm the racist argument that black people take more than their fair share of services. Some even blamed their financial crises on the arrival of refugees - not on the Poll Tax, not on the Tory government, but on the presence of Kurds, Somalis or others in their boroughs.

Despite all this, the campaign against the Bill was persistent and principled. The churches talked about human rights. The housing organisations stood firm against the attacks on homeless people's rights. Some MPs made stirring speeches. Paul Boateng shone in debate. And the Bill was dropped: so much opposition had coalesced that it could not be got through the Lords in time for the election.

Then came a series of well-planned and highly publicised raids and arrests (probably originally timed for the final passage of the Bill through the Commons). Suddenly Hattersley announced that the Labour Party was willing to resuscitate the dead Bill. Subsequently, some front benchers claimed that it had all been blown up by the press; it was not a real offer, it was a manoeuvre. But the message was clear. For Hattersley and colleagues, racism is not an issue to be confronted but an embarrassment to be circumvented. For them, basic human rights, the lives and safety of those fleeing oppression, can be reduced to a bargaining counter in a seedy pre-election game.

We have to change that in our Party. We must ensure, now, that there is no repeat after the election. We must force our MPs to promote real rights for those seeking refuge here: a proper appeal system for people refused permission to stay, with free legal representation; incorporation of the UN convention on refugees into British law; the abolition of fines on airlines; an end to discrimination against refugees in welfare benefits and housing; and the provision of resources for language and other training for refugees.



*Racist Roy Photo: NEWSFOCUS*

Our local councils must be compelled to stop scapegoating refugees. Every Labour authority should have a positive policy guaranteeing refugees the same housing and other rights as other residents, including rights to have their specific needs met. And there should be no immigration checks in any council offices.

As Labour activists, we ought not to relate to refugees as victims, but as people with whom we can share our experiences of struggle, victory and defeat. Make contact with your local refugee community groups. Invite them to your branch meetings. Find out about the background to the war or repression that drove them here. Learn from them. Learn about their approach to politics, their understanding of the world, their view of Britain and its problems.

You will find you have more in common with them than with Hattersley.

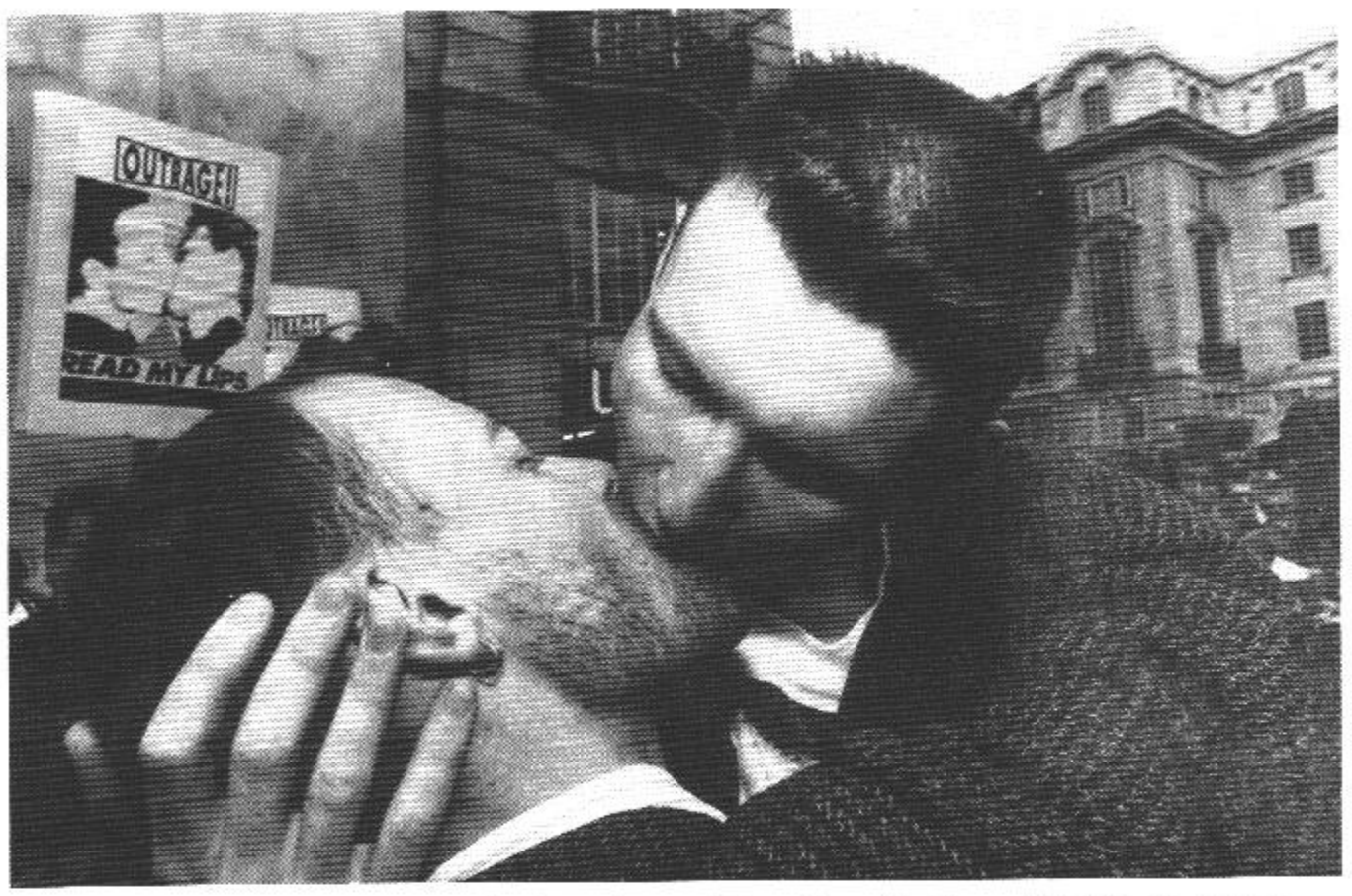
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# OutRage! a suitable response to bigotry...




*OutRage demo - 'Kiss-in' Picadilly Circus PHOTO: Paul Mattsson*

*The direct action group OutRage! has been conducting a high-profile campaign for civil rights for lesbians and gay men in the months running up to the general election.* Labour Briefing *spoke to OutRage activist* ***Peter Tatchell*** *about the thinking behind the groups' deliberately provocative tactics.*

"UNLIKE THE campaign against Section 28, which was merely defensive, OutRage! seeks to tackle equal rights on all fronts, to set the agenda for advance rather than just wait for the next attack.

It employs a style of political protest that is both educational and entertaining. Humour and imagination are effective ways of defusing hostility, overcoming apathy and increasing public awareness. Unfortunately, the typical format of protest - a march with speakers - is rarely 'newsworthy'. We've got to learn to use the media creatively to get coverage of radical ideas. We have to use broadcasting and the press if we want to challenge prejudice and win public support for lesbian and gay equality.If we restrict ourselves to behind-the-scenes lobbying public attitudes will never change. The key to building a majority for equal rights is creating a visibility for lesbian and gay issues. To do that we have to break through and get our issues, our concerns, into the mass media".

For more information contact OutRage! 67-69 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6BP; tel. 071 490 7153.

## One law for all

DISCRIMINATORY LAWS which criminalise gay men for cruising, meeting and chatting each other up in public were flouted by members of OutRage! at the Eros Statue, Piccadilly Circus, London, on Thursday, March 5th.

Participants wearing winking masks defiantly exchanged giant calling cards with names and telephone numbers to highlight how gay men cruising and swapping names and numbers or even merely winking at each other can be prosecuted, convicted and imprisoned. Demonstrators "confessed" to these "crimes" and challenged police to arrest them.

Afterwards, groups of three gay men acted out "frenzied bonking" inside OutRage's portable "wendy-house" - thus symbolically breaking the law which criminalises male homosexual acts when more than two men participate. There are no similar legal restrictions on heterosexual sex involving more than two people.

Many of the discriminatory laws under which gay men are prosecuted were never intended by Parliament to be used to repress homosexuality. Police and judges have taken it upon themselves to interpret the law in the most homophobic way possible.

Typical is the use of Section 32 of the 1956 Sexual Offences Act against gay and bisexual men. It was originally introduced in 1898 to arrest heterosexual men seeking female prostitutes, but is now used almost exclusively to criminalise social contact between homosexual men which does not involve prostitution.

Under this legislation, "it is an offence for a man persistently to solicit or importune in a public place for immoral purposes." Despite the supposed decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967, homosexual behaviour is still deemed by the police and courts to be an "immoral purpose". This means it is unlawful for two consenting men to cruise or chat each other up in a public place with a view to arranging sexual relations - even if they never have sex. Similar behaviour by heterosexuals is not a crime.

Judges have interpreted soliciting and importuning as including any form of communication, ranging from verbal propositions and passing notes, to merely smiling and winking at another man.

This results in the legal anomaly that it is a criminal offence for adult homosexuals to meet each other for the purpose of arranging sexual relations which are completely lawful.

In 1989, in England and Wales, 462 men were convicted and another 117 cautioned for cruising and chatting-up, contrary to Section 32. Six of these men were imprisoned, with three of them receiving sentences of six to twelve months.

# The right to marry

LESBIAN AND GAY couples filed applications for civil marriage at Westminster Registry Office in the third week of March, 1991 - the first ever attempt to do so in Britain.

The couples, dressed in tuxedos and bridal dresses and carrying flower posies, included lesbian partners, Lynn Sutcliffe and Sarah Hews. Both aged 25, they've been together for more than two years.

"We feel our relationship is just as loving and valid as any heterosexual marriage," says Lynn. "It's offensive the way the law gives special privileges to married men and women, but denies them to gay and lesbian partners like us. We want the same legal rights as married heterosexuals, including recognition as next of kin for the purposes of inheritance, compassionate leave from work, and visiting rights in hospitals and prisons."

"The right to marry and found a family is a fundamental human right," Sarah added. "If Lynn gets sick, I'd want to be able to get compassionate leave from work to care for her. In the event of Lynn having an accident or dying, we both want the law to recognise me as her next of kin."

In her previous employment as a nurse, Sarah witnessed firsthand the practical problems that arise from the non-recognition of same-sex relationships.

"I saw the partners of lesbian and gay patients excluded from the hospital bedside by parents who disapproved of their relationship," Sarah recalls. "There were instances where hospital staff ignored the wishes of homosexual patients and their partners. They took the side of homophobic parents who were granted next of kin status and abused that position to deny the wishes of their lesbian and gay children."

"When I went into hospital last year, I had lots of difficulty nominating Sarah as my next of kin," says Lynn. "The medical staff pressured me to put down my mother's name instead. It took a real effort to get them to accept my wishes."

Sarah had a similar problem: "At work, there's an accident insurance scheme where your next of kin automatically gets paid benefits if you are injured or killed. It's not easy to get the company to accept a lesbian partner as your beneficiary."




*OutRage demo - Hyde Park Corner toilets PHOTO: Paul Mattsson*

# Military homophobia

IN A PROTEST against the military ban on lesbians and gay men serving in the armed forces, OutRage! "re-decorated" statues of four of Britain's most famous military leaders who were homosexuals/bisexuals: Field Marshals Kitchener, Haig and Montgomery, and Admiral Mountbatten.

Among those participating were lesbian and gay ex-service personnel who have suffered victimisation by the military.

Between 1987-1990, 306 lesbians and gay men were dismissed from the armed forces. Thirty-two were imprisoned, some for up to two years, for consenting homosexual behaviour.

In 1991, a WREN serving in the Royal Navy reported that she had been investigated as a suspected lesbian simply because her name was discovered in another woman's address book.

She recalls: "I had my telephone tapped, I was followed off camp, my mail was 'accidentally' opened, and I suffered stress at work with comments about 'poofs, raving homosexuals and dykes'."

A bandsman in the Royal Highland Fusiliers, Paul Crone, was imprisoned and tortured by Military Police in 1988 after he was seen talking to a gay former soldier while socialising off-duty.

To make Crone confess to his gayness, they subjected him to sleep deprivation, despoiling of his food, and forced physical exercises while being beaten. Military Police also stood on his back wearing boots with metal studs which cut into his flesh.

According to a friend: "For over a week, he couldn't wear a shirt without the blood seeping through." Faced with incessant violent abuse, Crone admitted his homosexuality and was dismissed from the forces.

A lesbian army corporal in the WRACS was interrogated for eight hours and imprisoned for a week in 1989 after officers from the Special Investigation Bureau barged into her quarters while she was watching television with another woman soldier.

Accusing her of being a lesbian, but unable to prove the charges, the SIB harassed her until she eventually agreed to resign.

In 1987, second aircraftsmen Andy Thomas and Ian Smith were court-martialled, and received custodial sentences of four and three months respectively, for consensual sex during their free time at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus.

# Hattersley hedges on PTA

*The Prevention of Terrorism Act, like the poor, it seems, is always with us.* ***Ronan Bennett*** *reviews the life and times of the PTA.*

ONCE AGAIN, the Prevention of Terrorism Act has had its vindictive and worthless life extended.

Kenneth Baker told MPs on February 24th: "We are dealing with fanatics who stop at nothing" and argued that the powers of arrest, detention and questioning conferred by the Act were essential to defeat "the terrorists".

The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provision) Bill was introduced in a knee-jerk response to a particularly bloody IRA campaign in several English cities. It made its first appearance in Parliament on November 27th, 1974 and was law by the following day. Roy Jenkins, the then Labour Home Secretary, told MPs that the Bill contained "Draconian measures unprecedented in peacetime", but justified them on the grounds existing legislation did not give the police sufficient powers to combat the IRA.

***"Labour, it seems, will only tinker with the Act, leaving in force enough of it to maintain the harassment of the Irish community"***

The Act's first victim - a young, unemployed Irishman - was picked up by police in Southampton only hours after Jenkins had introduced the Bill. He was suspected of having been involved in several fatal bombing attacks. The new legislation allowed the police to detain and question him, without a solicitor being present, for seven days.

As Jenkins himself admitted to MPs when he introduced his Bill, its provisions would "involve some infringement of civil liberties" and "inconvenience, perhaps more than inconvenience, a few people who may not deserve it". One of those who did not "deserve" this "inconvenience" was the young Irishman arrested in Southampton. The seven days' rigorous, at times brutal, questioning was bad enough, but paled into insignificance compared to what was to follow. For the suspect was Paul Hill and he was to spend the next fifteen years in prison for offences he did not commit.

It was an inglorious beginning for the PTA. Almost twenty years on, the fiction of its "temporary provisions" has been dropped and it has become established as a permanent fixture in the state's repressive armoury. Many of the safeguards incorporated in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act - the tape-recording of interviews, access to legal advice - are overridden by the PTA, and those unfortunate enough to be arrested under it discover that the burden of proof, in effect, has been shifted on to them: the suspect must prove to the satisfaction of Special Branch and/or the Anti-Terrorist Squad that he or she is not involved in subversive activity.

The Act has singularly failed to achieve its stated aim: the prevention of terrorism. If Baker asked any British Rail or London Underground commuter about the success of the Act he would have been given short shrift. We are all too familiar with the IRA's successes in assassinating MPs, mortar-bombing Downing Street, blowing up the Grand Hotel at Brighton, organising jail-breaks and causing large-scale destruction of property and disruption of public transport. Over the past year, at least one IRA active service unit (possibly two) has been carrying out operations throughout England, apparently unimpeded by the Act.

But this is to fall into a sterile, even unreal debate. The framers of the PTA could never have hoped to defeat "terrorism", even with the severe measures they brought into being.

Following the PTA's introduction in 1974, Special Branch organised numerous raids, which were nothing but trawling expeditions against the Irish community. The aim was not so much to pick up active service unit members (who steered clear of the focal points of the Irish community in England), but to gather intelligence - most of it low grade, almost all of it of questionable utility - on the Irish community. The only effect of the dawn raids, detentions, checks at ports and airports, exclusion orders (a form of internal exile whose counterpart was so often condemned in the old Soviet Union), and harassment has been the intimidation of the Irish community into withholding support for Republicanism. Many of those whose sympathies lay with the Republican Movement and who worked for it in legal ways were terrified into quiescence.

For the government and police, this has been the Act's main achievement. It is difficult to communicate to non-Irish readers the emotional and psychological impact of the PTA on Irish people living in Britain. It produces much the same emotions as those created by the old 'Sus' laws among Blacks, or the Asylum Bill among refugees.

The police and Special Branch/Anti-Terrorist Squad have, of course, been lobbying to retain the Act. Perhaps this explains Roy Hattersley's bungled attempt to put up coherent resistance to renewal of the PTA. In 1983 Hattersley broke with bi-partisan policy on the issue and announced that the Labour front bench would be opposing renewal of the Act. But he told the House during the February debate that Labour would reform rather than repeal the legislation. Labour, it seems, will only tinker with the Act, leaving in force enough of it to maintain the harassment of the Irish community. The decision, apparently, was the outcome of an internal review endorsed by the Shadow Cabinet the previous week.

