DECEMBER 1992 £1.00

BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left



inside ...

- Skinner: the next step
- Windsors in flames
- Class traitor of the month

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In this month's

BRIEFING

Coal not dole 4
Skinner: winter of struggle 5
Jeremy Corbyn on NHS 6
Tatchell tackles the Catholic Church 7
Mirror 8
Cohen's Corner 10
Asylum Bill 11
Twilights of the idols 12
Left behind on Europe 14
Rank and file march again 15
Collapse of Conservatism 16
Class traitor of the month 18
Witch hunt in Brighton 19
Waiting for Elvis 20
Sean Coyne in South Africa 21
Smash the pay freeze 23
Trade Union notebook 24
Reviews 26
Inside Kinnock's Labour Party 27
Periscope 28
Letters 30
Miners support network 32

Cover design by Gary Drostle

London Briefing Group
open discussions

Defeat from the jaws of victory — inside Kinnock's Labour Party
7.30pm Monday 7th December
Marchmont Community Centre
62 Marchmont Street
London WC1
(Russell Square tube)

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Open a second front



THE TORY GOVERNMENT continues to lurch from crisis to crisis. The sterling debacle, the pit closures furore, Maastricht, Tomlinson, the public sector pay limit, Bosnian refugees, Saddamgate and above all the continuing recession and mounting unemployment have left Major's government looking weak, incompetent and impotent. This catalogue of disasters is not, as facile media commentators like to claim, the result of poor political management or bad luck; it is a direct consequence of the Tories' inability to alleviate the long-term decline of British capital, a decline expressed starkly by the withdrawal of sterling from the ERM on Wednesday, 16th September. Devaluation by default was a devastating blow to the British ruling class, both psychologically and materially, from which it has not yet had time to recover. It's our job to make sure it doesn't get the chance.

The disarray of the ruling class and its flailing attacks on the working class have reawakened the labour movement after years of torpor. Public anger has been aroused and there is a readiness to fight back which desperately needs a lead and a focus.

The stakes are high indeed. Concerted working class action - both political and industrial - can without doubt bring the government down and inaugurate a new era of combativity and rising expectations. However, inaction or defeat in the coming months will leave workers perilously exposed to the maelstrom of international capitalist slump. Should the Tories survive this period, it will be that much harder for Labour to win an election in a few years time.

As Dennis Skinner keeps telling us, "Seize the moment!" If we waste it, the consequences will be devastating. The ruling class will have a free hand to try to solve its economic dilemmas at the expense of the working class in an assault on our rights, jobs and standards of living that could make the Thatcher years look tame in comparison.

This reality seems not to have dawned on the Labour and TUC leaderships, whose passivity in the current climate beggars description. The first step is a day of industrial action called by the TUC: this has to be followed up by a sustained campaign of industrial action by the millions of unionised workers affected by the government's public sector pay freeze. We need a second and third front now. Action over pay, hospital closures, redundancies is the best way to ensure the government does not get off the hook over the unpopular pit closure programme. If the latter goes ahead, demoralisation will spread across all sections of the working class; any fightback anywhere against redundancies will be undermined.

The Labour leaders need to give unequivocal support to workers taking action against the government. They need to join in the call for a day of action. As part of that call, John Smith should give a commitment now to oppose Maastricht and the institutionalisation of market forces, deflationary economics and mass unemployment for which it stands. Beyond that, we need Smith, Brown, Beckett, Cook et al to begin offering people a socialist alternative to the economic policies of the Major regime: including commitments to full employment and an expanded public sector. It was easy for Lamont to steal Labour's "policies for recovery" because they involve no serious deviation from the primacy of market forces. If we cannot offer a distinctive alternative, why should workers fight to get rid of the Tory government and replace it with a Labour one? And if workers do not have the target of a Labour government as an immediate, achievable objective, they are unlikely to fight at all.

The opportunities which now present themselves will not last forever. The ruling class is already regrouping and catching its breath. It seems as if the Shadow Cabinet actually wants a return to stability and politics as usual - certainly, such a development would be welcome to some career parliamentarians who regard the class struggle with disdain. But for working class people it would be a disaster.

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

***Labour Briefing* is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. The next EB will meet on January 31st (provisional). 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. Deadline for the next issue is January 18th.

***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?**

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PHOTO: **Bryn Griffiths**

Make 9th December our day of action

DECEMBER 9TH has been declared a "National Day for Recovery" by the TUC. Norman Willis thinks workers should arrange to have meetings with management on that day to discuss ways of securing "economic recovery". Luckily, there are indications that many workers see this for the nonsense it is and it is likely that industrial action of various kinds may be widespread on that day.

The miners need a second front opened now. In 1984-85 they were isolated with dire consequences for other trades unions and other groups of workers in the years that followed. Now is the time for those workers, particularly public sector employees hit by Lamont's pay freeze, to take action in defence of the miners - and of themselves. Pressure should be piled on the TUC to make the "Day for Recovery" a day of co-ordinated and generalised industrial action.

Henley miners' regatta

HENLEY CLP and Oxford Miners Support Group are "bringing it home to Heseltine" on Saturday, December 5th, when miners and miners supporters will march through Henley town centre. Heseltine is MP for Henley.

"Tarzan won't come down to the pits, so the miners are coming to him," explained an Oxford Trades Council spokesperson. Strong local support is expected from the normally Tory town. Yorkshire NUM are bringing down a contingent and national speakers will address a rally.

More information from Tony Richardson 0865 715921.

Here we go!

Miners' diary:

December 5th: Stoke on Trent, Henley, Huntingdon (organised by Cambridge Miners Support Group), Newcastle (organised by NE Area NUM and Regional TUC, noon, Town Hall, with Arthur Scargill).

December 6th: Blackpool march and rally.

December 12th: Worksop, Chesterfield, Ashington, Seaham, Darlington, Ammanford (all-Wales rally near threatened Betws pit, organised by Wales NUM).

December 16th: Banbury

December 17th: Reading (rally for Scottish NUM marchers with Tony Benn).

December 19th: London reception for Scottish marchers organised by Hammersmith and Fulham Trades Council.

Defend Trentham

Mass March and rally
Called by NUM

Supported by Stoke on Trent Trades Council and Miners' Support Group

Saturday
5th December
Stoke on trent
11am: March from Hanley Park through Stoke City Centre
12:30 pm: Rally, Hanley Park

Speakers: Peter Heathfield, Ken Capstick, Ken Cameron, Rose Hunter (North Staffs Miners' Wives Action Group), Paul Foot
More information: 0782 657244, ext. 2046 or 2095.

Coaches leave ULU, Malet Street, Central London at 7:30 am. To book, phone: North London: Graham (081-452-7227); East London: Simon (081-519-0799); Central/South London: Camilla (071-350-0598) or Helen (071-485-3952).

Brent Miners Support Group

Public meeting with Dennis Skinner

7:30pm
Monday, 7th December

Bridge Park Centre
Brentfield, London NW10
Stonebridge Park tube

● TRENTHAM COLLIERY in Staffordshire is the largest of the ten front-line pits and the most modernised. By preventing adequate pit maintenance, the government and British Coal are in effect vandalising these pits during what's supposed to be a 90-day "consultation" period ordered by the courts. Kevin Perry, local NUM Power Group Secretary, told Chris Knight: "If we fail to save this pit in the next few weeks, that will be bad news for the other nine. If morale in the front-line pits crumbles, then miners' spirits right across the country could all collapse as suddenly as they were lifted. By February, the Tories could be laughing."

● The University of North London Miners Support Group is organising a conference of student supporters of the miners. Contact Anton 071 609 0658.

A winter of struggle ... for us all

Dennis Skinner took time out from harrying the Tories in and out of Parliament to talk to *Labour Briefing* on the difficulties and opportunities confronting the struggle against pit closures.

LB: There seems to be a lull now following the big demonstrations. What do you think are the priorities for the movement between now and the end of the government's 90-day review period?

DS: When the NUM Executive met just after the pit closures were announced, we felt we had to take the matter before the courts and buy some time. We managed to buy that time because of the instantaneous support we got up and down the land. The response was incredible. Now that the pay freeze policy has been introduced for about four to five million public sector workers, many of them low paid, the next stage of this scenario, I hope, will be that the leaders of those unions are going to realise that they have to open up a second and third front. That never occurred on a major scale during the 1984-85 strike. In my opinion, the Tory government has now offered the union leaders a big chance to really get stuck in. This winter should see the emergence of a fightback against a very fragile government from people other than miners.

Is the definition of success getting rid of the government?

I haven't got a blueprint for getting rid of the government, but one thing I do know is it rarely happens inside Parliament. The policy of the NUM is for a Day of Action supported by trade unions and if possible the TUC - and this time not on a Sunday. That's the logical next step. After all, there are several major unions now in the firing line, NUPE, NALGO, COHSE, GMB, T&G, and civil service unions and teachers. What they should be doing in a co-ordinated fashion is acknowledging that the only power working people have is to withdraw their labour. If that happens, who knows what the next step would be? The pay policy is bound to create bloody havoc. Soon it is bound to leak out that some Mr Bigwig has just got another quarter of a million quid. And we are going to find out in January that the banks are making big profits. As each day goes by, you'll see more and more evidence of double standards in relation to pay. People will get even more furious. Who knows, the Winter of Discontent of 1979 could look like a tea-party!

What do you think the government intends to do at the end of the ninety days?

They'll make a political judgment. They've got all these problems facing them. One is Maastricht, and they can't resolve that because it depends on the Danes and they're not sure they can get it through Parliament quickly. Another is the economy, with a massive public sector borrowing requirement growing daily and a balance of payments deficit which they can't resolve. The third is Saddamgate, and that is in the hands of some friendly investigator and probably the Law Courts before long. But there is one problem they can resolve, and that is the pit closures, because the government holds 40% of the electricity shares. They can say to all the regional electricity companies: we want to make sure that 31 pits stay open and therefore you've got to increase the amount of coal you are burning at the power stations. You've got to cut back on imported coal which is running at 20 million ton a year. And if you halve that, you are saving ten pits right there. So it is a political judgment. And they are more likely to take the necessary action to stop the pit closures the more pressure we put on them, the more demonstrations, the more industrial action and so on.

How does all this link up with Maastricht?

For the first time in thirteen years, the government did not know whether they were going to win the vote. Mostly, Tory rebellions are all carefully calculated and the government knows it's safe. But on that second vote on Maastricht, they didn't know and they don't know for sure what will happen on the next vote. In that situation it is incumbent on John Smith and the rest of the Labour leadership to vote against Maastricht on every occasion, including the third reading.

What are the chances of getting the Labour front bench to oppose Maastricht?

We've got to make sure that people in the constituencies are telling their MPs: "We've got old age pensioners dying this winter. We've got low paid workers suffering a pay freeze. We've got all the cuts in local authority expenditure. we've got more homeless, hospital waiting-lists growing, schools dropping to bits, unemployment increasing. We want our Labour MPs to do what is necessary to support all those people being hurt by this government. We want them to make every issue a crisis of confidence for the government and that means voting solidly against Maastricht." There is no time now for any fancy rhetoric; you judge people by their deeds and not by what they say. It's no time for propping up a government that has only got about 20% support in the country. We condemned the Liberals for bailing them out. Surely we are not going to do the same thing.

How central for Smith and the Labour leadership is the pit closure issue?

It is easy to score points on Saddamgate. But there are a lot of workers out there who realise that this is just one of these Parliamentary games. It is all about Ministers lying in the House of Commons. What's new? They lie every day. But some of our people seem to think that is more important than workers being chucked on the scrapheap, than pensioners not having two ha'pennies to rub together. What the people out there want is not for the Labour leadership to drop Saddamgate, which can help undermine the government, but to support people fighting against the pay policy, unemployment, hospital closures and all the other attacks. So get on with Saddamgate and I'll do my part. But I know at the end of the day that the Labour leadership have to identify with people in struggle.

Hospitals face Tomlinson turmoil

Jeremy Corbyn MP for Islington North reports on the need to defend the Health Service from the devastation of Tomlinson.

THERE ARE 135,000 Londoners awaiting hospital operations, all doctors' surgeries are busy and most are grossly over-crowded. Bad housing, unemployment, poverty and living rough are major causes of ill health. Every hospital out-patients is crowded with people unable to get to a doctor and most staff are grossly over-worked and stressed.

A sensible solution would be to deal with some of the causes of ill health, improve GP services and re-open the large number of closed wards in the hospitals. A decent society would not allow the misery of 'living rough' to continue.

Yet for many years the Department of Health has worked on the assumption that London has too many hospitals, too many beds and that there is general over-provision of all hospital services. Earlier this year the Kings Fund (a health research group) produced a report designed to back up this fiction of over-provision. It was timely in that it prepared the ground for the publication of Sir Bernard Tomlinson's report on the future of London hospitals and teaching establishments.

His report cost over £250,000 to produce, he was paid £24,000 and it is the sloppiest piece of intellectually dishonest prose seen for a very long time. He claims gross over-provision of hospitals, and that Londoners are healthy compared to the rest of the population. Ignoring waiting-lists and other obvious data he takes an axe to the hospitals, proposing the closure of seven major hospitals, the loss of 4,000 beds and about 20,000 jobs. No guarantee of transferring these resources to primary care is envisaged nor any democratic form of health planning. All his analyses are based on the use of market forces to see if a hospital is "likely to attract sufficient contracts". Note the use of language, not health needs but contracts that might be given.

Famous hospitals are due to be closed, no doubt to add to the capital's total of 22,000,000 square feet of empty office space. Barts, St Thomas's, Charing Cross, Tropical Diseases are amongst the list. Barts, first established before 1200, which nursed Wat Tyler in 1381, survived the Great Plague, the Great Fire and the Blitz is due to go and with the jobs of thousands.

But there is a fight back. The argument about "over-provision in London" has been roundly defeated and London's Labour MPs, trade unions and Party are fighting all out to defeat the plan. A mass lobby of Parliament is planned for 2pm on 10th December, a presentation to the Health Select Committee on 16th December, dozens of local public meetings and a SERTUC organised rally and march in January. At every meeting links are made with the miners, transport workers and homeless. Pensioners groups are giving all out support to the campaign.

Whilst London is in focus it is not a London issue - the arguments run far wider and any area of the country could, and will be, a victim. Tomlinson can be defeated and the unity to do it will bring other victories. A miners' victory is a blow against privatisation - a defeat for Tomlinson is a victory for universal health provision based solely on need, not markets, profits, or Department of Health lies. ❑



PHOTO: **Bryn Griffiths**

More Papal bull

Peter Tatchell challenges the homophobic attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church.



OutRage! Action at Roman Catholic Cathedral, London 1992 PHOTO: Steve Mayes

AFTER 359 years, the Catholic Church finally admitted in November 1992 that the Inquisition was wrong to condemn Galileo as a heretic for arguing that the Earth was not the centre of the universe.

How many centuries will it take before the Catholic Church acknowledges the equally historic wrong it has perpetrated against lesbians and gay men?

In medieval times, 'abominable sodomites' were also condemned as heretics by the Inquisition and burnt at the stake.

This sexual inquisition isn't over yet. Its modern successor is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Based in Rome and presided over by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in July this year it issued a new proclamation authorised by Pope John Paul II: "Some Considerations Concerning The Catholic Response To Legislative Proposals On The Non-Discrimination Of Homosexual Persons."

This document, designed to mobilise Catholic opinion against equal rights legislation for lesbians and gay men, describes homosexuality as an "objective disorder" and a "tendency ordered towards an intrinsic moral evil". It states there is "no right" to homosexuality. The civil liberties of lesbians and gay men can be "legitimately limited for objectively disordered external conduct". In certain circumstances, social discrimination against homosexuals is "not unjust" and may even be "obligatory" - especially with regards to "the consignment of children to adoption or foster care, in employment of teachers or coaches, and in military recruitment".

