BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left



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- **Labour at Blackpool**
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Seize the moment — sack the government



THE STAKES IN the current struggle to save the coal industry are enormous. The grim prospects facing miners today will be reality for millions tomorrow if we don't succeed in defeating the Tory government now. The alternatives are stark: either prolonged economic slump or some kind of socialist renewal.

No one should underestimate the seriousness of the crisis facing the Tory government. The divisions over Maastricht and the pit closure programme are symptomatic of a general loss of confidence by the ruling class in its government. The exit of sterling from the ERM was a devastating blow; the "European" option for the salvation of British capital seems to be vanishing once again over a distant horizon. The alternatives left to the Tories are Little Englandism (which is a chimaera) or continued drift. Tragically, it seems the same is true for the Labour leadership.

The consequence of years of right-wing policy revisions, attacks on the Party's grass-roots and general parliamentary cretinism on the part of our leaders is that there is a real danger that the government will be let off the hook. Make no mistake: what is keeping the Tories in office at the moment is primarily the absence of a viable Labour alternative - viable in offering either a coherent economic policy clearly distinguished from the Tories or a dynamic leadership for what is potentially a mass social movement. At the moment, Major is in more danger from his own right wing than from the Labour Party.

To capitalise on the Tories' travails, Labour needs to break decisively from the dismal 1980s consensus on market forces; it needs to offer a socialist alternative to the market and to Maastricht - which must have as its centrepiece a radical programme for full employment not as a distant ideal but as a practical goal to be achieved through planning and public ownership within the life of a single Parliament.

What we need now is for Labour to lead a national movement against the pit closures. Motions passed at Conference give it ample authority to do this. To succeed this movement has to use the pit closures issue and the popular anger generated by it to forge a more general offensive against unemployment. That in turn must mean opposition to Maastricht - because Maastricht embodies the dictatorship of market forces and the institutionalisation of mass unemployment. By bringing together Maastricht and the miners, Labour can outflank and marginalise the Tory right (who are now posing, dangerously, as potential saviours of the nation from Major's wet incompetence) and resurrect itself as the premier voice for the majority of the population.

Industrial struggle - and ultimately strike action not only by miners but by other workers in transport, manufacturing and other industries - will be necessary but industrial struggle alone cannot win this battle. Indeed, without a popular political struggle now industrial action is unlikely to happen at all. We have to see the defence of the miners as a focus for the widespread anger at skyrocketing joblessness and plummeting living standards. What's needed is a miners' support network which organises meetings, demonstrations, rallies, pickets and a host of creative, innovatory mass actions to blow the glowing embers of anti-Tory rage into a roaring blaze. We need People's Marches for Jobs in every corner of the land, proceeding from pit to pit, from closed factory to closed factory, town hall to town hall, and refusing to disband until the government either reverses its policies or leaves office altogether.

In this context the left has the potential to become the leadership of a new majority. For years we have swum against the stream; now we have an opportunity not only to go with the flow but to channel and lead it.

But if we are to transform public opinion into a mass movement that can get rid of the Tories and install a socialist Labour government we need to exercise more self-discipline than we are accustomed to. This means, more than ever, guarding against sectarianism. It means shunning merely propagandistic demands for "general strikes" and empty injunctions to the TUC to "fight" in favour of concrete proposals to unite and activate the labour movement at all levels. It also means a recommitment to the Labour Party.

In particular, this will require making the Party's link with the trade unions (reconfirmed at Blackpool against the recommendation of the leadership) not just an inert financial chain but a live electric cable fusing the strengths of the industrial and political wings of the movement for the benefit of both and the advancement of the working class as a whole.

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

Labour Briefing **is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. The next EB will meet on October 25th. We are happy to offer a right of reply on the usual basis to all members of the labour movement. All articles published in *Labour Briefing* reflect the opinions of the authors alone unless otherwise indicated. *Briefing* welcomes criticisms and contributions. Deadline for the next issue is November 16th. *Briefing* is the only magazine on the left which is not funded by any part of the labour hierarchy or by any organised grouping. To survive and thrive we need the support of our readers. Why not take copies to sell at your local Labour Party, trade union or campaign meeting?**

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the case for coal

TUESDAY OCTOBER 13th 1992 was one of the coal industry's bleakest days. The natural hatred of the Tories for miners, their families, their communities and their culture finally spilled over in a blaze of frenzied announcements of one pit closure after another.

Ken Capstick
Vice-Chair Yorkshire NUM

Twenty seven coal mines to close, four more to be mothballed, 30,000 jobs to be scrapped, and a another 60,000 associated jobs among railway workers, power stations workers, mining supply workers, and many, many others...Why?

Britain's coalmines are highly competitive. Britain's coal is 30% cheaper than gas, and 350% cheaper than nuclear power which receives a £1.2 billion per year subsidy. Now that the pound has fallen against the dollar, many of the pits earmarked for closure can deliver the coal to our power stations cheaper than imported coal.

Isn't it a crazy world we live in? The Government put the security of Britain's energy supply into the hands of the market, and that market could leave us without an energy policy and without the security of energy supply that our vast coal reserves represent.

What is the crime of the British miner? Over the past six years he has increased his productivity by over 155%. No other industry in Britain can complete with that performance. In the same period the industry's costs have been reduced by 33% and there has been no price increase for coal. The mineworker has accepted and adapted to new technological changes, which have revolutionised coalmining into a modern, hi-tech industry, capable of providing coal well into the next century. On top of that, British mines have the best safety record in the world.

In Britain today we possess half of Western Europe's coal reserves and that must be the envy of any other European country. Closing Britain's mines is to damage security of energy supply, not only in Britain but for Western Europe. Britain, already a net importer of energy, is all set to add a further massive burden to our balance of payments problem. It is estimated that should the pit closure programme go ahead, the bill for imported oil and coal will cost between £2.75 - £3 billion per year. There can now be no doubt whatsoever that the privatisation of the electricity supply industry has been a disaster for the British people. Our energy security is now decided in the short term interests of those who enjoy having the British people as captive customers.

All the productivity gains and cost cutting exercises of the miners have been passed on directly as profits to the generators, who at the same time have increased electricity prices to the customer by 6% in real terms. Now they are going ahead with the "dash for gas" in the knowledge that it will result in dearer electricity, the cost of which will be passed on to the consumer and profits will not be affected.

So where is the so-called rationale? Could it be that Cecil Parkinson let the cat out of the bag recently, when he referred to the 1972 and 1974 strike victories of the miners and indicated there should not be too much sympathy at the run down of the industry. The Tories have always regarded miners as "the enemy within". Today's miners are the sons of those who fought in the great struggle of 1972 and 1974. They were school children at that time, and still in their tender years. Were they also regarded by the Tories as 'the enemy within'? Are they still regarded by the likes of Cecil Parkinson as such? No matter how one tries, it is difficult to reach any other conclusion. That is why there must be a fightback. That is why everyone must now be mobilised to make the government retreat. The government that has surely gone one bridge too far.

Crushing closures

● **Terry Harrison, President of Kellingley NUM, Yorkshire, spoke to *Labour Briefing*. Terry started work in 1967 at Wheldale colliery, Castleford. He then transferred to Kellingley when Wheldale closed after the miners strike.**

I've worked all my life down the pit. It has given me immense comradeship. The working together and the interdependence is a way of life. The closure news is totally devastating. Today I have a job at Kellingley. Tomorrow who knows? I was talking to one of my oldest mates who works at Grimethorpe which is to be closed. He was gutted. It is last pit in the Barnsley area.

On top of the closures the management appear to be adapting a tough line on transfers. Four hundred jobs are due to go at Kellingley. But if 500 volunteer for redundancy some workers from the other pits can be taken on.

The pit has already lost 800 jobs over the last few years. It is down to 700 compared with 2,500 before the miners strike. The last few months there have been attempts to provoke action by constantly cutting bonus payments. Perhaps this was a series of attempts to soften up the men prior to the big one. I want action against the closure. The workforce is fed up and there is demoralization. However the redundancy payments on average will only equal one year's pay. If there could be a general pulling together by a wide range of the unions, perhaps initially with the railworkers, it might be possible to stop the Tories.

I am very bitter but this will not stop me from fighting for what I think is right.

Communities could collapse

● **Barbara Smith of Castleford Women's Centre reports:**

"We have been inundated with anxious enquiries, women have been coming in crying, in a state of shock, wondering what kind of people would sink so low as to wreck our communities. The government's actions are vindictive. They're not being economical, they're being destructive. They don't have to come to provincial areas, like ours, and so don't bother. Haven't they thought of the extra workload that doctors and services will be burdened with, coping with the stress caused? People can't be expected to uproot themselves when there's no jobs elsewhere anyway. From our previous strike experience, Women Against Pit Closures feel more confident. We will be an even bigger force to be reckoned with this time. But we need backing from everyone, to show John Major has misjudged the feelings of the entire nation. We need to know the reaction of people in other areas.

It is our aim here to compile all messages on the issue and get a petition of 90,000 signatures, one for every estimated job loss caused. I would appeal to people to listen to Arthur Scargill. Give him a chance. He was right before, and he's right again now."

● **Send messages to Barbara Smith, 2 Wesley Street, Castleford, Yorks**

Seize the moment!

Labour Briefing met **Dennis Skinner** at the House of Commons to talk about the outcry unleashed by the government's pit closure plans.



Skinner and Scargill: socialism with a smile PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

LB: Can the miners win?

DS: The miners can win if we could get a bit of breathing-space. We definitely need that because the Coal Board and the government have deliberately set about this salami-type chopping up of the pits in about five or six tranches within the next few months. Fortunately it's already clear we've got more support now than we did at the beginning of the 1984 campaign. One person in a Jag stopped me today outside Westminster. He rolled down the window and shouted, "Get stuck into those Tories, Skinner. I've voted Tory all my life, but never again." If we can win the case for further delay in the pit closures, the support is so tremendous that we might be able to win the miners over for a positive strike ballot in a few weeks' time. I am doing a meeting this weekend in Shirebrook church, organised by the vicar. I can't remember when I last went in that church. Shirebrook colliery is due to be closed at the end of November and the whole area has rallied round. I think if we can get a few weeks in order to organise and campaign in the coalfields and elsewhere, we could defeat the government and the Coal Board on this issue.

Why is the Tory press attacking the government so stridently? What are Ridley and Churchill up to?

You have to look at it on two levels. You will recall that during the general election campaign a lot of us said that if Labour gets in, there would be a right old mess to clean up. There is an eerie suspicion that some people are now hankering after a national government to clean that mess up. After all, you have got a Public Sector Borrowing Requirement of probably about £40 billion. There are going to be massive cuts in public expenditure this autumn. They are going to hit some people who have probably never been hit before. There are pay-freezes being discussed. So you can see, looming up in front of you, a lot of difficulties on the industrial and economic front. It's just conceivable that some Tories and some editors of Tory newspapers think, "Why should our lot take all the blame? With a bit of luck, we might be able to lure Labour into carrying that blame."

The other level is Maastricht. It is now apparent that there's about 70% of the British public that says "scrap it". They can see that the halcyon days of the Common Market are over. I suspect that a lot of people with money are realising that there are going to be extreme difficulties in the next year or two. So the Tory press is hostile to Maastricht because a) they know it's breaking down in Europe, b) they want to get off before it's totally broken down, c) they can see this slump is going to hit them and hit them hard in the pocket. The *Sun* said the other day, "Why don't you give a lead, Mr Major?" I thought, "I wonder what they mean by lead?" so I read what they said, and they wanted a pay-freeze on public-sector workers, massive cuts in social security benefits, getting rid of child benefit for all those over about £25,000 a year, targeting benefits across the board.

Is it possible to take the anger around pit-closures and build it into some more general movement against mass unemployment and actually bring the government down?

Yes. The key is for Labour to vote against Maastricht right across the board, including the third reading. It is no use just voting for or against minor amendments. It has got to be a principled vote against this government. The Front Bench should not be able to separate Maastricht from pit closures; they shouldn't be able to separate Maastricht from unemployment; they shouldn't be able to get away with the idea that Maastricht can be separated from pay freezes and from cuts in the public sector. The Labour Front Bench have got a duty to use any and all occasions, including Maastricht, to threaten this government's existence.

How can rank and file Labour left-wingers help the miners' struggle at this moment?

They should be helping to organise events in every town and city in Britain because it is going to be a long, drawn-out affair. We have got to reconstitute all those support groups. Above all, people have got to get active inside the Labour Party. The Labour Party has got an umbilical cord to the trade union movement. Every so often something happens in our society which shows that this umbilical cord is the most important thing in British politics. That's what's happening now and that's why I am in the Labour Party. People who leave the Labour Party willy-nilly because they don't like the leaders and they don't like the NEC results and all the rest of it should stop and think. I hope that a lot of them are going to come back and are going to rejuvenate the Labour Party, become active, take key positions inside the constituency parties. This pit-closure programme could be the catalyst that actually sets everything on a leftward course within the movement. Every so often there is an opportunity in politics when you can seize the moment. This could well be one of them.

BRIEFING INTERVIEW

The pruning of Plant

Hamish Renton (Cambridge CLP) interviews **Lord Plant** (Chair of Labour's working party on electoral reform and Professor of Politics at Southampton University).

HR: The Alternative Vote system has one overriding crucial weakness: in many constituencies which Labour currently holds under First Past the Post (FPTP), AV could give victory to the Tories or Lib Dems because the second preferences of Liberal voters are far more likely to go to the Tories rather than Labour. This system, consequently, would deliver endless Tory coalitions or at best weak Lib-Lab deals. True?

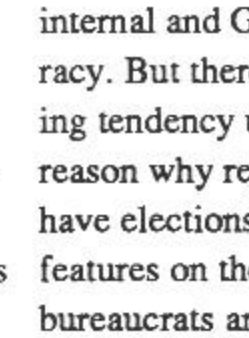


Plant: Quite possibly, although there will be strong regional differences in voting patterns. Certainly, in the south Liberals will back Tories overwhelmingly, but this is not so generally true for the north - Rochdale being a notable exception. We also have to consider AV in the light of any policy overlap with the Lib Dems, eg. a limited agreement on constitutional reform would certainly change second preferences. Also, Labour had a significant programme of constitutional change for this election i.e a Scottish Parliament, abolition of the House of Lords, a charter of rights, regional assemblies etc. We had these policies for a number of years but the campaigning on them was very limited apart from the devolution issue in Scotland. We were not committed on PR, merely considered it. The Liberals were committed on PR, but did not campaign on it or specify which system they favoured and so they were open to Tory counter-attacks from Ken Baker. If PR is to be adopted by Labour, it needs to be put to the top of the agenda and campaigned on loud and clear.

For the left, the Additional Member System combines the twin evils of strengthening the party bureaucracy (overwhelmingly white, right wing males) and also weakens the rights of ordinary party members, as half the MPs returned to Parliament are accountable not to constituencies or local party members but to those who put them on the list.

Possibly, it certainly happens in Germany, in fact a group is going there to examine the functioning of SPD internal and German national democracy. But there is no intrinsic centralising tendency under AMS: there is no reason why regional parties cannot have elections to determine who features on their list. Certainly party bureaucrats are strong in Spanish, German and Portuguese socialist parties but not in Holland or the Nordic countries because of strong internal party democracy. There is also a case where the state may require all political parties to have democratic procedures.

Fine, but Labour has never gained 50% of the vote and is unlikely to do so in a society where everything is against Labour. This makes hung parliaments the norm under PR.



Sure, but those who oppose PR must consider that FPTP has delivered working majorities only twice, in 1945 and 1966. Boundary changes may cast further doubt on our ability to achieve this under the present system.

Yes, but apart from Sweden, FPTP has given Labour office for longer than any other socialist party in Europe.

Yes, but the underlying issue is what Political Scientists call the "exaggerated effect" of FPTP whereby a relatively small percentage of the popular vote over-exaggerates the degree of representation in Parliament. By the way, academics analyzing the last election now reckon this has almost vanished.

Yes, but I did some number crunching after the election and worked out that Labour achieved the lowest votes to seats ratio of all the parties. Isn't it true that whatever the voters said to pollsters in principle about PR, they clearly rejected it in practise by voting for the only party unequivocally against PR?



Yes, but Labour should have campaigned more on its electoral policy and whatsmore, polling evidence i.e the latest MORI 'State of the Nation' poll, produced mixed results about PR. On the one hand a significant number of people say they would prefer PR, but they are quite attached to single member constituencies.

At the last NEC the unlikely alliance of Benn, Skinner and Kaufman called for the abolition of the Plant committee. Isn't there a strong case for abandoning consideration of PR and start devising policies to win the next election?

Yes, but left wing defenders of FPTP have to remember that the logic of FPTP drives parties towards the centre ground and left wingers have to evaluate how far socialist policies are driven out by a winner-takes-all electoral system. They also have to argue that people didn't vote Labour because it was not left wing enough and decided to vote Tory. You can't look at electoral systems to see why a party wasn't elected; it's policies. The logic driving parties to the centre is implicit under FPTP, explicit with PR.

What about the electoral strength of radical conservatism under FPTP?

The Tory 1979 platform was not that radical - no Poll Tax, no privatisation. The radicalism came in the early 1980s when Labour was a very ineffective opposition. You have to see radical conservatism as the mirror image of an enfeebled opposition.

Dennis Skinner calculated earlier this year that out of the 92 Football League clubs in England and Wales,

Labour controls the local town hall in 89 of them, under PR this figure would be 38. If you accept that a Labour Council is some sort of a "shield" (dented or otherwise) against a central Tory government is it responsible to plump for PR?



So far the working party has concentrated on the Scottish Assembly and the European Parliament and has no proposals for local government. However, the pressure for PR for councils is less than that for other institutions because of Labour's current policy of replacing a third of the council chamber each year. Furthermore in terms of PR producing more hung councils, most councillors who are in coalitions have presented evidence to the working party saying the experience has been positive.

Benn argues with force that under PR power is transferred from the electorate to party leaders in smoke filled rooms. Under FPTP voters can clearly choose their government on the basis of their manifestos. Under PR they are likely to get coalitions which they did not vote for. Coalitions also deny voters real choice as principles will be the first casualty in the coalitionist horse-trading after the election.

The counter-argument is that party leaders engaged in coalition building have to bear in mind whether the terms of the coalition are acceptable to their MPs who are in turn accountable to their local party and voters. For example in 1974 Heath was not able to do a deal with the Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe because the Parliamentary Liberal Party thought they would be breaking faith with the people who elected them.

If Labour ever does implement PR then surely it needs to sort out the constitution first?