Something has surely gone badly wrong here. A law described by its original architect as "draconian" and whose victims have included hundreds of people entirely unconnected with the conflict in Northern Ireland cannot be reformed. It belongs nowhere other than the rubbish bin. It does Hattersley and the Labour Party no credit to propose anything other than dumping it once and for all.

■ **In 1987, when Ronan Bennett was working for Jeremy Corbyn MP as a researcher, his House of Commons pass was withdrawn on the advice of the security services. In recent weeks the Tories, who persist in wrongly describing Ronan as "ex-IRA" (whatever that means), have been reminding the press of this incident in a feeble attempt to "play the Irish card" against Labour. Neither Ronan nor Jeremy is the least impressed.**

# London's crack-dealing cops

*Operation Jackpot - Scotland Yard's official probe into allegations of drug dealing by police at London's Stoke Newington station - has unearthed what senior Metropolitan Police sources have called "the most serious corruption charges over the past twenty years".* ***Heenan Bhatti*** *and* ***Shaun Waterman*** *investigated - exclusively for* Labour Briefing.

THE MAIN OUTLINES of the accusations against Stoke Newington police have already emerged in the media, but our enquiries have uncovered further allegations involving a startling number of other Hackney police officers. These will add new impetus to the call by local MP Brian Sedgemore for a public inquiry into the policing of the north London borough.

The revelations centre on an alleged "culture of violence" at the neighbouring City Road police station. Seven officers were dismissed from the station in 1990 after a disciplinary tribunal was told that they had beaten north London man Gary Stretch with bottles, nearly severing his ear. Two recent cases involving alleged assaults on a group of six other officers from City Road collapsed amid allegations that the police had violently beaten the two accused men and then conspired together to mislead the court.

The Hackney Community Defence Association, a local group which assists victims of police malpractice, has published the names of thirty other officers from City Road, Stoke Newington and Hackney police stations allegedly involved in assaults, perjury and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

We can also reveal new details of Operation Jackpot, which has already led to the transfer of at least eight officers from London's largest purpose-built police station.

One Stoke Newington officer, DC Roy Lewandowski, is currently awaiting trial on charges involving theft from the effects of a murder victim and a multi-million pound VAT fraud. In court, it was said that Lewandowski was to remain under investigation following allegations that he was also making more than £2000 a week through drug racketeering.

The claims that prompted Operation Jackpot come from two women. One, a convicted drug dealer who cannot be named for legal reasons, says that she dealt drugs supplied to her by police officers, who also gave her "protection".

Another woman, Ida Oderinde, 31, a friend of the dealer, is presently serving a four year sentence for drug offences. She claims to have been planted with crack by police officers after refusing to deal for them.

In the House of Commons Sedgemore accused Stoke Newington's senior officer, Chief Superintendent Roy Clark, of "misleading" him and of being "duped by his own officers". He has called for a judicial inquiry into the scandal.

The bizarre suicide of Sergeant Gerrard Carroll at Barkingside police station has added further fuel to the fire. It appears that Carroll was facing questions from the Jackpot team when he shot himself dead with a police firearm in a cell at the east London station late last month.

Carroll, who had been a custody officer at Stoke Newington until a recent transfer, was at the centre of a number of allegations made by convicted drug dealers. One of them claims that Carroll and another officer beat him in a cell and then offered him £1000 for information about dealers' activities in the area.

One legal source, who deals frequently with officers from Stoke Newington, told *Labour Briefing*: "The impression one gains is that certain officers have been running wild with carte blanche to do almost what they like."

In October 1991, three men had convictions for assaulting police officers quashed at Knightsbridge Crown Court. The court was told that the testimony of the officers bringing the charges could not be relied upon. The alleged victims and key witnesses (all of the latter were policemen) had been at the centre of another dramatic trial the previous month, when Michael Lavery and Geoffery Eaton were acquitted of a violent assault against police.

A jury took just fifteen minutes to clear Lavery and Eaton of five counts of actual and grievous bodily harm, after one officer admitted that parts of her statement had been copied "word for word" from a colleague's notes. Independent eye-witnesses told the court that they had seen the arresting officers beat both men with truncheons while they lay handcuffed and face down in the road. They are currently suing police for wrongful arrest, false imprisonment, malicious prosecution and assault.

Between them Lavery and Eaton sustained more than forty injuries, including head wounds apparently inflicted by a truncheon. They told the court that the beating was a "grudge attack" launched after an argument in a pub about the Gary Stretch case.

One officer in the case claimed on the witness stand that police at City Road were "100% behind" the seven men sacked for the assault on Stretch. Another attributed the anger in the crowd which gathered at the scene of Lavery's and Eaton's arrest to anti-police sentiment in the community. "That's just what they're like round there," he said.

Attitudes like that have made many people in the area unwilling to co-operate with the Jackpot investigation. Local youths - both black and white - talk of continual harassment, with 'stop and search' being a daily experience, especially for those already 'fingered' by police officers.

One local mother said: "Round here you feel like a prisoner. If one of my boys steps out of the door there is a sure bet he will be stopped and searched. Many black people are scared to speak out because they feel there will be harassment."

A spokesperson for the Hackney Community Defence Association said: "The call for a judicial inquiry is not just a knee jerk reaction. It is the only way to get people to come forward given the lack of trust between the police and the community here. It is surely in everyone's interest to get at the truth but this will not happen as long as you have the police investigating themselves."



# Bricked up for life

*Frank Johnson is an Irishman serving a life sentence for a murder he did not commit. In this first of a two part investigation into the Frank Johnson case,* ***Andy Parr*** *and* ***Mike Marqusee*** *look back at an anti-IRA "dirty tricks" operation that went wrong - and the innocent man who has been made to suffer for it.*

Frank Johnson came to England at the age of 16 in 1955. In 1972 he went to work as a shop assistant for another Irishman, John Sheridan, who ran a tobacconist and newsagent in Whitechapel, east London.

On the evening of February 3rd, 1975, Frank was in the rear of the shop watching television when Sheridan came running in from the front with the upper half of his body on fire. A man in a donkey jacket, he later told Frank, had entered the shop, thrown petrol over him and lit the blaze. Frank threw water over Sheridan and doused the flames. An ambulance took Sheridan to Guys Hospital. Police arrived, questioned Frank and showed no sign of disbelieving his account of events.

The next day the story appeared in a local paper under the curious headline "IRA Human Torch Attack".

Remember, this was early 1975, in the middle of a prolonged IRA bombing campaign in England. The PTA had been introduced; anti-Irish fervour was at its height. The police and security services were engaged in all kinds of covert and overt operations against the Irish community.

Retrospectively, it is clear that the press story (which could have only come from the police) was an attempt to paint Sheridan as the victim of a brutal IRA protection racket, an obvious device to discredit the IRA within the Irish community in London.

But complications arose because Sheridan survived the fire attack. Frank visited him several times in hospital. He told Frank he had given two statements to the police. He knew nothing of his attacker and nothing about any IRA connection.

Three weeks after the attack, Sheridan died of blood poisoning brought about by his burns becoming infected.

Ten months later, on December 16th, 1975, police came to Frank's home and arrested him - at gunpoint - for the murder of John Sheridan. He has remained in custody since that day.

Frank was arrested on the basis of statements made by two men, Jack Tierney and David Smart, who claimed that Frank had conspired with them to attack Sheridan in order to rob him of £4,000 which Frank knew he kept in his shop. According to the two men, Frank was the "inside man" who had plotted it all. Tierney also described Frank as an extremely dangerous figure who had what Tierney called "connections", meaning connections with the IRA.

All three men were charged with murder and other offences. Their trial took place in September, 1976. The only evidence against Frank was the statements made by his alleged accomplices. Smart gave evidence in the trial and admitted to throwing petrol on Sheridan and setting him alight. Tierney refused to give evidence and as a result could not be cross-examined. The police claimed that Sheridan had been too unwell in hospital to make any statements. All three men were convicted of murder and given life sentences. The judge recommended that Frank serve a minimum of twenty years.

They key to the Frank Johnson story is the strange career of Jack Tierney, whom Frank had first met in the 60s. In Tony Bunyan's 1976 book *The Political Police in Britain* Tierney is mentioned in connection with a failed Bomb Squad attempt in the early 70s to frame two left-wing political activists on charges of conspiracy to buy firearms. Bunyan describes Tierney as a "police informer" and quotes Tierney's testimony in the firearms trial to the effect that on police instructions he had tried to inveigle the accused activists into buying guns from him.

In Ireland in 1970 Tierney survived five gun shot wounds which police said he received while in the process of recovering stolen property for the Irish government. Others have claimed that he was shot in the course of an argument arising over money he and the others had stolen together. This incident contributed to his reputation as a "hard man" and won him the nickname "No Bullets" Tierney.

The police investigating the Sheridan murder admitted that they already knew Tierney and the judge actually congratulated him on his work as a police agent. Tierney is now in an open prison awaiting parole.

If Tierney was working for the police or other state agencies in a "dirty tricks" operation against the IRA, as Frank now believes, then why did he end up getting sent down for life along with Frank? Two things have to be born in mind. The first is that Tierney was both an active criminal and a police stooge; the second is that he had obviously bungled the Sheridan killing. From occasional outbursts in court he seems to have believed that if he implicated Frank the police would let him off the hook. But he had become too much of an embarrassment, too much of a loose cannon. Prisoners believe that Tierney has continued to work for the authorities while in prison and he is seen by many as an informer for the screws.

In any case, it is clear that Tierney and his associate Smart (who died some years ago in prison) cannot be considered reliable witnesses against Frank.

It is also hard to accept the prosecution's account of Frank's alleged motive for the murder. He was close to Sheridan, who had trusted him with money on many occasions. If he wanted to steal £4,000 from the man he had plenty of opportunities without going to such violent lengths and without involving other people.

During all his years in prison Frank has never stopped protesting his innocence. Because of that, prison authorities have tried to portray him as mentally ill and in the early days even tried to "nut him off" to Broadmoor. He has no chance of parole because he shows no "remorse" for the crime he insists he did not commit.

"I came across Frank Johnson several times in prison and got to know him well," Billy says. "He first told me of his case in the late 70s and when I came across him in later years he never deviated one bit from his original story. It's obvious that from the beginning there was something very wrong with the whole set-up."

**Write to:**
**Frank Johnson**
**338667,**
**HMP Swaleside,**
**Brabazon Road,**
**East Church,**
**Kent NE12 4OZ.**

# Prem and Sam must go free!

**Valerie Veness**
Islington North CLP

THE DRAB STREETS of East Ham in London's East End are home to many Asian people, mainly Bangladeshis but also people from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Over the years many have suffered racial assaults by individuals and organised attacks by the National Front and other fascist groups.

In November 1986 a particularly brutal fire-bombing resulted in the deaths of three Sri Lankan Tamils in a house in East Ham. The police were faced with an outcry. Demonstrators outside the local police station demanded action against the perpetrators. Relations between the police and the local black communities, already severely strained, reached crisis point.

Within days police arrested and charged five Sri Lankan Tamils with the fire-bombing. At the trial two were convicted and given life sentences. These two were young men from Jaffna: Sam Kulasingham and Prem Sivalingham.

The prosecution alleged that Prem had joined with others, for one night only, and that this group had been responsible for the fire-bombing. The main evidence came from two witnesses, Muralee and Indra Kumar. The former admitted in Court that he had deliberately lied on a number of occasions. The trial judge consequently directed the jury to acquit three of the defendants, as there was no case against them.

Both Muralee and Indra Kumar claimed that Prem had confessed his part in the killings to them. Kumar said he had used the words, "We did it". Prem insists this conversation never took place. Kumar also claimed that Sam was present when Prem's so-called confession took place. It was put to the jury that the "we" in "we did it" implicated Sam.

According to the prosecution, the attack had come about as a result of rivalry between two Tamil groups in East Ham. There was ample evidence to show that one of these groups was led by Kumar himself. There was no evidence whatsoever to link Prem with either of them.

The prosecution conceded that it could not seek a conviction without the evidence of Kumar and Muralee, although it had already been accepted that Muralee had committed perjury and Kumar's testimony was so inconsistent and unreliable that the trial judge felt obliged to tell the jury that he, Kumar, clearly had his own axe to grind and his own interests to protect.

The men's conviction is based solely on Kumar's evidence, unreliable, inconsistent and uncorroborated.

Kumar was in this country on a visa due to expire in December 1986. Having applied for leave to stay, he was kept in protective custody by the police from 1986 to the trial in 1988.

The men appealed against their conviction. On February 11th, 1992, their case was heard by Lord Chief Justice Lane, who in one of the last acts of a miserable career dismissed their arguments.

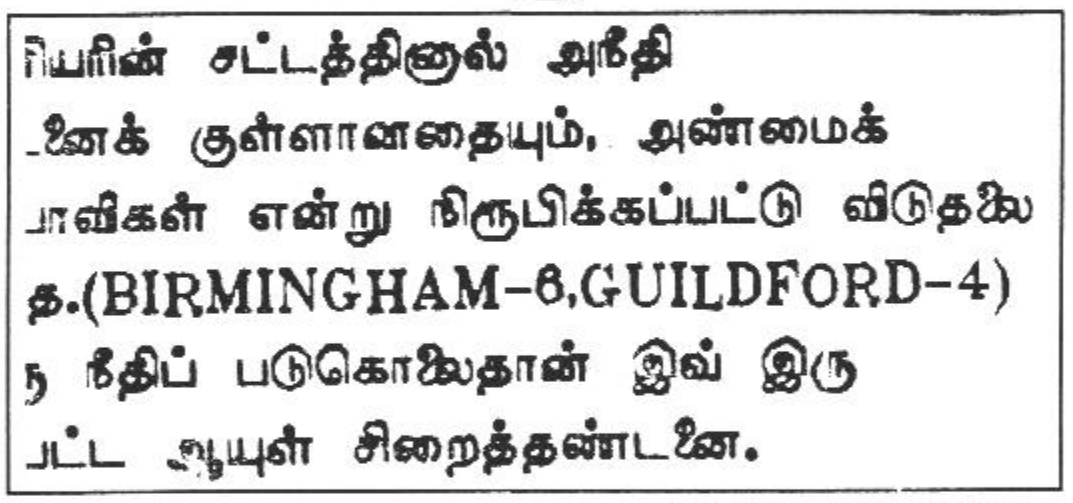
Sam Kulasingham has been on hunger strike since then. He is now in the hospital wing of Wormwood Scrubs prison. His condition is giving grave cause for concern.

Sam feels he has had to put his life at risk to draw attention to the injustice to which he has been subject.

A candle-lit vigil in support of Prem and Sam was held outside the prison on Friday March 6th. The turnout was impressive, especially the support from the Tamil Community and other victims of injustice such as Billy Power and John McGranigan.

A campaign to secure the men's release is being set up. Please write to them at: D Wing, HMP Wormwood Scrubs, PO Box 757, Du Cane Rd, London W12. Every letter means a great deal.

■ **For more information contact: Prem and Sam Campaign, c/o Veness, 23b Mildmay Road, London N1 4PU.**



நியாயின் சட்டத்திலுல் அநீதி
னைக் குள்ளானதையும், அண்மைக்
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த.(BIRMINGHAM-6,GUILDFORD-4)
ந நீதிப் படுகொலைதான் இவ் இரு
ட்ட ஈயுள் சிறைத்தண்டனை.

*Leaflet from Prem and Sam*

## Siol Phadraig Feile Bride

MARIE MAGUIRE WRITES: Women do not have it easy anywhere, but in Irish cultures women lead unnecessarily interesting lives.

No view of the Irish has managed to deny us a central role, however marginalised we may seem. Other people have Kings, Lords and Commons. We have Men, Women and Children. Siol Phadraig 1992 plans to promote surprising and exciting notions about Irish women, ideas about what they are, what they're doing and what they might dream up next.

**Until April 14th:** The Barrogs in **Men**, an Irish musical. Why are women like metaphors? Why are builders called Gerry?

**Until April 6th**: **Signora Joyce**, a new one woman show about the great woman in front of James Joyce, Nora Barnacle.

**Until March 28th**: **The Seagull** in a new version by Thomas Kilroy. Chekhov's dilapidated men and aspiring women translated into the Ireland of the Big House and the inevitable end of its subsidised gentility.

**Until March 28th**: **Play** and **Footfalls**, by Samuel Beckett.

**Also**: **Mother Ireland and Loyalist Ladies**, exhibition of female images reflecting political myths.

**Banshearchas**, exhibition about the ancient and magnificent women of Ireland, myth and reality.

**April 4th**: Irish poets at the South Bank, Festival Hall, Nuala ni Dhomhnaill, Rita Ann Higgins, Leland Bardwell and Eileen ni chvilleanain and Eavan Boland.