Unfortunately, this proclamation is not the ranting of a harmless group of intolerant men who live in an all-male institution, wear frocks, and orally commune with the body of Christ. Already, this Catholic offensive against homosexual human rights is threatening personal suffering worldwide.

In Italy, the left-wing Bologna city council recently introduced an equal opportunities policy to give homosexual couples access to municipal housing on the same basis as heterosexual partners. The Catholic Church responded, with the backing of the neo-facist MSI Party, by announcing plans to mount a legal challenge under Article 29 of the constitution which "recognises the family as a natural entity founded upon marriage".

Cardinal Silvio Oddi condemned Bologna's decision as "bestiality" and warned that "divine retribution" would fall upon the city.

In Lithuania, Roman Catholicism has been a major social force preventing the repeal of Paragraph 122 of the Stalin-imposed penal code which punishes consensual sodomy with up to five years hard labour.

There are currently 29 men imprisoned in Lithuania for homosexual behaviour. They include a 17 year old teenager, Marius Sadauskas, and the chair of the Lithuanian Human Rights Committee, Arvydas Cekanavicius.

Many of those gaoled are routinely raped by prison guards and other inmates. At least two gay prisoners have been murdered while in custody.

In Nicaragua, Cardinal Obando y Bravo has attacked homosexuality as "immoral" and publicly aligned the Catholic Church with the recent recriminalisation of lesbian and gay sexuality by President Chamorro's right-wing UNO coalition.

Article 205 of the new criminal code stipulates three years imprisonment for anyone who "induces, promotes, propagandizes or practices in scandalous form concubinage between two people of the same sex". This legislation not only criminalizes homosexual behaviour, but also the cohabitation of two homosexual people and the advocacy of homosexual rights or lifestyle.

Here, in Britain, to highlight lesbian and gay anger at Catholic involvement in stirring up anti-gay hatred and discrimination, OutRage has confronted the Vatican ambassador in his London embassy, and disrupted mass and staged a 'Queer Crucifixion' at Westminster Cathedral.

According to Lyn Sutcliffe of OutRage: "Thousands of lesbians and gay men are sacked from their jobs, arrested for consensual behaviour, beaten by queer-bashers, denied custody of their children and driven to attempt suicide. The Vatican is not only silent about such discrimination and violence, it now implicitly sanctions it." ❑

Daily Mirror

Shock!

Horror!

The great *Mirror* jobs massacre

● **Daily Mirror NUJ Chapel**

A hundred journalists have been sacked by the Daily Mirror. Why?

Was there any complaint about their work? None whatsoever. Are they superfluous for the Mirror's production? No. Everyone in the building can tell you that the production of the paper is chaos without them.

Is the Daily Mirror making a loss? No. Profits for this year are estimated at £30 million. Most of the sacked workers get their only income from the Mirror. So what is going on? A new Wapping-style management have taken over the Mirror with the approval of the big banks, especially NatWest. David Montgomery, the banks' policeman as chief executive, has promised his masters to make the Mirror even more profitable - and push up the share price. That way, the banks hope to retrieve the millions they recklessly lent Maxwell - from us, the people Maxwell robbed!

If he keeps his promise Montgomery's share options will make him into yet another rich newspaper tycoon. It is to satisfy this ambition that these barbaric sackings have been ordered. And there are more to come. Montgomery promises that the Mirror will stay Labour. But what's the point of pretending to care about Labour, if you treat your own labour like dirt?

Messages of support to Mirror Chapel, NUJ, Acorn House, 314 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP.

Mirror madness

One hundred Mirror journalists found themselves barred from their place of work by the new management team appointed by the consortium of banks which effectively inherited the Mirror Group newspapers from Maxwell. Management claims that the hundred are "casuals" are bogus - most have worked for the paper for years, some for decades.

David Montgomery, a former editor of Today and the News of the World, made a written pledge when he took over as Mirror Group Chief Executive only a month ago that there would be no redundancies and no change of editors. Not only has he sacked the hundred journalists, he has also replaced the editors of the People and the Daily Mirror itself. One of the first acts of the new editor of the People was to axe Peter Mandelson's column, which provoked howls of protest from the Labour front bench. John Smith is alternately sweet-talking and threatening Montgomery in hopes of striking a deal with the new Mirror regime that will have nothing to do with reinstating the hundred sacked journos. The Mirror has always been an ardent supporter not of the Labour Party but the Labour leadership. Indeed, under Maxwell, the Mirror conspired with the leadership to wage an infamous smear campaign against Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield. Ironically, the chief hatchet-man in that obnoxious enterprise was Terry Pattinson, the paper's industrial correspondent, now calling for the miners to help him picket the Mirror building (see above).

One of the first signs of the intentions of the new Mirror management was the abrupt termination of the "Miners' Noticeboard" column. Now the miners' struggle has virtually disappeared from its pages. Montgomery is also a well-known champion of Ulster unionism. The Mirror's longstanding support for British withdrawal from Ireland is clearly under threat.

The new Mirror editor, David Banks, is another Murdoch veteran, having played a key role in the 1986 move to Fortress Wapping. Banks says the Mirror needs "more of a sense of fun".

Montgomery has received plenty of help from another member of the new Mirror Group management team appointed by the banks, Lord Hollick, the millionaire Labour peer and Kinnock crony who was part of the general election campaign team which performed so lamentably in April.

Mirror militants

As *Briefing* goes to press, picketing is being stepped up outside the Daily Mirror building at Holborn Circus. "I'm calling on all trade union members - Mirror readers or not - to come up here and assist us", Mirror industrial editor Terry Pattinson told *Briefing*.

Camilla Power
NUJ Haymarket

"Our role in backing the miners has joined us to the labour movement like we never were before. It's given us the authority to become the focal point for all the many disputes which are now beginning to erupt. Arthur Scargill was here the other day - but where's Norman Willis? Miners, tube workers, Blue Circle cement workers, Royal Bank of Scotland workers, railmen, miners - I want you all here! Our fight is yours and yours is ours!"

Pattinson isn't optimistic about short-term prospects. With Paul Foot and numerous other left-wing journalists who won't cross a picket-line, he faces the risk of immediate dismissal. To beat the NUJ, a scab workforce is being put together by Cheshire country squire and Sporting Life editor Michael Gallemore, former close buddy of Maxwell. But in the event of a drawn-out struggle, Terry is confident. "This isn't Wapping," he told *Briefing*. "Here in Central London, it's an ideal building to picket. As the thing snowballs, we could soon have thousands on this pavement here! And with the Tories facing crisis on all fronts, we're in a position to win!" *Briefing* readers are urged to join the picket, which is all day and especially Saturdays, from 9am to 8pm.

Nightmare on Market Street

The Poll Tax is dead but like the stench from a rotting corpse it continues to blight the lives of many. **Terry Liddle** of Eltham CLP went to court recently.

SO I FIND myself back in Market Street Magistrates Court to answer a summons to show why I've not paid the Poll Tax for 1992 - 1993. As I register my presence, an official from Greenwich Council demands to know why I'm contesting the summons. I tell him to mind his own fucking business and insist on my right to a hearing. Justice, I've been told, must not only be done but must be seen to be done.

I am herded into the dock with three other people not one of whom I've met before. I attempt to demand a separate hearing but before I can get my words out I'm told by the magistrate, who typifies the arrogance and contempt for ordinary people of his class, to shut up.

There follows a parrot-like performance from a Poll Tax officer who reads a prepared statement in an utterly boring monotone. I start my questioning - when were bills and reminders sent out, can you prove that I ever had them!? To every question the answer is "no"! The magistrate then interjects to tell me my line of questioning is irrelevant and that he doesn't want to be there all day. I tell him in no uncertain terms that if I can't put my questions there is no point in my continuing with this farce.

The chap next to me - I later discover he has been arrested twenty times and gone to prison six times for peaceful protests against various injustices - then has his say. Perhaps because he is wearing a pinstripe suit he is allowed to get away with demanding to be reclassified as mentally impaired, which would exempt him from Poll Tax, on the grounds that the authorities have always treated him that way. He makes it plain he won't pay and will be happy to be back in prison. He informs me that this mockery of justice is costing £50 a minute.

The two others in the dock are a woman of seventy who has been fighting for two years to get her rebate sorted out and a man on Income Support about to be made homeless because the Council won't pay in Housing Benefit the £160 a week demanded by his landlord for the one room in which he lives with his partner and two children. Both say they can't pay and are prepared to be imprisoned. The woman says it would be "a nice rest". It is interesting to see how their experience with the Poll Tax has freed these working class people from any fear or respect they had for bourgeois law and order. This is something socialists can build on.

I'm then in the witness box to give my evidence. I start by saying that Poll Tax typifies tyranny and the way to end it was the way the tyranny of Charles Stuart was ended 350 years ago - by revolution! The magistrate interrupted saying that he respects my political opinions (when my class has the power, there'll be none for his - they'll be dealt with in the way Dzerzhinsky dealt with the enemies of October) but I'm out of order and must shut up.

At last the organised vengeance called justice is over. There are three liability orders and an adjournment. The next time I'm in court it'll be to be committed to prison. My answer will be as always - revolution!

Banbury cross

Karl Statton reports: Threatened cuts in services at Horton General Hospital have caused widespread anger in Banbury on October 30th, Four thousand braved the freezing cold to take part in the biggest local demonstration in living memory. A meeting called by Banbury Health Emergency was packed to overflowing. Local MP Tony Baldry was invited, but instead sent apologies and a local Tory Party hack.

Nearly £700 was raised to help BHE continue its fight against NHS cuts. It is now linking up with other NHS struggles, and has affiliated to London Health Emergency.

Reading pad

SHORTLY BEFORE Ashdown saved Major from defeat on Maastricht, Reading Labour Party confirmed a formal electoral pact with the local Liberal Democrats. Its General Committee overwhelmingly endorsed plans to stand aside in two key wards in the 1993 Berkshire County Council elections. This should allow the Lib Dems to regain Kentwood and Tilehurst West from the Tories.

Confidential papers indicate that the Party will "develop tactics to ensure...that appropriate messages reach Labour supporters in these areas."

Labour apparently stands to benefit from unspecified concessions from the Lib Dems in other areas. Deputy Leader of Berkshire's Labour Group Pete Ruhemann -who believed Ashdown worthy of a Cabinet post had Labour won the General Election - was an avid supporter of the scheme. It was also warmly welcomed by Calum Macdonald MP, who has publicly advocated formal pacts at Parliamentary level. The Reading plan could be a launch pad for much larger Lib-Lab pacts to come.

What a waste!



Cohen's Corner
A new monthly column from the Commons

AS USUAL THE best suggestions for new laws, which are really relevant to peoples' lives, have come from the Labour Left. My own bill, working with Women against Rape, to modernise the rape laws and Jeremy Corbyn's "Elimination of Poverty in Retirement" are two current examples. Another is the Racial Harass-

Harry Cohen
MP for Leyton

ment Bill, to criminalise racial attacks, which is now in draft form with the Anti-Racist Alliance.

My proposed law recognises the right of women to have control over their own bodies and redefines rape based upon sex by coercion and without consent. For the first time it would give statutory recognition of rape in marriage and male rape. But it is a comprehensive measure so it also seeks to ensure that women are not forced back to a rapist partner because of financial desperation. Income Support would have to be promptly available as well as proper compensation. At present the current Criminal Compensation Board limit is £5,000 compensation for women who have a child as a result of being raped. That is ludicrous and in no way reflects the costs of bringing up a child.

But it is these very proper financial arrangements - even more so in Jeremy's Bill, which would save the lives of very many thousands of pensioners - which result in the Tories blocking the progress of these measures. Capitalism can't afford them.

What can it afford? It can afford the Royal Family having a free ride at the taxpayer's expense. Parliamentary Question — "Will the Chancellor make it his policy to extend taxation of income to members of the Royal Family?" Lamont's reply — "I have no plans to do so".

It can afford the international speculators making a billion pounds killing in one day at the expense of the British economy. Parliamentary Question — "What plans has the Chancellor to curb the activities of speculators in the currency market?" Reply — "I have no plans to introduce controls aimed at curbing the activities of speculators in the currency market".

It can afford fat cats like Richard Branson weaseling out of paying their fair share of taxes. My Commons motion explains that he paid no tax on his £229 million capital gain in selling the Virgin Music Group to Thorn EMI by using tax havens in Jersey and Guernsey to avoid a UK tax bill of £92 million. This loophole costs us over £4 billion a year.

It can afford more weapons. Even now the Ministry of Defence is working on a new nuclear weapon - the TASM (tactical air to service missile) - and has probably already spent about £3 million on blueprint costs. The European Fighter Aircraft is set to cost £20 billion. The workforce is less than 10,000. We could give each worker a million pounds and still have £10 billion left over. Incidentally a recent Commons Library paper points out that the costs of the Falklands to this country works out at £2.6 million per Falklands inhabitant.

Capitalism can afford those wasteful costs, but not to pay a realistic level of unemployment benefit. Britain has one of the lowest levels in industrialised Europe. Similarly low paid workers are too expensive for the bosses, so the Tories are determined to scrap the remaining Wages Councils. Poverty level pay will be replaced by pin-money pay for many thousands of women workers. This is a financial rape.

Massive job losses, like those of the miners, and a virtual pay freeze for teachers, fire-fighters, health and local government workers is also the price of the Tory excesses.

There was a chance to inflict a humiliating defeat on the Tories over their European timetable to ratify Maastricht, but the Liberals saved them twice. They must therefore from now on share the blame for job losses, hospital closures, pay freezes and other cutbacks.

The unscrupulous greed of the Tories has also been exposed in the Matrix Churchill scandal. In the cause of profit for arms sales Ministers were prepared to breach the arms embargo upon Iraq and tell lies to Parliament. In the Gulf War British troops faced possible death from British armaments which had been eagerly sold to Saddam Hussein. Ken Livingstone has done some good work in exposing the evil activities of the arms dealer, Mark Thatcher.

With all this going on, the best one can say of Labour's front bench is that it is ordinary. John Smith achieves a regular draw with Major over the dispatch box, but in the meantime the Party's economic policy, particularly how we would pay for absolutely vital social and industrial improvements, has been virtually dismantled. There is currently no significantly large programme for new jobs or for a peace dividend by cutting military expenditure. On the Tory plans to close many of London hospitals there is still hesitation from Labour's team in taking a position to oppose all closures.

In his last book *Some Lives* the late London GP David Widgery stated that he saw the social cost of the Tories in the streets of the East End: "the schizophrenic dementing in public, the young mother bathing the newborn in the sink of a B&B, the pensioner dying pinched and cold in a decrepit council flat, the bright young kids wasting away on 'smack' who can get drugs more easily than education." Unless the Labour leaders start producing radical socialist policies to tackle these enormous problems, *they* may as well be wasted on smack! ❑

Defend the refugees, defeat the racists

Sue Jones urges opposition to the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill which now threatens the rights and lives of refugees.

IN OCTOBER a Somali woman, several months pregnant and accompanied by her other 7 children aged from 2 upwards arrived at Heathrow. She was exhausted, distressed, and spoke no English. She claimed asylum - she was fleeing the continuing civil war in her homeland. The immigration services allowed her into the UK temporarily while they examined her case. She should then have gone to the Refugee Arrivals Project, who would have helped her with housing benefits, and put her in touch with her community in London. But they were unable to help: the Home Office had refused extra funding for interpreters and they could deal with no more people. So she spent two days at the airport concourse alone, penniless and afraid, until she spotted another Somali walking by. He helped her find someone to stay with. When she tried to apply as homeless a few days later (having outstayed her welcome on the living room floor) the council turned her away twice before an advice agency intervened and she was placed in a hostel.