Yes, I'm in favour of a written constitution; it's essential to unravel a settlement based on convention.

If you go for PR for the Scottish Assembly, European Parliament and elected second chamber, won't this create democratic imbalances with these bodies claiming greater legitimacy than a FPTP House of Commons?



Granted, but different institutions serve different purposes and there is no reason why they can't have different electoral systems. For example Labour's proposed elected second chamber is envisaged to have roughly 200-250 deputies, so the legitimacy of this body and its deputies wouldn't just rest on its electoral system, but on its size and function. For example, the Australian second chamber is elected by Single Transferable Vote whereas their primary legislative body is elected by AV - which incidently is not strictly PR.

So, what do you think the working party will recommend about the European Parliament election system?

You have to remember that the Treaty of Rome commits its member states to arriving at a common electoral system.

Does it specify a date for this convergence?



No. Also, there is consternation in Europe because what the Europeans see as large political groupings (i.e the Lib Dems who are one of the largest Liberal Parties in the EC), get no representation from Britain in the European Parliament. There is also concern that the composition of European political groupings are markedly effected by FPTP results from the UK. For instance, in the last European elections in 1989, Labour's MEPs became the largest grouping in the European Socialist Group, because FPTP exaggerated the majority in terms of the swing to Labour. Pressure for change is currently coming from a committee under the chairmanship of the Belgian DeGucht, and our proposals have to be considered in this light. There is a strong case for PR for the European elections.

What's the state of play with regards to the Scottish Assembly?

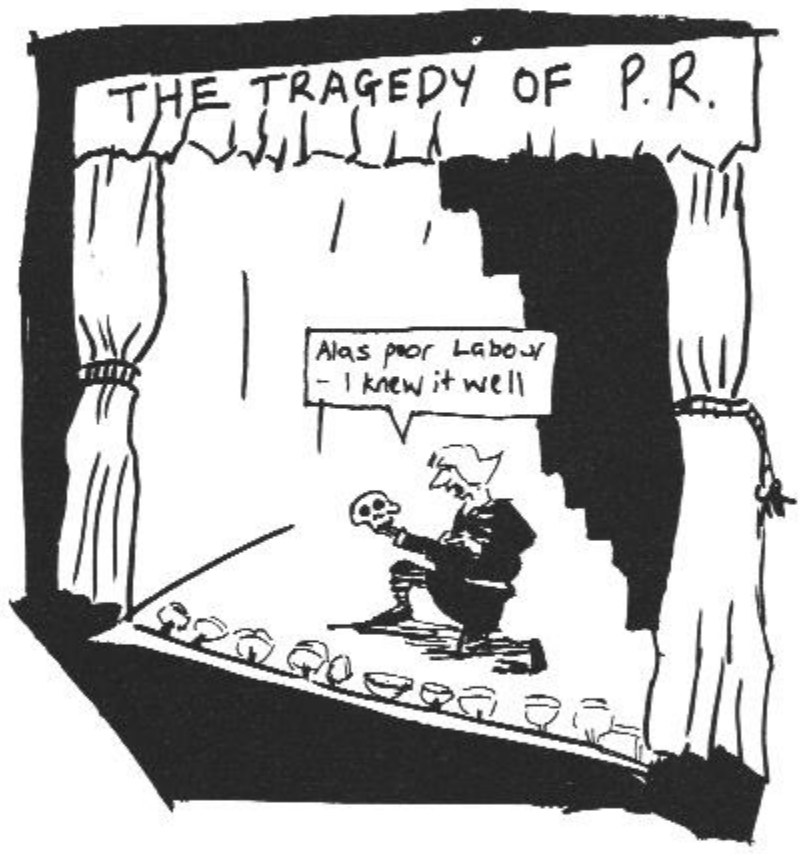
The working party has worked very closely with the Scottish Labour Party and EC and the likely form of PR to be recommended will be agreed by them and submitted to conference for ratification.

And for the jewel in the crown for the PR lobby, the House of Commons?

There should be some output from the working party by February or March, but the most likely candidates for PR are the elected second chamber and the European elections.

Lastly, during the death throes of the last election campaign we were treated to the ridiculous spectacle of Neil Kinnock saying he had made his mind up on the PR issue, but refused to share it with the nation. What did he really think?

We had over ten discussions with him and if he had "firm views" he certainly kept them extremely secret!



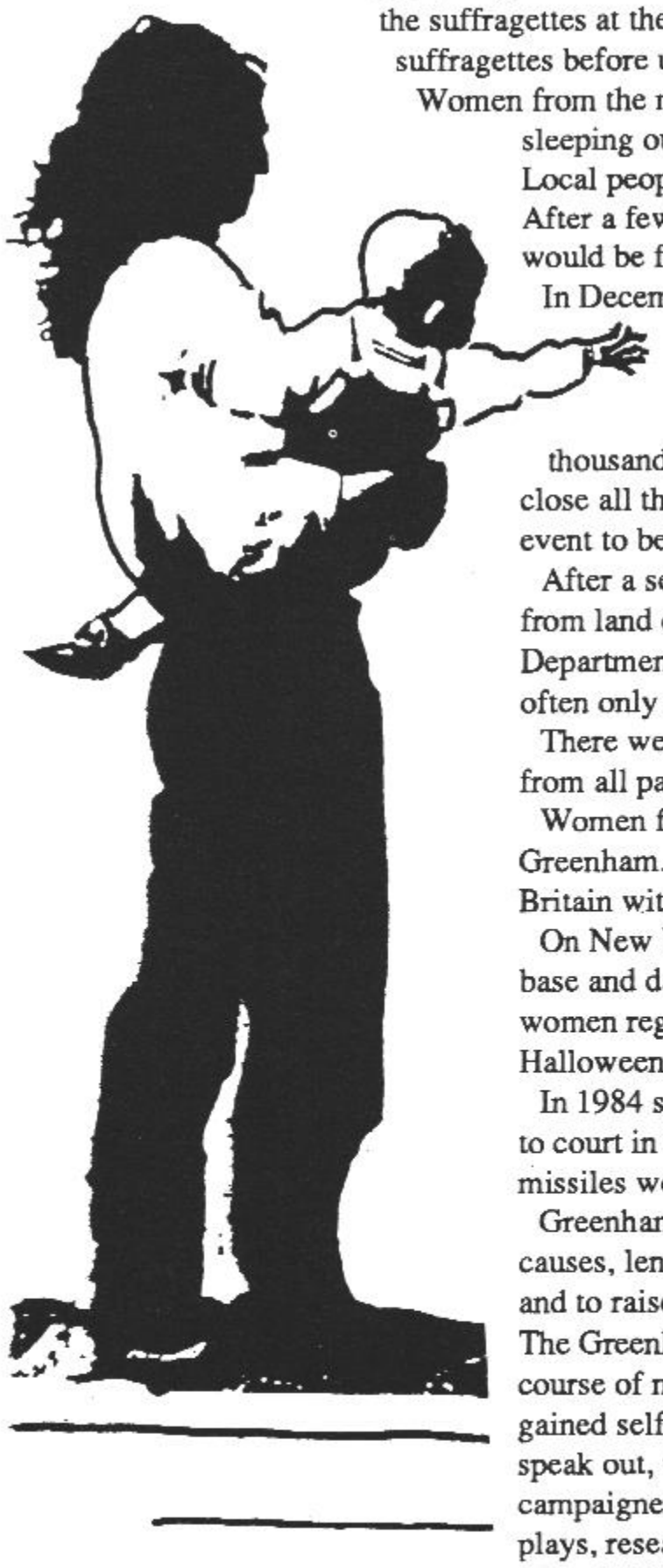
● For an alternative view contact the *First Past the Post Campaign*, Chair: Bob Cryer MP, 22 Edmund Street, Bradford, Yorks BD5. Tel 0274 734367.

Monumental struggle for peace

Campaigning political artist **Thalia Campbell** remembers the road to Greenham Common for which a commemorative sculpture is planned.

THREE DOZEN women and half a dozen men left Cardiff on 27th August 1981. The marchers were looked after on route by local groups, councillors and some political party members. Mostly we slept on wooden hall floors and occasionally in comfortable beds in houses where we were offered much appreciated baths.

On our arrival at Greenham Common, four women from different generations chained themselves to the fence, like the suffragettes at the beginning of the century. As the suffragettes before us, we too were vilified.



Women from the march were angry and decided to stay, sleeping outside the main gate under the stars. Local people brought food, firewood and tents. After a few months it was decided the camp would be for women only.

In December 1982 30,000 women embraced the base, decorating the fence with flowers, babies' booties and photos of relatives killed in wars. Several thousand women stayed on to blockade and close all the gates the next day; this was the first event to be covered by the media.

After a series of evictions, the women moved from land owned by the council to MOD land, Department of Transport land and back again, often only moving a few yards each time.

There were seventeen marches to Greenham from all parts of the country.

Women from all over the world visited Greenham. Soon there were at least 25 camps in Britain with others in Australia and America.

On New Year's Eve 1982 women entered the base and danced on the missile silos. Thereafter women regularly invaded the base, and on Halloween 1983 miles of fence were cut down.

In 1984 some Greenham women took Reagan to court in the USA claiming that American missiles were illegally in the UK.

Greenham women began to support other causes, lending their support to the miners strike and to raise funds for the famine in Ethiopia. The Greenham camp experience changed the course of many of the women's lives. Many gained self worth and confidence to act and speak out, with some women becoming council campaigners and others writing books and plays, researching women's history and organising exhibitions.

CND was rather suspicious of the Greenham women at first, but was supportive although the Greenham camps always kept their own identity. Greenham brought feminism, emotion and an environmental flavour to CND and revitalised it.

On 5th March 1991 the last cruise missile left Greenham Common. Yet the achievements of the women at Greenham Common have been forgotten. They are the forbidden and forgotten agenda now. A Welsh TV programme which would have set Greenham in its historical context and looked into the future including the sculpture was turned down by BBC and HTV this year.

The Labour Party too has sidelined women, and shunned peace. It has for too long neglected the women's agenda, paid lip service to our needs and aspirations whilst not taking the actions needed to see we get justice and equality.

Why were we not allowed to have our voices heard on the appalling situation of the Gulf War? We had no supporting speakers from the floor in the disarmament debate this year, and the Party has repeatedly ignored Conference decisions to cut our defence spending to that of other European countries.

Women and their concerns for peace receive little formal recognition. There are many statues of men; kings, aristocrats, philanthropists, members of the military and monuments to war. In Britain there are few public sculptures of individual women. Close by the House of Commons there are two statues of women. One is a black metal statue of Boadicea (Boudicca) with her horses and chariot with knives on the wheels. Is she there because as a warrior she was as good as a man?

Nearby is the statue of the suffrage leader Emmeline Pankhurst. There is a later addition of a metal relief portrait of her eldest daughter Christabel. They get formal official recognition, but the only recognition of Sylvia her socialist daughter is the logo she designed which is included in this monument.

Few women have the opportunities to reach formal positions of power. To be heard, they have to do things differently; camp in the open, blockade roads, get thrown in ditches, suffer imprisonment and be vilified.

These women deserve recognition.

We propose to set up a commemorative sculpture in Cardiff at the place where the march to Greenham Common began, dedicated to all the women who have been part of Greenham. The sculpture is to be a simple natural figure of a woman and a baby, to be realistic, recognisable, and life size. It will be a celebration of women, children, motherhood and the power of ordinary dedicated people working with little money against the full power and resources of the state to win their argument and achieve their aims. In future when small children are dragged past by mothers with shopping, and the child asks 'Mummy, what is that baby doing there?" women can sit on the plinth and tell children about Greenham Common and all it means to them.

The TGWU's Frank Cousins Peace Award has provided the financial base for the project. This has been topped up by donations from diverse peace groups, unions and individuals. The late Judith Hart, the Construction, Mining and Energy Workers Union of Australia and a lunchtime whip-round at a Yorkshire pit are listed among the contributors.

● **If you can help with the sculpture project by publicising or funding it, please contact Thalia at Glangors,Ynyslas, Borth, Dyfed SY24 5JU; tel. (0970) 871360.**

Irish struggle for women's choice

Leonora Lloyd reports: Ireland's referendum on Maastricht in June was highly coloured by controversy over the country's abortion law. The Irish government had secretly attached a protocol (amendment) to the treaty requiring other EC countries to respect Ireland's draconian ban on abortion and information about abortion. The case of the fourteen-year-old pregnant rape victim created an explosive situation and the government was forced to promise that it would have further referenda specifically on the abortion issue.

The draft wording for what has turned out to be a three-part referendum caused dispute as soon as it was published. One part will allow women to travel abroad, but another will continue to outlaw information. The most contentious question, however, allows abortion only in life-threatening situations, specifically omitting mental health and the possibility of "self-destruction". It was precisely the likelihood of the fourteen-year-old committing suicide that led the Supreme Court to allow her to travel to England for an abortion.

Clearly, the Irish government is seeking to appease the anti-abortionists, although Prime Minister Albert Reynolds has pulled back from the worst horrors involving a ban on the right to travel. Difficulties of reaching agreement with the other parliamentary parties have led to the date of the referendum being put back from the end of November to December 3rd.

Pro-choice groups have been organising all year and will be vigorously opposing attempts to take the law back to where it was before the Supreme Court judgement.

Whatever happens, women will continue to come to Britain - the numbers have steadily risen over the last few years, probably due to the publicity resulting from anti-abortion attacks on the counselling agencies in Ireland.

● For details of how you can assist the Irish women's campaign, contact NAC on 071 923 4976.

Justice for the Casement Park accused

SEVEN DEFENDANTS are to go on trial on November 7th on charges arising out of the killing of two British army corporals who drove into an IRA funeral in March 1988.

Following the incident, hundreds of people were arrested or raided and 41 were charged with offences ranging from assault to murder. Yet no one has actually been accused of the killings and instead the Crown has relied on the notorious doctrine of 'common purpose' whereby people can be found guilty of murder simply by being present.

All of the Casement Park trials have occurred in Northern Ireland's no-jury 'Diplock Courts' in which the right to silence has been abolished and the rules of evidence are biased against the accused. They have been criticised by the Haldane Society and the Committee on the Administration of Justice.

Justice for the Casement Park Accused is a broad-based campaign which can be contacted c/o Green Ink Bookshop, 8 Archway Mall, London N19 5RG.

Kiranjit celebrates

Liz Davies reports: Kiranjit Ahluwahlia, jailed four years ago for killing her brutal husband, was freed by the Old Bailey on September 25th.

In the summer, the Court of Appeal had ordered a retrial following new medical evidence. At the retrial, she pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced accordingly. Since she had already served four years, she was released immediately. She told her supporters outside the court that her thoughts were with her sisters, Sara Thornton and the other women victims of domestic violence still in jail.

The Court of Appeal refused to consider whether the law of provocation should be extended to include women victims of violent husbands, saying that was a job for Parliament alone. Not true, as the law of provocation has been developed over the years by judges through case law. The prosecution's decision to allow Kiranjit to plead guilty to manslaughter and her immediate release by the court came in response to the political pressure built up by campaigners for Kiranjit and other women in similar circumstances.

One woman is now free. We have to continue campaigning for all other women jailed for standing up against domestic violence.

Free Frank Johnson!

Public meeting

November 12th
Camden Irish Centre
Murray Street
London
7:30pm

Speakers: Billy Power (Birmingham Six)
Pat Reynolds (Irish in Britain Representation Group)
Jeremy Corbyn MP
Chair: Cllr. Liz Davies (Islington)

Frank Johnson has served seventeen years in prison for a crime he did not commit. He needs your help now. Come to the meeting to find out about his case and the campaign to release him.

***"Frank Johnson is yet another in a long line of victims of miscarriages of justice. His case should be reopened immediately."* — Andrew Puddephatt, *Liberty*.**

Russian revolution

Looking back...

Paul Field writes: **The academic establishment rushes to excise courses on Soviet Communism from the syllabus of colleges up and down the country.**

Meanwhile the media tell us that Marxism has been consigned to the slag heap of history. In this context, it is important that those of us who still fight for the social transformation of society reassess the true legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution.

The following contributions to the debate on the meaning of the Russian Revolution appear here to coincide with its 75th anniversary. Reflecting a variety of political backgrounds and perspectives, they all look specifically at what socialists today can learn from the victory and eventual defeat of the October Revolution 75 years after it first shook the world.

***Tony Benn** MP For Chesterfield, former cabinet minister and presently the only socialist voice left on the NEC*

The revolution in 1917 was the greatest event of this century. It was the first time in the history of the world that a workers movement displaced - in this case - a feudal/semi-capitalist society and began to build on the basis of the interests of everybody. It has been the permanent commitment of Western Governments to destroy the revolution, fearful that the ideas may spread. And of course the ideas did spread. The anti-colonial movement in the post-war period that destroyed the European empires was inspired by the Russian Revolution. It went wrong for a variety of reasons. Instead of diffusing power it became centralised under Stalin. Eventually, Russia bankrupted itself, through its enormous burden of military expenditure. When discontent grew, then all the corruption of centralised and secretive power finally ceased to be able to hold it together.

The West never cared a bit about democracy in Russia. They had lived with the Tsar when there was no democracy, they can live with Yeltsin when there's little democracy.

You have to take a measured view. I never believed in the centralised society, never believed you could have socialism other than by consent and never supported the inefficiencies of the command economy. But the socialist idea implanted and tried there over years will have a permanent influence, like the Paris Commune, the French Revolution and the English Revolution, and for centuries people will look back with gratitude to those who first launched that Revolution in 1917 after the defeat of 1905.

***Margaret Dewar** was a schoolgirl in Petrograd at the time of the Revolution. Later in Germany she became a supporter of Trotsky's Left Opposition and was forced to flee the Nazis.*

I would not have been in the Left Opposition had I believed in the parliamentary system. I don't think you can make radical change through such a parliamentary road. Whatever government - Conservative, Social Democratic or Labour - they are heading for disaster, ecological disaster, if they don't achieve radical change. This is more dangerous than anything else.

The significance of the Bolshevik Revolution is that it opened our eyes and ears to the possibility of changing society by means of revolution. It was a very noble attempt but could not continue.

Change will come eventually, but I do not know what form it will take. It may not be the same as the Russian Revolution because things have since developed with new production methods and a high-tech society. It has to be world-wide. You can not have socialism in one country or even in half of Europe. As a convinced Marxist and revolutionary socialist, obviously I am disappointed that it is taking so long for the revolution to materialise. But come it must if exploitation of man by man is to end and mankind is to survive. It is now up to the younger generation to give a lead.