*For a festival brochure and list of venues (the festival will be constantly moving all over London) send a SAE to Festival Office, 76/82 Salisbury Road, London NW6 6NY. Tel: 071-624-7438, 071-624-3158.*

# A letter from Tim Donaghy in prison

AFTER THE "Community Charge" of Trafalgar Square, I was, unfortunately, one of the community charged with an array of offences resulting from "Operation Carnaby". Most were dropped, leaving riot (Section 1 Public Order Act), carrying a maximum sentence of ten years imprisonment, and violent disorder (Section 2, POA) as an alternative (to back them up if they couldn't make riot stick).

In return for a Section 2 guilty plea, the Gestapo offered to drop the Section 1 charge. This deal was, however, only available if both of my co-defendants and myself were willing to plead guilty: the bastards wanted all or nothing. One of my co-defendants was willing, having served eight months in custody; the other was just plain pessimistic and wanted it all over and done with as soon as possible. The offer looked tempting as an alternative to the eight years that we were to expect if found guilty of riot.

What could I do? It was all up to me. My co-defendants' future had been placed in my hands (deliberately, I think). A guilty plea would ensure that the reputation of the police would not be tarnished. Morals, ethics and personal principles hammered at me alongside a sense of duty to keep the other two out of the shit. Ultimately, I thought "Bollocks!" and decided I wouldn't surrender. It would be a fight to the death if they were going to nail me.

After over two weeks of a gruelling trial at the Old Bailey, three verdicts of "not guilty" were reached for Section 1 (Riot). Myself and one other defendant were found guilty on Section 2 - the third walked free - after eight months in custody.

I got three years and the other guy got two. He was also found guilty of a third charge for which he got an additional six months.

Conclusion: we got at least (or better than) what was offered on a plea bargain, plus one of our number walked away. We also exposed to the jury the gross negligence of duty and other atrocities committed by the police that day (although these revelations were hurriedly swept under the carpet by Judge Machin).

I went down with peace of mind knowing the full outcome of the trial rather than endlessly wondering what "could" have happened from inside a cell.

If the Gestapo offer a plea bargain, tell them to stick it where the sun doesn't shine and FIGHT THE POWER to the bitter end.




*Drawing by Tim Donaghy*

■ **At least 120 men were imprisoned as a result of the anti-Poll tax demonstration in Trafalgar Square of March 1990. Only two have been refused parole. Both are black. Tim Donaghy is one of these.**

**If released before September he will be able to complete his course in film making at the London College of Printing.**

**HELP TO REDUCE THE PRISON POPULATION BY RELEASING THOSE WHO SHOULD NOT BE THERE!**

# Poll Tax Rebellion - the book!

POLL TAX REBELLION (by Danny Burns, published by AK Press, £4.95) is an entertaining, informative and admirably partisan account of the anti-Poll Tax movement, its successes and failures.

**Cllr. Liz Davies**
Islington

The book is well-furnished with anecdotes from local campaigns and is refreshingly informed by personal experience, although the author's habit of including lengthy extracts from his diary is sometimes irritating. One flaw is that the anecdotes tend to all come from those areas where the author has contacts, notably the south west, parts of Scotland, Haringey and Hackney.

It contains a perceptive analysis of Militant's involvement in the movement. Burns rightly analyses their motives in taking up anti-Poll Tax work as a way of recouping the base they were losing in the Labour Party. He notes their success in organising both locally and nationally and in using the oratorical skills of Tommy Sheridan. He also notes their lack of democracy, packing of meetings and failure to relate to the community.

Danny Burns was himself one of three non-Militant supporters on the Executive of the Anti-Poll Tax Federation and witnessed the manoeuverings first-hand.

The book covers each stage of the anti-Poll Tax struggle in detail. It starts with Scotland, moves onto the demonstrations outside Town Halls in England and Wales in March 1990 and the great Trafalgar Square demo of March 31st. It rightly praises the Trafalgar Square Defence Committee for its tireless non-sectarian work.

Written and published by anarchists, the book is relentlessly critical of the Labour Party's role. It recounts the failure of the Scottish Stop-It campaign, Kinnock's and Hattersley's condemnation of the Trafalgar Square demo and the pathetic spectacle of Labour councils using bailiffs against the poorest people in the community.

It fails, however, even to mention the fight that went on inside the Labour Party, the councillors and local Party activists facing disciplinary charges for their involvement in the anti-Poll Tax movement, the battles over non-payment and imprisonments. There's only a perfunctory reference to Terry Fields.

Nor does the book analyse the current lack of activity in the anti-Poll Tax unions; at a time when more and more people on low incomes are being sent to jail for non-payment, organisation to defend them is at best sporadic.

Still, *Poll Tax Rebellion* is a good read that will restore your faith in the capacity of collective grass-roots organisation to change the world!

# The war for Thatcher's face

*Did Thatcher provoke the Falklands War in order to get out of political trouble?* ***Alistair White****, Banbury CLP, has reconstructed the sequence of events that led, ten years ago, to war in the South Atlantic.*

BY JUNE 1981, Thatcher was casting about for an issue which she could use to regain popularity - something like the sale of council houses which had helped her with the 1979 election. Since the early part of the year she had been low in the polls. There were even suggestions that her party might ditch her.

She was well aware of the potential for a conflict over the Falklands. Though not often highlighted in the British press, the issue was familiar to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and to the Cabinet Defence Committee which discussed the danger as a regular item on its agenda.

Thatcher was also receiving reports from the Joint Intelligence Committee: she had already instructed this top-level body (responsible for the analysis of all intelligence) to report directly to her. This enabled her to plot a breakdown in negotiations with Argentina without anyone else realising what she was up to.

In June 1981, the fate of HMS Endurance came up as part of the Defence Review. It was not the first time that attempts to save defence expenditure had targeted military commitments outside NATO. But whenever the question had come up before, successive Foreign Secretaries had pressed for the vessel's retention on the grounds of its importance as a symbol of Britain's commitment to the Falklands and indeed its interests in the entire region. In June 1981, Foreign Secretary Carrington again argued for retention; this time he was overridden. The decision to withdraw Endurance was confirmed at the end of the month, despite strong objections by the Falklands Islands Council, who knew that the withdrawal would be interpreted by Argentina as a signal that Britain would not defend the Islands against invasion. In retrospect, it seems this was just



*Buenos Aires - youth march to reclaim the Malvinas*
*PHOTO: Paul Mattsson*

the signal Thatcher wanted to give. Defence Secretary John Nott did not overrule Carrington on his own: the decision was Margaret Thatcher's. Later, in November 1981, the vessel's captain was told to stop arguing his case that the wrong signal was being given to Argentina: it was "causing displeasure in high places".

Talks over the Falklands had been going on with little progress since 1966. There had been light on the horizon when the "leaseback" idea was approved by the Cabinet Defence Committee in July 1980. This would mean that Argentina would achieve its goal of sovereignty, while Britain would continue in occupation for a certain number of years to be agreed. In November 1980, the government effectively told the Islanders it was leaseback or nothing. But on December 2nd of that year the proposal received a hostile reception in the House of Commons. The British side began to stall the talks, publicly asserting once again that the wishes of the Islanders (who wanted to remain British forever) were paramount.

In the context of the HMS Endurance withdrawal, it was reasonable for the Argentines to conclude that the British government, having been unable to sign away the Islands in the face of Parliament, where the Falklands lobby was strong, was indicating that the problem could be solved by an Argentine invasion which would not be met by counter-force.

In 1977, during a previous period of tension, the Labour government had sent a naval force to the South Atlantic to forestall a possible attack. Why didn't Thatcher follow the same course in 1981-82, even as late as mid-March 1982, when tensions reached a height with the landing of scrap merchants and later a naval vessel in South Georgia?

While Thatcher was studiously cautious in her public responses to these events, behind the scenes she was preparing for military conflict. On March 31st she ordered the Chief of Naval Staff to prepare a Task Force capable of re-taking the Falklands. One vessel secretly set sail at 7 am on April 1st - the day before the Argentine order for invasion was given. If she had been interested in deterring an attack, she would have made her military preparations as publicly as possible.

The final point in the indictment is well known: the sinking of the Belgrano to scupper a practicable peace plan. Having got so far, Thatcher had to ensure that the peace efforts of new Foreign Secretary Pym, as well as those of Alexander Haig, Perez de Cuellar and Peruvian President Belaunde, would fail.

Belaunde's last-minute proposals involved a ceasefire and temporary third country administration of the Islands, but left the final decision on sovereignty to later diplomacy. These proposals proved acceptable to Galtieri. The news that they were about to be agreed by the Argentine junta was relayed to Haig and Pym during the day of May 2nd. Pym claims he did not inform the War Cabinet and Thatcher at once, though that seems strange.

On the evening of that day, the Belgrano (and with it the imminent outbreak of peace) was torpedoed while sailing outside the 200-mile combat zone declared by the British.

# Women for Socialism and the perils of "networking"

**Cllr. Liz Davies**
Islington

THIS YEAR'S Women for Socialism AGM, held in London on February 29th, was a poor show, attended (at its height) by no more than forty women. Most were London activists, many of whom had played leading roles in the organisation for some years. Rank and file feminists from outside the capital were few and far between.

The turn-out was a chilling reminder of the dearth of grassroots activists in today's women's and labour movements. Few new women volunteered to take on jobs and the organisation will continue to be run by a sprinkling of overcommitted figures who will be at full stretch doing their best just to keep the organisation alive.

The AGM agenda reflected a lack of direction which has bedeviled Women for Socialism for some time. Most of the meeting was taken up by a succession of unrelated speeches from women urging us to campaign on a variety of issues from Mohawk Indians, Amazon Forest villagers, green issues, and "the world situation". Each issue was interesting in itself, but there was no thought-out strategy, no suggestion that Women for Socialism had key goals and campaign plans to match them, no unifying theme - only the dreaded shopping list of worthy causes. It was a classic example of the perils of "networking".

The invited speakers left little time for discussion about the organisation's problems and prospects. When the time finally did come, many women, especially from outside London, had already left.

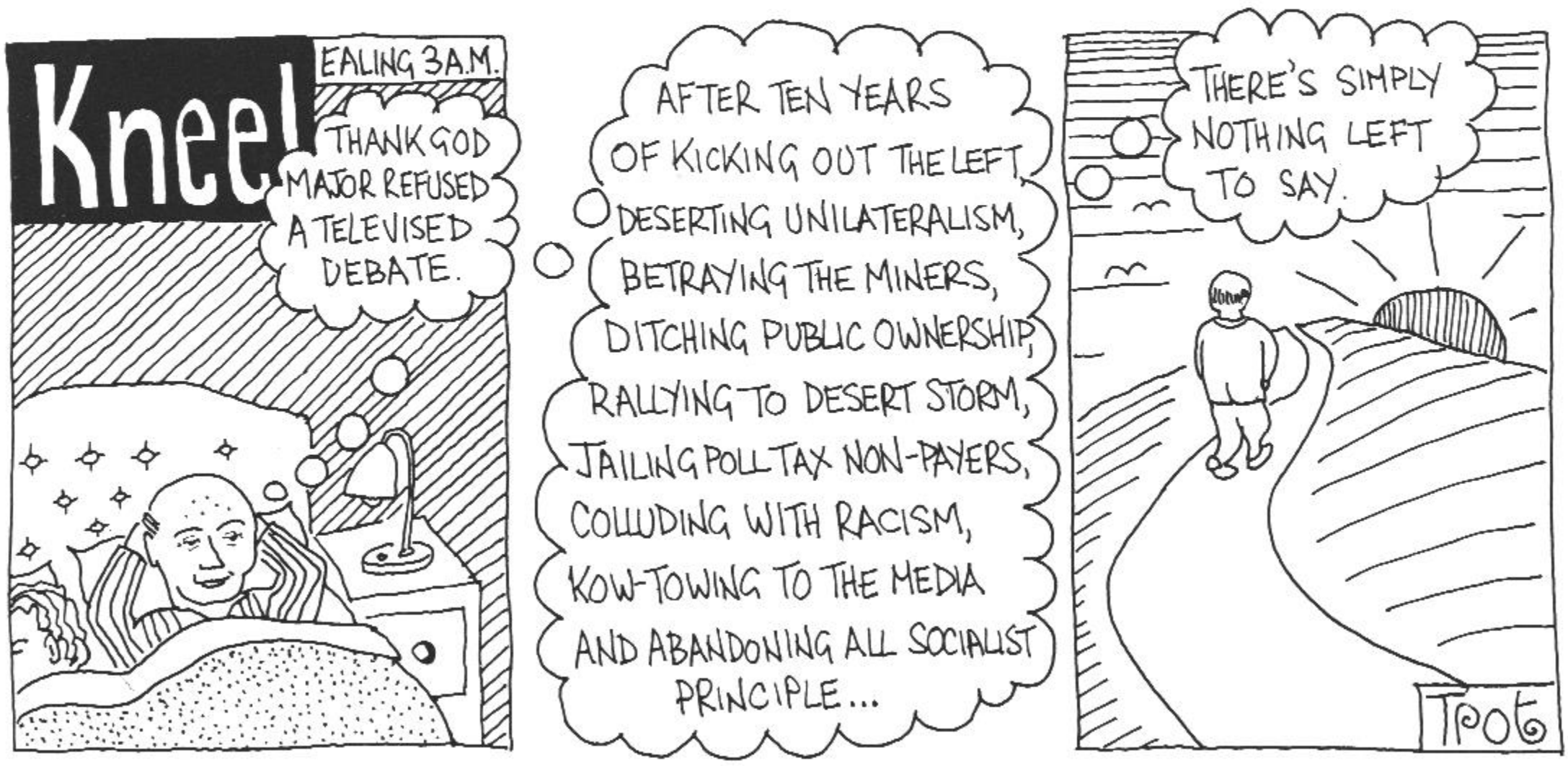
Women for Socialism now needs to take a long, hard look at itself. It can only begin to realise any of its goals by recruiting new activists. But how will it attract them without undertaking more activity in the first place? It has to decide on a limited number of campaigning objectives - and these have to be selected at least partly on the basis that they are achievable by a group with our present strength and resources.

One of these must be increased work in the Labour Party. Women for Socialism was born four years ago partly because many feminists in the Labour Party were fed up with the careerist, top-heavy Women's Action Committee. It is true that many left activists have now abandoned the Labour Party or become inactive. However, following the general election, things may change very quickly.

Women for Socialism needs to prepare itself to exploit the political opportunities that may open up in the coming months and years. It can do that by putting specific demands on the Labour leadership: give the Ministry for Women some legislative teeth, introduce contract compliance, put a three-line whip on reproductive rights bills in Parliament, put your money where your mouth is when it comes to child-care.

Women for Socialism should focus on promoting socialist feminist causes and candidates inside the Labour Party. It should play a leading role in selecting the left candidates for the women's places on the NEC and in campaigning for them. It was a disgrace that Women for Socialism failed to do anything last year, when there were three women candidates for those places (two of them Women for Socialism supporters) who despite receiving practical support only from the Campaign Group and *Labour Briefing*, still managed to achieve respectable results.

Obviously, Women for Socialism is a broad organisation, not restricted to members of the Labour Party. But choices have to be made. Campaigning in the Labour Party provides us with a platform from which we can voice demands to a relative large constituency and attract new blood. If Women for Socialism ends up as just a "networking" organisation, an information exchange, it will lose the vitality, exuberance and powerful attraction to socialist feminists which were so evident in its founding conference.



# Treacherous twins of the trade union right

*Not the least distressing thing about the newly merged AEEU "super-union" is the higher profile it will give Engineers' leaders* ***Bill Jordan*** *and* ***Gavin Laird****, among the most naked of all our great movement's many Class Traitors.*

BOTH MEN worked their way up from the shop floor and both regard their places at Britain's (and Europe's) top tables as hard won and richly deserved. They are pillars of the establishment and proud of it.

Laird succeeded the odious racist John Boyd as the AEU's General Secretary in 1982. He has served as a Director of the Bank of England since 1986 and during the ten years before that he was a director of BNOC. Currently he is a director of Britannia Life and a non-executive director of Scottish TV. On top of this he sits on the Arts Council, the "President's Committee" of Business in the Community, is a governor of the Strathclyde Business School and the London Business School and a member of the editorial board of *European Business* magazine. In 1988 he was made a CBE - reward for years of service to the ruling class.



Laird ran the AEU machine and controlled all the union's internal affairs, including the lavish *AEU Journal* whose headline in July 1984, at the height of the miners' strike, ran: "A New Start for Nuclear Energy".

Jordan is three years younger than Laird. As an apprentice at engineering firm GKN in the early fifties he may well have run into the far-right Economic League, which was at that time running special "anti-Communist" courses for young GKN workers. In this same period, the young Eric Hammond was also an apprentice in a firm with Economic League links.