A new bill on asylum is going through the Commons, which proposes:

• to restrict the basis on which refugees can claim asylum in the UK.

• to reduce the rights of asylum-seekers to appeal against refusal of rights to stay.

• to remove the rights to appeal of some visitors and other people wanting to come to the UK temporarily (eg, for family celebrations).

• to refuse asylum-seekers permanent housing until their immigration case is dealt with.

• to allow councils to turn homeless asylum-seekers away if there is anywhere else they can stay however temporary.

The bill is being rushed through committee stage now. Why the haste? The previous bill was clearly a shabby attempt to 'play the race card' in the run-up to an election, matched only by the shameful attempt by the Labour front bench to rescue it at the last minute.

The new bill was promised in the Tory Manifesto. It is part of the deals worked out in secret by groups of European ministers and immigration officials, to create a common immigration policy across the continent. 'Fortress Europe' is set to defend itself against attempted entry by the poor and oppressed from the rest of the world. Why do they need to leave? Ask the Bosnians about Germany's actions in the former Yugoslavia. Ask the Somalis about the French and British colonial carve-up that failed their country. Ask the Kurds about the British broken promises to promote an independent Kurdistan, and the NATO support for the Turkish army that tortures and massacres them.

The bill must be opposed. Join the campaign - you will be in good company. The Commission for Racial Equality has condemned it as racially discriminatory. The Catholic Bishops Conference has issued a strong statement to MPs. The major housing charities have demanded the removal of the housing clauses. The Law Society has opposed the removal of rights to appeal and representation.

The backbone of the campaign against the bill, however, has been the refugee community groups themselves. These same groups already receive and support new arrivals, develop housing training, advice projects, and fight for the interests of their communities. Often they have little or no support from official bodies, operating from borrowed premises on contributions made from members' benefits or low pay. Beyond lobbying against the bill, we should also be pushing for decent facilities and funding for these groups, to build on the strength, creativity and resourcefulness they bring to us.

• get speakers from the Asylum Rights Campaign or Refugee Ad-Hoc Committee for Asylum Rights to your meetings.

• find out what your local authority policy on refugees is and lobby them.

● Contact the Asylum Rights Campaign at Bondway House, Bondway, London SW8 (phone 071 582 3969), and the Refugee Ad-Hoc Committee for Asylum Rights c/o 365 Brixton Road, London SW9 (phone 071 738 6408).

Tony Deane cleared

WHAT APPEARS TO be a racist police frame-up was thrown out of court on 30th October when Tony Deane was cleared at Snaresbrook Crown Court in London of two charges of police assault.

Tony Deane, aged 24, and his father Arnold Deane were the victims of an unprovoked assault by Forest Gate police officers last November. Arnold Deane, 54, was taken to hospital unconscious. Both men were then charged with assaulting the police themselves!

The campaign to defend the Deane family, launched by the Newham Monitoring Project, attracted wide support, including from Newham Council and the West Indian Standing Conference. Four thousand people demonstrated outside Forest Gate Police station.

Arnold was found not guilty last June, but Tony was convicted on police evidence. Now that conviction has been thrown out as unsafe.

Mr Arnold Deane said, "We are now going to begin civil action against the Metropolitan police for the assault and imprisonment we had to suffer."

Twilight of the Idols

This inflammatory article by **Terry Liddle** (Eltham CLP) and **David Craig** (Editor, *Republican Marxist Bulletin*) adds insult to injury as a deservedly miserable year for the Royals comes to an end.

SHOCK! HORROR! Scandal! Like a pack of curs yelping at the heels of a wounded stag, the hacks of the gutter press have expended mountains of newsprint and an ocean of ink dissecting and speculating upon the matrimonial misfortunes of the Windsors. The sexual activities and proclivities of consenting adults should not be a matter of concern for socialists - we have better weapons in our armoury than smutty gossip.We should, however, be making the point that the press has little in the way of concern or pity for the millions of ordinary people whose relationships have been damaged and destroyed by unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

The effects of this scandal mongering have not been entirely negative. People who have been depicted as near super-human beings, the very repository and example of every bourgeois virtue, have been knocked off their pedestal at the foot of which thronged the plebian worshippers. They have been revealed as human, all too human, and are losing their glamour and power to mystify. Perhaps the longest running soap opera is reaching its concluding episodes and what was hailed as a new Elizabethan age (like thousands of working class kids, the first TV broadcast we saw was the Coronation) is drawing to a close.

Sadly, all too few appreciate the delicious irony of the fact that these events are taking place in a year which marks the 350th anniversary of the outbreak of the English Civil War (which should really be called the English Revolution) and the bicentenary of the publication of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*. Such are the recuperative powers of the system that it was Anne Windsor who gave a lecture to mark the publication of Paine's work, a work which her ancestors tried mightily to suppress! No wonder, for it exposed them for what they were - armed bandits who stole the land from under the feet of the common people.

But if the Norman invasion was the start of feudalism, 1642 was the end of it. The muskets and pikes in the hands of common folk which brought down Charles Stuart's haughty cavaliers also brought down the concept of the divine right of kings. Charles may have ruled dei gratia but a revolutionary people demonstrated that a sword is as long as a sceptre and can as easily smite a king as a commoner. It was in this period that ideas prefiguring socialism arose: the Levellers demanding political equality; the Diggers demanding the land for those who worked it. There were good reasons why Cromwell had the Levellers shot at Burford and the Diggers were driven off of St. George's Hill at sword point. The rising bourgeoisie recognised that a rebellious people were as much a threat to its property as they were to a tyrant king.

After the Stuart restoration, if there was little resistance in England, in Scotland a peasant-based guerilla war was waged for nearly thirty years. In Scottish history this is called the "killing times". While the aim of the rebels was a theocratic rather than a democratic republic, they were still a threat both to the bourgeoisie and the remains of feudalism which were forging the alliance and compromise which still pertains today. At the end of it the Stuarts got exile and Dutch William got the throne. The mercantile capitalists who funded him got the Bank of England, the bourgeoisie got a constitutional monarchy and the people got a new yoke fastened on their necks.

When the French Revolution again raised the banner of equality and Paine lauded it, he had to flee for his life. Jacobin, like Leveller before it and socialist after, became a word which struck terror into the hearts of the ruling class. It was then that the industrial revolution took off and there arose a working class and a labour movement, with the call for a republic joining with the call for socialism. This is the history we are not taught in school since both our rulers and misleaders do not want us to learn it.

Up until now, the British monarchy has survived by periodically reinventing itself. Queen Victoria invented the imperial monarchy and became Empress of India. The Second World War brought forth the social monarchy based on an enlarged public sector, a welfare state and national health service etc. In 1952 Elizabeth Windsor was crowned head of this new 'welfare state' and became the symbol of the new era. The Labour government 1945-50 played a major role in building the basis of the social monarchy. Later the term Butskellism was used to signify that no matter

how much the parties slagged each other off, they were united on essentials. The monarchy was the focal point of that unity.

Under the social monarchy children got National Health orange juice and free school milk. The Royal Family got free transport, trains, boats and planes, free castles and no taxes. The orange juice and free school milk has long since gone. But social benefits for the Windsors remain.

The Windsors symbolised the era of the welfare state. Now thanks to Thatcher, the Windsors symbolise nothing, except perhaps the last remaining subsidized state industry. When they are slated in the press, don't expect to see outraged subjects demonstrating in the streets. This is why the editors have dared to do what would have been unacceptable a few years ago.

It is not surprising that Thatcher was not very popular up at the Palace. All this talk of privatising everything and standing on your own two feet is not what the social monarchy stands for. Thatcher created a myth that she had modernised British capitalism and created a dynamic competitive system. In reality the system is as corrupt, badly managed and inefficient as ever. Her real achievement will go down in history as merely undermining the old welfare monarchy and replacing it with growing political instability. Thatcherism has put nothing in its place except naked greed. Essex man and the social monarchy can co-exist no longer.

The decline of British imperialism goes back over a hundred years. Things are coming to a head in the current crisis, which is affecting the whole society from top to bottom. Of course in a class society, pain is not equally distributed. Being homeless or on the dole can hardly compare with being a billionaire and having your family scandalised in the gutter press. Nevertheless the root cause is the same, a sick and decaying society in its death throes.

The world has moved on. The monarchy and the political system have stood still. There is growing pressure for change. But how do you change one of the most conservative institutions in the UK? If things do start to change, they don't always end up where you intend, as Gorbachev and many others before him have found out. This makes it a dangerous period for the Windsors.

The failure of the Tories to modernise the economy has been obvious for many years. Tory MPs knew this, when they dumped Thatcher herself. Major was able to keep up the pretence until the collapse of sterling and the ditching of the ERM. Now they have no credible economic policies left. The country's attention is turning slowly but inevitably to the question of constitutional change. The United Kingdom certainly needs a democratic political revolution. As socialists we must unite all our forces around the demand for a Federal Republic of England, Scotland and Wales — and a United Ireland. We must raise the level of debate about the Royals beyond puerile tittle tattle about who is screwing who, especially when we've already been screwed for a few billion quid.

Using the royal crisis to raise socialist politics among the working class is difficult, because the British left lacks any real republican politics or tradition. The Labour Party, for example, has only ever debated the question once in sixty years. Trotsky noted the supine character of the Labour leaders in his writings on Britain. He said "the Royal power, they (Labour leaders) declare, does not interfere with the country's progress and is cheaper than a president if we count all the expenses of elections etc... these speeches of the Labour leaders are characteristic of their peculiar (English) nature, which cannot be called anything other than conservative stupidity." In 1937 Clement Attlee said "I wouldn't lift a finger to turn a capitalist monarchy into a capitalist republic." Attlee, true to his word, never did "lift a finger." But he was soon bending knees at Buckingham Palace.



Marx, Engels and Lenin had the answer to Attlee. All three made a clear the distinction between a capitalist monarchy and capitalist republic. It was simple. The republic was more democratic. That in itself was sufficient for a socialist to prefer a republic. More democracy is not something to be sniffed at. But as revolutionaries they had another argument. The movement from one state to the other didn't leave everything else unchanged. On the contrary it opened up further possibilities for socialist advance. Mobilising the democratic and republican working class is part of the real revolutionary tradition of Marx and Engels. The left has not done anything to exploit the royal crisis by putting forward the democratic case for changing the political and constitutional status quo.

Now is the time of the twilight of the idols! Now is the time to rekindle the republican flame! ❑

Left behind on Europe?

The first Labour European Conference held in November at Brighton, never transcended its limited ambitions to be a grand love-in for Euro-fanatics and party apparatchiks writes **Andy Howard**, Reigate CLP.

THE IMPRESSION that the conference was one long PR stunt to demonstrate the Party's Euro virility and a sop to the self-importance of the MEPs was confirmed by the dismal nature of the plenary sessions. John Smith, Gordon Brown, and Margaret Beckett used their speeches to defend their opposition to the Maastricht paving bill (do we need to apologise for opposing the Tories?) and to attack Paddy Ashdown. All good knockabout stuff but what about Europe? What about the serious party debate on Britain's future in Europe?

This was meant to be the role of the workshops which offered a rare opportunity for delegates, MPs MEPs, trade unionists, and the odd academic to participate in free discussion around vital issues such as political union, the social chapter, race and nationalism, campaigning, single market etc.

My initial suspicions of this format were confirmed by the uncommonly friendly and fraternal atmosphere of the first sessions. It was the workshop on political union that gave the game away. Here David Martin MEP (arch-Federalist) and Lord Callaghan (Election saboteur) led the workshop in a discussion of Maastricht and political union.

Now I understood. The disorientating absence of rancour and the fraternalism came easy because everyone agreed with each other. The conference was self-selecting and packed with right-wing re-treads from the 1970s and the new Euro-dreamers who see the Federal rainbow as the ladder out of Tory Britain.

The real surprise was not the dismal speeches or lack of debate or even the spectacle of watching Callaghan basking in the mainstream. It was in the absence of the Left. The Campaign Group had no visible presence, and my overriding impression was that I had gatecrashed the wrong party. It was Saturday lunchtime before anyone even tried to sell me a newspaper!

The anti-Maastricht case was hardly heard at Brighton, although a Common Market Safeguards Committee fringe meeting was held before the conference opened and before delegates had arrived. Jim Mortimer and Michael Hindley spoke at a fringe meeting on Europe and disarmament but the main mood of the conference was that the Left had stayed away and was being left behind on Europe.

If the conference was just a Euro love-in does it matter that the conference was dominated by the right and the Euro-crazies? Clearly many Left activists were participating in events in support of the miners but the suspicion remains that for many on the Left Europe is an issue to be sneered at rather than addressed.

How many activists realise that in 1994 the party will fight on a manifesto determined by the "European Socialist Party" by majority voting? The creeping Euro-orthodoxy must be challenged and joining the campaign against Maastricht is not enough.

Euro-CLPs are being resurrected in order to select for 1994 and the left must be active in ensuring that CLPs maximise their representation in Euro-GCs and ECs to oppose the careerists and sycophants who chase the Euro gravy train. ❑

National Conference

Alternatives to Maastricht

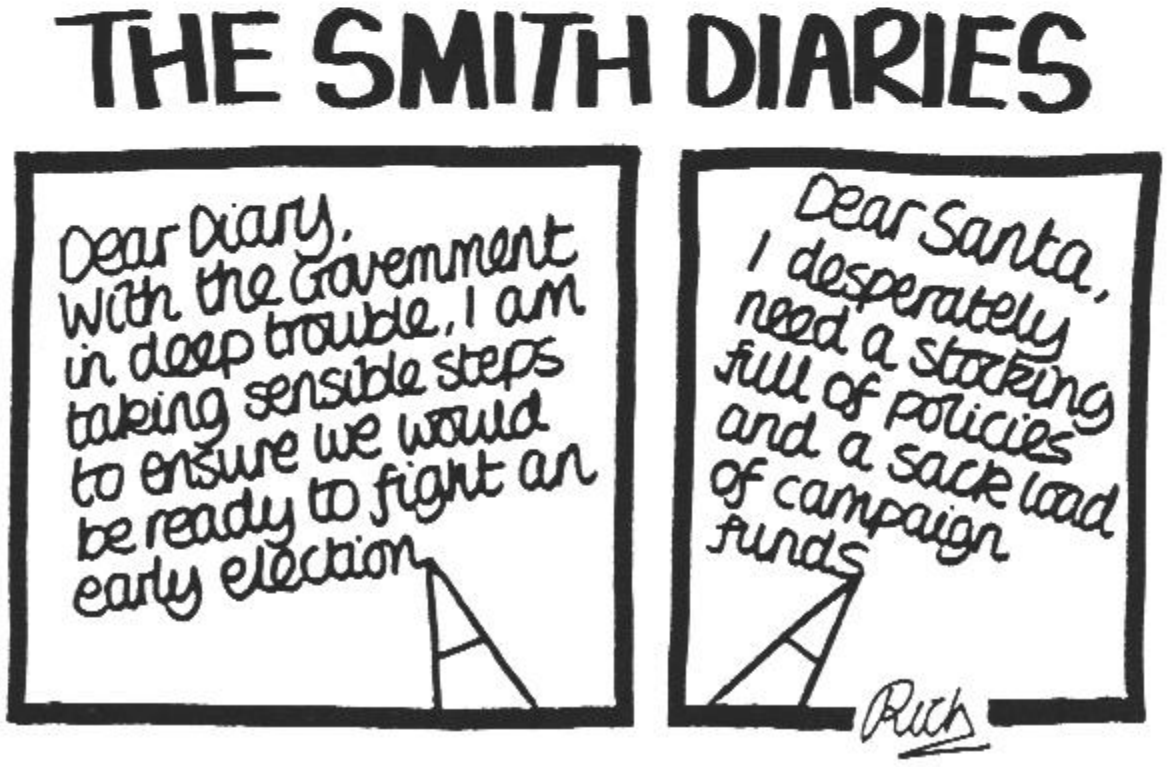
Saturday 5th December,
10.30am to 5pm
The Assembly Hall,
School of Oriental and African Studies
Thornbaugh St, Russell Square, London WC1

Speakers include: Diane Abbott, Tony Benn, Ken Capstick, Alex Falconer, Bryan Gould, Ken Livingstone, Alf Lomas, Alice Mahon, Seumas Milne, Peter Shore and Marc Wadsworth.
Organised by Socialist Forum c/o 1-3 Ardleigh Road, London N1 4HS
Registration £5 waged, £2 unwaged.