***Charlie Van Gelderen**, born in South Africa, attended the founding Congress of the Fourth International in 1940 and has been active in left-wing politics ever since.*

For five decades the October Revolution was central to my political thinking.

On October 25th (November 7th) 1917, the world saw "the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny" - as Trotsky said.

Yes, the years which followed did not see the fulfilment of that promise. The isolation of the Russian Revolution, which gave birth to the utopian theory of building socialism in one country was the basis for the growth of the monstrous Stalinist bureaucracy, the physical and moral destruction of the Bolshevik Party and a reign of terror equalled only by the barbarism of fascism. To defend the October Revolution in those years meant, first of all, an unrelenting fight against Stalinism and all it stood for.

Today, when the Soviet Union lies in ruins, destroyed by the inner contradictions of the bureaucratic regime and the pressures of imperialism, we can still say that the Revolution, like the Paris Commune before it, was a beacon which lit up the future of humanity. It inspired the working class and the oppressed everywhere. We must learn from its triumphs and failures and prepare for new Octobers.



От Военно-Революционного Комитета при Петроградском Совѣтѣ Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.

Къ Гражданамъ Россіи.

Временное Правительство низложено. Государственная власть перешла въ руки органа Петроградскаго Совѣта Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ Военно-Революціоннаго Комитета, стоящаго во главѣ Петроградскаго пролетаріата и гарнизона.

Дѣло, за которое боролся народъ: немедленное предложеніе демократическаго мира, отмѣна помѣщичьей собственности на землю, рабочій контроль надъ производствомъ, созданіе Совѣтскаго Правительства — это дѣло обезпечено.

ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТЪ РЕВОЛЮЦІЯ РАБОЧИХЪ, СОЛДАТЪ И КРЕСТЬЯНЪ!

Военно-Революціонный Комитетъ
при Петроградскомъ Совѣтѣ
Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.

26 октября 1917 г. 10 ч. утра.

Lenin's proclamation posted in Petrograd, October 26th, declaring the taking of power from the Provisional government by the Petrograd Soviet and the Bolshevik controlled Military Revolutionary Committee.

***Mildred Gordon** is Labour MP for Bow and Poplar and one of the few principled socialists remaining in the PLP*

The Russian Revolution demonstrated that capitalism could be overthrown and a powerful economy could be built without competition and the profit motive.

It also showed the nightmare that developed from central control without democracy.

Marxist-Leninists mistook the infancy of the capitalist system for its death throes and were taken by surprise by its resilience and its ability to keep going despite inner contradictions.

Large scale manufacturing industry has been moving from Europe to the Pacific Rim and it may well be that the next successful anti-capitalist revolution will again take place in what has been considered to be a backward country. Our task in the West, is to keep the ideals and principles of socialism alive and fresh and to distinguish them from the Russian and Eastern European bureaucratic dictatorships. We must fight for socialist policies inside the Labour Party.

We need to rethink and spell out how a socialist system can avoid bureaucracy given that the average person wants to do the work and go home, and it is the eager beavers who are prepared to take an extra responsibility who are often the budding bureaucrats.

***Chris Knight**, Marxist anthropologist and one of the founders of London Labour Briefing*

Politics is about power. The Labour Party has held office, but never power. As Tony Benn's diaries show, even when we've won elections, treachery at the top has kept all real power in the hands of the same ruling class which governs us under the Tories.

Bolshevism showed us how to "take the power". The slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" was crucial. Only when the oppressed realised that their Menshevik leaders didn't want power could they see through them and conclude that if the power was to be taken, they'd have to take it themselves.

October 1917 was the greatest event in written history. True, Bolshevism failed to win enough power. Confined with the boundaries of a few backward nation-states, the revolution was bound to fail.

The lesson I draw is that we must go further next time. The first thing is to learn to dream once more, as Lenin and Trotsky dreamed. Forget about national "planning". Either the planet becomes conscious and self-managing, or our own and many other species may become extinct. Stalinism's demise, by placing the entire planet once again under naked capitalist control, is making this glaringly obvious. Provided the cruel lessons are learned, future historians may well see Bush's short-lived "New World Order" as setting the scene for humanity's "second October".

***Noam Chomsky**, Professor of linguistics at Massachussetts Institute of Technology has been a leading figure of the American left and a thorn in the side of US imperialism for over thirty years*

The lessons of the October Revolution for socialism depend, of course, on how the term is understood. If it is intended to comprehend such principles as control over production by working people, vesting of decision-making in popular hands (over investment, work conditions, social life, etc), then the Bolshevik takeover was a serious defeat for socialism.

Lenin and Trotsky moved at once to destroy the incipient socialist institutions that had developed including Soviets and factory councils, intending, as they made clear, to convert the working population to a labour army under the command of the vanguard party and its maximal leader.

They moved further to demolish every form of democracy and popular organization, instituting tyrannical rule over every aspect of society. Naturally, the world's two great propaganda systems agree on calling this "socialism": the West, so as to defame socialism, the USSR, so as to gain what prestige it might by absurdly associating itself with socialist ideals.

For socialists, the collapse of the corrupt and brutal tyranny is a victory, like the overthrow of fascism; but only if doctrinal illusions are shed.

...and forward!

Labour Party Conference Blackpool 1992:

Delegate Dorothy's diary

Dorothy Macedo
Hendon South CLP

LABOUR PARTY Conference this year was boring. Apparently this was intentional: some journalists claim it was a deliberate ploy, keep a low profile and watch the government screw up. This attitude was caricatured by cartoonist Steve Bell during the election as "boring people into voting Labour". It didn't work then and it won't work now.

However there were both highlights and lowlights. On the debit side, the loss of Dennis Skinner from the NEC was a bitter blow. Conference actually voted in favour of the Policy Forums which will make future conferences a hollow sham - as has been said, a rare case of turkeys voting for Christmas - and another composite from the AEU and GMB calling for "social partnership" between workers and bosses - turkeys voting to co-operate with butchers? And delegates sat politely through some extremely uninspiring speeches by some exceptionally untalented platform speakers. Yet the left had its moments, there was the occasional glimmer of dissent...

Monday morning began with objections to the inclusion of Robert Maxwell's name in the NEC Report's list of those for whom a minute's silence was held.

The Conference Arrangements Committee was over-ruled by a vote to add the resolution from USDAW on pensions to the timetable, a promising start. It then went one better and voted, against the NEC's wishes, for the resolution opposing the Child Support Act. I had mixed feelings about this as in recent years the NEC has rarely suffered more than one such defeat per Conference - it wasn't even lunchtime, had we peaked too early?

Monday afternoon brought the debate on Europe. Tony Benn was called (another improvement on recent years) but the result was obviously stitched up in advance. I managed to speak in the following debate, on the general election, as did Lorraine Monk (one of the left's candidates for the NEC Women's Division). We raised the reasons for Labour's failure to win women's votes, in particular its contempt for its own women members.

The NEC results: not just the loss of Skinner, but for the second year running a CLP division of seven men. Yet Mo Mowlem, supposedly the spokesperson on women, welcomed this result! She was pleased because Blair and Brown were victorious. How the hell are shadow cabinet members supposed to represent the interests of CLPs?

Tuesday morning - the nadir, in my opinion. Composite 17, a forceful reaffirmation of Labour's basic values, was defeated. As an encore, Conference voted for the Policy Forums - despite a warning from Rachel Ashworth (Newham South) that "democracy is being undermined by this proposal." They then voted against a resolution from the NUM calling for a green energy policy, including the phasing out of nuclear power.

Tuesday afternoon, besides John Smith's speech, also featured debates on Party finances and organisation. Ted Knight (Norwood) demanded to know how much of the £770,000 listed in the accounts as "other expenses" had been spent on the witch-hunt. There was a ludicrously evasive reply by Sam "missing millions" McCluskie, who went on to assure those alarmed by the £3 million deficit that "the situation...and this may sound silly...is under control." In the debate on Party organisation which followed, Leonora Lloyd (Ealing Acton) told the platform bluntly that the proposed £18 subscription was too high, especially for low paid women. Jane Hobday (Hertsmere) added "we need a mass membership, not a massive membership fee."

Wednesday morning started badly. Resolutions critical of the disastrous National Membership Scheme were defeated or remitted, letting the NEC off the hook. Then came debate on women's organisation, including proposals for the election of the NEC Women's Division by Women's Conference. There is no doubt we have won the debate, what we can't yet manage is to win the vote. The movers agreed to remit to avoid defeat.

Wednesday afternoon: the resolution on pensions, that had been left off the agenda initially. The NEC wanted it remitted - it contained serious spending commitments! USDAW refused and it was carried overwhelmingly to great applause. Defeat number 3 for the platform.

The debate on party-union link was the most important debate of the week in my opinion, and not just because I was moving the key composite, which committed the party to democratic links at all levels.

The NEC wanted my composite remitted and also the ones on the EPIU affiliation and women's shortlists. We all refused, and called for card votes. Richard Rosser deserves special mention for his reply on behalf of the NEC: his claim that there was some problem with the EPIU's TUC affiliation was greeted with howls of outrage from union delegates who knew this was rubbish.

The composite on women-only shortlists was heavily defeated, with less than a million votes for. The composite opposing trigger ballots (which effectively end mandatory reselection) was lost by 3.2m to 1.9m. But there were stunning defeats for the platform on EPIU affiliation - carried by 3.9m to 1.3 - and the TU link: my composite was carried by 3.2m to 2.1m. Bill Jordan denounced this result as an example of "baronial" power (readers can rest assured I will not be using my title) and complained it had "snapped a pair of handcuffs" on the working party on the TU link. Well, we can only hope he is right.

Conference voted to alter the balance of voting from the present 90/10 split in favour of the unions to 70/30 from 1993.

Thursday morning. The undisputed highlight of the week: Arthur Scargill moved the emergency resolution on pit



Briefing *fringe meeting: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Cllr. Liz Davies and Leonora Lloyd express their views on Maastricht PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths*

closures, a stirring speech followed by a standing ovation. Bill Jordan tried to attack the NUM in the guise of raising a point of order and was booed off the rostrum. The chair threatened to suspend conference - it was just like old times. But the reply by Dennis Skinner on behalf of the NEC was a virtuoso performance, and received an emotional ovation that eclipsed the reception given to any other speaker. The recording of this outsold the tapes of all the other sessions put together.

Thursday afternoon: resolutions supporting the ARA and opposing the Asylum Bill were carried. What real action will we see on these? The resolution calling for the scrapping of Trident was defeated, though only narrowly, while the resolution on defence cuts was again carried by a two-thirds majority on a card vote.

Friday morning, and the hall was half empty. Ireland: the party is committed to the repeal of the PTA, but so it was last year and look what happened. Any bets on the policy sticking this time? Campaigning: by now there were so few people left that I was called to speak despite my *Briefing* T-shirt. I referred to the defence cuts vote and suggested we campaign on this policy.

So the left had a few successes and we should try to build on them. We can demand campaigns on pensions, the Child Support Act, the Asylum Bill, defence cuts, etc. We also had setbacks. It is no good calling for people to vote Dennis Skinner back on the NEC next year unless we do some groundwork now. Get involved with the Socialist Campaign Group Network.

Sideshows by 'Press Pass'

THE MEDIA CIRCUS was surrounded by fairground stalls, featuring names now familiar to Labour Conference such as Nirex, B&Q, British Nuclear Fuels, Cellnet etc. A Falkland Islands stand was promoting tourism.

UK Nirex Ltd told us that Jack Straw's reaction had been "very good. Very interested. Pleased to see us here. We also get a lot of support from Jack Cunningham as you might expect." Eurotunnel's representative was asked about the environmental damage. Hadn't it made a mess of Folkestone? "It depends what you mean by a mess," he countered. Safety? "There's no such thing as 100% safety." At the non-union Mercury Communications stand Louise Canny and Noreen Dignan were busy distributing free phone cards. "We haven't seen anyone from the BT stand, but the NCU keep coming to see us!"

We asked Ray Williams at the Police Federation stall if they had been bombarded with complaints about police violence. 'No, none of that...' At that moment he was forced to revise his view by a passing miner's reaction. "Except for him of course," he conceded. "Racial harassment?" we ventured. "No - we've had coloured people coming up and talking to us." Had MPs been supportive? "Donald Anderson - good as gold, he is."

The 'Democracy Now' stall, promoting Labour Party representation in Northern Ireland, succeeded in gaining support from several MPs. Delegates' suspicions that they were really pro-Unionist and anti-united Ireland were met with diverse reactions. "I can't continue this discussion, I have a headache," we were politely informed, whereas Mayor of Luton Ray Sills was branded "a racist".

'Peace through NATO' also had a stall, and a fringe meeting at which David Clark MP proclaimed: "We haven't sung the praises of NATO enough." The *Briefing* fringe meeting provided arguably the best debate on Maastricht, and the Campaign Against the Witch-hunt and the Socialist Campaign Group meetings were packed to capacity. The *Briefing* Quiz Night social was attended by Dennis Skinner and surprisingly Jeff Rooker, who had drunk enough to buy a *Briefing* badge which we assured him would enhance his career prospects. Bill Jordan won the conference 'Class Traitor' ballot, narrowly beating...Jeff Rooker.

Inside Conference, the press were (as usual now) handed copies of platform speeches before they were delivered from the autocue. Also available were press releases advertising fringe meetings at which frontbenchers were to launch "blistering attacks" on the government. Clearly, not all the action was confined to the spectacular £33,000 worth of grey platform and backdrop at the conference centre.

Cohen's Conclusion

Harry Cohen MP sums up: The conference was without sparkle. The election defeat hung heavy, and those who had a hand in that failure consolidated their leadership positions, without any new ideas between them.

In the same way that workers keep their heads down for fear of unemployment, so local parties and trade unions have moved to the right at the shock of the electorate's choice. It will only be temporary as it is realised that the scale of the economic crisis, which face people in their daily lives, cannot be solved by policies which are in any way similar to those of the Tories.

Trash Trident — unilateralism regained

Walter Wolfgang, Vice Chair of Labour CND, advises on action after the Labour Party Conference debate.

THE VOTE AGAINST Trident was only lost by 215,000. Last year the majority against was one million. We are making progress. This is the beginning of regaining Labour's commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament. Today it is more essential than ever that the Labour Party reinstates that commitment. For contrary to popular perceptions, world nuclear disarmament is in the doldrums. True, the United States has agreed to substantial reductions, yet it remains firmly opposed to eliminating nuclear weapons altogether.

Yeltsin's Russia has agreed that some nuclear weapons should be retained indefinitely. The United States wants to retain nuclear weapons in order to put pressure on the Third World to impose a Capitalist Pax Americana. It is not just that this retention will impede efforts to prevent proliferation. As long as nuclear weapons are about, their use may not only be threatened, they may actually be used. That possibility is increased by global instability. It may well be that the risk of nuclear weapons being used is now greater than it was at the height of the Cold War. The present complacency about nuclear weapons is not justified. In addition there is now the danger that a European Community with a common defence policy will have a nuclear arm, initially constructed by combining the French and British "deterrents." That would significantly increase the risks. If Maastricht (in however modified a form) is agreed, the danger is real. But it may be equally real if Maastricht falls or if we have a twin track European Community. If currency union is put on a back burner, the emphasis may shift towards other measures such as defence and foreign policy integration.

A worldwide agitation is now needed to put the elimination of nuclear weapons back on the international agenda from which, for the moment, it has disappeared. A pan-European refusal - East and West - to station nuclear weapons on European soil and waters - would stimulate that pressure. That refusal can be generated if one country refuses to have nuclear weapons, be it Britain or the Netherlands. Britain could start this process if the Labour Party becomes firmly recommitted to unilateral nuclear disarmament and acts and campaigns on it. This could have the effect of reviving the European and the international anti-nuclear movement, even while Labour is still in opposition.

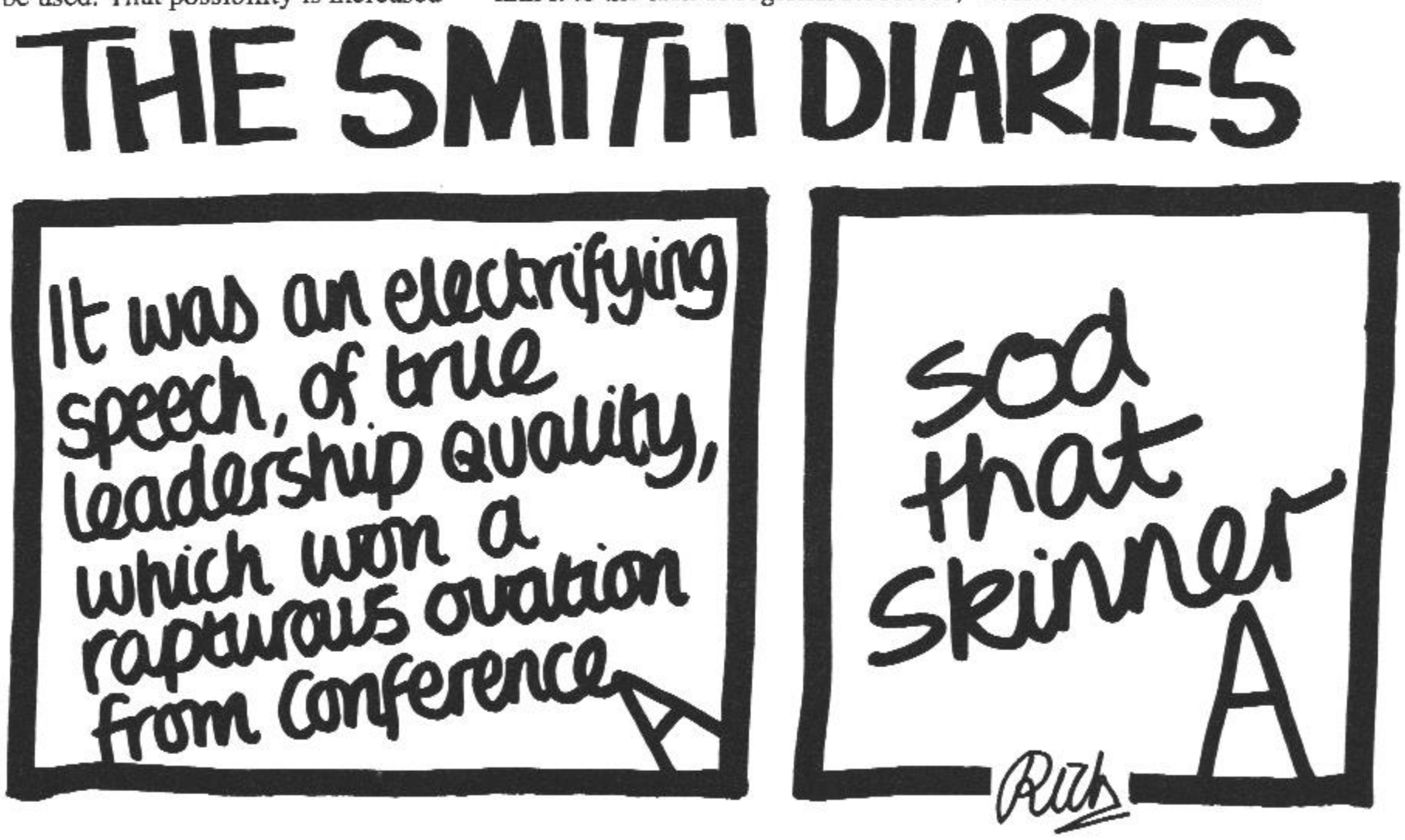
So let us use Labour's regional conferences to get the dynamics going for a Labour commitment to scrap Trident. The fact that Trident will cost more than £33 billion can be used to link it to the lack of regional resources, in order to prevent it being ruled out of order. Equally we have to use trade union conferences for the same objective. That means working for a break with the Kinnockite idiocy which refused to mention foreign or defence policy in election campaigns. That refusal has weakened Labour's credibility and its electoral chances.

