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BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left



inside...

- Labour by the seaside
- Maastricht mayhem
- Racist resurgence
- Class traitor(s) of the month

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

Schools make teachers sick

LAST YEAR more than 4,000 teachers retired early through ill-health. In 1981 the figure was less than 1,500. Many of these retirements were as a result of stress-related illnesses.

A major research project has revealed that amongst serving teachers, nearly a quarter "were suffering levels of anxiety, depression and psychosomatic symptoms at or above the level of psychoneurotics receiving out-patient treatment." Poor working conditions were identified as a main contributory factor.

A huge number of schools still have outside toilets, many without heating, lighting or washbasins. Last year saw severe outbreaks of dysentery in many parts of the country. Dangerous conditions obviously also cause many of the 7,500 very serious accidents (including fatalities) suffered by pupils and the 500 suffered by teachers each year.

The 1981 Education (School Premises) Regulations were issued in response to growing fears for health and safety. They set very modest targets for local authorities to meet during the next ten years. But last year, at the end of that period, the basic standards had still not been achieved. The government's audacious response has been simply to extend the deadline by five years to 1996!

Information courtesy of NAS/UWT.

● THE LIMPOPO, one of Africa's great rivers, has dried up. Although much of the area through which it flows is not densely populated, there are still hundreds of thousands of people who have had their lives rendered unsustainable by the river's disappearance. They have dug six foot holes in the dry, cracked riverbed desperately and unsuccessfully seeking the life-giving water.

So the great grey-green greasy Limpopo is no more. And no one seems to know exactly why.

London Briefing Group

Open discussion

Is science socialist?

Is socialism scientific?

7.30pm, Monday October 6th
Marchmont Community Centre
62 Marchmont Street
London WC1

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Cover drawing by Gary Drostle

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Blame it on the Bundesbank?



STERLING'S UNDIGNIFIED EXIT from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism was a stark confirmation of the abiding weakness of British capitalism and the futility of government efforts to restore its fortunes through "Europe".

Blaming the Germans or the French (as the Tories have tried to do) or Major and Lamont (Labour's preferred targets) ignores the most obvious villain of the piece: the brutal anarchy of market forces. What we saw in action was the global capitalist system in all its ruthlessness. Lamont's annoyance with the Bundesbank for not behaving in a more comradely fashion was absurd, as were the laments over failed "European unity" from the legions of Euro-besotted media pundits. Surely the whole episode must compel those on the left who have looked to the EC for salvation from British Toryism to think again.

The Tories will take some time to recover but they will be helped, alas, by Labour's leaders, who performed with a feebleness exceeding even *Briefing*'s expectations. What was exposed on September 16th was not only the bankruptcy of the government's economic policy but the sheer non-existence of the opposition's. Smith and Brown failed even to ask why the £10 billion wasted in a few hours' vain effort to prop up the pound was never available to build hospitals, improve schools or invest in jobs. They should have been demanding: who runs our world? Voters or speculators? Workers or bankers? They refused to do so because their own commitment to the ERM, to Maastricht and to market forces was hardly less than the government's. Only two days before the collapse of the pound, Labour's NEC (including Gould and Blunkett, despite all the noise they made in the press about devaluation and a referendum) rejected calls from Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner to break with the bipartisan consensus on Maastricht and the ERM.

By failing to offer an alternative to market mayhem, Labour has re-enforced the popular impression that what happened on September 16th was some kind of natural disaster. Only the Tories, the nationalists and racists can benefit from this perception.

This Labour leadership appears incapable of articulating popular anger at the deepening recession. It is unwilling to address the anxieties felt by millions of working class people who may not know just whom or what to blame for the crisis but strongly suspect that in the end they will be the ones who will have to pay for it. And they're right. The future looks bleak. Severe public spending cuts, public sector wage controls, increased poverty, unemployment and homelessness all seem unavoidable. Labour should put the blame for all these where it belongs: with an inherently inequitable, undemocratic and wasteful economic system.

Labour should mobilise its supporters now against the government's looming austerity programme. It can only do this if it offers an alternative economic strategy incorporating cuts in defence spending, a substantial increase in expenditure on public services, a programme for achieving full employment, an expansion of public ownership and controls over the City and the movement of capital. We must make it clear that while this entails a rejection of Maastricht, the ERM and what too often passes for "Europe", it does not mean we turn our backs on the outside world. We cannot resolve our economic problems in isolation. We have to construct new, equitable trade relations across the whole of Europe and with the poor majority of the world's countries. We have to build political alliances with workers' movements worldwide. Only these can provide an effective counter-weight to the hostility of global market forces.

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 4th. 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 October 12th.**

***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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Billy Power

West Midlands cops slander Six

THE FACT that it was the *Sunday Telegraph* which was given the dubious honour of launching a new campaign of innuendo against the Birmingham Six and the Maguire Seven is a sure sign that Tory Cabinet ministers are behind the smear tactics.

According to Fleet Street, unnamed sources within the discredited West Midlands Police allege that "new scientific evidence" sheds doubt on the innocence of the Six and the Maguires. The carefully planted but utterly unsubstantiated "revelations" may have something to do with the upcoming trial on charges of perjury and conspiracy of George Reade, one of the coppers responsible for putting the innocent parties in prison for years on end.

"I'm angry but not totally surprised," Billy Power, one of the Birmingham Six, told *Briefing*, "The West Midlands Police were bound to try to claw back some credibility, especially with Reade's trial coming up. They've produced absolutely no new evidence and no new analysis of the old evidence. Beside, our exoneration was based not only the bogus forensic evidence but also on the fact that police were shown to have fabricated evidence against us.

"Of course, it's not just about the West Midlands Police and Reade. It's about the Home Office - which is coming under more and more pressure to act over a whole series of miscarriages of justice. They want to muddy the waters by slandering us. But I won't have my good name defamed again.

"And I'll continue to campaign for the release of other victims of injustice, like Frank Johnson, the Bridgewater Three and Prem and Sam, the East Ham Two."

Framed by drugs squad

MCDONALD HYLTON is one of a number of black men framed in recent years by the West Midlands Drug Squad.

Hylton is a motor mechanic who allowed a man to park a van overnight at his garage. The following day Drugs Squad officers burst in and arrested him for "possession with intent to supply drugs".

"When I went to trial I was shocked to hear the things I was supposed to have said at the interview," Hylton said. "When they read the statement back to me at first I refused to sign it." He claims that the police invented an elaborate story to suit their case.

"To my surprise, at the trial the charge had changed to conspiracy with four other men, two of which I had never met before." He was convicted in 1989 and sentenced to seven and a half years. His co-defendants, George Collins and Wesley Leroy McKoy, got six and ten years respectively. McKoy is one of the "Long Lartin 22" supported by the National Association of Probation Officers. Hylton has been cited by Liberty as one of its one hundred plus possible miscarriages of justice requiring investigation.

"These Drugs Squad officers are worse than the Serious Crime Squad who were disgraced by their fabrication of evidence," Hylton added. "They are really corrupt."

Messages of support to: McDonald Hylton, House 4, HM Prison Featherstone, Wolverhampton, WV10 7PU.

● BURY WINS THIS month's Ian Macgregor Award for union-busting Labour councils. Four months ago the council suspended the Nalgo Branch Secretary because the branch had issued a leaflet condemning cuts. In his capacity as a social worker he was instructed by management to withdraw the leaflet. In mid-September the council sacked him outright - after seventeen years employment.

Runner-up is Haringey, which is trying to get workers in finance and other departments to re-apply for their own jobs at a lower grade - some workers stand to lose thousands of pounds. Personnel Chair Josie Irwin (a former *Briefing* supporter) told the unions that new low-paid posts would provide "opportunities for training" for local school-leavers. Meanwhile, Deputy Leader Ian Wilmore is threatening to turn Haringey into an "agency council" providing all services through private contractors or management buy-outs and employing only 1000 direct staff (in the process shedding 6000 existing jobs in a borough of astronomical unemployment). A former winner of the award, Camden Council, deserves mention this month for being the only labour movement organisation in north London to back a local health service opt-out.

