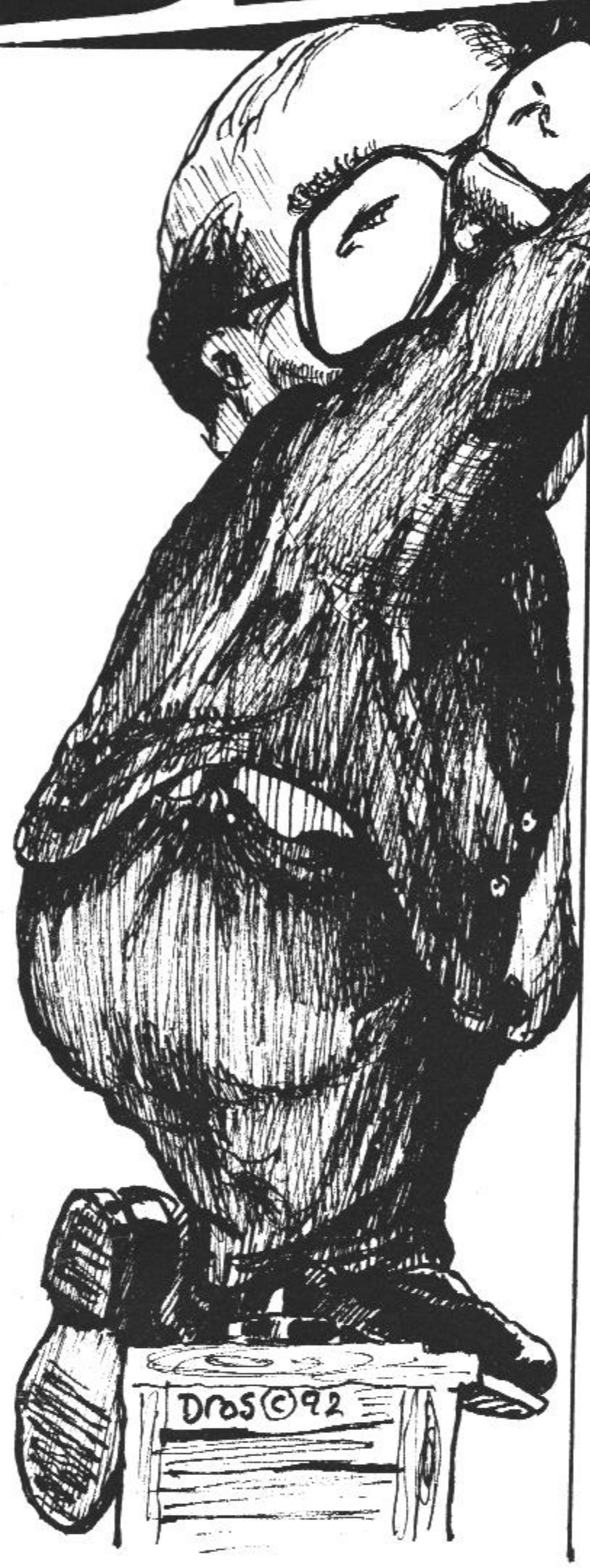
BRIEFING

May 1992 80p (60p unwaged)



"Smith and Gould are tweedledum and tweedledee ... It's high time people understood what I learned as an NUM member years ago: when Labour is in opposition in Parliament you have to look to extra-Parliamentary activity, to industrial action, to thwart the anti-working class policies of the Tory government."

Dennis Skinner -
see page 4



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Where next?

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Fields

Yorkshire miners
prepare for action
Abortion rights

Class Traitors
of the
General Election

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Labour Briefing

Annual General Meeting

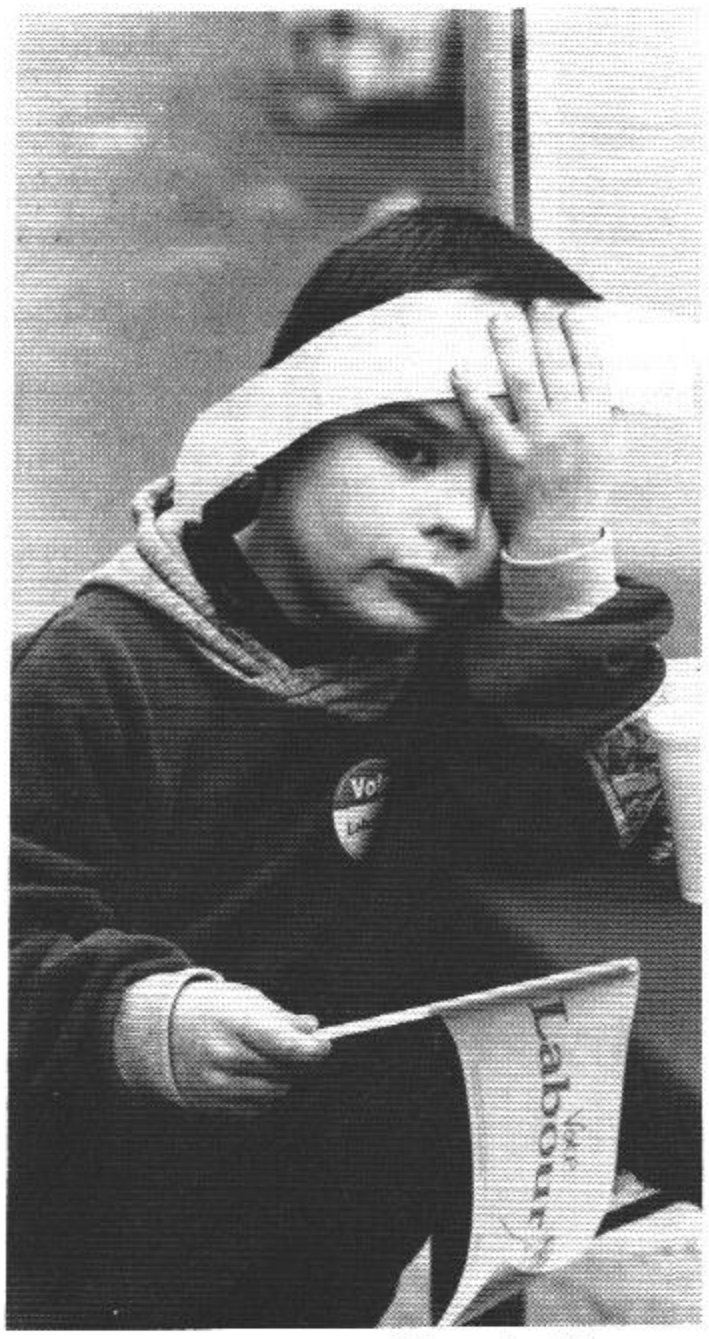
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where the hell do we go from here?

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Don't mourn, organise! Photo: Paul Mattsson

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Labour and the trades unions: the link is indispensable!

A DISMAL CONSENSUS seems to be emerging, embracing Fleet Street, John Smith, Bryan Gould, the LCC, the Socialist Society and *New Left Review*, that the historic link between the trades unions and the Labour Party is dispensable.

This is a consensus with which *Labour Briefing* will have no truck.

The conquest of political representation by organised labour was a huge step forward by the British working class. To cede that ground by untying the knot with the unions would be a huge step backwards from which we might not recover for generations.

Without the trade union link Labour would lose its distinct identity as a working class party; it would become just another value-free vehicle for career politicians. Workers as workers, as members of a class with particular interests, would be denied any organised, collective, political expression of those interests.

Bryan Gould and his friends in Fleet Street would substitute for this particular interest an alleged "general" public interest, an ill-defined ragbag of good intentions. But without a clear mandate to represent a particular interest even the most "progressive" and "humane" politicians will be sucked in the end into the camp of the ruling class - because there will be no organised counterweight to its immense influence and power.

The trade union link is a mechanism of tremendous democratic potential. It holds out the promise of a deeper and more direct participation in politics for workers in the workplace than could ever be possible if they were to be confined merely to voting as individuals for Labour (or other "left") candidates in general and local elections.

The problem with the trade union franchise in the electoral college, in annual conference and in Parliamentary selections is not its continued existence but the way in which it is exercised. Our object should be to place the trade union link under the control of rank and file union members. At local level we want the link to become a living channel for discussion and joint action between workplaces and constituency parties. At national level, we want to see an end to backroom stitch-ups; we want to see the block vote cast in a manner which makes it accountable and responsive to union members, which promotes political debate and participation in the workplace and beyond.

The trade union link offers the possibility - a precious possibility - of a group of elected politicians being held to account by the country's single largest (and most economically central) organised constituency. The only realistic base for socialist politics, indeed the only base for progress of any kind for working people, remains organised labour. Those who wish to dispense with that base are obliged to specify an alternative. The trade union link enables Labour to represent the working class as a class, a group of individuals with collective interests and the collective capacity to defend and advance those interests. It therefore fosters class identity and ultimately class solidarity. All those who spent time in the general election canvassing for Labour candidates confirm that it was precisely this class identity - sharply heightened at times of recession - that motivated Labour voters across the country and propelled them to come out on April 9th in hopes of ridding the country of their class enemies. There was a strong and healthy feeling of "us against them". This provides us with our base for the future.

We can win the next general election, but not by imbibing any of the quack remedies being peddled at the moment by the very people who have just been proved so wrong about the last one. Retailoring our tax policies, backing PR, entering into pacts or changing our name will get us nowhere. In this country, a general election is ultimately a test of strength between the labour movement and its party and the ruling class and its party - a test determined by strength of leadership, by material, organisational and ideological strength. On April 9th we lost, fundamentally, because on balance we were the weaker side in all respects. Our leaders ran an irrelevant and at times incompetent campaign. In the preceding years they had gutted the Party of principle and purpose. They cannot be exonerated from responsibility for the immediate causes of the tragedy of April 9th. But even more they cannot be exonerated from responsibility for the last thirteen years of industrial and social defeats, ideological retreats and above all shrinking trades union organisation which made Labour so vulnerable to the Tories on polling day.

We cannot circumvent these weaknesses by electoral gimmicks. For the labour movement to triumph at the ballot box (and beyond) it must expand, it must embrace those workers who are currently unorganised, it must exercise its industrial muscle and develop a coherent, convincing socialist alternative to the ideology of the free market.

For Labour Party activists this means taking steps to consolidate the Party's existing base, politically targeting the working class and joining without reserve in all its struggles. As Dennis Skinner says in this issue of *Briefing*, the key now is to build the strongest possible extra-Parliamentary resistance to the Tories; Labour will only recover form the general election blow and become strong enough to defeat the Tories if it becomes the champion and focus of all those fighting back against them now.

The Party has become a shadow; it must be rebuilt from the bottom up. It has to recruit new members, educate and organise and sink deep roots in the communities on whose votes it relies. It has to be relaunched as a whole - with the trade union link at its heart - not split, destroyed or displaced. Yes, this means a long and difficult struggle in inhospitable conditions.

But there is no alternative for anyone whose socialism is about changing the world, not merely holding a comfortable position within it.

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 May 11th.

***Briefing* is the only magazine on the left which is not funded by any part of the labour hierarchy or by any organised grouping. To survive and thrive we need the support of our readers. Why not take copies to sell at your local Labour Party, trade union or campaign meeting?**

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

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"We have to learn the lessons of the last eight years..."

***Dennis Skinner**, whose majority in Bolsover is now 20,660 (up from 14,120 in 1987 on 5.7% swing) talked to* Labour Briefing *at the House of Commons in the third week of April.*

LB: Could Labour have won the 1992 general election?

DS: Yes. The Tory government should have been thrashed. Our trouble began when the leadership decided to turn a socialist party into one that appealed to yuppies in the City. They spent a small fortune wining and dining people in the City but it all came to nought at the end. We wasted years on this when we should have been building closer links with people who had natural roots inside the labour movement.

When people came face to face with the evils of the Poll Tax two years ago they voted in substantial numbers for Labour. But then when people organised in Trafalgar Square and other places against the Poll Tax, the Labour leadership condemned them. Labour became far too Parliamentary-orientated. It forgot that socialist battles have to be won outside Parliament. It spent money on listening reviews, policy reviews, quality polling, quantity polling, measured polling, demographically orientated polling, but we failed to reach people. You can have as many Policy Reviews as you like but at the end of the day you've got to have a clear message. One that identifies that there are bosses and workers and in their struggle Labour ought to be clearly on the side of the wealth creators against the exploiters.

LB: What about the election campaign itself?

DS: We were on our way to a hung Parliament for most of the campaign until the Friday before polling day when the leadership decided to chase Ashdown's tail on PR. We lost vital days when we could have been talking about the NHS and education, instead of trying to buy off Paddy Ashdown's votes. The triumphalism at Sheffield did us no favours either. No football manager gloats at half time just because so far his team has been outplaying its opponents. The leadership should've kept its eye on the ball and stuck to the issues.

LB: What about the political future?

DS: The European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) has got to be tackled. It's not enough to say you can devalue within ERM. It's not enough to rely on one simple, mechanistic move. A socialist government in the UK will have to get out of the ERM. It'll collapse anyway, like the gold standard in the pre-war years. Whenever there's been a recession in the industrialised world in the past, they've been able to look to the US to set the dynamo going and drag the rest out of recession.

Germany and Japan have performed the same function in more recent years. Now the prospects for all three are very bleak. Where's the lead going to come from? The 90s will see continuing mass unemployment, world slump, warring tribes, nationalism, fundamentalism. In this context socialists will have to be very wary of the rise of extreme right groups. Proportional Representation, of course, will make them look even stronger than they are.

LB: How would you advise people to vote in the leadership contest?

DS: The Socialist Campaign Group is backing Ken Livingstone and Bernie Grant - not least because we want to expose the scandal of the 20% rule. Tony Benn and I opposed it on the NEC when it was brought in in 1988 to stop any further challenges to Kinnock from the left. Now you've got people on the right and centre complaining about the rule but there wasn't a bleat from any member of the Shadow Cabinet when it went through.

Smith and Gould are tweedledum and tweedledee. They're offering basically the same policies and they both supported all the changes in the Policy Review, all the constitutional changes since 1987 - that applies to all the candidates except Ken and Bernie. We have to learn the lessons of the last eight years. Witch-hunts haven't won us seats. The national membership scheme resulted in a loss of membership. Our finances have been drained. On all these issues Tony Benn and myself have been left to fight the battle on the NEC alone.

