BRIEFING

February 1992 80p (60p unwaged)

Since 1979, the ill-effects of cold weather have killed off 200,000 OAPs before their time.

Freezing to death

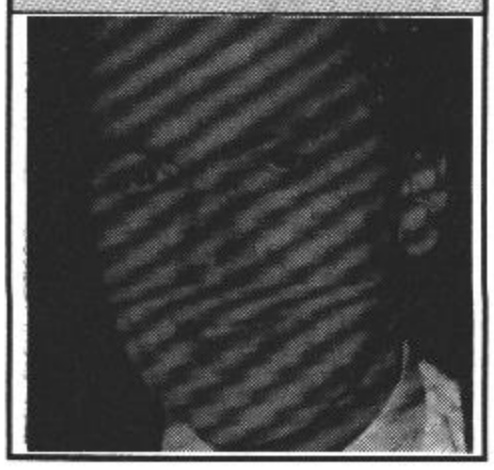
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"The Tory response to pensioners' call for a better life has shown a callous class hatred for all working people. For the Tories, when our people can no longer work to produce a profit, they are not worth a second thought."

- Harry Rees, Midlands Pensioners Convention

Inside this month's 36-page *Labour Briefing*

Class Traitor of the Month



Kurdistan, Cuba
Spanish miners

Anti-Racist Alliance
Silcott still unfree

Labour's financial crisis
Witch-hunter profiled

Poll Tax prisoners
US Teamsters revolt

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

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... and **Kneel**

February 1992, No. 119

Sleeping with the enemy

THE RECENT Commons debate on nuclear defence showed just how ridiculous New Realism can make the Parliamentary Labour Party look.

Jeremy Corbyn MP

In answer to the government's motion reiterating its faith in the deterrent and its determination to keep nuclear weapons come what may, Labour's Front Bench responded with a pledge to maintain "an effective defence for the UK based on the necessary level of forces provided with the appropriate equipment and weaponry" and a call for arms talks among the eight current nuclear powers.

> "When the election comes I shall present myself to the people of Chesterfield as a candidate who is committed to the ending of nuclear weapons and bases in Britain...a substantial number of people in this country share my view - far more than might be suggested by the number of their parliamentary representatives..."
> **- Tony Benn**

An amendment from the Socialist Campaign Group called for the decommissioning of Polaris, cancellation of Trident and renunciation of all nuclear weapons.

The front bench exchanges were dismal affairs, marked by a great deal of mud-slinging and petty point-scoring.

At the end of the debate the official Labour amendment was put to the House and defeated by the government majority. Our unilateralist amendment was not called, though Tony Benn spoke eloquently for it during the debate and Tony Banks and myself were allowed to contribute briefly at the end.

Following instructions from the Labour whips, 164 Labour MPs abstained on the final vote on the government motion, thereby failing to oppose the government's dangerous pro-nuclear declaration.

> "In this world brutally divided between north and south and between rich and poor, in which a billion people are on the point of starvation and serious poverty, the British government's solution is to spend £23 billion on the Trident missile system, which breaks the nuclear non-proliferation treaty... And what is NATO's solution? Instead of winding itself up, as it should, it turns itself into the political police force of the rest of the world..." - **Jeremy Corbyn**

Twenty-eight Labour MPs, joined by 23 Liberals and nationalists, insisted on trooping into the "No" lobby to register their continuing hostility to the costly insanity of nuclear weapons.

The following Labour MPs voted against the government's nuclear defence motion: Banks, Barnes, Benn, Bennett, Brown, Campbell, Canavan, Cohen, Frank Cook, Cryer, Terry Davis, Fyfe, Godman, Grant, Hinchcliffe, Lamond, Livingstone, Loyden, McAllion, McKelvey, Madden, Mahon, Marshall, Michie, Mullin, Skinner, Strang, Wise.

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No way to run a campaign

OF COURSE Labour ought to win the coming general election at a canter.

The economic situation is dire, the people remember the Poll Tax (they're still living with it) and despite John Major's relative popularity, his government is directionless and discredited.

Why then does it remain such a close run thing? And what can be done to make sure we get a majority Labour government?

It would help if Labour's Shadow Cabinet didn't panic every time the Tories dusted off their familiar attacks on taxing and spending. Further qualifying the Party's extremely modest proposals on pensions, child benefit, taxes and National Insurance is certainly not the answer. Neither the poor nor the rich will be pleased and the muddled signals from the leader's office simply make everyone less likely than ever to believe a word we say.

We have had five years to prepare for this inevitable onslaught. We were told that the purpose of the Policy Review was to protect Labour from precisely these kind of accusations. Now it is clear. All the years of launches and relaunches, of phoney consultations and limitless trimming have yielded...nothing!

The truth is that Labour's economic policy has been seen by the leadership as a mere component in a prolonged public relations exercise. No wonder Labour spokespersons get so testy when broadcasters and journalists press them on their policy ambiguities.

But there remain key areas of accepted Party policy - strongly supported by all sections of the movement and with powerful resonance in the working class - which could still allow us to go on the offensive.

The arguments for a better deal for pensioners - set out by Harry Rees and Sid Gregory in this month's *Briefing* - could be used to mobilise people of all ages to get out and vote Labour in the knowledge that it really will make a difference to the sum total of human happiness.

The more we expose the brutal reality of the Tory attack on the elderly, the more their scaremongering about high taxes will seem just what it is - an appeal to the selfishness of the few over the welfare of the many.

Although a GMB-commissioned study showed that highlighting the Party's commitment to a £3.40 per hour minimum wage could have an immediate positive impact, our campaign co-ordinators insist on playing the issue down. How about a poster campaign with the slogan "£3.40 per hour - the Tories think it's too much"?

An unshakeable and unapologetic commitment to rebuilding the NHS would have the Tories on the ropes in no time. But in rejecting defence cuts and locking economic policy into the European Community and the ERM, our leaders have boxed themselves in and forfeited this electoral trump card.

What we're talking about is, of course, a new policy launch. Only this time it would contain unambiguous commitments backed up by a clear class appeal.

ALAS, THE terms required for this class appeal - even the terms required to make the basic case for progressive taxation and redistribution of wealth - are not in the Campaigns and Communications Directorate's lexicon. Instead, it's "Made in Britain", surely the most obnoxious slogan under which Labour has ever fought an election. As a description of economic policy it is vacuous, especially from a Party whose leadership has committed itself with such fanfare to the European Community. Worse yet is its squalid, jingoistic appeal to national chauvinism. In the context of the Tories' Asylum Bill, the rise in racist attacks and the runaway growth of mindless nationalism across Europe, it simply stinks.

Peter Mandelson may think Kinnock's greatest qualification for being Prime Minister is his "patriotism" but for us it remains the last refuge of the scoundrel. We repudiate it entirely.

POLITICS, OF course, is not all about traitors and cowards. *Labour Briefing* is therefore happy to announce its New Year's Honours list for services to the oppressed.

Our awards go to three individuals who never contemplated political careers. All three, finding themselves in intolerable circumstances, joined their individual struggles to collective ones and in so doing gave a voice to the voiceless.

Sharon Raghip kept up her fight for the Tottenham Three in the face of public indifference, media hostility, Kinnockite hyper-cautiousness and the antics of some of the less constructive elements on the far left.

Sara Thornton showed astonishing guts in challenging centuries of sexist despotism from her cell in Holloway Prison. Her appeal for justice, which has evoked such an impressive grass-roots response, has made an impact on public consciousness which will grow in significance in the coming years.

Vic Williams stood up to the military machine and demonstrated that soldiers do not have to be mere pawns in their rulers' mad power games. His example will be honoured and cherished when passers-by spit on Schwarzkopf's grave.

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

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

All articles published in *Labour Briefing* reflect the opinions of the authors alone unless otherwise indicated. *Briefing* welcomes criticisms and contributions. Please keep us posted on what's going on in your area. Deadline for the next issue is February 10th.

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

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

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"The old folk do moan"

***Sid Gregory** is a pensioner, community activist and secretary of the TA on one of London's largest council estates. He's angry at the Tory treatment of the elderly - and not so pleased with Labour's alternatives either.*

THE OLD are the ones who went through the horrors of the 1939-45 war and there is still a handful who can tell of the carnage and terror of 1914-18; many bear the scars of the 20s and 30s and recall the hope and despair of the General Strike.

It's hard to find words to describe the wickedness of the Tories' treatment of these people.

Shortly after their victory in 1979 they severed the link between pensions and earnings. If that had not occurred a single pensioner would be better off today by £12.80 per week and a married couple by £20.50. To be fair, they have readily extended kindness and consideration to those old aged pensioners who can afford private health insurance. When the tax form is filled in this item can be entered under the expenses column and deducted. Batter the poor, pamper the rich, it's the traditional Tory way.

The last loony Labour GLC introduced the travel permit which ensures all pensioners, regardless of financial status, free access to all London Transport facilities and certain BR routes. After GLC abolition, funding passed to local councils within the Greater London area. Now some hard pressed councils want to renege on this obligation. The end of free travel would mean confining hundreds of thousands of elderly Londoners within the four walls of their home.

The Greater London Pensioners' Association (GLPA) is now in the forefront of the campaign to retain the travel permit. It also believes that its use should be extended throughout the land, with central government footing the bill. This would at least bring us in line with the rest of the European Community.

Because it has backed its words with actions - such as demonstrating outside Downing Street and demanding that John Major repudiate the Tory No Turning Back group, which proposes means-testing of the state pension - the GLPA has lost its grant from the London Boroughs' Grant Committee. To their shame, certain Labour councils voted for the withdrawal.

At the moment, Labour's only promise to pensioners is to increase the single pension by £5 a week and the married couple's by £8. It is non-committal about abolishing the gas, electricity and telephone standing charges and just as mute about any reduction to the television license.

If Labour wishes to gain the trust and votes of pensioners it must pledge that money from the cancellation of Trident and the peace dividend will be used to meet the basic human needs of the growing proportion of the population living beyond retirement age.



Pensioners on the march

Pensioners fight back

"THERE ARE two different kinds of pensioners' organisations," explains Harry Mundy of the Greater London Pensioners Association, one of the most active and militant pensioner groups in the country. "There are the service-orientated ones, like Help the Aged, Age Concern, and Pensioners' Link, and there are those that organise pensioners as pensioners, that are run by pensioners themselves and not by paid staff."

One of the leading groups in the second category is the British Pensioners Trade Union Action Association, to which the GLPA is affiliated. "It's the only one doing mass campaigning," says Harry. "Others hold occasional rallies, which is good, but they are always seen in isolation, not as part of an ongoing campaign."

Last year BPTUAA launched its Pensioners' Charter (see right), which has already been signed by some 40,000 in London alone.

"It's not just a statement of demands", says Harry, "but a basis for a continuing national campaign. It's also a way of building new local pensioners' groups."

Trade union support for the Charter is growing in the AEU, GPMU, FTAT, GMB, MSF and UCW; surprisingly, NALGO, NUPE and the NUT have shown less interest.

"Many unions have their own retired members' groups," explains GLPA secretary and AEU member Peter James, "which often have no links to active pensioners' organisations and perform mainly a social function. We need to bring them into campaigning."

The National Pensioners' Convention, chaired by Jack Jones, remains the main umbrella groups for pensioners' organisations of all types. It has its own pensioners' charter, the Declaration of Intent, which will be updated at its conferences in Birmingham in April.

Pensioner activists at the GLPA believe the traditional NPC approach of deputations to ministers and lobbies of Parliament is inadequate. "We need to back up these events with organised activity involving the mass of pensioners," says one. "It's no good the established campaigns telling pensioners, 'Don't worry, we'll speak for you'. Pensioners can and will speak for themselves in growing numbers."

Labour Party and trade union members should invite speakers from the BPTUAA to meetings and get their wards, branches, trades councils, etc. to back the Charter.

Keep the cold from the old

***Harry Rees**, chair of the Midlands Pensioners Convention, lambasts the "callous class hatred" which, since 1979, has seen 200,000 old people die before their time from cold weather and its ill effects.*

PLUNGING TEMPERATURES pose grave dangers for the elderly. For the majority of pensioners the winter night is long and bitter. For those eking out an existence on the state pension, the frosty mornings hold nothing but misery and fear. Homes with inadequate heating will be riddled with that damp chill which cannot be dented with a one-bar electric fire and in which illness breeds.

When is this Tory government going to tackle the annual tragedy of old people and cold weather? Three years ago it introduced a miserly £5 per week cold weather supplement and last winter increased it by £1. But the system by which it is handed out is unfair and bureaucratic.

First, you have to be on income support, have less than £1000 in savings and it has to be 0.0 Celsius for seven consecutive days in your area. If on one of these seven days, the temperature rises, you do not get the supplement. It might be freezing Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, but if Wednesday was slightly warmer, you get nothing.

Even this measure was introduced reluctantly, more as a public relations exercise than out of any real concern for the elderly. It's outrageous that retirement holds nothing but fear and poverty for the bulk of old people who have spent a lifetime creating the wealth on which our society is built.

Retirement should be a pleasure not a nightmare. That means more than cold weather payments; it means a pension rate which offers not just bare existence but the possibility of a full and fruitful life.

The Tory response to pensioners' call for a better life has shown a callous class hatred for all working people.

For the Tories, when our people can no longer work to produce a profit, they are not worth a second thought. We must tell them that either they take action now to stop the annual cull of old people dying before their time or we will make sure they stand indicted before the entire country for those deaths.

Finally, I find it hard to understand how it is that we live on an island underpinned by coal, surrounded by a sea oozing with oil and gas, and yet the geniuses at Whitehall can somehow not find the means to keep old people warm and alive in the dead of winter.

P.S. Don't grow old in Britain; you will live to regret it.



Collecting signatures for Pensioners' Charter

PENSIONERS' CHARTER

A 10-point programme to obtain retirement in decency, dignity and independence:

1. A universal basic state retirement pension of not less than one third of average earnings for each pensioner.

2. Full health care provision including hospital and community care shall be free and available at time of need and where needed.

3. Payment of an additional £5 a week heating allowance to all pensioners' households from October 1st to March 31st each year.

4. Christmas bonus of £50 to be paid to all pensioners, free of income tax.

5. The death grant to be restored and re-named, more appropriately, the funeral grant and to be in the sum of £400.

6. All payments to pensioners to be uprated at six-monthly intervals on the basis of the increase in earnings or the cost of living, whichever is the greater.

7. All Pensioner households to be relieved of paying standing charges and for TV licences.

8. Free Travel facilities to be available for all pensioners on bus, coach, underground and rail services, whether publicly or privately owned, nationwide. Equal facilities to be available for disabled pensioners.

9. All pensioners to be able to live in accommodation which is appropriate to personal needs and circumstances, including sheltered housing, with life-line facilities.

10. The full range of social and community services to be available to pensioners as and when needed. Pensioners to be entitled to invalid care allowance.

Issued by the British Pensioners' Trade Union and Action Association. For more information and copies of the Charter, contact Greater London Pensioners' Association, 28a Highgate Road, London NW5 1NS.

They're in there for us - we're out here for them

***Julie Boston** praises the continuing efforts of Poll Tax prisoners and their supporters outside.*

THE HARSH sentencing of anti-Poll Tax demonstrators has now been followed up by harsh sentencing of Poll Tax non-payers.

The Poll Tax Legal Group estimates the number of Poll Tax non-payers who have served prison sentences at 200. The length of sentence has varied from 14-90 days. The majority of those imprisoned have been active campaigners against the Poll Tax. The majority of councils committing non-payers to prison are Labour controlled.

The conspiracy of silence which binds together press, judiciary and local authorities conceals desperation and outrage, which can be witnessed in the magistrates courts of any town in England and Wales.

Normally a magistrate who sentenced a couple with an 19-month-old baby to prison would be held up to public scorn, but not when the victims are Poll Tax non-payers. The couple in question requested to be imprisoned separately rather than simultaneously, in the interests of the child, but that was rejected.



Magistrates courts are refusing to use the wide discretion granted them under Regulation 42 (2) of the Community Charge (Adminstration and Enforcement) Regulations, which gives them powers to remit payment of Poll Tax where it is in the interest of justice to do so.

The fact that a woman earning £400 a month has been able to support an unemployed husband and two teenage sons, despite a breakdown following the loss of their home, is admirable. The burden of having to pay her husband's Poll Tax as well is clearly "not in the interest of justice". If she fails to pay it her husband faces 60 days in prison.

Millions of non-payers are now vulnerable to imprisonment. Are Labour councils really going to face an election while hounding masses of people into prison for bad debts?

In this bleak situation there is one hope: the prisoners themselves. Publication of non-payers' prison addresses in *Militant* and *Socialist Worker* has given Poll Tax prisoners the boost of enormous mail; one thousand letters and cards were sent to Becky Palmer during her three month sentence. The pub lication of prisoners'letters conveys their defiance; it has also shown how many of the prisoners are pensioners, often veteran socialists or trades unionists.

Before collapsing with a suspected heart attack last June, 73-year-old Harry Cunliffe wrote to *Militant:* "One of the Guinness twisters was released from jail because he was too old - 70 and ill. Am I not ill with heart trouble and arthritis? Is it not a good example of one law for the rich and another for the poor?"

Many Poll Tax prisoners have been supported by demonstrations, pickets and daily visits. They have also been strengthened by solidarity from fellow inmates. Many leave prison more determined than ever to fight the Poll Tax. They carry a rare memento from Her Majesty's Prisons - bin liners filled with letters and cards.

Computer chaos

Recent court decisions in Liverpool, Gravesend, Lambeth, and Bury St. Edmunds have driven a coach and horses through the government's Poll Tax legislation.

Magistrates in these courts have ruled that computer records are hearsay evidence and that councils cannot rely on them to prove that the necessary documents have been served and that a defendant has not paid. They have therefore refused to grant the councils' requests for liability orders.

Although legislation provides for the admissibility of computer records in certain cases, this has never been extended in law to civil cases in magistrates courts.

Lawyers have put this argument before over a hundred courts in the last year but in the few cases where it was accepted local councils simply reintroduced the cases before different magistrates, the vast majority of whom have been happy to rubber stamp any requests from councils in regard to Poll Tax non-payers.

In the process, the courts have been turned into an administrative arm of local government and citizens have been stripped of their right to due process.

But perseverance has paid off once again for the anti-Poll Tax movement. As the legal arguments have sunk home, more and more magistrates are getting cold feet. Cases are being adjourned by the thousands as the courts wait to see what will happen next.

The government is under pressure to issue a ministerial order to extend the Civil Evidence Act to magistrates courts immediately. This would make computer records admissible, but it is a risky course.

In effect, it would be an admission that the five million liability orders issued so far should not have been granted. There would be a mass of appeals against previous court rulings and claims for false imprisonment. Councils might be obliged to refund payments and start the whole recovery process all over again from the beginning.

Even if he government decides not to intervene, appeals from Camden and Hackney on the question of computer records are proceeding to the High Court, whose decision (unlike the ones made by magistrates' courts) will be binding on the lower courts.

Lawyers acting for non-payers believe their arguments are strong and the entire Poll Tax collection mechanism could be about to come crashing down.

Learning from victory

By the time this issue of Labour Briefing hits the streets ***Matt Lee*** *will have been released from prison where he was sent after having been convicted of "violent disorder" under Section 2 of the Public Order Act. His real crime was defending anti-Poll Tax demonstrators trapped in Trafalgar Square on March 31st, 1990. Like hundreds of others there Matt fought back as the police drove vans into the crowd. By organising a human shield, which allowed people to leave the Square, he saved lives. In this article, written originally for Poll Tax Prisoners News, he asks what the anti-Poll Tax movement has really achieved.*

AS THE anti-Poll Tax movement enters its final phase, it's important for all of those who've been involved to draw a balance sheet of our activities.

For me personally there is a great need to seek out the real gains from the struggle. I've spent ten months in jail. It's not ten years, but even ten months is a bloody long time in jail. As a Marxist, as a revolutionary, I'm prepared to put my money where my mouth is and stand to the front when the crunch comes. But just because I'm politically willing, doesn't mean it isn't personally difficult.

So have we, as a movement, gained from the sacrifices and the struggle we waged? Have we "won" or was it all a waste of time. Was all the struggle for nothing, all the sacrifice in vain?