GET UP! GET UP! DEMAND OUR RIGHTS!!

25 Years after the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, lesbians and gays are still massively discriminated against.

Demo

Sat October 31st
Assemble 12 Noon,
Hyde Park
March to Trafalgar Square
Rally with guest speakers 2pm

Lesbian & Gay Rights Coalition
c/o London Lesbian & Gay Centre, 69 Cowcross Street, London EC1

25 years of women's choice: cause to celebrate

The battle for a woman's right to choose has been long and arduous - and it isn't over yet. **Leonora Lloyd**, secretary of the National Abortion Campaign, looks back at twenty-five years of safe, legal abortion in Britain.

ON OCTOBER 27th, 1967 the new Abortion Act received the Royal Assent. Although it was not to come into force for another six months (to give the NHS time to gear up for the expected demand) it marked a new era for women.

Despite the introduction of the pill earlier in the sixties, "family planning" was still largely a hit and miss affair. Contraception could only be obtained from clinics run by the Family Planning Association and was almost impossible for single women. The pill had unpleasant side effects and was too dangerous for many women to use. As a result women of all ages resorted to illegal abortions and many died or were maimed for life.

In the 20s and 30s a few courageous women - amongst them socialists Stella Brown and Dora Russell - campaigned for legal abortion. The Co-operative Women's Guild was the first organisation to make legalisation part of its programme. It did so on the basis of women's right to control their own bodies, to enjoy sex without fear and to decide freely on the number of children to have.

It was the health dangers of illegal abortions that led increasing numbers of medical professionals and MPs to realise that something had to be done. There were several attempts to get a private member's bill through Parliament before a Labour government gave the young David Steel extra time in 1967.

LIFE was initially formed to fight the passage of the Bill. A few years later some of its members broke away to form SPUC, claiming the former was too closely tied to the Catholic church. Ever since, anti-abortion forces have mounted one attack after another, every one of them defeated by a combination of mass campaigning, lobbying and good parliamentary tactics. Until 1990, anti-abortionists could claim with some justice that MPs had never had a real chance to vote on the issues, but a government bill that year changed all that. It is now clear that a majority of MPs recognise the need for a liberal abortion law.



Photo Graeme Cookson

Young women have always been in the forefront of campaigning around the issue. They would be the ones most affected by a successful attack on the 1967 Act, but they are also the ones with no memory of the pre-legalisation era. Older women either had direct personal experience or knew someone who had, which is why in the early days of NAC in the mid-seventies, it was they who were most eager to sign our petitions and tell their daughters to support us too.

NAC was formed in 1975 and immediately began to work in the labour movement with the result that by 1979 the TUC led a massive demonstration against the Corrie Bill. This orientation was opposed by some members and was one of the reasons for NAC splitting in 1983, but has been continued so that today we have more union affiliations than ever before, despite all the mergers.

Over the years attacks on the 1967 Act have been renewed in many forms. Anti-abortionists from the States have set up "rescue" groups in many European countries with little local support anywhere, not even in Catholic Italy, where they invaded a Rome abortion clinic. In the absence of immediate parliamentary threats, NAC has been able in recent years to develop a strong educational programme and recently produced the first issue of a new magazine, *Women's Choice*.

To celebrate the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act, NAC is organising a rally at the Camden Centre on Saturday, October 24th. There will be a showing of a new video, *Campaigning for Choice*, and speakers associated with the campaign from before 1967 and since, including Madeleine Simms, Jo Richardson, Wendy Savage and Ruth Riddick from Ireland. Between the speakers, there will be pro-choice songs. A special programme is to be published with contributions by David Steel and many others. As well as celebrating the events of 1967 and the successful defence of the Act in the years since then, we will be looking forward to securing the sort of legislation and service we want.

● **For further details contact NAC at The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL or phone 071 923 4976.**

Thai army back to barracks - for the time being

In Bangkok on the day after the recent Thai elections, **Paul Field** interviewed **Sonsak Kosaisook**, President of Thailand's state railways Employees Association, a train driver and leader of the May democracy movement.

PF: How was your union effected by the February 1991 military coup?

SK: The February coup last year was an attack on the labour movement. The State Enterprises Law enacted by the military separated public and private sector railworkers, forcing us to become just an association of railworkers in the public sector. It was no longer possible under the law to organise joint action. All rights to collective bargaining were lost, as was the right to organise meetings in work time.

What was the significance of yesterday's election?

In the run up to the election, which is in itself the product of the mass movement for democracy that emerged in May, union leaders in the public sector held talks with political leaders. The four democratic parties that now comprise the coalition all gave us assurances that they would abolish the State Enterprises Law and allow us to organise as real unions once again. Now we must wait to see if they deliver.

What role did you play in the May democracy movement and what was your opinion of Chamlong Srimuang's leadership?

When the movement began workers in the public sector organised the State Enterprise Relations Confederation. This body appointed five persons, of which I was one, to represent it in the Confederation for Democracy established on May 15th by 26 organisations. This group appointed a seven person leadership, including representatives of the student movement, teachers, non-government organisations, lecturers, existing democracy groups, political parties (represented by Chamlong) and trade unions (represented by me). Media attention was concentrated on Chamlong and the press tended to regard him as the de facto leader of the movement. This was because he is a former Governor of Bangkok and the only established political leader to have really embraced the struggle for democracy. His personal charisma and decision to go on hunger strike until Suchinda resigned also increased his stature.

Has any consideration been given to creating an independent labour party linked to the union movement?

I have twice participated in attempts to create such a party. The fact that each party must field at least 120 candidates and that a deposit of 10,000 baht [£200] is required for each person running for office has been has been very restrictive. Moreover, many workers still have the old ideas that they should not involve themselves directly in politics but should instead exert pressure on the existing political parties. For these reasons the labour movement is not yet strong enough to stand under its own colours. However, with an end to the military dictatorship we have entered a period of preparation for the time when it can.

Can you compare the present period to the spell of democracy that existed between 1973 and 1976?

The democratic movement in May was different to the student-led movement of 1973, when there was little participation by ordinary people or political parties. Also, the middle class and professionals did not play the prominent role in the 1970s that they did in this year's May events. The most important result of the May uprising has been that it has left a national democratic movement that is able to mobilise the people in every province and town and city throughout Thailand. However we are also aware that if this movement does not maintain its momentum the military could reassert itself once again as it did in 1976. Therefore we understand the need to look to extra-parliamentary activity to push for reform if the new government fails to make any real progress towards democratisation.

The middle class did not participate directly in the 1973 demonstrations, but much of the business community nevertheless supported that movement. Three years later, the rise of the Communist Party together with increased labour unrest led many to switch their allegiance back to the army. In a different economic climate, is it not likely that the middle class would once again look to the generals to defend it against an empowered labour movement?

Yes, it is a real possibility. That is why we are trying to use the space opened up by the May events to create an anti-militarist culture. We are saying that the struggle between labour and capital must take place independently of the army. If the middle class begin to lose interest in democracy again, the need for a political party for workers would become paramount.

● In February 1991 a military coup led by General Suchinda Kraprayoon overthrew the elected government of Thailand. The military rulers proceeded to consolidate their political influence through the adoption of a new constitution. Amid allegations of vote-buying and political manoeuvres by senior army officials, this year's March 22nd elections produced a small majority for a bloc of five conservative pro-military parties.

Less than a month later this bloc appointed Suchinda non-elected Prime Minister. This act, symbolising the army's domination of Thai politics, provoked a campaign of mass opposition to the military government which staged almost daily protests in the capital.

By May 17th the demonstrations in Bangkok had grown to 250,000. That day the military's bloody crackdown began with hundreds of unarmed demonstrators being shot down by troops. The public outcry caused by the massacre and the intervention of the King forced the military back to the barracks - for the time being. On September 13th, the first elections since the end of military rule led to the formation of a coalition of the four parties which had backed the May democracy movement.