Labour Party Socialists AGM

Saturday 5th December,
11am to 5pm.
Steve Biko Room, Mandela Building, Sheffield Hallam University, Pond Street, Sheffield.

Speakers include: Bob Cryer, NUM, Women Against Pit Closures and NALGO strikers.
Registration £10 waged, £4 unwaged (includes 1993 subs), to 106 Lytham Road, London SW2 phone:071 733 3403 (day), 081 671 4564 (eve)



Rank and file march again

Hamish Renton, Cambridge CLP, outlines the case for a new rank and file mobilising committee that can make the left's weight felt across the movement.

IT IS twelve and a half years since the Rank and File Mobilising Committee was established at the end of May 1980. It aimed to defend and extend the gains that successive Labour Party Conferences had achieved in internal party democracy during the late 1970's and proposed a series of meetings for Labour Party and Trade Union activists. It wanted to put out a large circulation magazine to explain why the CLPD inspired advances were crucial in avoiding a future repetition of the 1964-70 and 1974-79 Labour government's failures. It sought to organise broad caucuses in the party and the unions to bring together human and financial resources to launch the project.

The RFMC programme was drafted in such a way that all the constituent groups in it could agree with its main propositions: mandatory reselection, defence of the current NEC structure, the right of the NEC, elected by conference to draft the manifesto, the electoral college and accountability of the PLP to Conference.

That is all in the past. I was eight years old at the time. All of the above demands have been either never agreed or clawed back by the right. Labour is broke. There is, also, the little matter of 4 election defeats in a row.

It is vital for all working people in Britain that Labour gets its act together, and this means the left has to get its act together. Like it or not, the Socialist Campaign Group is the only likely institutional basis for this.

The SCG Supporters Network is a latter day RFMC. It has rapidly amassed over 2,000 supporters and local groups, if not springing up like mushrooms, are certainly growing up quickly from within the rank and file. The Campaign Group of MPs has facilitated this and initiatives such as the Socialist Councillors and Youth/ Student networks will develop it further.

The SCG Working Party established by the Leeds conference has produced positive organisational outcomes, getting in touch with supporters on the ground and organising the recall conference in Manchester in February. Participating left groups have shown a high degree of tolerance and willingness to work together, in the spirit of the old RFMC. It has also exposed serious problems which, if allowed to remain unaddressed, may well prove fatal for left revival.

Firstly, there has been widespread disgruntlement with *Socialist Campaign Group News*. There is a concern that the editorial board is not open and democratic. Many activists are reluctant to sell and promote a paper that they feel, rightly or wrongly, gives them little chance to contribute and thus little stake in.

Concern has also been voiced by some over the extent to which the paper is perceived in some circles as being relatively unco-operative with the SCG Network. Many charges against the paper remain in the realms of subjective judgement and clearly the appearance of the special "Case for Coal" edition was timely. But there needs to be action. It is obviously undesirable that in the establishment of a body of supporters the paper of that body must play a crucial role.

Therefore the editorial board must be open to all contributions, letters, articles from rank and file activists and these should be placed alongside speeches by MPs. Above all, the paper must reflect the many disparate and diverse strengths of the left and provide a lively and informative debate about policy decisions, future directions and events on the left. It must be a symbol of unity of action and purpose on the left without quashing individual views.

Secondly the SCG movement must be democratised along with the paper. This need not mean mind-numbing constitutionalism: but local SCG activists must feel they belong to an open, pluralistic, devolved and democratic movement or else they will become disenchanted and passive if the organisation merely pays lip-service to their views.

Thirdly, the SCG must, along the lines of the RFMC, construct a short set of key policies that are clear and consensual and agreed democratically. I offer an Alternative Economic Strategy, Unilateralism, Internal Party Democracy, Internationalism, Clause 4, Minority Rights, for starters. We will not just be offering a clinical critique but also a set of radical democratic socialist alternatives.

Finally, and this cannot be overstated: the SCG must reach out to society at large and recruit. The unemployed, women, young people, environmentalists, ethnic minorities, liberation campaigners, the low paid, senior citizens should be brought on board in large numbers. We need an active programme of recruitment not just the vague niceties that the right churns out of 'building a mass party' or the windy rhetoric that the left is prone to of 'building the struggle'.

We should be getting out and recruiting as well as encouraging ex-members, lapsed or otherwise and campaigning for an end to expulsions. To do otherwise is folly — with Labour in such a state we cannot create a viable left without fresh input into the party.

We not only need to mobilise the rank and file (and we don't need too many committees to do it), but to debate and define our positions, reform our internal structures in a positive spirit. Most importantly reach out to the millions cheated and dispossesed by this government so that we can, for all our sakes, avenge their crimes. ❑

The collapse of Conservatism:

what does the left have to offer?

Andrew Coates, Ipswich CLP, argues that socialists have to carry the message of a revived and democratic public sector into the heart of the labour movement.

THE GRIP OF Conservatism on British society looks as if it is held together by sellotape and string. Now would seem the time to look at the weaknesses in the government's strategy in order to see how best to move onto the offensive.

The politics of the Major government, like its predecessor, have been based on the principle that the 'free market' provides the only model for organising all dimensions of public life. In his recent book, Modern Conservatism, and in an article in the latest Political Quarterly, Conservative MP and former policy researcher David Willetts offers a rationale and a 'free market agenda' for the present Cabinet.

The Citizen's Charters are described by Willetts as the embodiment of how "internal markets within the public sector" can "bring the good features of choice and competition into publicly financed services". In local government, the NHS, education and the civil service, workers and users have already seen what this means. Councils are being gradually reorganised as powerless contracting agencies. Publicly accountable bodies are being replaced by pseudo-entrepreneurs living off the public purse. Financial criteria take precedence over all other concerns. Employees are expected to ghost real markets and deal with each other as 'customers'. Although some parts of the left have been overwhelmed by the apparent dynamism of these changes, even Conservatives are now beginning to falter as the public becomes heartily sick of glossy brochures and charters. No amount of public relations can hide the fact that our everyday working and social conditions have worsened and that services have deteriorated under a swollen managerial dictatorship.

In these circumstances those who have reluctantly backed the 'dented shield' policy of holding onto what little power Labour has in the public sector may now be now looking for alternatives. The whole 'soft left' project has been undermined by the perpetual upheaval in local government. Co-operation with the voluntary and associative sector has proved a chimera: its own funding is in perpetual crisis. The 'free market' has replaced universal and equal public provision with personal dependency and greater bureaucracy (as the proliferation of agencies, trusts, and consultants show).

All sections of the left will be able to combine together if we recognise that campaigning politics can have an effect in altering this. We need to do more than simply resist the forthcoming Tory cuts. Why can't we demand new powers for local government finance and the replacement of unelected and unaccountable bodies by genuine control by workers, elected bodies and the community as a whole? With such changes in prospect more people will find it makes sense to become politically active.

If the results of the private control of water and electricity are guides, denationalisation brings with it higher prices and an utter disregard for the substantial interests of consumers and producers. Planning for social need, developing structures that reflect the rights of the workforce, rather than the latest half-baked managerial theory about 'quality', have become ideas that deal directly with the reality of everyday life. Why can't we shout their advantages from the roof-tops?

The left is coming out of a long period of life on the fringes. The legacy of bitterness and disappointment (not least with the leaders of our Party) will be difficult to overcome. If we wish to channel the wave of hostility toward what Willetts calls the "party of freedom and free-enterprise" we have to unite around a social and economic alternative that breaks down some of our divisions. This means that we will have to think and act ourselves back into the broad stream of the labour movement. Our refusal to play the game according to Tory rules will place us in a credible position, if we can adapt and change.

In his book on political image-making, Images of Power, another Conservative advisor, Bruce Brendan, admits that it was the fight against the Poll Tax that brought Thatcher down. Can we do the same to Major? We have to use our experience of an earlier period of activism in the 80s to refound a strong left inside the Labour Party and in the wider labour movement - one capable of addressing people's most pressing concerns. The present revolt is motivated by what confronts us immediately in the workplace, in the streets and the home - a world of bright televised images, expensive government publicity, the precarious life of part-time and 'peripheral' workers, the privatised miseries of unemployment. We are already part of it. What we need now is to make the connection between what happens outside parliament and what goes on inside and to help build a leadership capable of defeating the Conservative enemy. ❑

More sharks than the Bermuda triangle

Islington Councillor **Liz Davies** warns Labour against siren songs of the born-again privatisers of the erstwhile soft left.

YET AGAIN the LCC coterie in North London's Haringey is breaking new ground. They have produced something called "The Haringey Triangle - a discussion paper on the Council in the fourth term of Tory government". The paper is based on the reasonable assumption that delivery of high quality public services will be made more difficult than ever by a Tory government still determined to smash Labour local authorities. The problem is that the only response to these "major changes" the LCC can think of is for Labour councils to put out to private tender all council services!

The LCC's "triangle" ostensibly links council, service consumers and service providers. The council's role is reduced to one of awarding contracts to private agencies to deliver high quality services at low cost.

The authors of the document seek to exploit the despondency among the Labour ranks following our defeat in April. They purport to offer a means by which Labour local government can continue to provide public services without confronting the government. The "Triangle" is thus an easy way out of a difficult dilemma, and as such should be regarded with the utmost suspicion. In seeking alternatives to political confrontation, the LCC simply adopts the government's own agenda, which is, as we all know, the complete privatisation of council services.

Bizarrely, the LCC hopes to retain what they call Labour's "core values" by privatising services before required to do so by the law. Among those core values, we are told, are "redistribution" and "equality". As used by the LCC the former is simply a code word for cuts. The argument that services should be targeted to the poor sounds fair enough but in practise all council services are used overwhelmingly by the working class - which sections will be cut and which sections "targetted"? This is a recipe for division, competition and scapegoating amongst Labour supporters. As for "equality", even the LCC admits that under the CCT legislation equal opportunities clauses cannot be written into private contracts; how then will their "Triangle" protect the "core value" of "equality"?

Other values are "regeneration", which is largely defined as working with the private sector - again, a coded way of saying that the idea of the public sector is dead and that only the market can deliver. "Efficiency and effectiveness" are obviously desirable but here they seem to mean nothing more than management diktat and the arbitrary rule of highly paid consultants.

Finally there is "empowerment" - precisely how this will happen when public services are delivered by people who remain unaccountable to local electors is never explained.

The paper fails to acknowledge that in many areas the local council is the single largest employer and that its workers are drawn overwhelmingly from the local community. The distinction between residents and workforce is facile. In reality, the interests of the two cannot be separated conveniently. Labour councils have a duty to provide decent jobs to local residents and to set standards for other employers by negotiating proper terms and conditions with trade unions. In the context of skyrocketing unemployment, that duty is more important than ever.

High quality services cannot be delivered by exploitative, cost-cutting employers disliked and distrusted by their workers. What is needed is an informed, self-organised workforce, committed to the service it is employed to deliver, consulted and involved at every stage by elected and accountable local councillors. No council which regards its workforce as an enemy can deliver anything but conflict and irresponsibility.

At least the LCC has started a debate about the delivery of public services, which is welcome, even if its prescriptions are not. In Haringey, the LCC-controlled Local Government Committee has produced a supposedly impartial document summarising three different positions. One is the "Haringey Triangle", one is Cllr. Josie Irwin's embarrassingly muddled and hopelessly vague "middle position" and the third is the position of the local Labour left, outlined in the excellent "Working with the People: a Return to Democracy in Haringey". It proposes a genuine opening of the books and involvement of the community, workforce and voluntary sector in determining the Council's financial strategy via local meetings. This would offer real "empowerment" to a community under severe pressure from the Tory government. Its honesty is a refreshing contrast to the fraud of the Haringey Triangle's "agency council", an attempt by the discredited cohorts of the LCC to pretend they have a radical agenda, when all they have, in fact, is the Tory agenda.

Stop press

AS BRIEFING GOES to press, Islington's Local Government Committee is meeting with the Labour Group to elect a successor to Margaret Hodge as Council leader. Liz Davies is the left candidate in a seven-horse race. After discussion involving the whole of the local Labour left, Liz stood on a public political platform of no cuts in jobs and services, respect for trade union rights, opposition to privatisation, a renewed commitment to equal opportunities and an end to the jailing of Poll Tax non-payers.

Her campaign was closely linked to support for the local NALGO strike (see page 24). A leaflet outlining specific policy pledges and listing prominent local Labour Party, trade union and community supporters was circulated to local Party members, trades unionists and community groups. Much to the shock and chagrin of the local right and 'soft left', this open and honest socialist campaign paid off: Liz secured the second highest number of nominations (four wards, two women's sections) as well as coming in a strong second in a number of other wards. If it had been an OMOV, first-past-the-post ballot of the Party membership, Liz might well have won! As it is, her candidacy has established that the Labour left is a force to be reckoned with in Islington. Full report with final results in the next *Labour Briefing*.

CLASS TRAITOR OF THE MONTH

The last of the dinosaurs

Dick Knowles, Labour leader of Birmingham City Council, is actually Sir Richard Marchant Knowles, born in Kent in 1917 and knighted by Margaret Thatcher in 1989. Is this old-time town hall boss the last of a dying breed? Let's hope so.

PROUD OF his working class origins (he got his education at village schools and via the WEA and was a manual worker for twenty years in the construction and shipbuilding industries), Dick Knowles is famously contemptuous of "middle class dilettantes" in the labour movement, which is why he so deeply detests the 'soft left'.

Knowles signed on as a full-time Labour Party organiser in Sevenoaks, Kent, in 1950. A few years later he moved to Leeds where for over a decade he ran the local Party with a rod of iron (one of his proteges was a young Joyce Gould). He was and is a traditional Labour right-winger: paternalistic, authoritarian, chauvinistic, royalist, Atlanticist and anti-Communist.

In the 60s he moved to Birmingham as a Regional Organiser. In 1972, the year he finally left the full-time employ of the Party, he stood for elected office for the first time, winning a seat on Birmingham City Council. For the following ten years he was employed as the National Organiser of the Co-op Party. On the Council Knowles became Chair of Planning, a post in which he could deploy his well-honed skills as a wheeler-dealer and dispenser of patronage. Only two years later, however, he lost his seat and Labour lost control of the Council. Between 1973 and 1977 he was a member of the West Midlands County Council before being re-elected to the City Council in 1978. Labour briefly regained control of the Council between 1980-82, when Knowles was again Chair of Planning. In 1984 Labour established the control which it has just about managed to maintain since then; Knowles became and remains Labour leader.

Knowles is a big man who likes to smoke big cigars, an old-fashioned clubhouse politician who did not always fit in with the 80s Labour Party of smart suits and blow-dried hair. At Labour's nationally-organised rally held in Birmingham Town Hall during the general election campaign, he was not invited to speak and had no place on the platform (there was, however, room for Margaret Hodge).

Bluff, irascible and patronising, he will attack anyone in any forum if he feels his interests or his dignity are threatened. Colourful and bizarre phrases spurt from him as logic, grammar and history are thrown to the wind.