The commitment to cut defence spending to the average level of other West European countries has this year been carried by an unprecedented majority. It is an essential element in a credible economic and foreign policy, which - at the moment - Labour is not advocating. Tory-bashing is essential, but it must always be linked to propagating a credible alternative in order to be effective. Those CLPs who have a Labour MP must now demand that he/she should pledge to press for public advocacy of the defence cuts commitment in Parliament, and report back to the CLP on what has been done. Trade unions must be encouraged to demand just that from the leaders of the Parliamentary Labour Party. A paper commitment is good — but never enough by itself. Labour must be encouraged to fight and lead. The conference results are only a beginning.

● **Suggested resolution for Regional Conferences:**

"This Annual General Meeting - aware of the rundown in housing, education, transport and infrastructure - considers that the Trident missile programme, whose cost is likely to be £33 billion, should now be scrapped.

It also believes that the scrapping of this programme is an essential step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction worldwide."



Don't hound the heretics



A Christian socialist appeal to John Smith from **Jean Calder** former Brighton Councillor facing expulsion.

"Dear John Smith,

I am writing to appeal to you to stop the witch-hunt of Brighton Labour Party members.

You and I belong to different strands within the Party, you of the right, and I of the left. However, what binds us together is that we are both Christian Socialists. As members of the Christian Socialist Movement we are both committed to a set of fundamentally anti-capitalist Aims involving "redistribution of wealth", a "classless society" with "social, sexual and racial equality", and "common ownership and democratic control" of the world's wealth. You have a reputation as a man who is concerned with fairness and democracy. Yet there are contradictions in your present position. You now lead a Party seemingly wedded to market principles, and the management of capitalism. You also preside over a witch-hunt of anti-capitalist dissenters within our Party, which is being prosecuted in a manner which is as cruel as it is unjust.

Critics of our faith might argue that witch-hunts and inquisitions are endemic to the Christian tradition. However, I imagine you would agree with me that the Christian witch-hunts represented a distortion of the faith, by a hierarchy which had lost its grip on founding principles. Like the witch-hunts of today, their purpose was to silence dissident and rebellious voices. One of the lessons we can learn from our history is that it was often the heretics, who spoke out against corruption and abuses of power, who best safeguarded the fundamental truths by which their persecutors claimed to live.

The witch-hunt in Brighton began in earnest in 1990 when Brighton Labour Party called for the reinstatement of six councillors who had been suspended from the Labour Group of Councillors. In line with Brighton Labour Party policy, the councillors had refused to support the use of the courts against Poll Tax non-payers. Though we expected punishment for breaking the Whip, we were unprepared for the draconian response of the party leadership. We were indefinitely suspended, and when the local Party protested, it too was suspended for 'investigation'. The names of individual members who objected were sent to Party Headquarters, and twenty six of them were later suspended.

Throughout this process Council leaders publicly attacked the suspended councillors, while emphasising the Council 's intention to vigorously pursue non-payers. Small wonder that with the Party suspended, and dissident councillors barred from standing for re-election, the Labour vote reduced by 6,000 in 1991, and by a further 4,000 in 1992, with a loss of 8 Labour seats (overwhelmingly the worst result in the South East). Now, with the Labour Council teetering on the brink of losing control, twenty of us are facing expulsion.

The investigative process to which we have been subjected is biased and unjust. It is a Kafkaesque process throughout — the accused know they are accused of something, but don't know what it is or how to defend themselves. The presentation of evidence is selective and unfair, there are no sworn statements, unsupported hearsay evidence and rumours are accepted, and secret 'evidence' is made available to the 'prosecution' and 'judges' which the 'defence' is not permitted to see. Members are suspended for actions which at the time they took place were not against the rules, and for misdemeanours for which they have already been punished. Disproportionate weight seems to be given to the submissions of members who support disciplinary action, while that of others, even if they are in an overwhelming majority, is ignored, or even worse, suppressed.

As a lawyer you know how many miscarriages of justice have occurred because of untruthful testimony, unprincipled investigative practises, and the denial to the defence of access to all information resulting from an investigation.

There are those in the NEC who say that the witch-hunt of *Militant* is justified, but that it should go no further than that organisation. The truth is that this was always a witch-hunt of socialist ideas, and not of organisations. It serves no one's interests except those of the ruling class. Since the mid eighties *Militant* supporters have been the Party's primary scapegoats, and have been made to carry the burden of its failures. But it was always clear that the witch-hunt would move on, first to other organisations, and then to non-aligned comrades of the left.

The language used on *Militant* supporters is typical of the language historically reserved for scapegoats. In a report in 1986, which he quotes in evidence to the N.E.C., one Brighton councillor referred to *Militant* supporters as "parasites". I recall that your predecessor referred to them as "maggots". It is a language of bigotry and fear which denies the humanity of people, in order to make it possible to betray them.

Your predecessor set in motion an inquisition which has decimated our Party, set comrade against comrade, and played into the hands of the Tories. A system was set up which penalised honesty, and encouraged sneaks, bureaucrats and informers. Aided by the ambitious, the corrupt and the naive, they have taken over our Party and hold it in an iron grip. Now, seemingly out of control, the witch-hunt has acquired a terrible life of its own. With the national membership scheme and the Party's finances in crisis, recruitment at an all time low, and a haemorrhage of disillusioned members away from the Party, the NEC continues to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds on expelling some of its most loyal and experienced campaigners.

A climate of fear and anxiety has been created, which has eaten away at the fabric of our party. In Brighton many members have resigned or let their membership lapse. The left is weary and sickened, and those on the right are too demoralised and scared to speak out about the abuses they see all too clearly. Last week, I was shocked when a very elderly and frail member, whom I had always thought supported the witch-hunt, apologised to me, saying: "I should have done more to help you, but I was frightened I'd get on a list too. I've been a member for years, I didn't want to get expelled."

As socialists we have enemies enough without having to fear each other. I appeal to you to use the power that you alone have to end this witch-hunt."

● To the above extracts from her letter, Jean adds:

John Smith has no history as a witch-hunter. I ask him to —

- declare an amnesty for all members currently facing investigation or awaiting hearings before the National Constitutional Committee.
- readmit those members previously expelled by the NCC who wish to rejoin.
- institute a formal re-examination of the disciplinary procedures and structures of the party, in particular the role of the Directorate of Organisation.
- institute an urgent inquiry into the possible involvement of domestic or foreign security services in destabilising the organisations of Labour.

Is Labour disablist?

Roger Robinson, Chair of Hampstead and Highgate CLP, urges the Labour Movement to put disability on the agenda.

THERE ARE over 6 million disabled people in the UK; over 90% live in the community, only 36% are in work. Recession or no recession, disabled people are inevitably unemployed. Not for lack of skills, but because this able-bodied society practices discrimination against disabled people in employment, through lack of accessible offices and buildings, lack of accessible public transport, able bodiest attitudes of employers and employees alike. Disabled people have come to the conclusion, by and large, that they should 'not put their faith in princes, (or politicians) for in them there is no salvation'. Disability politics, then, is on the increase. Militant, angry, disillusioned with the pious platitudes, the patronising attitudes of politicians with notable exceptions like Jack Ashley, Alf Morris, Jeremy Corbyn and a few others.

The Labour and trade union movement (and I write as an activist of over 36 years) wax lyrical, (and rightly so) on equal opportunities- women, race, sexuality. But the movement is strangely quiet on the issue of disability. Time and time again motions go to Annual and Regional Labour Party conferences on transport, employment, education et al, yet rarely do we see mention of the need to make all these fully accessible to disabled people. Where is the outcry and the campaign from the Left or Right for legislation to be sought to make it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people in employment, to seek the setting up of a Disability Rights Commission like the EOC to campaign for accessible public transport, to ensure all employees and employers have Disability Equality Training and to campaign for legislation to make all buildings fully accessible? This year's Annual Conference was no exception. Hampstead and Highgate CLP, at my suggestion, submitted an amendment to the transport resolution from TSSA and others to include a piece on ensuring all transport was fully accessible. The motion was discussed, moved and seconded, yet no mention of accessible transport was made by any of the speakers. It has gone through, been accepted, yet what action will the Party, the PLP, the NEC, the CLPs and the unions take to campaign for this?

Disabled people feel that the only way forward is to fight their own battle- no more platitudes from able-bodied politicians. We need more disabled people as MPs and councillors and we need to attract disabled people into the Party as a special interest group. If we believe in equal opportunities, what the hell are we doing meeting in non-accessible venues for branch, GC and conferences?

Do we consult disability groups on disability issues? Have we made contact with them in our areas? Do we offer sign language interpreters for our meetings for the profoundly deaf? Issue our agenda and papers in large print or on tape?

This Party must now consult disability groups, and start to put disability on the agenda. It cannot ignore those six million plus disabled people. It must practice what it preaches.

Labour will continue to ignore disability power at its peril.

John Turner — an appreciation

Roger Robinson writes: John Turner, former despatch supervisor at Walworth Road, died suddenly at Labour Party Annual Conference. He was 66 and had retired just one year ago. But, true to his love for the Party, he came to Conference as a visitor with his wife, Vi, as he had done for so many years as a Head Office worker. John's death has devastated me; for I worked with him for so many years when I was Administrative and Personnel Officer at Walworth Road, and his section was in my department. He was a lifelong SOGAT (now GMPU) member and activist; Father of the Chapel; a staunch defender of his members' rights; tough, lean, sometimes laconic, pugnacious, and a good supportive friend in times of trouble. When the Party made me redundant at 50 with no hope of a job my life was torn asunder. John went in batting for me - arguing against my redundancy, taking the fight right up to Neil Kinnock's office and to Larry Whitty, and any NEC members he could buttonhole in the corridors of Walworth Road and the House of Commons. I was not a SOGAT member yet his deep friendship and loyalty to me made him fight all the way for me. And we lost. Yet the fight was a good one and I will always remember his friendship. He loved the Party and the trade union movement; was very popular in both wings; and his popularity was so well expressed by the large congregation that filled the Hospital Chapel in Blackpool for his mass, and the Church in Dulwich one Friday in October for his funeral service. He was loved by his family and friends; and Alan, his son, carries on as Despatch Supervisor at Walworth Road in John's traditions of hard work and loyalty. You don't have many friends in politics. John was my friend and friend to my family. I shall always miss him. He was a staunch socialist and a tough fighter to the end.

They shall not pass!
Stop the National Front!
Remembrance Sunday
November 8th
1pm sharp
Westminster City Hall
Victoria Street, London

Year after year the National Front has held a parade on Remembrance Sunday, marching from Victoria to the Cenotaph where they lay a wreath. It is time to stop them in their tracks.
They Shall Not Pass Committee:
071 277 0817

Financial fiasco



Labour's £2.9 million overdraft, the legacy of the Kinnock years, will be a drain on Party members' pockets for years to come. **Mike Marqusee** investigates.

LARRY WHITTY admonished Labour Conference: "Let us never forget the enormous debt we owe to Neil Kinnock." More to the point than this injunction would have been an admission that "We will never be allowed to forget the enormous debts that Neil Kinnock left us."

Final returns on 1991 show the Party overspending its £6.9 million income by £1,330,000. This is deficit budgeting on a scale never contemplated by even the most left-wing Labour local authority! Our cumulative overdraft at the Co-op bank is now £2.9 million. All the 10p increase in union affiliation fees agreed at Blackpool will go to paying this off. Likewise, most of the £3 hike in individual membership subs (none of the extra dosh goes to CLPs). Retiring Party Treasurer Sam McCluskie and NEC Finance Chair John Evans tried to blame this disaster of on "our success" in "forcing" the Tories to postpone the general election throughout 1991. The reality is that bureaucratic mismanagement and political error resulted in the waste of precious resources.

Between 1989-1991 *Labour Party News* cost the Party £534,000 in direct subsidies - including £186,000 in 1991, 14% of the Party's total 1991 deficit. This sum is disguised by a crude accounting device which claims £178,000 "income" for *LPN* in the form of "CLP subscriptions" - though of course nobody in their right mind ever voluntarily took out a sub to *LPN*! Defenders of *LPN* like to point out the magazine's excellent fund-raising record. Indeed, the 1991 accounts show that *LPN* fund-raising efforts brought in £230,000 profit. However, every penny of this was absorbed by *LPN* itself. How many Party members innocently respond to *LPN* appeals thinking the money goes to the Labour Party? Will they be pleased to know their hard-earned dosh all goes to propping up *LPN*?

Perhaps the single biggest scandal in the Party accounts is the huge sums attributed to "other expenses" of the Organisation Directorate. In recent years, this has been the fastest growing single item of Party expenditure. Between 1989-1991 this totalled £1,508,000. In 1991 alone it was a staggering £776,000 (far more than the £523,000 spent by Walworth Road, trades unions and CLPs supporting the Party's national agency service). These "other expenses" are not itemised; they do not include "organisers' expenses", "regional office expenses" or even "car leasing expenses" all of which are listed separately. Since no accounting item exists for the National Constitutional Committee or for investigations and disciplinary matters, it can be assumed that some of this cash mountain is being frittered away on the witch-hunt. However, even this can only account for a fraction of the sum (most expenditure on the witch-hunt is in the form of staff time and clerical support, which are accounted for under other headings). Just what the hell is this money - 9% of total 1991 expenditure - being used for? Members should write to Larry Whitty demanding an answer.

The Party's much-lauded fund-raising efforts are also not all they are cracked up to be. The "High Value Donors" scheme (i.e. £500-a-plate dinners, etc.) did indeed raise £228,000 in 1991 - but at a cost of £92,000. Part of this is money paid to Julia Hobsbawm (daughter of ...) who is retained by Labour on a "full-time consultancy basis". Part went on her trip to the US where she studied how Democrats and Republicans soak the rich. But of course the "High Value Donors" scam is only a small part of the Party's new "income generation" initiatives. Between 1986 and 1991 we spent £1,533,000 raising £2,401,000 net profit. In other words, of every pound given to the Party in response to one of its fund-raising appeals, just under 40p is used to meet the costs of the appeal! Would Oxfam or any other reputable charity tolerate such a ratio?



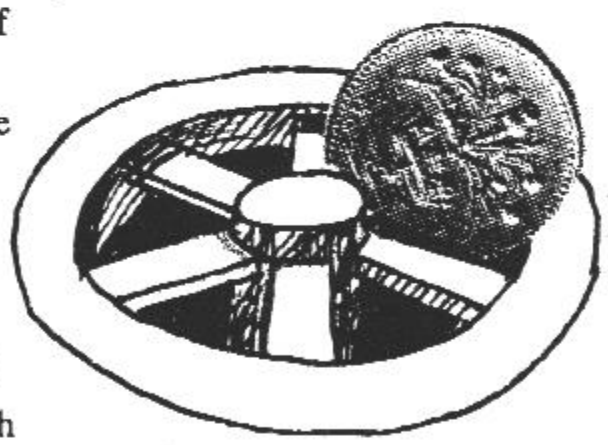
Between 1988 (when the first phase of the national membership system was launched) and 1991 a total of £1,338,000 was spent on membership processing. This does not include additional sums spent on computers (at least another million). The result: a loss of some one third of the Party's members in the same period. So much for value for money.



Even Walworth Road now admits that we lost 80,000 existing members in 1991. The reality is even worse. Comparing the claimed membership of 260,000 with the actual audited income from individual subs reveals a shortfall of at least 60,000 members. If we really had the members claimed by the NEC in 1991 they would have paid over £1.1 million to the national party rather than the 791,000 listed in the accounts.



Every once in a while the NEC is panicked into taking some cost cutting measures. They have scrapped regional and youth conferences and consultative forums. Back in 1990 they scrapped the verbatim conference report, thus saving £20,000. But at the same time they squandered £33,000 on this year's grey and orange conference platform. And then of course there was the £100,000 spent on the Sheffield rally...



● In next month's *Briefing*, Mike Marqusee will examine the political roots of Labour's cash crisis and propose some radical remedies.

CLASS TRAITOR OF THE MONTH

Self-promotion: beginner's guide

This month's Class Traitor, **Harriet Harman MP,** has skilfully exploited her excellent connections at the top of Labour's greasy pole to advance herself to the unlikely and undeserved position of Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

HARRIET HARMAN HAD only been in the Labour Party for four years when she was elected to the Commons, aged 32, in the Peckham by-election of 1982. However, through her high-profile work as a Legal Officer for the NCCL in the previous decade she had already acquired a national reputation - and cemented an alliance with Patricia Hewitt, who worked with her at the NCCL.

Prior to the by-election she was identified with the Bennite left, was a member of the Executive of the then left-wing LCC, and had signed a statement supporting Peter Tatchell in which she had asserted the necessity of "extra-Parliamentary activity". During the by-election itself, she defended "breaking the law", and held a public meeting with Tony Benn and demanded "freedom from the horror of nuclear war" and transfer of resources from defence to social needs. The Peckham by-election marked the first time Regional Office stepped in to run the show. A then little known Larry Whitty acted as the key trade union link-person.

Over the next year she struck a variety of left-wing poses, blaming juvenile crime on unemployment, lashing out at the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and criticising the Labour Front Bench for its "bipartisan approach to legal issues", backing the PLO and closer links between Labour and the unions.