South Africa: liberation (or not) from below

In this first of a regular series focusing on the difficult issues facing the anti-apartheid movement, **Sean Coyne**, a writer based in South Africa with extensive contacts within the ANC and the trade union movement, has some harsh words for the ANC leadership.

THE MASSACRE at Bisho stunned the world - for a short while. De Klerk predictably denounced the ANC's hesitant mass action campaign and tried to blame the victims themselves. The ANC responded by announcing further mass actions, before quietly entering into talks about talks with the regime and eventually putting the mass action campaign on hold.

De Klerk, the born-again democrat, has been able to seize the political initiative time after time. He has maintained a high degree of legitimacy, especially at international level, even in the face of damning evidence of his involvement in the slaughter of hundreds of innocent people. How has this been possible?

The press can take some of the blame. They have too often taken the easy option of regurgitating press statements from Pretoria as if they were the truth. But do we really expect the press to behave in any other way?

It is painful to accept, but the main reason for De Klerk's success has been his ability to exploit the vacuum created by the ANC's lack of a coherent political strategy.

Clearly, all liberation movements need time to adjust to new-found legality and with it new conditions for organising. But this period of adjustment coincided with the decisive challenging of many old certainties, particularly in Eastern Europe. The South African Communist Party, a key source of ideas within the ANC, was forced to re-evaluate its own history and many of the basic principles which had guided its activity. This was a painful process for the old guard and a frustrating experience for the younger militants who wanted to see action on the ground.

The combined effect of these and other factors was demobilisation, which was not helped by the lack of accountability within the liberation movement.

Over the last two years, the ANC has been unable to organise and structure its once unassailable popular support. ANC structures are notoriously hierarchical. ANC branches are often the last to know what has been decided by leadership bodies and not surprisingly they have faltered and lost enthusiasm. However, there is some evidence that the political struggle within the ANC is far from over.

The same political forces within the ANC which presided over the wind-down of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in this country clearly believe that the future of South Africa can only be decided over a negotiating table. Many of these comrades were schooled not in the tactics of mass action and workers' democracy, but on the Foreign Embassy circuit. Like bureaucrats everywhere, what worries them most about mass action is that it might slip out of their control.

The mass action line and its supporters within the ANC were given a terrific boost in August by the success of the general strike, which was organised mainly by COSATU. Months of preparation, including the widest possible debate amongst worker activists, succeeded in producing the largest industrial stoppage ever witnessed in South Africa, despite the hot and cold approach of the ANC. Millions of workers heeded the strike call, attended support rallies and a took part in a week-long array of actions. COSATU was able to show in practice how pressure from below strengthens the hands of its allies at the negotiating table. But the key lesson was that without a constant struggle to achieve the highest levels of accountability and internal democracy, including in the formation of policy, the potential of the mass democratic movement will not be realised.

The success of the stay-away boosted those within the ANC who argued successfully for a campaign of mass defiance against apartheid's so-called independent homelands - a campaign immensely popular with grass roots activists.

The homelands have always represented the weakest political link in apartheid's chain of divide and rule. The puppets who 'govern' them are universally despised for their sycophancy, greed and ruthless treatment of all opposition.

Though De Klerk has tried to distance himself from their worst excesses, he has come under considerable pressure to re-incorporate them into a unitary state. But like Frankenstein's monster, they will not submit to dismemberment willingly. The appalling slaughter in Bisho showed the lengths to which they are prepared to go to cling to power and privilege. But their days are numbered.

De Klerk, facing economic pressures fuelled by continuing political crisis, needs a breathing space to pacify his international backers and to reconstruct the National Party as the acceptable face of South African capitalism.

The ANC has to be sure that a return to the negotiating table will bring tangible results for its supporters in the townships and factories. The cost of demobilising those supporters now may be a permanent undermining of its pre-eminent position.

For the workers of South Africa, ensuring that their organisations maintain a high degree of worker control may yet prove to be their only guarantee of a successful fightback. ❑

In place of Maastricht

OUTSIDE LABOUR'S one-day Special Conference to "elect" our new leader, I was handed a leaflet entitled "Britain's future under Maastricht" issued by the cross-party Campaign for an Independent Britain.

Mike Phipps
Brent South CLP

The leaflet approvingly quotes Winston Churchill ("We are with Europe but not of it") and criticises Maastricht mainly from a narrow nationalist viewpoint. "People from other European Union countries will be able to stand for office and vote in British elections," it warns.

This is not the way to oppose the Maastricht treaty.

Already some on the left have complained about the "loss of sovereignty" involved in Maastricht. In fact, Parliament's sovereignty is already undermined on a daily basis by secret government, party patronage, unaccountable international and defence commitments and a host of other undemocratic practices at the heart of the British state.

Others, like Dennis Skinner, have suggested that behind Maastricht lies the danger of German domination and even rearmament. This is, to say the least, confused.

The Maastricht treaty could have all kinds of effects on British life, most, though not all of them, bad. But there are two fundamental reasons to oppose it.

The first is on grounds of democracy. Far more objectionable than the mere idea of greater European centralisation is the fact that the institutions to which Maastricht gives more power - the Council of Ministers and European Commission - are neither democratically structured nor accountable. They are bureaucracies behind which national governments can hide, whilst the only elected European institution, the Euro-Parliament, remains a toothless talking-shop. Real power in Europe lies in a privileged sanctum full of politicians whose careers are washed up at home - Leon Brittan, maybe Neil Kinnock soon - safely beyond the voters' reach.

The second problem with the kind of closer European integration Maastricht offers is that it is inherently exclusionist. It creates a privileged, more integrated twelve-state 'Europe' from which the rest of the continent - and the world - is walled off. This the real danger.

Recently in Rostock, German youths attacked a hostel of east European immigrants for several nights running. One can blame agitation by the extreme right for this, but the problem is deeper. Rostock, with over 20% unemployment, is a run-down area neglected since reunification. It is a cynical example of the German government policy of cramming into one deprived area two different communities of the very poor - then watching them fight it out over the minimal resources available. The main political result of Rostock is that the opposition SPD has now come round to supporting tighter immigration restrictions, which is what the government wanted in the first place.

What has this got to do with Maastricht? Quite a lot. The response of West European politicians to growing inequalities in Europe is to segregate, exclude, deport and tighten entry restrictions. Maastricht encapsulates this ethos: a buttressing of a select community against the politically unstable, economically ravaged rest of Europe and beyond - the strengthening of a privileged 'Fortress Europe' against the excluded and exploited.

A socialist approach has to tackle the root inequalities which produce the flashpoints, headlines and kneejerk responses over Rostock and elsewhere, but which are actually an ongoing daily fact of life in two-tier Europe.

For the closer European integration allegedly promised by Maastricht, we should substitute a campaign for European-wide respect for human, civil and social rights. Instead of the restrictive single market of Maastricht, we should demand the universalisation of the highest standards of civil liberties and workers' rights for the whole of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals - and beyond.

In short, our opposition to Maastricht must be suffused with an internationalism and a perspective of genuine European co-operation, not the nostalgic little Englandism of Peter Shore or Austin Mitchell, which even some of the Parliamentary Labour left seem prone to. ❑

Jeremy Corbyn MP
sends greetings to Labour Party Conference
— ***YES*** *to internationalism!*
— ***NO*** *to Fortress Europe!*

Mildred Gordon MP
sends greetings to Conference delegates:
Capitalism isn't working
Fight for socialism!