To take the view that we "failed" is to lose touch with reality, to get buried in an idealism of perfect victory (no such thing). The anti-Poll Tax movement did succeed; it did score a victory. But it's also had its losses, its failures. Any struggle has its large quota of cock-ups and disasters healthily mixed with glowing successes, wonderfully liberating victories.

Compared to most of our struggles during the 80s, the anti-Poll Tax movement was a resounding victory. That is obvious to all but the most disillusioned or idealistically sectarian.

The Poll Tax has been well and truly fucked - by us, the working class, in the teeth of utter hostility from the Labour Party leadership and overall apathy from the bulk of the trade union movement. That is not to say the new "council tax" isn't a "son - or daughter - of Poll Tax" and that the ruling class won't attempt to achieve the aims of the Poll Tax via other routes. Obviously it will. But we won round one.

The militancy of our working class communities, which exploded from Bristol to Birmingham, Lambeth to Leeds, was a major factor in dethroning Thatcher. In the eyes of many working class youth of our generation, who have grown up knowing nothing but Thatcher and defeat, her demise was of huge importance, especially as it was brought about by our actions.

IN WANDSWORTH, which set the lowest Poll Tax in the country last year (with a little help from central government) more people have now been summonsed for non-payment than voted for the Tories at the last council elections.



For over twelve years a generation of workers - my generation - grew up watching, to paraphrase George Orwell, "a jackboot stamp on our face" every day of our lives. Even as a revolutionary, with a faith in history and a belief in my class, it was at times crushing to see defeat after defeat after defeat. So many people put the idea of "winning" out of their minds. Not the idea of resistance, merely the belief in our power. The Poll Tax fight gave us a brief but illuminating glimpse of that power and in my view will prove to be the first flash of awakening in a new phase of struggle.

It was a liberating struggle in many ways. The feeling of "going somewhere", as I fought alongside my friends and comrades to establish an anti-Poll Tax union in my local community, was fantastic. The feeling reached a peak on the day of the "Battle of Trafalgar" as we fought back against that same Thatcherite jackboot.

March 31st was of more symbolic than practical significance, however. To riot is to rebel; it is not to revolt. It is a defensive action, not an offensive one. It is our class fighting for its life, not destroying its foes. For that longer struggle we must be better organised, better able to fight and think and know the way forward.

Cllr Ray Davies, the first person in Wales to be jailed for non-payment, has had to face a barrage of attacks from the right-wing Labour establishment since his release from Gloucester prison.

One local Rhymney councillor, outraged to discover that having served their sentences the non-payers were released from the debt, demanded that the council take further action to force them to pay. He wants the council to "take away their wheelie bins."

The Kurdish crisis and the fate of Turkish democracy

FRUSTRATION in the Turkish army, which is trained to think of itself as the true defender of the state, is mounting over the new coali-

Ihsan Qadir
Kurdistan Focus

tion government's handling of the Kurdish issue.

Army leaders are stage-managing provocations in Kurdistan to foment the kind of crisis which they believe will force the government to grant them the special powers they crave and with which, they believe, they can smash Kurdish aspirations once and for all. In the last week of December more than 50 people were killed by the army in separate incidents in Turkish Kurdistan. Nonetheless, after seventy years of systematic repression, forced assimilation, persecution and deportation, the Turkish state has finally admitted the Kurds' existence. No longer are they referred to as "mountain Turks". They are allowed to speak their language. Turkish politicians talk about the need for dialogue and trust.

This wind of change has come about in direct response to the increasing activity and militancy of the Kurdish masses.

In the ten years of military rule from 1980-1990, more than 250,000 Kurus were imprisoned or tortured. But the ferocious and indiscriminate nature of the Turkish repression helped to bring about a wide national awakening in Kurdistan. Every Kurdish family in Turkey has a relative who has either been imprisoned, beaten up or held in police custody.

Today thousands march in the streets of Kurdish towns and cities, knowing full well that they face possible punishment but armed with new confidence.

Successful struggles of other nations around the world for self-determination and independence have bolstered the Kurds' determination to seize their destiny as has the spectacular rise and fall and rise to de facto self-rule of the Kurdish movement in Iraq. The armed struggle waged by the PKK (the illegal Kurdish Workers Party) has also enhanced self-belief. The masses are bold, fearless and deeply committed.

The tragedy of the present period is that there is not yet a strong and organised force that can lead the Kurds in Turkey to final victory. With the exception of the PKK all the Kurdish groups and parties are too weak to lead the masses. The intensity of struggle and resistance has thrown them aside. Yet even the PKK leadership admits that it is no longer in the driving seat of the movement which is increasingly resorting to spontaneous action.

Given the tribal and divided nature of Kurdish society, a broad new organisation is needed that can represent all the sections and classes of that society, that can command the masses in action against the Turkish army. The need for such an organisation is felt by all Kurds and attempts are now being made to create it.

The Kurdish HEP (People's Labour Party) cannot fill this role. As part of the left-wing SHP (Social Democratic People's Party) block, the HEP secured 70% of the vote in Kurdistan in last year's elections and captured all the Kurdish seats. Via the SHP, it is now part of the coalition government run by Suleiman Demirel's DYP (True Path Party). The HEP leadership is itself not clear what it wants and is under constant pressure to denounce the PKK, foreswear "separatism" and ensure the survival of the coalition.

The Turkish army is expert at bullying, coercing and pressurising civilian governments. They know full well that if they are to get special powers there must be special circumstances to justify their demands. If there aren't any, then they must be created.

The recent violence must be seen in this context. It looks like the army is on the move again. The question is how far will it go?

On December 24th, the local army commander in Kulp, in defiance of government orders, staged a massacre in the Kurdish town which left fifteen dead and 400 wounded. This provocation led to an immediate military response from PKK guerillas in the area and action by supporters in Istanbul, where a shopping centre belonging to the brother of the emergency law governor of Kurdistan was set on fire, causing the deaths of eleven people. This in turn led to hysteria in the right-wing Turkish press and a physical attack on one of the HEP leaders in parliament.

The new coalition government is being tested to its limits by these events. Will it give in to threats from the army and fascists and fundamentalists or will it proceed to the next stage of establishing a viable democracy in Turkey by satisfying Kurdish demands for extensive national rights, including changes in the constitution, an autonomous Kurdish assembly and promotion of the Kurdish language in state schools?



Keith Veness in discussion with Pesh Merga ("facers of death")



KDP leader Massoud Barzani told the labour movement delegation from north London: "The Turkish government claims that they have only been bombing a limited strip but they have actually been going 30-40 kilometres deep into Free Kurdistan. There have been recent attacks on Barzan, Amadya and in the Zakho region, killing women, children and old men. We encouraged our people to go back to their villages but now the Turks are killing them and they are returning, frightened, to the hills. There is an ongoing conflict in Turkey between the military command and the civil government and the issue of Kurdistan is being used as a scapegoat in this dispute...This is not a refugee crisis, nor is it simply a humanitarian problem - the root cause is political. Many people confuse these issues. As long as this political question is not being addressed, all the other problems will continue. Our people are exposed and they need protection."

The Bangladeshis and the Kurds: an untold story

*In November, **Keith Veness** of Hackney NUPE was part of a delegation sent to Kurdistan by labour movement organisations in north London. In the course of their tour through "Free Kurdistan" in northern Iraq they stumbled across a touching and shocking story that has not appeared in the western media at all.*

OUR FIRST night in northern Iraq saw us billeted in the home of a Kurd who extended the usual hospitality shown to all visitors. However, we were puzzled at the particularly warm reception he gave to one of our party, Talal Karim, an Islington councillor who comes originally from Bangladesh. Our host kept saying "Bangladeshis - very good people" which was surprising as he spoke hardly any English.

After our trip through the area we returned on our last night to the house where we had first stayed. Our translator then explained to us the story behind the affection displayed towards Talal. It is worth retelling as an example of the humanity and bravery of many of the individual Kurds that we met.

Two years ago, Saddam Hussein's security forces had conducted their last and most brutal round-up of Kurdish dissidents, an operation known as "Anfal" from a misuse of a term in the Koran that allows Muslims to dispossess "unbelievers". The people rounded were paraded through Zakho and the other towns before an appalled population powerless to save their friends and relations.

After Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, thousands of Asian migrant workers, the majority from Bangladesh, fled the city and attempted to return home. In the west we saw their wretched fate in Jordan where they were dumped in the desert and had to rely on whatever help the aid agencies could provide.

What we weren't told was that 400,000 others fled north to try to escape into Turkey. A twelve-mile convoy got stuck on the road between Dohuk and Zakho trying to reach the Turkish border at Harbur. These people had no food or water and faced daytime temperatures in the 80s or 90s. The Iraqi police told the local Kurds not to have anything to do with the Bangladeshis and made a series of threats to enforce this.

The Bangladeshis might have faced a miserable death on a forgotten road. But they were saved by the response of the local Kurds, mobilised by painful memories of "Anfal".

With a population of only 110,000 between the two towns, the Kurds undertook to feed and shelter the 400,000 until they could pass into Turkey. A series of "town meetings" agreed that everyone would give half of everything they had to the Bangladeshis. Many people went out to the road to deliver food and other goods. The man we stayed with went down and invited four of the Bangladeshis to stay with him. These four would not at first come into his house and insisted on sleeping in the garden as they had had to do in Kuwait. However, Kurdish hospitality swiftly overwhelmed Bangladeshi modesty and the four became part of his household for eight weeks.

A women who lived next door to our host had only one sheet and one bar of soap - yet she cut them in half and walked with these bits to the road to give them to the travellers. The local bakeries delivered all the bread baked on alternate days to the roadside despite threats from the Iraqi secret police. For eight weeks the Kurds succeeded in supporting the 400,000 in their plight. Eventually the border was opened and these unfortunates were flown back to their countries of origin - but only after Turkey and Iraq had forced an agreement from them to say nothing about what had happened. This was why our Kurdish host had felt so close to the stranger from Bangladesh.

It was explained to us that the Kurds in Zakho and Dohuk felt that this was not "charity" but real solidarity with fellow victims as well as an effective way to strike back at Saddam.

Later in the year, when the Iraqis bombed and strafed the area, our host had fled, along with the rest of the population, to the mountains. With his young daughter he spent a miserable few hours in the rain before deciding to return to Zakho and single-handedly face the Baathists. He returned in time to see the Iraqi Army retreating and was the first person to meet the Royal Marines taskforce when it entered Zakho as part of the Military Control Commission sent to enforce the "safe haven" policy.

■ **A full report of the delegation's trip to Kurdistan, including a rare interview with KDP leader Massoud Barzani, is available from 23b Mildmay Road, London N1.**

The case for the Anti-Racist Alliance

The Anti-Racist Alliance was launched by black activists last November and has attracted substantial Labour Party and trade union support (though no help from the Shadow Cabinet). Labour Briefing *interviewed four of its founding executive members:* ***Palma Black, Unmesh Desai, Narendra Makanji,*** *and* ***Mark Wadsworth.***

LB: What makes ARA different from previous anti-racist initiatives?

MARK: It was founded with black people in the leadership by a group of black organisations, including the Black Sections, the Black Liaison Group, the Society of Black Lawyers and others. The Black Liaison Group brings together community groups and campaigns including the Newham Monitoring Project, the Indian Workers' Association, the National Black Caucus, and Black NALGO, and represents thousands of the most active black people around the country. ARA is also an alliance with the labour movement. On the trade union side, the Scottish TUC and five national trade unions have now affiliated and we are expecting more soon.

UNMESH: ARA has an approach which is in tune with the needs of the present time. In the 1990s we are faced with Euro-racism, with racist attacks, with police and state racism as well as the fascists. ARA does not rest on an historical analysis of fascism which goes back to 1936 and Cable Street - which is not to take anything away from the people who fought there. Newham has the second highest number of recorded racist attacks in the country. But the far right is involved in less than 2% of these. The fact is that most racist attacks are carried out by ordinary discontented white working-class youth. By and large, these people are not members of any far right party; they do not go on any far right marches. What I think is much more instrumental in forming people's attitudes is state racism, popular racism, the media. And it is this contemporary form of racism that ARA has come together to oppose.

PALMA: I come from Lewisham, an area which has faced a lot of racist attacks over the years. When the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) was first around there were not any black organised groups able to deal with the attacks and that was obviously because black people were held back. Now that black organised groups are well established in the community, we do not need white groups like that to tell us what to do. We are there on the ground and we know how we should deal with it.



Palma, Narendra, Unmesh PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

NARENDRA: There is also a world situation in which the old alliance between the Eastern Europeans and the African, Asian and Caribbean countries has broken down and there is no support for liberation movements. Europe itself has got an identity crisis about who is part of it and who is not. Increasingly we will see that anyone who looks European will be OK; anyone who does not will be out. A mere economistic analysis, saying that whenever there is a down-turn there will be an upsurge of racism, is not going to be good enough anymore because even in times of plenty there will be high levels of racism in this set-up. What is required is much deeper organisation, organisation that is going to be enduring, long-term, with many ups and downs, but always carrying on with at least some level of activity and not disappearing, thinking that racism is just a flash in the pan.

UNMESH: Many sections of the left persist in the argument that fascism is the problem and racism is an incidental by-product of this. It is racism that is the problem and fascism thrives on racism. Of course, fascism affects lesbians and gay men and many others and I am not dismissing that lightly; we've got to stand by those people. We cannot have a league-table of oppressions. I am interested in people fighting back, not who is more oppressed than whom.

MARK: The anti-racist, anti-fascist struggle in Britain has been too inward-looking. Black people, because we are spread around the world, part of a diaspora, are outward-looking. We are able to make links in Germany, Belgium and France. We have got contacts with the Initiative Schwarz Deutsch in Germany and with Dacia Valent, one of the four black MEPs. There is more of a necessity and a capability to network as a result of how we got here and that will also mark out ARA.

NARENDRA: The other difference between ARA and previous initiatives is that we are consciously going through the mainstream of British politics and that means signing up the MPs, trade union leaders and trade unions themselves, forcing debates within those organisations, working with churches, religious leaders and so on.

LB: In practice then, how will ARA take up these challenges?

MARK: The first initiative we took up was the Rolan Adams case. We held a briefing for MPs which helped get the case raised in the Commons. We have support for a demonstration on February 22nd in Eltham and we intend to push the Conservative Council down there into acting against the BNP headquarters in Welling. Other issues we're working on include the question of Le Pen and the Asylum Bill. We will be holding a rally on January 29th and a series of meetings around the country. Local



Mark Wadsworth and Palma Black PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

groups are being set up and we plan a major carnival in the summer, as well as fringe meetings at party conferences and student work.

UNMESH: ARA can give a national platform to people who are struggling at various levels, often in isolation, in various defence campaigns, various community groups, resisting racist attacks, defending the victims of police racism, working with refugees. What is needed is something that can bring all these things together into one powerful coherent national voice.

LB: What will ARA be doing during the general election?

MARK: We know that the fascists intend to stand sixty candidates or more in the general election and that will entitle them to a party political broadcast. I would be in favour of pulling the plug and linking with trade unionists to build this as a popular campaign.

NARENDRA: In every country in Europe the centre and the left are actually giving in politically to the right-wing and we have to stop that. We have to make it clear that if they make any compromise with racism they will actually lose votes. My own proposal would be to declare the Sunday ten days before the general election as an anti-racist day. We could either have a national event or say to our local branches to have local events to ensure that in every constituency candidates of all parties are being forced to speak out against racism. We should turn the race-card on its head. There are three million black votes plus the white anti-racist vote and we have to make ti clear that everyone of those will be watching and every candidate and every party will have to respond. If we do decide to have a national event, we will demand that all the party leaders address it. We could consider issuing an anti-racist declaration on that day and anyone who fails to support it will be judged accordingly.

LB: What should Labour Party and trade union activists do?

NARENDRA: Labour ARA has been set up and is working at this moment to contact every constituency party with offers of speakers, model resolutions, etc. In the run-up to Party conference and trade union conferences we want to ensure maximum support for ARA resolutions. The TUC itself is going to take a historic step in February with its first ever black members conference. We want to see some action coming out of that.

UNMESH: Labour Party members have to seek out relationships with anyone doing principled and consistent anti-racist work in their communities. That is how they will gain credibility, by linking up with the people who are already fighting racism and fascism instead of substituting for them. This is how principled anti-racists can distinguish themselves from opportunist elements who simply come into an area, go away and then leave behind the local black community to suffer the counter-attack.

PALMA. I think that when people talk about racism they often leave women's issues out of it. As a black woman, we don't only face racism, we also face sexism. We are doubly oppressed. Within the ARA, because there are black women's organisations, we are more able to deal with our problems than white feminists who know nothing about the way a black woman leads her life. The ARA is unique in that it has given a platform to black women's organisations.

MARK: ARA is also an opportunity for demoralised Labour Party members and inactive branches and CLPs to revitalise themselves via grass-roots activism around an issue that many Party members feel passionately about. The best way to build any political movement is through struggle and that is certainly not what we have had in the Labour Party recently.

LB: What about ARA's internal democracy? Will there be participation and decision-making by local groups and affiliates?

NARENDRA: Let's be clear about this. At this year's Labour Party Conference the issue of the Black Socialist Society was settled, which freed up some time for some people who got together and drew up the ARA statement. We called a meeting of invited organisations, as broadly based as we could, but it would have been irresponsible to make it an open meeting because it could lead to the fascists coming in and smashing it up. The Black Sections Executive and the Black Liaison Group were in constant contact running up to the launch meeting. The Black Sections Executive drew up the slate of ARA Executive members and that list was put to the meeting and adopted.

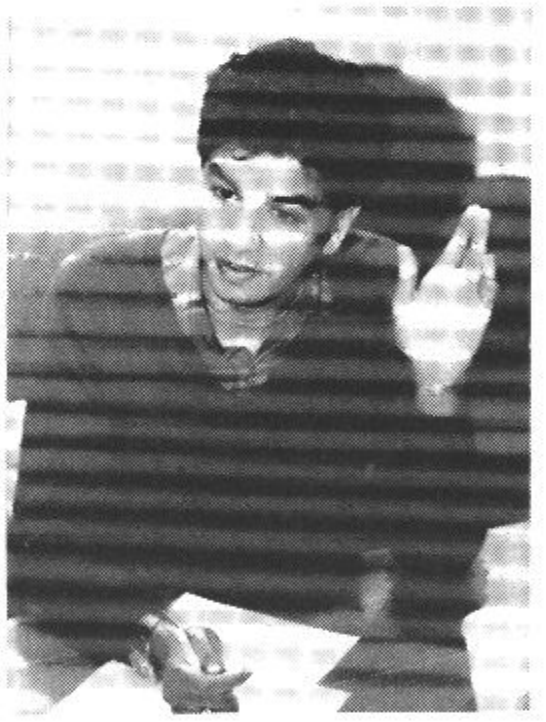
MARK: We intend to move to a founding conference where the local groups can assert themselves, because there comes a time when you have got a sufficient membership and network that you can say let's start electing people, but that's not the first priority. Defending the black community against the fascists and the racists is the first priority.

UNMESH: At its December meeting the ARA executive passed a proposal to begin draw up a paper containing different constitutional strategies. I can't think of too many mass movements actually willing to have that debate.

MARK: I'm going to upset someone now. There is a group who have been very supportive of the ARA, but they got the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf badly wrong. I found it obscene that when two hundred thousand people of colour were being slaughtered by the North in the first North-South war, this group were involved in sectarian in-fighting. We couldn't take part in that.

NARENDRA: We will never allow that to happen in the ARA.

Continued on page 12



Unmesh Desai PHOTO Bryn Griffiths

Winston Silcott: still waiting for justice

THE FAMILIES of the Tottenham Three, along with the recently released Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip, have launched the Winston Silcott Defence Campaign.

In 1984 Winston was attacked at a party by a well-known criminal gang armed with knives after Winston tried to shelter a young man whom the gang was after. Winston defended himself and subsequently the gang leader, Anthony Smith, died. Winston then surrendered himself at the police station.

While he was on bail awaiting trial police made him the prime suspect in the killing of PC Blakelock and the media portrayed him as a murderer. His subsequent trial in the Anthony Smith case was hopelessly biased.

Winston still needs our support.

Contact: Winston Silcott Defence Campaign, 247a West Green road, London N17 5ED; tel: 081 809 6483.

Justice for the Deanes!