At the meeting to draw up the manifesto Tony and I proposed twenty amendments on the economy, on social issues, foreign affairs, defence. We got defeated nineteen times by votes of around 38 to 2. Smith, Gould and the others were there and there's not a cat's whisker between them.

LB: What's your recipe for the Labour Party now that the Tories are back for at least a few years?

DS: It's high time people understood what I learned as an NUM member years ago: when Labour is in opposition in Parliament you have to look to extra-Parliamentary activity, to industrial action, to thwart the anti-working class policies of the Tory government. In the last eight years all extra-Parliamentary struggles have been dampened down by a combination of the Shadow Cabinet and the trade union leadership. If the miners and others had had the full support of these people in the 80s the Tory government wouldn't be in office now. That's the golden rule. You fight to get a Parliamentary majority but you also fight to undermine the Tory government's activities through using the strength of the industrial wing of the labour movement.

The vote in the Yorkshire NUM is very important. It shows that even though we've lost 140 pits and 140,000 miners' jobs since the end of the strike there's still spirit and determination in parts of the British coalfields. If people expect a few Tory rebels to stop the privatisation of British Coal they're living in cloud cuckoo land. That can only be prevented by miners and others in the trades unions and the Labour Party taking action.

Votes, voices and values

AT AN ELECTION hustings in a notorious "bed and breakfast" area of London, several women demanded to know why they had no vote. The answer was simple: they and their families had been homeless for several months, and were likely to be moving in and out of temporary accommodation for years to come. They had no right to a permanent home, no choice as to where to live or where their children went to school (if at all), no right to cook meals, no right to use the bathroom or loo when they wanted to. They were not surprised that they had lost what was being described by politicians every day on the TV as a basic democratic right. They knew that the councils and B&B owners who now controlled so much of their lives had not bothered to register them, just as they had not bothered much how they could feed their children, get basic health care or survive as a family.

Another woman pointed out that travellers also had no vote and was quick to draw the contrast with the money spent on encouraging those overseas to vote. Some of those voting in this election left the UK in nappies: they have not been back since. The government spends a great deal more to get them to vote than it spends on making sure that the homeless are registered.

For various reasons, millions of working class people did not exercise the franchise on April 9th. ***Sue Lukes*** *is fed up with a debate on electoral reform that takes no account of the democratic rights of the poor and dispossessed.*

There were other people not registered: a lot of privately rented flats and houses full of bedsits had no one listed on the electoral roll. Why? Some but not all were avoiding the Poll Tax. Since 1989, short-term tenancies are the norm and private landlords have greatly increased powers to evict and to charge high rents; people are forced to move on again and again. In addition, many migrants and refugees (most of whom have no vote) rent privately because they have no other option. Canvassers reported that the turn out was very low on the "worst", i.e. poorest and most run-down, estates. Whole blocks told us that they saw no point in voting. And, frankly, it was difficult to find reasons why they should in Labour's manifesto.

It was difficult to find much to illuminate this in the quality press: the debate on the underclass was suspended in favour of the debate on PR. As the results came in, and reporters spoke of a high turn-out, the 20% to 40% of those registered who did not vote disappeared altogether, and discussion centred on the "C2s", the "middle classes" and the Liberal Democrats.

But look again at the results in the twenty-five constituencies where Labour lost by 2000 votes or less. Most of those missing extra votes were those of the poorest and the most disadvantaged, the people who have already lost so much in thirteen years of Tory government.

Without a programme that would make a real difference to those "lost voters" and a Party leadership with a credible commitment to carrying it out, there is no reason why these people should vote Labour.

If there is to be a debate about electoral reform, let's make sure it includes the voteless and voiceless. Let's talk about why those who have lived and worked here for twenty years get no vote while those whose taxes shored up apartheid in South Africa for twenty years are enfranchised at government expense. Let's talk about why it is so easy to register them, and so difficult to register the homeless and the travellers. Let's talk about what it will take to get all of those who felt they had no stake in what happened on April 9th voting for the only Party that can represent their interests. And that means talking power not percentages, socialism not STV.



Campaigning in Chapel Market, Islington Photo: Paul Mattsson

Sweep out the middle class careerists!

***John Wilton**, Labour's candidate in Birmingham Edgbaston, had the twenty-third best Labour result in the country. It owed nothing to Walworth road, Regional Office, or the Policy Review and everything to left-wing socialist commitment and plenty of grass-roots elbow grease. If others Labour candidates had performed as well as he, there would be a Labour government today. Here he examines the reason for Labour's defeat and calls for a new reform of the Party machinery - from the bottom up.*

THE FAILURE to get a Labour government elected on April 9th was a disaster for the working-class. Reading the national press, watching TV or listening to the radio, you would think the only disaster the general election result brought was for the pollsters. There is, however, a link between these two "disasters".

Both were caused by the fact that the individuals involved - in the national media and at Walworth Road - are completely out of touch with the needs of ordinary people. Both the media and the Walworth Road clever dicks think elections are all about what goes on in the press and on TV. They simply couldn't fathom what was really happening on the ground - because they spent all the time talking to each other.

Walworth Road's obsession with the political agenda set by the *Guardian* and other voices of the establishment had already resulted in a non-stop nine year attack on the Party's campaigning base in the constituencies. Yet results on April 9th clearly showed that where there were still active local campaigning Parties Labour did better. The difference between a swing at around the national or regional average and a better than average swing can mainly be accounted for by local Labour Parties that ran campaigns not just over weeks, but over years. Good results were produced where local Labour Parties and their candidates were visible day in and day out along side working-class people in struggles against the Tories.

That was the basis of our campaign in Edgbaston over the last five years. Our swing of 5.8% was well above the national swing of 3% and the average Birmingham swing of 2.8%. Our 42% increase in the Labour vote cut the Tory majority in half and placed Labour only 4,000 votes behind the Tories in a constituency in which it came third in 1983.

The secret of our success is simple: the local Labour Party made sure it was always present, working directly with people on real issues over five years, not just turning up for four weeks or smiling on the TV. Whether the issue was the Poll Tax, health cuts, job losses, housing repairs or council cuts we made sure we were there.

In the course of a Trades Council meeting held during the campaign a left-wing comrade from another constituency said, "The struggle begins after the election when we get a Labour government." He failed to realise that for unemployed people, for pensioners living on a pittance, for people living in damp, dilapidated housing and for workers facing the loss of their jobs and cuts in their living standards, the "struggle" goes on every day - and has been for years. The real tragedy of Labour's failure to win on April 9th lies in what it means for those people. And the roots of that failure lie in the gap between the Party and that ceaseless, every day struggle.

Walworth Road's campaign approach was embodied in Kinnock's presidential-style country-wide parade in Daimlers, jets and helicopters. Contrast that campaign, so isolated from the voters, with Major's "soapbox" walkabouts. President Kinnock's campaign was like that of some vainglorious, unelected Third World dictator. His autocratic, intolerant internal Party regime was clearly a preview of the kind of Labour Prime Minister he wanted to be.

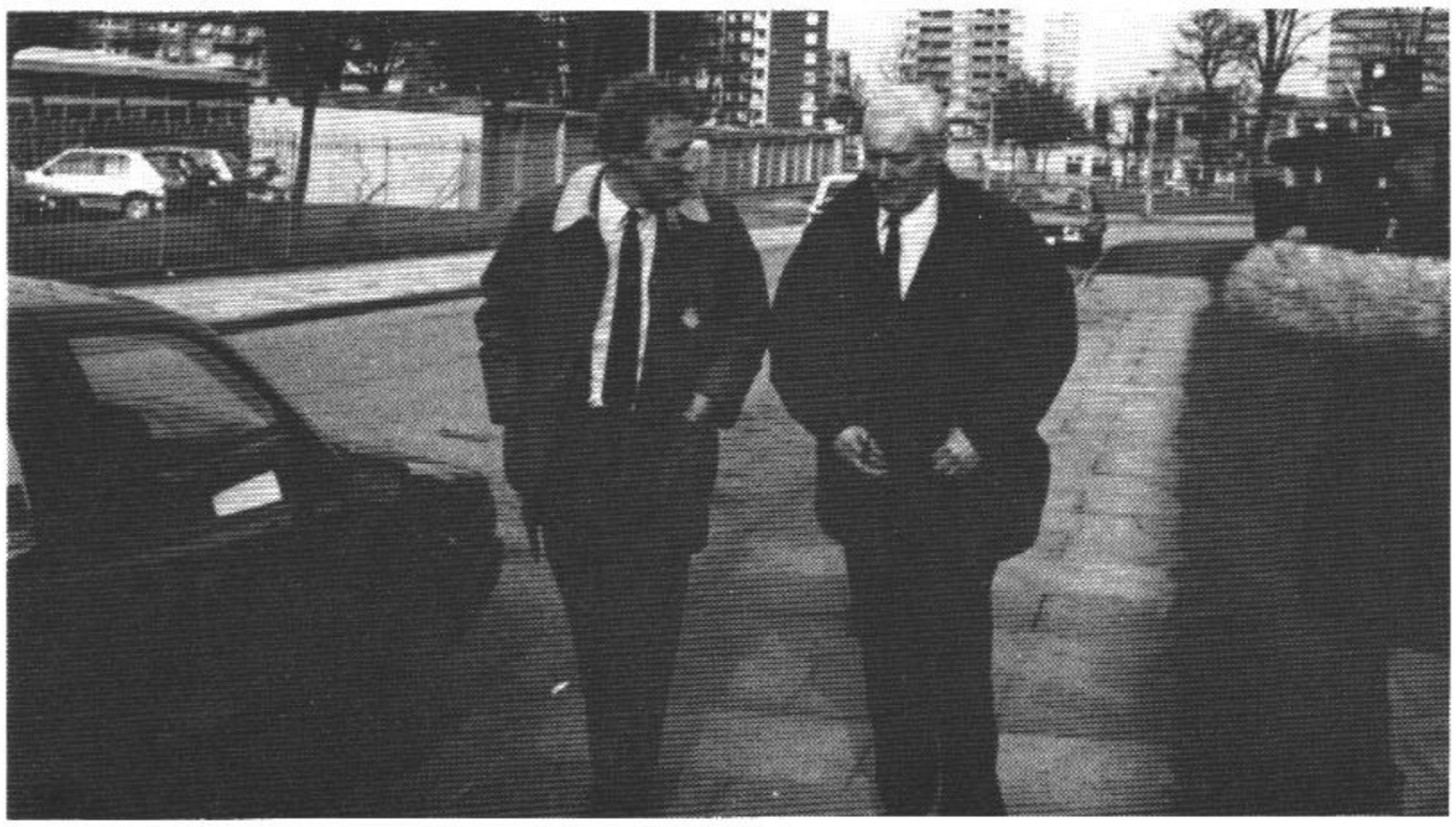
Unaccountable rule from on high is Kinnock's legacy to the Labour Party. His "reforms" were designed to tame the membership. The disastrous national membership scheme, the witch-hunt, the destruction and closing down of active constituency parties, the organisational centralisation, the financial and organisational bankruptcy all resulted in a largely inactive rank and file - leaving the plastic people at Walworth Road and in the regional offices strutting around in front of a cardboard cut-out facade of a "mass party."

In many places the Party is now represented by people frightened to voice any of their own views or opinions. Many appear unable even to form an independent opinion.

During the election campaign Walworth Road sent candidates sets of standard answers to pressure group questionnaires. They were also sent standard, sanitised policy briefings. I spent an interesting hour one afternoon in the campaign doing a meeting with two Labour candidates in 'target seats'.

They spent the whole time passing their official policy briefings back and forth, quoting from them parrot fashion in answer to questions from the audience. When the audience asked a question outside the remit of the briefings, they were stumped.

In Birmingham the Kinnockite election "experts" targeted four seats: Selly Oak, Northfield,



John Wilton and Tony Benn on the campaign trail Photo: Jeremy Lang

Yardley and Hall Green. They poured thousands of pounds and hundreds of workers into these contests. They contributed absolutely nothing to our campaign in Edgbaston. Three times they wrote to Party members in Edgbaston telling them to work in those four targeted seats (particularly Selly Oak), rather than Edgbaston. Halfway through the election campaign our members received a letter from Jack Cunningham telling them we were twinned with Selly Oak. No one bothered to inform any of our Party officers about this arrangement any time during the two-year run-up to the election.

Of course, we shouldn't have been surprised at the lack of help. Some people might say that the lack of help was a help in itself! The decision not to give any help in Edgbaston was a political one. The need to win Selly Oak, Northfield, Hall Green and Yardley had much more to do with Regional Office bureaucrats in Birmingham trying to keep their jobs than with the priority of getting a Labour government elected. For two years we told them that even if we won Selly Oak, Northfield, Hall Green and Yardley we still wouldn't have a Labour government with a safe overall majority.

In the event Yardley was won with a majority of 162 and a 3.2% swing. Northfield was won with a majority of 630, and a 3.5% swing. Selly Oak was won with a 2,060 majority, and a 4.3% swing. Hall Green, however like many of the target marginals, was lost to the Tories by 3,665 - with a swing to Labour of 4.4%.

Despite all the money and personnel poured into those four seats in Birmingham, and in the middle of the deepest recession since the war, all the Regional office election machine in Birmingham could manage was to scrape home in three of the seats with very small majorities.

In Edgbaston we ran a different sort of campaign. We produced thousands of our own leaflets - on pensions, the NHS, women's rights, the minimum wage, the environment, and recession and unemployment. In my election address, we talked about nuclear disarmament, Third World debt, animal rights, women's equality, the need for increased public spending, the scandal of private education.

We challenged the Tory MP to a public debate in an advert in the local freesheet. Needless to say, she declined. We highlighted the fact that she lives in Northampton miles from the constituency and my own commitment to continue living in the constituency on the average wage of a local skilled worker.

We leafleted school gates, post offices, bus stops. We met with local trades unionists. We wrote directly to every council tenant. We intervened in every local issue. We targetted the working-class and polarised the election clearly between ourselves and the Tories.

We launched the campaign with a packed public meeting with Dennis Skinner, and we also had visits from Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn - both of whom got a great reception from campaign workers, pensioners' groups and the general public. We never ran away from any issue - whether it was the abolition of grammar schools in Birmingham or a woman's right to choose on abortion (my opponent, Jill Knight, is a pro-hanging "right to lifer").

The only time Regional office showed any interest in our campaign, apart from trying to convince our members not to work in it, was after I called Jill Knight a racist in a speech to Birmingham Trades Council and my remarks were reported on the front page of the *Birmingham Post*. Regional Office rang our agent and spent half-an-hour on the phone telling us to drop the race issue!