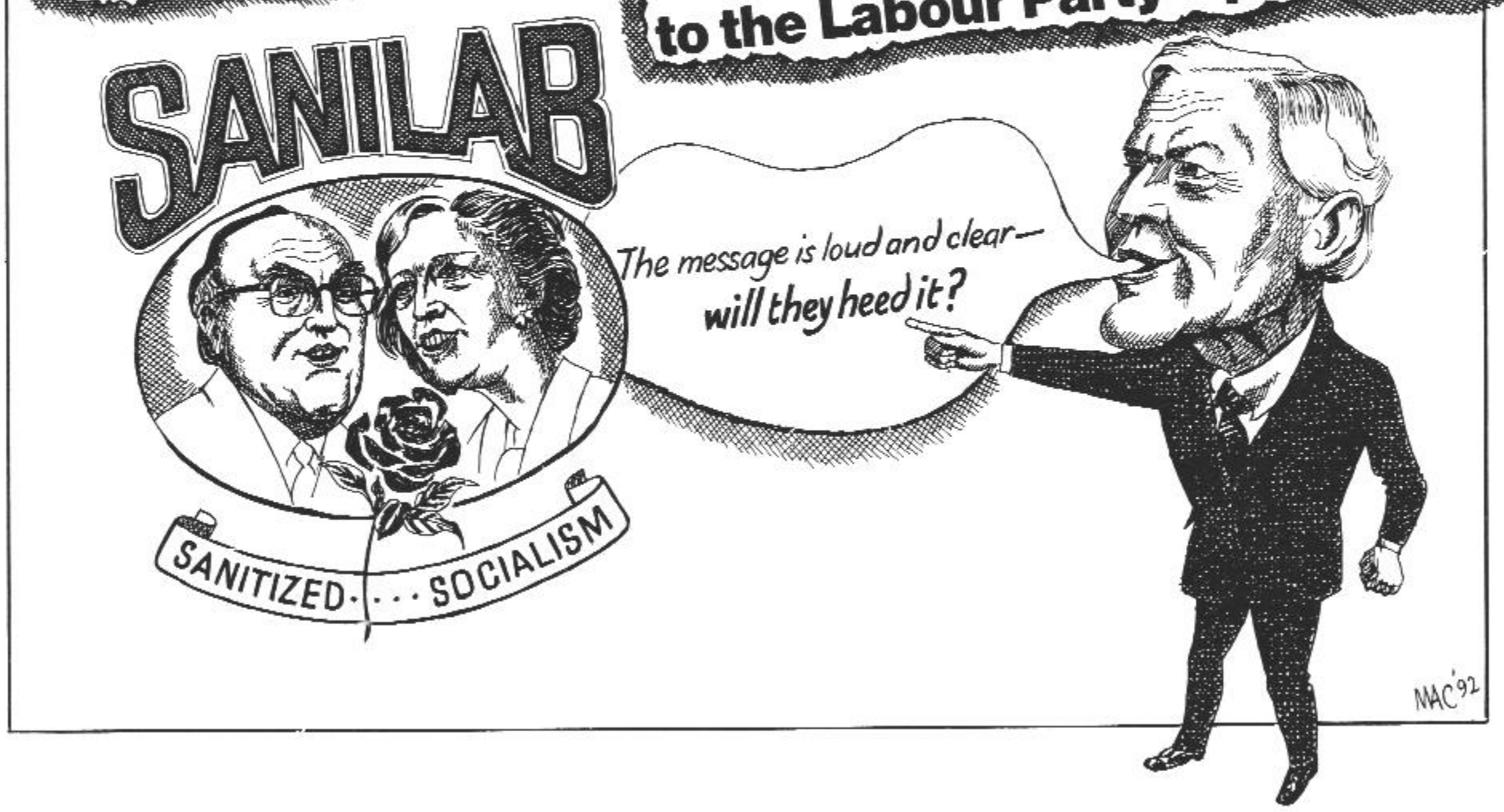
Greetings from *Alf Lomas*, Euro MP — working for peace and socialism in Europe.

THE GUARDIAN
Monday August 17 1992

ECONOMICS/Accepting the Euro package means swallowing the Government's economic strategy, hook, line and sinker, writes **Larry Elliott**

FINANCE AND ECONOMICS

Why Maastricht should be anathema to the Labour Party's philosophy



Left MEPs trump pro-Treaty trick

"THE MAASTRICHT Treaty is a step forward for Britain and Europe... That is why Labour Euro MPs say, don't retreat on the Treaty, but take this step forward for the future of Europe."

Alex Falconer MEP was among those horrified to see this nonsense printed in a glossy circular widely distributed by the European Parliamentary Labour Party (EPLP). He immediately demanded a correction but Glyn Ford, EPLP leader, refused.

"It is wholly irresponsible to say all the Labour MEPs support the Treaty, knowing the wide diversity of views," said Falconer, who was among thirteen outraged MEPs to issue a protest which pointed out that "at least one-third of the EPLP is opposed to the Treaty and they certainly do not believe that the PLP should be supporting the Tory government in the House of Commons on this matter...We are opposed to a European Central Bank, independent of any political control, which would have the power to limit member states' budget deficits to 3%. This would mean savage cuts in public expenditure. We are also opposed to the exclusion of the UK from the Social Chapter.

"We regret that the Leaders of our Group should try to mislead party organisations into believing that 'the 45 Labour Euro MPs' support the Treaty."

Along with Alex Falconer, the others signatories were Roger Barton, Janey Buchan, Alf Lomas, Mike Hindley, Eddy Newman,Tom Megahy, Barry Seal, Brian Simpson, Alex Smith, Llew Smith, Ken Stewart and Norman West.

Alex Falconer added, "Rocketing unemployment and poverty demand socialist solutions. It is a slur on the memory of the Levellers and Chartists to hand decision-making to unelected bankers and judges."

Alf Lomas, MEP for North East, London, argues that "the Maastricht Treaty attempts to enshrine Thatcherite monetary policies as the economic policy for a future European union."

In answer to the criticism that MEPs opposing Maastricht are somehow anti-European and not internationalist, a group of fifteen MEPs from ten different countries campaigned jointly for a French "non" vote in the referendum and promoted a progressive alternative.

If you are concerned about your MEP's defection to the capitalist club we suggest you complete the ballot paper below in the following way when it wafts its way in your direction.

Trigger ballot

Ballot paper

This European constituency currently has a Labour Member of the European Parliament. Party rules allow for a trigger ballot on whether to go through a full selection procedure or to endorse the sitting member as the candidate without considering further nominations.

Please indicate your preference by placing an X in the appropriate box:

For endorsing the current Labour MEP as the prospective candidate [ ]

Or

For considering other nominations as well as the current MEP [X]

YOU HAVE ONLY ONE VOTE

Labour

The black experience:

"Opposition to racism and fascism at the national level has been weak and ineffective." **Dave Palmer** interviews anti-racist campaigner **Unmesh Desai**, a leading activist in the Newham Monitoring Project, which was a founding member of both Anti-Fascist Action and the Anti-Racist Alliance.

LB: How do you see the relation between what's happening in Europe and in Britain?

UD: There has clearly been a qualitative development in events, especially in Germany. It's not just that the attacks are becoming more vicious but - as we saw clearly with Rostock - they are becoming more organised with whole communities cheering on the attackers. The mainstream reaction in Germany has been to blame the actions of the racist and fascist thugs on the so-called 'liberal' asylum policy of the Kohl government. The left in Britain is rightly concerned with the activities of fascist-inspired groups on the continent - but it would be misleading to look at the British black experience and the British far right from the vantage point of events on the continent. Because of state racism, because of police/media campaigns which criminalise black communities, because of the way the Commission for Racial Equality and others developed to contain black militancy, because of a Labour front bench which tails Tory policy, because in response there is a much more solid tradition of anti-racist and black organisation in this country, lessons can be learned from our experience here as to how groups on the continent can actually fight back.

The British experience is different from the continent in that debate here does not need to focus so much around the activities of the far right - about which we should be vigilant - but around racist attacks at a level of 70,000-80,000 a year. It is that day-to-day racism that determines what sort of movement we need, what sort of anti-racist work is done and how we fight back.

What about the current level of opposition to racism at the national level? Has it had much impact in the last year?