Mr Deane, a 53-year-old severe asthmatic and his son Tony were savagely beaten by Metropolitan police officers in West Ham in the East End and then charged with assaulting the police.
Since the assault, on two separate occasions officers from West Ham police station have visited the Deanes at their shop on Green Street. On both occasions they were abusive and refused to leave when asked. On the final visit one officer told Mr. Deane, "If you have any trouble here don't call West Ham Police Station".
A campaign has been set up to have the charges against the Deanes dropped and to have the officers immediately suspended and charged.
It has held two well-attended public meetings (attended by a total of 800) and organised a 60-strong picket to support the Deanes' on their first day in court.

Further details from the Defend the Deane Family Campaign, PO Box 273, Forest Gate, London E7 Tel: 081 555-815.

Beware!

Keep your eyes out for the latest right-wing crusaders for "freedom of choice". A near-anonymous leaflet is being circulated by an unknown organisation, the NFEC, operating out of Worthing, Sussex but using an outer-London phone number, 081-471-6872. Labelled an "Important Notice to Parents" it supports the right of white parents to move their children from schools which are predominantly "Black or Asian". It cites the recent court ruling that the 1988 Education Act over-rides the 1976 Race Relations Act. Why not ring up and find out more about this shadowy group? You could start by asking who funds them - reversing the charges, of course.

Anti-Racist Alliance

Stop racist attacks!
Fight Euro-racism!
Oppose the Asylum Bill!

Weds 29th January
7.30pm
Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square WC1

Speakers: Dianne Abbott, Richard Adams (father of Rolan Adams), Harry Cohen, Ronny Dzedzek (Initiative Schwarze Deutsche), Maria Fyfe, Zerbanoo Gifford (Liberal Democrat PPC), Peter Hain, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Ken Gill, Ken Livingstone, Leela Ramdeen, Cardiff 3 Campaign, Deane Family Campaign and George Silcott

Further info from Anti-Racist Alliance,
c/o PO Box 188, London SW1A OSG

The case for the ARA (from page 11)

LB: You've been very critical of the re-launch of ANL. What is your response to people who say: what's wrong with a plurality of initiatives?

UNMESH: You need to understand the history. No one is denying that the ANL did a good job of pinning the Nazi label on the NF. But after the 79 general election, Paul Holborow of the SWP called people together to announce that fascism is no longer a problem so we're dissolving the ANL. But while fascism might have gone away, racism had not. The SWP closed down the ANL without consultation, just as racist attacks were coming onto the agenda. The NF did badly at the 79 election not just because of the ANL but also because of Thatcher's "swamping" speech. Why support an NF candidate in jack boots when you had a respectable racist on the ballot? Having spurned the chance to turn ANL into a mass anti-racist movement, the SWP then absented themselves from the anti-racist struggle throughout the 80s. In the early part of the decade there was an explosion of anti-racist community-based campaigns including Newham Monitoring Project itself. It is this experience of the 1980s which has come into ARA. The cynical relaunch of the ANL reminds me of an Egyptian mummy taken out of the tomb by the people who killed it in the first place. It is comical. Worse yet, it is divisive and diversionary. ARA has a positive agenda and will grow as it draws on the experiences of the groups that form it. We are living in a new reality. For example, one of the effects of European integration is going to be identity checks. How do you distinguish an illegal black immigrant from a legally settled black immigrant? Because we all look the same. We carry our passports on our faces. Therefore all blacks will be subject to harassment. This sort of thing did not exist in the 1970s.

We as black people have to fight the far right for physical survival, but we also have to fight the ultra-left for political survival. In 1992 when even the TUC, that body of conservatives, has recognised the necessity of black self-organisation, we cannot have a situation in which the SWP remains contemptuous of self-organisation and is prepared to accept black people only as victims, not as leaders.

Yes, we need unity in action. I will work with the SWP and others on the streets against the BNP, but I will not subsume my political identity to something that is taking us back to the 1970s.

PALMA: For black people racism is a reality, it's here with us every single day. The ANL came and they went away. How did they determine that we were safe, that we were OK, and why are they back now?

Palma Black is an active member of East Lewisham CLP and on the Black Sections Executive. Unmesh Desai works with the Newham Monitoring Project representing the Black Liaison Group on the ARA executive; Narendra Makanji is a Haringey councillor and Black Sections activist, as is Mark Wadsworth, who is also an activist in the NUJ.

Why did thirteen die?

After twenty years, we're still waiting for the government to come clean about what happened on Bloody Sunday. ***Marie Maguire*** *examines official and unofficial reports.*

ON JANUARY 30th, 1972 the British Army First Paratrooper Regiment shot down thirteen Irish civilians in Derry. The thirteen were among 15,000 taking part in the first anti-internment demonstration in the town since the introduction of detention without trial seven months before. It had been one year since the first British soldier had been killed on the streets of northern Ireland and five months since all marches had been banned in the six counties.

The route - from Creggan through the Bogside to Guildhall Square - had been chosen by the march organisers, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. The event was illegal, but the local RUC closed its eyes to it, while threatening arrests later on. The Stormont government appeased unionists by placing a battalion of shock paras at the Guildhall Square exist, ensuring that the march would not leave the nationalist enclave.

CS gas canisters exploded, coloured water jets were sprayed - and soldiers fired rubber and live bullets, killing the thirteen. The official government enquiry led by Lord Widgery, then Lord Chief Justice, found that the dead and wounded had not been handling firearms when shot.

The British embassy in Dublin was burnt down by 30,000 protestors. Taoiseach Jack Lynch declared February 2nd, when the victims were buried, a day of national mourning. But in Britain, Lieutenant-Colonel Derek Wilford, commander of the para regiment, was awarded an OBE for his day's work.



Bloody Sunday

One of the few doctors on the scene was Raymond McClean, a Derry native, who treated two of the first casualties and four of the dead men. Officials of the Widgery enquiry told him his presence would not be needed. Instead, the officials chose Dr Kevin Swords, who had treated only one casualty, and was called to give evidence to establish whether Gerald Donaghy had anything incriminating in his pockets when he died.

In fact, Donaghy was tended by Dr McClean, who also looked after Jim Wray, Gerald McKinney and William McKinney. McClean noted that the enquiry made no reference to the fact that forensic evidence was consistent with eye-witness reports that Wray was shot in the back as he lay on the ground.

Eye-witnesses also stated that Gerald McKinney was walking forward with both arms raised when he was shot. Forensic evidence showed Gerald McKinney was shot through the chest from left to right. He must have had both arms raised, otherwise the fatal bullet would have penetrated one or both arms. Again, there was no reference to this in the Widgery Report.

However, Widgery did admit that nineteen of the twenty-two shots fired by soldier H were "totally unaccounted for" and that the evidence given by soldier H was totally untrue.

In the conclusion of his report Widgery declared: "The intention of the senior army officers to use the First Para as an arrest force and not for other purposes was sincere." However, he also said: "In First Para the soldiers are trained to go for the gunmen and make their decisions quickly. In those circumstances it is not remarkable that mistakes were made and some innocent civilians hit." Twenty years later, the question remains: why was the First Paratroop Regiment drafted into Derry to police a demonstration?

Dr McClean's excellent book *The Road to Bloody Sunday* (1983, Ward River Press) chronicles the events leading up to the massacre and details the casualties, the effects of CS gas, the work of the Derry Internee Dependents Committee and the assistance given by Irish-Americans in the States.

His conclusion is worth quoting, "To my mind the most feasible theory [about Bloody Sunday] concerned the difficulty that army intelligence were having at the time in obtaining detailed information concerning IRA men on the ground. To place key people within that relatively tight structure, it would be necessary to create an influx of new blood into the IRA structure. To create this influx it was necessary to precipitate a major emotional calamity in a large centre, prepare adequately for the expected publicity backlash and ride the situation out."

Bloody Sunday
Twentieth Anniversary
March
Saturday, January 25th
Noon
Hyde Park to Quex Road, Kilburn
Organised by Committee for
British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland,
tel 071-609-1743

Cuba's place in the New World Order

With the collapse of its old trading partners in eastern Europe, the Cuban revolution faces new challenges. ***Sue Lukes*** *interviewed* ***Roberto de Armas****, First Secretary at the Cuban embassy in London, for* Labour Briefing. *The interview was conducted in Spanish in December, 1991.*



Sue: Is this a time of crisis for Cuba?

Roberto: We are in a special period in Cuba, and that means sacrifices, privations and scarcities. It means queues to get basic necessities. It is not a crisis that has been created or generated internally; it has been produced by the sudden change that has happened in our international economic relations. The Cuban economy depends 90% on external trade and the conditions for that have changed totally.

Sue: One could say then that in 1959, Cuba was a dependent country, dependent on the US. Now, in 1991, it is still dependent, but on the Soviet Union. For all the triumphs of the revolution, it failed to make itself self-sufficient or create a wider trading base.

Roberto: Our links with the Soviet Union, the socialist bloc and Comecon meant that we did not diversify the Cuban economy. For many years Cuba had the task of supplying sugar and other essential, traditional products, like nickel, tobacco, citrus fruits to Comecon. But it was on very advantageous terms for us, which allowed us to develop in other sectors, like our public health and education systems which are first class on a world scale. So the social standards Cuba was able to reach after thirty years of revolution and economic association with Comecon have brought great benefits, but they also meant a certain stagnation. Even so, we built up the basis for other developments because of which we will be able to diversify the economy in a very short time span.

In spite of the fact that we lost chances to diversify the economy we did not lose time, because we built up a new generation of professionals who are able and skilled and can transform the economy. Something I must make clear is that there is no comparison whatsoever between the situation in Cuba and what is happening in the Soviet Union and other European countries.

Sue: Why?

Roberto: In the Soviet Union, the situation has happened as a result of a deep internal political crisis of the system. Our difficulties are the result of an economic crisis, not a political one, which derived from the changes that happened in the system with which we were associated, not from internal problems in Cuba.

Sue: Many outsiders say there are internal problems.

Roberto: There is no political crisis in Cuba. The Party Congress demonstrated that the great majority of the people supports the solutions proposed in the Congress, the programme of the Party and the Party leadership.

Sue: So there will be economic changes?

Roberto: Radical changes.

Sue: But will there be political changes?

Roberto: We have started to make some political changes. We must adapt our socialism to our realities. We had for many years in Cuba a model of socialism copied in some aspects from the eastern European model, especially the Soviet Union. We now see the need to build a socialism in Cuba on the basis of our own experiences, our own reality.

Sue: Why didn't you do it before?

Roberto: Because we didn't have to. Everyone moves in response to pressure. Now, we have to evolve in this direction to survive, to save the revolution and the gains we have made in the last thirty years. If we did not have to do it, we wouldn't be doing it. It's just pragmatic.

Sue: But if the political changes come from outside pressures, what about principles?

Roberto: The socialism we had in Cuba until now was not in contradiction with our principles, we still have those principles and we will not be changing them. What we will be changing are the forms, the means, the methods. There is no political crisis; there is an economic crisis that, if not resolved, may produce a political crisis.

Sue: But in the Soviet Union they also had an economic crisis.

Roberto: Cuba is a different case. There is no crisis of confidence. Not in the Party, not within the leadership of the revolution, not in socialism as a system and not in what it has brought for Cuba.





If you did a survey in Cuba, people would say that they want to keep all the good things that the system has brought them. Of course, they want to get rid of the things that cause problems. So we start from the real fact that we have the support of the majority of the population. If we did not have political unity, if we did not have this national consensus behind us, we could not do what we are doing.

Sue: Why is this only the Fourth Party Congress, after thirty years in power?

Roberto: These congresses started only in the mid-seventies and have been held every five years since then. Prior to that, the revolution developed in a non-institutional way. The party was formed in 1965, and worked formally outside the state apparatus for the first ten years. Then when the country got organised we decided to have congresses every five years.

Sue: In Europe the talk is of pluralism, of new parties forming, etc. Is there any likelihood of other parties being formed and participating in the political process?

Roberto: We are not philosophically against the existence of political pluralism; it is just that we believe that, right now, political pluralism is not the means of solving our problems. Now, more than ever, we need political unity in Cuba, unity around the proposals and objectives of all the people. If we start to create other parties, the political spectrum begins to fracture and we lose the national unity that is our chance to get out of the crisis. Right now, the one party system is our guarantee of the necessary unity. I cannot talk about the future, when we have survived this difficult period and returned to normal, when the external pressures disappear and especially when the hostile and aggressive policy of the US towards Cuba ends, maybe then we could analyse the possibilities of political pluralism in Cuba. But right now, it is unthinkable.

Sue: There is no place for organisations outside the party then?

Roberto: No, but there is room for debate inside the party, for discussion, and the Congress showed that there was space to debate, discuss and express differences within the general analysis and principles of the Cuban revolution.

Sue: What is the greatest fear for the future?

Roberto: We cannot talk about fear; we can talk about risks. There is a political risk that the economic crisis could turn into a political crisis if some basic problems are not sorted out soon. If that happens, there could be a deterioration of confidence in the party and its programme, and we could begin to have a political crisis. I do not think that it will happen, because the results of the first economic measures are already coming through.

Sue: Do you have a message for the British left?

Roberto: We need the British left now more than ever. We have always given our solidarity and political and moral support to progressive causes; now we need it in return from anyone who believes that we should survive. Many have already joined the UK campaign for Cuban sovereignty. On the economic side, you can help by finding out what we need and sending it. For example, we recently had a campaign to send bandages to Havana.

A final message: Cuba is standing firm, not hiding its principles, and we are confident that we will resolve our current economic problems and we will keep our socialism. We have heard talk of "social democracy", but we do not have the slightest intention of changing our banners.

We will succeed because we have a people capable of doing it, with long experience of struggle. And no other Latin American country has a leader so respected as Fidel.

For the right of Cuba to national sovereignty

We believe that the people of Cuba, like any other state, must be free to decide their own internal affairs free from outside interference.

We therefore defend Cuba's right to national sovereignty and independence.

There must be an end to interference in Cuba's internal affairs by foreign governments.

We call for an end to the US trade embargo against Cuba, and for the British government to publicly oppose its extension through the Mack amendment or other similar proposals that may come forward.

We call for the normalisation of all diplomatic, economic, cultural and scientific relations with Cuba by the US government.

To endorse the appeal, contact Cuban National Sovereignty Appeal, c/o British Cuba Resource Centre, Latin America House, Kingsgate Place, London NW6 4TA.

Trips to Cuba (Easter) and Peru and Bolivia (August).

Visits, sightseeing and discussion in good company combine to give you a real insight into these countries. Ring 0533 511157 any time, or 0533 857384 evenings, for further information.

Russian leaders play the "disaster card"

At midnight on December 26th, 1991, the red flag of the USSR was removed from the Kremlin palace and replaced by the pre-revolutionary Russian tricolour. It was the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. But the beginning of what? ***Gus Fagan*** *looks at the unfolding crisis in what used to be the Soviet Union.*

IT HAS been one of the remarkable features of the birth of the new Commonwealth of Independent States that its own leaders outdo each other in painting scenarios of potential disaster. Russian vice-president Rustkoi described his own country as "not a democracy, just chaos and anarchy". Ex-foreign minister Shevardnadze sees right-wing or military dictatorship around the corner. Western journalists and politicians back them up with anxieties over who will end up with nuclear weapons and imminent conflicts between Russia and Ukraine.

Undoubtedly there are real and potential conflicts here. But what is interesting is that in a country of almost 200 ethnic groups there has been relatively little inter-ethnic conflict. However, as we all know, whenever insecurity and material hardship are on the rise for the mass of working people, political leaderships are prone to stirring up ethnic and other conflicts. Yugoslavia is a case in point.

Behind all the dire warnings of catastrophe, accompanied by an increasing diet of religion in all the Russian media, is a real fear among Russia's new leaders about how the workers will react to the incredible sacrifices imposed on them by the new/old nomenklatura.

Nikolai Akritov, an official in the Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, warned just recently that "almost the entire country is ready to strike."

This may be an exaggeration, but it is certainly a major preoccupation of the Yeltsin leadership. One of his advisors, Alexis Golokov, wrote in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* recently: "The number of jobless and poor will increase. With the government's hard line, hundreds, if not thousands of enterprises will collapse in the next ten months...To carry through such a reform the government will have to be firm and decisive. It will have to be capable of dealing with the resistance of the population whose discontent will inevitably be expressed in strikes and perhaps in even more brutal forms."



Moscow shopper: price rises will force 80% below the poverty line

Yeltsin, once an orthodox party apparatchik, dismissed from the Politburo in 1988, has become a symbol of anti-socialism. He dismissed the referendum on the Union in March 1991 because he thought the real question asked should have been: "Are you for or against socialism?" In *Izvestia* at the end of 1991 he explained why Gorbachev had to go: "He wanted to unite what couldn't be united, communism with a market economy, private property with public property and the Communist Party with multi-partyism. The coexistence of these contradictions is impossible."

For the Yeltsin leadership, intent on a programme of rapid capitalist restoration, the question of the military is very important. Although the western media tend to deal with this issue only from the angle of potential military coups or power-play among the republics (the Baltic fleet), the most interesting aspect is the way in which the Russian and Ukrainian leaderships court the military for their own domestic purposes. Both governments have doubled the salaries of military personnel and promised them other material and social benefits. Yeltsin explained his special concern for the army in a statement in December: "In moments of difficulty, the stability of the armed forces has an important influence on the situation and on the other layers of society." In other words, they are part of that "decisiveness" with which the government plans to handle the "resistance of the population" mentioned earlier.

And what of the population? Is there reason to believe that there can or will be effective resistance? The situation is certainly desperate. The government admitted in December that as much as 80% of the population may fall below the poverty line (currently 50% live below it). Officials estimate one million unemployed in Moscow by the end of the year (population of nine million) and thirty million in the ex-Soviet Union as a whole.

The still-state-run economy and the currency are in disarray.

The expected boost from privatisation and foreign investment has not happened. At the end of the year only 0.2% of large enterprises and 0.4% of medium-sized enterprises were privatised. The number of co-operatives (as the new private businesses are called) actually fell by 25% in 1991 because most of them weren't really private businesses, just means by which existing enterprises could increase prices and avoid taxes.

A Swedish economic advisor to Yeltsin, Anders Aslund, describes the situation as "a complete powder keg". But it is difficult to gauge the real potential for popular resistance. Because of his strong attacks on the hated old political-economic establishment, especially after 1988, Yeltsin was able to win broad popular support. This may be fraying but at the moment there is no party or organised political current able to channel the discontent.

One doesn't have to be clairvoyant to predict that 1992 will be an eventful year in Russia. The political and organisational reserves of the Russian workers have yet to be tested.

Women in Eastern Europe fight for reproductive rights

***Leonora Lloyd**, secretary of the National Abortion Campaign and Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Hendon South, reports on the awesome challenges facing women's rights activists in the former Stalinist states.*

WOMEN FROM every eastern European country met last December in Prague to discuss reproductive rights, the first such international conference attended by women from Albania.

A number of women from Yugoslavia were present, representing all the warring groups there as well as members of peace groups.

Women representing a number of international organisations also attended, including the European section of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (which sponsored the conference) and the European Network for Women's Right to Abortion and Contraception, which I represented.

The eastern European country facing the most pressing and imminent problem - Poland - was unfortunately able to send only one woman and the conference took place before Polish doctors decided, at their national conference, not to perform abortions except to save women's lives.

The contribution which made the greatest impression was from the Irish delegate, who graphically portrayed what could be the future in other countries.

Reproductive rights means a lot more than just abortion. Throughout eastern Europe women are being stripped of many rights that enable them to choose to have children - childcare, job rights and much more. In eastern Germany, for example, unemployment amongst women is soaring, creches and nurseries are shutting everywhere, and women are going on a "baby strike", with the demand for sterilisation (contraception is all but non-existent) at an all-time high.

All the eastern countries reported two major problems: a lack of sex education and accurate information about sex and sexuality generally, and a lack of decent, affordable contraception. The old regimes, unable to afford modern methods, had an interest in promoting the ideas that the pill was dangerous and barrier methods inefficient. Such ideas retain their grip even when better quality contraception becomes available, as a family planning doctor from Romania explained.

A delegate from the French Family Planning Association explained its "twinning" project with grass-root groups in Poland, where they are using their expertise to try to fill the enormous gap in public information which has emerged since the government replaced sex education with showings of the Silent Scream and withdrew family planning funding.

I was able to report on the activities of British anti-abortion groups which, frustrated in their attempts to make abortion illegal at home, are funding "pro-life" projects in Romania and elsewhere.