Appointed to the Front Bench Health and Social Services team in 1984, she was a prominent backer of the "realignment of the left" in 1985, ostensibly supporting Neil Kinnock in order to influence him from the left. That year, she was reselected from a shortlist of one. In 1986, she made headlines by becoming the first ever woman to take maternity leave from the Labour Front Bench - an admirable initiative somewhat compromised by her subsequent willingness to trot out her offspring at the click of a photo-opportunity. Fond of posing as an "ordinary working mother", her attempt to portray herself as a lonely victim of the male-dominated Commons club won her plenty of publicity but carried little conviction, given her absence from any women's struggles outside Parliament.

Following the general election defeat of 1987, she stood for the Shadow Cabinet on the Tribune slate, attracting 57 votes (27 less than needed to grab a place) and was promoted to Deputy Spokesperson on Health. At the same time her CLP was suspended - with Harman's support - following allegations of financial improprieties. This allowed her a free hand in the crucial years in which she completed her transformation from ardent socialist to hyper-cautious careerist. She backed Kinnock on dumping Labour's unilateralist policy and increasingly shunned any identification with any causes not fully approved of by the leader's office.

Following the reconstitution of the CLP under close supervision from Regional Office, she was forced to stand in a contested reselection contest. Initially the local Women's Section had declined to back her, preferring left-winger Pauline Purnell; but under orders from Regional Office the Women's Section was reconvened and the vote was reversed. A very nervous Harman breathed a very audible sigh of relief.

She used her front bench position to cultivate contacts in the media and prove her loyalty to Kinnock. She had herself "Folletted" by image consultant Barbara and softened up the fake working class accent she had adopted earlier in the decade. In 1988 she visited the USA to study health care(!). Later that year three members of her personal staff who had resigned accused her publicly of "undervaluing" their work. At the same time she was squeezed off the Tribune Shadow Cabinet slate, much to her annoyance, by Clare Short. This did not please Peter Mandelson and Kinnock, who had decided Harriet was just the person to provide the kind of safe, "feminine", telegenic "women's image" they needed on their platforms. Certainly, her performance on the Front Bench (understudying Robin Cook) was lacklustre, a fact reflected in her inability to come even close to winning a place in the Shadow Cabinet ballot - despite heavy backing from the leadership and promotion through the usual Mandelson conduits in the media - in 1990 and 1991.

TGWU sponsored, she is married to TGWU bureaucrat Jack Dromey, which would be of no significance whatsoever were it not for the fact that she has acted as a bridge between the Shadow Cabinet mafia (Blair and Brown - also TGWU sponsored) and the TGWU right-wing. She played a key role in pushing Dromey into his ill-fated candidacy for the union's Deputy General Secretaryship against Broad Left candidate Jack Adams.

Following this year's election defeat, she backed Smith and Beckett (acting as a "campaign manager" for the latter), finally won a spot in the Shadow Cabinet poll and was made Shadow Chief Secretary of the Treasury - despite having no previous discernible interest in economic policy. Since then she has followed meekly in Gordon Brown's plodding footsteps, generally failing to score any points against the Tory government as it plunges from disaster to disaster.



Yugoslavia: how the left was lost

Replying to John Turkie's article in the last *Labour Briefing*, **Keith Veness** issues a socialist plea for a revived Yugoslavia.

IN THE CONTEXT of the attempted dismemberment of Yugoslavia by the Western powers, John Turkie's analysis is just not good enough. To comment that it is "Serbian nationalism, not Croatian nationalism, that is responsible for the murderous mayhem that is enveloping the region" is to stand reality on its head.

The Western powers, and in particular Germany and Austria, have long coveted both an outlet into the Adriatic and territorial influence in the Balkans. It was the crass and ill-considered decision of Germany (dragging the rest of the EC in its wake) to recognise first "Croatia" and then "Bosnia Herzegovina" as its puppet states that provoked the armed clashes and the ensuing dirty war.

Yugoslavia was the creation of various treaties after the First World War (Versailles, Trianon, St.Germain, etc.) and met the long-held demand for self-determination for the "South Slavs". Like all the successor states, Yugoslavia contained a host of problems arising from the break of the Hapsburg ("Austro-Hungarian") and Osmanli (Turkish) empires. Groups of peoples were intermingled and the area contained blood-feuds that went back centuries. The worst anomaly was the placing of two million ethnic Albanians in the South West of the country into a state that did not recognise their language or different traditions. As the Albanians occupied the area of Kossovo ("the Plain of the Blackbirds"), an almost mystic site for the South Slavs who had twice fought for independence against the armies of the Turks there, this provoked much conflict.

The new state also included half a million Magyars in the Vojvoidina area in the North East as well as the Slovenes, a distinctive Slav group with long attachments to both Italy and Austria, in the North West.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of the new state's citizens were South Slavs who spoke Serbo-Croat and the main differences were not ethnic or linguistic but religious. The Serbs were Eastern Orthodox Christians who had fiercely maintained their religion even under Turkish rule, though a minority had converted to Islam, often for diplomatic reasons. These are the so-called "Bosnian Moslems" currently beloved by the Western media. The Croats were Roman Catholic Christians who had been under the influence of Vienna and Rome and had suffered under a variety of tyrannies, both German and Magyar, as part of the Hapsburg empire that was run virtually as a private royal estate!

It is important that these facts are born in mind when looking at the last few years. Secession on religious grounds from multi-ethnic states is not generally supported by socialists - we did not support setting up Pakistan or Israel - and we should not support creating a "Catholic Croatia" or an "Islamic Bosnia". The attempted division of Yugoslavia should be rejected and all military intervention, either by the EC, NATO or the UN, must be rigorously opposed. Without this interference, there is a chance for peace and a new federal state emerging. The alternative is a series of religious-based satraps for various powers to use as surrogates.

John Turkie found the Serbian leader Karadzic's claim that the "Bosnian Muslims" want to create an Islamic State absurd. It is a pity he did not read what the protagonists themselves have said. Izetbegovic, the leader of the Islamic forces, as long ago as 1972 propounded the creation of a theocratic Muslim state in Bosnia-Herzegovna, with the "infidels" being moved into their own states. At the time he was considered a fringe maniac but now he actually enjoys substantial backing both from the West and the Islamic dictatorships. There is currently an obscene contest between Saudi Arabia and Iran to see who can send in the most arms and "volunteers" to fight for Islamic theocracy.

In addition, no-one in Yugoslavia can forget the last time a "Croatia" was set-up - by Hitler and Mussolini - in 1941. The resulting mass murders of Serbs, Jews, Romanies and every political opponent has seared its way into the historic consciousness of millions of South Slavs. A unitary state with rights to free expression and religious tolerance is a better bet than three sectarian statelets with a variety of outside backers.

The traditions of the Partisans and of the centuries of struggle against Hapsburg and Osmanli oppression are a better guide for the Yugoslavs than any amount of Western blandishments. No-one is opposed to sending in food, medicines and humanitarian aid - though how it is dispensed is itself a political issue. Sanctions against Belgrade are disgusting and have no place in a civilised world. More aid to more starving people could be got through if it went in via Belgrade and the attractions of religious secession would be a lot less.

The crucial issue for us is to oppose all armed intervention, all arms shipments and all outside interference. It is not too late to save Yugoslavia but so far the left's response in Britain has often been wrong. Now is the time to make a stand against the "New World Order" of Bush and Kohl by demanding "Hands Off Yugoslavia"! ❑

> *"The British media are working themselves up into a lather again, a huge self-righteous trip, as they did at the start of the Falklands and Gulf Wars. Such exhibitions always provoke in me a contrary impulse...They are on an emotional trip which utterly lacks any even-handedness and its objective is to open the way for acts of war against the Serbs. Such acts would be of sensational stupidity and utterly counter-productive. If bombers are sent in, I hope that Lady Thatcher & Lord Owen are in the first one, and without parachutes!"*
>
> — from E.P. Thompson's article in the Autumn issue of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly newsletter.

South Africa heats up

In the latest instalment of his regular column, **Sean Coyne** asks whether De Klerk has over-played his hand following the latest action by COSATU.

FOLLOWING THE successful mass action led by COSATU, and the terrible slaughter of Bisho, the temperature is rising again in South Africa. Recent developments have made all the major players re-examine the state of play, and reassess the demands they are raising and the strategies they are prepared to pursue.

Readers of *Briefing* are probably more aware than most of the complexities of South African society. It is not just a matter of the good, the bad and the not very attractive. All the interrelated political, economic and social factors which make up this most complex of jigsaws are also deeply distorted by decades of apartheid rule.

But let us start with the economic news. It is not good. Growth and more crucially investment, despite the lifting of sanctions, have failed to materialise at the levels desperately needed by De Klerk. He has to show the multinationals and the international bankers that South Africa is as good an investment as ever, that his reform process will bring stability and industrial peace. He has also to persuade his own constituency, that these changes will not significantly alter the privileges they enjoy, which is not easy. Defaulting on mortgage repayments and unemployment among whites is escalating. The emergence of poor whites begging in every major city is a very sharp image indeed, and one which is ruthlessly used by De Klerk's enemies on the right.

For the majority of South Africans there is no let up in the economic struggle. Job losses continue to rise against a backdrop of massive unemployment in the townships and rural areas. Even the most modest of social measures to correct some of the more glaring imbalances of apartheid have been shelved by the De Klerk regime as it further reduces social spending.

The state of the economy remains a major concern for COSATU. Having passed through a period of quite spectacular growth in membership, key sections of the labour market are now being savaged. Mining and engineering have been particularly hard hit, and both the NUM and NUMSA are under serious pressure to provide an alternative economic model within COSATU's structures.

COSATU as a whole is desperately trying to maintain its mass democratic character, but is also being buffeted by the economic crisis. The alliance with the ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) has recently been reaffirmed around the mass action campaign. But there is a growing acceptance that if it wants to develop a socialist alternative for the economy, it may well have to rely on its own ability to articulate and campaign for one. It is certainly the only organisation which publicly uses socialist language!

The ANC is only now recovering from the heart attack it suffered at the time of the Bisho killings. The proponents of the mass action line within the ANC have been derailed (some would say permanently) in favour of the negotiations lobby. The ANC's readiness to enter into talks about talks with the regime after such a bloody episode reflects its inability to present a tangible political and economic alternative to the permanent austerity measures favoured by De Klerk.

In fact, attention within the ANC has now switched away from economic questions to the deliberations of its recently formed 30-strong Electoral Commission. The Commission has been charged with the task of preparing the organisation for general elections in 1993. This has caused some painful soul searching. The ANC has always prided itself on its non-racialism. For decades it has stood for equality and for a common approach regardless of racial or ethnic classification. However, it has been unable to break through the enforced barriers of apartheid to win a significant base in any other community except black South Africans. Despite the complexion of the ANC leadership, there are still only relatively small numbers of both the Indian and Coloured communities organised at local level. The presence of whites at this level remains more symbolic than political.

So the hard facts of electoral arithmetic are beginning to emerge. The ANC at present cannot rely on the non-white community to elect it to power, and yet to win the size of majority which De Klerk is insisting upon means that it has to reach precisely those layers it has been unable to organise.

One of the accusations the ANC will increasingly have to face is over its close association with the SACP. There are many in all communities who thoroughly reject the apartheid project, but who still maintain a deep distrust of Communism. There are historical, political and religious reasons for this, but it has not been helped by recent press revelations (not refuted) of the costly private education which a number of leading members of the SACP are providing for their children.

The SACP is also planning to intervene in the elections as part of the ANC and not under its own flag, which is being used by its enemies to fuel speculation about its motives, and the 'hidden agenda' of the ANC as a whole. Quite how comrade Mandela will react to all this remains to be seen. Party activists on the ground and in the unions express frustration at the absence of a distinct SACP programme for the crisis in South Africa.

If electoralism is emerging as the most pressing discussion within the ANC, the violence in the townships continues to cast its shadow over all other political questions. Many respected commentators have come to the conclusion that the legacy of apartheid's vicious divide and rule policies, its brutal uprooting of whole communities and the scale of criminal violence it inflicted have left a terrible scar which cannot be removed by cosmetic surgery alone. Despite efforts to establish peace accords in many areas, the violence seems to have its own grisly dynamic, slowly eating away at the heart of the community, and providing ample carrion for those who hope to benefit from it.

These are difficult times for socialists in South Africa. Thankfully there are signs that following the mass actions of COSATU and the readiness of workers to fight when given the opportunity, De Klerk may still have bitten off more than he can chew. ❑

Echoes of an era:
images from South Africa

Bryn Griffiths (Hackney South and Shoreditch CLP) reviews an exhibition of over 30 photographs by **Alf Kumalo** showing scenes of unrest, removals, police raids and student revolt. The event is organised by Camerawork and co-sponsored by the African Arts Trust. It runs from 17th October to 21st November 1992 at Camerawork, 121 Roman Road, Bethnal Green, London E2.



Youth running away from tear gas, Soweto 1976

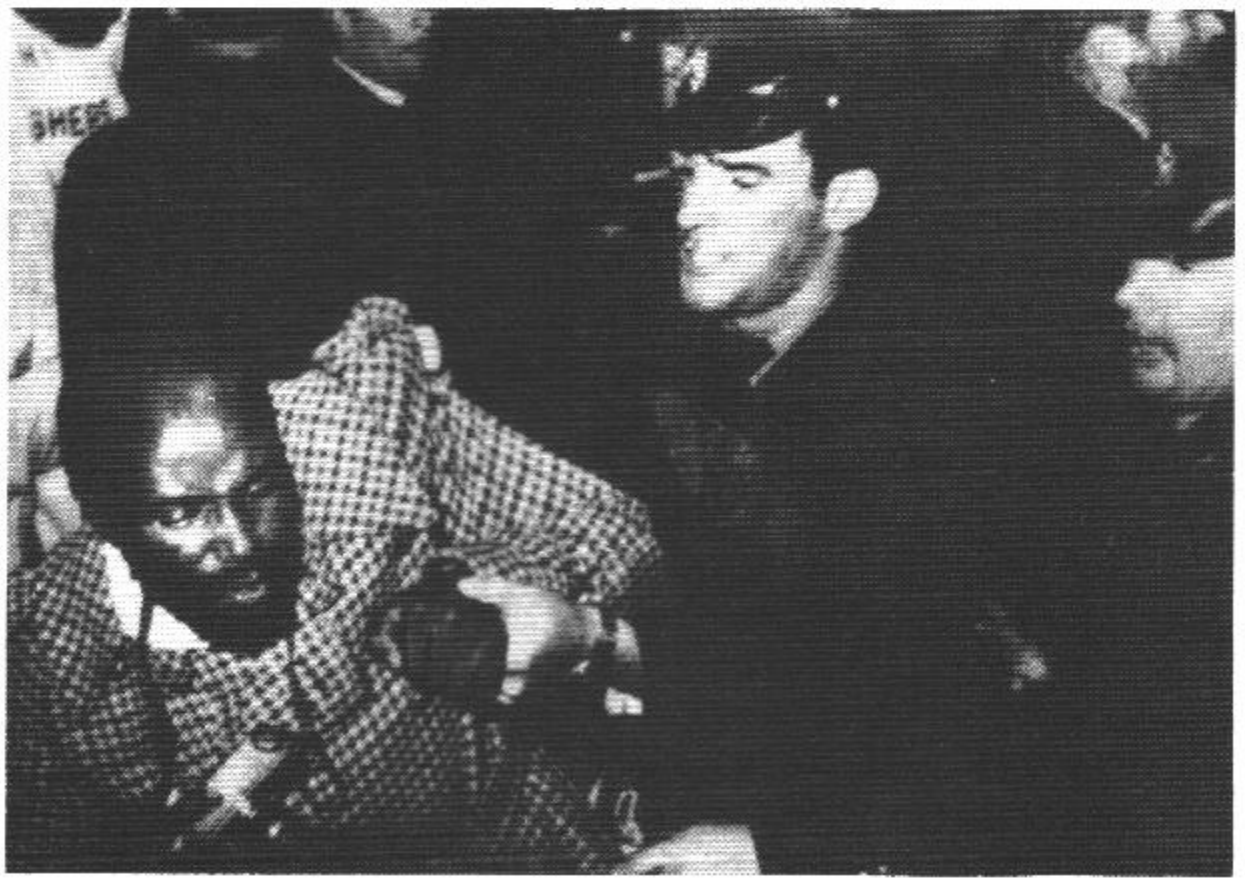
THE SOUTH AFRICAN history of black struggle and social habits has mainly been seen through, or heard of, from the point of view of white photographers and writers. Whilst black writers have at last surfaced, very little is yet known of photographers. Alf Kumalo is one such rare unknown quantity. For over thirty years he has diligently photographed, unnoticed in Europe, almost the entire struggle of the black people for liberation, and much of the social day to day urban and rural South African ghetto life.

Kumalo's photographic language is disturbing, alive and creative. He has created out of the chaos that has been, and still is, in South Africa. He has created images from the worst possible scenarios; tear gas, police, soldiers and guns, victims and victors. There are few photographs by Alf Kumalo which do not engage the viewer or make the viewer a participant, few which leave the viewer passive. The onlooker becomes the photographer, the victor or victim. Alf is quoted as saying: "a conscientious photographer can spot a picture where others will see none... that way, to me, photography becomes a work of art, with a lot of imagination."

On social life, Kumalo is at his humorous best. He manages to laugh at his community as well as laugh with it. Within the laughter, there is a biting statement at the ridiculousness of the apartheid system.

What Kumalo does not mention is the danger of the racist terrain in which he has worked in South Africa. The images indicate a mission to tell everything, the good and the bad, truthfully. Some tell the story in group themes, some as single shots and some a mixture of both, a story none the less.

Alf has been a newspaper photographer for almost all the South African papers and is currently senior photographer for *The Star* in Johannesburg. The exhibition, the first representing Kumalo's work in Britain, includes this work but also other images which go beyond anything his papers can safely reproduce and contravene the often one dimensional news reports which filter back to Europe.



Kumalo has faced regular assaults by police, hospitalisation and imprisonment

● The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive education pack highlighting some of the key areas relevant to the teaching of art, English and history within the National Curriculum.

It explores the rich and powerful context of the striking images and their interpretation. The pack also facilitates an analysis of the contribution Alf Kumalo has made to media representations of the anti-apartheid movement during his 40 year career in the industry.

He will be working in East End schools during his visit.

"Students should be encouraged to use photography to record their history," Kumalo advised.