In 1966, at the age of thirty, Jordan became Convenor of the AEU Shop Stewards at the GKN plant. Ten years later he was elected a full-time Divisional Organiser for the Birmingham area but played no formal role on the national scene until his election as AEU President in 1986, when he defeated the Broad Left candidate, the late John Tocher, by 119,000 to 95,000.

As AEU President Jordan chaired the Executive Council, on which he had a casting vote, and took charge of nearly all the union's external affairs: relationships with employers, the TUC, government, the EC, etc.

Like Laird, he is one of the elite: sitting on the Council of the Industrial Society, the National Training Task Force, a governor of the London School of Economics and the Manchester Business School, and since 1988 the tame trades unionist on the BBC's Board of Governors. He is also president of the European Metal Workers Federation and Chair of the TUC's European Strategy Committee; in these functions he often visits the continent, meeting with both union bureaucrats and top management. In 1990 he claimed £10,000 travel expenses from the AEU. In that same year he was re-elected President, defeating a little known left opponent by 77,000 to 46,000 in a 17% turn out.

Jordan and Laird are both apostles of the single-union deal. One of the biggest of these has just been struck with Toyota to cover its new plants in Derbyshire and Wales. Despite Jordan's "leadership" of the 35-hour week campaign (on hold, Jordan told the nation, until the employers were safely out of the recession), the Toyota deal stipulates a 39-hour week. As usual in these set-ups there is no shop steward structure and management will deal only with full-time officials. Jordan gave this odd reassurance to his members: "Whilst not guaranteeing jobs for life, the company have given an unqualified commitment to job security".



Jordan is also an enthusiast for Japanese "lean production" methods: just-in-time, quality circles, team working, etc. "So compatible with the AEU's traditions" are these new methods, Jordan said, that "a number of Japan's leading companies chose our union as a manufacturing partner."

A desire to corner the market in the "multi-skilled", "flexible" manufacturing workers of the future was a major impetus behind the ruthless drive for merger with the EETPU, as was the AEU's hunger for a piece of the action in white-collar and managerial grades.

Jordan was a fanatic for merger from the beginning; Laird was initially more cautious, perhaps because the original plan was for Jordan to remain as President of the new union but for Laird to step aside to allow Eric Hammond to become its General Secretary. Laird outmanoeuvred Jordan at the AEU Executive and blocked his attempt to go over the heads of the National Committee (the union's annual conference of elected lay delegates) directly to a ballot of members. The first round of talks collapsed when the NC voted against the merger, scared off in part by Laird's admission that the relatively autonomous District Committees would go in the new set-up.

But with Hammond nearing retirement and both the AEU and EETPU ailing financially Jordan and Laird struck a deal whereby Laird became the new union's General Secretary for its first two years. By now the once mighty AEU Broad Left had collapsed completely and the Executive backed the merger unanimously. Even so Laird had to pull out all the stops to ensure the NC recommended a "yes" vote last December by 49-33.

A fortune (as yet undeclared) was spent on winning the merger ballot. Union officials were threatened with loss of jobs if they didn't put everything else aside to join the campaign. Laird made surprise workplace visits to plug the merger, often accompanied by management representatives. He argued: "a merged AEU-EETPU would be better for Britain... every manufacturing employer would welcome moves towards dealing with a single union... amalgamation will create a union that will have most single union deals".

Well, at least he spelled it out.

# New Left brains hit rock bottom

*The latest issue of* New Left Review *carries a major article by NLR editor Robin Blackburn calling for a "tactical" vote in the general election and expressing a preference for a Liberal-Labour coalition over a majority Labour government.* Briefing *editor* ***Mike Marqusee*** *takes a horrified look at the political collapse of Britain's left intelligentsia.*

"IN ENGLAND it will make sense to vote Labour or Liberal Democrat depending on which candidate is better placed to defeat the conservative, with some allowance made for the individual's stance on democratisation...A Labour, or even better a Lib-Lab, majority, is to be worked for...because...there would be a real chance of serious electoral reform..."

Thus Robin Blackburn in what is widely believed to be Britain's leading Marxist theoretical journal.

Because "the programmatic gap between Labour and the Liberal Democrats has dwindled almost to vanishing point," Blackburn argues, "nothing will be lost by a Liberal-Labour agreement, while much might be gained if they can be committed to proportional representation and other reforms".

The only "gain" specified by Blackburn is the opening of political space via PR for what he calls a "New Left party". In this daydream, Blackburn is joined by members of the Socialist Society and a variety of ex-Communists who are now taking steps to set up just such a body. Its great merit, according to Blackburn, would be that through it "we are allowed to achieve representation under our own colours."

But just who is this "we"? Certainly not the working class, most of whose members still regard Labour as "their" party. Certainly not the Labour left, which is an integral part of the labour movement and as entitled to stand in its colours as anyone else.

The "we" here is nothing less - and definitely nothing more - than the British left intelligentsia.

From the evidence of Blackburn's article, this social caste remains, as ever, obtusely unaware of the nature and function of the British labour movement - and chronically detached from the urgent necessities of working class life.

Maybe I'm being too hard. Maybe it really is in the interests of the working class to subordinate (for example) the minimum wage, the first casualty of a Lib-Lab coalition, to the drive for PR. Maybe, on the other hand, these people have completely lost touch with reality.

The intellectuals will rejoin that in reality a minimum wage (not to mention anything more far-reaching) would probably be scuppered by a Kinnock-led majority Labour government. No doubt. But the point is that a majority Labour government would encounter far more problems, far greater resistance, in doing so than would a Lib-Lab coalition. This is because the former would be seen to be accountable to the working class voters who put it in office, while the latter would be seen to be accountable to no one but the coalition partners themselves, bound only by the threads of their Parliamentary stitch-up.

The struggle to hold a majority Labour government to account would therefore be conducted on political and organisational grounds much more favourable to the left than would obtain if we were all making propaganda against a Lib-Lab coalition from the safety of a "New Left" bunker outside the Labour Party.

Blackburn's dismissive comment about the absence of "programmatic differences" between Liberals and Labour reveals a failure to grasp what really makes Labour different from the other parties: not its policies, but its working class constituency, its links to the trades unions, its place within a larger "labour movement" - all of which means that, despite its leaders, Labour continues to represent a distinct social interest opposed to the interests represented by the Liberals.

If Blackburn really believes a Lib-Lab coalition would be some kind of reforming, "modernising", democratising government, he is sadly deluded. PR of some sort would be introduced (though possibly not for years) but it would undoubtedly be a PR reflecting the narrowest politicians' agenda, divorced from any wider electoral or democratic reforms and designed to ensure the continued rule of a minute elite, not to guarantee fairer representation for a socialist minority. Saddled with economic crisis, and possibly growing social discontent (including trade union action), a Lib-Lab coalition would resort to Thatcher-style authoritarianism - unhindered by the restraints placed upon a Labour government by its links with a mass organisation outside Parliament.

***"Saddled with economic crisis, and growing social discontent (including trade union action), a Lib-Lab coalition would resort to Thatcher-style authoritarianism - unhindered by the restraints placed upon a Labour government by its links with a mass organisation outside Parliament"***

Does Blackburn really believe Neil and Paddy will tackle the judges, the police, the security services, the military establishment? Or is he just carried away by the fantasy of a new party selling the message of "socialism" in a deregulated political market-place?

Let's suppose this New Left party came into being and was able to exploit PR to gain a handful of seats in the House of Commons. Just what would this rump of "socialist" MPs do that would be any more

*Continued on next page*

# Labour and women: amidst the pious waffle, some real commitments

WALWORTH ROAD'S policy documents about women may be long on pious waffle and short on concrete proposals for action but Labour still has some commitments worth campaigning for.

**Dorothy Macedo**
Hendon South CLP

The Ministry for Women will not be the huge bureaucracy portrayed by the Tories, nor will it have sweeping powers, but it will be able to keep an eye on the rest of Whitehall to make sure women's interests are not overlooked. It will be a political gain for women and a potential pressure point to be used when a future Labour government is tempted to downgrade women's needs.

The new sex equality legislation promised by Labour is desperately needed since the old statutes are clearly too weak to be of much use. New powers for the Equal Opportunity Commission will also be a boost for women fighting for their rights.

A Labour government is pledged to set an example both as an employer and as service provider. The commitment to introducing "contract compliance" for firms doing business with government is central here.

A few small but welcome changes, such as ending to VAT on sanitary towels, introducing the right of women to see a woman doctor, are also promised.

In addition, the Party's remaining firm commitments on pensions, child benefit and minimum wage are of particular importance to women.

No one could disagree with other equally attractive but vaguer assertions about improved child care, equality in pensions, rights at work, access to training, housing, the "right to a clean environment", safety from crime/harassment/violence, etc. Presumably the Ministry for Women will have a lot on its plate chasing up the other departments to make sure they're getting on with all these priorities. Will it be properly resourced? These aims will remain pie in the sky without extra resources - and we all know what Margaret Beckett says about that.

***Continued from page 16***

useful than what the best elements of the Socialist Campaign Group already do? Blackburn tacitly accepts that they would be part of a broader left alliance in Parliament. Presumably, they would support a Labour-led left government against the Tories and other right-wingers, while opposing it when its leadership attacked the working class - exactly what the Socialist Campaign Group at its best does now. What would be lost is the Campaign Group's weight inside the Labour Party, its links with the trades unions, and thereby its potential to address the whole working class, to engage in a struggle across the whole movement.

What lies behind the left intelligentsia's obsession with PR is something called the "Anderson-Nairn thesis". According to this thesis, propounded many years ago in *New Left Review*, the British state is a peculiarly undemocratic institution profoundly marked by the strange continuity of the British aristocracy as a class and the curious survival of state institutions related to it (monarchy, House of Lords, etc.).

Within the working class, the mirror image of this deformation of bourgeois democracy is "Labourism". To the British left intelligentsia, "Labourism" is the source of all evil and must be extirpated at any cost (even Lib-Lab pacts).

For many years now the left intellectuals have hungered for a technical fix - a written constitution, PR, European union - to both the undemocratic character of the British state and the restriction of working class politics by "Labourism". Hence their infatuation with Charter 88, whose public impact and political weight they ludicrously overestimate.

Blackburn defends Charter 88 from left criticism on the grounds that "the advance of democratic rights has an independent validity". I'm happy to agree with that. My motto at the moment is "bourgeois democracy is better than no democracy"! What I dispute is that Charter 88 is any kind of movement for democracy. Under the careful manipulation of its self-selecting leaders it has deliberately eschewed any specific campaigns to right any specific wrongs. Instead, it has become a crusade for PR, an unholy alliance between Liberals (and others in the political centre) and a handful of socialists united by a common desire to strengthen their electoral hand against Labour and a common contempt for "Labourism".

The left intelligentsia have stumbled into this trap partly because of their one-dimensional view of "Labourism". The fact is that a vote for Labour (including in constituencies where Labour comes third) is a political expression of class consciousness. The working class's identification with Labour reflects both its political limitations and its resilience as a class. For the foreseeable future, it is a unifying and strengthening factor in the class struggle.

Blackburn is surprised and pleased to find that the right-wing Labour think-tank, the Institute of Public Policy Research, now backs PR. He notes with pride that its assistant director, Kinnock strategist Patricia Hewitt attended the Charter 88 assembly in Manchester. But why on earth is he surprised to find the Kinnockites in his camp? The new Labour establishment, the professional politicians and lifelong careerists whose perspectives are so well represented by the LCC, seeks to cut Labour off from its roots in the organised working class, to refashion it as simply one political faction among many, supported by state funding and competing via the media for the votes of the otherwise disenfranchised masses. These people know that under certain circumstances PR would serve their purposes admirably.

"The workings of the British electoral system are, quite simply, indefensible," says Blackburn. He may be right about that, but his strategy for change - a Lib-Lab coalition - would involve the political disenfranchisement of the labour movement and the establishment of a new permanent and unaccountable government of the centre, sustained by PR, ruled by the civil service and further entrenching precisely those antiquated, undemocratic forces which the Anderson-Nairn theses identified.

# Scotland's electoral conundrum

*The election campaign in Scotland burst onto the Westminster and international stage with a (flawed)* Scotsman *poll showing 50% of Scots in favour of independence. Suddenly Scottish nationalism was on every front page. Jim Sillars appeared on Breakfast TV and Major suddenly scheduled a Scottish trip for himself and ministers. Delors commissioned a paper on the impact of Scottish independence on the EC and a Panorama special was scheduled. Glasgow Labour activist* ***George Eastwood*** *looks behind the headlines.*

IN SCOTLAND itself the poll that sparked all the blather was dismissed as statistically flawed because it ambiguously conflated Home Rule and independence. Nevertheless, the political initiative did shift to the SNP and Labour was put on the defensive. Suddenly the economics of independence were accepted by the London media: it appeared it would require no tax increases after all. Attempts by John Smith to place a £7 billion price tag on independence failed and were dropped. Alex Salmond won the argument by default. The recent furore has driven home several lessons.

First, events in Scotland only become real when reported on national news.

Secondly, national commentators and non-Scottish national politicians don't understand the debates and events around the Scottish Constitutional Convention: nobody here talks of devolution or an assembly but rather of Home Rule and a Scottish Parliament.

Finally, and most importantly for the election, the Scottish political agenda is now totally set by the Tories and the SNP. Labour has only one policy - Westminster government and a Home Rule Bill. It is incapable of responding to SNP initiatives.

After the last general election, Labour had 50 Scottish seats; it talked tough but did nothing to stop the Tories in Westminster. The SNP fought the Poll Tax, won Govan from Labour, elected a leadership who describe themselves as socialists, adopted left policies and called for independence in Europe.

The Poll Tax was the turning point. In the past, traditional Labour voters have made protest votes against Labour; now many were permanently deserting to the SNP. The SNP also now has a larger share of the youth vote than Labour.

During the Christmas recess the Tories seemed to decide to polarise the debate between full independence and the status quo.

The reasons for this were purely electoral. If enough Labour voters switch to SNP in key marginals then the Tories could theoretically hold or increase their Scottish representation from its present low of nine out of 72 seats. (Ladbrokes, by the way, give 66 to 1 odds on the Tories holding the nine seats and only 14 to 1 on them having no Scottish representation at all!) Murdoch was drafted in to give the Tory plan a big push and suddenly the Scottish Sun became SNP instead of Tory.

Such cynicism shows the Tories don't really care whether the union holds or not. A poll showed that 55% of Scots would back independence against the status quo if that were the only choice.

Interestingly a majority of Labour supporters would also back this option. The Labour and Constitutional Convention proposals were squeezed out of the equation so that although 80% of Scots favour change - the same number as at the last election - support for independence is now running between 34-40% as against 46-40% for Home Rule.

> ***"Labour is deliberately ignoring Scotland because it must win in the south of England to win at Westminster"***

The SNP has a clear message: independence in Europe, lower taxes, no Trident, nationalise Ravenscraig. It has effective media figures in Alex Salmond, Sillars, Sean Connery, etc. It seems to be riding the tide of history, as in Eastern Europe. It has momentum (rising polls, untapped support for independence), groups like Business says Yes and Artists for Independence and, of course, the Tories polarising the issue.

Labour appear to have Donald Dewar and little else.

Labour in Scotland is hamstrung by Walworth Road. Posters appear saying "Vote Labour - Made in Britain". Effective Scottish MPs such as Smith and Brown are preoccupied with national presentations and when speaking on Scottish issues seem out of touch. The support for Trident and refusal to contemplate steel nationalisation are out of step in Scotland.

Labour has, however, 48 seats and most of these are demographically impregnable unless the SNP takes around 45% of the vote. Presently it stands at 28% in the polls against Labour's 38%.

Labour is deliberately ignoring Scotland because it must win in the south of England to win at Westminster. Policies are patently tailored to that and not to Scottish interests. This rankles even amongst Labour activists. The surprise is that the SNP recovered so strongly at a time when Labour has such a good chance of winning at Westminster. Clearly many Scots feel there are other games than the Westminster one! If it becomes apparent that Labour can't win UK elections and hence can't deliver a Scottish Parliament, Labour votes will cascade to the SNP. If Labour loses, a hardcore of Labour MPs will seek Home Rule or independence by other means and will tactically ally with the SNP. The SNP would decimate Labour at the May local elections.

How should socialists vote in Scotland? Some leaders of the Constitutional Convention have called for tactical voting. This practice is already well-established in Scotland. Clearly in a Labour-Tory marginal, we vote Labour. In an SNP-Tory marginal, most people on the left have no compunction in voting SNP. The main contest in working class seats is, however, Labour-SNP. The SNP, despite the left turn, remains a petty bourgeois nationalist party. It does, however, contain many socialists and is standing on a programme clearly to Labour's left. Labour has so compromised its policies it is difficult to call for a Labour vote in all circumstances. I believe the best policy in Labour-SNP marginal contests is to vote for the best left candidate. If there is no left candidate many socialists would vote for the SNP, not Labour.