There is an immense amount of work to be done. Opposition to racism and fascism at the national level has been weak and ineffective. The Asylum Bill march was only 5,000 strong - and where did it lead? What is needed is a powerful national campaign based in communities and trade unions. But how many local branches of the Asylum Bill Campaign have been organised? How many MPs were pressurised? How were the trade unions brought in? One demonstration does not constitute a campaign. If a new campaign is to emerge against the Asylum Bill it will have to work through the different anti-deportation groups round the country.

When it comes to any significant national campaign against state racism - let alone fascism - it is, I think, a bleak picture. The worst thing you can do in the current situation is to delude yourself. Attacks are continuing at a high level, particularly against refugees. To think we have moved ahead even one iota over the last year is a serious con-trick.

What is NMP as a grass-roots, anti-racist group doing at the moment?

At the national level NMP is currently involved in supporting two significant campaigns. First, through the Sahitharan Memorial Committee it is seeking to initiate a national and European alliance against racist murders. Secondly, through the Deane Campaign it is supporting the 'Innocence' initiative to establish an umbrella campaign on miscarriages of justice which confronts the racism of the criminal justice system.

At the local level over the last year we exposed police racism in a sharp way through the case of Mr Natt - who taped police officers making racist comments. Our emergency service continues to provide practical help by sending people out in the middle of the night to see people who have been racially attacked.

The question is not who carries what placards but who can give help to the black family which has been attacked at three in the morning. Because we have this organic relationship with the black communities in Newham it is this question that frames all our perspectives. From our own case work we can identify issues which need to be turned into campaigns. We are also doing the essential 'education work' that needs to be done among the white working class - in the schools and youth clubs around the borough - right at the sharp edge of racism. Change is not going to be brought just by more letters in the national press or by a campaign from on high proclaiming that it will challenge all manifestations of racism. People are changed through action and struggle.

You've referred to the 'black experience' as the basis for the anti-racist movement. What do you mean?

Our community-based anti-racist politics is located in



Unmesh Desai Photo: Bryn Griffiths



anti-racism at the crossroads

day-to-day experiences. We may be marginal but we have shown ourselves to be relevant. What we mean by the black experience is not just simplistic statements that 'black people should lead their own struggles'. It is not just about what I call 'pigmentation politics'. The black experience is based on the fightback of black people against state racism, police harassment and racist and fascist attacks which, because it was ignored by the official labour movement, was organised through community organisations. It is that long, rich history of self-organisation which we mean by the black experience. For us black is a political concept of struggle and resistance within a wider class framework - not 'identity politics' of people who happen to be black.

Organisations like NMP and Southall Monitoring Group which came out of community struggles over fifteen years resent our experiences being appropriated by people who then talk in our names and have the audacity to say that because they have set themselves up as something grand we must fit in with their 'project'.

What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of current anti-racist and anti-fascist work?

Let's be blunt - there is a fightback in some localities but nationally there is no effective, coherent, dynamic movement which can go on the offensive. Let's look at the different strands that exist. The strand that takes up 'anti-fascism' (i.e. AFA, ANL) is based upon an 'historical' and therefore limited analysis of fascism - Cable Street, 1936 and so on. This strand fails to understand the importance of state and popular racism in all their manifestations, let alone relate to on-going events in Europe. Because of their limitations these people are irrelevant to black people and the working class in general. As a result the racists often have much more of a base in poor white communities than the 'anti-fascists'.

Another strand is more interesting but is based on the premise: we are black people and we lead the struggle and no one dare challenge us. This misunderstands the black experience. What is important is that those experiences have to be at the forefront of any fight against racism. We need a leadership that reflects and is based in those experiences and communities, not people who just come in from outside and try to subordinate all other organisations within their own definition of black politics. We reject this strongly - especially when these people have to rely on a white left organisation to do the donkey work. That is not a movement based on and led by black people.

The Racial Harassment Bill currently being touted by ARA is at best a diversion and might even be a step backward. The police need no extra powers to deal with racial harassment. The real problem is that the police are not interested in taking action with the powers they already have. A Racial Harassment Bill could be used by the ordinary copper to say that this incident is nothing to do with me but has to be dealt with by a special squad.

What saddens me is that in the middle of the worst upsurge of racism and fascism in Europe since the Second World War words like 'self-defence' are not even being mentioned by these national organisations. We should be giving political and material support to those people who engage in self-defence and others like those at Waterloo who directly take on the fascists.

We at NMP also have to look at our failings, notably our failure to take national initiatives ourselves. These have largely arisen out of the 'state of siege' those of us who are active in community organisations find ourselves living under. What we now realise is that 'single case' campaigns have limitations - the state can absorb their impact. The way forward is to relate single issue campaigns to national questions. If we are going to be relevant to black communities we will have to be able to turn defensive into offensive struggles. This can only be done in a national and European context. The problem is that because of our failure to do this other people have substituted themselves and, because of their limitations, have failed to express the grass-roots anger and militancy of the ghettos.

We supported ARA and its original conception. It is now clear that ARA - whilst we remain a component of it - has to face up to its crucial weaknesses. It has to make its agenda and its work relevant to black people's experiences and the wider anti-racist movement. We cannot progress by stage-managed events. We need an organisation and movement which is dynamic on a day-to-day basis, which responds consistently to fascist mobilisation and racist attacks. We need to translate trade union affiliations into practical support. We need a movement which provides a framework for grass-roots organisations. It seems unlikely the ARA leadership (which is Black Sections and *Socialist Action*) will respond to this agenda - but we hope they will. That is why we are organising to influence the direction of both ARA and ANL, to compel them to make themselves relevant to the anti-racist and anti-fascist movement. But if they are not prepared to 'do the business', then we will. ❑

Anti-racists mobilise

FOLLOWING THE MURDER of 16-year old Rohit Duggal by a gang of white youths in Eltham in south east London in July, anti-racist groups are stepping up their campaign for the closure of the Nazi British National Party headquarters in nearby Welling.

Since the BNP arrived in the area in late 1989 three young black people have been murdered. In July local shopkeeper Mohammed Irshad Mia was brutally beaten after leaving a mosque. On August 27th racists firebombed a local mosque and a Sikh temple in Charlton.

On September 7th the offices of Greenwich Commission for Racial Equality were covered in racist and fascist graffiti and the area was plastered with racist and anti-semitic BNP posters. Plumstead police report an 87% rise in recorded racist attacks between 1990 and 1991.

Anti-Racist Alliance National Secretary Marc Wadsworth said, "As black people, there must be nowhere we can't go and nowhere we can't live." The ARA is backing a demonstration called by the Rohit Duggal Family Campaign, together with a conference a week later on racist murders, organised by Greenwich Council.

The Anti-Nazi League, also backing the demonstration, added: "The best response to the Nazis is to see thousands of black, Asian and white trade unionists, community organisations, local councillors and others marching against the racist scum."

DEMONSTRATE

Saturday, November 7th
Assemble 11.30am
Eltham Common Recreation Ground
Well Hall Road, London SE9 (behind Brook Hospital).

Saturday, November 14th
Anti-Racist Alliance
Day conference on racial attacks
Greenwich Town Hall

Saturday, November 21st
Demonstrate against the Asylum Bill!
Central London

Equal ops drops

EDDIE NILES, Islington North CLP, reports: Over the last few years black people employed by Labour authorities have had to pay the price for Labour's failure to win the last two general elections.

Most Labour authorities have now abandoned their commitments to equal opportunities. White chief officers who now have total control of these authorities get away with things they would not have dared to consider a few years ago.

More black staff have lost jobs than their white friends in the same sections. In one London Labour authority a report was produced by the head of personnel (whom I am told is a black man) which shows that last year 14% of black staff were either disciplined or dismissed in comparison to 2% of their white colleagues.

As an ex-Councillor and ex-NUPE branch secretary I am seeing an average of four black women a day, mostly workers in education and social services, requesting help and advice on disciplinary matters. In Islington the under-fives services is now under the control of the education department - with the result that black women who have given many years service to the Council and have been in charge of their centres are having to move aside for white teachers.