Perhaps, if nothing else, the campaign in Edgbaston convinced a few more members of the local Party that they should be far less deferential to the "modernising" experts from the Party bureaucracy. In this context, "modern" is a code-word for a middle-class takeover of the Party. There is nothing genuinely modern (i.e. relevant and useful to the problems working-class people face) about it. It's just old fashioned position-seeking, parasitical careerism, undemocratic and unaccountable.

This is why we have to reclaim our Party. These Walworth Road and regional office "experts" are the people who a week before election day decided to focus the campaign on constitutional issues and thus threw away the momentum on the NHS debate. Suddenly, they found themselves talking about hung Parliaments and PR - an issue which not one person had mentioned to me on the doorstep or in the street in five years.

Working-class members of the Party need to rediscover confidence in their own judgements and experiences. That can only happen if we run campaigns day in and day out over five years in every constituency, if we put ourselves alongside people struggling in whatever way against the Tories. Constituency Labour Parties have to be rooted in their communities, not in armchairs in front of TVs. Socialists have to challenge and remove the middle-class cliques who run our Party. Exchanging one 'smart suit' as leader for another will not make any difference. We have to democratise not only the political, representative machinery of the Party, but also its organisational machinery.

The struggle now is for the soul of our Party. The "know nothing", "experience nothing" middle-class posers of the soft-left and the right, and the theoretical masturbators of the sectarian so-called left, have to be swept aside. They are all a burden which the working-class, facing five more years of Tory attacks, simply cannot afford.

Save your tears for another time

***Paul Field**, Newcastle Central CLP, calls on the left to measure up to the huge tasks facing the movement in the wake of our general election defeat.*

LOOKING AT the media coverage in the wake of the election you could be forgiven for believing that it was only Neil Kinnock who suffered crushing defeat on April 9th and who now deserves our sympathy for being denied a move to Number 10. Predictably there has been scarce reference to the millions of working class people throughout Britain who were pinning their hopes on a Labour victory and who are now condemned to another four or five years of Tory rule. Anyone who canvassed in the election knows that kind words for "poor Neil" have little place in the minds of the pensioners, the unemployed or the working class families struggling to meet Poll Tax demands and scrape an existence in the midst of the recession.

The implications of this fourth Tory victory for the labour movement are immense. What is at stake is the future of the Labour Party and the political representation of the working class.

The Blairs and Browns on the right of the Party will see the result on April 9th as a mandate to do a deal with Paddy Ashdown on PR. With the demoralisation of the working class and the on-going haemorrhage of the left from the Party, those who favour severing the link with the trade unions, scrapping Clause 4 and shedding the Party's last trappings of collectivism will argue with new urgency for some kind of pact or even a merger with the Liberal Democrats as a route to renewed electoral success.

An outcome along these lines to the struggle that lies ahead would represent a defeat of historic proportions for the working class in this country. It would provide a future government of the right with the opportunity to abolish the NHS in all but name and reduce the trade unions to absolute impotence. The City would realise that with the working class broken and silenced, it could go some way at least to restoring the profitability that British capitalism has lacked since the late sixties, while Thatcher would comfort herself in old age with the knowledge that her ambition to "kill socialism", by which she always meant Labourism and trades unionism, had finally been realised.

The task we face is nothing less than reclaiming the Party for the working class. That requires a left-wing strong and active enough to attract those in struggle back to the Party and provide them with a political focus in the years ahead.

We need to take a hard, critical look at the state of the left in the Party. Unfortunately, neither Labour Left Liaison nor Labour Party Socialists has proved itself capable of organising the type of national campaign that is now a necessity if we are to salvage the Labour Party from the right. The only body on the left that has anything like the kind of national profile that is needed and to whom activists both inside and outside the Party generally look for leadership and direction is the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs. It is vital that as many people as possible attend the Leeds Conference on June 20th organised by the Campaign Group and that real commitments are undertaken to open up and democratise the group by allowing individuals and CLPs to affiliate to it and by providing it with an elected campaigning structure.

From there we can begin the fight to take the Party back from the middle class careerists who made a home for themselves at Walworth Road in recent years. We can start to link up with the thousands of committed Labour activists who, against their better judgement, were persuaded that silence about the purges, the Poll Tax, Labour's support for the Gulf War and its betrayal of principles like disarmament and common ownership, was the necessary price of a Labour general election victory.

Above all, we can make sure that those workers who have passively borne the brunt of the recession for the last eighteen months in the hope that it would help the election of a Labour government, receive positive support and solidarity from the Party when they begin to resist the Tory offensive. In doing this we can once again start to channel back into the Party those dynamic social movements which were deliberately alienated by New Realism. By making the Party respond to the ongoing struggles against racism and fascism, for lesbian and gay rights, and for women's liberation and address for the first time the problems of young people, we can draw in those forces that will shift the balance in favour of the left in the Party - and make Labour strong enough to survive the present crisis and go on to defeat the Tories.

We cannot allow the despondency that has been so evident among left activists in the last few years to inhibit us in the pivotal struggle that lies ahead. We must put past defeats behind us, reorganise and fight back! Failure to do so will only assist the right and those ultra-left currents which thrive on the despair of Labour activists, encouraging comrades to desert the Party of the working class and join them in their empty posturing on the fringe of British politics.

Facts about pacts



IF THERE HAD been an electoral pact between the Liberals and Labour on April 9th what would have happened?

There were 112 seats where a combined Liberal-Labour vote could have theoretically secured victory over the Tory. Half of these are purely arithmetical possibilities; the victorious Tory candidate having captured over 45% of the vote, every single Labour and Liberal vote would have to be combined to make any difference to the result. Of the 112 seats, Labour was second in 86 and the Liberal second in 26. To oust the Tories and secure a Commons majority for a Lib-Lab pact, the Lib-Lab candidates would have to win at least 35 of the 112 seats. Labour would also have to retain the 65 seats it won on April 9th with less than 50% of the vote; in many of these seats it holds the seat in part because the Liberals syphon off middle class votes that would otherwise go to the Conservatives.

There are 42 seats where Labour displaced the Liberals as the second party on April 9th and another 30 where it is very close to doing so. There are also 14 seats where the main contest is between Liberals and Labour.

The most likely effect of such a pact in Scotland and Wales is not to win any additional seats (at least for Labour) but certainly to increase the nationalist vote. The consequences in local government elections would be chaos.

To have defeated the Tories in the popular vote on April 9th at least 72% of all Liberal voters would have had to back the pact candidates (assuming all Labour voters do likewise). Since the evidence is that in urban and suburban areas the Liberal vote is first and foremost an anti-Labour vote, such an outcome is wildly improbable.

Finally, any conceivable Lib-Lab electoral pact would result in a minority Labour government or coalition entirely dependent on the constant support of 30-40 Liberal MPs for survival in the Commons.

Yorkshire election round-up

THE ONLY MAJOR gain for Labour in the whole of Yorkshire was the super-marginal of York.

Expected gains in Elmet, Keighley, Colne Valley and Batley and Spen did not

Cllr. Garth Frankland
Leeds

materialise. The campaigns were run non-politically, large numbers of leaflets were thrown at the electorate, candidates were mostly right-wing and very little canvassing was done. If the campaigns were examined politically the results could easily have been predicted: there was nothing offered to those who have suffered real damage by the Tories. The lack of politics was compounded by organisational weakness, lack of imagination and in some case downright incompetence on election day.

Right-winger Ann Taylor held on to Dewsbury by the skin of her teeth. She admitted that she that the fascist threat had damaged her campaign! She offered no political appeal to the substantial Asian population in Dewsbury.

Left-winger Alice Mahon held on to Halifax despite vicious attacks on her in the Tory press and a whispering campaign in Labour' own ranks predicting her defeat. This was combined with open hostility from the leadership of the local Labour council.

In Leeds East, former council leader George Mudie retained Denis Healey's seat for Labour and John Gunnell, a former leader of West Yorkshire County Council, inherited Merlyn Rees's Leeds South and Morley seat with a meagre 0.3% swing.

In Leeds North East the soft-left candidate achieved a creditable 6% swing, smashing the Lib-Dem vote into a bad third place. A detailed break down of the returns reveals that there was an increase in the Tory vote over the local elections, especially in the white council estates. It may be that Thatcher's assertion that she won the election has some truth in it.

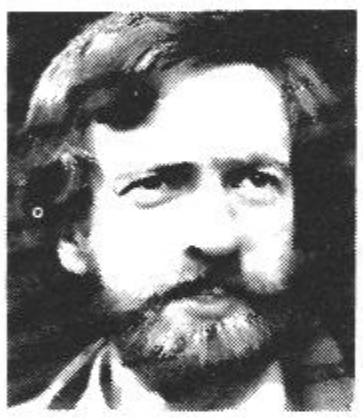
Advice from the enemy (never to be followed):

"If the Labour Party is to become electable again it must embrace wholeheartedly the principle which, above all, won the Conservatives four election victories in a row: the principle that it is the individual, acting in a free market, who should have the power and the right to be the master of his own fortune and his own destiny." - The London *Evening Standard.*

Who says there's no collusion between health authorities and the Tories?

Over 350 nurses living on the Joyce Green Hospital site (Dartford and Gravesham Health Authority) were barred from voting in the general election because they had not been registered by the Health Authority. Having first tried to claim that individuals were responsible for registering themselves, the authority finally admitted to a 'mix-up'. Heard that one before?

Disappointment, anger and a new determination



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

BY APRIL 11TH *the disappointment of thousands at the Labour defeat of the 9th had turned to bitter anger.*

During a 'thank you' loudspeaker tour of the Islington North Constituency we found great support for Labour, apprehension at the future and deep anger that money, wealth and greed appeared to have triumphed again.

However, the results are worth analysing. Labour gained 41 seats and our national vote went up to 11.6 million. This reflected a genuine popular anger at the Tories that almost all Labour canvassers noticed on the doorstep. But did Labour's election campaign measure up to the needs of the moment?

The early part of the campaign did become one of "us vs.them", especially over health and education, but this was not followed through. On the questions of redistribution of wealth, on paying for Labour's programme by arms cuts or a wealth tax, the leadership faltered. At no stage was the question of how a Labour government would challenge the ERM or the industrial policies of the EC even raised.

Presentation and image are important in any political struggle and good design should not be the preserve of the right wing or the advertising industry. However, the production of millions of glossy but vacuous leaflets did not say much to the three million on the dole or the millions more consumed with anxiety over their economic future.

The image of "soap box" Major talking to people in the street made an uncomfortable comparison to "jetaway" Kinnock's round of photo-calls and invitation-only rallies.

The culmination of this process of alienation from the people was the Sheffield rally. £150,000 could have been much better used and the time and energies of 10,000 Party members better employed than in the orgy of self-congratulation and arrogance we saw on our television screens.

The resignation of Kinnock and Hattersley was rushed. The speed and spatch-cock method of electing the new leader are designed to deny us the policy debate we need. There is a frenzied rush which is preventing a necessary examination of the consensus politics of the last five years - and the ritual expulsions that went with them.

Now we need a clear statement of socialist values, a renewed and genuine internationalism and the reconstruction of a Party determined to fight. The Tories' health cuts, the housing free-for-all and the impoverishment of the elderly and jobless will not be stopped by a strategy of "heads down for 1997". What's needed is a labour movement determined to defend and demand.

Left candidates and honest political statements did not lose electoral support. My election address re-stated my opposition to the Gulf War, opposed nuclear weapons and advocated Irish unity, none of which aroused doorstep hostility; on the contrary, there was enthusiasm from many.

There is nothing unpopular about socialism; it's just that millions never hear about it!

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES *do change the course of politics; the left has a duty in the post-USSR period not to hide its socialism but to re-state it. This year two big events give us that opportunity.*

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade is designed to set the seal on Japanese/North American/Western European control of the world economy for the next quarter century. It won't work. The victims of flood, drought, environmental disaster and World Bank "restructuring" simply will not put up with it any longer. Even the new NATO rapid deployment force cannot control the whole world or the minds of all the world's people.

The "earth summit" in Rio de Janeiro is also crucial. Environmental protection cannot be achieved by military power or the free market. Sustainable production for need based on an acceptance that all have to eat to live must be the starting point.

The Major-Bush strategy is to blame the poor for their poverty. The socialist solutions required by the world crises of mass poverty and environment destruction are anathema to them. Socialism, as William Morris pointed out, is about working in harmony with the natural world.

The Labour leadership's failure to raise environmental issues in the election was an abject dereliction of duty. It gave an all too clear - and all too blank - message to the millions of young people who were voting for the first time.

Islington North Labour Party
Black Socialist Society
Inaugural meeting and social!
Tuesday May 19th, 7.30pm
Red Rose Club
129 Seven Sisters Road N7
Guest speakers:
Irma Crichlow, Marc Wadsworth, Jeremy Corbyn MP

Putting paid to the 'Tax Myth'

A MEDIA-PEDDLED myth to the effect that John Smith's tax changes in his Shadow budget 'lost' the election for Labour is rapidly gaining currency.

Junking even Labour's present minimal commitment to wealth redistribution and declining to reverse even a small part of

Dave Palmer
Hornsey and Wood Green CLP

Thatcher's "tax give-away" to the rich is heralded by Bryan Gould (backed by Ken Livingstone) as the next stage in "modernising" Labour's programme and winning over voters in the South East.

According to the *Economist*, an ardent opponent of Smith's tax proposals, "In those constituencies with the highest household incomes the swing to Labour was a full one point higher than the national average." In the South and Midlands, where incomes are highest, the swing to Labour was 5% compared with a national figure of 3%.

Whatever lost Labour the election it was not those on above-average national incomes in the South East (the top 20%) being scared off by Smith's proposed changes. Let's remind ourselves of what Smith was proposing. The removal of the unfair National Insurance anomaly was demanded by the most basic notion of fair taxation. Under the present system those on basic rate up to £21,000 are paying a total income tax bill of 34% (25% + 9% NI). Those between £21,000 and £25,000 pay only 25% tax. All those over £25,000 pay 40% - only 6% more than those on average and below average earnings.

Smith's upper rate of 50% was to apply only to those over £40,000 per year. Eight out of ten stood to gain from the shadow budget. Yes, the tabloids and the Tories distorted this, but was it Smith's budget or the way that it was presented, the absence of any coherent economic or industrial strategy to go with it, that let the enemy get away with the distortion?