The final session of the conference was devoted to the problem of how to start women's groups from scratch. A major difficulty reported from every country was the association between the "women's movement" and the ex-Communist regimes. In Prague, a women's centre not associated with the Party had been confiscated and negotiations were being held to get it back.

Many delegates laboured under the illusion that the women's movement in the west had had an easy birth. We were able to explain that we too had started from nothing. But with the end of Communism, rents and other costs have soared and finding premises (once groups get too big to meet in someone's home) is a real problem.

Among the many conferences currently being held on women's reproductive rights in eastern Europe, this one was particularly useful, not simply because of the broad geographical spread, but because of the grass-roots nature of many of the groups it brought together.

Brazil PT Congress

Against a backdrop of 10,000 job losses a week and a 300% increase in business failures, the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) held its first ever congress at the end of last year.

There were greetings from 110 foreign organisations and Nicaraguan Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega addressed the delegates on the need for international action by revolutionaries against the New World Order.

There was a rich discussion, including a debate on the position of women in the PT. Lula's "Articulacion" tendency remains the party's largest.

Brazil is plunged deep in social crisis. Austerity is worsening, the income gap is widening and there is unprecedented violence. Five children are murdered every day by "death squads".

Lula closed the Congress by calling for the renewed defence of Cuba abroad and at home "a struggle against social injustice, the Collor government, for land reform and in defence of wages".

News from Nicaragua

When the right-wing UNO coalition won the general election in Nicaragua in 1990, the army remained in Sandinista hands under the leadership of Defence Minister Humberto Ortega.

Today the army may have dwindled to only 10,000. The aim of the right-wing, guided by the US embassy, is not to take it on, but to displace it by building up a powerful and well-armed police force. This parallel force would be made up of ex-Contras and would allow the government to speed up the counter-revolution.

Ex-president Daniel Ortega has warned that if this plan goes ahead, the FSLN may create a Sandinista militia in self-defence.

Meanwhile, violence is on the increase with the "re-Contras" stepping up their terrorism in the north. In October there was an outburst of anger against right-wing figures following the bombing of the tomb of FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca.

A wave of strikes involving 8,000 sugar and public sector workers was met by tear gas and batons from the police.

Environmental work brigades to Nicaragua

July and August 1992 for 4 or 6 weeks. Participate in a communal reafforestation project, supporting sustainable development and self-determination. From £950 inclusive.

Contact: Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG. Tel: 071 272 9619.

Spanish miners take on Brussels

*Madrid-based journalist **Andy Robinson** reports on the fierce struggle of miners in Asturias against the job-cutting "socialist" government of Felipe Gonzalez.*

AS IF ONE set of sharp suits and attache cases telling Asturias miners what competitiveness means from offices in Madrid wasn't irritating enough, they're now getting a telling off from Brussels too.

Unless the Spanish Socialist government's plan to cut employment at Spain's state-owned pits by over a third (6,000 jobs) is presented to the European Commission before February 10th, President Felipe Gonzalez will be up before an EC tribunal in Luxembourg charged with illegally subsidizing a loss-making business!



Asturian miners fire gunpowder rocket at police

Industry minister Claudio Aranzadi, one of the new breed of "supply-side" socialists who have entered the PSOE government since the fall of vice-president Alfonso Guerra, is terrified at the prospect of standing in the dock accused of sloppy interventionism. "The government is not prepared to appear before the Luxembourg tribunal," he said on Thursday, January 9th, the seventeenth day of the strike held by miners against the job-cutting plan. "When the deadline is up we will present the plan in Brussels".

To the Ministry of Industry, the plan to rationalise the mines controlled by the state company HUNOSA seems, if anything, over-generous. The mines are deep shaft; the seams are thin and HUNOSA lost 65 billion pesetas (£360 million) last year - not to mention the lives of seven miners. An Asturian miner cuts 200 kilos of poor quality coal per hour; a British miner (since the 1984-85 strike) cuts 600 kilos per hour, each of which fetches a higher price. At EC headquarters in Brussels the plan to pension off 6,000 miners and close nine of HUNOSA's 23 pits seems like common sense whatever language you speak.

Two-hundred and seventy-two metres underground, the figures looked less convincing to the 36 miners who occupied the Barredo de Mieres pit over the Christmas fortnight. Why hasn't money been invested to provide alternative employment in an area so dependent on the mines? Why are there still nuclear power stations in Spain when the Valdbernardo accident three years ago nearly wiped Tarragona off the Mediterranean coast? Why does the government resort to rhetoric about the "European challenge" every time it sacks workers?

Up on the surface, miners are using lengths of steel pipe as missile launchers and firing rockets at the riot police. Technically, the strike was called off two weeks ago by the two national unions, UGT and Comisiones Obreras, which preferred lightning stoppages, but nobody paid any attention. Miners at a private pit down the Atlantic coast in Galicia held their boss hostage throughout a whole night in protest at projected job losses.

Union leaders and local Socialist politicians have been carried along by a wave of militancy which has left them stranded in the most compromised of positions. Jose Angel Fernandez Villa, miners' leader and member of the executive committee of the Socialist Party, declared that he was "in complete agreement with PSOE's global programme" while taking part in the underground protest at Barredo de Mieres. Nicolas Redondo, UGT general secretary, and Antonio Gutierrez of Comisiones Obreras, while opposing the continuing strike, say they will call another twenty-four hour general strike in Asturias and Galicia in view of the success of the first held on October 23rd.

"I don't want to dramatise," Redondo declared on Cadena Ser radio last week, "but if things carry on like this, with this explosion of discontent, we could be headed towards a serious social crisis".

Redondo's ex-friend Felipe Gonzalez has his eye on Jaques Delors' job at the EC and has sacrificed his extraordinary popularity with the Spanish electorate to win the hearts of the chaps in the Bundesbank and Brussels. Kicking out PSOE hero Alfonso Guerra in favour of Euro-Business man of the year, economy minister Carlos Solchaga, has cost Felipe the support of the Socialist rank and file. "If Alfonso was around," one member was reported to have said, "Asturias would never have happened."

Far to the south and east in Barcelona and Seville, where preparations for the Olympics and Expo 92 continue apace, the monumental waste of public and private money on sports stadiums that glow in the dark, replicas of fifteenth century galleons which capsize on launching and holograms of Ferdinand and Isabela is approved by the Madrid/Brussels technocrats as "emblematic components, indispensable as enticements to productive investors". About three trillion pesetas (16.5 billion pounds) have been spent on the two big 1992 events, enough to keep HUNOSA going even at current levels of productivity for around thirty years.

South Africa: "basic demands cannot be achieved without struggle"

***Adam Habib** of the South African Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) spoke to* Briefing *about the current situation in South Africa.*

"THE POLITICAL settlement is taking place in a situation unfavourable to the working class. This is now clear from the concessions the ANC is making to the regime.

The PAC made a lot of concessions to the ANC by joining the Patriotic Front, which the ANC call a 'multi-party conference' and the PAC call a 'pre-constituent assembly . After this, a group split from the PAC, reflecting the tension within its ranks. This helps explain why the PAC pulled out of the preparatory meetings for CODESA.

The situation in the working class is very contradictory - in November three million stayed away but very few marched against VAT. COSATU organised marches but failed to turn up to them themselves! People are aware that the ANC is striking deals and a lot of tension and confusion is being created.

The 'workers tendency' has been eclipsed in the unions. The Economic Trends Group set up by NUMSA supports a kind of regulated capitalism and this view informs economic policy within NUMSA and COSATU.

Events in Eastern Europe have had a big effect on people like Moses Mayekiso. There is a redefinition of socialism taking place with a re-think of the relationship between market and plan. But in the South African Communist Party there is also a redefining of how to achieve socialism: there is a rejection of insurrection and Leninism, and new support for the parliamentary road.

Different trends exist in the SACP. Slovo's right wing has been overtaken by Cronin, a left social democrat who got the highest vote in party elections recently. He seems to have the support of a layer of the grassroots activists.

We all expected the ANC to capitulate but we have all been surprised by the speed of it. The idea of a constituent assembly seems to be moving quickly off the agenda.

We attached a lot of importance to the constituent assembly as the key means of addressing democratic and national demands. But the left has been deficient in developing its own policy positions in detail.

We need to develop policies which will give direct material betterment to the working class and which will enable it to mobilise itself, starting from the position that insurrection is not currently on the agenda, but recognising that even basic demands cannot be achieved without struggle."

Cancel the debt

An estimated £557 billion is owed by Third World countries to western banks. Annual interest alone is running at £37 billion. Unicef calculates that half a million children die every year just to pay this interest.

In a new pamphlet, Piggy Banks, the World Development Movement points out that while western banks have made their own provisions against Third World debt not being paid, they still refuse to cancel the debt itself.

In 1989 Lloyds and Natwest set aside £1.2 billion, allowing them, on top of previous provisions, to write off 75% of their Third World debts.

But have they actually written off the debt itself? No. They get tax relief on the money set aside - while still requiring that the debt is paid!

Good for business? Lloyds shares rose by 31 pence and NatWest's by 12 pence on the day the provision was made.

Meanwhile, countries like Sudan, on the verge of famine, continue to export "cash crops" to earn dollars to pay off the debt. And in Ghana where half the children are malnourished, over 50% of farming land is used to grow coca for western chocolate bars.

The World Development Movement is calling on all those who hold a credit card with any of the four big banks to cut it up and send it back in protest. It also offers advice on alternative, ethical credit.

Campaign packs (£1 each) from WDM, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR.

Madagascar killings

Twelve people were shot dead and seventy wounded when troops opened fire on a peaceful demonstration in northern Madagascar last October. Earlier in the year at least 30 supporters of the opposition group Hery Velona were killed and 200 wounded when the presidential guard threw grenades and fired into a crowd of thousands in the capital. On the same day ten demonstrators were killed in the north.

The victims were all involved in protests calling for the resignation of President Ratsiraka who has been in power since 1975.

US kills its youth

With the exception of Iran and Iraq, the USA has executed more juvenile offenders than any other country in the last decade. Four have been killed since 1985 and there are 31 juveniles on death row at present.

Thirty-six states now execute murderers. In 1989 the Supreme Court ruled that it was constitutional to execute juveniles and the mentally retarded. A bill currently before Congress aims to extend the death penalty to more than 50 crimes - including non-homicidal offences. It also seeks to cut the power of appeal for death row prisoners. In recent years, 40% of death sentences have been overturned on appeal in federal courts.

Amnesty International believe that US methods of execution amount to torture and that conditions on death row are cruel and inhuman. Their report *USA - The Death Penalty and Juvenile Offenders* is available at £4.50 from AI, 99-119 Roseberry Ave, London EC1R 4RE.

No place for NATO

- NATO, Militarism and the Divided World Day conference

Speakers: Mike Hindley MEP, Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Grant, Maria Flores (Cuban ambassador), Afif Safieh (PLO) and others

Saturday 1st February 1992

University of London Union, Malet Street, WC1
Organised by the Campaign for Non-Alignment
Contact CNA, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG

Portrait of a witch-hunter

SITTING ON the National Constitutional Committee panel that expelled Dave Nellist in December was one Shelley Burke, elected to this high and responsible position by constituency delegates at the last Party conference.

Burke's politics were easy to guess - she was backed by the LCC and nominated by the hard right Holborn and St Pancras CLP - but those who had the misfortune to meet this little creep at Sussex University in the early eighties were especially astonished at her temerity in sitting in judgement on other people's loyalty to the Labour Party.

In her first term at Sussex in 1983, Burke joined a right-wing splinter from the official Labour Students calling itself the "Democratic Socialist Group".

At that time Sussex's Labour Students had 250 members and was affiliated to both the local Brighton Labour Party and the National Organisation of Labour Students. Brighton Labour councillors and constituency party officers (left, right and centre) canvassed for Labour Students candidates in local student elections.

Shelley, along with her twenty odd cronies in the "Democratic Socialist Group", regularly championed alternative candidates to these official Labour candidates. On occasion she stood against them herself. No doubt she thought she was the "Real" Labour Candidate!

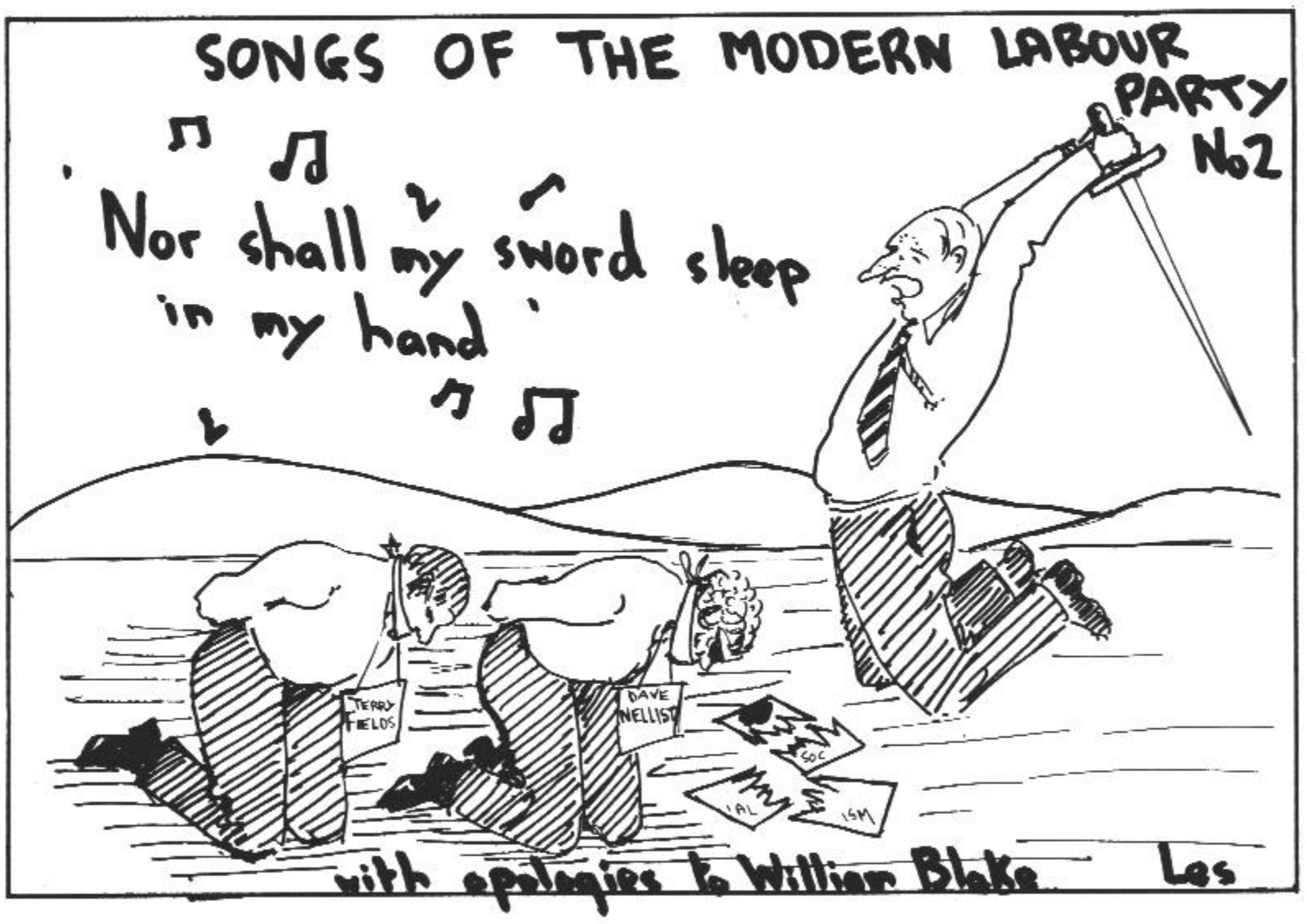
The only time Burke showed any interest in the Party was when she teamed up with the Militant, of all people! The deal was that if the "DSG" helped the Militant pack the Labour Students AGM (where delegateships to the Brighton Labour Party GC were up for grabs) the Militant would leave the "DSG" with a free run in the student union elections (where the prize was full-time sabbatical posts).

Many of the "DSG" members defected back to Labour when it was discovered that the group had joined with the Federation of Conservative Students in lobbying university management to prevent a student union donation to the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp.

This came to light at a student union meeting of over a thousand - leaving Shelley Burke high and dry weeks before the crucial annual student union elections.

Burke is now employed as a personal assistant to Islington Council leader Margaret Hodge.

Will she disqualify herself from sitting on any of the panels hearing the cases of the suspended Brighton 26?



Manchester follies

Manchester councillor John Clegg has been suspended since the summer for allegedly working against the Labour candidate in the Walton by-election. The accusation sprang from a visit he paid in the company of other Manchester councillors to a Poll Tax prisoner in a Liverpool jail during the by-election campaign.

Clegg is a left-winger but no Militant supporter. This is well known to both the Manchester council leadership and its allies in Walworth Road but it suits them to keep him suspended anyway. His council term expires in May and his ward wants to get on with re-selection - but refuses to do so until John is reinstated to Party membership.

Originally the NEC's Organisation Sub-committee, having been appraised of the facts in Clegg's case, was due to reinstate him in December. But at the prior NEC Joyce Gould announced that there was new information and the decision would have to be postponed.

It appears that new NEC member Gerald Kaufman informed Gould that Clegg was "involved with" the SWP.

The basis for this fantasy is that at a public meeting Clegg had debated against the SWP - strongly urging all socialists to remain in the Labour Party.

"MOST DEPRESSING of all, the Labour Party is so afraid of the City that it can't join in the debate (on the level of the pound).

So here we are, a matter of weeks before a general election, with an enormously important economic question buried by mutual consent." - letter from the Chief Executive of Courtaulds Textiles to the *Guardian*.

The stuff of McCarthyism

***Geoff King**, a member of the suspended Brighton Labour Party, leafs through the "evidence" which persuaded the NEC to refer 26 local Party members to the National Constitutional Committee for expulsion.*

DISTORTIONS, inaccuracies and downright lies make up much of the "evidence" presented to the NEC.

The dossier, prepared by Joyce Gould following her "investigation" last year, has now fallen into the hands of Friends of Brighton Labour Party. Much of it is a blend of vague rumour, innuendo and ancient history; old scores are settled and old obsessions dusted off. Some of it verges on paranoid fantasy.

Nonetheless, taken on balance, the whole of the evidence probably contains as much argument against as in favour of the disciplinary actions. Any neutral reader could hardly be left in doubt that there were two sides to the story and nothing conclusive enough to justify the drastic steps taken by the NEC. However, Joyce Gould's summary of the evidence fails utterly to reflect this balance. If she were a judge and these the proceedings of a law court, the case would be bound to fall on appeal because of her highly biased summing-up to the jury. Not that the NEC majority which backed her can be considered anything like twelve men and women "good and true" when it comes to such matters.

It is clear that "guilt" - as defined by those who wanted the investigation to further their own ends - had been decided well in advance. Thus far, the whole process of investigation and consideration of evidence is little short of farce. So feeble is much of the case that the National Constitutional Committee may well struggle to reach the verdict pre-determined for it by Walworth Road, especially if the cases are vigorously contested.

The one-sided nature of Gould's summary is significant given that most hard-pressed NEC members would probably have had little time, even if they had the inclination, to plough through all the original evidence. Her conclusions amount to little more than a simple repetition of the unsubstantiated claims of the likes of Brighton council leader Steve Bassam, whose motivation has been simply to rid the local Party of those councillors or members who have put up any opposition to his increasingly intolerant regime. He provided his own "hit-list" of 42, from which the 26 appear to have been chosen.

In his submissions, all consideration of the complex issues facing the local Party is lost. Instead, anyone who opposes any element of council policy is painted as an evil subversive seeking to sabotage the wonderful achievements of the town's first Labour council. There is an attempt to disguise the fact that what was really involved here was opposition to a few key council policies - such as cuts in jobs and services or the use of bailiffs to recover Poll Tax - that ran counter to both the democratically-determined views of the local Party and the promises made in the manifesto on which Labour won control.

There are lessons here in dealing with future "investigations". It is important to submit all evidence in full, written form, as Joyce Gould's summaries of oral testimony are so brief as to be distorted even with the best will in the world (and there certainly wasn't much of that).

However, even the most authoritative and detailed "defence" submissions will not guard against the intrusion of certain lunacies.