PHOTO: Birmingham Post & Mail

Christmas competition: What is Sir Richard doing with his whistle? Prizes for the best suggestions! Send entries to Labour Briefing.

As Council leader, Knowles has kept Birmingham among the lowest-spending Labour councils in the country with a record of chronically underfunded education, housing and social services. In January 1988 he defied his own Labour Whip by voting with the Tories in support of Sunday trading. That same year, in response to resistance from Nalgo members to a particularly sharp round of cutbacks, Knowles tried to impose a no-strike clause and an unprecedented "loyalty oath" on City Council workers.

While jobs have been shed, facilities closed and trade union rights attacked, high-profile monuments to municipal megalomania have mushroomed. Despite his arrival in the city late in life, Knowles constantly plays to local chauvinism and justifies his various money-wasting projects with rhetoric about "making us all proud Brummies again".

The International Convention Centre, known to its detractors as the "Ick", has been Knowles' greatest folly. Disregarding opposition within the Party and criticism in the press, Knowles poured over £160 million into the project. When Prince Charles declared the Ick "an unmitigated disaster", Knowles replied: "the problem is the prince doesn't always appreciate the fact that modern-day buildings are put up purely for commercial gain." Perhaps that explains the inordinate price of a cup of coffee (80p) in what Knowles once tried to dignify as a "people's palace".

Knowles has dragged his feet about getting rid of Birmingham's grammar schools and has failed to raise the level of spending on education to the legal maximum - Birmingham spends about 10% less per pupil than the average for Metropolitan areas. The public could not help but notice the contrast between the Council's miserliness on education with its largesse on stunts like the Ick, the Birmingham Super Prix road race, the failed Olympic bid or the despicable arms fair held at the National Exhibition Centre, of which Knowles is a trustee.

Knowles joined with Tory council leaders in promoting commercial Poll Tax collection fairs, issued summonses for non-payment in huge numbers - including to thousands of local people who were still waiting for the Council to process their rebate applications - and employed some of the most brutal bailiffs in the country.

All this is what Knowles likes to call "sensible socialism". The right-wing Tory-backing *Birmingham Evening Mail* praised "Sir Richard" because "he has been able to keep the left in place and has crushed past attempts to increase their sphere of influence". Local electors are not so convinced. Labour enjoyed abysmal results in the local elections in both 1991 and 1992. This seems to have had some effect on Sir Dick, who has now taken to quoting Lenin, William Morris and "Comrade Gramsci" in papers to the Labour Group and seems to be trying to recast himself in his dotage as some kind of doughty working class warrior. Pull the other one, Dick! ❑

Just another dirty weekend

Richard Hanford reports from Brighton, where the National Constitutional Committee spent the weekend of 14-15th November down at the sumptuous Royal Albion Hotel.

OUTSIDE THE weather was filthy. Inside, dirty linen lay symbolically piled up in the corridors, whilst the NCC performed their disgusting disciplinary acts behind closed doors.

Things began disappointingly for the disciplinarians. Their first intended victim, Rod Fitch, the 1983 parliamentary candidate for Brighton Kemptown, had his case deferred because he had not been sent all the evidence in advance.

Geoff Jones was next. He joined the party in 1963 and has held many posts including Chair of Brighton Labour Party. Playing an active organisational role in all elections, he gained a party diploma in 1982.

"My political philosophy as a socialist in the Labour Party crystallised during the early Wilson Government years and has not noticeably changed. Thus my political development differs greatly from that of Councillor Bassam and other leading members of Brighton Council Labour Group. They spent the seventies in ultra-left organisations, sneering at me as a member of a 'bourgeois party', then joined and skidded across the political spectrum at breakneck speed. They have ended up on the 'respectable right' calling for my expulsion as a dangerous left-winger.

During 1988-89, the vital process of informed discussion and debate between the Labour Group and the Party's General Committee broke down. There were divisions over a whole range of issues, including building on green field sites, appointments by the council and cuts in spending. Decisions were not reported to the party until after they had been made. This led to a spiral of decreasing trust between the Labour Group leadership and the rank and file party delegates. The timing of the call for an inquiry in 1990 was not accidental. Apparently the Labour group suddenly woke up to the fact that the ward activists with whom they had worked for many years were "infiltrators", "intimidating" party members. This of course was nonsense. Simple arithmetic suggested that the forthcoming selection process could produce a majority of councillors opposed to the leadership's strategy. This is what is usually known as democracy. But having already secured a change in the standing orders allowing him to reign in perpetuity, Councillor Bassam was not going to give up power to a mere democratic majority. The majority must be wrong! They must either be "infiltrators" or have been "intimidated" by "infiltrators".

Bassam did not mention that the only case of intimidation ever brought to the notice of Brighton Labour Party was a case where he himself harassed and verbally abused a female fellow councillor and was forced to apologise. This was not an isolated incident. In a recent branch meeting, he had to be reprimanded by the Chair for shouting down and swearing at a woman who happened to disagree with him.

These examples could be multiplied. In general, Bassam's "evidence" was beneath contempt. The whole shoddy process aims to keep in power a clique of individuals who believe that they have a divine right to rule Brighton Borough and Labour Party. Sadly, the results of the last Local Government elections suggest that the electorate do not agree. Perhaps Councillor Bassam is even now producing a dossier calling for the abolition of the Brighton electorate on the grounds of "infiltration" and "intimidation"?"

A loyal and long standing member of the party, Geoff was predictably expelled.

Kate Packham has been active in socialist politics since her schooldays. She canvassed for Labour in all elections since 1970 and was a Brighton Borough Councillor from 1987 to 1991. Kate has always been active in womens groups and campaigns. The main accusation against her was of being a *Militant* supporter, a charge which she freely admitted. As to breaking the Labour whip, she retorted that she had retained the support of her local party. "I have always defended the policies of Brighton Labour Party, which selected me and to which I was accountable." Astonishingly accused of breaking the whip even after it was withdrawn, Kate commented "I continued to defend local party policy, and to raise issues such as the Gulf War, children's rights and the environment."

In answer to accusations of involvement in Anti-Poll Tax Unions, she stated squarely: "In my community, many people sought practical advice and many stated their inability to pay the Poll Tax. I helped set up an APTU and took an active part in it. I stated my intention not to pay the poll tax, in solidarity with those who are unable to pay."
The last charge was involvement with the "Friends of Brighton Labour Party".

"I attended the founding meeting of the Friends. The name was chosen by analogy with the "Friends of John McCarthy" - I and others felt our party was being held hostage by the NEC enquiry and the small number of individuals who had called for the enquiry, most of whom had little or no history in BLP. The Friends was set up not to replace the BLP but to defend it, campaigning for the reinstatement of the Party and keeping some political discussion and education alive."

Kate concluded: "To me, the most important part of the constitution is the section which is actually printed on our Labour Party cards - Clause 4 part 4. It is my support for this principle - the common ownership of the means of production distribution and exchange -which is why I am being expelled from the Party. If the leadership had actually advocated this instead of witch-hunting socialists, Labour would be in power today and not the sorry and declining force that it is.

In Brighton, by cutting services and making people redundant, in using bailiffs to hound the poor, Labour managed to lose several of its safest seats last May. The working class people in my ward and in the biggest council estates in Brighton are now represented by Tories. Labour leaders in Brighton - and nationally - have done a massive disservice to ordinary working people."

The last victim was charismatic county councillor **Clive Walder**. Since joining the Party in 1976, he held every office in the LPYS, and was on the Southern Region Executive Committee for eleven years. Clive was expelled for what Joyce Gould confirmed as his "close allegiance" to *Militant*.

He summed up the proceedings thus: "I am disgusted to have been expelled for my views by this Stalinist show trial. With such massive debts, surely the party has better things to do than waste money on this. The 'evidence' was based upon gossip, hearsay and rumour, all to justify decisions already made in advance. The enquiry, in short, is a load of bollocks." ❑

Waiting for Elvis: the left enters the post-Bush era

The US left is currently engaged in fierce debate over its relationship to the new Clinton administration. **Tim Patterson**, writing for the US magazine *CrossRoads*, weighs up the prospects.

AS MIGHT be expected, activists on the left had their usual wide range of reactions to the results of 3rd November - everything from doctrinaire disdain to simple relief to sober determination to barely restrained euphoria. Already the discussion among progressives has begun to move from analysing what happened to wondering about what to do next.

Was throwing the Republicans out just fun for one night or will the prospects for the left really be any different once Bill Clinton is in charge and George Bush is officially history? Even though the ink is still drying on the returns, it seems a safe bet that the conditions under which the left operates will be dramatically different.

After more than a decade of steady growth in influence and positioning, the far right has taken a big, public mass hit. The verdict of the voters doesn't eliminate the right as an organised political force, but it does cut off the hard right's influence at the White House and its access to appointments to the federal judiciary. At the same time, the right took a beating in the "cultural war" it had so zealously proclaimed. The Christian right decided to pick a fight over "family values" and lost it, fair and square.

Inside and outside the electoral arena, the end of the Cold War is reshaping the terms of political debate. For the first time in anyone's memory, the use of anti-Communism as a club against progressive initiatives of all kinds is declining and even the sacredness of the defence budget is being eroded.

This confluence of changes has led many on the left to draw parallels between 1992 and the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 or the victory of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, elections in which the arrival of a comparatively conservative Democratic President ushered in a period of radical social ferment. There is something to these comparisons, but there is also a whopper of a difference:



in those periods, unlike now, there was already a large, organised, militant, progressive social movement on the ground and a significant left presence within it.

This difference is hardly academic because the key to making any real advances under the Clinton-Gore regime is the ability to exert pressure from the grassroots - in demonstrations, yes, but even more importantly in local, state and congressional elections, in union and community struggles, in lobbying campaigns and court challenges and legislative budget battles. The left, frankly, has very little weight to throw around at the moment. But it seems almost guaranteed that mass constituencies, buoyed by the election results, will press their demands more aggressively, creating new openings for the left.

Progressives involved with cross-class issues - in the women's movement, the lesbian and gay movement, and environmentalists - stand a good chance of getting at least some of what they want from a Clinton administration and the new Congress. The prospects for positive action on the specific concerns of the working class communities, however, are much less certain. The issues of poverty, rebuilding the cities, trade union rights and race are exactly those that Clinton and Gore refused to touch in the campaign, and there is no evidence for assuming they will automatically start getting attention in January. Indeed, there is good reason to worry instead that, left to its own devices, the new administration will accentuate the gulf between the have-clouts and the have-no-clouts among progressive interests.

The have-no-clouts are precisely the communities in which the left's lack of a social base is most glaring. The hardest-hit portions of the working class are where the left has to be, and where the left has to learn to understand, participate in and help to link together the struggles that flare up. Until that happens, the left will remain largely peripheral to national politics.

There will undoubtedly be both a re-emergence of - and a realignment within - the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, as new figures thrown up by the 1992 elections attempt to pressure Clinton and build their base. The pull on social movements towards working to extract everything that can be extracted from a Democratic administration will be enormous. Under these circumstances, the prospects for growth of third party movements in the immediate future seem slim.

The end of the Reagan-Bush era is terrific news, and activists should jump on it for all it's worth. Every inch of social terrain that can be reclaimed from the right is worth the fight. ❑

● First printed in *CrossRoads*, No. 27, Dec-Jan 1992-93. Contact PO Box 2809, Oakland, California, 94609, USA.

Friday 13th: Unlucky for some

In his latest report from South Africa **Sean Coyne** explains how the far right seems to getting off the hook — with help from unlikely quarters.

ON FRIDAY 13th November, President FW De Klerk visited London for talks with Prime Minister John Major. The usual anodine statement was made following their meeting and both declared that it was business as usual on the road towards democracy and prosperity for all. Do you feel reassured? It's a pity that we couldn't rely upon the forces of superstition on such a date to expose the criminal (not to say monstrous) activities of De Klerk and the antics of the sychophantic Man of Grey in Number 10. Let me try to explain.

Over the last six weeks, the newspapers in South Africa have been carrying reports about the inquest into the cold blooded murder of human rights activist David Webster who was gunned down outside his home on May Day 1989. David Webster was among the first to report that Renamo bandits were being supplied guns and training from the South African regime. The court proceedings make harrowing reading even by South African standards. Witnesses from the locality and officers of the notorious Civil Co-operation Bureau have been put in the dock and have given evidence which clearly points to the explicit involvement of the Government in this and other unlawful killings. The family of David Webster have faced an uphill struggle to get the inquest underway, and although they are under no illusions about the outcome, they are determined to get to the truth. Their tenacity has been remarkable in itself, and is in part motivated by the need to encourage others to take similar action. However, it is recognised that countless other poorer families will not have the available legal expertise and finance to follow suit.

Watching the television news of the CCB agents leaving the court house, after giving evidence was particularly unnerving. Here were government employees who had the job of assassinating opponents, walking down the street with broad grins and apparently without a care in the world. The previous item on the news bulletin explained why.

Even though De Klerk was facing public outcry from all but the far right, he used his Presidential powers in an unprecedented manner to push through a bill granting indemnity to all those who have committed crimes when acting on behalf of the state. He has appointed three judges, who will sit in private, who will receive confidential applications from persons employed now or in the past by the state, and who will be able to grant them full pardons without revealing their names or the crimes which they have committed. It's not suprising that the CCB murderers of David Webster and countless others look relaxed.

Not altogether unconnected to this have been the latest comments made by Joe Slovo, one-time General Secretary of the South African Communist Party and now a born-again democratic communist who sits on the leadership of the ANC. It was Comrade Slovo who was among the first to express the need to reassess Stalinism in the light of the collapse of the Eastern European regimes, and who bravely argued for a new openess, for political tolerance and an unwavering committment to democracy. However his latest comments, which he has carefully asserted are his own personal views, have created a bit of a storm.

Comrade Slovo has pre-empted both De Klerk and it seems the ANC and SACP by declaring that the only way to get the negotiations on the future of South Africa moving again is for the ANC to concede that power sharing is inevitable, and that there should be a 'sunset clause' job guarantee for civil servants to reassure them that they have nothing to fear from a Government which includes the ANC.

Activists on the ground have expressed concern at Comrade Slovo's statement. First, it is not accepted that someone of Comrade Slovos stature should make statements on such crucial issues in a personal capacity when he is so closely associated with the ANC and SACP. Secondly, as any shop steward would tell you, it is extremely bad negotiating tactics to declare openly what concessions you are prepared to accept before negotiations actually begin. Thirdly, the issue of power sharing is far from resolved within the liberation movement.

Excuse the rhetoric, but where exactly does power lie in South Africa? In Parliament, in the offices of multinational corporations and banks, or within the semi-secret enclaves of military intelligence? Fourthly, a sunset clause for all civil servants flies in the face of the need to dismantle the apartheid state in favour of democratic non-racial institutions. Does Comrade Slovo believe that the South African state is neutral and will respect the rule of law? Will the CCB agents who have been given indemnity by De Klerk give their unswerving allegiance to a new democratic South Africa?

These are important questions for socialists in South Africa as indeed everywhere.

As the CCB operatives jauntily walk away from the court house, and De Klerk fondly remembers settling down to watch the South African rugby team in John Major's backyard, it is reassuring to note that activists on the ground are collectively reflecting on these issues in their daily struggle to survive. It is highly unlikely that half measures will satisfy their appetite for change. ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Crisis in Sweden

POLITICS IN Sweden has been completely transformed by the right-wing four-party government's historic deal with the Social Democrats. The deal sealed a huge cuts package pushing social security, welfare and wages back twenty years. The cuts are aimed at forcing down interest rates, pushed to 500% by the Bank of Sweden - headed by a right-wing Social Democrat.