We see more black men appearing before disciplinary hearings on charges of sexual harassment than their white friends. Is this because black staff have less chance of receiving training or is it the case that these so-called radical Labour boroughs no longer have a commitment to fairness where black employees are concerned? Certainly, equal opportunity policies seem to have gone out the window almost everywhere.

German anti-Nazi jailed

IN GERMANY a frail 69-year old man has been convicted for the alleged murder in 1947 of a Nazi military judge in a Russian POW camp.

Conscripted into the German army at the age of 19, Gerhard Buzelein was sent to a work camp after refusing to take part in a mass execution of resistance fighters and Jews. On his third attempt, he escaped to the Soviet Union, where he joined the Red Army.

This May he was found guilty of the murder in a Soviet camp of Nazi Erich Kallmerter, who had himself signed 1,200 death sentences. Buzelein was originally investigated in the 1950s but the case lapsed because of lack of evidence. Although no new evidence has emerged, German reunification became the pretext for a trial against Buzelein in which all the prosecution witnesses were former Nazis.

According to the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, the case "symbolises all that is rotten in the new Germany", with "history falsified, Nazis portrayed as victims, anti-fascists as traitors."

Battle of Waterloo

ON SEPTEMBER 12 Nazi thugs gathering at London's Waterloo Station in readiness for a gig featuring favourite fascist band "Screwdriver" were met by opposition organised by Anti-Fascist Action.

"The police seemed only concerned to protect the fascists," said an eyewitness in the front line. "They did nothing to stop the fascist thugs from throwing scaffolding poles at the demonstrators." Some things have changed little since the battle of Cable Street.

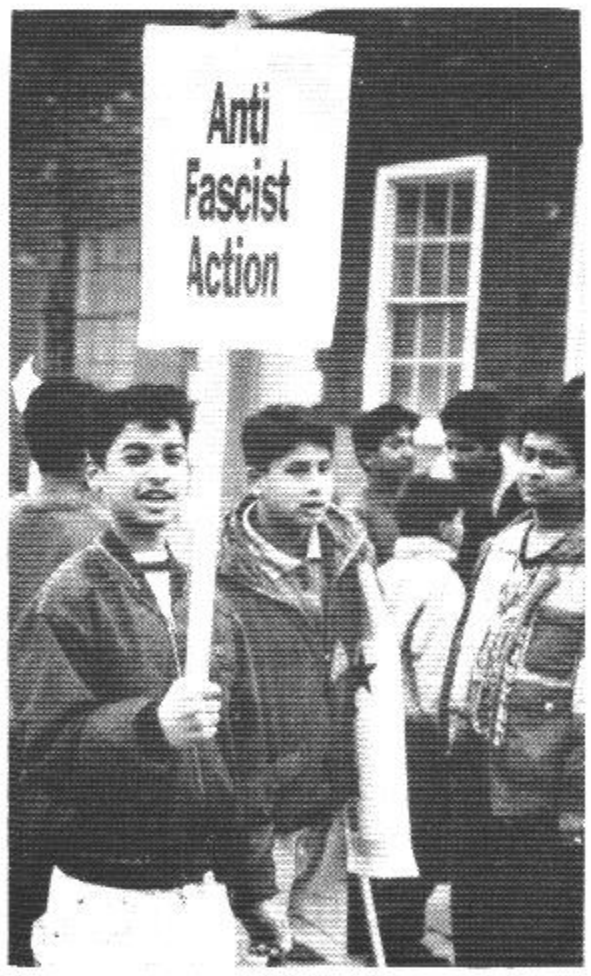


Photo: Bryn Griffiths

Thoroughly modern Mussolini

Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of the fascist dictator, has been invited to address a fringe meeting held by the far right Western Goals at this year's Tory Party Conference. The visit is part of Western Goals' continuing efforts to build links between fascist groups on the continent, like the Italian Social Movement (MSI), and the right inside and outside the Tory Party in Britain. **Jim Taylor** of the Campaign Against Fascism in Europe recounts the MSI's horrendous history.

ON AUGUST 1st, 1980 a bomb exploded at Bologna railway station. Detonated at the height of the holiday season, it was designed to cause maximum casualties. The blast completely devastated the station, killing over 80 people and leaving over 200 badly injured.

This was the worst terrorist outrage anywhere in Europe since the end of the Second World War and was carried out by the MSI's Armed Revolutionary Nuclei (NAR) as part of the party's strategy of escalating social tension and disorder. The explosives used in the bombing were delivered to NAR by Massimiliano Fachini, then MSI President and an elected councillor in Padua. The MSI was formed soon after the end of the war by leaders of the short-lived Salo Republic, the statelet created by Mussolini and Hitler to fight a last-ditch stand in defence of Italian fascism - probably the most brutal episode of Mussolini's reign.

Georgio Almirante, for many years leader of the MSI, was a senior official in Salo. When he brought a libel action against a socialist in Modena who described him as a "mass murderer and torturer of Italians" he lost the action on the grounds that "the allegations had been proven to be true."

In the 1960s the MSI adopted its "strategy of tension": combining terrorist murders and bombings designed to create fear and tension with an electoral drive to present itself as the only force capable of securing law and order. The terrorist side of its work was carried out in the name of formally independent movements such as Ordine Nuovo. Officially there was no connection between the different organisations.

The NAR was formed in 1977, uniting three terrorist organisations with a widely overlapping membership: the Ordine Nuovo (New Order), Ordine Nero (Black Order) and Avanguardia Nazionale (National Vanguard). These groups were openly Nazi in ideology. Ordine Nero, for instance, issued a declaration that: "The Nazi flag did not die in Berlin in 1945. It still lives for a powerful fascist and Nazi Italy. Nazism will return for the salvation of a renaissance Italy."

Pino Rauti founded Ordine Nuovo and later guided the formation of the NAR. He was eulogised in *League Review*, journal of the openly Nazi League of St George in Britain, as representing "the radical hardline viewpoint within the MSI from an ideologically principled viewpoint."

Back in 1951 Rauti had set up the Revolutionary Armed Fascists, which quickly forged links with like-minded organisations in France and Belgium, and with ODESSA, the powerful, sinister and secret SS organisation led by the world's most wanted Nazi war criminal, Walter Rauff.

On the death of Almirante, Rauti became leader of the MSI.

Clemente Graziani, one of the originators of the "strategy of tension", co-founder and political secretary of Ordine Nuovo stated: "The murder of the old, of women and of children is absolutely necessary." He also explained that Ordine Nuovo was "under the protective banner of the MSI."

Sandro Saccuchi, a former MSI Member of Parliament, was another co-founder of Ordine Nuovo. In 1976 he committed a particularly brutal murder and had to flee to a safehouse in London, where he met with the League of St George.

Roberto Fiore, the NAR activist involved with the Bologna outrage, also found a safehouse in Britain for more than a decade. A former member of the MSI student group, FUAN, he shared a flat with Robin Davies, personal assistant to revisionist historian David Irving and advised the National Front on the use of terrorism.

When Ordine Nuovo murdered three policemen in what became known as the "Peteano outrage", Carlo Cicutini, one of those involved, was able to escape justice after Almirante gave him £20,000 to finance his travelling abroad. Other episodes in the MSI's "strategy of tension" included: the bombing of the Italicus express train as it passed through a tunnel, killing twelve and seriously injuring 48 others; the bombing of the Banca del Agricultura on the Piazza Fontana in Milan in which sixteen were killed; the assassinations of the famous magistrate Vittorio Occorsio and the much-respected judge Mario Amato; the murders of student Antonio Leandri and newspaper worker Maurizio di Leo; a massacre at Milan police headquarters where four policemen were killed; and the shooting of two policemen in Empoli by Mario Tuti.

This is the politics Allesandra Mussolini will be representing at the Tory Party Conference.

● **CAFE is pledged to organise to stop her. Contact CAFE on 071 277 0817.**

Labour Party Conference 1992

Warning to delegates: Don't vote Liberal!