In the Brighton case, first prize for crazed paranoia must go to the Party member (who shall remain nameless) who produced several pages of arcane symbolism accompanying a breakdown of recorded GC votes which managed to divide all the delegates into two, neat, totally non-existent categories: those who recognise the Brighton Party as "part of a larger constitutional body" and those for whom - in this fevered imagination - it is regarded as "an autonomous revolutionary body".

Most of the evidence relied on by Gould and the NEC is a depressing collection of scraps of misinformation and petty anecdotes. The most insignificant incidents are made to sound deeply sinister. Typical of this nonsense is the claim that the Friends of Brighton Labour Party - a loose grouping formed to maintain some kind of inner-Party communication during the suspension and to argue against that suspension - is a conspiracy against the Party in general when it is in fact supported by a much larger cross-section of local members than the small minority who supported the suspension.

A number of those earmarked for expulsion have been picked purely for their activities after the Party was closed down - a denial of natural justice striking even by recent internal Labour Party standards.

Labour Briefing comes under attack. The number of "supporters" listed by Bassam is rather flattering, although this one-time *Briefing* contributor also dismisses the magazine as little more than a "minor irritant".

No, the root of all evil, it seems, is an unholy alliance between *Briefing* and *Militant*. That anyone could find Bassam's or Kinnock's policies and style of leadership unacceptable other than through devious manipulation appears unthinkable. If anyone votes or agrees with someone else who happens to read or sell a particular journal this must be the result of an alien conspiracy rather than of a valid or persuasive argument.

This is the stuff of true McCarthyism.

Bedfordshire: costs of coalition

THREE BEDFORDSHIRE Labour councillors have been expelled from the Party - for opposing the ruling Labour-Liberal coalition on the County Council which has closed old people's homes, laid off workers, and sold school playing fields.

All this was in defiance of local Labour Party policy. It seems in this case the "crime" was failure to follow Liberal Party policy!

Under new rules passed at the last annual conference covering councillors and the formation of unofficial "groups", the three - Robert Ross, Macolm Bailey and Mike Heathcote - have been thrown out of the Party without being charged with any specific offences, without the benefit of a hearing or the right of appeal.

Messages of support to: John Jefferson, Secretary, Bedfordshire County Labour Party, 55 Winchester Gardens, Luton, Beds., LU3 3UD; tel: 0582 583544.

What are they doing with our dosh?

Labour enters the general election campaign in an appalling financial mess. ***Mike Marqusee*** *and* ***Dave Palmer*** *have been looking at the books.*

AT THE December meeting of the NEC Larry Whitty revealed that the Party's deficit for 1991 would be £750,000, that costs on the national membership scheme had over-run by £400,000 and that the Party's overdraft with the Co-op Bank was heading for £2.5 million - up from £1.8 million in January 1990.

Luckily, there is a separate general election fund, set up at the insistence of the trades unions in 1988 and funded mainly by a slice of the trade union affiliation fees. Although this fund is running well behind forecasts and has already been raided for by-election and policy launch purposes, it is likely that the big unions will cough up whatever's needed when the time comes, though we will certainly be outspent by the Tories. God help us if we have to fight another general election within a year or two!

The short term crisis is caused by rapidly falling revenues (due largely to the failure of the national membership scheme) and heavy increases in spending on general election preparations.

But the financial malaise goes deeper than that.

Falling trade union membership has meant declining income from affiliation fees, despite yearly rises in the fee since 1988.

The unions have got into the habit of making direct one-off donations to Computers for Labour, the Labour Party Business Plan (which paid most of the computerisation costs at Walworth Road), Shadow Cabinet researchers and other facilities for the leadership. This has helped strengthen both the Parliamentary elite and the unaccountable power of trade union general secretaries.

Income from individual membership has also been declining, even before the national membership scheme.

Strangely, although in 1990 income was down by 2.6%, the Party claimed a 5.9% increase in membership. If the party had the paying members it claims, the income from their fees should have been £1,127,000 instead of the £957,000 listed in the accounts. Paid party membership was probably 50,000 less in 1990 than claimed. This inconsistency is nothing new, but the gap has been growing in recent years.

Nor is the Party's revamped fund raising programme all it's cracked up to be. The total net income for fund raising in 1990 barely covered that year's increases in expenditure in the Organisation and Campaigns and Communications Directorates.

In 1990 the Organisation Directorate accounted for 44% of all Party expenditure (up from 36% in 1984). Fourteen per cent of that is listed in the accounts as unitemised "other expenses", up from only 9% in 1984. In 1988 these "expenses" cost us £129,000; in 1989 £310,000. The further increase in 1990 makes it the single biggest growth area in the Party's budget.

Since expenses for the NCC and the investigations run by Joyce Gould are not listed elsewhere in the accounts, it can be assumed that most of these unitemised "expenses" are down to the witch hunt. One London-based member of the NCC took a £90 taxi ride from London to a hearing in the midlands - at our expense.

Worse yet, the proportion of the Organisation budget going on salaries has decreased from 78% in 1984 to 62% in 1990. This is one field where exactly the opposite tendency would be desirable; organising ought to be labour intensive.

In Campaigns and Communications (where spending tripled between 1984-1990) this trend would be welcome; we should be spending more on printing, postage, advertising, etc. and less on salaries. Unfortunately, where in 1984 (before the re-organisation of Walworth Road) 54% of the press and publicity budget went on salaries, in 1990, after five years of Mandelson, the proportion was up to 83%. No wonder there's always an anonymous "Labour Party spokeswoman" available to dish the dirt to the press on dissident Party members.

Labour Party News is a major drain on the Party's treasury, accounting for £169,000 of the Party's £289,000 deficit for 1990. Much of this is concealed by a sharp accounting practise which claims £220,000 income for *LPN* in the form of "CLP subscriptions". This is simply a straight forward subsidy from individual membership fees; no one is asked to take out a sub to *LPN*.

The leadership like to praise *LPN* for its fund-raising success and it's true that in 1990 the accounts show fund-raising income from *LPN* of £271,000. But all of it is swallowed up in funding *LPN* itself - the £169,000 loss comes on top of that! Do people who respond to *LPN* fund-raising drives know they are giving not to the Party but to *LPN*? In 1984, the reviled *Labour Weekly* accounted for 1% of total Party expenditure; in 1990 *LPN* accounted for 2.5%.

And how does anyone explain the £51,000 (not including the Youth and Student Officer's salary) the Party allegedly spent on youth activities in 1990 - up from £36,000 the year before?



Labour's second £500 a plate fund-raiser will be held on February 13th at the posh Park Lane Hotel in London. The "Spring Gala Dinner 1992" is being underwritten by the generous Ken Follett - and threatened by Class War! The last dinner, whose alleged success Walworth Road has been boasting about for months, featured a number of non-paying guests. One was MP Keith Vaz, who had told Party officials he didn't want to go and couldn't afford it. In the end he was prevailed on by the full-timers, who picked up his tab because they "needed someone" to nursemaid a table of rich Asian businessmen.

"Don't let the poisoned pen write off Labour left unity"

*That's the appeal from **John Nicholson**, former deputy leader of Manchester City Council and now co-chair of Labour Party Socialists, in response to the article by Vladimir Derer of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy in the last* Labour Briefing.

VLADIMIR DERER argues that "the left can regain" (yes, regain) "the leadership of the Party" but that to do so it must "prioritise issues which are potentially acceptable to Party members".

I have argued with him for some time that this amounts to the left jettisoning potentially unacceptable issues (and members), including the positive discrimination which Vladimir says he is "prioritising" through Labour Left Liaison. Vladimir argues that he "does not mean dropping 'unpopular' issues"; they remain "part of ongoing propaganda" (what?). But in reality, prioritising the acceptable means an "ongoing" deprioritising of the rest.

The previous history of CLPD within the Labour Party was highly praiseworthy and CLPD is well regarded by many ordinary Party members for this reason. However, its direction since 1987 has been distressing. Instead of attacking the right and using its considerable experience to help unite the left, CLPD spends far too much time attacking other left wingers.

In 1988 the attempt to create a regionally focused, broad based "Campaign for Socialism" out of the Benn-Heffer leadership challenge was subject to intense CLPD attacks. CLPD's own established principle of contesting all leadership elections was not matched by real support in the event for Benn and Heffer or for the attempt by the Campaign Group to use "Campaign for Socialism" - and through it the rank and file - in order to agree and promote future NEC slates. This would have meant real grass-roots influence over the MPs, but rather than bolster this development, CLPD allowed a tiny-minded sect within LLL to alienate non-aligned socialists around the country and the initiative collapsed.

"In a hung parliament we will call on socialist MPs to use their power in the interests of the working class"

This meant (and let's learn this lesson) the established "groups", although in some cases existing in name only, maintained whatever limited franchise on the left they had.

The "twin track" approach ("strategy" is a bit over the top) is a Socialist Movement one. It is not an LPS one and cannot be ascribed fairly to all those on the Labour left who disagree with CLPD. Vladimir does no one (on the left) any help by banging on about the Socialist Movement as if it was the most serious threat to the Labour Party since Ramsay MacDonald.

The behaviour by all organisations over this year's NEC slate was nonsensical. The after-the-event rationalisations have been worse still. The MPs may have been wrong in the way they drew up the slate (so what's new?) but having Dave Nellist on it, as one LPS National Committee member said at the time, gave us the first chance ever of a genuinely broad left slate. Moreover, we could have had a full slate of five left women for the Women's Section of the NEC, if we hadn't been busy competing over the CLP places.

CLPD compounded these difficulties by a backing a silly list ("credible candidates" is a long-held CLPD criterion; although I've always thought this problematic CLPD should at least stick to its own rules), and WAC, which CLPD always champions, excluded left women from its Women's Section slate. *Socialist Organiser* exploited LPS to undermine *Militant*, when the witch-hunt of Nellist was obviously imminent. *Briefing* has in my view exaggerated the "disastrous" nature of all this, but the lesson has to be that agreement on a slate requires wider involvement of socialists up and down the country, not narrower concentration on dwindling "national" sectarian fronts.

Vladimir is right about the importance of "positive discrimination" - but it seems some are more positive than others. The NCC slate, for example, was 100% white and male and there has never been any attempt to rotate delegates for the Conference Arrangements Committee CLP place (the present incumbent does a good job, but where does that leave the "prioritising" of positive discrimination?). The CLPD fringe meeting platform at conference ("Party not MPs") was littered with MPs, but excluded Corbyn and the witch-hunted Nellist, a point made by Audrey Wise among others on the floor, and by Benn and Skinner from the platform.

While the WAC-backed Anni Marjoram was prominent on the platform and got the chance to make a full speech and to reply to an attack from the floor, the "other women" (Purnell and Lloyd) were reduced to belated add-ons, and even that only after intervention behind the scenes.

CLPD's most recent excess is the attack on the Campaign Group MPs in the last *Briefing*. It was a mistake by *Briefing* to give it this degree of prominence. The piece was geared to alienate MPs, making them less likely to listen to anyone in the Party at large.

In a hung parliament we will call on socialist MPs to use their power in the interests of the working class. At this juncture we should therefore be giving the MPs every incentive to listen to the widest gathering of Party members, not alienating them in the interests of preserving an artificial stranglehold on left organisation.

Conference

Labour and the Economy
A Programme of Action

Saturday 25 January
11am-5pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC2
(Holborn tube)

Admission £5/£2 unwaged

Tower Hamlets: Liberal Council RIP?

IN THE next few weeks an election court will issue an order for at least seven Liberal Democrats in Tower Hamlets to stand down from the council.

The seven were elected in wards where the Liberals had distributed a fake "labour leaflet", replete with pledges to give homes to "Bangladeshis and squatters", during the May, 1990 elections.

In a first hearing over a year ago, Sir John Rowe QC, presiding over the special election court, ruled that the leaflet was acceptable because it was an accurate representation of things said by Labour politicians. He ordered the Labour activists who had made the complaint to pay the Liberals hefty costs.

This bizarre ruling came just two days after the NEC, with considerable publicity but without warning, decided to launch an investigation into the Tower Hamlets Labour Parties. This resulted in the expulsion of thirteen alleged Militants last summer.

Undeterred, three Tower Hamlets Party members insisted on appealing Rowe's decision and were rewarded at the end of last year when the High Court finally overturned it.

The court found that the counterfeit leaflet was indeed a "corrupt practice" which had created an "impediment to the free vote by virtue of a fraudulent advice". Significantly, it also directed the election court to apply the judgement to all others involved in the deception. These include eight other local Liberal councillors, among them the PPCs for the two Tower Hamlets constituencies. Rowe will now have to decide whether to throw the whole lot off the council.

Both the national Liberal and Labour Parties wanted to bury this dispute. Indeed, Walworth Road would have struck a deal with Ashdown if the local Party members hadn't insisted on proceeding with the appeal.

The Tower Hamlets party is now keen to get on with by-election preparations, including selection of candidates for what may prove an ideal opportunity to retake control of the council. But Walworth Road is proving uncooperative. The NEC has decided to treat these by-elections like Parliamentary by-elections (in other words, to give them the Hemsworth treatment).

An emergency LGC executive meeting in early January was told by regional officer David Wilkinson that the by-election panel would be vetted by the Regional Executive Committee. Some candidates were promptly excluded; others were asked to come for an interview; still others were passed without comment.

Not what's Best for Labour's health

IN EARLY January, Robin Cook declined to take part in a BBC Newsnight feature on the NHS - apparently because he was fed up with being asked to reconcile Labour's commitments to the health service and its Torier-than-thou fiscal conservatism. In his place appeared one Gordon Best, a paid adviser to Cook and one of those responsible for drawing up Labour's programme for the NHS.

A former director of the King's Fund (which gave the government advice on how to manage the health service), Best is well known among NHS professionals for a slavish devotion to managerialism and a belief in the power of bureaucracy to "improve" the service.

Best only joined the Labour Party when he began working on Labour's policy in 1987 (as an adviser to Michael Meacher). Best was, however, already known to local Party members in the north London borough of Haringey because of his activities on the District Health Authority. As a Tory government appointee, he voted in favour of the final closure of the Prince of Wales Hospital in Tottenham and, to the horror of Labour representatives on the authority, strongly supported the closure of a children's ward at St Ann's Hospital. Best publicly castigated the party members campaigning against the closure as "people unable to face realities".

As a freelance health policy consultant Best is reported to have given advice to NHS Chief Executive Duncan Nicol on the government's health "reforms" (opting out, etc.) even as he was working on Labour's alternative.

Not that there is any conflict of interest here. Best is an enthusiast for "competition" and in *Marxism Today* advised "socialists" to "use the market" to further their aims. In private, he is apt to tell people that many of the Tory NHS "reforms" are inevitable.

Despite his political inexperience and lack of any record of electoral work for the local Party (in 1987 he refused to vote for the left-wing Labour candidate in a local by-election), Best quickly rose to the heady heights of the LGC Executive. Though proving inept as LGC chair (ignorant of procedure and contemptuous of democracy), he used his position to offer the Labour Group leaders a steady stream of the same advice he peddles elsewhere - how to cut services, reduce costs and sack workers in the name of effective management.

It's been said that the legacy of Thatcherism is a host of "little Thatchers" in every nook and cranny of Britain's public life. The same could be said about the "little Kinnocks" who now populate the Labour Party at all levels. Best's career shows that sometimes the two are actually the same person.

The language of priorities

Overheard at a Manchester Town Hall gathering shortly after Kaufman's election to the NEC.

"Well, Gerald, where now?"

(Presumably the questioner expected some bon mot about world peace or a Labour victory ...).

"Now we can get those .....s in Rusholme and Fallowfield," was Kermit's reply, referring to two dissident wards in his Manchester Gorton constituency.

The poisonous Dr Jack

This month's Class Traitor is the polluters' pal, Labour's irradiated "Campaign Co-ordinator", ***John Cunningham MP.***

UNLIKE MP Austin Mitchell, Dr John Cunningham has always considered the title conferred on him by his Chemistry Phd a valuable political asset to be displayed as publicly as possible.

He is the son of Andrew Cunningham who for years ran the Northern Region of the old GMWU as a personal fiefdom and served on Labour's NEC. Following grammar school and Durham University, young "Jack" (as he likes to be called, at least by journalists) was given a paternal leg up on to the ladder of labour movement politics: in 1969 he was appointed a full-time regional officer for the GMWU in the North East. In the same year he was elected to Chester le Street District Council.

His father's personal power base was broken when he was arrested and imprisoned in 1973 for his involvement in the Poulson scandal.

Cunningham Sr.'s successor, Tom Burlison, now Deputy General Secretary of the GMB (and Labour NEC member), kept the union's political machine well-oiled and in 1974 ensured that Jack was returned to Parliament from the Whitehaven constituency (later renamed Copeland).

On entering the Commons Cunningham was quick to associate himself with James Callaghan's faction of traditional right-wing Labourites (as distinguished from the gang of Euro-philes and future defectors around Roy Jenkins). He was Callaghan's Parliamentary Private Secretary from 1974 to 1976, when he played a key role in his boss' successful campaign to succeed Harold Wilson. After a brief stint working in No.10, Cunningham was made an Under Secretary of State in the Department of Energy, where he remained until Labour's defeat in 1979.

From 1979 to 1983 Cunningham maintained a low profile as a junior opposition spokesperson on industry, devoting his energies to the Solidarity Group established by the Labour right in 1981 in response to the Bennite threat and the SDP breakaway.

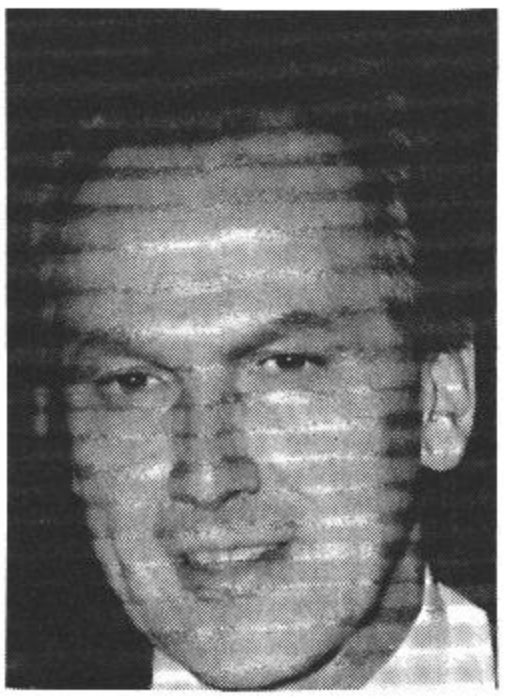
That same year he managed to save his seat by scuppering plans to redraw the constituency boundaries which would have left it with a Tory majority.

Dr Jack was elected to the Shadow Cabinet in 1983 and was surprisingly given the Environment portfolio. This placed him at the party's local government helm during the rate-capping struggle. Despite repeated votes in all party bodies affirming the strategy of non-compliance, Cunningham never spoke out publicly for it and did his best to sabotage it behind the scenes. In January 1985 he cancelled a promised "in depth" interview with *Tribune* on the subject after previously rescheduling it twice.

But he was not so shy when it came to acting as parliamentary advocate-in-chief for the nuclear industry. The Windscale/Sellafield nuclear processing plant is in Cunningham's constituency and he enjoys close links with the BNFL management. On his Commons office wall hangs a large framed photograph of the leukaemia-dispensing plant.

He fought a successful rearguard action over several years against repeated Conference attempts to commit the Party to the closure of nuclear reactors. His most difficult hour here came in 1986 when in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster the anti-nuclear clamour was at its height. For a while his Shadow Environment post seemed threatened. But it soon became apparent that Dr Jack had made himself indispensable to the leader. Kinnock went to extraordinary lengths to protect him from criticism - although he was forced to hand responsibility for environmental protection and green issues over to David Clark.

Cunningham retained his Environment job after the 1987 election defeat and was given command of Labour's campaign against the Poll Tax. "We will be calling for a national broad-based crusade against the Poll Tax. We are going to give the Tories hell," he promised, but as chair of the Party's unelected Local Government/ Poll Tax group he worked hand in glove with the leaders of Labour's new municipal right (Hodge, Betts, Beecham) to distance the Party from the insurgent anti-Poll Tax movement. At the 1988 conference he declared sternly that "even if there was a basis for a mass non-payment campaign, we wouldn't recommend it." This was perhaps more honest than the "soft left" line at the time, but the same could not be said for his speech in the Commons eighteen months later, when he (correctly) described the Tories' £140 Poll Tax cut financed by a rise in VAT as an "attempt to buy off the widespread and implacable people's opposition to the Poll Tax".