Phone 081 980 6256 for details.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Murder in Berlin

Keith Veness (Islington North CLP) reports on the assassination of four delegates to a meeting of the 'Socialist International'

THE SHOCK headline above should have scandalised the whole international labour movement and bought forth waves of protest worldwide - yet only a few lines actually appeared in some newspapers and, with honourable exceptions, not one word of protest came from political leaders.

The full story of this scandal is as follows:

On 17th September 1992, the Socialist International was meeting in Berlin. Amongst the delegations present was a group from the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), the largest Kurdish group opposing the Islamic regime in Teheran.

After the formal session had finished, the Kurds left the meeting chatting to other Iranian opposition groups who were present - they decided to go to a local Greek restaurant, the "Mykonos", to have a meal and continue their chat.

Whilst eating, they were ambushed in the restaurant by a group of gunmen who burst in shouting in Farsi (Persian) "Death to the sons of whores" and proceeded to spray the KDPI leaders with indiscriminate gunfire before fleeing. Four people were killed, including the General Secretary of the KDPI, Dr. Sharafkandi, two colleagues and another Iranian oppositionist, Mr. Dekurdi. No-one has been arrested for this slaughter and the German authorities have tried to play down the whole issue.

The murder of Sharafkandi and his comrades is only the latest outrage by the barbaric government of the mullahs, who have slaughtered and assassinated all who have opposed them from exile.

The previous General Secretary of the KDPI, the well-known historian Dr Qasemloo, was assassinated in Vienna in 1989 after being lured into a meeting with Teheran's representatives. Two years ago in Paris the former Iranian Prime Minister Shapour Baktiar was killed in his house by unknown assailants. Once again no-one was caught and the authorities put little effort into pursuing the perpetrators.

There can be little doubt that the latest slayings in Berlin have been "hushed-up" because the German Government is currently trying to re-establish its trade links with Teheran that proved so lucrative under the former Shah. In addition, they did not want fundamentalist prisoners in their jails who would be the excuse for more hostage-taking and retaliation. Even worse, a Berlin Police chief initially tried to blame the Kurdish guerilla group in Turkey, the PKK, for the killing.

This patently absurd suggestion - most PKK members are Turkish speaking and do not know Kurdish let alone Farsi - was swiftly denied and served only to inflame the Kurdish community internationally. The simple fact is that the KDPI is the strongest opposition faced by the mullahs, with the seven million Kurds in Iran still totally opposing Teheran and waging a guerilla war throughout the four Kurdish provinces of the North.

The funerals of the KDPI martyrs took place in Paris on Friday 25th September and many thousands turned up to show their grief. Danielle Mitterand, the President's wife, led French supporters in showing their grief and horror.

In London a memorial meeting was held at the Kurdish Cultural Centre in South London at which every Kurdish political organisation was represented - including the KDP and PUK from Iraq, the PKK and KSPT from Turkey and the KDPI itself - and many Iranian opposition groups including the Fedayeen Khalq, the NRC and the Baluchi ethnic minority organisation. Trades unionists and Labour Party members involved in *Kurdistan Focus* and *Briefing* also attended and spoke.

Jeremy Corbyn MP tabled an "early-day motion" during the two days that Parliament was recalled and gained the support of 49 MPs.

Iran remains an appalling, terrorist state that is a prison for its many peoples — Kurds, Azeris, Arabs, Baluchis and Turkomans as well as Persians — which must be totally opposed by socialists everywhere. The murder of Dr. Sharafkandi will not stop the eventual victory and self-determination of the Kurdish people.

Peace process stalls in El Salvador

THE SALVADOREAN PEACE process has fallen behind its agreed timetable, with the government not complying with agreements on 46 different counts.

Although one of five elite army battalions has been dissolved and human rights abuses continue to be investigated by the new Truth Commission, the twin issues of land distribution and a resettlement package for ex-combatants remain unsolved.

The FMLN, which has integrated 40% of its resistance army into civilian life, has refused to proceed further until these problems are overcome.

The setting up of a new civilian police force is also well behind schedule. This has contributed to a rising crime wave, fuelled by the availability of cheap weaponry left over from the civil war. A hand grenade, for example, can be bought for around US $1.25.

The crime wave may also be masking a resurgence in the activity of the death squads. Increasing numbers of tortured bodies have appeared. Trade union leaders have been particularly targetted.

FMLN spokesman Francisco Veliz said: "We hope to avoid something very dangerous: that the dirty war conceals itself with delinquency."

Stand up for Nicaragua

Cabaret to celebrate 500 years of resistance

Friday, November 27th
Conway Hall
Red Lion Square,
London WC2
Food, cheap and late bar, DJ

Doors open at 7:30pm
£5/£3.50

Organised by Camden Nicaragua Association



Clinton is no saviour

Writing in the October issue of the US *Labor Notes*, **Suzanne Gordon** explained why Bill Clinton is no friend of organised labour.

WHEN THE AFL-CIO announced its support for Clinton, the Bush campaign was quick to seize the endorsement as proof that Clinton is a "pawn of big labour". The labour movement should be so lucky. American unions have few political allies and Bill Clinton, governor of a 'right-to-work' state [i.e. a state that favours scabs' rights over workers' rights] and former chairman of the business-backed Democratic Leadership Council is not one of them.

Campaigning in Missouri in September, Clinton correctly observed that the Bush administration's answer "to the pain of the working class is more pain". But Clinton's own answers to union members' problems don't offer much relief.

Contrary to Republican claims that he's a "pander bear" to "special interests", including the unions, Clinton has spent much of his campaign demonstrating that he doesn't pander to labour.

At this year's AFSCME [a leading public sector union] convention, Clinton pledged to eliminate 100,000 government jobs (all federal employees, represented by a different union). His views on contracting out are similar to those of Republican governors. Clinton declares that "all levels of government have a responsibility to provide the best value for every taxpayer dollar and this may require some privatisation of government functions".

Clinton disappointed United Auto Workers delegates at their convention by strongly endorsing the job-killing North American Free Trade Agreement. Last spring, Clinton applauded General Motors workers in Texas who under duress gave up traditional contract protections. He criticised "union bosses" for trying to block the changes.

Strengthening workers' rights provisions of the National Labour Relations Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act are longtime priorities of the labour movement. But Clinton and the Democratic Party platform speak only vaguely about more neutral enforcement of existing laws; they make no commitment to reforming them.

On health coverage, Clinton proposes a "play or pay" scheme that would leave most people still dependent on their employers for medical benefits and everyone at the mercy of the doctors' lobby, drug companies, hospital chains and private insurers who profit from the current shortage of affordable, quality care.

Despite all this, and despite Clinton's poor labour record in Arkansas, the bottom line for many trade unionists is still spelled ABTB - Anybody's Better Than Bush.

Backing the Democratic ticket on the basis of lesser evilism is an understandable response to twelve years of Republican rule that have been ruinous for many unions. But unfortunately providing critical support for Clinton and applying pressure on him to improve his positions is not part of the labour hierarchy's presidential election strategy.

With a few honourable exceptions, top labour officials have engaged in mindless boosterism for Clinton - spending millions of dollars trying to convince their members that he's some sort of labour saviour. Many of the claims being made for Clinton - for example, that he favours labour law reform - are simply not true. When he fails to meet the expectations raised by such propaganda, there will be the same sort of disillusionment, cynicism and frustration among trade unionists that developed in the late 1970s over the betrayals committed by labour's last champion, Jimmy Carter.

Making any gains under an administration as business-orientated as Clinton's will require massive membership education and mobilisation - especially on issues like health care. Union members need and deserve straight talk about the shortcomings of the Democrats and the weakness of political action strategies that rely on them exclusively.

All we're getting now is slick packaging of a product that's bound to disappoint. ❑

TRADE UNION

PICKET

NOTEBOOK

At last, NALGO pricks up its courage

NALGO'S DISTRICT Local Government Committee for London has called for a Day of Action on Wednesday, November 4th, culminating in a major demonstration and rally.

Jon Rogers
Assistant Branch Secretary
Lambeth Nalgo

For the first time in years the leaders of our union across the whole of London are urging a concerted response to the government's attack on our jobs. Following their general election victory the Tories have made it clear that local government workers are in their sights as never before. The noose of financial control will be tightened around the neck of local councils - local government is set to bear a large share of the coming multi-billion pound cuts package. The leader of the CBI used his appearance at the TUC to call for a public sector pay freeze to help make these cuts.

At the same time, the government is planning to break up local authorities once and for all, to remove the last vestiges of democratic accountability and to destroy the basis for unified and effective trade unionism. Schools are being bribed to opt out, tenants are being encouraged to set up their own co-ops. Housing management is to be a guinea pig for Compulsory Competitive Tendering in white collar services. All this is part of a government drive to use market mechanisms to force down wages and slash conditions of service.

Across London, thousands of NALGO members have been taking action against the government attacks and the councils which have tried to implement them. In Lambeth three hundred college workers, including NALGO members, took strike action to defeat the threat of compulsory redundancy. In Islington, seven hundred workers in Neighbourhood Offices are now on strike to stop compulsory redundancies. In Camden ninety playworkers are out.

In the biggest strike to hit London local government in years, NALGO called out the whole of the Newham branch when the Council threatened to sack strikers. The union forced the withdrawal of the sacking threat and won job offers for redundant workers.

A determined show of strength from our trade union now could force the government to back off. However, the Labour leadership seems unwilling to support any action against the government, especially one that could place Labour local government leaders in an embarrassing position. NALGO insiders report high level contact between NALGO's Mabledon Place HQ and Walworth Road apparatchiks keen for NALGO to call a halt to the day of action! NUPE's district officials also appear to be under orders from on high not to support the action. NALGO members can only hope that common sense and solidarity prevail over spinelessness and stupidity.

NUPE, one of the largest unions in the water supply industry, recently compiled a table listing the total number of private consumers that water workers had been forced to disconnect since privatisation. The shocking figures showed that in 1990/91 a total of 7,560 households were cut off.

For 1991/2 the equivalent figure is a massive 21,286. These wretched people now have no water supply for drinking, flushing the toilet or washing. NUPE is often approached by members upset at this barbaric practice.

The effects on hygiene, on the spread of disease and on general health have yet to be calculated — but what sort of society deprives the poor of drinking water? The only people, besides the overpaid Directors of Water PLC, who can support this must be Perrier share holders and the ghouls who follow ambulances.

MSF, the union for the swinging 90s, is to apply to the British Standards Institution for its BS5750 "kite-mark" of quality. This sets quality standards that are assessed by independent experts and, if achieved, allows the firm in question to display the "Kite" as a sign of excellence.

What next? Perhaps the AEEU could apply for a "Kite" flown upside-down to show the service it gives employers? Or what about the GMB being given a "Kite" flying down the drain as a comment on John Edmonds' speeches? The next logical move will be to refer NUPE and NALGO to the Monopolies Commission!Richard Hanford, our new editor, assures us that *Briefing* has no intention of applying for quality standards - particularly if it entails experts sitting in on the monthly production nightmare!

One of the few left successes at Blackpool was the agreement to let the Electrical and Plumbing Industries Union (EPIU) affiliate to the Party. The new union was originally formed by plumbers and sparks who could no longer associate themselves with the EETPU's antics over Wapping and single-union deals. Both MSF and the TGWU assisted the new union which has established itself in a variety of industries, including Fords UK, local government and building contractors.

This success was achieved in the teeth of opposition from Bill Jordan and the AEEU — and from left papers like *Socialist Worker* and *Militant* who opposed creating a new TUC-affiliated union. The EPIU can now expand and play a full role in the movement.

A recent study by Millward, Stevens, Smart and Hawes (Dartmouth Publishing £19-95p) shows the enduring strength of trades unions despite the recession, unemployment and "post-Fordism".

It demonstrates that union membership amongst employees fell from a peak of 58% in 1984 to a current 48% but that this was closely linked to "recognition" by employers. Even more interesting was the fact that the percentage of places with shop-steward or lay representative committees had actually increased over the same period.

The authors conclude that "broadly speaking no new pattern of employee representation has emerged to replace that provided by trades unions".

COHSE in the lion's den

COHSE BOLDLY staged a fringe meeting at the Tory Party conference. The health union took its case against London hospital closures to the lion's den in Brighton on Wednesday, October 9th.

COHSE London Regional Secretary Pete Marshall predicted, "There are going to be a lot of Tory MPs rebelling over hospital closures which could cost them their seats." Teaching hospitals, he argued, must be preserved and in any case London is not over-provided with health care. "Tories talk about choice. Every year thousands of women choose the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital. Market forces would deny them that choice," he said.

"The market system has to go," said Geoff Martin of London Health Emergency. "It's mind blowingly bureaucratic." He called for a simplified Greater London Health Authority structure with a strategic health plan.

Nurse Helen Weatherty from Kingston could not speak about the Trust for which she works due to its gagging clause. Nonetheless she explained how pressures of budgeting added to the stress of their work. She argued that "intensive care is expensive care, and can't be restricted by budgets". The Tomlinson report into London's health facilities would place more nurses on the dole. The Patients' Charter she dismissed as "a paper exercise...a mere token gesture."

Tory MP Jerry Hayes backed Tomlinson because "year after year the London problem has not been addressed." Without the report, he claimed, "you will have teaching hospitals collapsing about your ears." Virginia Bottomley must take tough decisions and act swiftly. "You cannot rationalise health care in London without a raft of cash. What a ridiculous thought - nurses on the dole - who wants that?"

"We seem to have more chance of convincing Tories than we do Labour," the COHSE crew commented wryly afterwards. Labour's David Blunkett has maintained that some closures are necessary. Pete Marshall reacted sharply to Blunkett's statements on Tomlinson and London's Hospitals: "There is no justice in the argument that London is overprovided for in hospital beds. If that were the case then there would be no waiting lists and my members would be standing around filing their nails rather than working around the clock to save lives. Right at this moment St Thomas's, Barts, Charing Cross and the UCH (all hospitals under threat of closure) are continuing to provide health care of the highest standard. Anybody who advocates their closure is advocating an act of vandalism beyond the bounds of acceptability. COHSE will fight on to save these hospitals."

Most Boring Trade Union Journal — Part 54

PROVING THAT EVEN relatively wealthy members can't buy the best designers, this month's *AUT Bulletin* wins our Most Boring Trade Union Journal Award.

Packed with full-page insurance ads, a letters spread with fewer illustrations even than *Briefing*'s, hum-drum timetables and a sycophantic tribute to former General Secretary Diana Warwick, it outbores even our old favourite, ASLEF's *Locomotive Journal*.

The latter breaks the mould of New Realism this month by daring to lead with a story of an alliance with the mining unions over rail and pit privatisation and closures. There is even a photograph with Arthur Scargill.

In case you were unsure how effective the hard right had been at the TUC, you only need to read AEEU General Secretary Gavin Laird's opening line in their slicker than an oil spill *Journal*: "Last month's TUC in Blackpool has shown the way forward for the trade union movement..."

Struggling through page upon page of excuses for failing to take action to defend their members (this is what passes for trade union journalism today), one paper stands out in contrast. The *Yorkshire Miner* can be yours for just £4 a year from the Miners' Union, 2 Huddersfield Road, Barnsley, S70 2LS.

Cadbury-Schweppes, the multi-million pound tooth-rot conglomerate, has served up a none-too-enticing notice to its unions of its intention to derecognise three-quarters of its shop stewards (29 out of 39 at Somerdale in Bristol and 26 out of 45 at Bournville in Birmingham). Brian Revell, TGWU Food Industries Officer, remarked that the "traditional Quaker-inspired paternalism seems to be drawing to a close."

This trend has occurred in many areas, including the public sector. Apparently employers have no objections to unions as such - just to unions representing their members!

The Joint Sites Committee, which is trying to organise rank-and-file building workers in London and elsewhere, is holding its first AGM on November 11th. The JSC anticipates savage wage cuts from sub-contractors in the run-up to Christmas. It is currently looking for office accommodation and would welcome any offers of office furniture or equipment. If you can help please phone 071 731 7725.

REVIEWS

In praise of personality

Mike Marqusee reviews
The End of an Era: Diaries 1980-1990
by Tony Benn,
published by Hutchinson, £25.00.

NOTHING BETTER illustrates how wrong Tony Benn is when he dismisses what he calls "personalities" in preference to "policies" than this book. Its frank and uncompromising chronicle of a decade of socialist struggle testifies above all to the crucial role played in that struggle by one particular "personality" - Tony Benn himself.

Of course, Benn is correct to deride the reduction of politics to the personal mannerisms that fascinate Fleet Street diarists and Parliamentary sketch writers. But he is wrong not to see the importance of an individual's personal political record. In his own case, the courage he has displayed again and again in using his renown and authority to speak out on behalf of even the most unpopular causes, his conscious resistance to the many and subtle blandishments of the establishment, his willingness to endure defeat, ostracism and even humiliation rather than do what he knows to be wrong have won him the trust of millions.

"Shadow Cabinet at 5 was a long and painful meeting..Michael Foot repeated, 'I insist on a condemnation of London Labour Briefing.'" — Wednesday, November 11th, 1981

"The Organisation Committee met...Denis Healey responded. 'Tony has a persecution mania and he won't repudiate London Labour Briefing.'"
— Wednesday, December 9th, 1981.

"To the PLP meeting. I was nervous, actually, and the atmosphere was icy..Finally Michael Foot summed up. He asked me yet again to repudiate London Labour Briefing."
— Thursday, December 17th, 1981.

This latest volume of the diaries contains a surfeit of special treats for *Briefing* readers who will enjoy comparing Benn's day-by-day account of the 80s with their own perceptions of political events in which they were grass-roots participants. This latest (and I hope not last) instalment of the diaries is once again superbly edited by Ruth Winstone, who in this case has had to prune the 3.5 million words of the original to a mere 325,000. Her task has been made even more difficult because during the decade she is covering Benn's activities were so intense and so diverse; this volume includes accounts of the deputy leadership contest of 1981, the Tatchell affair, the Falklands War, the 1983 general election, the Chesterfield by-election, the miners' strike of 1984-85, Zircon and Benn's ongoing battle with the security services, the first Socialist Conferences of 1987-88, the leadership challenge of 1988, and the Gulf War.