THERE ARE crucial issues to be debated and if the wrong decisions are taken it could render Conference powerless and threaten the very nature of the Party itself. The general election presented the public with three main parties whose policies were strikingly similar. The only way to win is by offering voters a choice between the capitalist parties and a real socialist alternative. But far from heralding radical renewal, Blackpool could instead clear the path towards pacts and deals with the capitalists' second XI, the Liberal Democrats.

Delegates to this year's Blackpool Conference hold the Party's future in their hands. **Richard Hanford** argues that this could be the last chance to heed the late Eric Heffer's warning and prevent Labour becoming on "SDP Mark 2".

End of the road for Conference? There is a real danger of this year's Conference being the last in which CLPs and affiliated organisations play a proper part in setting the agenda and making policy. The NEC seems intent on pushing through changes to cut out direct CLP input. The current democratic process will be replaced by a cumbersome and costly bureaucratic maze. The basic right to send two submissions - one resolution, one amendment - direct to Conference would be lost. The proposals for the new scheme were presented to Party members in a complex diagram in which arrows were supposed to indicate the routes that resolutions would follow. There were so many arrows flying around, it looked like a scene from the Bayeux Tapestry.

Under the NEC proposals, resolutions would have to find their way through:

- A Standing Commission to decide which resolutions are "acceptable" for further consideration;
- An elitist Policy Forum, with only a small number of CLP representatives, which would have the power to make amendments.
- The NEC, to exercise "executive authority over the whole policy making process".
- Finally, the Conference Arrangements Committee.

The chance of any controversial policy proposals surviving this elaborate screening process are nil. Conference must remain our sovereign policy making body. Delegates supporting the changes would be like turkeys voting for Christmas.

Electoral reform — The Plant Report will be presented to Conference in the hope of introducing some form of PR. PR spells electoral suicide for Labour (Kinnock's flirtation with it in the last week of the general election was a disaster). Millions of workers who vote Labour hoping for real change would find these hopes dashed by a system designed to safeguard the capitalist status quo. Rather than offering voters a clear choice of governments, it would make cobbled-together coalitions almost inevitable. 'First Past the Post' remains the best chance of electing a Labour government with real power to serve its supporters - and the only system under which those supporters could hope to hold a government elected in their name to account. This debate is a dangerous diversion from the task of devising policies to win the next election - on our own.

Don't touch the trigger — The "trigger mechanism" is a device designed to increase the job security of sitting MPs and reduce their accountability. Reselection would become dependent upon a one-member-one-vote "trigger" ballot, which amounts to either a public vote of no confidence in an MP or automatic endorsement. Alternative candidates wouldn't even get a hearing and trade unions would be completely excluded from any involvement in reselection.

Without mandatory reselection of MPs Party democracy is an empty shell and Labour parliamentarians can avoid being held to account for their actions.

Economic policy — The Party has been led way off course from its main aim and objective. Having turned its back on the commitment to common ownership stated in Clause 4 of our Constitution and printed on every membership card, the 'modernised' Labour Party does not even propose to bring majority holdings of privatised industries back into the public sector. Without this, a Labour government will always lack the economic power needed to bring about the "fundamental shift in wealth and power in favour of working people" omitted from recent manifestos.

Support for PR, defeats for public ownership, Conference sovereignty and mandatory reselection will leave the Parliamentary Labour Party free to abandon the Party's class base. We will become indistinguishable from the Liberal Democrats.

Farewell Conference and welcome to Ashdown's post-socialist "Coalition for Change"! ❑

The Strange Death of Labour England

Labour's crisis is a crisis for the working class.

John Nicholson, former Deputy Leader of Manchester City Council, stakes out an ambitious role for the Labour left.



"Honey, I shrunk the membership!"

ROY HATTERSLEY said on TV that to end the link between Labour and the trades unions would be the "Strange Death of Labour England". His reference to the demise of the Victorian Liberal Party nearly 100 years ago is timely.

For it was the Labour Representative Committee which broke the "respectable working man's" adherence to the Liberals. The LRC was to enable the working class - principally through its institutions of self-organisation in industrial work places, the trades unions - to secure elected representation in local council and Parliament. If Hattersley understands that the end of the trade union link is indeed the end of Labour England, then so should we.

This prompts me to ask: are we "rebuilding the left" (for example, through the Socialist Campaign Group Network launched at Leeds on June 20th)? Or are we in fact rebuilding the whole Party? Can anything be achieved in the present Labour Party?

Perhaps we should try asking people in Liverpool, Lambeth, Brighton, people who have stood as candidates and been removed, supporters of *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* or people who have just had enough and left the Party - and political activity - altogether.

Is it possible then to rebuild a Labour Party out of the present shambles? For some, the chance has been removed. For those of us who remain, the last chance exists while the membership still has any vote at all and while the trades unions still look to the Party.

So what is the Labour Party we need? Our Party has to start from principles. Clause IV remains essential if we are to aspire to any serious transformation of society, any real shift of wealth and power. Similarly, the principle of the self-emancipation of the working class is still vital. We should be proud to be associated with the right of people to organise in their own work places, the right of workers' organisations to be involved in the representative electoral process and the right of people to have work in the first place. And we should be supporting the self-determination of people in their own communities (employed and unemployed) and the self-determination of black people through their own organisations.

Our Party has to develop political education - and re-education. James Callaghan once remarked that *Militant* had performed a better political education service than the mainstream Party. He then helped kick them out of the Party altogether, presumably thus equalising the gap in political education.

Our Party has to have a structure which is accessible to new members. It has to involve all members in decision-making. That means members have to make more demands now. Instead of simply opposing the outrageous "trigger" mechanism, designed to give sitting MPs a ticket for life, we could be putting forward mandatory shortlists of three, for all selections.

Most of all our Party has to behave as a party. Never again should we have to put up with the elected leader of the Labour Party introducing the ditching of long-established policy, such as unilateral nuclear disarmament, on TV chats.

We have to rebuild the Party. The Leeds Conference on June 20th could be a turning point. The Socialist Campaign Group of MPs took a lead; but in doing so also submitted to the genuine pressure of the rank-and-file. The SCG MPs are the best MPs we have: they opposed the Gulf War, defended unilateral nuclear disarmament, promoted rights of lesbians and gay men, opposed the witch-hunt, stood up for trade union rights - but they need a base of support and accountability.

The initiative taken at Leeds and now being pursued by a working party of left Labour activists from all regions and a variety of political currents can reassert the principles of socialism and working class self-organisation. We can start political education of our own - argue on the economy and debate our involvement in European institutions and challenge the relationship between local and national government and much more besides. We can generate a speakers' list of comrades who will go and speak about their own experience and impart their hard-won skills to groups of socialists up and down the country. We can involve Labour Party members in regional and district groupings, linking local Socialist Campaign Groups to the national Network which is being built. The two will stimulate and complement each other.

We can promote Labour candidates for local government, Westminster and European Parliaments, bring left councillors together and create a common platform from which to present socialist policies to the Party and the communities we live in.

In this way, we can help ensure continuing elected representation of the self-organised working class.

The Strange People who have been running the Party in recent years have earned their own Strange Deaths - after four election defeats, that seems only fair - but it is in our hands not to let them take the rest of us with them. ❑

The left, the Labour Party and the 57 varieties

"The sect sees its raison d'etre and its point of honour not in what it has in common with the class movement but in the particular shibboleth which distinguishes it from the movement... The moment was right for the sectarian movement to merge in the class movement and make an end of all sectarianism. As for the true content of the sect it would, as was the case with all previous working-class sects, be carried on into the general movement as an element enriching it." - Karl Marx, 1868.

WHY IS the British left so sectarian? Or why, in Marx's terms, do so many groups place their "particular shibboleth" above what they have in common with the class movement as a whole?