Lowering taxes for those below average earnings should be a priority for a Labour government. Raising them for those well above average earnings is a necessity if such a government is to provide any improvement in public services. The left needs to propose more re-distribution, not less. It is staggering that Labour has failed in thirteen years to develop a comprehensive tax policy. To join those wanting to abandon any commitment to progressive taxation (as Livingstone has done) is an act of complete folly, particularly on the evidence of the election results.

Livingstone's "advisors" should put their own tax proposals on the table rather than propagate the 'tax myth'.

Unionists topple Adams in West Belfast

ONE OF THE most depressing results of April 9th for many socialists was the defeat of Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein's MP for West Belfast and one of the architects of the political turn to the left within the republican party.

Adams actually gained a 1% swing in his favour. He was defeated by the direct 7% swing from the Ulster Unionist Party to the SDLP.

This indicates how effective a voice Adams has been: loyalists were prepared to vote for the "nationalist" SDLP for the first time in history in order to keep him out. It also indicates how puny a threat to the Unionist veto the SDLP represents. Despite years of censorship and constant vilification from every other party and the media, Sinn Fein gained a respectable vote of over 60,000 throughout the North of Ireland, well above the Conservative Party which fielded eleven candidates. Where they stood, the *Militant*-backed Labour and Trade Union candidates polled an average 1.7%.

They gave a party...

TERRY LIDDLE reports: Some fifty people attended the Socialist Society's annual meeting on March 21st. Anyone who thought they had come for a serious discussion on the desirability and possibility of a New Left Party must have been sadly disappointed. With the exception of Andrew Coates, who is opposed to a new party, the platform speakers treated the audience to a morning of incoherent waffle and vague meanderings. The question at hand - do we need a new party? - was never really addressed, let alone given a concrete answer.

If the platform was confused, Labour Party members in the audience were not. Several of them, including two *Briefing* supporters, put up excellent arguments for staying in the Labour Party and waging the fight for socialism within it. The only real enthusiasts for a new party were ex-members of the CPGB. Perhaps having dissolved their own party they feel left out.

For many in the Socialist Society, PR has been elevated from a democratic reform to a fetish, a universal cure-all which in some mysterious way will make space for a new party if it ever gets formed. So jaded, cynical and tired (not to mention grossly confused) have the ex-CP, ex-IS, ex-everything elements in the Socialist Society become that some were arguing for voting Liberal Democrat or even claiming that the Liberal Democrats were to the left of Labour. The mind boggles!

At one point someone suggested the Labour Party comrades there should have gone canvassing instead. They were right.

The Labour leadership and a woman's right to choose

WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS within the Labour Party, including Women for Socialism and Labour Women in the National Abortion Campaign, have organised a meeting on Saturday, May 23rd to which all candidates nominated for the Labour Party leadership and deputy leadership will be invited.

All the candidates will be asked where they stand on a number of key issues, including women's organisation within the Party, quotas and women's reproductive rights.

The meeting will be held at Camden Town Hall from 2:30 to 4:30pm and will be open to all women in the Labour Party.

The National Abortion Campaign has published a guide to the voting records of all the candidates on what remains a key issue for Labour women.

Two votes are listed. The first vote was on David Alton's Bill seeking to reduce abortion time limits. The second was on abortion on request.

Abortion on request is Labour Party policy, agreed at several conferences. Although a free vote was allowed and no whip imposed, most members of the Labour front bench (including Neil Kinnock) took part.

Name of Candidate	Alton	Request
Margaret Beckett	Against	For
Ann Clwyd	Against	For
Bryan Could	Against	No vote
Bernie Grant	Against	No vote
Ken Livingstone	Against	For
John Prescott	Against	No vote
John Smith	For	No vote

For further details, contact Leonora Lloyd at NAC on 071 405 4801.

Naming names: who's to blame for Labour's defeat?



The failure to win the 1992 general election was one of the most avoidable and costly betrayals of the working class in living memory. Labour's leading politicians, pundits and bureaucrats are now scrambling around trying to lay the blame anywhere but where it rightly belongs - on their own shoulders. A comprehensive list of the time-serving, value-free careerists with which the Labour Party hierarchy is currently stuffed would fill several issues of Briefing. *Instead, we offer readers this choice selection of* ***Class Traitors of the General Election****.*

JACK CUNNINGHAM, Labour's General Secretary in all but name, whose attempts to bully the press, Party members and voters into rallying behind the leader were entirely counter-productive. Now the Tories are alleging he violated election law by abusing his influence with British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. BNFL didn't do him much good in any case; the swing of a mere 0.5% from Tory to Labour in his Copeland constituency was one of the worst results for Labour in the country.

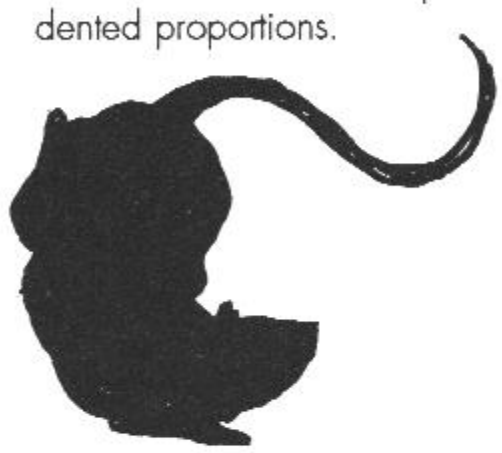
Gerald Kaufman, architect of Labour's shameful policy on the Gulf War and his comrade-in-arms **Martin O'Neill**, were mercifully invisible throughout the election campaign but had already done more than enough damage in preceding years. Thanks to their efforts, the pundits tell us, defence was not an issue in this campaign. Neither, therefore, were the billions wasted by the Tories on weapons of mass destruction.

John Smith and **Margaret Beckett** gave Thatcherite economics a ringing public endorsement each time they vetoed another spending pledge with their dreaded incantation of that depressing mantra, "as resources permit". They made a mockery of Party conference and left the Party to fight the election with a joke policy on education, an incomprehensible policy on housing and no policy at all on transport.

Donald Dewar (5% swing from Labour to SNP in Glasgow Garscadden) and Brian Wilson (1.7% swing from Labour to Conservative in Cunninghame North) refused to challenge the Tory mandate in Scotland and vilified Poll Tax non-payers.

Gordon Brown and **Tony Blair**, the "beautiful people" beloved of Fleet Street and the BBC, who replaced commitments to full employment, trade union rights, planning, public ownership and industrial democracy with sound-bite politics of such yawning vacuousness that a Tory government with an uncertain leadership was able to survive severe recession and skyrocketing unemployment.

The **Tribune Group and its 150 Labour MPs**, who were prepared in recent years on any occasion to do the leadership's bidding, no matter how destructive or disruptive it might be to the Party, no matter how at odds with their professed personal commitments. In a desperate attempt to reward this ever-swelling crew of the chronically eager-to-please, the leadership had to expand the Labour Front Bench to unprecedented proportions.

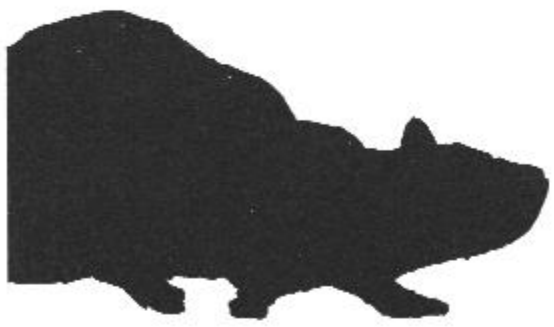


Philip Gould, Deborah Mattison and all their colleagues in the **Shadow Communications Agency**, aided and abetted by **Patricia Hewitt**, the pseudo-messiahs of mass communication, who came close to wrecking the Party by divesting it of soul, vision and purpose. In their reckless drive to out-Tory the Tories, the SCA spent tonnes of our money on inaccurate polls, ineffectual (on occasion incomprehensible) posters and counter-productive Party Political Broadcasts trumpeting what all the polling data showed was the Party's single biggest liability - the personality of its leader. Fatally seduced by their own propaganda, they were responsible for the hollow triumphalism of the Sheffield rally, a fiasco which alienated millions of voters in the last week of the campaign. Oscar Wilde's adage, "the play was a success, the audience a disaster" sums up their view of the election defeat. Alas, this over-paid, over-achieving, under-talented flotsam and jetsam of the London demi-monde of so-called media professionals will not themselves pay the price of their errors; that will have to be met by tens of millions of working class people whose existence was completely ignored by their campaign.

Charles Clarke, Neil Stewart, Julie Hall and other members of Kinnock's Westminster Bunker, his private office, who worked flat out for nine years to substitute the personal interests of Neil Kinnock for those of the Labour Party as a whole, creating a climate in which dissent or sensible political discussion of any kind was strictly verboten. They were adept at nothing but the time-honoured arts of arm-twisting, blackmailing and rumour-mongering.

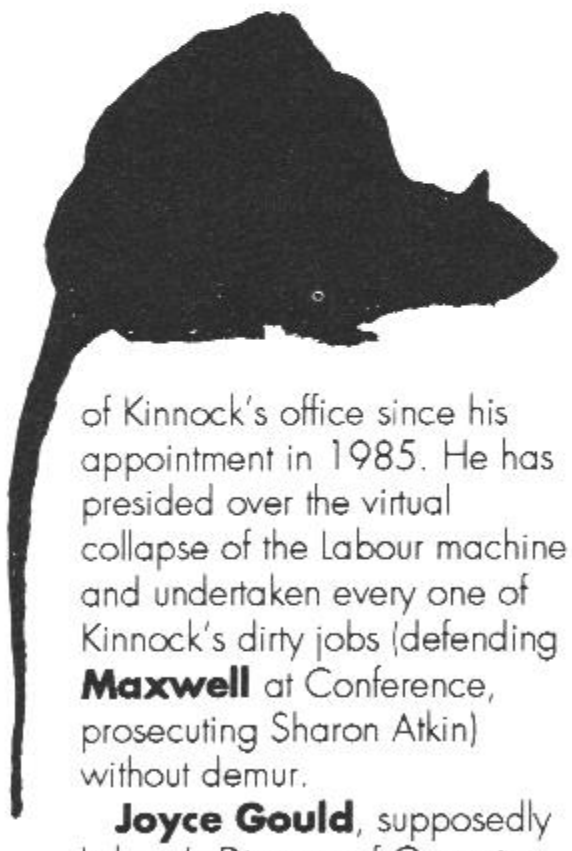
John Prescott, Bryan Gould, David Blunkett, Robin Cook and Clare Short all endorsed Kinnock's vote-losing election strategy time and again by sticking up their hands for it at the NEC. They now claim that they acted at times against their better judgement but their refusal to challenge Kinnock's judgement when it counted is testimony to their acquiescence. Should these self-confessed hypocrites ever be trusted by the movement again?

Margaret Hodge, Graham Stringer, Alan Whitehead, Steve Bassam, Dick Knowles and all the other Labour local government leaders whose policies of cuts, cuts and more cuts,



combined with a ferocious attack on Poll Tax non-payers, turned local government from a potential vote-winner into a no-go area for Labour's campaign.

Labour's General Secretary (in name only), **Larry Whitty** has been a compliant prisoner



of Kinnock's office since his appointment in 1985. He has presided over the virtual collapse of the Labour machine and undertaken every one of Kinnock's dirty jobs (defending **Maxwell** at Conference, prosecuting Sharon Atkin) without demur.

Joyce Gould, supposedly Labour's Director of Organisation, spent most of her time in recent years "investigating" Party members, "reporting" on their activities to the NEC and "examining" them before the NCC. Under her supervision Labour's Regional Offices became centres of political policing, leaving hard-pressed grass-roots activists to deal with election preparations virtually unassisted.

In London the likes of **Phil Cole** and **Margaret McDonagh** failed miserably to seize their target marginals from the Tories, not least because their energies had been given over to hounding Party members in places like Lambeth and Haringey.

In Birmingham, Trades Unionists for Labour full-timer **Keith Hanson** stuck his nose into Parliamentary selections throughout the region, helped fix the Small Heath nomination for right-winger **Roger Godsiff** (2.5% swing from Labour to Conservative) and "organised" a "major rally" with **Blair, Brown, Hodge** and **Hattersley** on the Monday evening before polling day. The hall seated over a thousand but only a hundred odd Party activists allowed themselves to be dragged away from canvassing duties by full-timers desperate to avoid embarrassment in front of the Party's superstars.

Vicky Phillips (former NOLS apparatchik and ex-President of the NUS) is the Party's national Women's Officer. She promoted the likes of **Harriet Harman** as the acceptable face of Labour women while systematically dismantling the once vibrant women's organisation. Surprise, surprise: even fewer women than before were prepared to vote Labour in the election.

Neil Usher, another ex-NOLS apparatchik, is Labour's Youth and Student Officer. Just what his contribution was at a time when Labour no longer has a functioning youth section remains a mystery.

Sally Morgan, yet another ex-NOLS hack working at Party HQ, made a complete mess of Labour's "target seats" operation, using it to reward political favourites and punish enemies, and even managed to instruct Party members in one safe Labour seat to work in four different marginals at the same time.

David Hill took over the



Party's Campaigns and Communications Directorate after **Peter Mandelson** and **Colin Byrne** had forced out John Underwood. The latter were responsible for fostering the unsavoury habit among leading Party figures of smearing each other in off-the-record press briefings. While Hill himself refrained from this process, he seemed to think that the art of mass campaigning consisted of getting the lighting right at press conferences, phoning up and protesting to errant journalists who wrote less than completely favourable pieces about the Party and ensuring that his former boss, **Roy Hattersley**, had at least his fair share of the limelight.

Jo Moore was ensconced in the Walworth Road press office by Peter Mandelson despite her lack of journalistic experience (her qualifications were the usual stint of student factionalism augmented by a spot of witch-hunting in Haringey). It's hard to say whether Moore is disliked more by her colleagues at Walworth Road or by those professional journalists who have described her as "incompetent, rude, arrogant and unpleasant".

Similar sentiments have been expressed about **Jo Scard**,



Labour's London Press Officer, whose idea of promoting the Party in the capital was to disseminate as many lurid tales of "loony Lambeth" to as many Tory journalists as possible.