I had not realised before just how much we had all asked of Tony in the early 1980s - and how much he gave. Isolated within the Shadow Cabinet, subject to persistent vitriolic attacks from fellow Labour MPs, he resisted both carrot and stick (unlike his erstwhile "soft left" allies, who come out of this volume looking even more duplicitous and opportunistic than I had previously imagined) to continue to uphold the banner of the left. What emerges from the first half of the book, in particular, is the sheer complexity of representing and holding yourself accountable to a grass-roots movement while occupying any position within the Labour Party hierarchy. Again and again Tony is besieged by siren voices chanting "don't do it...you'll lose...you'll get blamed...it's the wrong time...it's the wrong issue..." Luckily for us, Benn followed his instincts and heeded what he calls his "inner voice" instead of the advice from "experts" and "friends" urging caution and self-preservation. In the end, what becomes clear in the account of the deputy leadership contest of 1981, in particular, is that the arguments against Benn's campaign were arguments against debate and democracy, against political struggle itself, without which the left and the Labour Party as a whole can never flourish.

Like previous Benn diaries this one is packed with historical irony and telling judgements on a host of political figures. Michael Foot's petty vindictiveness, Kinnock's insecurity, Robin Cook's pomposity, Jack Straw's bombast, Frances Morrell who "sort of frowned at me like a headmistress dealing with a difficult member of staff", Clare Short arguing against the 1988 leadership challenge because "if we lost it would badly damage Tony".

As always with Tony, the sharp words for some of his Parliamentary colleagues (not to mention the villains of the broadcasting media, notably Peter Snow and Vincent Hanna) are offset by generous tributes to comrades and to the many people in struggle he encounters in the course of his work.

My sole objection to this readable, revelatory and moving book is the title: surely, Tony, recent events have proved that the reactionary doldrums of the late 80s were not "the end of an era" but an interregnum in a long and still unresolved struggle in which you are continuing to play a leading role.

Painting politics

Anna Macedo reviews *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland*
by Bill Rolston,
Beyond the Pale Publications £9.95

FOR MANY READERS this collection is likely to be viewed as a coffee-table book. It is, in fact, much more than that. It must surely be the most comprehensive guide to work of this sort, and is sure to have a historical perspective too, as murals are defaced by the army and police.

Divided into loyalist and republican murals there is also a separate section for the work of Gerard Kelly - who only started painting after serving time in prison for a politically related offence. Though the author doesn't like to use the word 'propaganda', murals are bound to be viewed as such. As he says "people would stand and look at a mural before they would read a paper", and they are therefore of great significance.

The artistic quality obviously varies greatly, from the stunning Celtic King Nuada mural in Springhill Avenue, Belfast - to some that are little more than graffiti. There are some interesting international themes concerning Palestine, Namibia, Russia and Cuba.

Although *Drawing Support* does not seem to aim itself at any one particular audience, with its political commentary and 112 colour pictures, its easily accessible format should appeal to a variety of readers for a variety of reasons.

Dirty Harry comes clean

Camilla Power reviews Clint Eastwood's latest film *The Unforgiven.*

I'M A FEMINIST. So I haven't had much time for Clint Eastwood films. In fact I hadn't had any until I went to see *The Unforgiven*. The film proved as ruthless and violent as expected; it possessed all the ruthlessness, grandeur and violent logic of myth.

Being a student of anthropology, I've had to think and write on the question of how cultures use myth to talk about the deepest-going conflicts in their societies. Ideology serves ruling groups by masking and disguising conflict. True myth presents those conflicts in terms of wrenching contradictions: people's bodies get torn apart; beautiful young women get turned into toads; magic comes from blood. Myths do violence.

So does *The Unforgiven*. It transports us to a primordial landscape -Big Whisky, Wyoming - where culture itself has not come into being. Savage biological laws operate. The conflicts of interest between women and men are absolute - and sexuality is the issue. From the first scene there is no room for negotiation; there is hardly call for a language between the sexes. We see a whore having her face slashed open by a cowboy at whom she gently laughed for the size of his 'pecker'.

The next scene reveals the nominal 'law' in the town - the tyrant Sheriff - to be a law that respects only dominance and possession. The Sheriff rules that the cowboy and his accomplice must recompense the pimp who runs the whorehouse. The pimp spent good money bringing a pretty girl to the wilds of Wyoming to work as a whore; he needs money back for 'damaged goods'. The price is to be paid in horseflesh. So who owns a woman?

In the next scene, culture comes into being. We see the bloody-faced whore resting in bed; a bowl of bloody water beside her on the sheets; the rest of the whores gathered round. They are refusing to accept such violation; they are determining to assert their material power. This is the first cultural act of political organisation. It is expressed through one of the oldest symbols of human myth and art: women's collective bleeding, women sharing each other's blood-loss in a state of taboo and inviolability.

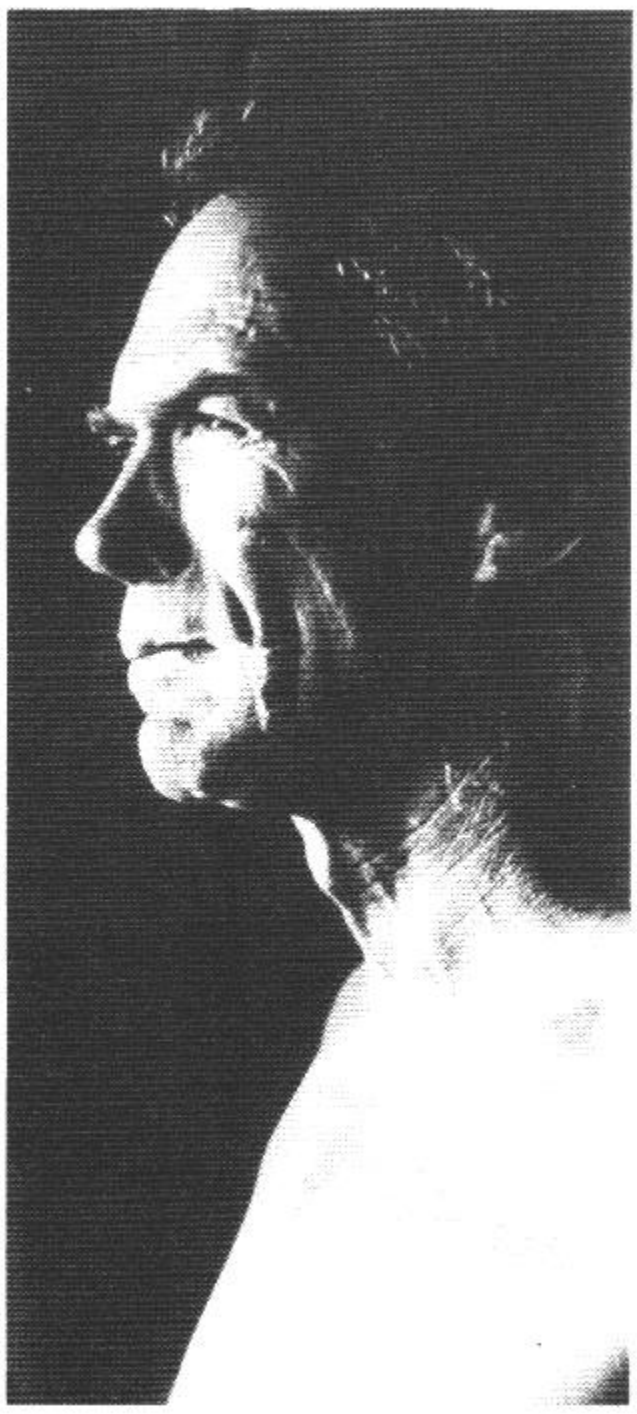
This is the symbol of female collective power on every continent, regarded with terror and abhorrence by male ideology everywhere. In Aboriginal myth, it takes the form of a giant Rainbow Snake; in European fairytale, it takes the form of the dragon which must be slain by the patriarchal hero. In Clint Eastwood's *The Unforgiven*, it summons up the sisterhood of a group of whores, their bloodpower. Blood cries for blood, vengeance for the violated sister. They will pool their entire resources to put up a reward for a gunfighter who will come to Big Whisky and gun down the cowboy violators.

One thousand dollars. At the going rate, $1,000 = 1,000 fucks -all those years humping cowboys - their collective sexual power translated into material terms. These whores, it should be said, are the only women in the film (apart from one dead wife and one native indian wife). There are no 'respectable' women. Or rather, these whores are all the women in the world. The wives, symbolically, are individual, privatised women whose interests are overridden by the collective need of womanhood - whores. Didn't Marx spell that out in *The Communist Manifesto*: before culture, under capitalism all women are whores?

So here we have a western predicated on a revolutionary act of female solidarity - revolutionary because it overthrows the rule of male dominance in the town. All the action in the film stems from this female strategy, this female collective's decision to assert its power. The whores remain a remorseless presence, furies exacting revenge for the infringement of taboos, spellbound princesses remote in the seclusion of their whorehouse.

The legend of the Whores' Gold - like the legend of the Golden Fleece - spreads abroad to Kansas, Texas, Montana, attracting gunfighters like parody fairytale heroes from afar. Viciously, the sheriff imposes his rule, demanding that allcomers surrender their weapons - he and his henchmen alone, agents of state power, carry theirs. Eastwood is among those who come, a gunfighter with a mythical past, now turned hog-farmer. He's first seen falling on his face chasing hogs in the mud. Myth does not operate through psychological development of character, but through dialectical transformation. The weather and atmosphere oscillate between open sunny prairie and dark flooding storm. So, Eastwood metamorphoses from a domesticated pig-farmer with a dead wife and two kids, to a shamanic figure, imbibing intoxicating substances to attain an ecstatic state of invincibility. From being the avenger of the women - for purely material gain - he becomes the monstrous avenger of his own partner, a black man tortured by the Sheriff. The women's solidarity is the necessary premise creating this male solidarity.

The film is far from perfect. Eastwood squanders the stark mood of mythic dreamtime with ill-judged episodes of comedy, mawkishness and ironic self-parody, not to mention all the bang-bang male fantasy, which occupies far too much of the later part of the film. He is wearing political correctness on his sleeve, and yet perpetrating all his old crimes. Even so, the story keeps its power and depth because it respects unflinchingly the logic of myth. Eastwood's power is the power of the dragon; he is the violent agent of the oppressed, of the collectivity of whores.



For all its faults, this is a revolutionary film expressing a revolutionary morality. Cultural laws of bloodpower and taboo are counterposed to the anti-cultured rule of male dominance and proprietorial control of women. ❑



Hors de combat

The *New Statesman's* guest diarist Laurie Taylor reported to NS readers that he had heard that the NS daily bulletin at Labour Party conference was a great success. It was certainly more professionally produced than its rivals but its writers seemed to share the problem of most professional journalists writing about the Party: not understanding how it works or who's in it. For example, the *NS* bulletin claimed that *Labour Briefing* had a line of supporting a referendum on Maastricht but calling for an abstention in it. Very droll, except, of course, it wasn't true!

Somehow the *NS* hacks had muddled *Briefing* up with *Socialist Organiser* (which will certainly piss off the latter!). The error was pointed out to the *NS*, but it declined to print a correction, explaining, "We're like you, 'unrepentant'."

Meanwhile the joint *NS/Tribune* team - competing as the Sendero Luminoso (Blackpool Branch) - came within a whisker of winning the *Briefing* Quiz at our social at Party Conference. Contrary to the report of this event in *NS*, the team failed at the final hurdle not because they could not list all the ingredients for a fruitcake, but because they failed to name all the current MPs who were formerly GLC councillors. They were pipped here by the know-it-alls from the *Socialist Outlook* team, which carried off the prize (a bottle of Famous Grouse) for the second year running. If they make it a hat-trick in Brighton next year, they will be forced to retire from the competition.

Not a fair cop, guv

Ian Aitken's Points of Order column in the *Guardian* delightfully dubbed *Labour Briefing* "one of the hardest of all the hard left papers" but then wrongly gave us the credit/blame for a wisecrack about the lack of air conditioning in the Winter Gardens in the daily 'Campaign Briefing' bulletin produced by CLPD and Labour Left Liaison.

Contrary to Aitken's assertion that we are obsessed with "a conviction that almost everything is a conspiracy" we attribute his error to nothing more sinister than sheer lazy incompetence!

Nuff said

After winning a seat on the NEC, **Tony Blair** proceeded regally to the Conference platform. On the way he was seen thanking members of the press for their "support". Later he opined, "People want the Labour Party to have an organisation that is as capable as has been the Party's Parliamentary performance."

Believe it or not

In a paper circulated to the Birmingham Labour Group, Council leader **Dick Knowles** shared the following pearls of wisdom with his fellow councillors:

"We ain't got the people with us because we seem to be suffering from an inability to translate theory into practice and we have fudged telling them what we are doing. Without giving too much credence to Nairn and Anderson, this may simply be the result of our peculiarly English tradition of elevating empiricism at the expense of thought..."

Just to prove he is no slave to empiricism, Knowles peppers his paper with quotes from "Comrade Gramsci" and even **Lenin** and the admonishment that "we must have aspiration which mean something to the 'lumpen proletariat' and which all its members are prepared to accept."

Wishful thinking

Astute readers of the official Walworth Road-issued ballot paper for the NEC elections will have noticed that in the brief statements allowed to candidates **Neil Kinnock** described himself as "President of the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community, 1992-."

Alas, another dream bites the dust. This self-advertisement was as hopelessly wide of the mark as "Neil Kinnock, Prime Minister, 1992 - ". Rumour has it that Spanish President **Felipe Gonzalez** vetoed Kinnock's Euro-socialist ambitions, just as John Major has vetoed his Euro-bureaucrat ambitions.

You'd think the least they could do would be to allow us to export this walking disaster area to Brussels.

Revisionism

Are you now or have you ever been a feminist?

Margaret Beckett explained her position in the latest issue of *Labour Student* (in comparison to which *Labour Party News* look sexy).

"I'm wary of describing myself as a feminist because a lot of things that I know fuel feminist feelings in other women I lack, purely because of my own work experience. I'm not particularly sensitive to being patronised. You can't be when, at eighteen, you go to work in a factory where there are very few women."

Another specimen of the exquisite reasoning of our deputy leader can be found in the latest volume of Tony Benn's diaries. During the Campaign Group meeting which discussed the 1988 Benn-Heffer challenge, Beckett "thought we should take soundings on the deputy leadership only."

Sorry!

Last month's Periscope carried an entirely erroneous piece about Mike Terry and others attending a conference in South Africa. Our usually reliable sources were on this occasion grievously misinformed.

Our **apologies** to all concerned.

Tory agenda

Not satisfied with the government attempt to increase restrictions on Irish people coming into Britain by demanding they show passports at customs, **Hornchurch Constituency Conservative Association** used their resolution to Tory Party Conference to call for the swearing of an oath of allegiance by all immigrants to the "British way of life." Other bright ideas from Tory Conference resolutions: compulsory identity cards, privatisation of the Crown Prosecution Service and, of course, the restoration of hanging.

Help wanted

From a *Sun* advert in a recent issue of *UK Press Gazette:* "We need intelligent news sub-editors who can combine speed with accuracy and imagination."
The stress, we presume, is on imagination.

Outrageous allegation

At the Campaign Group fringe meeting at Conference, one of the speakers alleged that **Giles Radice** had claimed that commitments to increase child benefit and pensions had lost us the election. When challenged, Radice countered, "I didn't say anything so stupid. What I said was: it didn't bring us extra votes."

So there.

If the shoe fits

During Tory Conference in Brighton, the local *Evening Argus* ran an advert for "a bankrupt stock of dummies". The phone number to ring? Brighton Conference Centre.

Missing Lynk

The *Sunday Telegraph* quotes James Campbell, a 36-year-old Nottinghamshire miner: "Everyone around here hated Arthur Scargill but now the talk is very different. It is obvious that Mr Scargill was right and Mr Lynk was wrong. The lads feel they have been sold down the river and words cannot express their disgust."

At the time of writing **Lynk** is sitting-in at the bottom of mine shaft to protest pit closures, receiving visits from Tory MPs. A miner in Derbyshire commented: "So what's new? Last time round we were all out and Lynk was in."

Perhaps if they close the pit they'll seal Lynk in once and for all.

Revenge

In an open incitement to vigilante violence, London's *Evening Standard* recently published addresses of alleged "terrorist organisations operating in the capital - groups like the Irish In Britain Representation Group (the ES gave the wrong address there), the Kurdish Cultural Centre in Hackney, the Troops Out Movement, and various Sikh and Tamil groups.
Periscope is compiling a list of the names and addresses of key ES journos for publication in a forthcoming *Labour Briefing*. The list will be circulated to all the "terrorist" groups named in the ES article.

Mike Marqusee: alive and kicking!

Graham Bash, Editor of *London Labour Briefing* from 1981-1986, pays tribute to *Briefing's* outgoing editor Mike Marqusee.

IT IS TYPICAL of Mike Marqusee that this couldn't go in last month's *Briefing*, his last as editor."It would be embarrassing", he said, "and a waste of space". Embarrassing it maybe, but to record Mike's contribution to the left is no waste of space.

The relaunching of *Briefing* 22 months ago and its restoration from the fringes to a central place on the left - in the most unfavourable political conditions - has been a collective achievement of which a number of us are proud. But it is an achievement that belongs above all to Mike who has personified the combative activist, angry, personal, sharp, open, democratic, accountable, human, lovable face of *Briefing*.

He has been an excellent editor and journalist, innovative (to him belongs the credit for creating 'class traitor of the month'), imaginative, broad minded and literate. Not for him the narrow 'party press' carrying the latest line of the Central Committee. He prefers the cut and thrust and controversy of debate and the opening up of difficult issues to the fresh air of the 'public opinion' of the left.

But not for him either the academic, objective treatise, preaching to those in struggle from the outside. Above all, he has tried to make *Briefing* the voice of those in the frontline of struggle, and he has brought to this all his passion for justice, his hatred of capitalism and its lackeys in the labour movement, and his vision of a sane socialist world.

Mike Marqusee is no paragon (as he would be the first to agree). He is sometimes - though rarely - politically wrong (i.e he disagrees with me!) and occasionally - though temporarily - he gets depressed and frustrated with the treachery of political enemies, the hopelessness of comrades, and the supposed inadequacies of himself.

This is no political obituary. Mike has lots of plans - to write novels, travel, watch cricket and enjoy life - and I hope he does them all. But he remains *Briefing*'s political correspondent and above all it is certain that he will remain a key political activist whose honesty and human decency has won him a respect that goes well beyond his own political constituency.

Gay rights guide

NALGO's National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee has produced a handbook which should become an indispensable guide to lesbian and gay rights at work. The comprehensive 55 -page "Lesbian and Gay Organising Handbook" provides up-to-date advice on fighting discrimination.

Contact NALGO, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJH. (Phone 071-388 2366).