All regulations on the money market were removed by the then Social Democratic government in 1989. Since then a crisis has hit Sweden every six months, causing the Social Democrats to abandon its policy of fighting unemployment and instead slashing social security and seeking full EC membership. This resulted last year in their worst election result since 1926.

The new four-party government, comprising parties representing the nobility, the peasantry, the employers and the priests, lacked a parliamentary majority until the populist 'New Democracy' abandoned its opposition to welfare cuts. As speculation against the Krona mounted, carried out more by Swedish business interests than foreign speculators, interest rates rose from 11% to 19% and then temporarily to 500%, fuelling demands from the employers for unprecedented austerity.

On 6th October union leaders called a 'day of justice' to protest against the government. Thirty thousand workers took part and the mood was clearly defiant towards the Social Democrat leaders. The cuts package will push unemployment up 50,000 and create a crisis in retail sales. Purchasing power is expected to fall 10% in 1993 and some employers are pushing for actual wage cuts.

What should be a golden opportunity for a socialist opposition is undermined by a deep crisis of the left. The traditional Stalinist party, now called the 'Left Party', is split three ways and the trade union based Workers Slate, formed in 1990, has virtually collapsed. But a fight back from left-wing trade unionists in steel, mining and engineering could create the conditions for strengthening the left.

The immediate future looks bleak, with a weakening of the unions, more open racism and more cuts in the famous Swedish welfare state in the short run. International developments could have a big impact: the current struggle in Italy and Greece and the drastic undermining of John Major may help bury the Maastricht treaty. This will create tremendous confusion among the Swedish ruling class who have embraced its ideas to the point of foolishness.

Support the Chico Mendes Fund

SLAVE LABOUR ENDEMIC on plantations owned by western companies; two out of three leaders of the local Rural Workers Union murdered; gunmen operating with impunity throughout the area. This was the horror story unfolded by Father Ricardo Rezendé from Rio Maria in the eastern Amazonian state of Para, at a recent public meeting organised by Brazil Network.

Father Rezende told of one case where a 17 year old boy had escaped confinement on a slave farm by walking cross-country for seventeen hours. He was then picked up by gunmen attached to the farm, which was owned by a state deputy. He was shot in the head and left for dead, but managed to make his way to the federal police. It took them a month before they visited the farm, releasing sixty other slaves, but making no arrests.

Human rights abuses in the Amazon are highest in precisely those areas which are suffering the worst deforestation. Brazil Network has launched the Chico Mendes fund, in honour of the assassinated workers' leader, to channel material resources to those resisting. The fund is currently seeking to finance basic protection for key union activists whose lives have been threatened.

For more information contact Brazil Network, PO Box 1325, London SW9 ORA.

Nicaragua update

DAMAGE CAUSED BY the recent tidal wave in Nicaragua is estimated at $26 million, with 118 people dead and 25,000 more evacuated. Yet USA refuses to end its suspension of aid to the country.

Conflict is increasing on all fronts. Despite Supreme Court rulings against him, Alfredo Cesar, a former Contra leader, is flouting the rules of the National Assembly in a attempt to promote a constitutional crisis. In a recent move designed to bring about ungovernability, he called on supporters to take to the streets. Meanwhile the 'Recontras' have threatened to step up their terrorist activity against economic targets.

The government of Violeta Chamorro continues to renege on its agreements. Telecommunications workers, students, war-wounded and ex-army personnel have resorted to longer strikes to secure their demands.

Meanwhile, a warrant has been issued for the arrest of former deputy minister of the Presidency Antonio Ibarra who has been charged with embezzling over $1 million of public money.

GATT Goes Bananas

LONDON NORTH EAST Euro MP Alf Lomas had a recent meeting in Strasbourg with the Prime Minster of Dominica Eugenia Charles, to discuss proposals for the banana market under the new GATT arrangements.

Bananas from the Caribbean have had preferential treatment by the EC compared to the 'dollar' bananas from Latin America, but under the new GATT proposals they would lose this.

Charles told Alf that Dominica and the other Windward Isles were almost totally dependant on their banana exports and could not compete with the large multinational firms with cheap labour plantations.

"Unless we can at least keep the present guarantees for the banana-producing Caribbean countries, their economies could collapse," said Alf, who is one of Labour's spokespersons on relations between the EC and developing countries.

Smash the pay freeze

The only effective response to the 1.5% freeze, argues Hackney NUPE Officers Branch Secretary **Keith Veness**, is to organise strikes and walk-outs throughout the public sector.

THE LATEST government U-turn is one that will cause misery and hardship for millions of people. After proclaiming the virtues of a free market, John Major's tottering government has now decided that discredited incomes policies are to be re-introduced.

For public sector workers this means an attempt to impose 1.5% as a pay-norm and a real and savage cut in all our living standards.

The vast majority of workers affected are low paid, such as manual employees, typists and clerical workers, nurses and care staff. Levels of wages have already lagged behind the private sector and a campaign to catch-up was long overdue. The only way to defeat such incomes policies, as the past thirty years have shown, is to take united action aimed at industrial disruption and grinding the machinery of the public sector to a halt.

After years of total lethargy the almost moribund TUC has finally lurched back into life. Following on from the two massive Days of Action in support of the NUM, they have called for a lobby on 9th December on the issue of justice for the public sector. Every shop-stewards' committee and union branch should seize on this and turn it into a day of walk-outs and strikes throughout local government, the NHS and the whole public sector.

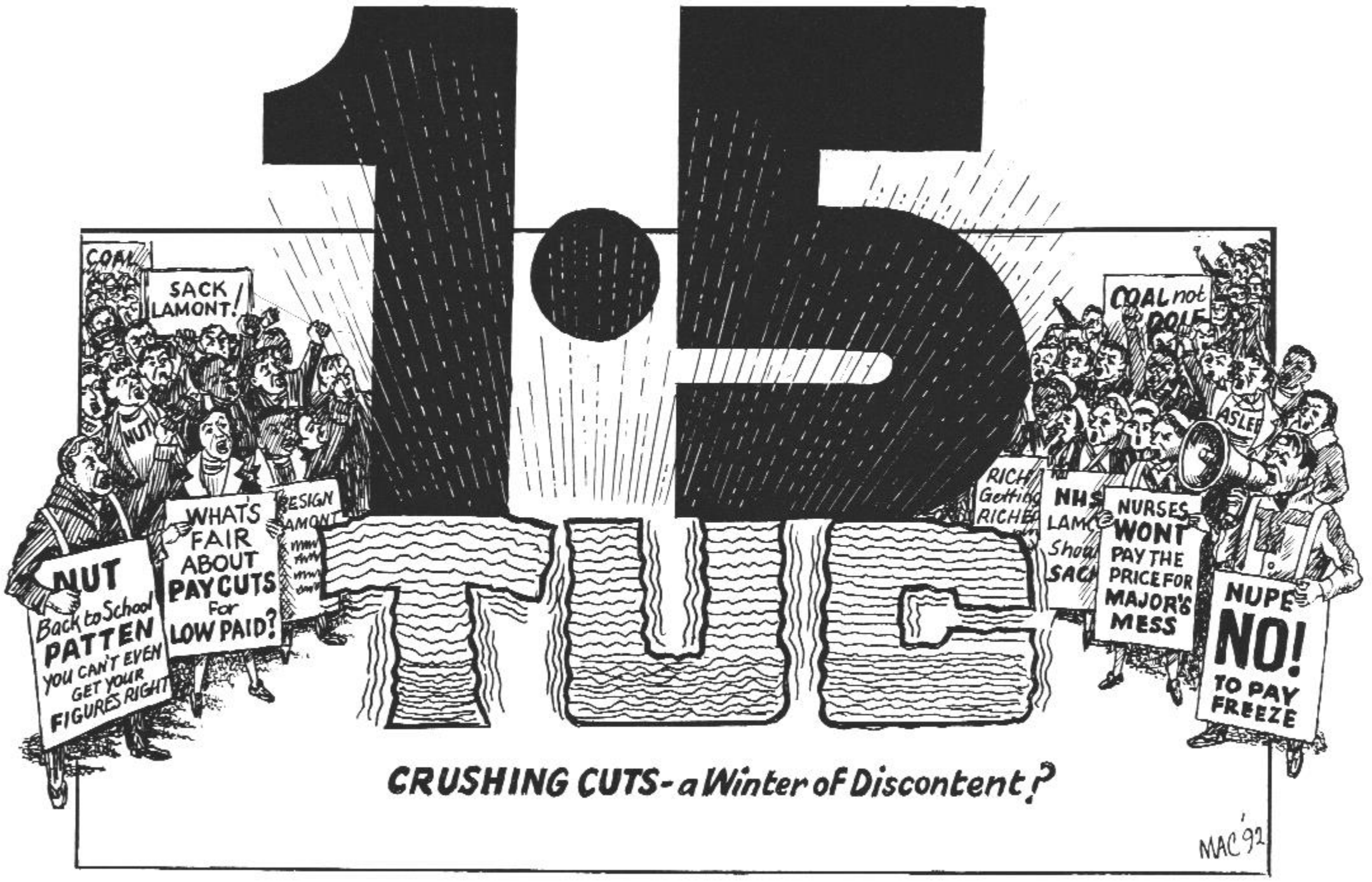
Already a number of unions are embroiled in a series of actions over pay and victimisation. The 9th December, almost the last practical date before Christmas and New Year, offers a superb opportunity to reinforce the actions and mobilise members ready for the 1993 pay-round. The government is highly vulnerable, further weakened by its blood-stained role in the Iraqi arms scandal. Now is the best time to defeat them on pay.

For many years members of NUPE and other public service unions have been scapegoated and used as a way of implementing cuts. Now we must be ready to take the offensive.

The miners battle will erupt again in the new year - the more fronts we can open up against the government the better!

All the unions in the public sector need to begin organising now - whether in local councils, the civil service, the health service or any other service. This gives us a chance for real unity of action.

The 9th December should see the return of active fighting unions and signal the end of the pay-freeze. ❑



TRADE UNION PICKET NOTEBOOK

Jobs bombshell on BR

Greg Tucker
RMT Train Crew Grades National Conference Secretary

AT A ROUTINE meeting with BR managers union leaders suddenly found themselves presented with a package of 5,000 job losses. If the cuts go ahead compulsory redundancies are inevitable. A warning was given that further redundancies were probable in future years. And to make matters worse the plans do not take into account the effect of British Coal's pit closure programme, which could lead to a further 5,000 jobs being destroyed.

This is clearly an all-out attack on the BR workforce. Despite claims from Tory ministers that the decision has been taken solely by BR for purely commercial reasons this is another example (after the miners) of government policy forcing management's hand. British Rail has one of the highest productivity levels of any national rail system, despite lack of investment over many years. These cuts are dictated by the government's decision to reduce running subsidies and force the pace of privatisation.

Hidden in the small print of BR's announcement was an escalation of disputes over railworkers' conditions of service. For example, a restructuring initiative for train drivers which had been rejected by all the unions was once again placed on the table - this time with the threat that redundancy payments would be affected by any refusal to accept it.

Safety would be seriously threatened with drivers forced to work up to eleven hours a day. It would be possible for drivers to be rostered to work up to 120 hours over eleven days without a day off. For many drivers, particularly in the south, this would be coupled with loss of bonus payments and a wage cut. BR is banking on drivers approaching retirement voting to take enhanced redundancy payments leaving younger drivers to carry the worsened conditions.

BR staff are shocked and angry. We should be planning for industrial action now to get this cuts plan withdrawn.

Out of the frying pan into the merger

IN JANUARY, Reed and the Dutch company Elsevier will merge to form the largest publishing conglomerate in the world. Both have anti-union records. In anticipation of a tough fight for union recognition and rights, a Justice at Reed-Elsevier Campaign has been launched by the Pergamon 23 and their supporters. Elsevier bought Pergamon from Robert Maxwell and continued his exclusion and victimisation of Pergamon NUJ members.

Backing the campaign, Bob Norris, NUJ National Assistant Secretary, warned, "The Pergamon battle is lost, but the war for justice goes on. The evil that men do lives after them. Maxwell was a clearly identifiable hate-figure, whereas with the new set-up we are dealing with a more faceless, deliberately anonymous bureaucracy. Decision-makers hide behind spokespersons who simply say 'no'."

The campaign aims to put pressure on Reed-Elsevier at every level: at the workplace, strengthening and coordinating chapel organisation; at local level, forming branches in key areas; nationally, publicising the company's anti-union behaviour and raising the matter in Parliament; internationally, linking up activities at key sites throughout Europe and lobbying the European Parliament.

Details from and support to: Justice at Reed-Elsevier, 60 Cricket Road, Oxford OX4 3DQ.

Most Boring Trade Union Journal

LATEST NAS/UWT's *Career Teacher* tops the poll this month for unadulterated, no-nonsense tedium: page upon page of unillustrated text makes it look like the bureaucracy's answer to *Workers Power*. The AUT saved themselves from the ignominy of yet another month's award by dropping their drab journal for a snappy *Update*. The *AEEU Journal*'s sycophantic grovelling to the CBI is countered by *FTAT Record*'s report of TUC Congress: "I compliment NALGO for its daily news bulletin on Thursday...it had attached a free condom. I conceived it a welcome protective shield for delegates from electric shock, on the day when the TUC embraced the former double EE, double X, TPU."



"Welcome to the company.."

Tube boss terrorists

AS *BRIEFING* goes to press, uncertainty reigns as to whether the 3-1 pro-strike ballot among RMT members working on London Underground will actually result in industrial action.

Management's attempt to impose new contracts as part of a "modernising" company plan which would cost 5,000 jobs on the underground was greeted with hostility by the workforce and the turn-out in the RMT ballot was a hefty 55%.

However, the other underground unions conducted ballots not on the question of strike action but merely as referenda on the management proposals, which TSSA members duly rejected by 5-1 and ASLEF members by 3-1. ASLEF announced it would further ballot its members on strike action but only after the RMT members are scheduled to begin their walk-out. ASLEF General Secretary Derrick Fullick, having issued a dramatic call for a day of general industrial action, instructed his own members to cross the RMT picket lines, thereby shoring up management's ridiculous contention that the RMT strike vote was of little importance because RMT was only one union among many.

Management has been working flat out to cripple any strike action. The public insistence that managers can run the underground system on their own is, of course, pure bull, designed for dissemination through their house organ, London's *Evening Standard*. More significant is the campaign of mass intimidation management has been waging across the underground. Since the announcement of the RMT strike ballot, nearly every worker (including all 3500 train crew) has been hauled alone into management offices to be told that they have eight days to sign the new contracts or face dismissal. Not surprisingly, large numbers signed. This terrorist offensive, calculated to exploit rising unemployment in the southeast, was made possible only by the threefold increase in management numbers over the last two years.

ISLINGTON NALGO MEMBERS, on strike against compulsory redundancies for three months, have been on the receiving end of some of the worst anti-trade union behaviour seen in London in recent times.

The Labour Council has smeared the strikers in the local press, threatened to use the Tory anti-union laws to inhibit picketing, and twice sent letters to every one of the 700 plus strikers threatening them with various dire penalties if they did not return to work.

Agency staff have been paid to scab on the NALGO members and no serious attempt at negotiation has been made by the Council leadership (though with the election of a new leader to succeed the City-bound Margaret Hodge being held as we go to press, hopes of a new broom are high).

The NALGO demands are modest: simply that the Council stick to its previous agreement on redeployment and that it revise the criteria for redundancy it has attempted to impose unilaterally. Among these criteria are sickness, "performance" (undefined), conduct (which could include trade union activities) and others which NALGO members have described as "a charter for arbitrary management and victimisation".

When North East Area NUM General Secretary David Hopper visited Islington to speak about the miners, he was shocked to see what the Labour Council were doing. "It's no different from the threats Heseltine has made against us," he said, promising solidarity from the miners to the Islington strikers.