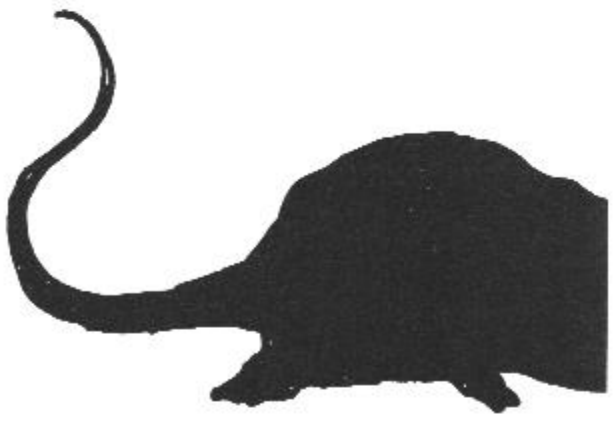
As the editor of *Labour Party News* **Virginia Gibbons** produced the most boring publication of all time, an insult to the intelligence of Labour's members and a massive burden on the Party's purse.

As an adviser to **Robin Cook, Gordon Best**, a closet Tory, sabotaged Labour's progressive NHS policy, tried to swing the Party behind Kenneth Clarke's NHS "reforms" and nearly left Labour without a card to play in its strongest suit, health care.

Finally the man himself. **Neil Kinnock** was nothing but a small-time hustler, a nervous opportunist with a big chip on his shoulder: forever insecure, forever apprehensive of the stab in the back. His selling point to the Party in 1983 was that he was "good on telly" but his appearances on TV in the following years were a source of perpetual embarrassment to Party members. He was the classic case of a small man in a big job - fearful of all potential rivals, intolerant of criticism from any quarter, thriving on the phoney praise of sycophants and protected from all contact with reality by a small circle of cynical courtiers. Anyone with an independent mind or a personal commitment to any vestige of socialist principles was weeded out, often subject to derisive abuse via the media. Under Kinnock Labour became an ugly party very few people wanted to join. His "tough guy" routine with the Labour left, the "enemy within", was in stark contrast to his abject submissiveness in the face of any and all the institutions of the ruling class.

The highest personal rating Kinnock ever obtained in a Gallup survey was in the month he was elected leader in 1983. It was all downhill after that. For much of the public he was simply the archetypal forked-tongued, double-dealing, self-serving politician; working class voters showed their maturity in the general election by voting for Labour in spite of Kinnock, not because of him.

In creating a Party in his own image, Kinnock opened Labour up to an influx of corrupt and usually talentless self-seekers alien to the movement but keen to exploit it for personal advancement. He leaves Labour possibly weaker than at any time in its history. The Party is broke, its membership has shrunk to an all-time low, it has no discernible policies or guiding principles of any kind. Kinnock and his acolytes threw away the marvellous opportunity for success Labour had on April 9th 1992. We must not allow their like to do it again.



Labour councils wake up to the morning after

The general election result spelled defeat for the Party's official local government strategy: keep your head down and hope for a Labour government! Now that it's clear a Labour government is not going to be with us for at least four years, how can Labour councils preserve the jobs and services that still remain? How can they defend their communities against another wave of municipal privatisation and an ever-tightening financial noose? Islington Councillor ***Liz Davies*** *looks at the new dilemmas facing Labour councillors.*

THE TORIES WILL seek to destroy what's left of local government. We may end up with local authorities having few more responsibilities than parish councils. There are already proposals to privatise central administrative functions. All local authority statutory duties will soon be subject to compulsory competitive tendering. They will only be able to keep services in house by cutting jobs and conditions. As the jobs go, the services decline - at the very same time that working-class communities which elect Labour councillors will be in ever more pressing need of those services because of recession and Tory government policies.

In recent years new model Kinnockite councils have treated jobs and services as though they were competing demands: if jobs are provided the services will suffer. They use this logic to bash the trade unions in the name of the community. They ignore the fact that local authorities are usually the largest local employers - the provision of council jobs is directly related to the level of local employment. And they claim that services are made more "efficient" by job losses. Socialists should not argue for over-staffing, and we should always be in favour of efficiency, but jobs cut because of financial constraints have nothing to do with efficient re-organisation and leave gaps in the provision of services.

"In recent years new model Kinnockite councils have treated jobs and services as though they were competing demands: if jobs are provided the services will suffer"

The Tory government has already suggested that council rents should be at "current market value". Now they will legislate to ensure that that happens. The whole idea of public housing will be eradicated. Council houses are not designed to make a profit from land ownership, but to house those who cannot afford to live in private accommodation. As rents increase, tenants will reasonably demand that the quality of services also increase. Given privatisation and cuts in council staff, they will be disappointed. Already, this spiral has been used by the Labour right as a convenient tool to set tenants against workers and avoid their own responsibility for the crisis.

The Poll Tax may have been abolished, but non-payment lives on. Councils can seek to imprison non-payers until 1999. Non-payers faced with imprisonment are overwhelmingly the poorest in the community, people who really cannot find the money to pay Thatcher's Tax. Those people need defending. No Labour Council should be seeking to jail them, nor should they try to turn Poll Tax payers against non-payers by imposing surcharges for Poll Tax non-payment on the Poll Tax or future Council Tax bills.

A Labour Council's task in the next five years is to preserve the few jobs and services that remain and prepare the ground for new demands for improved and extended services delivered at local level under local democratic control. That means, in the first place, uniting local people against the government, not dividing them against each other.

No Council can pin its hopes on the next Labour government; that prospect is too far away. Instead Labour Councils must seek to build alliances rather than create division. They must take the lead in putting the blame for poor services, cuts in jobs, etc. exactly where it lies - with the Tory government. Despite the restriction in political campaigning, a Labour Council can seek to unite tenants, trade unionists, service consumers, Poll Tax payers and non-payers in defending jobs and services. Rather than managing one round of cuts after another, councillors should make their priority assisting political campaigns and local self-organisation in any way possible. In this way some practical self-defence of those communities threatened by and already hostile to the central government can be achieved. In the absence of this sort of activity, just what purpose is served by the Labour Party standing in council elections?

In Islington well over 50% of the electorate voted Labour in the general election. Both Tories and Liberal Democrats were roundly rejected by the electorate. We have a mandate from the people here, as do Labour councils up and down the country. Surely with this mandate comes some obligation not to go on in the usual way, consulting endlessly with senior officers over how best to implement the latest Tory directive, dodging and weaving to ensure that somebody else, anybody else - trades unionists, squatters, Poll Tax non-payers, even fellow members of the Labour Group - gets the blame for the reductions in quality and quantity of services which we are imposing on our own voters.

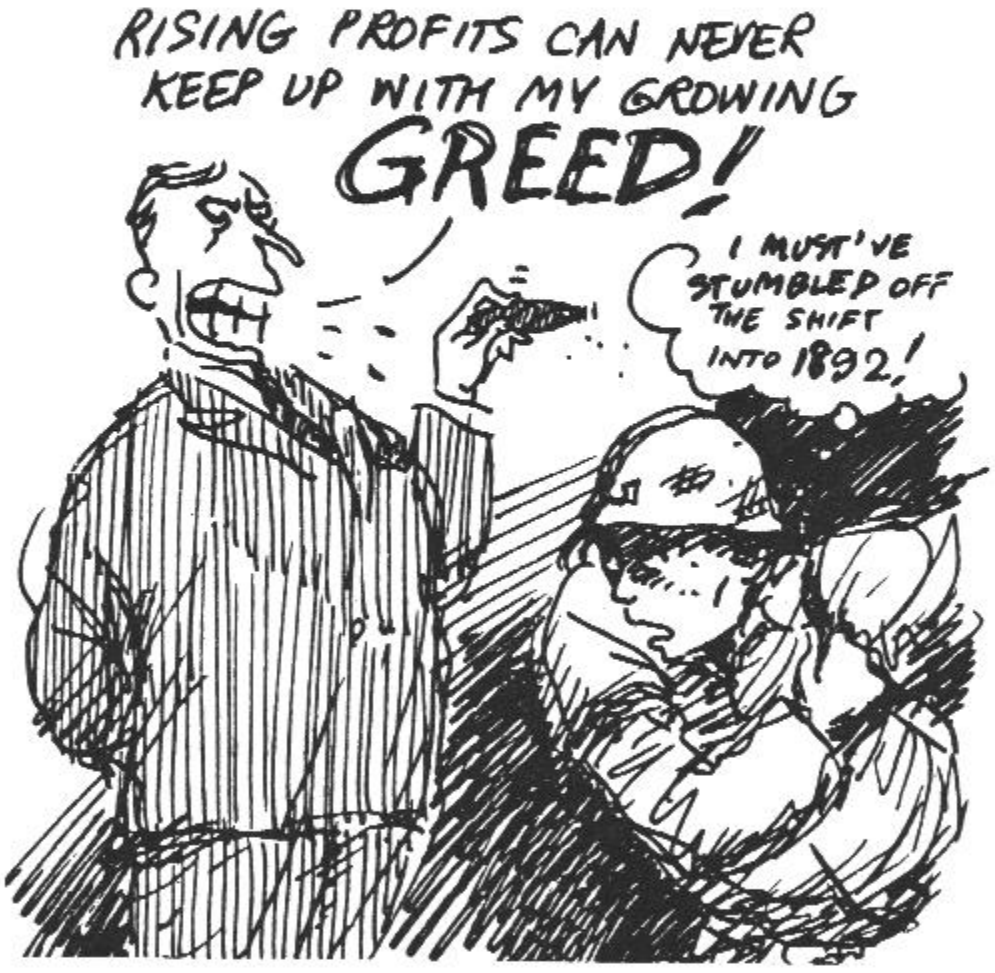
Yorkshire NUM move into action

YORKSHIRE AREA NUM is gearing up for selective strike action against British Coal following the first successful ballot for industrial action in the British coalfields since the end of the 1984-85 miners' strike.

Earlier, delegates representing all 32 Yorkshire branches had voted unanimously to support Armthorpe Branch in its struggle against BC's imposition of outside contractors in place of existing development teams.

The ballot for action at Armthorpe itself was won with an overwhelming 80%, following BC's attempt to use the courts to overturn an earlier 71% support vote. Fearing the eventual result in this 'best of three' contest, BC even measured the 'yes' and 'no' boxes on the re-issued ballot papers!

A resolution brought by Armthorpe to the Yorkshire Area Council called for support and for a campaign leading to an Area-wide ballot on industrial action. Meetings, leaflets, posters and special issues of the *Yorkshire Miner* were all part of the campaign - which was delayed due to the Area's concentration on working for Labour in the general election.



Branches were balloted in the week following the re-election of the Tory government and produced a 50.7% majority for selective strikes in support of the Armthorpe miners.

Yorkshire NUM General Secretary Ken Homer said: "The crucial point in the dispute over the imposition of contractors at Armthorpe is management's refusal to negotiate. This is not just an Armthorpe dispute. If they succeed in talking away the jobs of development workers employed by BC at Armthorpe, no BC employee's job is safe."

The miners are now waiting for management's response to the successful ballot. The Area Council will reconvene on May 5th to discuss implementing the vote for industrial action.

NALGO NEC elections: left loses ground

AFTER A NUMBER of years in which the political balance of NALGO's NEC hasn't shifted much, the "left" suffered net losses in 1992. Among the more celebrated casualties are Roger Bannister - one time Broad Left candidate for General Secretary and (from a position which most *Briefing* readers wouldn't recognise as on the left...) Jean Geldart, last year's chair of the National Local Government Committee.

Jon Rogers
Lambeth NALGO

Results in London were particularly poor with the self-selected "left" slate suffering a net loss of two out of eight places to the hard right "fightback" slate. Significantly, the London area saw the lowest of what were generally low turnouts.

The consistent failure of the "left" on the NALGO NEC to build upon the success of the 1989 pay dispute in local government has been rewarded with a vote of apathy and cynicism. There must be a danger that this mood will infect the ballot on the merger with COHSE and NUPE, the success of which is vital for the left and indeed for all public sector workers

Unfortunately, in the absence of any effective organisation of the left in NALGO socialists are very much in the position of by-standers as bureaucrats of different stripes slug it out for seats at the top table.

A renewed Tory onslaught on public sector trade unionism - and on local government workers in particular - is clearly in the making. The new merged union could be our most effective weapon in resisting this. However, to forge this weapon, and to ensure rank-and-file members are allowed to wield it, unity and organisation on the left are required urgently.

Most boring trade union journal, continued

THIS MONTH'S CLEAR winner is NAS/UWT's *Career Teacher*, which has all the verve and flair of a maths textbook. Despite the headline "Teachers Revolt" (the most radical slogan to appear in any trade union journal this month), *Career Teacher*'s wall-to-wall text, tacky adverts, 'spot' colour that appears to have been half left on the printing press and 'surprise, surprise' letter from Cilla Black make it a monument to tedium.

On a positive note (for a change) let's congratulate those union journals which pulled out the stops for Labour in the general election. *Yorkshire Miner* produced a series of election specials that spelled it out loud and clear ("Tories Out!") and linked its campaign for Labour with a campaign for a 'yes' vote in support of industrial action against outside contractors at Armthorpe (see above).

The FBU's *Firefighter*, another fighting journal, carried articles on the rise of fascism in Europe and a report of exchange delegations with the Scottish NUM. Other papers calling for an uncompromising vote for Labour included UCATT's *Viewpoint*, GPMU's *Journal*, a special edition of *NCU Journal* and *The Miner*. ASLEF's *Locomotive Journal* linked the vote very well with what the election means for British Rail.

On its front cover, the *AEU Journal* asked coyly, "How will you vote in the General Election?" but inside it included two colour 'Vote Labour' posters. The GMB's design-mad *Direct* boasted an 18-inch high cover photo of Kinnock with his gob open.

Class War called for a hung Parliament - the graphic of a suspended Major and Kinnock said it all.

The routing of the French Socialists

AFTER THE March 22nd local and regional elections the French Socialist Party is in serious crisis. From 32% of the vote in 1986 the Parti Socialiste (PS) slumped to a derisory 18%. The mainstream right-wing parties won over 30%, which does not, however, give them an absolute majority of seats in most regional governing bodies.