# "Never again"

*Those who forget the mistakes of the past are bound to repeat them - that old adage should be dusted off as we approach a general election with Labour hopeful of forming the next government.* ***Richard Heffernan****, Hornsey and Wood Green CLP, reviews Labour's last, lamentable period in office and issues a warning to Party members.*

THE LAST Labour government was an unmitigated disaster for the country and for the Labour Party.

Propelled into office on a wave of political unrest and industrial militancy, epitomised by the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974, the Labour cabinet, elected on the basis of a radical programme promising "a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families", made it clear within a year that it had no intention of even questioning the prevailing balance of economic, political or institutional power here or abroad.

The new Labour government encountered grave economic troubles: inflation, non-existent growth, rising unemployment and a permanent sterling crisis. Instead of tackling the roots of the economic problem and empowering its working class supporters, the government moved to defend the prevailing economic system by suppressing labour militancy.

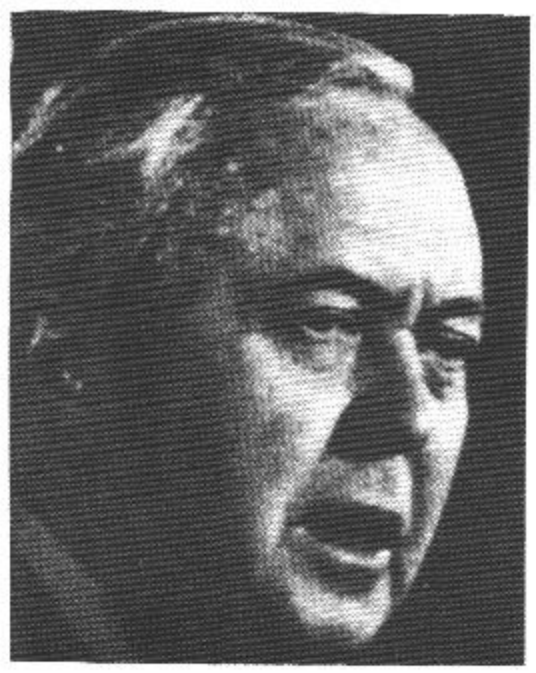
From 1975 the government's overriding concern was to restore confidence in the British economy; to do this a financial price had to be exacted. The Labour government accepted that it would have to be paid by working people.

Labour's handling of the economy was so disastrous that, years later, Conservative ministers still use its record to attack the Party. Within a year and a half of taking office, the leadership had ditched the interventionist policy upon which Labour was elected. The 1975 Industry Act, the centrepiece of Labour's industrial policy, was gutted at the behest of the captains of industry. No profitable industrial concern was nationalised; planning agreements were overturned and multi-nationals allowed to run riot.

Major public spending cuts packages were agreed by the Cabinet in April 1975, November 1975, February 1976, July 1976, all leading up to the IMF debacle of December 1976. The year before, a Labour Secretary of State had launched the first round of cuts in local authority spending with the infamous declaration, "The party's over".

"Thatcherism" began in 1976. Denis Healey was the first monetarist Chancellor. Cash limits were introduced and social spending (health and education) cut to the bone as the government - in a phrase to be taken up by the Tories after 1976 - told its erstwhile supporters, "There is no alternative." Between 1976-1978 alone, public expenditure was cut by 9.5% in real terms.

The Social Contract, sold to the movement as a partnership in which government and unions would together determine questions of pay and welfare benefits, was quickly transformed into nothing more than an incomes policy, imposed by the government and policed by the union leaderships.



In July 1975 a flat rate wage increase of £6 was decreed - equivalent to a 10% rise in average wages when inflation was 26%. This was followed by a 4.5% increase in August 1976 - when inflation was 16.5%.

The 5% norm imposed by Callaghan in 1978-79 was the final disaster. It was rejected by the Labour conference (by a two-to-one majority) and opposed by the TUC. It led to the Winter of Discontent in which huge strikes were mounted by low paid public sector workers and others no longer prepared to foot the bill for Labour's economic policy.

The government's foreign policy was shameful. Soon after its election the Cabinet attempted to sell warships to Chile (where Allende had just been deposed by Pinochet). It proceeded with naval manoeuvres at the Simonstown base in South Africa. In 1977 a secret Cabinet Committee agreed to modernise the Polaris system with the Chevaline programme, at a cost in excess of £1,000 million.

At the outset of the "Second Cold War", Callaghan agreed to President Carter's suggestion that British defence spending should increase by at least 3% in real terms each year between 1979-85. At the Guadaloupe summit in January 1979, Callaghan tried to secure US financial support to replace Polaris with Trident. At the same meeting Callaghan agreed in principle to the deployment of Cruise and Pershing in Western Europe.

The government was a disaster for civil liberties. Wilson and Callaghan opposed a Freedom of Information Bill and staunchly defended the Official Secrets Act. During their term of office the Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced, the Guildford 4 and Birmingham 6 were imprisoned, American dissidents Agee and Hosenball were deported and journalists Aubrey, Berry and Campbell were prosecuted in a blatantly political show trial.

In 1977, having lost his Parliamentary majority after a series of by-election defeats, Callaghan entered into a "non-coalition" Lib-Lab pact. A working majority was maintained in the Commons through a series of shoddy deals, one of which involved increasing the Parliamentary representation of Ulster Unionists.

The abject failure of the Wilson and Callaghan governments created the climate of reaction in which the Thatcher government was to come to power. They drove millions into the arms of the Conservatives for a decade.

After the debacle of 1974-79, the Party turned sharply to the left. Activists vowed that "never again" would a Labour government be allowed to turn against its own supporters. Successive defeats at the polls, in local government and industry helped quash that spirit, but it must arise again if we are to prevent a repetition of the tragedy of the last Labour government.

# RSI - is it a pain in the arms?

*Repetitive strain injury (RSI) is a term used to cover various types of musculo-skeletal disorders to which workers performing numerous rapid, repetitive movements are vulnerable. VDU operators have been identified as a high risk group. Below, a* ***TGWU member*** *suffering from RSI divulges the harsh realities of this new industrial plague.*

FIRST LET ME say what RSI is not. It is not just an ache in an arm or the sort of muscular pain one gets after a bout of particularly vigorous activity involving the arms, such as sport, gardening, moving and carrying heavy objects, decorating, etc. My own experience is that I first became aware of a searing burning sensation in my arms in the middle of the night on returning to work after a fortnight's holiday. The pain became so bad that I couldn't lie still. At 3am I was walking around the house in agony, from time to time holding my arms under the cold water tap to try to get some relief from the tingling, burning pain.

It was like having a very bad toothache extending from fingers and thumbs up both arms along the shoulders to the neck as far as the back of both ears. And that was only the beginning.

What it meant to me was being trapped when left alone in the house as I could not even turn the doorknob on the front door in order to get out. It meant only being able to carry out the most basic ablutions with great difficulty. Showering, drying myself and even just washing my face became a slow, painful process. Buttoned garments were out as were shoes with laces. Hair and teeth brushing were attempted but not pursued with any enthusiasm. All the normal everyday movements in a morning's routine became a supreme effort.

It was not just the pain which made these simple tasks almost impossible but the lack of control over my hands, arms and fingers. For example, if my nose itched and I tried to scratch it I would poke my finger in my eyes. (A kind friend who suffers from a disability suggested I aim for my eye in the hope that I might hit my nose!) It meant eating with my fingers and never having a cup more than half full of lukewarm tea in case my hands suddenly decided to give up the unequal struggle and throw the tea in my lap.

Quite apart from work, suddenly I wasn't able to do the simple things for myself that those of us fortunate enough to have no disabilities take for granted. It meant being unable to write a cheque. Taking ages to fish coins out of my purse at a cash point while being aware of a lengthening queue of muttering people behind me. Giving up my much loved hobbies: knitting, gardening, yoga, reading (books were usually too heavy to hold and if they weren't I still couldn't turn the pages).

Worst of all I was denied that greatest all pleasures to new grans. I couldn't hold my long-awaited, precious new grandson in my arms. In a short time I had changed from being an independent, busy, happy person into a helpless, depressed individual.

I haven't worked now for over a year and am very much improved. The pain has subsided from my arms but I still get quite a bit in my upper back. I still can't peel vegetables or open a carton of milk, but I can open my front door with the help of a special aid which is attached to my key.

I find a towelling dressing gown dries me after a bath thus dispensing with the need to struggle with a towel. I am able to do a little gardening, changing position frequently and never working for more than half an hour. With the help of a wonderful consultant, specialist physiotherapy and regular exercise, I have found many different ways round obstacles which once seemed insuperable.

I appeal to anyone who thinks they might be at risk to take proper breaks from any type of repetitive work.

No job is worth being crippled for and no employer's work is more important than all the wonderful, intricate functions performed by the human hand. Employers would do well to remember that no machine can ever replace it.



# New public sector union: focus for the left

ON THE day that the trade union right celebrated the marriage between the AEU and EETPU, a special NALGO conference gave the left something to at least think about celebrating about.

**Jon Rogers**
Assistant Branch Secretary
Lambeth NALGO

The conference voted decisively to back the proposed merger with NUPE and COHSE which will create something that is still being refered to merely as the "New Union".

The merger has great potential for socialists for at least two reasons. First, the greater industrial muscle of the New Union and second, the weight it would have within the TUC and - in the longer term - the Labour Party. The New Union could provide extra strength and a new focus for the left in the labour movement, particularly since much of NALGO's present branch autonomy - which enables socialists to make positive use of at least part of the union machinery - will be preserved.

Unfortunately, there is a danger that some socialists in NALGO will argue against the merger on the grounds that not all of the guarantees which the left have sought have been obtained, or out of a more general, and quite reasonable, mistrust of anything that the National Executive is in favour of.

This will play into the hands of the reactionaries who are trying to scupper the merger in order to prevent Labour Party affiliation and to preserve the elitist division between manual and office workers.

The final vote will be at June's annual conference. Now is the time for NALGO members to begin linking up with the left in NUPE and COHSE and organising across all three existing unions in order to build a democratic and fighting New Union.

## Barclays proved racist

THE BANK EMPLOYEES' union, BIFU, has won a four year legal battle to prove a case of racial discrimination against Barclays Bank. The case arose from a dispute over pensions granted to staff recruited from the Asian community in East Africa in the early 1970s.

Barclays lost the case because it did not credit the staff for overseas service with the bank. They had been forced to sign away their pension entitlement for a small compensation in order to obtain entry permits into Britain. This compared unfavourably with the full credits given to white staff transferring to the UK at the same time. The decision affects five staff in this test case, but it is expected that hundreds of others will be covered by settlement negotiations now going on between the union and the bank.

## Most boring union journal - latest entries!

This month's most boring trade union paper has to be ASLEF's *Locomotive Journal* which features wall-to-wall text broken by nothing more exciting than pictures of union officials.

The cheekiest publication has to be the GMB's *Direct* with a full page colour cover photo of John Edmonds and Bill Morris beaming at each other! Will this be the biggest merger of them all?

Fatuous page of the month has to be a larger-than-life picture of Gordon Brown's head in the same journal, which also prints the results of an interesting survey showing that GMB members are more likely than either members of other unions or of the general public to be *Sun* readers. Obviously, it's Ken Livingstone's column (every Thursday) which pulls them in.

The *AEU Journal's* special issue on "Women in the AEU" has a wonderful insert with reports (accompanied by portrait photos) from no less than 53 officials. You've guessed it - they're all men!

Honourable mention in this month's competition must go to *Co-operative News* - with a four page feature, no less, on vacuum cleaners.

## BT: sexual harasser

THE NATIONAL Communications Union has taken British Telecom to task over its production of sexist calendars.

The calendars use sexually provocative images to remind contractors not to dig into cables. They have appeared on managers' walls despite a previous promise to cease publication of such material. As NCU's Assistant Secretary Jenny Fosdal reported in the union's journal, "It is a great pity that some of the male managers who decide to make use of such material cannot experience the embarrassment and fear felt by women subjected to whistles and comments by contractors."

## Caring, Sharing... cashing in!

YOU MAY HAVE thought the "caring, sharing" Co-op would be one store that cared enough about its workers (and USDAW) not to open its shops (illegally) on Sundays. Not so. A *Co-op News* story under the headline "No let up in Sunday trade war" explains that over twenty Co-ops are now open on Sunday in the south east alone.

## Sainsbury's beats retreat

TWO PART-TIME Sainsbury's workers, sacked for refusing to work on New Year's Eve, have won reinstatement without loss of earnings.

Louis Fern and Wendy Hill, who both have young children, were dismissed by the manager of the company's New Barnet store when he unilaterally scrapped the agreement stipulating that holiday work was voluntary.

Pressure from USDAW was crucial in overturning the sackings in a significant victory for shopworkers.

## Small union, big struggle

FIFTEEN MEMBERS OF one of the country's smallest trade unions went on strike in September in a dispute over the future of their jobs and the survival of the union.

The union, the Card Setting Machine Tenters' Society, was last involved in a dispute during the First World War and now has less than fifty working members. The dispute began when the management at English Card Clothing Ltd demanded a six-month pay freeze and a renegotiation of the collective agreement with the union. As soon as the workers went on strike, the company sacked them all. A picket line is being maintained and funds are needed. Contact: CSMTS, 48 Scarr End Lane, Staincliffe, Dewsbury WF12 4NY (0924-400206).

# TUC cuts: watch out, there's a "super union" about!

PANIC STATIONS have been assumed at Congress House following revelations of deepening financial crisis in the TUC and a 20% cuts package to be implemented within months.

Norman Willis' address to TUC staff in mid-March failed utterly to allay anxiety in the ranks. *Briefing* is reliably informed by a disenchanted TUC hack that Norman was in classic form; he spoke for thirty minutes without completing a single sentence.

Of the 250 TUC employees (including regional staff) 45 will have to go.

Willis' plan is to reduce the number of TUC regions from eight to five, with consequent cuts in staff and services to members, particularly in trade union education, one of the few TUC activities of direct benefit to the rank and file. One new region will be created, for example, out of the current East and West Midlands regions (ostensibly because "they have a good motorway link") and out of the South West and Wales. The cutters do not dare touch the Scottish TUC, a bastion of autonomy.

Another saving will come from the merger of the Social Insurance Department (which deals with policy on benefits and pensions) and the Equal Rights Department, only recently established after years of pressure from activists.

Willis has admitted that the cuts plan isn't supported by the TUC Heads of Department or by his own deputies and assistants. The impetus has come entirely from the Finance and General Purposes Committee, effectively the executive body of the General Council. The influence of John Edmonds of the GMB, Bill Jordan of the AEU, and other would-be "super union" bureaucrats is suspected behind the move, which is seen by many as a pre-emptive strike against the continuing existence of the TUC.

The TUC refuses to recognise any unions for its own employees, who are formally represented by a non-union Staff Office Committee, which is currently negotiating with management over the terms of the redundancy offers. The SOC wants to know just how the TUC managed to run £1 million pounds over budget in the last year and is asking the General Council to "open the books".

# UCW leaders stitch-up rank and file

A UCW SPECIAL delegate conference, held in Bournmouth in February, approved major changes in the union's structure and a new industrial relations package with the Royal Mail, which employs 70% of the union's members.

Left UCW activists have described the two developments, which are closely interrelated, as "a disaster for the rank and file".

The number of branches and branch secretaries is to be reduced from over 700 to 80 across the whole country.

UCW leaders told members the new structures were "absolutely necessary if the union was to be financially and organisationally independent" but critics point out that the entire move was precipitated by management restructuring of the postal service in preparation for privatisation.

"In one stroke they've taken out the main body of the union," said one veteran left activist. "The elimination of so many branch secretary positions will knock out a large number of the union's most influential and effective people. By concentrating power in the hands of a small circle of professional full-timers with no direct accountability to workers, they've taken the teeth out of the union on the shopfloor."

The entire postal service is now to be divided vertically into three sections, rather arbitrarily designated processing, delivery and distribution. Under the new agreement, employees in these three different sections will have different union representatives.

Left UCW branches put amendments to the conference demanding the right of "cross referencing" (i.e. cross-representation) between sections. The conference supported the demand nearly unanimously, but management has said it will not accept it and the UCW leadership has no inclination to fight for it.

An example of the effects of restructuring can be seen in one London workplace which used to have 26 elected members on its highly active branch committee, ensuring members 24 hour a day union representation - an important achievement in a 24 hour a day industry. Now the branch is no more and the workplace is entitled to send only seven delegates to represent it on a 21-strong "area branch" committee covering the whole of North West London.