The latest outrage from the Council is the hire of private couriers (at an estimated cost of £5000 to the Council) to deliver a letter to each striker threatening to impose a new contract entailing loss of almost all accumulated rights and benefits and extreme vulnerability to compulsory redundancy and victimisation.

"This is a strike that is easy to settle," said local councillor Liz Davies. "The problem is simply a lack of political will in a deeply anti-trade union Council leadership."

NALGO HAS LAUNCHED a campaign against North West Water's decisions to make 700 redundancies. The job losses come in the distribution, finance and laboratories sectors and the existing staff are being expected to reapply for just 400 jobs at a new centralised site at Warrington.

NALGO's National Emergency Committee has called for a boycott of the posts and is working closely with NUPE in the campaign to save the jobs.



NALGO members march against the cuts. Repeat performance needed. PHOTO Bryn Griffiths

REVIEWS

Women and British Justice

Liz Davies reviews
Eve was framed
by Helena Kennedy QC,
published by Chatto & Windus, £16.99 (hardback).

HELENA KENNEDY has a reputation as a radical and feminist barrister. She has appeared in high-profile cases, representing Paul Hill in the Guildford Four appeal for example, and is always quick to comment on TV when a judge makes a particularly outrageous remark about women. She co-wrote the TV series "Blind Justice", which featured Jane Lapotaire as a radical and feminist barrister.

Eve Was Framed - Women & British Justice is an exposition of much that is wrong in the legal and judicial system, especially as it impacts on women. There is no path-breaking feminist analysis here and the points she makes have already been made in more academic treatises by writers such as Susan Edwards or Susan Maidment. Helena Kennedy makes her points by anecdotal evidence, discussion of famous cases and a highly vivid and readable style - as you might expect from an advocate.

She covers judicial double-standards, exemplified by the different treatments of Mary Archer and Monica Cogland in the Jeffrey Archer libel case. She uses the New York Nussbaum/ Steinberg case to consider attitudes towards abused women.

Her examination of rape cases is insightful, she uses stories here from less well-known cases and is keen that justice should be done both to the victim and the defendant. The book covers the treatment of prostitutes and women shop-lifters in magistrates courts.

One chapter is given over to the specific discrimination faced by black women in the criminal justice system. She is interesting in her analysis of why people confess to crimes they did not commit - Judith Ward, Carole Richardson, Jacqueline Fletcher, who were not beaten up by the police but became susceptible to their interrogators.

She makes the usual plea for uncorroborated confessions to be inadmissible in evidence. She deals with the public perception of women who have committed horrific crimes, notably Myra Hindley. And covers in detail the provocation cases - Sara Thornton, Kiranjit Ahluwahlia, Amelia Rossiter and others - making points that will be familiar to *Briefing* readers.

All very interesting, but flawed by her constant references to her private life. We read about how hard life was twenty years ago for a young woman barrister. What a surprise! She tells us how she dresses in court and how judges have commented.

The details of the cases she discusses are interesting, the analysis is obvious to any thoughtful feminist, but welcome nevertheless. Unfortunately the personal details are quite tedious.

Xmas book guide

by Kevin Flack

Young Person's Action Guide to Animal Rights by Barbara James, published by Virago £3.99.

Excellent value, this book provides an A-Z directory from Angling to Zoos looking at all the issues involved in animal rights. useful action points and addresses provide the motivated reader with the ammunition to campaign. A follow-up guide to politics would be indispensable.

'Flight of the Paraffin Budgie' A North Sea Chronicle of poems by John F. Fyvie, published by OILC 52 Guild St, Aberdeen AB1 2NB, £5.00.

Sparked off by the Piper Alpha disaster, this collection of poems from a scaffolder with 14 years experience of the offshore industry is hard-hitting and moving.

"To the lads of the Piper,
you've not died in vain,
we'll remember you always
and inherit your pain."

25 years of legal abortion

Jacqui Brown reviews
The Campaign for Choice,
a booklet and video produced by the National Abortion Campaign.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS after the passage of David Steel's Abortion Act, the National Abortion Campaign has brought out a booklet and a video ("The Campaign for Choice") in celebration of a quarter century of safe, legal abortion. The booklet presents a collection of essays from a wide political spectrum interspersed with songs and photos. It provides both a history of the long fight for legal abortion and an outline of the attacks it has survived.

Abortion has always been available to the rich and the video shows the desperate lengths to which working class women have been forced in their attempts to control their fertility. A series of shots from the 1960's film 'Up the Junction' shows the horrors of a back street abortion and its aftermath. Also featured are excepts from a 'This Week' programme made the year before the Abortion Act was passed, and a look at 'Operational Rescue', the US inspired group who take direct action against abortion clinics.

Yes, women should celebrate, not least that 4 million in the last 25 years have been able to terminate their unwanted pregnancy safely and legally. However we must also remember the regional variations that mean that safe legal abortion remains something of a lottery. The National Abortion Campaign is needed as much now as it ever has been and until women, not doctors, have the right to choose it deserves our support.

● The booklet (£3.00) and video (£15.00 to buy, or £7.00 to hire) are available from the National Abortion Campaign, The Printhouse, 18 Ashwin St. E8, tel. 071-923-4976.

Unremittingly authoritarian

Tribune Editor **Paul Anderson** reviews
Defeat from the Jaws of Victory - Inside Kinnock's Labour Party
by Richard Heffernan and Mike Marqusee, Verso, £11.95

"LABOUR WOKE up on the morning of 10th April 1992 to find itself bereft of policies and ideology, financially bankrupt and stripped of one third of its membership," write Richard Heffernan and Mike Marqusee in the first paragraph of their new book. "Without roots in the working class or in the communities it claimed to represent, the Party was infected with a culture of careerism that combined, in unhealthy measure, forelock-touching and backstabbing."

The picture is, of course, a caricature. But it is in many respect a recognisable one. Labour has undoubtedly lost touch with the people it claims to represent. It is less and less a mass party, more and more a party of local councillors, MPs and trade union officials. Its financial position is dire.

Most important, even if it is an exaggeration to say that it is "bereft of policies and ideology" - it stands for cautious economic interventionism, modest redistribution and defence of the welfare state - it is suffering a profound crisis of political confidence at every level. There is little enthusiasm among members for the "austerity social democracy" that the Party has advocated since the late eighties. No one, however, seems to have a more radical alternative that is coherent and electorally acceptable.

So who is responsible? Heffernan and Marqusee have no doubt: Neil Kinnock and everyone who helped him move Labour to the right. Simply put, their thesis in *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory* is that Kinnock and his cronies deliberately set out to destroy the democratising Labour left movement of the early eighties that was the Party's only hope of renewing its appeal in the wake of the disastrous governments of Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan.

Unremittingly authoritarian, the Kinnockites turned a vibrant anti-establishment party into a moribund, cowardly, right-wing organisation without principle or purpose. The "soft Left", deluded by Kinnock's past, went along with it all and deserves, at very least, a share of the blame.

Now there is undoubtedly some truth in this argument. Kinnock did run Labour in a disciplinarian and often undemocratic manner. Party policy was changed, not least by the post-1987 policy review, without adequate discussion and for the shabbiest of opportunist reasons. The ditching of unilateralism and the Labour leadership's responses to the 1984-85 miners' strike, the Spycatcher affair and the Gulf War did disillusion many Party members.

Much of Heffernan and Marqusee's carefully researched and racily written account of the methods and personalities of the Kinnock regime rings horribly true.

The book's weakness is its underlying assumptions that the hard left represented a real hope for Labour renewal in the early eighties and that everything that has happened since has undermined the Party's chances of electoral success. I think the reality is different - that the Left programme, based on the Alternative Economic Strategy, was threadbare by the time of the 1983 election defeat and that Kinnock and his supporters were right when they argued that one of Labour's major problems in 1983, perhaps the major problem, was the widespread public perception that it was too left-wing. Contrary to what Heffernan and Marqusee believe, Labour moves to take the centre ground of politics were absolutely essential.

The tragedy, as I see it, is that Labour made many of the wrong moves and that the leadership forced them on the Party in a ridiculously heavy-handed way. Instead of embracing the causes of proportional representation, European federalism and radical environmentalism, the Party leadership decided that the way to woo centre voters was to promise that it would not change very much. Then it did its best to marginalise anyone who disagreed, using fair means and foul.

Heffernan and Marqusee are right to denounce the way that Labour was run in the Kinnock years and right to criticise the almost unbelievable caution of the policy settlement on which Labour fought the 1992 general election. But I have the feeling that Labour would be even worse off if their bunch had been in charge instead of Kinnock. ❑



Special offer for *Briefing* readers!

25% off cover price!

Yes, you can have your very own copy of *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory: Inside Kinnock's Labour Party* by Richard Heffernan and Mike Marqusee delivered direct to your door for £8.96 (25% off cover price) plus £1.50 packing and postage charge (£1 for every additional copy if you order more than one). Just fill out the form below and return it to *Labour Briefing*, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

Please send me ..... copies of *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory: Inside Kinnock's Labour Party*. I enclose ..... payment (cheques payable to Labour Briefing).
£10.46 for one copy; £20.42 for two copies; £30.38 for three. Packing and postage included.

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Haringey's answer to Santa Claus

Haringey Borough Council's PR department is celebrating the season of goodwill with a novel advertising campaign.

It is designed to scare people into paying the Poll Tax.

In festive mood, the Council advises: "The Poll Tax has not gone away. Don't you get put away this Christmas".

And large newspaper adverts bolster the seasonal jollity: "What do turkeys and Poll Tax dodgers have in common? - not much to look forward to this Christmas".

Briefing says: Stuff the Poll Tax, not the turkeys!

Understatement

TV actor **Richard Wilson** addressing a miners' rally called the Cabinet a "bunch of uncaring, callous, inhuman, untrustworthy bloody bastards".

Beset by crises, the Tories certainly have "one foot in the grave".

Paddy makes Sun go down

The Sun has been forced to pay substantial libel costs and apologise to **Paddy Hill**, one of the Birmingham Six.

The case arose over an incident alleged to have taken place in Crete in May, 1991, shortly after the Six were released from prison.

The Sun claimed Paddy demolished a hotel room and upset fellow holidaymakers with his "drunken and boorish behaviour". In fact, no such incident took place. Paddy was in bed with food poisoning at the time. He is teetotal. The settlement, believed to be adjacent to £140,000, has been paid to Paddy together with an apology for the bogus news item and for a suggestion in an editorial on the same day that sympathy for him following his wrongful imprisonment was misplaced. "Let this be a warning to anybody else who tries to defame my name or that of any of the Six," Paddy told *Briefing*.

Maxwell minion's mess-up

One of the many people libelled by Maxwell's Mirror was **MP Rupert Allason**. You might think *the Mirror* would have apologised gracefully following the departure of bobbin' Bob - but no. When asked to apologise by Allason, Maxwell sycophant **Joe Haines** replied, "I regard you with the utmost contempt. Rather than apologise to you for your wickedness, I'll see you in hell first." A year later *the Mirror* shelled out an alleged cool quarter-million in costs and damages to Allason.

A strange sort of hell.

Pit and path closure programme

Sir Peter Hordern MP, who wholeheartedly backs the pit closure programme, is seeking greater privacy at his Horsham country home.

He wants council permission to divert two public footpaths away from his land. Perhaps he fears demonstrators arriving on his doorstep, as they have at Heseltine's Henley residence. *Briefing* advises Hordernto keep both mines and paths open and his mouth shut.

Lambs to the slaughter

Reports that *LCC* hack, fanatic witch-hunter and full-time mediocrity, London Assistant Regional Organiser **Phil Cole,** is to desert the beleaguered regional office for a Parliamentary Officer's job at the RSPCA is good news for socialists but bad news for our furry friends. Let's hope they don't discover his aversion to 'moles'.

Comrade creep

Budding *NOLS* bureaucrat **Tom Watson** was in fine sexist form at a recent "Look Left Conference" for Labour students at Newcastle University.

Called upon in a 'baloon debate' to act the part of a well-known (but absent) female comrade on the student left, Watson declared himself a member of "the fat ugly woman faction". Not satisfied by this remark, he went on to tell an embarrassed audience of 40 students that a friend of his had "seen her tits and apparently they're enormous". Watson's other impersonations included **Peter Mandelson** and **Pol Pot.**

Whoever said the Labour right lacked a sense of humour?

Racist Kilroy

"A country peopled by peasants priests and pixies". That was how the charming former Labour MP **Robert Kilroy-Silk** described Ireland in a *Daily Express* article. The paper received an avalanche of complaints including a strong protest from the Irish Ambassador to Britain, Joseph Small. He condemned smoothy Silk's coarse comments as "gratuitously offensive and indeed racist".

Who whips the whip?

Longtime *Briefing* adversary **Phil Kelly** has been at it again.

As Chief Whip of Islington Council, the ex-*Tribune* editor, ex-Michael Meacher assistant and ex-Liberal Kelly has responsibility for overseeing the current elections to succeed **Margaret Hodge** as Islington Council leader.

Mindful of his duties, Kelly circulated all councillors, LGC delegates and ward secretaries with a letter (printing and postage paid for by Islington Council) attacking left-wing candidate **Liz Davies** on the very day Islington wards were meeting to make nominations and mandate LGC delegates.

Kelly had taken umbrage at a leaflet Davies' supporters had produced outlining her campaign pledges and listing over thirty local Party, trade union and community activists supporting her.

He decided that the circulation of such a leaflet was against Party rules, though to date he has been unable to cite which rule he believes Davies has broken. He also claims the leaflet was against "custom and practise" in the Labour Party, which will come as news to John Smith and Margaret Beckett, both of whom circulated literature during this summer's national leadership contest.

Kelly railed at Davies for trying to "buy votes", accused her of putting her "personal interests" (unspecified) before those of the Party and demanded to know, in vintage McCarthyite fashion, which "outside organisations" were funding her campaign. He even accused her of "American-style politics". Baffled readers wondered just what was "American" about a leaflet using the word "socialist" and calling for an end to Poll Tax jailings and no cuts in jobs and services, but there was certainly something distinctly George Bush-like about Kelly's crude attempt to influence the outcome of the election by character assassination.

Concern about Kelly's use of Council facilities to interfere in an internal Labour Party election is widespread in Islington as is amazement at his failure to take any action against supporters of right-wing candidate **Howard Mann** who used House of Commons envelopes to send out letters attacking soggy centre candidate **Derek Sawyer**. Islington North GC has called for Kelly's resignation.

In her written response to Kelly's attack, Davies pointed out that she had broken no known rule of the Party and that custom and practise in Islington was for candidates for council offices to circulate statements as they wished. She also explained - as indeed was already clear from the original leaflet - that its modest costs had been born by the people whose names were listed on it.

Kelly dutifully circulated Davies' response but only with a further missive from him attacking her attached to it. In it Kelly raised the dread spectre of Davies' association with - horror! - *Labour Briefing* and Labour Party Socialists. Truly, this man has no shame, no scruples and not a clue about either the rules of the Labour Party or the basics of democratic conduct.

He said it!

"I'm a strong believer in loyalty" - **Roy Lynk,** President UDM, *Sunday Express*.

Party slashes staff and spending

SAVAGE CUTS of 35% at Labour's head office and 25% in regional offices have been proposed by Labour's Finance Working Party. Initiated by Larry Whitty, the planned cuts have caused alarm and despondency among an already demoralised workforce. Dressed up as "reorganisation" with vague rhetoric about "greater autonomy", these are proposals for further centralisation, cutting the number of English Regions from nine to between four and seven. Each region would be limited to a small staff of 'spin doctors'. So another step will be taken to transforming the Party into a US Democrat-style operation, barely in existence between elections. London in particular could be dealt a massive blow, losing it's invaluable print service and a lottery scheme worth £500,000 per annum.