Andrew Coates
Ipswich CLP

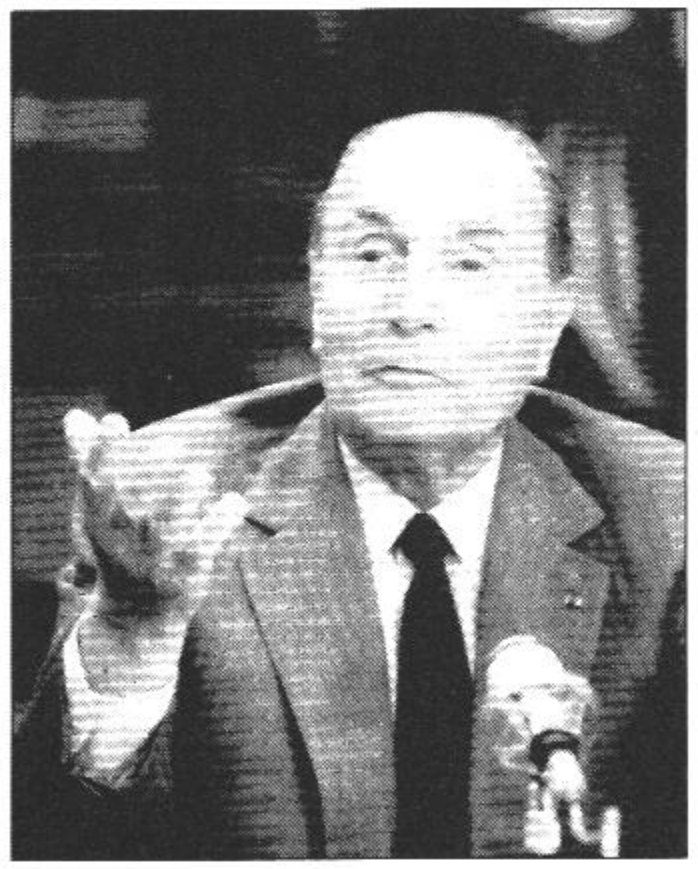
While the fascist Front National (FN) gained a total of 14% of the votes it did not spawn the kind of victorious wave many had feared. Confounding the political analysts the French Communist Party (PCF) scored around 8% - a modest increase - and showed signs of a revival in parts of the country, including the all-important Ille de France area encircling Paris.

The true winners of the election were the various splinter groupings, including the 'Verts' (Green Party) and 'Generation Ecologiste', which together obtained over 14% of the vote. They are, nevertheless, thoroughly divided amongst themselves. Local government in France will be in chaos for the next few years as attempts are made to construct coalitions between the different factions.

There are three simple reasons for the dramatic decline in PS support.

The first (often mentioned in the British press) is that France has been dominated by the same political elite since the end of the sixties. It's as if we had Michael Foot wheeling out the 60s *Tribune* line on last night's telly! Sheer boredom sometimes plays a more important part in politics than people think.

The second and most important reason (not mentioned by British commentators) is that the PS has no defined class base. In the north of France, it is true, the old SFIO federation represents a similar alliance between the unions and the Socialists to the one in Germany. But there are no formal links between the various socialist-inclined union federations and the PS itself. The PS declared itself to the left of the (despised) 'social-democratic' parties of Northern Europe during the seventies, and now is clearly to the right of even the Danish Labour Party. Mitterrand's various cabinets have introduced no measures to improve the lot of wage-earners (though they have passed a few useful reforms, such as setting up a real social security system). No union body was in a position to challenge this change in direction. Detached from working class links the Socialists have floated with fashion (from Marxism to free-market liberalism).



The third reason is quite crude. France is split between a 'Mediterranean' political culture and a Northern European one. Francois Mitterrand is fundamentally a Mediterranean figure: he has based his political career on a network of friendships, rewarding favours to services given, and skirting close to actual corruption.

Scarcely a day goes by without the French radio blasting forth about a scandal involving Socialist politicians and money. At the beginning of Mitterrand's reign the Northern and Parisian left looked at Mitterand's dubious associations with amused detachment. This attitude has vanished. People are genuinely sickened by him. A surprise best-seller last year, *Le President*, by Franz-Olivier Giesbert, gives chapter and verse about Mitterrand's ambiguous relationships. A move for decency has now infected the PS and may well lead to its break-up into the original factions that came together to found it in the 70s (which range from the 'New Left' to liberals).

There are two important features about these results that British socialists should think about.

First, the emergence of the neo-fascist Front National as a major political actor. The elections have been marked by violent demonstrations against Le Pen. And when I say violent I really should underline the word: bombings and shootings and helmeted leftists armed with iron bars confronting the police every time Le Pen speaks. There exists in France a network, created after the European elections in 1984, with rather more direct ideas about what to do with Le Pen than ever the Anti-Nazi League had about his counterparts over here. They have had some success in driving back the fascists. Despite its disturbingly substantial vote, the Front National has not been able to emerge as a realistic alternative to the mainstream right, which was its aim, and has been tainted by the image of violence.

Secondly, the collapse of the Socialists illustrates that a party of the left that does not have an organic link with the working class movement can swerve from left to right without any constraints. Even the FEN (teachers' union), which is the nearest the Socialists get to union support, does not have a direct bond - and has been unable, over the last ten years, even to implement its minimum programme of completely secularising the educational system.

The PS's Michael Rocard, who tried to implement a programme similar to that proposed by Britain's *Marxism Today*, completely detached from working class support, failed miserably. The much-loathed Communists, with their only real base in the CGT union federation, have been able to weather the storm after the fall of Stalinism surprisingly well. In fact, any revived left in France will probably come in the form of an alliance between left Socialists and the Communists at present united in the 'Refoundatations' movement.

Dohuk: Saddam's killing fields

A small delegation from Islington and Hackney returned to Free Kurdistan at the beginning of March to deliver equipment donated to the Kurdistan Press Office in Zakho. They travelled south to Dohuk, one of the three provincial capitals of Iraqi Kurdistan, and returned with the following harrowing account of the holocaust conducted by Saddam Hussein and the Baathists in the "Infal" campaigns against the Kurds. ***Keith Veness*** *reports.*

DOHUK IS A large, mainly Kurdish town on the main motorway from the Turkish border down to Mosul and Baghdad, the so-called "Tanker Route". Alongside the motorway stands a squat and rather ugly two-storey circular fortress. Iraqi Kurdistan is full of ridiculous palaces and forts erected by Saddam in a fit of building unseen since Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. Most of these now serve quite handily as offices for the various Kurdish political parties and local aid organisations.

It was only in December last year that the story behind this particular building was revealed. The Kurds who occupied the place were amazed to find it full of video tapes and recordings. As the various cells in the building were opened, the horrors of the place were fully revealed. Dozens of hooks were built into the ceilings for strangling suspects. The videos showed local Kurds being beaten-up, tortured and executed and were apparently sent to Saddam and his cronies weekly to show at Baath party leadership get-togethers.

Over 8,000 Kurds were slaughtered and their bodies dumped in a series of mass graves. The local Kurdish activists have now been advised not to excavate the mass graves until forensic experts can arrive to evaluate the evidence properly.

We visited the fort at Dohuk on Thursday March 5th and its horror still troubles all five of us. A harsh snowfall had persuaded many families to "squat" in the fort rather than spend a winter in tents. Over a hundred orphans were living there, with other families who had taken them in. When we went into the entrance-way dozens of kids rushed over to greet us and climbed all over the cars. An elderly Kurd pushed his way through and insisted we went upstairs. We walked along dark passageways that stank and were splattered with animal dung and human waste. Luckily Tom Hogan, one of our party, had a small torch which helped us avoid the worst of the mess. Finally the old Kurd led us into a room with a woman boiling water on a wood stove. About a dozen children sat there with her. She jumped up and welcomed us in. Through our translator she told us a story that reduced all of us to tears.



Members of the Islington and Hackney delegation outside Dohuk Fort

Her husband had been a PUK member arrested in the Infal round-up. He had been executed by strangulation in the very room this wretched woman now had to live in. She kept saying to us: "Tell everyone what happened here - everyone must know"! Our Kurdish guide and friend Sherko Shindi could stand it no more. He said, "Let's get out of here. I've seen this sort of thing 60 or 100 times but it still makes me break down."

As we picked our way back to the car we said nothing. We all felt dirty and degraded in a way only those who had seen the concentration camps or the killing fields of Cambodia could have felt. Sherko could only console us by saying, "Look at all the children; they're our next generation."

Dohuk is a clear example of the systematic genocide planned for Kurdistan by Saddam. British and German building firms connived at the horror by taking on lucrative contracts to construct his forts and prisons. The Dohuk fort itself was built with British money and by a British contractor. At the Kurdistan Front office in Dohuk they provided us with written evidence of the final insanity planned for Dohuk and its Kurds. After the Baathist counter-attack in April last year, Saddam Hussein issued the order that 95% of Dohuk's population was to be massacred - with the remaining 5% to be questioned and tortured. They were only prevented from completing this hellish task by the arrival of the US Marines at the start of the short-lived "safe havens" initiative.

There is a note of humanity in this chapter of horrors. The Pesh Merga rounded up a lot of the guards who had staffed the fort and were then left with the quandary of what to do with them. They had no intention of keeping prisoners who would need precious food better used for the civilian population returning to shattered homes.

A meeting in the town agreed that no one was to be executed. The guards were simply dumped bare-footed outside of town and made to walk back to Bagdad.

After all the terrors inflicted on them, this refusal to resort to mindless revenge perhaps says more than anything else about why we should support Free Kurdistan and demand international recognition for it - and never allow the Baathists to return to complete their genocide!

Turkish mining disaster:

Murder in Zonguldak!

Keith Veness
Hackney NUPE Officers

ZONGULDAK IS a dirty industrial town on the Black Sea coast of Turkey, thirty miles off the motorway linking Istanbul and Ankara. It is the centre of Turkey's coal-mining industry and is the equivalent of Barnsley or (in the old days) the Rhondda. The coal mining industry in Turkey, as elsewhere, is threatened by closures, cost-cutting and a management more interested in quick profits than in pit safety.

On March 4th the inevitable happened. A massive explosion wrecked the Kozlu pit, killing over 280 miners and totally destroying the whole coal face. The management at Kozlu had 23 minutes warning of the disaster - yet did nothing! The computers recently installed to detect dangerous rises of methane ("coal-damp") gas were triggered at 7:40 pm. They were ignored; the managers hoped the build-up of gas would subside. Instead, it kept increasing and finally at 8:02 pm the order was given to evacuate - only 29 seconds before the explosion.

This amounts to the wanton murder of the workforce and has triggered a tide of outrage across Turkey and from mineworkers worldwide. The Turkish government is trying to explain away its total silence on the complicity of the Turkish Coal Board, which originally tried to claim the explosion occurred twenty minutes earlier than it had!

One hundred and forty-seven bodies have been left sealed in the devastated mine and the coal face will be shut for at least six months. It may never open again. The Turkish Coal Board is still denying negligence in order to avoid paying the pitiful compensation owed to bereaved families. Forty-three miners of the trade union Genel Maden Is Sendikasi have been arrested for trying to organise a sympathy strike at other pits and three have been arrested at the neighbouring Karadon mine for "distributing information" - still an offence under Turkish statutes left over from the days of the military dictatorship.

International Women's Day events in Ankara organised by the SHP (the Turkish Labour Party), originally planned as a happy celebration of the struggle for women's rights, were turned into a massive outpouring of grief and anger as the miners' widows led a huge march through a saddened capital.

The Turkish government and the pit managers have many questions to answer, including why masks to protect against carbon monoxide poisoning, which are required under law, arrived only the day after the disaster. They are now trying desperately to avoid a public enquiry - but mineworkers and the whole labour movement both in Turkey and internationally must exert the maximum pressure to get one.

■ **Do your bit by writing to the Turkish Prime Minster: S. Demirel, T.C. Basbakanlik, Ankara, Turkiye. Send copies of your letters and resolutions to: Genel Maden Is Sendikasi, Zonguldak, Turkiye and to Solidarity Committee with Turkish Miners, c/o 2 Newington Green Road, Islington, London N1 4RX.**

Belgian teachers' strike

John Hayball
Nivelles, Wallonia

FRIDAY MARCH 20TH saw a 90%-strong one-day strike of teachers in Brussels and Wallonia. The action stems from an inconclusive month-long strike in the summer of 1991 against worsening working conditions in Francophone schools.

After the fall of the Martens government it took three months of tangled negotiations before a new coalition was formed. This has sparked fears among the eight-strong united front of teachers' unions that a further deterioration in education funding will occur when the schools return in September after the two-month summer break.

The teachers' demands include improved salaries and status for teachers. But as so often in Belgian politics the issue has served to underline the traditional divide in the Flemish and Francophone Communities.

Europe's sinister growth

THE SINISTER GROWTH of the fascist National Front in France, widely reported during France's recent regional elections (see page 16), is part of a trend reflected in other European countries.

In Italy's general election, the Northern League, a new alliance based around the racist Lombard League, gained 9% of the national vote, despite being a regional party. It was the number two party in Northern Italy and scored 23.5% in its stronghold of Lombardy.

In regional elections in Germany, the neo-Nazi Republican Party gained seats in the state parliament of Baden-Wurhemberg for the first time, gaining nearly 11% of the vote. In Schleswig-Holstein, the more openly fascist DVU scored 6.3%. Chancellor Kohl has tried to deal with the fascist threat by taking a 'tough line' on immigration and calling for reforms to deny refugees social security. But as Le Pen likes to boast, many racists seem to "prefer the original to the copy".

Brussels anti-racism demo

A VAST MASS of up to 150,000 anti-racist demonstrators took hours to inch its way through the centre of Brussels from the North to the South stations on Sunday March 22nd.

The demonstration was called to protest against racism, deportations and the rise of the extreme right wing Vlaams Blok and Front National in Belgium.

Eighty per cent of marchers were from Flanders, where the right wing polled highest in the general election last November.

The demonstration was supported by a small contingent of the Brussels Labour Party Group. *Labour Briefing* was in evidence as was the exported British Anti-Nazi League.

Nicaragua update

EARLIER THIS YEAR 7,000 Nicaraguan combatants were simultaneously disarmed. They come from two opposed groups: the 'recontras', contra soldiers who had

Mike Phipps
Brent South CLP

gone back to their terrorist activities, and the 'recompas' - ex-Sandinistas who had rearmed themselves against the 'recontras'. The government paid around a million US dollars to the ex-combatants, including $150,000 to 'Indonable', the murderous leader of the recontras, on condition he leave the country. Indonable has gone to Miami to continue the 'civic struggle'.

One worrying aspect of this disarmament process is the right-wing government's plans to incorporate large numbers of recontras into the police, thus building up a well-armed anti-Sandinista force. At the same time the budget of the army, led by Sandinista Humberto Ortega, is being cut back.

There are also doubts that the government's 'money-for-arms' swap can last long. Without land titles and credit to make a livelihood at farming many ex-contras will be tempted back to banditry once their cash pay-off runs out.