One reason UCW leaders caved in to this blatant attempt to undercut the power of the union in the workplace is thought to be a threat from management to end the check-off system which guarantees a steady flow of revenue to UCW headquarters and ensures bureaucrats' pay cheques don't bounce.

The delegate conference backed the new package by a five to two majority. Nearly all the larger, more active big city branches rejected the deal but the provincial members, who have rarely known strong trade union organisation and representation, were won over by the leadership's "there is no alternative" line.

In the lowest ever recorded turn-out in a major UCW ballot, Alan Johnson was elected to succeed Alan Tuffin as General Secretary with 20,732 votes, giving him a narrow margin of just 370 over identikit rival Derek Hodgson, who was subsequently elected Deputy General Secretary with the votes of a mere 9,353 members, less than 5% of the union's total membership.

The new top dogs are both creatures of head office and promise the rank-and-file little but years of ineffectual leadership. Johnson, in particular, has a reputation as being hopelessly weak when dealing with management. "Whenever you needed him, he seemed to have disappeared," one former branch secretary recalled.

**London Labour Left**

*The Left After the Election*

Wednesday, April 15th
7:30pm
Friends International House
1 Byng Place WC1
(off Gower St)
nearest tubes Goodge St or Euston Square.

with Ken Livingstone
(others to be confirmed)

# Union hacks sell-out DLO workers

*Lambeth has privatised half its housing repairs service. So what's new? Well, this time we saw "the grotesque chaos of a Labour Council... a Labour Council" making DLO workers redundant even though they had made concessions on conditions in order to submit the lowest tender.* ***Paul Ashton****, Norwood CLP, reports on the twists and turns of industrial relations in the post-witch-hunt, ex-left-wing Council.*

LAMBETH COUNCIL has awarded tenders for its housing repairs service to private contractors, Botes Ltd, the same firm which had won contracts with neighbouring Southwark only days earlier.

With all this work in hand you'd think that Botes Ltd were big fish, but the Labour Research Department has established that it only has forty employees!

Six suspended Labour councillors were heavily defeated at the March Lambeth Council meeting when they proposed reversing the decision.

Three weeks ago, a council committee decided to attack DLO workers' conditions in order to undercut the private bids. Workers were to be hired and fired, wages cut and conditions established totally outside all council and national guidelines. If workers didn't agree, they would be sacked! UCATT and EETPU 'leaders' at the meeting kept shtum.

At a small, special committee meeting called to award the tender, Council Leader Steve Whaley, egged on by Chair of Housing Peter Mountford-Smith, refused to award all the work 'in-house', claiming that the DLO couldn't deliver. Mountford-Smith argued that the DoE would shut down the whole DLO if it was granted all the work. But officers gave no reasons why the DLO could deliver on six contracts but not the full twelve. Out of six voting Labour councillors at the meeting only Greg Tucker proposed awarding all the work 'in house'. Joan Twelves voted for half, asking for the other half to be deferred. The others capitulated completely despite not being bound by any Labour Group decision.

Local UCATT and EETPU 'leaders', Peter Leaver and Bob Hillier, collaborated in the sell-out. Leaver quite rightly complained to the press that his members were "disgusted", but after the meeting he attacked left councillors, arguing that they should have accepted half the cake. Prior to the meeting he had AGREED to the Council leadership's approach. At no time before the decision did he voice the workers' "disgust". Lions led by donkeys?

Although Steve Whaley aspires to managerial anonymity, he managed to hit the local front page when he said at a DLO meeting that he "had to sit on top of a shit heap".

The thirteen suspended Labour councillors oppose the privatisation but most of the 26 in the rump official Labour Group have gone to ground. The Group has not even discussed the issue. As for Peter Leaver, he preferred to attend the Conservative Group meeting as a guest speaker!

Last year Leaver wrote to the Greater London Labour Party supporting the suspension of the thirteen and claiming to speak for "all manual and craft unions". Council NUPE, GMB, TGWU and APEX branches rapidly disassociated themselves from his letter.

Now Leaver is threatening to disaffiliate the local EETPU and UCATT branches from the Labour Party.

The whole sorry episode proves that when workers compromise to secure 'in house' bids under Compulsory Competitive Tendering there is no guarantee that councillors, even Labour councillors, will reward their efforts.

## Bristol coal campaign

**THE BRISTOL CAMPAIGN against coal imports has produced its first newsletter, 'Stop Coal Imports', with warm endorsements from Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield.**

**The campaign was sparked by Bristol council's attempt to sell-off Royal Portbury Docks to the First Corporate Shipping company, which has a deal with National Power to use the docks to import South African coal. The campaign aims to defend the British coal industry, expose the corporate and governmental attempts to destroy it and highlight the pollution and threat to jobs posed by the Tories' strategy of imports and privatisation.**

**Contact the campaign at Box 31, 82 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB.**

Yorkshire Miner
JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF MINEWORKERS YORKSHIRE AREA

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# US politics: rule of the big bucks

*The formation of Labour Party Advocates in the USA, reported in last month's* Briefing, *is welcome news. But before a future labour party can make an impact, argues* ***Mike Phipps****, Brent South CLP, there will need to be some radical changes in the country's political system.*

THE FIRST target of reform must be campaign finance. Barely a handful of Congressional seats will change hands this year thanks to the power of Political Action Committees - the financial arms of (mainly corporate) interest groups. To protect their investments, PACs pour money into the coffers of sitting Congressmen and women, who wield greater influence the longer they keep their seats, due to the Congressional seniority system. In 1988 one veteran Senator enjoyed a campaign fund of $6.2 million. His opponent reported contributions of just $20,000. Don't expect Congress to clean up its own act: less than a dozen members of the House or Senate refuse PAC-money.

Secondly: voter registration. Unlike in Britain, the onus in the US is on the voter to register. Unsurprisingly it is the poorest sections of society who are least aware of their political rights and least likely to register. Only about 50% of the US's black citizens are registered to vote. Invariably, then, election results are determined by a minority of the electorate.

In the US the first-past-the-post system effectively blocks any third party from making a sustained national impact. It should be scrapped.

Along with, of course, the grossly undemocratic electoral college which actually elects the President on the basis of a kind of block vote for each of the fifty states after the popular vote. It can distort the result wildly. In 1976, Carter won the popular vote with ease but nearly lost in the electoral college. It's said that semi-fascist Republican Pat Buchanan is currently outspending all the other candidates put together. This is democracy US-style, the rule of the big bucks, now available for export throughout the New World Order.

# Clinton, the Contras' friend

ARKANSAS GOVERNOR Bill Clinton, the likely Democratic challenger to President Bush this autumn, is a favourite with the establishment media in the US.

They seem happy to forgive his sexual and Vietnam-era peccadilloes because he fits their idea of the perfect opponent for Bush - someone who doesn't disagree with the President too much.

Actually, the Reaganite *New York Times* columnist prefers Clinton to Bush - because the former is more committed to "Israeli defence".

Clinton has presided for several years now over one of the poorest states in the union. Arkansas workers are burdened with a heavily regressive sales tax (which applies to food and medicines), anti-union "right to work" laws, low wages and the 48th worst environmental record in the fifty states.

Just to show what kind of man he really is, Clinton took a break from the New Hampshire primary to oversee the execution by lethal injection of a mentally retarded black man convicted of murder.

However, while the death penalty is, alas, a vote-winner in the US these days, the drug-running Nicaraguan Contras are not. In 1988, Clinton chose to honour three of the most notorious figures in the Contra nexus - Adolfo and Mario Calero and General John Singlaub - with "Arkansas Travellers" citations.

He had already sent the Arkansas National Guard to Honduras to help train the Contras, who also used the Mena airport in western Arkansas as a base for training and supply and, it is alleged, a stopover in the arms-for-drugs flow between the US and Central America. After investigation of activities at Mena by local police was repeatedly obstructed, the local state prosecutor approached Clinton, in person, to ask for funds to continue the probe. The prosecutor swears Clinton heard him out - and then never got back to him.

# After the Teamsters...

INSPIRED BY THE success of the Teamsters' rank-and-file rebellion, militant reformers in the United Auto Workers (UAW), organising under the "New Directions" banner, are challenging for the top spots in one of America's key industrial unions.

New Directions leader Jerry Tucker kicked off his campaign for the UAW presidency with rallies in Flint, Michigan and Detroit on January 30th. In Flint, Tucker laid a wreath at the monument to the 1937 sit-down strikers and dedicated his campaign to their memory.

In Detroit, Tucker and supporters were prohibited from entering the grounds of Solidarity House, UAW headquarters, and so held their rally in front of the gates.

Elections for local union delegates to the UAW's June convention began in February and continue through May. Since the president and other top officers are elected at the convention, New Directions must try to elect delegates in a substantial number of union locals (branches).

Tucker's chief campaign issues are the right to vote directly for top officers and an end to concessions on health coverage for retired workers.

Delegate elections are usually apolitical. In most locals, the best-known or best-liked plant politicians usually win the perk of a trip to California. Differing political platforms are seldom an issue.

In 1989 New Directions changed that in two of the union's fifteen regions, when it ran candidates for regional directors. Most delegate candidates ran pledged to either the New Directions or the Administration Caucus nominee, and the battles were highly politicised.

The campaign takes place against a backdrop of uncertainty about the future of the auto industry, a long strike against concessions in the agricultural implements sector, and the sale of a large chunk of the union's largest base in aerospace, the McDonnell Douglas corporation, to a Taiwanese firm.

Tucker criticizes UAW leaders for the "cosy but one-way nature of their much-publicized labour-management 'partnership'. UAW members can't stand much more of such joint decision-making."

# Hondurans defeat colossus of the north

THE PEOPLE of Honduras, one of Latin America's poorest nations, have not been favoured by the US. In the 1980s, the country became a base for US troops and the Contras who were waging a dirty war against neighbouring Nicaragua's

**Rachel Sieder**
Committee for Human Rights in Honduras

Sandinista government. Peasants were evicted from their land, crops were ruined and forests destroyed. A vicious counter-insurgency war conducted by the Honduran military targeted activists in the unions, peasant and human rights organisations. Hundreds of people "disappeared" or were assassinated by para-military death squads.

Today the biggest threat from the north comes in the shape of foreign investment packages. This February, indigenous people and environmentalists in Honduras won a bitter struggle to prevent a forestry concession being awarded by the government of Rafael Callejas to the Stone Corporation, a US paper giant. The forests of the Mosquitia in the east of the country represent the largest remaining forest reserves in Central America, an area about the size of El Salvador. These forests are the ancestral lands of 35,000 indigenous people of the Misquito, Sumo, Pech and Tawahka tribes, who have lived in the region since pre-colombian times.

The proposed forty year logging concession would have given the Chicago-based multinational exclusive rights over 16,000 square kilometres, a seventh of Honduras, a country where 80% of the economy is already in foreign hands.

The company hoped to harvest and export four million cubic metres of wood annually for use in its pulp and paper operations in the US and elsewhere. The controversial contract allowed it to extend its area of operations far beyond the limits initially agreed if it considered its yields from the original concession to be insufficient. The deal, which did not even contain a binding clause to ensure reforestation, was negotiated secretly with the Honduran President, and met with a storm of opposition from indigenous, environmental and professional groups when it became public.

The Honduran administration was pushing for the deal as part of its drive to privatise the economy and increase export revenues in accordance with the "conditionality" imposed on it for continued loans from multinational donors such as the IMF and the Interamerican Development Bank. Stone Corporation itself currently has debts totalling $4 billion. It looked forward to lucrative profits from the contract.

However, sustained protest from Honduran environmentalists, indigenous and peasant groups, professional organisations, teachers, students and the media, along with pressure from international environmental and human rights groups eventually forced the government to cancel the proposed deal on February 27th.

The Washington-inspired drive to increase export revenue and to privatise throughout Latin America has meant that deals like the Stone concession have become a constant threat. The recent events in Honduras show that popular organisations in even the smallest and weakest of nations can take on and defeat the colossus of the north.

■ **For more information contact: the Committee for Human Rights in Honduras, 83 Margaret Street, London W1N 4HB; tel. 071 323 2151.**

# Brazilian workers seek solidarity

CARLINHOS WORKED at the Garotto Chocolate factory in Brazil for ten years before he was barred from the plant following a 1990 dispute over the company's policy of sacking pregnant women.

Vanette Almeida, a trade union and women's activist for over twenty years, confirmed that the sacking of pregnant women is widespread. Many firms will not even employ women unless they have a doctor's certificate showing they have been sterilised.

Celso is union president at the Chadler Cocoa plant. The multi-national which owns it has a plant in Hull employing workers doing the same job as he does - only under much better conditions, as he was able to see for himself.

These trades unionists are currently on a tour of Europe establishing international links. They spoke in London at a Brazil Network meeting called to launch the Chico Mendes Solidarity Fund. The fund, named after the rubber tappers' leader assassinated in 1988, aims to raise money to support Brazil's fragile unions.

The meeting began with a showing of Amazon Sisters, recently seen on Channel Four, and afterwards Anne-Marie Sweeney who made the film delivered an impassioned appeal for the Solidarity Fund.

She explained how entire unions in the most militarised sector of Brazil exist without telephones and usually with nothing more than a typewriter. Union funds are often required to meet the most basic human needs, such as on food for jailed members. Activists who are detained by police - a frequent occurrence - get nothing to eat from their captors except banana skins.

*Amazon Sisters* is a remarkable film about the leading role of women in the struggle for a better life. In it we see the infestation of mosquitoes - the result of a dam newly created by the Electro Norte power company - which inflict thousands of bites an hour on the local people

Anne-Marie reported that 8,000 rural workers were now camping outside the Electro Norte plant demanding resettlement.

*Amazon Sisters* is available from Oxford Film and Video Makers, The Stables, North Place, Oxford OX3 9HY; tel. 0865 60074.

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"WE NO LONGER have the luxury of having a threat to prepare for," said the US's top military man, General Colin Powell, Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, trying to make the case against cuts in the US's $295 billion defence budget. "The real threat we now face is the threat of the unknown, the uncertain."

# South Africa: COSATU grows impatient

AT THE BEGINNING of March, the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of South African Trades Unions (COSATU) issued the following ten demands to the apartheid regime:

**"1. Sovereign interim government by June 1992 and democratic elections for a Constituent Assembly by the end of this year.**

**2. An immediate end to unilateral structuring of the economy, including privatisation, tariff removals, pensions, and other measures leading to economic hardships and retrenchments.**

**3. The urgent setting up of a National Economic Negotiating Forum involving government, trade unions and business.**

**4. Lowering of food prices, and the removal of VAT on basic foodstuffs, medicines, doctors fees, electricity and water.**

**5. Restructuring of National Manpower Commission, and the full, rapid extension of rights to farm, domestic, public sector and bantustan workers.**

**6. Decisive measures to end vigilante and state-sponsored violence.**

**7. The immediate release of remaining political prisoners, and general amnesty for remaining exiles.**

**8. Integration of security forces.**

**9. The immediate restoration of citizenship to all people in the TBVC areas, and the reincorporation of TBVC "states".**

**10. The creation of a democratic undivided South African State. No to forced coalition governments and 'federalism!'"**

COSATU is planning a four month programme of action to back up these demands including marches, meetings and demonstrations in all parts of the country, joint actions with the ANC, SACP and NACTU.

A "workers' summit" is planned for the end of May bringing all the country's trades unions together to discuss the progress of CODESA and "decide on sustained national mass action, to take place around July" if COSATU's demands have not been met.

Commenting on the Executive decision, Jay Naidoo, COSATU general secretary, said, "it is clear to us in COSATU that the most powerful weapon we have is a national strike... We want to warn the present government and the Conservative Party that any attempt on their part to delay the democratisation process is going to be met with mass resistance on an unprecedented sale. We are not prepared to wait beyond June."

## No entry to Chilean diplomat-killer

WHILE THE Home Office is inviting the press to witness the arrest of luckless "illegal migrants" in East London, the Foreign Office is keeping very quiet about one potential immigrant.

Francisco Javier Perez Egert is currently commander of the Quillota Cavalry School in Chile and has been named as the new Military Attache to the embassy in London.

Perez Egert is becoming quite well-known in Chile. He was in command of a platoon that killed eight political prisoners in cold blood in 1974 and his name has been linked to the "Squadron of Death" which killed many more. His real distinction as a senior military man has only become evident since the junta stepped down. He has refused entry to the Cavalry School to various legal officials and judges investigating the killings and has also barred elected congressmen. He has started legal proceedings against one of the judges involved and against the local paper which dared to carry reports of the cases involving him.

The Chilean government says that it is up to the Army who fills this diplomatic posting. The Foreign Office says nothing. Chileans in the UK, including some who were imprisoned in Quillota and knew Perez Egert's victims, are outraged.

Get your union or Labour Party branch to protest now to: Chilean Embassy, 12 Devonshire St, London W1N 2DS (copy, please, to Chile Democratico, 15, Wilkin St, London NW5 3NG).