Meanwhile, £50,000 was spent in Blackpool this year on hotel accommodation for members of the NEC and Labour full-timers.

Environmental Brigades to Nicaragua

THE NICARAGUA Solidarity Campaign is sending brigades to support the work of agricultural co-operative, environmental organisations and the FSLN. Four weeks during July, August, December, January. Contact: NSC, Red Rose Centre, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7; tel. 071 272 9619.

Pit postcards

ASSORTED POSTCARDS from the miners' strike, useful for sending messages of support to miners or protests to the Tories, available in packs of ten for £2.50 including p&p from Thalia Campbell, Glangors, Ynysglas, Borth, Dyfed, SY24 5JU.

BRIEFING Quiz Night

7:30pm-late

Monday, 18th January

Red Rose Centre, 129 Seven Sisters Road
London N7, Finsbury Park tube

When was John Smith a rebel?
Why did Tony Benn kneel before the Queen?
Who was Red Emma?

Think you know it all? Then you better *prove it* at the Briefing Quiz Night. Prizes galore!

Teams of four invited to enter; fee £10 per team.
Team entries to Labour Briefing, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QH.

Famous last words...

"Although some socialist parties in Europe might regret our leaving the EEC, not one will deny our right to campaign on the issue and carry out the policy if we win...Labour is in favour of withdrawal because withdrawal is necessary to carry out many other commitments in our manifesto...These policies just cannot be carried out within the framework of the EEC." - Richard Balfe MEP, in London Labour Briefing, December 1982.

"Whilst I am not anti-science or anti-technology (I am a scientist myself) and I recognise the benefits to women of many of the advances that have been made, such as decreasing infant and mother mortality and allowing formerly infertile women to have children, the price we have paid for losing control is de-humanisation of the experience of child-birth. An experience which should be one that strengthens us as women now appears as a source of weakness. We can never be completely in control of our own lives if we do not have control over our own bodies." - Jane Stockton, Briefing Streetlife Supplement, December 1982.


LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING 30p
No 25 DECEMBER 1982

LAMBETH:
WE'RE BACK!

by Ted Knight

MANIFESTO

PRIORITY

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Your letters are welcome, but please keep them short.
Write to:



I can't agree with the assertion by Keith Flett in the last issue that Mike Phipps' review of *The Good Old Cause* (Willie Thompson's recent history of the Communist Party) was "lamentably sectarian." There is no justification for arguing, as Flett does, that this dismal piece of post-Eurocommunist drivel is "an improvement" compared to "previous efforts from the Communist Party stable".

Of course, Thompson's book is more honest than the previous authorised CP histories produced by Klugmann and Branson. Thompson admits, for instance, that Stalin himself had a hand in drafting the first edition of the *British Road to Socialism*, and that the CP received considerable amounts of Russian money as a reward for its slavish support of the invasion of Hungary in 1956 (payment of which only ceased in 1979). Thompson, however, deserves no credit for this. How could he not come clean on such matters when the Russians themselves are now busily spilling the beans?

The books by Klugmann and Branson were written by authors who at least claimed to believe in the validity and relevance of class politics, revolutionary socialism, and Marxism (which Thompson most certainly does not). The problem was that they saw these as being epitomised by Stalinism which has turned out to be, as Trotskyists long ago recognised, thoroughly counter-revolutionary. Thompson's book is symptomatic of the final decay and degeneration of British Stalinism, at last explicitly disavowing revolutionary socialism. Perhaps Flett feels that Thompson deserves praise for having written such a book, instead of one paying lip-service to Marxism after the fashion of its Stalinist predecessors.

I for one find it impossible to give any credit to a book which contrives to excuse every social democratic/ reformist betrayal since 1914, and whose conclusion is that socialism is a doomed cause, that the working class is incapable of changing society, and that we can do nothing but wring our hands in despair before what Thompson regards as imperialism's victorious 'New World Order.'

Mike Phipps' conclusion that the book is "myopic, one-sided and defeatist" is not "sectarian". It is wholly justified and I really don't see on what basis Keith Flett can argue otherwise.

Yours fraternally,
Dave Turner
Canterbury

Does Keith Veness realise that he supports Serbian nationalism? Why does he think that recognition of Croatia by the West is to blame for the current crisis? Is he seriously suggesting that there would now be no crisis if the West had not recognised Croatia?

If so, perhaps he would care to explain the fact that Serbia invaded both Slovenia and Croatia before the EC took this 'crass and ill-considered decision.'

The reason why he cannot and why he conveniently avoids such uncomfortable facts is because Mr Veness has his head in the sand. To suggest that the left should support a unitary Yugoslav state (which has already disappeared) amounts to support for Serbian expansionism and aggression. It would also leave the innocent civilians of Bosnia and Croatia at the mercy of Serbian regular and irregular soldiers, some of whose tactics seem to mirror those of the former Ustashe which we all so rightly deplore.

Alison M Clarke ,
Greenwich

In his otherwise well-informed article "South Africa heats up" in your November issue, Sean Coyne states that COSATU "is certainly the only organisation (in South Africa) which publicly uses socialist language."

This is, fortunately, not true. The Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) is, as its name implies, committed to fighting for a socialist South Africa. Its members are active in the trade unions and the community organisations. WOSA will be holding its third annual conference in December. Just one other point while I'm writing. In the introduction to my contribution on the Russian Revolution, you give 1940 as the date of the founding Congress of the Fourth International. The Founding Conference took place in 1938.

Socialist greetings,
Charlie Van Gelderen

I found the article in November's *Briefing* exposing the anti-working class politics of Bill Clinton excellent. If for no other reason, his support for attempts to destabilise and destroy the Cuban Revolution, which despite Castro's Stalinism remains a beacon of socialism, should be good enough cause for socialists to oppose him.

I was horrified to discover that a number of full-time Labour Party agents had gone to America to help Clinton's election campaign. Surely at a time when tens of thousands are on the streets opposing the massacre of the mining industry their abilities should be put to use organising and leading the fight back with a view to bringing down the Tory government. Instead, they're helping a candidate whose victory will mean business as usual for American capitalism and its New World Order.

Is this another indication of just how far Labour's misleaders have gone in abandoning the Party's working class socialist roots and transforming it into just another bourgeois party, the 'left wing' of capitalism? Instead of policies and principles, will we now have our candidates packaged and presented like commodities with no use value — all form and no content? Like Britain, America has a socialist tradition which is typified by the Presidential campaign fought by EV Debs while imprisoned for opposing the First World War.

If Labour full-timers should be doing anything in America it should be unifying the scattered forces of the US left, building a mass working class, trade union based party and reviving the revolutionary politics of Debs, DeLeon and the Wobblies. Such politics are urgently needed here, there and everywhere!

Yours,
Terry Liddle
Eltham

Keith Veness (November *Briefing*), makes "a socialist plea for a revived Yugoslavia" and accuses me of standing reality on its head for arguing that it is Serbian nationalism, over and above all other factors, that is responsible for the murderous mayhem enveloping the region.

In the fantasy world inhabited by Keith, the Western powers are responsible for the "dismemberment of Yugoslavia." This "dismemberment", we are told, is part of "the New World Order of Bush and Kohl" to create "a Catholic Croatia" and "an Islamic Bosnia." To boot, in setting up its "puppet" Bosnian state, the West is in alliance with "Islamic dictatorships."

Keith perpetuates the well-worn myth that Germany, presumably seeking to re-create the Third Reich in the Balkans, is responsible for the wars because it pushed for recognition of the former Yugoslav states. For historical reasons, which Keith should be aware of, the real decision-makers in whether the West goes to war, are in Washington, London and Paris, not in Bonn (or Tokyo), though they may well fund the West's wars.

His "socialist plea for a revived Yugoslavia" smacks of Stalinism and is simply an apology for the excesses of Serbian nationalism. He only once mentions the word 'nationalism' and then when he is quoting me. In describing the wars as `religious', he is echoing the propaganda of Serbian extremists such as the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, who is directly responsible for having ethnically 'cleansed' 70% of Bosnia. Keith doesn't even feel the need to go in for any hand-wringing. Indeed, the nearest we get to any is one anodyne sentence about aid.

In his one-dimensional analysis, Keith conveniently omits any reference to Slovenia, which cannot be made to fit into any of his 'plot' scenarios - Islamic, Western or religious. Slovenia has no Serb communities and yet it was invaded by Serbia - almost five months before "the crass and ill-considered decision" to recognise both Slovenia and Croatia. Serbia only invaded Slovenia once the West had made it clear that, whilst it was against Serbian aggression, it would do nothing about it. By the time recognition came, war in Croatia had been raging for three months and the murderous siege of Vukovar was in full swing. It is Keith who is standing reality on its head.

Yours comradely,
John Turkie
London SE7

Hamish Renton has certainly got some weird and wonderful illusions about the merits of the First Past the Post electoral system (November *Briefing*).

First we are told that PR weakens the accountability of MPs to local party members and leads to the appointment of party bureaucrats. This argument doesn't cut much ice down here in Vauxhall CLP. I suspect activists feel more or less the same way in Hemsworth, Wallasey, Birmingham Small Heath, Coventry South East and Liverpool Broad Green, too.

"Benn argues with force that under PR power is transferred from the electorate to party leaders in smoke filled rooms," says Hamish. Get real, sunshine. In Britain today, "power" rests not with the electorate, but with the ruling class - the capitalist bosses, unelected House of Lords, civil servants, judges and media moguls that actually control our lives. In the last resort, "power" lies with the armed forces of the capitalist state. By its very nature, it is not something Labour can ever "take", regardless of the slogan gracing the cover of *Briefing* each month.

Under FPTP, the Tories can simply fix themselves 20 extra seats at the stroke of the Boundary Commission's pen and pump the votes of South African ex-pats into key marginals. Under FPTP, the Labour leadership can simply ignore socialist policies in the name of the need to win over the centre ground.

Under PR, a party gets parliamentary representation in line with its popular support. What could be fairer? Remember there is no way a government can even think about implementing a radical left wing programme until it commands majority backing. Given the profoundly undemocratic nature of capitalism itself, all electoral systems are, by definition, undemocratic. But PR represents the closest approximation to democracy currently on the agenda.

I for one find the argument that socialists should be against it because of the risk of a hung parliament rather less than convincing. Opposing democracy because you don't like one potential outcome is the thin end of a particularly nasty wedge.

Socialist greetings,
Dave Osler
Clapham

There were several useful articles in last month's issue (particularly on the Russian Revolution and Clint Eastwood film review). I think it would also be helpful if you recommended books on tragedies such as South Africa, as well as reports. Misha Glenny's book on Yugoslavia, for example, is far easier to understand than fragmentary articles. Illustrative maps and graphs would also be useful.

I don't belong to the Labour Party - or any other party - so articles on their shortcomings don't interest me (I was expelled from the Labour Party 34 years ago!). Similarly anyone who's been active in the trade union movement will know how bureaucratic it is. So why repeat this depressing fact? Surely we need to build up the rank-and-file, grass-root links on the left. Class warriors are more inspiring than class traitors. As class traitors exist at every level, and as workers have to work with them, it really is patronising to read articles telling you something so obvious.

Yours,
Julie Boston,
Bristol

Ed: Next issue will see the start of our new series of Class Champions.

Irish night for the miners

Camden Irish Centre
Murray Street, London NW3

Tuesday, December 15th
8pm-1am

Four live bands! Irish dancers!
Blues, soul and Irish music!
Full bar!
£4/£2 admission

All proceeds to the National Miners Support Network

Day School

for all independent Labour left students

University of London Union
Malet Street
London W1

Saturday January 16th
10.30am - 5pm

Speakers from Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

Details phone Paul on 0322-272059



PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

Miners need action, not words

Miners supporters should:

- Set up local miners support groups in co-operation with local Labour Parties, trades councils, trade union branches and community bodies.
- Twin with one or more pits; prioritise one of the ten immediately threatened pits where production has already stopped.
- Get their Labour Parties, trades councils, trade union branches (and national trade unions) and local miners support groups to affiliate to the National Miners Support Network.
- Ensure details of all miners' support action are communicated to the NMSN office so we can disseminate the information as widely as possible.
- Order copies of *Coal Not Dole* for distribution in your area.
- Send donations urgently to the NMSN!

National Miners Support Network, 219 Mare Street, London E8, tel. 081 985 1905; fax 071 281 5720.

THE NATIONAL Miners Support Network was set up in mid-October at the initiative of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs and has been working closely with the NUM and Women Against Pit Closures to provide information, resources and co-ordination for miners' supporters on the ground throughout the country.

Mike Marqusee
Islington North CLP

Now that the pit closures issue has been pushed out of the headlines, it is incumbent on the rank and file of the labour movement to work flat out to ensure that the government has no chance of burying the issue and closing the pits at the end of the 90-day review period in late January. Between now and then we have to turn up the heat and mobilise miners' supporters again and again to make it impossible for the government even to contemplate getting away with its proposed destruction of the coal industry.

This requires much more than rhetorical calls for "industrial action" - though industrial action is needed, and soon - it means doing the practical work on the ground to make industrial and political action of sufficient weight a real likelihood. Neither the miners nor any other section of workers will take action unless they see that they will get large-scale support and practical solidarity from the working class as a whole. The job of generating and making visible that support falls to the local miners support groups and bodies like the National Miners Support Network.

Networks do not spring into being fully-formed simply because a group of people decide to set them up: they have to be built, step by painful step, and they have to draw together real forces capable of delivering the goods when it counts. They cannot arbitrarily impose a priority or direction on a movement which is still only finding its feet, testing its potential. Because of this the NMSN has been concentrating on disseminating information and building a strong base of affiliates in the labour movement and among the local miners support groups (which, on last count, numbered at least 200 nationally).

The aim here is not simply to collect a lot of weighty-sounding names, but to create a coalition which combines the maximum degree of co-ordination and co-operation with the minimum degree of bureaucracy and top-down control. We want to see the NMSN develop into a delegate-based, labour movement body that represents the kind of broad forces needed to stop the Tories in their tracks.

Labour Party and trade union activists should be working to establish stable local support groups which can unite labour movement and community bodies around opposition to the pit closures. Comrades from the SWP and some other left groups have argued that local support groups should organise days of industrial action, call for general strikes or turn themselves into all-encompassing strike support committees. Yes, at root, all the issues are linked: the pit closures and NHS and the pay freeze and BR and London Underground. But the various struggles cannot be yoked together by mere rhetoric; the most effective way of making the links and uniting the struggles is not through slogans but through using the miners' support groups to organise direct contacts between miners and other groups of workers in struggle. Any attempt to expand their remit to incorporate all other current struggles will result in division and impotence. The broader industrial action needed to defend the pits and see off the government has to be worked for - it cannot be magically invoked by a political mantra. The confidence workers need to take action will be built by activities that demonstrate in practise a breadth and seriousness of working class support. So the petitioning, street stalls, rallies, marches, vigils and especially the twinning with threatened pits are all urgent and unavoidable if we really want to get that broader action and open the second and third fronts we need to win the struggle.

The National Miners Support Network has now moved into offices provided by Hackney Council trades unions and is being run by a small, hard-working team of volunteers. Badges and posters have been produced as have the first two issues of a regular bulletin, *Coal Not Dole*, of which 25,000 have been distributed in all areas of the country. We are still in the process of mailing out information and affiliation forms to trade union branches and activists across the country. We are hoping to organise a solidarity conference for miners supporters jointly with other organisations early in the New Year. The biggest problem we face is simply this: the gap between the resources available to us and the tasks we face is huge. Call the NMSN to find out how you can help close this gap. ❑

Printed by Wernham Printers Ltd (TU), 4 Forster Road, London N17