On a positive note, the government has been forced by an international environmental campaign to reject a bid by a Taiwanese company to exploit 350,000 acres of tropical forest in the north east of the country. The project would have had a devastating impact on the watershed and the livelihoods of the Indian communities living in the area.

61% call for withdrawal from Northern Ireland

MEMBERS OF THE Troops Out Movement carried out a survey of voters on March 21st which revealed that 61% of those questioned believed Britain should withdraw from Northern Ireland. Only 21% said it shouldn't.

A staggering 82% rejected government policy on talks and said all parties with elected representatives (including Sinn Fein) should be involved. 74% said a referendum should be held on British withdrawal.

The poll was an important challenge to the concerted attempt to keep Ireland off the General Election agenda. TOM chair Richard Stanton said, "The policies being pursued by the political parties on Northern Ireland are clearly contrary to the views of the electorate."

During the election campaign, a well-attended three-day Northern Ireland Human Rights Assembly took place in London. Martin Sweeney, a victim of torture in Castlereagh, was due to speak, but was prevented from doing so when he was detained at Heathrow airport under the Prevention of Terrorism Act - which rather proved the point.

LEWISHAM ANTI-RACIST ALLIANCE

Launch Meeting

7:30pm
Thursday 28th May
Lewisham Town Hall
Catford, London, SE6

Free Winston Now!

Public Meeting

Saturday 9th May, 2.00-5.00pm
Welbourne Community Centre
Chestnut Road, Tottenham N17

Invited Speakers: Stafford Scott (Chair), George Silcott, The Rolan Adams Campaign, The Cardiff 3 Campaign, The Bridgewater 4 Campaign, Billy Power (Birmingham 6) and Bernie Grant MP.

Irish Reporter

"CULTURAL WORKS are among the most economically useless but socially central products of the human race. People have died and continue to die for the right to cultural freedom. Languages have been killed and reborn in struggles to annihilate or restate identity. Paintings have been slashed and repainted. Books have been burned, banned and circulated illegally. Songs have become the icons of struggle and generations." Thus writes Harry Vince, introducing the exploration of culture to which the latest issue of *Irish Reporter* is dedicated.

Irish Reporter, now six issues old, is a Dublin-based quarterly journal which provides a creative framework for radical debate on a range of social and political issues. The current issue on cultural matters examines Irish writing, heritage, music, community arts and includes articles by Margo Harkin of Derry Film and Video Workshop (which has made films for Channel 4) and John O'Dea, one of the founders of the Sligo Arts Festival, as well as poems by Pol O'Loghlainn.

Irish Reporter is available by subscription at £10 from Box 3195, Dublin 6, Ireland.

Torture in India

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE have been tortured to death in India in the last ten years. The rape of women detainees is so routine it is casually reported in the press and children as young as twelve are given electric shock torture.

The latest findings by Amnesty International highlight everyday brutality in all Indian states for even the smallest offences. In only 25 of the over 400 documented cases of death in custody following torture since 1985 (in reality there have been many more) were the police officers involved arrested. In one case it took the police fourteen years of legal action to admit that a student had actually died in their custody!

Torture is most vicious where the state is fighting "separatist" movements. In the Punjab, detainees' legs have been wrenched apart and crushed with iron rollers. In Kashmir detainees have been burned with domestic irons and pierced with electric drills.

■ **Amnesty is calling for protests to be sent to the Indian Prime Minister, PVN Rao, South Block, Gate 6, New Line, New Delhi 110011 and to Home Affairs Minister S Chavan, North Block, New Delhi 110011.**

PERISCOPE

Comic timing

Periscope had heard that several so-called comedians (Jim Davidson, Jimmy Tarbuck, Bob Monkhouse) had threatened to leave the country in the event of a Labour government but it came as a surprise to learn that in the wake of the Tory triumph two other comedians, **Frankie Howerd** and **Benny Hill**, had decided to leave the planet.

Swings and roundabouts

In its election results summary the *Guardian* reported a swing to Labour in Northern Ireland of over 5%. A highly creditable performance - especially as there were no Labour candidates standing there!

We know the *Guardian* believes Labour would do better in elections if it somehow ceased to be the Labour Party, but surely this was stretching a point.

The *Guardian* also carried a remarkable article by *New Left Review* editor **Robin Blackburn** the week before the election in which the erstwhile 60s radical declared that "as a socialist" he would be casting a tactical vote for the Lib-Dems on polling day.

Briefing readers will be familiar with the bizarre arguments Blackburn uses to arrive at this conclusion (see letter, page 23) but they might be surprised to learn that in this case the Marxist intellectual managed to cast his vote the wrong way, tactically-speaking. Labour and not the Lib-Dems finished in second place in his constituency.

A fair cop

Labour's new MP for Hornsey and Wood Green is one **Barbara Roche**, former LCC vice-Chair and darling of Walworth Road.

When originally selected to fight the seat before the 1987 election, Barbara was very much a model of the "soft left" in its more progressive-sounding phase: committed to CND, withdrawal from Ireland, women's liberation, anti-racism and civil liberties. She presented her job running Hackney's Police Unit as a political asset.

Since then, all these commitments have been dumped in favour of Kinnockite conformism of the crassest variety. Locals dubbed her the "Queen of the Photo-Op".

In her recent campaign literature she described her job as "working with the police" to "advise local people about crime prevention". Amidst the standard pics of Barbara with Harriet Harman and John Smith was one of her sitting in a police car; its caption read, "Barbara out on patrol with the local police."

When the **RCP** attacked her at a local Charter 88 public meeting for her involvement with the notoriously corrupt and brutal Hackney police, her only response was a stunned, offended silence.

Extinct creatures

Terry Liddle writes to tell us that our report of the split in the Socialist Party of Great Britain (last month's Periscope) was somewhat off the mark. "What happened was that when the majority decided to drop the 'of Great Britain' from publicity material as too nationalistic, two branches which refused to accept this were expelled. It is these two branches which deride the majority as the 'Socialist Party of Clapham'.

"My experience of debating with them for nearly thirty years is that SPGB members have a fine grasp of Marxist economics and a grand vision of what a socialist society would be like. What they do not have is any concrete idea of how to get from here to there - beyond abstract propagandising. They have transformed scientific methodology into a pseudo-religion which claims that it alone is right.

"In a small way the SPGB mirrors the sorry state of British Marxism with many otherwise sound Marxists seeking the certainty of sectarian dogma and self-imposed isolation instead of embarking knowingly on the dangerous course of fighting the misleaders of the labour movement on the terrain created by the working class itself. In practice this means abandoning the soap box and the discussion circle for the long, hard, uphill struggle in the Labour Party.

"The **SPGB** has been called a monument rather than a movement. The landscape of the left is littered with many such monuments all of them dedicated to past defeats and failures glorious or otherwise. But we can't live in the past. We have to struggle today, and usually not in circumstances of our own choosing, to build the socialist future. If we do not then our proper place is not centre stage in the class struggle but under glass in the museum of antiquities alongside the fossilised remains of other extinct creatures."

Famous last words...

Ten years ago Brighton Labour Briefing ran the headline "Stop the Fleet" and carried articles reflecting a variety of differing views on the Falklands/Malvinas crisis. Other articles continued the debate on women, sexism and the Labour movement which was a major feature of discussion within the local Briefing group. Current witchfinder-general and Brighton Council leader Steve Bassam wrote on the Benefit Take-up Campaign! Other contributors included two recently suspended Brighton Labour councillors, then lowly Party members, and three current members of the Briefing Editorial Board (then even more lowly beings).

The fourth issue of Nottingham Labour Briefing responded to the attacks made by Tebbit's new trade union laws. The Nottingham groups' criticism of the lack of accountability of local councillors and the persistent junketing was now drawing a response from elected members. Peter Tatchell had spoken at a Briefing meeting of 50 people and one Alan Simpson (elected last month as Labour MP for Nottingham South) wrote on industrial injury.

London Labour Briefing did not come out because all its main contributors were up to their necks in the council election campaigns in the capitol. Do you have any back issues of local Briefings from the early 80s? If so, please send copies in to the office, so we can report on the spread of local Briefing journals across the country.


BRIGHTON LABOUR BRIEFING
15p
No.4 MAY 1982

Stop the Fleet

EDITORIAL — LABOUR IN CRISIS — CND LEADS —

FIGHT TEBBIT NOT ARGENTINA

Labour—Take the Power!

Frank Neal remembered

Sharon Jennings, Madeleine Kingston, William West *pay tribute to a much admired comrade who will be long remembered.*

MANY *BRIEFING* readers will be sad to hear of the death of Frank Neal on April 12th at the age of 81.

Frank was a member of Hornsey and Wood Green's Crouch End ward for a number of years. It was a ward whose witch-hunting, right-wing politics Frank frequently found exasperating.

Frank's own position was well and truly on the radical left, and the political hypocrisy of many Labour Party members angered and frustrated him. This prompted him to organise a left-wing caucus in Crouch End in the mid to late 1980s. He believed that by bringing comrades together and working collectively we could force genuine socialist policies through our ward.

As a result of this activity, the right mobilised to oust him from his position as New Members' Secretary. Indeed, it was through his use of this position that many on the left were first introduced to each other. We formed and maintained firm political friendships. Frank saw his position as vital to the Labour Party. He believed that grass-roots activity was the most important element of any socialist movement.

He was the main distributor of *Briefing* to his socialist friends in Crouch End - and even sent it as far away as Peru and Germany. For a couple of years he helped at the *Briefing* office, dealing with the finances. His involvement only ended when his illness was such that he could no longer make the arduous journey down to the old office in Brixton. He was very depressed that he could no longer make such an active contribution and that he could no longer work with like-minded socialists.

We his friends deeply feel the loss, but we also feel that there is much to celebrate and remember about his life.

He died when he was still so enthusiastic about living. He was busy planning the next ten years of his life, trying to work out where his political contributions could be most effective. His anger at a variety of Labour Party policies - such as those on Northern Ireland and the Gulf War - never decreased. He hated the Party's cringing philosophy of not rocking the political boat.

Frank, unlike countless others, lived and breathed his political convictions. We his friends were often struck at the lengths to which he would go to put his socialism into practice. He was totally committed to his belief that action was the ultimate political statement.

Letter to a renegade

Sue Hamilton *was outraged to discover that an old comrade had voted Tory on April 9th. She penned this missive to the ex-leftist a few days after Labour's defeat.*

DEAR TIM: It's the old question. Which side are you on?

By voting Tory you have reduced yourself to being a mean supporter of the status quo.

Yet you know that this is a world where your class has had 200 years to prove itself but has brought instead decadence beyond our imaginative grasp.

A world where six million were gassed in the strategic interests of that class, where further millions now live on the brink of starvation.

And you say that this is the best we can hope for! You choose to promote this world as the summit of human accomplishment. You celebrate the market as the best way to distribute the world's resources. What poverty of thought! How does it feel to think the concluding chapter in human history leaves millions of people dying from want of basic resources: homeless, stateless, workless. Is this really the highest possible form of society? Do you really think that there is no better world to strive for?

Or are you trying to believe that the atrocities of the bourgeoisie are avoidable and not intrinsic to class rule - are they really just errors of policy?

So when did history die? Were the Jacobins just idealists? Were the goals of the French Revolution nonsense or can liberty, equality and fraternity become real for us all - not just the bourgeoisie? We are in the tradition of those French Revolutionists; you are in the historic role of the First Estate. We are saying that society can move forward; you say that this is it and it's all there is.

You may not be able to see how we can win and build a better world, you may not want to be bound up with what seems to be a soft-headed romance but don't get too carried away with the ideology of success. Being on the winning side isn't all it's cracked up to be, because being on that side means sharing the glee of your class when the miners marched back to work in 1985; the glee of Franco after the rout of our class in the Spanish Civil War; the triumphant march of fascism after our defeats in Germany in the 30s; the approval of South African whites for the massacre at Sharpeville.

It means sharing the gloating of your new found friends as eighteen year old Brit murdered eighteen year old Argentinian in the South Atlantic. Or are you to be the Essex man - voting with your pocket and closing down your mind? Surely that is too high a price to pay for financial self interest.

You will shrink and shrivel as you twist and contort to convince yourself that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

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 was irritated and saddened to read Liz Davies' report of the Women for Socialism AGM in last month's *Briefing*.

Not only were there a number of factual inaccuracies (eg. the new steering committee has increased in size and involves a good number of new women) but more importantly, the article didn't answer many of the important questions it raised.

It's true that the turn out was poor; this was, as Liz says, a reflection of the isolation of feminists within the labour movement. The structure of the day did leave insufficient time to discuss priorities - a point that was made by many women present at the AGM. Positive decisions were made; in particular to draw up a Women's Manifesto to give feminist demands and Women for Socialism itself a profile during the election, and to restart a regular newsletter.

In my opinion, Liz is right to state that Women for Socialism has given insufficient attention to organising women within the Labour Party. But this task isn't easy.

First, the situation facing women in the Party is much more difficult than it was a few years ago. Not only have women been affected by the overall shift to the right under the New Realists, but at the same time the women's organisation has been under attack, with the trade unions - and in the present political situation that means male bureaucrats - given more say at the expense of constituency activists. Women's conference - which a few years ago was not only a highly enjoyable affair but consistently supported left politics - has become dull, tawdry and conformist. And as a result many women have - in my view, wrongly - either left the Party or become inactive. Many women's sections continue to do good work, but there is no national focus or co-ordination. Women for Socialism did organise a fringe meeting at last year's women's conference and had an input into fringe meetings and bulletins at Labour Party Conference itself. To do more requires, as Liz herself argues, more resources.

Many of Liz's suggestion are based - as mine were at the time - on the assumption that Labour would win the election. Sadly we were all too wrong. Our concentration now must be not only placing demands on the Labour leadership and the Ministry for Women, but on getting involved in grass roots campaigning around issues from hospital opt-outs to the Asylum Bill and raising women's specific needs within that.

Women for Socialism intends to participate in the discussion within the Labour Party as to why Labour lost and what policies we need and to support Socialist Campaign Group candidates in the election for leader and deputy leader. We are seeking discussions with the Socialist Campaign Group as to how feminist issues can be given a higher profile by the whole left in the Party. On the one hand we are concerned that many of the new women in the PLP are not candidates of the left, and on the other that raising women's issues is the responsibility of men as well as women.

We hope that in the run up to the Socialist Campaign Group conference in Leeds there will be wide discussion about the women's places on the NEC and that all organisations will campaign around these positions and not just the constituency section places.