Stalinist Steve censors circular

Fearful of bad publicity, Brighton Council leader Steve Bassam angered housing department staff by ordering the withdrawal of one little leaflet from a mass mail-out. The job was nearing completion when the interfering council leader issued the order to remove a circular for Brighton Lesbian and Gay Tenants Association.

Anti-Racist Alliance

Remember Rohit Duggal
No more racist murders -
BNP out of Greenwich

Demonstration: Saturday
7th November 1992
Assemble: 11.30am

Recreation Ground, Well Hall Road, Eltham, London SE9

Famous last words ...

Ten years ago, *Labour Briefing* held a fringe meeting at Conference with an all-women platform. In her speech, Lesley Lee of *Brighton Labour Briefing* said:

"There is an unfortunate tendency for left wing men to support the right of women to meet and organise autonomously and then sit back and think 'they'll put in the feminism so I don't have to worry about it'. We refuse to be hived off into producing articles on women's issues. We believe that every issue is a women's issue and we demand real practical solidarity from men. 'Solidarity is about the obligation which all men share to support the struggle of women to liberate themselves from inequality and subordination, to help in their fight to end the sexual stereotyping that limits their freedom.' And that isn't a quote from a radical feminist but a quote from Labour's Programme 1982."

She spoke alongside none other than our very own Deputy Leader, Margaret Beckett.


LONDON LABOUR 30p
BRIEFING
No24 NOVEMBER 1982

DON'T MOURN —ORGANISE!

LABOUR TAKE THE POWER!

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



I can't see that *Socialist Action*'s (SA) recent pamphlet "Fighting racism and the fascist in the '90s - in support of the Anti Racist Alliance" helps the anti-fascist/anti racist cause - on the contrary, I find it harmful and divisive. The main purpose of it is, as far as I can see, 1) to vilify the Anti-Nazi League and 2) in speaking for the ARA (why wasn't the pamphlet put out by the ARA?) to claim that only they, as against the ANL, are working with black groups.

ANL supporters, usually by far the largest contingent on anti-Irving demos, have been known to have been turned away by the ARA. This is exactly what the system wants and is anti-democratic and anti-worker. Contrast ANL's treatment by the ARA with the ARA's leafleting for an event organised jointly with Poale Zion!

Also, it's not true that all ANL members belong to the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). ANL sponsors include Ernie Roberts, Bernie Grant, Glenys Kinnock and the Indian Workers Association.

ANL does work closely with black communities under attack as in Brick Lane.

Concerning the ANL agenda, as stated in *SA*'s pamphlet, the ANL was set up after the ARA - with a different agenda. As their name implies, they limit their activities to fighting the Nazis. When they were formerly in existence, having successfully driven the nazis underground, the ANL disbanded. They believe that racism can't be successfully eliminated within the capitalist system.

Of course some of us believe that the British people are - unfortunately - not yet ready for a revolution. In the meantime, black people are daily fighting against racial injustice and state oppression, even genocide, and they can't wait for the revolution to get their share of the wealth which they, more than any other group, helped to create.

Members of black groups say, with regard to ARA/ANL, they "see no difference between them"; they consider some leading ARA members to be careerists and the leadership mainly white.

Come on *Socialist Action*! You've proved what a small committed group can achieve. I even support your line. But, at a time when black people fear for their lives on the street in many parts of Europe, white people who wish to participate in anti-fascist/anti-racist struggle must let go their sectarianism.

Yours sincerely,
John Howard
Haringey

May I be one of the first in the queue to remind Phil Kelly (October *Briefing*) that there are other ways of harming the Labour Party? Like, for instance, being seen to snub, and even oppose, one of the most popular and successful spontaneous working-class movements this country has ever seen.

But there is worse. It is deeply ironic that Phil concludes his letter by saying, "I hope comrades will reflect on the effects of their actions". Well, I hope Phil Kelly will reflect on the effects of his actions. We in Brighton know only too well where they lead: they lead to the McCarthyite witch-hunt that is destroying our once great Labour Party.

Fraternally,
Jim Grozier
Brighton

How can anybody really be surprised by the actions of Phil Kelly. Labour groups up and down the country have group leaders and chief whips who are nothing but cheap careerists and shysters who know they can do and say just about anything they want backed up loyally by Joyce Gould and the rest of the Walworth Road 'stalinist' hit squad.

Take Bedfordshire. Three working class councillors were disciplined by the group for supporting national Labour Policy. When their position became one of having to take orders from the Liberal group leader they set themselves up as a 'Technical Fourth Group'. Result: all three expelled, no charges, no hearing, no appeal. Yet Walworth Road had boxes of evidence of a formal Lib/Lab pact: action nil. Group leader John Tizard and his lap dogs are still in place. Even the Liberals in Bedfordshire have split into two groups as a protest against the Lib/Lab pact.

On December 1991 one disillusioned County Councillor resigned and in January 1992 I won the by-election with 70% of the vote. My views on the Poll Tax were well known and I was endorsed fully by the County Party and local division. As I still refuse to pay the Poll Tax I am disqualified by Tory legislation, so when Section 106 was introduced I lost my right to vote. The first I knew I was under investigation was when I read an interview with 'my group leader' in the local rag. At no point has either the group leader John Tizard or the Chief Whip Owen Heather even bothered to pick up the phone.

While class traitors like these two, Phil Kelly, et al are openly encouraged to witch-hunt the left, the Labour Party will never win diddly. Working class people looked to the Labour Party over the Poll Tax and were sold out by the bourgeois leadership and without doubt will be dumped on just as hard by them over the council tax.

Yours in socialism and peace,
John Jefferson
Luton

Mike Phipps' piece on sectarianism, (October *Briefing)*, and the far left does sound like something that *Marxism Toady* would have published had it not, most regrettably, ceased publication.

The value of the sect, and the Social Democratic Federation is the model from which all others follow, is that by standing aside from the class struggle it can survive, as can its 'shibboleths'. By shibboleth Marx did not mean democratic centralism or party organisation but an obsession with rather odd reasons for the crisis of capital. A modern day example might be to argue that the Major/Lamont debacle is caused by the decision to reduce the size of the 10p coin.

In general as class struggle rises the sect is tested. It is rarely subsumed by the struggle as Phipps suggests but rather is either involved in organising

and leading it or is found to be irrelevant to it.

Whether Phipps is right or wrong in his analysis of sectarianism, his review of Willie Thompson's new book on the history of the Communist Party is lamentably sectarian. Any Trotskyist could write a book length response on Thompson's errors, deviations and omissions. But, compared to previous efforts from the Communist Party stable, Thompson's book is an improvement. Those who stand for an honest history of the left in this country should not be afraid to say so before they get to work on their replies to Thompson!

Yours fraternally,
Keith Flett
Tottenham

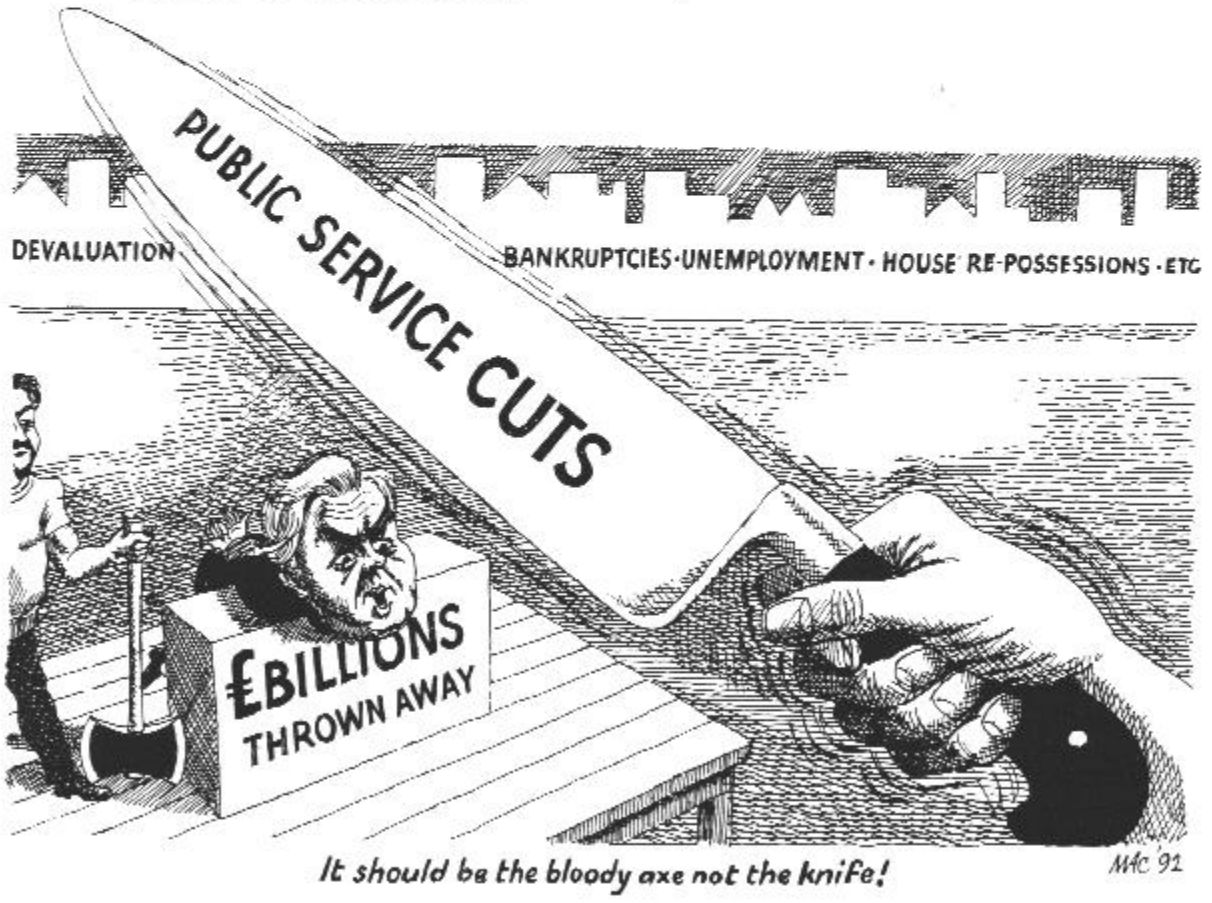
It is now over fifteen months since the war in former Yugoslavia broke out. Serbia has attacked three of the republics of former Yugoslavia and has suffered no reprisals from the West stronger than sanctions and verbal denunciations, penalties equivalent to those imposed on the Haitian coup-leaders, the butchers of Tiananmen Square, Mussolini in 1935, etc. Britain and France staved off recognition of Croatia for as long as possible, have upheld an arms embargo against Croatia and Bosnia, have openly equated the victims and aggressor and have backed the ethnic cantonization of Bosnia that would principally benefit Serbia. Douglas Hogg publicly joined with Radovan Karadzic to drag Bosnia to the negotiating table. France even opposed the imposition of full sanctions against Serbia. In July the West sabotaged a joint Croatian-Bosnian offensive in the Posavina region of Bosnia by threatening sanctions to force a Croatian withdrawal - this resulted in a major Serbian victory. UN troops have prevented Croatia recapturing its Serbian-occupied territories while allowing the Chetniks in these areas to continue the "ethnic-cleansing" of Croats. Recently the USA forced Croatia to impound an Iranian arms shipment destined for the Bosnian army. The Americans have even gone so far as to accuse the Bosnians of shelling their own civilians for publicity purposes, while the British media have more or less equated the entire Croatian nation with the wartime Ustashe. Nevertheless, though it may seem incredible, there still exist "socialists" who somehow believe that the West is on the verge of launching another Desert Storm against a misunderstood and anti-imperialist Serbia (the evidence being that Britain has, after fifteen months, agreed to send 1,800 troops). They have joined with Major and Hurd in equating Bosnian and Serbian nationalists and opposing Western intervention. This is supposedly "anti-imperialism".

Now it is obvious that the left should oppose a Western attack on Serbia or invasion of Bosnia, just as we should oppose a Western attack on Israel or South Africa. But this does not mean that we should support the Western policy of "non-intervention". Calling for the arming of the Bosnians is elementary: Tony Smythe's and John Major's claim that this would only increase the destruction is about as logical as saying that self-defence training for women encourages rape. The sending of Western troops to Bosnia should be opposed lest they be used to consolidate the Serbian gains, as has happened in Croatia.

Air cover for Bosnia, on the other hand, would not enable the West to impose a settlement. The experience of Iraqi Kurdistan shows it to be blood-less and to be something the imperialists give reluctantly: after supporting Saddam Hussein against the Kurds the West was forced to set up "safe havens" to avoid a public-relations fiasco. Though inadequate, they were preferable to a full-scale massacre of the Kurds.

As for Muslim nationalism, the left should treat it as we treat Palestinian, Irish or Kurdish nationalism: its war of national liberation should be given unconditional but critical support. Moreover, those Muslims fighting for Bosnia today are doing so side by side with thousands of Serbs and Croats committed to a united and multi-national Bosnia. Bosnia's government includes several Serb ministers, has consistently upheld the rights of the Serb minority, has no territorial claims on neighbouring countries and was so pacific it did not even prepare for this war. Anyone who equates the Muslim and Serb nationalists fighting in Bosnia today is a chauvinist who belongs in the Tory Party and not with the left.,

Attila Hoare
London



It should be the bloody axe not the knife!

Tim Donaghy was released from prison on October 16th. He was sustained in prison financially and spiritually by the Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign during his 21 months internment.

Labour Briefing printed one of his articles and *Socialist Worker* printed his prison address from July 1992 onwards. Three of us started to campaign for his release in February '92 on learning that he alone of 120 imprisoned demonstrators had not won a parole. We felt this was a racist decision becasue he was black.

In my opinion, *Briefing* would be making a positive contribution to our endless struggles if it looked at imprisonment in the UK and US as a means of control. The support groups would also need to be included, such as those now working for Winston Silcott.

It is also important to look at prisoners as activists. Printing letters, poems and articles by prisoners gives them a voice.

The main point is that it is worth campaigning. As far as I know, only three people wrote to the Home Office, but we've won. Without our activity Tim would have been in prison until February 1993. We've also saved taxpayers £1000 plus!

All the best,
Julie Boston
Bristol



So, farewell then, Margaret Hodge...

IN SEPTEMBER 1991, *Briefing*'s Class Traitor of the Month column predicted: "Margaret Hodge's ambitions now encompass a peerage and a post on the opposition benches in the Lords." Well, we got it wrong: we credited her with some commitment to the Labour Party.

Mike Marqusee
Islington North CLP

Hodge has now astounded even her staunchest supporters by taking a high paid job with Price Waterhouse, City accountants, sequestrators-in-chief to the Tory government, who are touting for local government contracts under Compulsory Competitive Tendering. Asked on Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* if this meant a change in political direction, she replied "not really". Local critics are comparing her flight to the City to the exodus of Tory ex-Cabinet Ministers to the boardrooms of privatised industries.

Hodge has been a Labour Councillor in Islington since 1973. Her finest moment was as an active Chair of Housing in the 70s, providing Islington people with desperately needed Council homes. As a critic of the "old-guard" right-wing Labour Council, she argued that the Council should be accountable to the local Labour Party and allied herself with the Bennite insurgency.

In 1981, 26 Labour Councillors defected to the SDP, which resulted in a few disastrous months of SDP rule but left the local Labour Party in the hands of the left. The next year, Labour swept back into control, taking 51 of the 52 Council seats. *Briefing* proclaimed the area "Fortress Islington". Margaret Hodge was elected leader of the Council.

Labour used its huge majority and genuine popularity to embark on a number of radical initiatives. Council Services were decentralised, campaigns on peace and international solidarity were supported and Islington followed the GLC lead in establishing Race and Women's Committees, proclaiming itself "an equal opportunities employer" and supporting local black and feminist initiatives. These moves were greeted with horror and derision by Fleet Street, partly because so many journalists live in the borough. Hodge became, after Ken Livingstone, the most famous face of the "London Town Hall left". She liked the fame but was always uncomfortable with the politics, especially any connection with lesbian and gay rights.

The rate-capping campaign of 1985 was Hodge's Rubicon. As late as April 1985 Hodge declared in *Labour Briefing*: "the government will not defeat local councils if they remain united". She attacked "the appalling manner in which the leadership in London" (i.e. Ken Livingstone) "managed their retreat." Within one month Islington itself, guided by Hodge, caved in and left Lambeth and Liverpool isolated.

From then on, "protection of local services" (otherwise known as "the dented shield") has been Margaret Hodge's mantra, supplemented increasingly in recent years by vacuous rhetoric about "efficiency". Since 1985, services and jobs have been cut, Council rents increased, old people's homes sold off - all in the name of "protection of local services". Out went all the "gesturing" - politics was replaced by management imperative.

For years Hodge ruled the roost by playing off rivals and would-be successors within Islington's ambition-packed Labour Group. Every issue was turned into a test of loyalty to Margaret. Her high profile, strong backing from the national leadership and close relations with senior officers enabled her to argue, like Thatcher, that There Is No Alternative. Without her, it was said, Islington would collapse into the kind of chaos seen in Hackney. However, in the wake of Labour's fourth general election defeat and the subsequent £16 million cuts package (involving redundancies, a library closure and cuts in front-line services), Party members and even a growing minority of Labour councillors began asking just where Hodge would draw the bottom line. Regarded as elitist, patronising and autocratic, she commanded neither loyalty nor affection from the people of Islington, who would have rejected her in any direct ballot for Council leader. She has jumped ship at an opportune moment - at least for her.

Hodge leaves the Islington Council locked in bitter conflict with its workforce and the community. Support for the Labour Council is probably at its lowest since 1981. The Labour Party has lost two of the five by-elections called in the last two years, both in Labour seats, and only retained the other three with decreased majorities. So good riddance, Margaret Hodge, gone but not forgotten or forgiven. ❑

Socialist Campaign Group Network takes off

THE NETWORK OF Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' launched at the Leeds Conference in June has now built up a list of over 2000 grass-roots left Labour activists. The hard grind of building an effective national network with strong local and regional organisation is being undertaken by a working party comprising representatives of local and national groups.

A real effort is being made to include all strands of opinion on the Labour left and to minimise the factionalism and division which have dogged previous efforts to construct left unity.

In Blackpool, Conference delegates received forms inviting them to join the Network, which was welcomed from the platform at the Socialist Campaign Group fringe meeting. A mailing to all supporters is now going out with details of a host of campaigns and other useful initiatives, including miners' support work. Make sure everyone in your local Labour left is on the Socialist Campaign Group mailing list.

● Send names and addresses and requests for further information to Jeremy Corbyn, 129a Seven Sisters' Road, London N7.

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