Cunningham revealed a deeply reactionary cast of mind in his response to the homophobic Section 28. Leading for Labour in the Standing Committee considering the proposal he initially supported it, and was only forced to recant following intense pressure.

In November 1989 Kinnock appointed him "Campaign Co-ordinator" and Shadow Leader of the House, although he had received the lowest vote of any MP elected to the Shadow Cabinet that year (winning backing from only 72 of his fellow Labour MPs).

In this capacity he oversees Labour's election, organisation and fund-raising machinery and behaves more like a domineering general secretary with a finger in every Party pie than Larry Whitty, whose authority seems to diminish by the month.

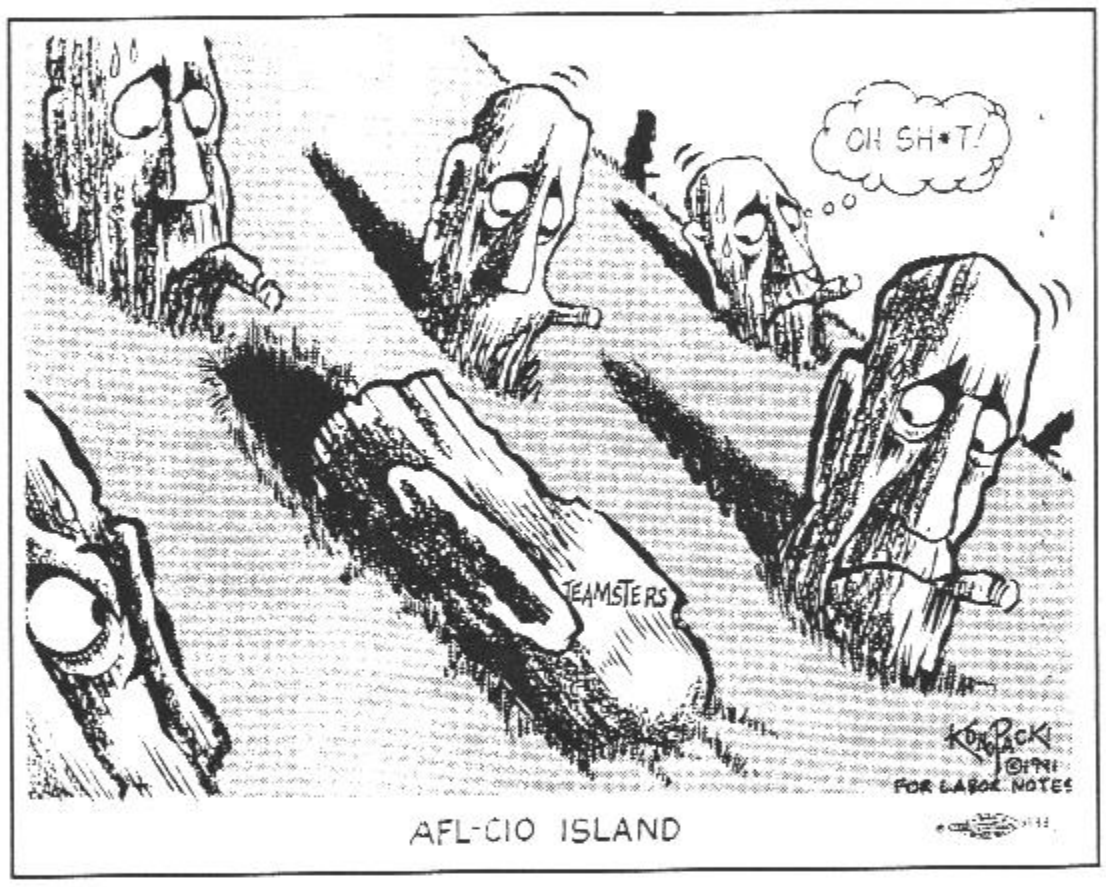
Cunningham chaired the "London Task Force" which was supposed to look into the Party's mixed results in the May 1990 council elections in the capital. He defended the London Party general secretary Terry Ashton, under attack from Hodge and the LCC, partly because Ashton was a well-connected GMB member and partly because he prefers the solid, traditional right-wing loyalists to the mercurial manoeuverers of the LCC. The only achievement of Cunningham's Task Force to date is the witch-hunt in Tower Hamlets, which resulted in thirteen expulsions last year.

Poor Jack is plagued with an unreliable parliamentary seat; his majority in 1987 was only 1,894. This means he will be forced to spend the general election in his own constituency, leaving his deputy Bryan Gould to chair the all-important daily London press conferences. At the moment it looks unlikely he will play a significant role in the election campaign, apart from supervising the Party's next £500 a plate piss-up.

Continued on page 35

US Teamsters throw out union bosses

In one of the biggest developments in US labour for over twenty years, Teamsters have voted out their notoriously corrupt leadership and voted in a new breed of rank-and-file based reformers. ***Mike Marqusee*** *investigates.*



WHEN THE votes in the first democratic elections in the US's second biggest union were counted (under the supervision of federal officers) on December 13th, the results astounded even the most optimistic of the reformers.

The old guard which had ruled the union and plundered its members at will for generations had been routed, despite its huge campaign expenditure, smear tactics and army of loyal local officials. The reform slate had won 48% of the votes in a 28% turn out, a hefty margin in a three-way race, and captured all sixteen of the positions it contested, giving it an overwhelming majority on the union's Executive.

The new president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters is Ron Carey, long-time leader of one of union's biggest "locals" with a reputation as an assiduous and incorruptible guardian of his members interests. He campaigned doggedly up and down the country, meeting groups of members small and large at all hours of the day and night.

The key to the reformers' victory lies, however, with the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, the rank-and-file group which provided the organisational muscle for the Carey campaign and played the leading role in shaping its strategy. Ten of those elected to the Executive on the Carey slate are TDU members, though Carey himself has always been careful not to join.

Under the old regime, the 1.55 million-strong union - based in the freight, transport and warehouse industries - had become a by-word for corruption, nepotism, collusion with management and reactionary politics. Four of its post-war presidents ended up in jail and its links with the mafia were infamous, as were the inflated salaries of its officials.

The election came about as a result of a 1989 out of court settlement of an anti-racketeering suit brought by the government.

The Justice Department, under pressure to "clean up" the Teamsters (which had backed both Reagan and Bush for the White House), originally planned to impose trusteeship on the union, but TDU organised against this and proposed instead a government-supervised secret ballots for all officials. The old guard, splintering under the pressure of repeated criminal investigations, had little choice but to agree.

Founded in 1976, TDU had been built in the face of leadership intimidation through years of often bitter and isolated struggle. What emerged was a remarkable network of seasoned grass-roots activists and local leaders. Today TDU boasts 10,000 paying members, with chapters all over the country and a national office in Detroit.

While democratic reform was always a focus, the TDU activists were clear from the start that they could only succeed if they coupled this with a militant approach on bread and butter issues, including opposition to sell-out national contracts and collusion between local union officials and employers.

TDU maintained an open internal regime in which a wide range of social and political issues were discussed. Early on it incorporated anti-racism and anti-sexism into its perspective. TDU co-chair Diane Kilmury (an NDP activist from British Columbia) was elected vice-president at large on the Carey slate; she is now the first ever woman member of the Teamsters' Executive.

TDU activists never looked to the federal government or the courts or the media for salvation. They were prepared to use all of these when it suited them, but they knew that the real power to see off the rotten bureaucrats lay with an alert, organised and self-confident rank-and-file.

Carey and his TDU allies now face daunting challenges.

There remains a sizeable middle layer of insulated old guard bureaucrats which must be cleaned out. Local and regional elections in the next few years will provide the reformers with the chance to do this. On the industrial front, the new leadership face a series of major contract negotiations with hostile employers.

The *Wall Street Journal* revealed that "many trucking and other employers are worried"; they consider Carey "an uncertain quantity, unwilling or unable to control his increasingly rebellious troops."

The reformers victory will have repercussions throughout the US labour movement. Its biggest immediate impact is likely to be in the United Auto Workers, where it has given a big boost to the insurgent New Directions movement.

"We need to make sure that this win has a ripple effect," said newly elected Executive member Bill Urman of Minneapolis. "Some of us on this slate will take positions on issues that go beyond the Teamsters and into the broader labour movement."

Kim Moody, Executive Director of the Detroit-based *Labor Notes*, summed up the situation for *Briefing*:

"Of course the TDU people face a lot of serious problems. There are clearly some limitations to Carey as an individual. But while Carey himself may be largely apolitical many of the people around him, including the TDU people on the Executive, are not.

"What's important is that it was such a clean sweep. And not just at the top. TDU is now winning control of more and more big locals so that they now have under their sway a substantial chunk of the union. Because of this they will be able to exert real pressure from below."

One day strike in Lambeth

Lambeth NALGO held one of its most successful one-day strikes on January 16th in protest at the council's decision to make two of its members compulsorily redundant.

Branch Secretary Caroline Hathaway told Briefing: "these two Nalgo members - both of whom are computer specialists - have been forced out of the council in spite of the fact that we have identified vacancies into which they should have been placed." During the day, the branch released one hundred helium-filled balloons to symbolise the hundreds of further redundancies now being threatened. Around 80% of the 5,000 Lambeth NALGO members went on strike - a show of strength that should make management think twice

Competition - for some!

The bizarre saga of the upkeep of the Royal Parks in London took a new turn recently. These parks (including Green Park, Hyde Park and St James) belong strictly speaking to the Crown but are effectively run as government departments. Heseltine decided to "privatise" them and over 600 workers were made redundant - apparently despite protests from the Queen Mother who did not want to lose her valued staff!

Putting the contract out to tender brought an interesting response. The Lewisham Council Park's DSO put in a bid, on the reasonable enough grounds that a large London Borough's workforce has more skills at running parks than any cowboy contractor could ever have.

Outraged by this turn of events, "Tarzan" decided it was time to rewrite the rules. From now on, council DSOs can only tender for public sector work. As Crown property the Royal Parks are not "public but government services" and therefore DSOs cannot bid! So much for the free market and value for money.

Barr & Stroud

Workers at Glasgow armaments manufacturers Barr & Stroud went on strike after 24 compulsory redundancies were announced, affecting the union convenor and over a dozen shop stewards. The workforce has been cut from 1,100 to 400 over the last three years and this victimisation was the final straw.

Southwark finance strike

Around 200 Southwark NALGO members from the finance department are on strike against the compulsory redundancy of nine colleagues.

The indefinite strike action is being taken in order to block the latest in a series of cutbacks in the workforce designed to keep Southwark's Poll Tax at the surprisingly low figure of £189. Branch Secretary Nick McLaughlin believes that "the Borough Treasurer has apparently identified the compulsory redundancies so that he can show he is setting an example to other departments in the Borough."

The strike has proved solid, with not one member returning to work, and the Branch has appealed for solidarity from the trade union movement in Southwark. Picket lines are at the Computer Service Department outside 29 Peckham Road, London SE5 (where outside consultants are reportedly costing the council £100 a day each) and at the Finance Building in Spa Road, SE15.

A Nalgo member told Briefing that "management appears to have no desire to settle". The dispute is expected to run and run. Southwark Nalgo can be contacted at 34 Peckham Road, London SE5 8PX (Tel 071 525 7663).

Rogers the scab

A number of major building industry employers are keen to set up house with the EETPU's "construction section", formed last year to split UCATT following left victories in the UCATT Executive elections.

Contract Journal reveals that "about a dozen leading industrial relations directors recently attended secret talks at London's Langham Hotel, where a strong case was argued that dealing with the EETPU is the way forward for the industry." Attending the secret talks as an "industrial advisor" to the Amec Group, one of the country's biggest building firms, was Jack Rogers - deposed last year from his UCATT executive seat by left-winger Peter Lenehan and until October a member of Labour's NEC.

Rodney Bickerstaffe - Nutritional Superstar

NUPE Head Office in Woolwich were surprised to get a phone call from Pace Services Plc (a subsidiary of P&O which currently holds catering contracts in Dorset, Buckinghamshire and Merton) asking urgently for a copy of the union's "nutritional guidelines" issued to shop-stewards to monitor their workplaces.

Apparently the wretched contractors did not have a clue about whether the fare they were dishing up in various schools and homes met any of the existing guidelines and NUPE was the only source from which they could get such info free.

News from Wales

The Point of Ayr colliery, North Wales' last pit, is to axe 200 of its remaining 400 workers.

Social Security offices in Wales took part in a day of action in support of striking CPSA members at Newtown, Powys.

The strike has lasted over three months now in what has become a bitter battle over staffing levels.

The Welsh TUC staged a "Citizens' Poll" on December 7th to give the public of Wales a chance to show what they thought about hospital opt-outs. The result: against 73,144, for 3,094.

Bus crews face assault

Bus driving remained one of the most dangerous jobs in Britain in 1991, with nearly 1000 out of the 16,000 drivers and conductors in London being victims of assault. This compares to just 813 out of 28,000 Met police officers attacked in the same period.

In Manchester, assaults were up 10% on the previous year, and in Yorkshire they have trebled since 1987. Peter Gibson, a bus driver from Croydon and Chair of the TGWU's regional passenger services committee, comments that, "As services are cut and fares are increased, often at double the rate of inflation, the bus crews become the punchbags for the public's exasperation, resentment and frustration."

London Health Emergency

London hospitals are in for a harsh new year, reports London Health Emergency. Every London District is facing problems in either revenue or capital financing despite last year's so called "steady state".
The government is in a tailspin over the NHS reforms with key opt-outs, the internal market and capitation funding all on hold until after the election.
After the election, the brakes will be taken off with three major London units, St Thomas's, Charing Cross and the West Middlesex at risk of early bankruptcy.
Further information from LHE at 446 Uxbridge Road, London W12 0NS.

Unpleasant to touch?

The new year brings a new Briefing competition: name the most boring trade union journal.

A quick survey of the latest postal arrivals in the Briefing office reveals a new GMB journal featuring a Steve Bell cartoon in glorious colour on the front page; despite the politics, it's a snappy and effective paper. The hard-hitting red and black magazine Fire Fighter (FBU) is somewhat more strident and stilted, but useful. The NCU Journal has been relaunched as an exact replica of the much-lauded NUPE Journal and is informative and well designed.

For sheer variety and general all-round interest, however, the AEU Journal is miles ahead of the others, much as we hate to admit it.

The first month's nomination for the most boring title has to go to KFAT ("it's-our-name-and-we're proud-of-it") News. For dismal layout and lack of style, nominations go to the new GPMU Journal (despite what must be a wealth of talent among its members) and - without a train-spotter in sight - ASLEF's Locomotive Journal. Send your nomination for the journal that's the biggest waste of union subs (special awards for "most-photos-of-the-General-Secretary" and "most-gratuitous-mention-of-Norman-Willis") to Briefing.

In the words of a GPMU member writing to her new union journal: "With regard to the first edition of the new Journal, you asked for comments. Awful is the first thing that springs to mind. It was even unpleasant to touch!"

Merger undermined

THE LONG-PLANNED merger of the TGWU with the NUM is under threat.

When Ron Todd initiated discussions with Arthur Scargill several years ago he indicated that after the merger there would be a single energy trade group within the TGWU and that Scargill would be at its head with the title of Assistant General Secretary (AGS).

Negotiations were put on ice while the TGWU wrestled with elections for General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary. At the same time, Scargill and the NUM came under heavy attack from the media, with the approval of the Labour leadership.

A few months ago talks resumed with Bill Morris at the helm. Unlike Todd, Morris is hostile to the NUM and its politics and is threatened by the idea of having a strong and independent figure like Scargill as his number three. Nonetheless, the NUM leadership remained keen on the merger and its strategy was backed at last summer's NUM conference.

After much delay, the TGWU came up with a ten page document in December. It guaranteed all NUM officials continued salary and employment, but stipulated that the NUM president would become a Trade Group Secretary (not AGS) in charge of a new mining section which, it was promised, would eventually become a full-blown energy section after a ballot of the members concerned. Union members at the UK Atomic Energy Authority and British Nuclear Fuels were to be excluded from the new trade group.



These terms were endorsed by the TGWU General Executive Council and widely publicised.

To the NUM leadership they seemed a clear attempt to marginalise Scargill and sabotage the long-held dream of a powerful industrial organisation uniting all energy workers.

The NUM Executive rejected the proposals and made counter-proposals, maintaining that their president should become an AGS and that there should still be a single energy group.

Morris responded by calling up Fleet Street journalists (including Terry Pattinson of the *Mirror*, chief purveyor to Robert Maxwell of smears against the NUM) and told them the NUM's demands were "unreasonable".

In fact they were nothing of the kind.

The NUM's membership may have slumped dramatically due to pit closures, but the union remains a substantial organisation by anyone's standards. It would bring £30 million worth of assets to a merger with the TGWU, which has only £70 million. In addition, its status in the labour movement and its active core of lodge officials make it a good deal more than just another small union on its knees waiting for salvation from a bureaucratic big brother. Even the right in the NUM rejected the TGWU proposals because they regarded them as demeaning to the NUM.

They recall that Eddie Haigh became an AGS and even got a seat on Labour's NEC after he brought his Dyers union into the TGWU fold.

Of course, Kinnock wants the NUM ostracised from the labour movement and would stop at nothing to deny Scargill any position of influence.

As yet the TGWU Broad Left, which is supposed to have a majority on the union's executive, has done nothing to ensure that the merger goes ahead.

GMB pays out for members

The thrusting, go-ahead General Secretary of the GMB, John Edmonds, a former Briefing Class Traitor of the Month, has been caught out again over a shoddy deal with LABOUR TRAIN, a dubious agency operating in the construction industry.

The GMB was awarded a sweet-heart single-union deal with this firm in return for a secured loan made by the union. The deal has the unique feature that the employer writes to all the workforce telling them that they have been enrolled in the union and will have subs deducted. If they do not agree, they have to go to the office and sign a form opting-out!

UCATT, under the discredited Albert Williams regime, had a similar deal but pulled out when the new left Executive was elected. Now the GMB has stepped in to buy up a few members. UCATT told *Briefng* that it had lent £30,000 to the agency but only got 400 totally disenchanted "members" in return.

Apparently the GMB is not so picky.

Tanks and Drums - still out

Ninety-six TGWU members at the Tanks & Drums firm in Liverpool are now in the tenth month of strike action.

The dispute arose over a pay claim which resulted in thirty workers (including all the shop stewards) being made redundant. The workers refused to accept this, balloted and went on strike. The company then sacked all those on strike.

Although the TGWU has made the strike official, the T&G Solidarity Group reports that "the courage and commitment of the 96 strikers has been badly let down by the union bureaucracy and officials who have done little to even publicise the strike let alone mobilise support for it."

In the absence of a national financial appeal organised by Transport House, labour movement bodies are urged to send donations and offers of support to: Vinny Tuzio, Senior Steward, Tanks & Drums Dispute, c/o TGWU, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool, L3 8EQ (cheques to 'TGWU-Tanks & Drums'); tel: 051 480 7263.

Inland Revenue's unusual industrial action

The 54,000 members of the IRSF (the union for tax-collectors) voted by over four-to-one in a ballot in the middle of December to take a new 1990s form of action called "working to charter". Taking John Major's blather about putting the public first, the union agreed to carry out to the letter all the demands of the "Citizens' Charter" by offering information whether it was asked for or not, wasting hours explaining gobbledegook to each other and generally being officious. As a result whole areas of tax collection are grinding to a halt and the union is refusing to review the position until the £10 million its members are owed has been paid.

Unequal - even in redundancy

The Yorkshire NUM is challenging discrimination in redundancy suffered by women ancillary and catering staff.

These women have had their redundancy pay reduced by one fifth of the total for every year they work over the age of 55. Thus when they reach 60, no redundancy money is payable. Men, on the other hand, find themselves subject to this penalty only after the age of 59.

Because redundancy money and pensions are deemed "pay" under European Community regulations, the decision could be challenged as discriminatory under EC law. The NUM is now pursuing a test case on the issue.

Searchlight accuses *Briefing* of "knife in the back"

***Graeme Atkinson**, European editor of* Searchlight *magazine, answers the allegations made by **Larry O'Hara** in the October* Labour Briefing.