## Chile: Indians fight eviction

AN INTERNATIONAL campaign has been launched to protect the human rights of the Mapuche-Penhuche Indians of Chile after the occupation of their land by a contingent of police, military vehicles and helicopters in what amounts to a state of siege.

The military operation was mounted to secure the eviction of the Indians who are resisting a Supreme Court ruling that their land be put up for sale.

In command of the operation is General Osvaldo Munoz Sanhueza, an active figure in the Pinochet dictatorship. The Indians will have their homes destroyed and be resettled away from their historic homeland in the isolated province of Cautin.

To prevent this tragedy, protests should be sent to Chilean President Patricio Aylwin and President of the Court Enrique Correa. Details from Comiíe Exterior Mapuche, 6 Lodge Street, Bristol BS1, tel 0272 279391.

## Haiti appeal

LABOUR MP Ann Clwyd, playwright Harold Pinter, ARA Secretary Marc Wadsworth and the 500 Years of Resistance campaign are among those sponsoring an appeal for the restoration of Jean Bertrand Aristide as the democratically elected President of Haiti.

After Aristide's landslide election in December 1990 (he received 67% of the vote in a field of eleven candidates) human rights abuses in Haiti fell sharply. Government corruption and drug trafficking were curbed and the country began to build a functioning democracy.

Last year Aristide was overthrown in a brutal coup that brought in a wave of repression and torture reminiscent of the worst years of the Duvalier dictatorship.

Despite verbal condemnation of the coup, the Bush administration has helped oil companies break the international embargo on the illegal regime and spread disinformation about Aristide. Now it is deporting refugees who have fled from the terror back to Haiti in any boat available.

The appeal calls for the unconditional restoration of Aristide. Organisers are planning a publicity campaign in coming weeks.

For more information contact the 500 Years of Resistance campaign, Latin America House, Kingsgate Place, London NW6 4TA; tel. 071-372-7608.

# Crisis in Kurdistan

*A British Labour and trades union delegation which visited Iraqi Kurdistan in December returned there in early March to deliver equipment to the Kurdish Public Relations Office in Zakho.* ***Keith Veness*** *reports on the desperate plight of Free Kurdistan.*

KURDISTAN HAS just had its worst winter for forty years, with deep snow and freezing fog blanketing the mountains and halting transport. Saddam's blockade is proving all too effective, with teachers and civil servants not being paid for five months and no food getting through. Electricity and water supplies are regularly cut off for hours or even days at a time.

The Kurdish *Pesh Merga* guerrillas had clashed with the Iraqi Army on many occasions and had succeeded in driving it back beyond Arbil, thereby gaining ten extra miles of liberated territory.

However, the newly built pontoon bridge over the Great Zab River (which connects the two halves of Free Kurdistan) was swept away in the Spring floods and the Iraqis were able to re-occupy the pass nearby. After an appeal to the remaining UN "Blue Berets" to force the Iraqi Guards to withdraw met with no response, the *Pesh Merga* attacked and drove the Iraqis back at the cost of seventeen enemy and nine Pesh Merga dead.

Militarily, as long as the Baghdad regime cannot use its aircraft or chemical weapons, the Kurds can more than hold their own. The day we arrived over 500 Iraqi troops deserted and came over to the *Pesh Merga*.

The Turkish Government has added to the plight of the people by stopping the trade in illicit petrol and other goods that provided the Kurds with some supplies and revenue. In addition the new coalition in Ankara has again authorised air strikes by the Turkish Air Force against non-existent "PKK bases" outside Barzan and Amadiya in Iraq. Of course not a single "PKK guerilla" was killed, only innocent Kurdish women and children.

Kurdistan is hungry. Children we met in November who were scrounging for cigarettes or chewing gum are now begging for food. The sewage system is collapsing and incidents of cholera and typhoid occurred during the winter, presaging epidemics when the weather turns warmer. Without a political solution involving international recognition of Free Kurdistan, the lifting of the blockade on food and medical supplies to the whole of Iraq and long-term development assistance, these people will again face starvation and social collapse.

We have learnt to admire the mountain people in whom the spirit of solidarity and freedom still burns brightly despite massacre and betrayal. They must not be left to stand alone.

# French elections: how not to fight the fascists

THE CAMPAIGN FOR the Regional Assembly in the Provence/Alpes/Cote d'Azur area in France has exposed the bankrupt policies of the Socialist Party (PS) government and further weakened its already falling support.

**Anna de Casparis**
Hornsey and Wood Green CLP

The focus of the campaign is the contest between the PS's candidate, Bernard Tapie, and National Front Leader Jean Marie Le Pen. It has revealed unprecedented *oportunism* within the PS.

In nominating Tapie, millionaire owner of France's top football league team, Marseille, as its leading candidate, the PS clearly envisaged using the elections to divert the French electorate from the real issues and hoped to create new alliances with the traditional right and centre forces on a purely anti-Le Pen ticket. Tapie's major political intervention to date has consisted in proclaiming Le Pen and anyone who votes for him to be a '*salaud*' (bastard).

This approach is fully endorsed by the PS national leadership! Thus Edith Cresson, erstwhile promulgator of racist immigration policies, has been spear-heading the anti-Le Pen campaign by references to "the devil's influences".

Unfortunately for the PS the attempt to use Le Pen as a smoke screen to distract voters from the growing economic and social crisis in France has backfired. Not only has it increased support in the area for the FN, with polls showing between 20% and 30% backing for Le Pen, it has also allowed the other political parties of the right to make openly racist comments.

In an attempt to retrieve some *crediblity* Laurent Fabius, PS national secretary, advised members to concentrate more on "the daily life of French citizens so as not to foster the impression that the PS had nothing else to say".

The persistent anti-fascist opposition on the ground has been co-ordinated not by the PS but by a growing number of anti-racist and trade union organisations which have ensured that *where ever* the FN rallies support there will be counter rallies and counter demonstrations.

Representatives of these organisations recently met in Paris to plan an effective united response to the Le Pen public meeting to be held there at the end of March. They were unanimous in their denunciation of the PS's manipulative tactics and under no illusion that the party is the real culprit in the present malaise. As Harlem Desir, leader of *SOS Racisme*, stated, "a campaign which purely focuses on the FN ignores the roots of this evil... unless the ideological void and social crisis on which such ideas feed are attacked no purpose is served."

"We all know," said Mohsen Dridi, general secretary of the Federation of Support for Immigrant Workers (FASTI), "that the struggle against Le Pen is inseparable from the struggle for equal rights, in particular the right to asylum." These forces will continue to mount a campaign against all racist and fascist manifestations. In so doing they are determined to disassociate themselves from the PS.

The groundswell of opposition to the PS threatens to turn to mass disaffection. It remains to be seen whether the party can make a last minute turn and begin to deal with the real issues facing the French working class.

# PERISCOPE

## When in doubt, grovel

Clearly the left has been going about it the wrong way. All those conference resolutions, lobbies of trade union delegations, letters to Walworth Road are a waste of time. If you really want to influence the leadership you've got to follow the example of one **Pete Sneiman**, editorial director of publishers Century Hutchinson.

The revelation came at a big fortieth birthday bash for Century Hutchinson's Managing Director **Gail Raebuck**, held at London's Groucho club. Raebuck's husband is **Philip Gould**, Labour's Shadow Communications Agency supremo, and **Neil Kinnock**, naturally, was in attendance.

As the celebrations reached their height Sneiman fell on his knees (yes, his knees) before the Labour leader and stayed there for thirty minutes (yes, thirty minutes) pleading with Kinnock to introduce proportional representation.

Not long after, Kinnock announced his intention of holding a nation-wide discussion on PR after he wins the election.

## Election update

The strangest irony of the election campaign so far is that it is the Tories who are arguing that the present recession is the product of a world crisis of capitalism and Labour who insists that it is not.

Meanwhile, Labour Treasury spokesperson **Mo Mowlem** appeared on TV to give this lucid explanation of the Party's attitude to **Lamont's** new 20% tax band: "This is a policy we have as a long term aim, but this isn't the year to do it..."

Labour's National Constitutional Officer **David Gardner** has written to five Coventry residents informing them that their applications to join Coventry North East CLP had been turned down "on the grounds that you are an active supporter of the Anti-Poll Tax Union".

Coventry North East is the constituency where left-winger **John Hughes** was deselected (amidst allegations of ballot rigging) and replaced with local councillor **Bob Ainsworth**, a former IMG member who these days spends his time as Chair of Coventry's Finance Committee collecting the Poll Tax and jailing non-payers.

The latest *Tribune* features a back page column by **Angela Eagle**, who was effectively imposed by Walworth Road as candidate in Wallasey after local favourite, left-winger **Lol Duffy**, was excluded by the NEC. **Eagle's** *Tribune* contribution bears the unfortunately appropriate headline, "A Rotten Choice is No Choice".

Finally, we are sad to hear that the long-serving chair of West Sussex County Labour Party, **Dave Stevens**, has decided not to renew his Party sub in protest at the treatment of his fellow FBU member **Terry Fields**.

## Time to declare!

The Register of MPs' Interests always keeps Periscope up late at night with its fascinating insights into how the other half lives.

It's no wonder you've probably never heard of Tory MP **Sir Michael Grylls**. After all, he hasn't got much time for politics what with directorships of Le Carbone Lorraine (GB) Ltd, Sterling Winthrop Group Ltd, Small Business Bureau Ltd, and Cape Plc, plus acting as a consultant or advisor to Digital Equipment Co. Ltd, Association of Authorised Public Accountants, Biwater Group, Unitary Tax Campaign, Humphreys and Glasgow, Harlingspear, Allied Partnership Group, and Freight Complex Development and Management.

Ninety-nine per cent of all directorships and consultancies held by MPs belong to the Tories - but there's always the odd exception, like Labour's **Gwyneth Dunwoody**, Parliamentary consultant to the British Fur Trade Association. And the SNP has **Jim Sillars** with his one hundred shares in British Steel (invaluable for re-opening Ravenscraig after Scottish independence).

**Quentin Davies**, Tory MP for Stanford and Spalding, takes the property declaration requirement very seriously, revealing his ownership of "a small flock of ewes".

**Sir Neil McFarlane**, Tory MP for Sutton and Cheam, is a director of no less than twenty companies; his only common interest with his labour challenger, **Geoff Martin** (a former hospital porter) appears to be a liking for golf. Geoff, however, is only an occasional player, while Sir Neil appears to be running half the golfing industry in Britain!

## World's greatest orator

US **Vice President Dan Quayle** stunned an audience of Christian fundamentalists by declaring: "My friends, we can and we will never, never surrender to what is right."

Quayle also enlightened a Detroit TV audience with the following observation about former Bush aid **John Sununu**: "This isn't a man who is leaving with his head between his legs."

## Neighbours

Disturbing portents for a Labour government in the Walworth Road.

On one side of Labour's HQ is a service which seems especially suited for Labour leaders incapable of calling a spade a spade: an 'aqua valet', better known to grimy vehicles users as a car wash.

On the other side is... a mystery. A modern, brick block affair with visible vents, but no windows and no clues as to the identity of its owners or occupants.

The local police deny a rumour that it is a mortuary. It is however, evidently, one of theirs: **Metropolitan Police** property. But what is it for? A photographic department, police say, hesitantly. With no windows? No comment.

Since Labour's programme does not demand the opening of the archives of the security services, Stasi fashion, to public view the mystery will probably remain a mystery.

And an 'aqua valet' will still be a car wash.

## Winning the Irish vote

Labour's candidates in Camden, **Frank Dobson** and **Glenda Jackson**, risked alienating 15% of the borough's electorate when they failed to show up or send representatives to a public debate organised by the Camden Irish Forum. Their Tory, Liberal and Green opponents all attended.

Haringey Council leader **Toby Harris**, replying to a Tory attack on the local Irish in Britain Representation Group: "They are a group we no longer fund, a group we are in the process of evicting..."

The *Irish Post* reports that after meeting new Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds in London **Neil Kinnock** declared that "any talks on Northern Ireland convened under government led by him would not have Irish unity as their objective".

## Splitters!

Coverage of the general election has rather overshadowed a major political development - a split in the **Socialist Party of Great Britain**.

The Party has produced a major document denouncing the splitters -who call themselves the Socialist Party of Clapham. Come back, Wolfie Smith! Suburban sectarianism still rules in south London.

# "Know your place - and sit in it!"

*This was the verdict pronounced by Lord Justice Taylor, recently appointed Lord Chief Justice in succession to the discredited Lord Lane, at the conclusion of his inquiry into safety at football grounds. From the terraces...* ***Arthur Chandler*** *reviews Taylor's past accomplishments and the strange course of the fightback against his all-seater stadium plans.*

AT LEAST ONE person appears to have benefitted from Lord Justice Taylor's report on football ground safety - Lord Justice Taylor himself.

Taylor's report was naive, uninformed and politically biased - yet it was promoted as supporter-friendly and even "revolutionary". He is a skilful marketer of second-hand ideas and an expert self-publicist. Perhaps, after Lord Lane, that's just what the judiciary needs.

Taylor's interim report called for supporters to be represented on local authority safety committees. His final report recommended just the opposite. Simply a change of mind, unprompted by politicians? I think not.

His recommendation that grounds be all-seater was especially important to government ministers. Not only did it get them off the hook of the ID card fiasco, but it was what they themselves had proposed already, just five days after the Hillsborough disaster.

Taylor's naivety is demonstrated by a few quite ludicrous statements in his report. He said that stadium capacities could be maintained after conversion to all-seaters - by building two-tier stands where previously there was only one. Cost? Planning consent? Hardly considered.

He also said that prices should not increase significantly after such conversion. So who pays? Perhaps the Lord Justice just doesn't realise how much things cost these days. Expect some interesting legal judgements over the next few years.

Opposition to the all-seater proposals has taken a peculiar course. The National Federation of Football Supporters Clubs initially argued that losing the open terraces was a price supporters would have to pay to get rid of ID cards. The more militant Football Supporters Association launched a campaign against the Taylor proposals but in comparison to its stunning success in the anti-ID card campaign, generally failed to mobilise significant action or even to get many signatures on its petition. It became clear that there was a significant minority of supporters who did not oppose compulsory seating and many others who simply did not care.

However, the missing element in the Taylor report was always funding; this gap has now come back to haunt football. To finance the new developments, clubs have had, in effect, to tax their supporters. Manchester United wants to increase admission prices by 50%. West Ham is trying to introduce a bond scheme, which in its original form demanded that supporters pay £500 for the right to buy a match ticket. In response to this nonsense, the campaign, which struggled for so long to get a national foothold, has finally been taken up locally.

Independent Supporters Associations were formed, first at Arsenal, in opposition to another bond scheme, then at West Ham and Manchester United. Attempts are now being made to link these groups.

A national alliance of local campaigning supporters associations, complementing the work of the Football Supporters Association, could in theory create a powerful force - which would have the welcome side-effect of undermining the FA's attempts to create an official supporters' organisation of its own.

The problem with the current campaign being focused around local groups is that it makes it difficult to formulate a national policy. The campaign must go beyond just stopping all-seater developments or rejecting punitive bond schemes. Taylor was right in criticising the squalid conditions at football grounds and any campaign that seeks to defend the status quo will appear reactionary. Massive investment is required, involving the creation of safe terracing as well as safe seating areas.

# Famous last words...

**In the run-up to the 1982 local elections, nearly a hundred Labour council candidates in London signed a *Briefing* statement calling for defiance of the government and District Auditor - so we could "Run London Our Way." Among the signatories were a number who were to rocket to the right in coming years - including the future leader and deputy leader of Lewisham Council, Dave Sullivan and Jim Dowd, the future Islington deputy leader, Alan Clinton and future ILEA leader Neil Fletcher. Five members of our current Editorial Board also feature in the list - so not everyone switches sides. The editorial defended Bradford parliamentary candidate Pat Wall, who was in hot water with the leadership for calling for a challenge to the power of the state in a debate with the SWP. Across the capital, battles for left control in local councils and constituency parties were covered (as always!). The debate about the best strategy for the left-led GLC went on...and on...Articles on racism included coverage of the Bradford 12 and an appeal to let black people speak for themselves in the formation of so-called equal opportunities policies.The 'Streetlife Supplement' tackled male violence and the demands of childcare. *Briefing* was taken to task by an irate correspondent for describing Kate Hoey as "left-wing" in the previous issue! The third edition of *Brighton Labour Briefing* rejected reliance on the police and called for self-defence against the Nazis following an attack on an Irish meeting at the local Unemployed Centre. Hard-hitting articles called for the left to take women's participation more seriously, condemned the witch-hunt of *Militant* and demanded that the labour movement make childcare a priority.**



LONDON LABOUR 30p

BRIEFING

No 19 APRIL 1982

Borough elections; target '82:

LET'S RUN LONDON OUR WAY!