Finally, Women for Socialism, like all other groups will only by as dynamic as its members make it. I would appeal to all *Briefing*'s women readers who are not already involved to consider joining, and to male comrades to make our literature available to women who might be interested. Together we can ensure that socialist feminism is an integral part of the agenda of the whole labour movement.

Yours,
Terry Conway
Islington

Editor's Note: For further information contact Women for Socialism, 57 Birnham Road, London N4.

I would like to reply to Mike Marqusee's critique of my article in *New Left Review* with its recommendation that the left should support the introduction of proportional representation and, to that end, a pact with the Liberal Democrats.

I feel that the dismaying outcome of the election only underlines the argument I was making since it clearly would have been possible to defeat the Conservatives if only Labour's leaders had not pursued such a selfish policy.

Labour's NEC was quite willing to de-select David Nellist and Terry Fields, but not to stand down fifteen or twenty Labour candidates in constituencies where the Liberal Democrats stood a good chance of beating the Conservatives.

I can understand left-wing members of the Labour Party working to commit the Party to anti-militarist, anti-capitalist and green policies. But this would not be compromised by an agreement on democratisation of the UK state with the Liberal Democrats. Indeed under a PR system Labour would face much less pressure to dilute its politics. If Labour's leaders' swung to the right then they would face the likely danger of a left-wing break-away.

I argued that a detailed comparison of Labour's policies with those of the Liberal Democrats showed how narrow the political gap between the two had become. While Labour supported a minimum wage and the Lib Dems did not, the Lib Dems were committed to a Citizen's Income for everyone, a policy that would help many of those outside the formal employment structure.

Is Mike Marqusee really arguing that the fine differences between Labour and the Lib Dems were of such vital significance that they justify awarding Major five more years? Am I not justified in branding this as a pig-headed example of Labour chauvinism?

The great advantage of the strategy I proposed in my article was that it combined (1) maximising the chances of defeating the Conservatives with (2) creating the democratic space in British politics for the emergence of a genuinely socialist politics.

Best wishes,
Robin Blackburn
London

Editor's Note: See page 9 on electoral pacts.

Liz Davies is alone among reviewers of *Poll Tax Rebellion* to point out that the Poll Tax still presents a threat to millions of people (April *Briefing*). She also notes that the book carries no analysis of the current lack of activity in anti-Poll Tax unions.

This is not surprising. Author Danny Burns' enthusiasm for community action has already evaporated. He has turned his back on can't payers and won't payers and now lives in Italy. It doesn't need much analysis to



see that libertarians are every bit as opportunist as groups such as *Militant* and *Socialist Worker*. Those of us who see the anti-Poll Tax movement as crucial need to collate whatever activity still exists. For that we still need to look to the labour movement. For instance, many people face losing their job if they don't pay. Camden NALGO, the Camden Trades Council and the local APTU have all co-operated in organising to defend an activist threatened with the sack. London Against the Poll Tax produces an excellent monthly newsletter which is widely read. The North West APTU Forum is working for amnesty and there have been various legal victories. *Militant* and *Socialist Worker* both provide weekly coverage of anti-Poll Tax news and have supported non-paying prisoners by regularly printing their addresses.

The way forward is to use the structure of the Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign. TSDC worked by identifying the jobs which needed doing, sorted out who would/could do what and reported back at following meetings. Many APTUs use the old hierarchical, confrontational method which only succeeds in driving people away. Satisfying for opportunists though!

Yours,
Julie Boston
Bristol

Mike Marqusee did a good job ridiculing the *New Left Review* article by Robin Blackburn (*Briefing* April 92). But there's one point that Mike didn't make strongly enough. By preferring a Lib-Lab coalition to a majority Labour government Blackburn is simply taking to its national conclusion the only feasible strategy for obtaining PR. At last he is honest enough to admit it. Whereas other avid supporters of PR, such as *Socialist Outlook*, refuse to think through the logic of their own position. They have a Blackburn-like commitment to PR as the way forward for the left, and yet oppose any pacts that might bring it about. I suspect that the reason for this contradiction is that *Socialist Outlook* at least give some attention to class analysis. Unfortunately this doesn't extend to PR. Here they lapse into the world of *Guardian* editorials.

Yours,
Pete Willsman
London

Geoffrey Sheridan's letter (March *Briefing*) concerning the stagnation of the Cuban revolution, once one of the most vibrant and positive events of the twentieth century is extremely accurate. The writer is entirely correct to criticise the hypocritical stance of De Armas in claiming the lack of Cuban democracy encourages unity. The issue has, of course, wider implications concerning the perception of revolutionary movements by the working classes of the more developed nations. Progressive thinking and solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles is not encouraged by the stifling of the masses in the name of The Revolution by the CP. On the contrary such actions merely provide ammunition for the most reactionary groups in opposition to genuine revolutionary gains.

In this period Cuba occupies a unique position in international affairs. Its leadership has the opportunity to counter the incessant stream of pro-American propaganda concerning the nature of Cuban society. The Cuban CP must initiate a period of genuine worker/peasant democracy in the knowledge that it is sustaining the Revolution with its people.

Yours in unity,
Dave Johnson
Stoke-on-Trent

I am an admirer of Phil Evans' cartoons and enjoy his wry sense of humour. However, the illustration for the article on RSI (April *Briefing*) was in lamentably poor taste.

It showed two women suspended from the wrists and the caption was "They say RSI is even worse".

This form of torture, known as Palestinian hanging, is still widely practised in the middle east against political prisoners. It can lead to a lifetime of pain and even dislocated shoulder blades. One Iranian woman described the agony:

"It affects the body's entire nervous system. After a while even if they don't beat you hard you feel it acutely. If they tap you with a pencil it feels like a hammer."

Torture is not a suitable subject for humour.

Yours,
Heather Clarke
London

I found Nigel Todd's response (April *Briefing*) to my earlier comment on the Victorian radical leader and Liberal MP, Joe Cowen, most useful. I will refrain from a PC-like textual analysis of Todd's letter and instead try and take the debate forward a bit.

Perhaps the key question is why we ended up with the first British Marxist Party, the Social Democratic Federation, being led by the businessman (and cricket lover!) HM Hyndman, rather than by Cowen.

Cowen would have been infinitely preferable to Hyndman given his record as a militant activist and his willingness, unlike Hyndman, to support workers' struggles. Why Cowen pulled back from involvement in the forerunner to the SDF, the Democratic Federation, is a matter of some historical importance.

My feeling is that Cowen was unwilling to undertake the hard slog of building a small Marxist Party. Perhaps this was partly because he had tried to build parties independent of radical liberalism before, and failed, and partly because by the 1880s, he was already well into middle age after many years of intensive political activity. Yet the key point still seems to remain that even compared to Hyndman or William Morris, Cowen was not willing to go through with a disciplined and vigorous organisation. He may well have been the best leader which British Marxism never had but one wonders if we would have had British Marxism at all if he had been in charge?

One can only hope that Nigel Todd's fine book stimulates further research into the origins of British Marxism.

Yours fraternally,
Keith Flett
Tottenham

In 1984, the Labour Party produced an excellent poster/pamphlet, charting the "Long March of Labour". It quotes Keir Hardie's 1901 call for a "Socialist Commonwealth, founded upon the common ownership of land and capital, production for use and not for profit, and equality of opportunity for every citizen." It also boasts that the Poplar Councillors of 1921, in defending the poor, breaking the law and being jailed for their beliefs, showed "socialist principles in action". Also highlighted is the 1983 Conference re-affirmation of unilateral nuclear disarmament with a photograph of Neil Kinnock addressing a CND rally. Some of us have certainly marched a long way since then.

Fraternal greetings,
Richard Hanford
Sussex

Tortuous path to a woman's right to choose in Ireland

A NEW AD-HOC organisation has been set up to support women in Ireland campaigning for abortion rights. It is supported by (amongst others) the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group, the National Abortion Campaign, London Irish Women's Centre, Women Against Fundamentalism, Southall Black Sisters and Women for Socialism.

Leonora Lloyd
National Abortion Campaign

The aim of the new group is to publicise the struggle for a woman's right to choose in Ireland, and to organise supporting actions, including more pickets of the Irish Embassy, public meetings, fund-raising and so-on. The group will not put any demands of its own on the Irish government, but will simply act in solidarity with Irish women, taking up and supporting the demands made by those fighting for greater choices.

The situation in Ireland is very complicated and it is not yet clear what the government is doing, nor how women campaigning in Ireland will respond. A Supreme Court decision allowed a fourteen year old rape victim the right to have abortion, which in this case meant travelling to England. However, when the judges later gave the reasons for their decision, it was based not on the right to freedom of movement but on their interpretation of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, which "acknowledges the right to life of the unborn...with due regard to the right to life of the mother". Because the young woman was threatening to commit suicide rather than give birth to her rapist's child, the judges gave precedence to the girl's right to life. As a result, it is now legal for women to have abortions in Ireland in limited circumstances, but not to travel for one outside the country - nor to give information about abortion in Ireland!

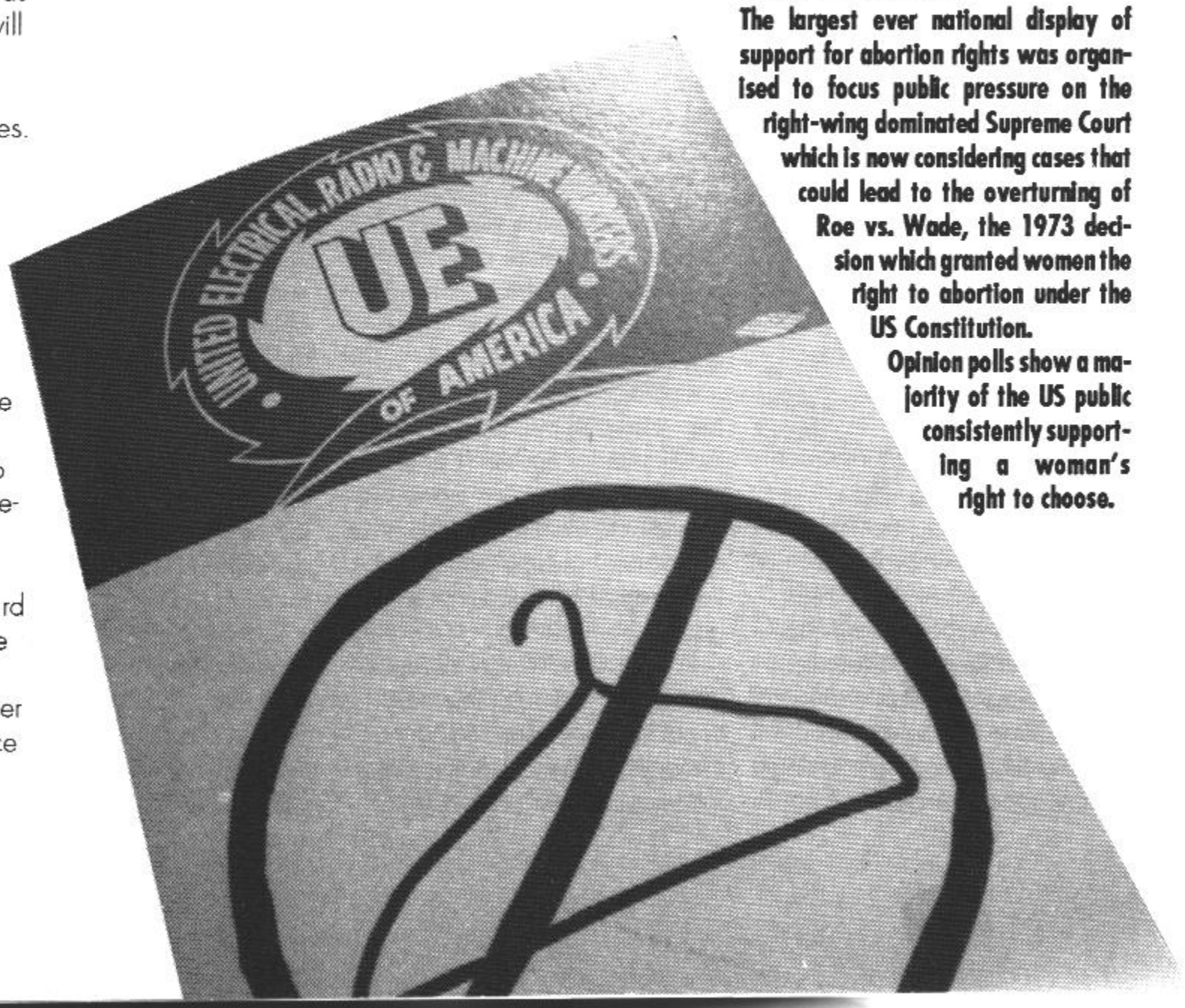
The government is proposing a referendum on the protocol to the Maastrich treaty, which currently prevents the rest of the European Community interfering with Ireland's ban on abortion or information about abortion.

At the moment it looks as if this will be held before there is any further change in abortion law, so that in effect this referendum will become a referendum on abortion. This could result in both pro- and anti-abortion activists calling for a vote against!

Albert Reynolds, the Irish Premier, has indicated that he does want to allow both travel and information which would mean amending the protocol on this point. However, an amended protocol would still prevent an Irish woman going to the European Court asking for the right to abortion in Ireland in cases not covered by the Supreme Court decision. The government has succeeded in negotiating an amendment to the Maastrich treaty modifying its stance slightly.

The government has two other possibilities open to it: to amend the anti-abortion clause in the constitution or to propose legislation along the lines of the Supreme Court decision and in both cases to allow travel and information. The timing is also important - only by proposing this is done before June 18th can the government ensure that the Maastricht referendum in effect does not turn into another abortion referendum, the result of which will be totally unilluminating as it will be opposed by both sides, with only the don't knows voting for it!

The National Abortion Campaign is producing a new magazine, *Women's Choice*, the first issue of which will have extensive coverage of the abortion situation in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic and a special feature on abortion in America in election year. To obtain a copy, send £1.25 (including postage) to NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU. For details of the new campaign phone NAC on 071 405 4801.



750,000 marched in Washington DC on April 5th in support of a woman's right to choose on abortion.

The largest ever national display of support for abortion rights was organised to focus public pressure on the right-wing dominated Supreme Court which is now considering cases that could lead to the overturning of Roe vs. Wade, the 1973 decision which granted women the right to abortion under the US Constitution.

Opinion polls show a majority of the US public consistently supporting a woman's right to choose.

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