LARRY O'HARA'S latest cheap tirade is so full of holes it is difficult to know where to begin. I shall try to deal with his inaccuracies in order.

First, the Jewish Awareness Group meeting at the Ilford synagogue a year ago was not chaired by Gerry Gable.

Secondly, we did not print the Newham Monitoring Project's two letters and the statement from Black groups because they contained gross inaccuracies; for example, the bizarre claim that we refused to name the Black Nationalists working with Patrick Harrington's wing of the National Front. In fact, we published the names in both *Searchlight* itself and the pamphlet "From Ballots to Bombs".

Ray Hill was right to question the existence of some of the groups that signed the statement. Some do not exist in any meaningful political sense; some are extremely sectarian and we remain to be convinced that all its signatories were even asked if their names could be used.

Next, if O'Hara doubts whether it is true that the London allies of Al Sharpton do not want to work with white anti-fascists, why doesn't he go and ask London Anti-Fascist Action about its experience with these people?

As for the *Searchlight* July editorial, we stand by our position that it is hardly wise to launch fierce verbal attacks on the police in situations like the Nazi riot that erupted in Bermondsey when, because of sheer political incompetence, one is then forced to rely on them for protection against a racist mob.

The hoary old 1977 "Gable Memorandum" story is dredged up once more and reveals O'Hara's pitiful ignorance of the history of both Gerry Gable and *Searchlight* magazine.

However, the 1986 *International Times* interview is something else. In that case, a number of journalists who were engaged in researching the more dubious activities of British intelligence were visited by a Black journalist who said he was working for the resurrected 1960s *IT* which, rather like O'Hara, appeared from nowhere.

Operating out of an office near Charing Cross Road, the set-up had an agent of the Samoza family hanging around. *IT*'s journalist lied about his own credentials to get interviews and claimed to have information he did not have. Subsequently, he - and *IT* - vanished without trace.

Yes, *Searchlight* was critical of *Class War* supporters going on the streets with members of the National Front on "Stop the City" demonstrations. Should we not be? It is not true that *Searchlight* provided no evidence on this. In fact, we did so twice.

First, in April 1986, I spent two days in the Newham Monitoring Project office compiling a dossier which was then posted, from the postbox almost immediately outside the office, to then AFA executive member John Penney. The dossier disappeared without trace and was never put before the executive meeting.

Second, because my colleague Gerry Gable was unable to attend the AFA executive meeting he personally went to Newham Monitoring Project, photocopied the material and handed it directly to a member of the AFA executive to take to the meeting.

The first we heard of its non-arrival was when a story started circulating that we had attacked *Class War* without evidence. There are two ways of looking at this. The first is that the recipients of the material forgot it and were too embarrassed to tell us and their comrades in AFA. The second, I leave to readers.

As for animal rights and squatters, let's make some things clear. Is it or is it not true that the wife of the Nazi November 9th Society fuhrer Terry Flynn was slung out of a key position in the BUAV? She has not been the only case, either. This does not mean we denounce the BUAV, merely that we expose - as we have done with the trade unions and all the main political parties - fascist and Nazi "moles" within their ranks.

Exactly the same applies to squatters, who have included fascists like the Islington gang which included Nicky Crane and other well known Nazi thugs.

O'Hara also trawls through the dispute with the SWP over the 1989 Blair Peach commemoration march. He wrongly claims that Blair was an SWP member at the time of his murder by police. The fact is that Blair had actually been suspended from SWP membership at the time because his organisation regarded him as too militant an anti-fascist. The SWP's activities around the 1989 demonstration were divisive.

Finally, we are not in the least surprised that sections of the police show an interest in anti-fascist groups. They do this because all too often they equate anti-fascism with fascism.

However, not a single accusation about Searchlight's "intelligence connections" holds water.

O'Hara should look at Gerry Gable's and *Searchlight*'s track record. In the 1960s, Gerry Gable was so badly beaten by police officers that he still today suffers from the internal injuries he received.

In the 1970s, he made several programmes bringing police corruption to light. Also, in the 1970s, the magazine published the first documentary evidence exposing far-right establishment plots against Heath and Wilson.

In the 1980s, he co-produced the TV programmes "M15's Official Secrets" and "Spying for the Comrades", both of which exposed British Intelligence.

Throughout the 1980s both Gerry Gable and *Searchlight* have been exposing the far-right links of British Intelligence: the Roberto Fiore case, the secret "Gladio" operation, the cover-up of war criminals in the UK and Klaus Barbie's involvement with the intelligence underworld.

Gerry Gable is currently awaiting trial on a serious charge arising from incidents at a neo-Nazi rally last May. Of course, he is being treated this way because of his "suspect links with the secret state".

Anti-fascists both in Britain and abroad are appalled at the knife in the back tactic of *Labour Briefing* in publishing O'Hara's collection of smears.

■ **The above is an edited version of Graeme Atkinson's reply.**

Reclaiming a Victorian radical

The Militant Democracy: Joseph Cowen and Victorian Radicalism, *by Nigel Todd, published by Bewick Press, 132 Claremont Road, Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear, NE26 3TX.*

"HALF IF not a whole Communist and a jolly fine fellow," wrote Engels of Joseph Cowen, a Tyneside Radical unselfishly active during the great struggles of the mid-to-late nineteenth century which shaped the political topography and democratic norms of European statehood and set the future of working class organisations.

Nigel Todd reclaims Cowen from those historians who have packaged the man as either a mainstream radical/liberal concerned to incorporate the working class into the body politic of the state or an architect of Liberal hegemony over the emergent labour movement.

Todd reveals Cowen as a politician who not only worked closely with and enjoyed the respect of radical workers and European revolutionary nationalists, but who also had a vision of a future and better society.

Cowen had money and lots of it. He used his wealth and social standing in the cause of European revolutionary nationalism, including in Ireland, and on behalf of the British working class. He set up the daily *Newcastle Chronicle* which became a campaign and educational tool (and sometimes a strike bulletin), giving a voice to radical and exiled journalists.

For over forty years wherever there was struggle, Cowen was in on it. He ran guns for Polish and Italian nationalists, served as an MP for Newcastle (singled out for particular hatred by Queen Victoria) and engaged in fierce conflict with the eventually victorious Chamberlain faction of the Liberals.

But he died in 1900 politically, emotionally and physically broken.

Engels was impressed by Cowen, in particular by his refusal to desert the Irish struggle, and preferred him to other possible leaders of an alliance which he and Marx were trying to put together between radical politicians and the trade unions.

Cowen chaired the founding conference of this Democratic Federation but broke shortly afterwards possibly - explains Todd - because of personal hostility to the obnoxious bourgeois Hyndman as well as a hostility to tight organisations.

Engels was right to say that Cowen was not a communist. But neither was he a liberal - by "inclination nor taste". His practice placed him head and shoulders above his contemporaries.

The conflict within the Liberals over Ireland's destiny seems to have contributed to wearing out Cowen. His principled opposition to the Coercion Bill cut him off from some of his north east base and made him the subject of great hatred amongst his parliamentary colleagues.

Bourgeois liberalism won out over Cowen's radicalism and he never went fully over to the new socialist movement. He seems to have been disorientated by the changing world. He defended the Fenians but in his later years he was with the imperial tide.

With hindsight it's easy to see that Cowen's politics lacked the vital ingredient of an understanding of wage-slavery and private property. But it's not as if Cowen was presented with a rounded Marxism which he rejected. Indeed "capitalism" as a noun depicting a specific historical period does not appear in Marx until the mid 1870s.

Had Cowen not been impaired by mysterious ill health and had he not endured the tormenting faction fight within the Liberals perhaps his contact with developing working class politics would have led him to resolve the conflicts he identified within the co-operative movement.

Cowen's story is important. Right now, with the international crisis of our class and movement, honourable moments of our history need to be preserved, rediscovered or reclaimed. We have precious little to draw upon to reinforce us and point us to the future.

Heather Hawkwood

Okri's uneasy prize-winner

The Famished Road, *Ben Okri (Jonathan Cape, £13.99)*

A child of the spirit world, a fluid dimension which knows no boundaries, decides at birth to linger in the harsher and more exacting world of everyday realities. Coming down to earth with a bump, he finds himself born into a poor family, scrubbing a painful existence in a world of colonial corruption and exploitation.

Ben Okri's Booker Prize winner is a colourful, freewheeling blend of fact and fantasy, moving easily (if disorientatingly) from one level of reality to another. The label "magic realism" may be overworked, but it is difficult to avoid applying it to The Famished Road.

Okri is perhaps at his best in evoking the chaotic texture of a society caught midway between "modernising" dynamics such as deforestation and the arrival of electricity for the rich few and a more resonant mythological structure.

Geoff King

The Pogues at Brixton Academy

FOR THOSE of us who grew up politically in the days when the Clash were playing Anti-Nazi League gigs, tne chance of seeing Joe Strummer fronting the Pogues on stage was too good to miss. The Brixton Academy, with a predominantly young, Irish crowd (and how many gigs do you see these days with thousands of people and even the band really enjoying themselves) was a perfect setting for the Irish band's irreverent mix of new and old styles. And where else would you hear a song introduced as "this one's by Kirsty McColl's dad"?

Dirty Old Town and many more had a singalong, holiday crowd in high spirits. The streamers and fireworks helped, but even on an icy December evening, this band would have electrified its audience without any props.

"Have you no Shane?" demanded one fan's banner. Well, no, but they've got a replacement in Joe Strummer who can actually finish a gig. At twelve quid a time, the audience deserves that. "I Fought the Law" was an apt encore for an Irish band playing the Academy, just half a mile from a successful Republican breakout from Brixton Prison, though maybe they should have changed the bit about "and the law won"!

Kevin Flack

Through the wrong end of the telescope

The Crop Circle Enigma,
edited by Ralph Noyes, Gateway Books, £14.95.

AS ARTHUR C. Clarke remarked in his famous TV Programme on mysteries, "They're onto something, but God-only-knows what!"

The amazing appearance of flattened circles in cereal fields, mainly in southern England, throughout the 80s and 90s has attracted its fair share of spiritualists, water diviners, "new age" magicians and various other idiots. It has also attracted scientists - meteorologists with talk of "mini-whirlwinds" and physicists with discussions on plasma vortices.

Because this book aims to be "all-embracing" it gives a lot of space to rubbish about Glastonbury, "ley-lines" and the particularly stupid theses about UFOs and LGMs ("Little Green Men").

However, because something attracts a variety of cranks does not mean there is not something there that needs investigating. Many parts of conventional science were once dismissed as fantastic. Wegener's theory of "Continental Drift" is now part of orthodox geology and the Alvarez catastrophe finishing off the dinosaurs is becoming acceptable to paleontology.

That exquisitely beautiful patterns have appeared etched in fields of wheat (and sometimes barley and rye) overnight is a fact. However, as someone remarked about the canals on Mars, "They are a product of conscious intelligence - it just depends which end of the telescope the intelligence is". Some corn circles are clearly the product of intelligence. No plasma vortex creates itself in the shape of a tadpole, a swastika or a celtic cross!

Yet if all the circles are the product of hoaxers, we are faced with a massive and far-ranging conspiracy indeed. Over 2,000 have been found, mainly in Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire (Hardy's "Wessex") but some in Scotland and even reports from as far away as Canada. They occur in a variety of crops and areas - the book even finds a reference to one in 1746, that was naturally attributed to "Old Nick" and his works.

Perhaps scientists were the wrong people to send in to investigate.

Uri Geller succeeded in hoaxing prominent scientists even though all his tricks have been easily duplicated by professional magicians and conjurers. Harry Houdini spent the last years of his life exposing (and copying!) the various "mediums" and occultists of Victorian England, who duped brilliant investigators like Conan Doyle!

I suggest the truth behind corn circles is rather different. There is some natural force that does occasionally produce the genuine item - and whether this is related to "ball lighting", methane "will o'the wisps" or something entirely new is worth investigating.

Even more interesting would be an examination of the motives of the hoaxers, who have created patterns of design worthy of an Arts Council grant. If these people put the same energy into socialist politics, revolution would be just round the corner!

Keith Veness

Verso in brief

Jeremy Baskin's ***Striking Back: a history of COSATU*** (Verso, £12.95 paperback) is a serious and highly readable 500-page study of the growth of South Africa's largest trade union federation from 460,000 to 1.2 million members in five years.

It is at its best when telling the story of struggle: the NUM stoppage after the Kinross mining disaster; the successful rail strike of 1987, which led to a police raid on COSATU House; the miners' strike which ended in retreat; the June 1988 stayaway involving three million workers; and finally the more contradictory period following the release of Mandela in early 1990.

Baskin is less successful on the political issues behind trade union divisions and his treatment of the smaller NACTU federation is one-sided. COSATU, he claims, stood for really independent trade unionism taking a middle road between "workerism" and the ANC'S Freedom Charter. But at the very end he admits, "COSATU was the voice of the ANC when the ANC could not openly speak."

Overall, though, this a thorough attempt to tackle a period of working class politics packed with incident and lessons for the future. Which is more than can be said of **Without Fear of Being Happy: Lula and the Workers Party of Brazil**, by Emir Sader and Ken Silverstein (Verso, £10.95 paperback), a lightweight pot-boiler on the phenomenal rise of the Brazilian Workers Party, whose candidate Lula secured 31 million votes and narrowly lost to Collor in the 1989 presidential election run-off.

There's a fair journalistic account of Lula's rise from trade union activist to Workers' Party founder and leader, of the party's commitment to land reform and its electoral gains.

But the book's focus on electoral performance crowds out any real study of the growth of the party among rural workers or of its diverse inner life. The authors' catalogue of dirty tricks by Collor against the party is eye-opening but rather superficial, and it's left to a short interview with Lula in the appendix to offer a glimpse into the creative and flexible approach which is the key to the Workers' Party's success.

Some newspapers on the left seem quite enthused about the essays on the fall of Communism collected in **After the Fall** (edited by Robin Blackburn, Verso, £10.95 paperback) but I found them disappointing, showing just how unreconstructed the so-called New Left remains. Few depart from the level of arid armchair generalities and many actually seem nostalgic for the Cold War. Miliband's discussion of the need for a real separation of powers under socialism is characteristically sharp, but even Blackburn's substantial essay on socialism and the market seems timid in its conclusions. If Hobsbawm, Habermas and Halliday are the theoretical way forward, the future looks bleak indeed.

Mike Phipps

PERISCOPE

Spirit of '68

Another triumph for the national membership scheme.

In December 1990, inspired by Christmas, a south London man decided it was time to join the Labour Party. He filled in his application form and posted it off before the New Year.

Before he could blink, in September, 1991, he received his first **membership card**. He scrutinised this precious document, as anyone would, and discovered that it gave the date he first joined the Party as July, 1968, when he was two years old.

Sign up for democracy

Charter 88 supremo **Anthony Barnett** has come up with a novel way of meeting the ever-so-polite requests for just a little internal democracy, please, voiced at the Charter 88 jamboree in Manchester a few months ago.

His brainwave is to use the computer records of Charter 88 supporters to generate randomly the names of two member "representatives" who would then be invited to attend meetings of the (unelected, self-appointed) executive body - without voting rights, of course.

Briefing has decided to launch a campaign for the democratic reform of Charter 88's anachronistic constitutional set-up and is now collecting signatures for an advert in the *Guardian*.

Who's not celebrating?

Not seen or heard among those celebrating the vindication of the Tottenham Three was Labour's spokesperson on legal affairs (and putative Attorney General in a Kinnock government) **John Morris QC MP**.

Morris was Engin Raghip's barrister in the original 1987 Blakelock murder trial. He had little faith in his client's case and repeatedly urged him to plea bargain with the prosecution.

Of course, he is not the only Labour big-shot unable to cope with the victory of the Tottenham Three.

David Blunkett on BBC's *Question Time* on the night Engin and Mark Braithwaite were released said that it would be a pity if "one or two" misbehaving police officers were to discredit the force (DC Melvin was Head of the Met's Serious Crime Squad when he framed Winston Silcott and was promoted to its Organised and International Crime Squad on the basis of his work in the Broadwater Farm investigation).

Blunkett also opposed any "rush" to amend the Police and Criminal Evidence Act to prevent future prosecutions based on uncorroborated confessional evidence.

And we mustn't forget **Roy Hattersley** who refused for many years to speak out for the Tottenham Three. Even after the Home Secretary had referred the Raghip case back to the appeal court he cancelled a meeting with the Three's lawyers when he learned that family members planned to attend as well. "Choose Freedom", indeed!

The coming period...

What does 1992 have in store for us?

Briefing's resident Marxist gazes into the crystal ball.

February: The AEU/EETPU opens merger talks with the CBI. *Tribune* comes off the fence and declares itself firmly against the Suez War. All Labour Party members with a scouse accent are suspended. Alan Bleasdale is imposed as candidate in Liverpool Broad Green. Carol Thatcher speaks at Poll Tax non-payment rally. Militant's "Welsh Turn" is leeked by the Guardian. Socialist Worker's pension fund disappears, as does Tony Cliff.

March: Faroe Islands win World Cup qualifier against Germany.

Tribune is proscribed for its anti-war stance; *Briefing* donates old typewriter to Tribune defence fund. Lol Duffy selected by local Party as Labour candidate for Wallasey; NEC imposes Lynda Chalker; *Socialist Organiser* declares it will work for the imposed Labour candidate. *Briefing* comes out with no articles on local government. General election called. The *socialist* calls for a vote for Labour, Plaid Cymru, SNP, Greens, Liberals and the SDLP in West Belfast.

April: *Tribune* pension fund discovered in Nigel Williamson's locker at the *Times:* a woolly hat and two blankets. Mystery multi-millionaire buys Faroe Islands. *Briefing* sacks Editor for being American and therefore an agent of CIA. Labour's national membership scheme reveals total membership of 517; Neil Kinnock does not appear on computer list: "it was my fault - I sent a cheque to Walworth Road."

General election produces hung parliament; government of national unity is formed. The only Labour Minister is Peter Mandelson MP (Minister of Propaganda).

May: Government collapses after extensive leaks in *Guardian* of goings on before, during and after cabinet meetings. Proportional representation introduced. Michael Heseltine accepts invitation to lead Green Party. Hunting of whales declared illegal in Faroe Islands. Left groups call Unity Conference.

Tribune closes itself down at request of NEC. Its editor is appointed chief of *Faroe Islands Weekly*. Labour's national membership scheme declared "total success" by John Evans; all 517 members found to have been paid for by personal cheque signed by Roger Godsiff.

June: Left Unity Conference postponed due to failure to agree on venue. Green vote trebles in local elections; Ken Livingstone accepts Heseltine invitation to become Deputy Leader. Tom Sawyer declared General Secretary of new merged public service union; Rodney Bickerstaffe found bound and gagged in broom cupboard by privatised cleaner.

Paul Foot discovers Robert Maxwell and Tony Cliff alive and well in Faroe Islands. *Daily Mirror* prints the story under headline: "The blood-sucking leech that saved the Mirror". *Mirror* editor claims never to have met Maxwell. *Socialist Worker* editor claims never to have met Cliff.

July: 'Keep Sunday Special' campaign awarded the *Briefing* "We Were Smashed" trophy at its AGM; Ken Livingstone declared Class Traitor of the Year. *Socialist Worker* changes slogan to 'Neither Washington Nor Faroe Islands'. Left Unity Conference rescheduled for August 15th in London, August 16th in Birmingham, August 17th in Manchester.

August: Thousands of Faroe Islands boat people land in Shetlands.

Scoop!

If you occasionally see an item in *Briefing* you think isn't really newsworthy, remember you could be reading *The People*, which recently ran a fascinating exclusive which we are proud to reprint in full:

"The **Queen Mother** lost a shoe and almost fell on one knee when she stumbled after a service at Portsmouth cathedral yesterday. She quickly recovered and walked on."

Thanks to...

Paul Browning, Tony Link and Lewisham *Briefing* supporters for raising £48 for Briefing at the Christmas Fair at Lewisham Labour Club.

Labour in the relegation zone

*From the terraces...**Arthur Chandler** despairs of Labour's "Charter for Sport", unveiled at the customary fancy press launch last autumn.*

THE FIRST page of the introduction to Labour's Charter for Sport is to the subsequent pages what a lovingly prepared hors d'oeuvre is to a stale cheese sandwich. "Sport in Britain is in urgent need of new ideas," the Charter declares, then proceeds to demonstrate conclusively that Labour doesn't have any.