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

# LETTERS

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

## Dear *Briefing* ...

**The enemies of** Kurdish independence are many and the methods employed against it are multifarious. They range from the sadistically brutal torture and executions carried out by the Turkish contra-guerrillas, death squads and village guards to the racist hysteria of the Turkish media for whom no slander is too sordid and no lie is too big to defame the PKK-ERNK and ARGK, the authentic leadership of the Kurdish war of independence.

Recently however a new modus operandi has been adopted reflecting the deep contradictions provoked by the need for more subtle means to discredit the independence struggle. The new propaganda attack involves the use of innuendo and insinuation combined with damnation by faint praise. Not unnaturally the attacks happen to coincide with the new strategy employed by President Ozal and Prime Minister Demirel of permitting a limited use of the Kurdish language, playing host to autonomists like Talabani and Barzani and talking unctuously of Kurdish rights while intensifying anti-guerrilla operations and bombing the hell out of what are, officially, their own mountains.

Ozal's stick and carrot policy has not gone entirely unrewarded. He may not have convinced a single PKK guerrilla that the Turkish leopard has changed its spots but he has certainly impressed the reformist-autonomists of the Kurdish petty-bourgeoisie. Foremost amongst these impressionists is Ihsan Qadir of *Kurdistan Focus*. Writing in February's *Labour Briefing* Qadir guardedly welcomes the Ozal ploy. As an unsolicited PR exercise for Ankara it takes a lot of beating: "...after seventy years of systematic repression, forced assimilation, persecution and deportations, the Turkish state has finally admitted the Kurds' existence. No longer are they referred to as "mountain Turks". They are allowed to speak their language."

To which any self-respecting Kurd would surely retort: "Big deal! so what!"

Admittedly the Turkish political situation, like the British one, is continuously evolving and general elections do give a rough guide to the development of political consciousness. But this is a far cry from trying to dramatise and exaggerate the tactical difference that episodically arise between the armed forces and government over the handling of ethnic questions. Qadir writes: "Frustration in the Turkish army...is mounting over the new coalition government's handling of the Kurdish issue." Turkey's generals know only too well that an all-out war against the Kurds would create a very unfavourable impression both with the EC and their US allies - not to mention the Central Asian and Caucasian Republics with whom Ozal is trying to ingratiate himself. Within Turkey too the chiefs of the armed forces are constrained to observe certain constitutional norms which, though irritating, are not over-oppressive. If they were, the armed forces would have acted by now because the legislature in Turkey has immeasurably less power than its counterparts in western Europe. Qadir wants to play down the significance of the PKK's leadership in the Kurdish war by focusing attention on the possibility of a spontaneous transformation of government policy by pressure from the Kurdish masses and an inherent conflict with the army.

"The tragedy of the present period," he claims, "is that there is not yet a strong and organised force that can lead the Kurds in Turkey to final victory. With the exception of the PKK all the Kurdish groups and parties are too weak to lead the masses."

But this is only the chocolate coating to the poisoned pill: "Even the PKK leadership admits that it is no longer in the driving seat of the movement which is increasingly resorting to spontaneous action...A broad new organisation is needed that can represent all the sections and classes of that society... attempts are now being made to create it."

Since Qadir wisely omits to mention his source for these bizarre allegations we are free to dismiss it as a crude attempt to discredit the PKK.

Fantasy is no substitute for concrete truth. In reply to Qadir we would like to quote from the *Economist* (December 14-21, 1991):

"The war against the Kurdish guerrillas in the south-east has been going sharply worse since mid-summer, much worse than it ought to have done. The guerrillas are run by the Kurdistan Workers Party. They face at least 20,000 soldiers of the regular army and the gendarmerie (which in Turkey is much more like an army than a police force) plus 30,000 villages guards and some admittedly rather helpless local policemen. Yet in the three months starting in July the guerrillas managed to kill, even on official count, almost twice as many people as in the same period last year. The final quarter of 1991 looks like being even bloodier.

Moreover, the fighting has spread. Last year most guerrilla attacks took place near the eastern end of Turkey's southern border. This year they have reached up into a curve of provinces farther north - Siirt, Bitlis, Mus and Bingol. Outside the towns large parts of the thirteen south-eastern provinces are now no-go areas for the security forces after dark. Road-blocks are frequent, a train was derailed in August, and the guerrillas have temporarily kidnapped several groups of foreigners to demonstrate their expanded range of action. They are recruiting more local youngsters; some teenage local girls were found among the bodies after a recent fight in Siirt. It is still hit-and-run stuff, but suddenly rather formidable."

Despite its condescending tone this account reveals a picture vastly different from and opposed to that painted by Qadir. Far from losing control of the "spontaneous" mass movement, which in any case is indissolubly linked to the armed struggle, the PKK in its more recent statements has projected new plans to give a greater scope to it by setting up a Provisional War Government in the Botan-Behdinan area.

The political bankruptcy of Qadir is expressed most clearly by his inability even to elaborate a policy or perspective for the Kurdish struggle. We are left in a kind of limbo which also reveals a pathetic acquiescence to the apparent strength of the Turkish state and a shameless accommodation to its patronage in the form of an "autonomous Kurdish assembly".

To a mouse there is no greater animal than a cat. To Qadir and his friends in *Kurdistan Focus* there is no greater power than the state from whom the Kurds can only demand - and expect to get - an autonomous assembly, not independence and self-determination.

Perhaps this also explains the charitable, even euphoric attitude to the feudal-tribal reactionary collaborationist and CIA and British dominated and protected KDP-PUK "leadership" in Iraq (south Kurdistan). Qadir




writes of "the spectacular rise and fall and rise of the Kurdish movement in Iraq". It is hardly any wonder that he should magnify the importance of this bunch of imperialist stooges who have spent the last thirty years wheeling and dealing with every reactionary regime in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran in order to secure the form of administration most suitable to preserving their privileges and power while giving a certain credibility to their parties in the eyes of the masses, i.e. autonomy. The price paid for this opportunism has been immense. What is "spectacular" about these leaders is their organic inability to learn anything from their disastrous experiences.

Independence and a separate state would put a dramatic end to their feudal power and tribal privileges. That is why they have been snuggling up to Saddam for the last ten months assuring their people that there was no alternative to talks on autonomy while Saddam slaughtered the Shias and, when he felt strong enough, not only drove the Kurds out of Kirkuk but established a merciless blockade of the Kurdish areas.

In answer to Qadir's absurd speculations we would commend the stern realism of Abdullah Ocalan which underlies his statement published in the *"Turkish Daily News"* (November 26, 1991):

"There is an expression which goes as follows: 'Show your right fist but strike with the left'... This we have thought about and we feel we should be very cautious. Even if some steps are being taken we are always sceptical of them."

*Yours,*
*Malcolm Graham*
*Kurdistan Solidarity Committee*

What next for the Middle East? Who's resisting in Burma and Thailand? What's happening in Central America 500 years after Columbus? Is there a peace movement in Yugoslavia? What about the links between sexism and militarism?

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**Keith Flett's letter** (March *Briefing*) on Victorian radical Joseph Cowen was most welcome as a positive contribution to debate. Cowen, as Keith says, was a "figure of immense importance" and "always on the side of workers' struggle."

But assessing Cowen still seems to carry awkward implications for the left.

I think Keith Flett was a little unfair on Heather Hawkwood and *Briefing* for reviewing my recent biography of Cowen (see February *Briefing*). The fact that Cowen was not a Marxist - and I would also deny trying "to claim him for socialism" - should not inhibit left-wing journals from reviewing his life and record. Surely, Cowen and people like him should be evaluated by socialists precisely because they constructed popular campaigns offering proletarian-led co-operative democracy and did so from a non-socialist standpoint? Rosa Luxembourg, indeed, would have argued strongly for concentrated analysis of progressive movements emerging outside the left's usual frames of reference.

The cream of Victorian Socialism had no difficulty in engaging with Cowen. He was respected and cultivated by Eleanor Marx, William Morris, Michael Davitt (and Peter Kropotkin to extend a point) as well as Engels who described Cowen as "half - if not a whole - communist." Presumably, they knew what they were talking about!

Finally, *Briefing*'s may have been the first review of Cowen's biography "seen anywhere" by Keith (thanks *Briefing*!). However, the book had already aroused considerable interest in north east England (both in the local press and in the North East Labour History Bulletin, No. 25, 1991) and in the Irish press. including the left-wing *Irish Reporter* in Dublin and the *Irish Post* in Britain.

*Yours sincerely,*
*Nigel Todd*

**The SWP's relaunch** of the ANL is based on the idea that Britain is lagging behind Europe and that fascism will develop here soon as it has in France and Germany. Perhaps the reverse is true, that Britain was fifteen years ahead of Europe with the ANL and RAR and for that reason fascism and a big upsurge in racism are not on the agenda here. France certainly needs something like the ANL but does Britain? Wouldn't the SWP be better to use their resources and energy trying to mobilise an expression of anger about unemployment - back towards 3,000,000 and still no demonstration!

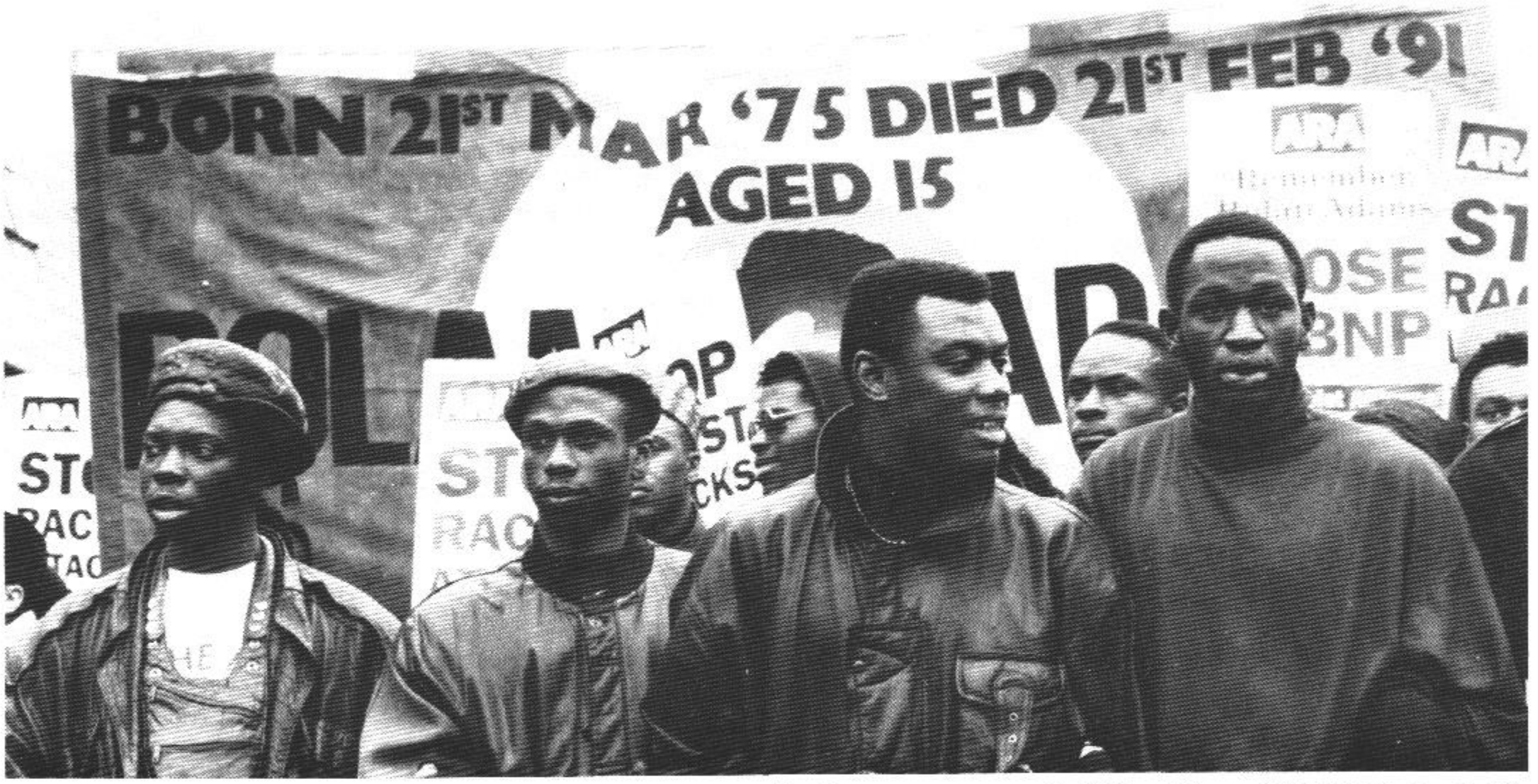
The SWP sees itself in a long dreamed of position: hegemonic on the revolutionary left. All workers looking for revolutionary solutions have only one place to look now; therefore, the SWP must inevitably grow. But perhaps the forces and characteristics shared by its failed rivals (IMG/WRP/CP/Militant) are also acting on and shared by the SWP. In that case they are doomed to fail as well!

With reference to your story about arcane union rules suppressing democratic challenges to union 'leaders' (March *Briefing*): after the merger of TASS and ASTMS many members in the Bristol University technicians branch of MSF were disgusted at the massive payout to Clive Jenkins (the sum was so huge I forget what it was), who retired a millionaire.

We decided to run Ron Stone, a storeman in the physics department and respected union activist, against Ken Gill in the election for General Secretary of the merged union. Ron's platform was to be no big payouts for retiring officials and no massive salaries for working officials.

Sadly, our hopes of nominating Ron were thwarted. Head office told us that the rules stipulated that a candidate had to be nominated by at least ten branches to get on the ballot paper. We've also been told that the rules prohibit us from communicating with other branches. So as far as we can see, the only people who can be nominated are those already known by ten branches - like the existing officials!

*Yours,*
*Will Brown*
*Bristol*




*Marching against racist attacks, Welling, February 1992 PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths*

# Racist killings: London, Manchester, Birmingham

IN FEBRUARY 1990 Panchadcharam Sahitharan arrived in Britain after fleeing the indiscriminate round-up of Tamils in his native Sri Lanka. He was granted exceptional leave to stay by the Home Office and went to live with his sister in Newham, east London.

On January 3rd, 1992, he died in hospital after being attacked by a gang of white racists four days earlier.

In the same month, Manchester taxi driver Mohammed Sarwar and shopkeeper Siddik Dada were murdered. Siddik was left in a pool of blood after being attacked by a white gang armed with machetes.

Not all racist killings are the responsibility of civilian thugs - the thugs in uniform have been busy too.

Mark Flether, a 21 year old African-Caribbean man died on February 8th in Dudley Road Hospital, Birmingham, after being detained by the police, sectioned under the Mental Health Act and injected in the spine with drugs.

■ **Further information from: Newham Monitoring project 01 081 555 8151; Mohammed Sarwar Memorial Committee, c/o Pakistan Cultural Centre, Stockport Road, Longsight, Manchester.**

## Derby anti-fascists organise

**THE BRITISH National Party is now organising in the East Midlands.**

**In recent months racist and fascist stickers have begun to appear regularly in Derby: on lampposts, bus-shelters and signposts. Fascist leaflets have been pushed through letter boxes on housing estates. A socialist paper seller was assaulted by fascist thugs in Derby City Centre.**

**Reported racist attacks in Derbyshire and particularly in Derby itself have trebled in the last year according to Derbyshire Police figures. In response to this racist upsurge, a Derby Campaign Against Racism and Fascism has been formed. It aims to monitor racist and fascist activities, collate all available information and respond with action when necessary.**

**Rallies have been organised in Derby City Centre to show the fascists that intimidation will not work. Door-to-door leafleting has been conducted in areas previously leafleted by the BNP. The campaign now intends to concentrate in the Derby North constituency where the National Front has announced it is standing a candidate in the general election. Support from the local Labour Party and trades unions has so far been poor. Work on this is in hand and campaigners hope to get some financial support soon. As *Briefing* readers know, leaflets have to be paid for.**

**"We have made a start to the fightback against racism and fascism in Derby," said a campaign spokesperson, "We urge like-minded people to do the same in their town."**

**Contact: Derby Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, PO Box 70, Derby, DE1 9JW.**

## Smash BNP election bid

THE BRITISH National Party, standard-bearer of British nazism, is fielding twelve candidates in the general election. Their campaign is already in trouble with Tower Hamlets candidate Richard Edmonds facing an affray charge and BNP organiser Kevin Scott injured after an attack by rival NF skinheads.

The BNP is standing candidates in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Rochdale, Dewsbury, Darlington, Peterborough, Erewash, Blaby, Cardiff, Bermondsey, Bow and Popular and Bethnal Green. Local anti-fascist and anti-racist activists must make the going as rough as possible for them.

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