By an ingenious use of large photographs and blank spaces, Walworth Road has managed to spread this Charter over fifteen pages containing no real commitments, apart from the extension of mandatory rates relief to sports clubs and the provision of swimming lessons to all children under eleven. But, we are warned, "not everything can be done at once, particularly where government is involved". So even these minimal gestures may have to wait.

The Charter promises that the financing and taxation of sport will be "reviewed" to ensure that a greater proportion of money taken out of sport will go back into sport. This may have something to do with the football pools, but who knows? It seems to imply greater public spending on sport, but on what? When? And how much?

A Labour government will apparently "back" British bids for the Olympics, the World Cup and other major sporting events. If this implies cash backing then it could well be wasted money. It costs millions to even put in even a half-hearted Olympic bid, money surely better spent elsewhere. A World Cup is simply a non-starter; there are no stadiums big enough and no plans to build them.

The rest of the document is so non-committal and vague as to be almost a work of genius. The recent Home Affairs Committee reports on football and horse racing will be given "careful consideration". An adequate supply of PE teachers in schools will be "ensured". Tory policies on Local Management of Schools and Compulsory Competitive Tendering have damaged school sport; so LMS will be "reviewed" and CCT will be replaced with "our quality programme".

Spectator sports will be "supported". Does this mean a Labour Cabinet will be spending Saturday afternoons on the terraces?

There will also be lots of "encouragement". Local authorities will be "encouraged" to prevent the commercial takeover of football grounds. Professional sports clubs will be "encouraged" to "open up their facilities". A Labour government will also "actively encourage the involvement of spectators and supporters in sport at all levels". Does this mean I can open the batting for England?

Sports Centres will be "encouraged" to make participation by women easier. "Special efforts" will be made to increase participation by women, disabled people, and the retired.

Of course, the absence of positive commitments is to be expected from any policy document produced by the modern Labour Party.

There are favourable references to the reports of other bodies such as the School Sport Forum, the National Curriculum Working Party on Physical Education and the Scottish Sports Council's document, *Sport 2000*, but there is no mention of what these reports actually say or recommend.

All this is a pity even from the narrow electoral standpoint of Labour's leaders. Both spectator and participation sports are passing through a tumultuous era of transition; working class life is full of lively debates about a wide variety of sports-related issues. Sport is important in the lives of millions and discontent with current arrangements is rife.

Here is another big opportunity for Labour and our leaders have blown it. Their Charter displays no leadership, no imagination, no priorities, and does not even mention sport in the inner cities, which was specifically singled out in the conclusions of the White Paper on sport produced by the Labour government as long ago as 1975. No process by which any of the vague preferences expressed in the Charter could be realised is even hinted at and there is no indication that the problem has even been seriously considered.

A revolution in sport on the horizon? Not if we leave it to this lot.

Famous last words...

Ten years ago Valerie Wise and Ken Livingstone called for "all out industrial and political action to defy the Lords!" over the Fare's Fair policy. Amongst those voting with them to defy the law were Paul Boateng and Tony Banks.

***Briefing* was reeling from Michael Foot's servile denunciation of Peter Tatchell in the House of Commons. With a nudge from MP James Wellbeloved, who had just defected from Labour to the SDP, Foot had decided that Tatchell's advocacy of "extra-parliamentary action" in an article in *Briefing* made him unfit to succeed the corrupt Bob Mellish as MP for Bermondsey. Never mind that Tatchell and the new team of activists who had challenged the rotten and discredited Bermondsey mafia, had doubled Party membership, set up a Fight Unemployment Committee, fought the closure of St Olave's Hospital, mounted a "stop the traffic" protest, and occupied HMS Belfast in a demonstration against Docklands speculation.**

***Briefing* took up the cudgels for Tariq Ali and his efforts to join the Labour Party. It also carried an article by one Dave Sullivan, then convenor of the East Lewisham Labour Left, now Lewisham Council's hard-right, pro-cuts, pro-redundancy deputy leader, and slammed the defection of 25 right-wing Islington Labour councillors to the SDP.**

Other articles included one by then Waltham Forest councillor Harry Cohen (now MP for Leyton) and then vice-chair of Northeast Derbyshire CLP Harry Barnes (now MP for the constituency).

In a report on *Briefing*, the Times noted, "Unlike much left-wing incunabula, it is literate and use of slogans is kept to a minimum."

Local Briefings were launched in Nottingham and Brighton. The Brighton mag ran stories on a local bus strike, why the left should build links with Solidarnosc, the Bradford 12 and the need for positive action against rape.


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BRIEFING
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ALL-OUT INDUSTRIAL AND POLITICAL ACTION TO
DEFY THE LORDS!
Labour—Take the Power!

LETTERS

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

Dear *Briefing* ...

I am surprised that Colin Hall tries to defend the NEC's proposal for periodic rules revision conferences (December *Briefing*). This is especially so since I've subsequently been told by leading *Briefing* supporters that the Labour Party Socialists' call for support for this change was a mistake.

One of the main reasons why the left made major breakthroughs on constitutional issues in the late seventies/early eighties was because we were able to build support year after year, eventually creating a head of steam that proved unstoppable. The same point applies to the more recent campaigns by Black Sections and the Women's Action Committee.

Periodic rules revision conferences, by preventing this campaigning tactic, would therefore involve a significant transfer of power from the rank and file to the Party's establishment.

On the question of how the NEC slate should be drawn up, CLPD believes that it must be through a process of negotiation between the established left groups (with the Campaign Group present as a left group). It is false to suggest that there are significant forces on the Left outside of the established left groups (for evidence on this point see Dorothy Macedo's article on LPS in the November *Briefing*, especially where Dorothy refers to "that elusive animal, the non-aligned left-winger"). The fact is that the groups are the only forces capable of organising for a left slate.

Your recent contribution to this debate (*Briefing* Paper Mark II) calls for a "major national conference" of the rank and file to draw up the slate. Most, if not all, of the activists attending such a conference would already be associated with an existing left group/sect. Other criticisms of your latest proposal were spelled out in your earlier contribution to the debate (*Briefing* Paper Mark I), namely that this option would be "hard to physically organise and service and would in many ways simply recreate existing groups such as Labour Party Socialists" (at this rate I dread to think what *Briefing* Paper Mark III will be like!).

We hear this talk of building "bottom up" unity every year or two when the latest "rank and file" organisation is being set up. No doubt LPS said exactly the same a couple of years ago when it was being formed. Even *Briefing* seems to admit that LPS has failed. The last thing we want is yet another rerun.

After all the dismal failures one would have thought that the ultra-left, and those with ultra-left tendencies like *Briefing*, would have rethought their tactics and strategy. Above all, this means focusing on issues around which, at any given time, the left can gain majority support from the individual and affiliated membership. Issues which, at the same time, are also capable of advancing the cause of socialism.

And it means adapting to the established patterns in the movement rather than always trying to set up parallel organisations. In other words, relating to reality as it is, not as we would like it to be. Activists can best contribute to building up the left by taking a full part in general election preparations and campaigns within their local party. A separate "socialist" campaign for Labour victory would increase the gap between the Labour Left and the great majority of Party members.

Finally, it was hard to resist a wry smile when in one breath *Briefing* lectures us about the importance of building "bottom up" unity while in the next you surrender all the "initiative and co-ordination" to the Campaign Group of MPs!

Over the years abject deference to left MPs has been a noticeable characteristic of the ultra-left and associated groups. The Campaign Group have had, and do have, a significant role to play, but this is as one force within the left as a whole, not as something extra special. And from my experience most left MPs wouldn't want that anyway.

Yours,
Pete Willsman
CLPD

First of all may I congratulate you on running the timely series on Western Goals by Ed Daley. In the interests of accuracy I would, however, like to make three points.

First, it isn't strictly true to say Stefano Della Chiae was "responsible for the Bologna bomb outrage" of 1980. He may well have been, but there are other plausible candidates whom we should not forget - eg. Italian military intelligence (SID) and indeed NATO/CIA.

Second, while associating with Nazis, it isn't necessarily the case that Western Goals are Nazi themselves; the common denominators are racism and nationalism.

We should not unnecessarily blur the distinctions between the two sectors of politics, for what is intriguing about groups like WG is their serious attempt to go beyond traditional Nazism. We need to be looking to the subtle changes of form the enemy will undergo in the future, rather than always viewing them through the prism of the (1930's) past.

Third, while WG and the League of Saint George do use 27 Old Gloucester Street, London, as an address, so do many other businesses and groups (as well as individuals), ranging from far left to far right to apolitical. It is run as a commercial venture, and its unique selling-point is that unlike an ordinary PO Box, it is not possible for the public (as opposed to Special Branch, of course) to find out the home address of the owner.

Yours sincerely,
Larry O'Hara

After you had featured Paul Boateng MP recently as your "Class Traitor of the Month", our GC instructed me to write to you, disassociating this CLP from the views expressed in the article.

Your article contains a great number of inaccuracies and is of course massively selective over quotes and information included. There are also some very strange assumptions - especially from a left standpoint - such as your view that Paul is solely responsible for this CLP's problems.

It must also be said that you don't really further your arguments by descending into the personal slurs which litter the feature.

But I suppose it has to be remembered that you are preaching to the converted. It's just a pity that this lefter-than-thouism still seems so important to so many principled members of the Party. It's so self-defeating.

I suppose you're lining up Livingstone now that he's writing for the *Sun*!

Yours sincerely,
Richard Simkins
Secretary
Brent South CLP

Class Traitor (from page 25)

He is one of the very few Labour MPs to earn substantial sums as a Parliamentary consultant to big business, receiving regular stipends from Albright and Wilson (UK) Ltd, Leather Chemicals and Dow Ltd.

Albright and Wilson (A&W), wholly owned by the Dallas-based conglomerate Teenoso Inc, makes chemicals for detergents and toiletries and has interests in 22 countries, including Colombia, Indonesia, and Singapore. Throughout most of the 80s it retained major holdings in South Africa, until forced to divest.

A&W owns the Marchon phosphate plant - which just happens to be located in Cunningham's constituency. Last August Greenpeace took the company to court because it was illegally pouring pollutants into the Irish Sea. A&W was fined £2000 and ordered to pay £20,000 costs. A month later 22 Greenpeace activists were arrested in a protest which blocked the Marchon plant pipeline; A&W took out an injunction to prevent further protests.

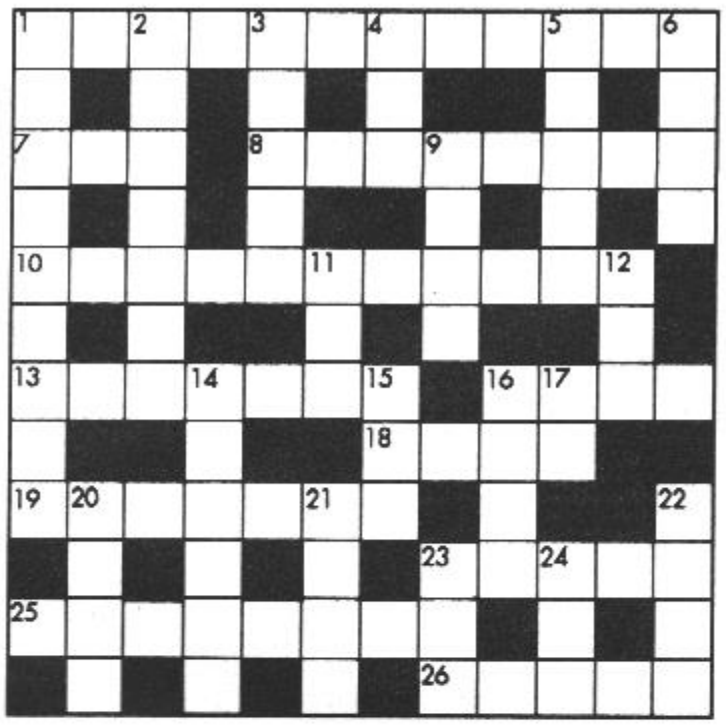
Dr Jack is paid by A&W to act as a "policy advisor" but just what this means in practise remains obscure. In any case, it's hard to see how his employment by A&W could be other than in conflict with the interests of his constituents, most of whom would presumably prefer not to be poisoned by industrial effluents.

Last summer there was a public hitch in what had seemed to be Cunningham's cosy if subservient relationship with the leader. *The Sunday Times* quoted an unnamed "Labour source" criticising Cunningham for going fishing in Norway before the Commons had risen for the summer - at a time when the Shadow Cabinet was supposed to be on "full election alert". It was put about that the leader's office considered Cunningham no match for Chris Patten, who as Tory Party chair is effectively his opposite number.

Cunningham will certainly never win any prizes for his command of public political argument. His familiar performances on TV by-election specials are always depressing, desultory affairs.

At the last Party conference he delivered the brown nose speech of the week when he praised Kinnock's address to the TV cameras as "commanding and exhilarating" and "dramatic and moving" and described "Neil" as the most "courageous, charismatic, inspirational and committed leader of any party in Britain".

Briefing crossword



Across

1. Ex-soviet republic
7. Hill-billy uncle
8. Light or region
10. African peak
13. Filipino language
16. Land measurement
18. Pakistan language
19. Atomic particle
23. Ligurian city
25. Babylonian law-giver
26. S.African desert

Down

1. Ex-soviet republic
2. Sung "once a year"
3. Argentine politician
4. Railway union - old name
5. It belongs to them!
6. Days of the General Strike
9. Japanese war commander
11. Engineering union
12. Rower's tool - not skull
14. Miners' "King"
15. Artillary or pistol
16. Polynesian axe
17. Commercial union - Jimmy!
20. Russian Mountain
21. Cricket ground
22 Clothing
23. Mother's ruin
24. Miners' union

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presents

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The Indestructable Beat

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Everyone a winner

The winner of the *Labour Briefing* Christmas competition to name the Class Traitor of the year is Comrade **T. E Hobday** of Nottingham, whose submission ran as follows:

"My top three class traitors of the last twelve months in order of odiousness are ***1. Neil Kinnock, 2. John Evans, 3. Tom Sawyer.***

There would be no class traitors without help and encouragement from the party leader. Why nominate a monkey when the organ grinder call the tune?"

A copy of the *Class War* anthology, a *Decade of Disorder*, is on its way to Nottingham.

Runners-up are the comrade from Wales (name withheld to protect the innocent), who nominated **Kim Howells** for calling on the police to investigate Arthur Scargill, and correspondent extraordinaire **Keith Flett**, who wrote:

"Herewith my top three class traitors of 1991 in reverse order:

3. ***Margaret Thatcher*** *(their class, not ours) for attempted sabotage of ruling class interests;*

2. ***Ian Willmore****, Haringey Labour Councillor and TGWU official, for slavish devotion to the Poll Tax;*

*1.****Margaret Hodge****, a winner by miles. In the same week that Islington Council, leader M. Hodge, jailed people over the Poll Tax, Labour politician, M. Hodge, had an article in Tribune headed The horror of the Council Tax. The horror, the horror, indeed!"*

Keith says he does not *"under any circumstances"* want the *Class War* book. "A discussion with **Mike Marqusee** about the prospect for the cricket World Cup and a pint will do."

Some thoughts on beating the Asylum Bill...

Sue Jones *analyses the challenges facing the campaign to defeat the Tories' Asylum Bill and urges the left, especially the Labour left, to get stuck in.*

REFUGEES ARE the ideal focus for the Tories' latest squalid campaign.

Most do not have votes. Their organisations are desperately overworked and under-resourced. In some areas they are effectively competing for dwindling resources with other black and ethnic minority communities, which has led to conflict, with some "community leaders" lining up with the government in support of the Bill.

The Bill is a calculated attack on human rights. The Commission for Racial Equality has stated that it breaches existing discrimination legislation (and we know how effective that is).

Refugee organisations have pointed out that it breaks with the UK's international obligations to asylum seekers. In order to bring it into effect, the UK government will have to block the application of at least two international treaties or conventions.

The race issue has the Labour Party leadership running scared, terrified that they might appear less tough on refugees than the Tories. The old temptation to pander to the racist vote is unlikely to be resisted, especially as Labour's "as resources permit" rhetoric reinforces the Tory argument that refugees are a drain on the nation's limited resources.

We need to mobilise now to ensure that our MPs and PPCs take a stand. The dividing line is clear: we are for the right of anyone in fear of persecution to seek refuge here. We say that everyone living in this country should have equal rights to housing, welfare benefits and all other basic necessities.

One senior Tory MP, when being lobbied about amending the Bill, said, "Why should we? A couple of thousand people turn out against Le Pen, but I don't see anyone turning out on this. Why should we worry?"

A black activist, when told about this remark, observed, "Yes, the left have always found it easier to campaign against fascists. It's a clear issue: you talk about 'the War', and you feel personally affected by it, but not by the racism we deal with every day of our lives."

We should not be deterred by the fact that there are divisions within some communities on this issue. These divisions represent both the effects of the "social advancement" of some black people and important debates about where the real interests of their communities lie. Does the left have anything to say about that? And if so can we say it so we can be heard? Unless we are there in the struggle, comment from outside will be rightly perceived as (at best) patronising.

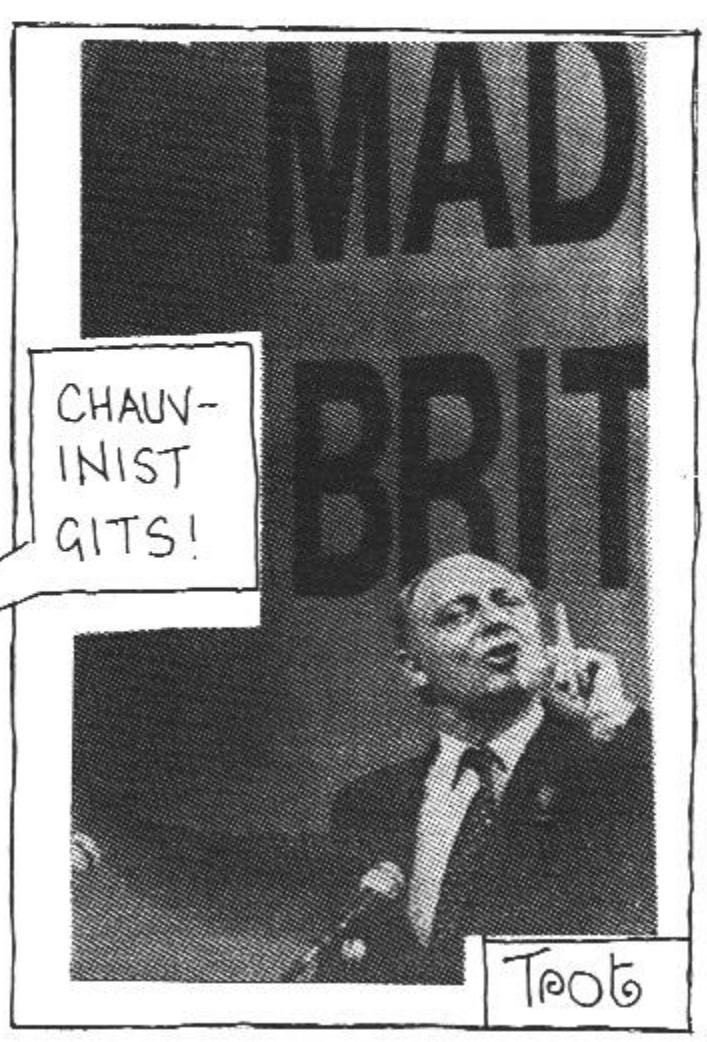
This Bill will not just affect refugees. The housing proposals will, in effect, introduce immigration checks into every housing department. These measures have all the signs of being tried out on refugees for use on everyone else later. The proposal to fingerprint all refugees on arrival and to include the digitised prints on an ID document is ominous in the extreme.

Campaigning against the Bill means talking to people about why refugees come here. It is not because they want to: it is because of the international policy of our government and its allies. They trade with the torturers, supply the arms and train the security services which drive refugees out of their homes in the first place. They do not care what their Turkish allies in NATO do to the Kurds or what their business partners do to the opposition in Kenya. They know that political repression is often essential to keep the "free market" working. Here too Labour's foreign policy only makes life easier for the Tories.

The Asylum Rights Campaign is a consortium of refugee, community groups and organisations working with refugees. It provides speakers and information about the Bill. Telephone 071- 582-6922 or write c/o Bondway House, 3-9 Bondway, London SW8.







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