Mike Phipps
Brent South CLP

It can't be put down simply to individual personalities, such as former WRP leader Gerry Healy, nor more generally to the legacy of Stalinism, which has been international in impact.

If Marx's observation is relevant, then sectarianism is a product of the detachment of a part of the left from the broader movement of the working class. It can be overcome by re-integrating the left sect into the broader movement.

Many left groups in Britain have both positive and negative sides. The positive side lies in the fact that they alone carry on any educational work or attempts to learn lessons from past experiences. The best of these groups are able to draw around themselves workers and young people who are committed to a root and branch solution to global problems of capitalism.

On the negative side, the narrow organisational model of distorted Leninism adopted by most groups and the self-perpetuating 'leaderism' that grows from this exploits the commitment and stifles the initiative of these people. The narrow sectish ties of loyalty and the emphasis on self-enlargement means that most groups are not only mistrustful of common activity with others but are often incapable of taking and following through initiatives which advance the interests of the movement as a whole. Consequently, these groups tend to alienate as many people as they attract.

Sectarianism is usually at is strongest when the mass movement is at a low ebb. Left groups do not then feel the pressure of a growing working class movement that requires unity in action as a prerequisite for advance. Periods of reflux in the class struggle, as now, are often accompanied by witch-hunts in which currents are driven out of the mass movement and lose their orientation. Some groups are voluntarily leaving the Labour Party because of its ten-year march to the right.

On the other hand, upsurges oblige groups to put the interests of the broader movement above their own narrow concerns - otherwise they are swept aside. Such advances also pose the possibility of a political reshaping of working class organisations in which the once-isolated left can play an integral part.

In Brazil, for example, the Workers Party grew directly out of the rapid rise of industrial unionism and the decline of the compromised 'pelege' unions. The radical left had the chance to take part in the founding of a new party - the PT - not as spectators or 'entrists' - but as real participants in an organisation whose character would be moulded in large measure by the quality of their activity.

Similarly, in South Africa the growth of the Black Consciousness Movement as a social force and the spawning of a radical socialist politics outside the Freedom Charter tradition was directly premised on the school students' uprising of the later 1970s and strengthened by the growth of mass industrial unionism of the eighties.

After four election defeats and the lowest number of strikes for fifty years, we seem a long way from such processes in Britain. Yet the problem of reorganising the movement is posed all the more sharply. This is already recognised by the right-wing who since the election have talked of breaking Labour's union link, alliances with the Liberals and moving the Party onto the terrain occupied by the American Democrats. In response the left seems to be sleepwalking.

It's clear the Party cannot stay as it is. Its traditional social base - the skilled unionised industrial working class - is, like the industries which shape it, in long-term structural decline. This is not to argue, like *Marxism Today*, that the working class is finished: it is to recognise that it is more differentiated and fragmented.

Rather than cling to the status quo whilst the right-wing pose as 'modernisers', the left must map out its own perspective. It is not enough to defend the bureaucratically-controlled block vote - we must democratise it. But as well as setting out the organic links we want the unions to have with the Party, we need to think about what kind of relationship should be forged between Labour and the millions of non-unionised workers, youth and urban poor who voted for it.

Tony Benn has called for a 're-founding' of the Party in this sense. Millions have taken part in the Poll Tax movement, campaigns to save local schools and hospitals, against HATs, for democratic and community rights and many other battles that have often by-passed both the Labour Party and the unions. How concretely can these forces find an institutional expression in the Party?

Unless it can reach out to and engage with these layers, Labour's chances of re-election must be slim. But it is precisely in this way that Labour needs to be reshaped if it is to be an inclusive party in which the most oppressed sections of society can find a voice.

Such a process will be the product of developments involving much larger forces than the current left re-groupments. But it would equally allow some of the left to overcome its sectarianism and 'enrich the general movement'. The alternative is greater fragmentation and isolation, both for the left and, more importantly, within the working class itself. ❑



Value for money? Party members will literally be paying the price of Kinnock's leadership for years to come.

The NEC's audited accounts (issued only a week before Conference) show a staggering loss in the Party's 1991 general fund of £1,330,000, bringing the total loss since Larry Whitty took over from Jim Mortimer (in whose last three years as general secretary the Party was in surplus) to £2,895,000.

The accumulated overdraft means that the Party will be paying £50,000 a month to the Co-op Bank for the foreseeable future. All of the proposed £3 hike in individual membership fees (set to reach a mind-bending £18 per annum) will go to Walworth Road and none to the constituencies. We'll be paying the price of Kinnock for years to come.

The subsidy to *Labour Party News* in 1991 was £186,000, though once again this is disguised as "subscriptions" deducted from membership fees.

Despite well over £1.5 million spent on membership development and processing since 1988 membership now stands at a thirty year low. Last year's Labour Conference issue of *Briefing* revealed that the official 1990 membership figures were wildly exaggerated. The NEC has now admitted this. But watch out; they're at it again. The 261,000 members claimed in 1991 should have paid well over £1.1 million in affiliation fees but the audited accounts list only £791,000 income from such fees. Real, paid membership of the Party may now be below 200,000. Even by the Party's own, dubious accounts, 80,000 existing members refused to renew their subs in 1991.

Final indignity: the Party's "High Value Donors" initiatives (£500 a plate dinners and so forth) claim to have brought in £228,000 in 1991; but Party expenditure on them was a startling £92,000.

Keep the link!

A CAMPAIGN HAS been launched to safeguard the Labour Party's trade union link.

"The Labour Party was founded to represent organised labour in Parliament. It should continue to do so. We will defend —

1. Representation of local trade union branches and other affiliates in the regular business of CLPs through delegates to General Committees;
2. Representation of local trade union branches and other affiliates at every stage in the selection of Parliamentary candidates by CLPs;
3. Representation of national trade unions at Party conference;
4. Participation of national trade unions in the election of the Party leadership and National Executive Committee."

Supporters so far include Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield (NUM), Bill Fry (NCU), John Aitkin (EPIU), Ken Cameron (FBU), Peter Lenahan (UCATT) and Tony Lennon (BECTU).

For further details contact Keep the Link, 120 Northcote Road, London E17 7EB; tel 081-520-5386.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM this year's NEC Report to conference:

- The general election report concedes that "we failed to inspire sufficient hope" and observes that "the failure to mobilise additional support among" Labour's core working class voters, especially the unemployed, council tenants, pensioners and the poor "is extremely worrying. We may appear to have moved away from the concerns of these groups." Also noted: "the reluctance by constituencies to take head office produced literature".
- The register of non-affiliated groups set up as an overture to the witch-hunt ten years ago has been abandoned because *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* "have been subsequently dealt with".
- There are now a grand total of 39 LPYS branches in the country.
- None of the Policy Review Groups has actually met since the last conference but "the convenors and other members were consulted as necessary".
- The NCC reports dealing with 45 cases before the election (leaving out the Lambeth, Brighton and Sheffield hearings conducted since then); four of the 45 individuals won "case not proven" verdicts; thirty were expelled from the Party, mostly for being *Militant* supporters; one Party member was suspended for two years for making racist remarks.
- A major "benefit" of the National Membership Scheme is that it ensures the wide distribution of *Labour Party News*, which we are told, "is currently revising its format".

Labour's youth regained

Responding to Paul Field's article on 'Labour's lost youth' in last month's *Briefing*, **Hamish Renton**, Cambridge CLP, argues that young people have a vital role to play in the reconstruction of socialist influence within the Labour Party - but that the left must offer them more than the platitudes of the current leadership.

I READ WITH tragic amusement the Young Fabians September newsletter (*Labour Tomorrow*) as it boldly proclaimed on its front page, "The next General Election has begun. WE CAN NO LONGER AFFORD THE LUXURY OF AN ANALYSIS OF THE 1992 GENERAL ELECTION."

This is the attitude of what effectively is the house journal of the youth establishment: no debate. These people are political automatons, a charge more frequently levelled at the left.

The battleground for the left starts with the Labour Party Young Socialists. Once a large *Militant*-dominated movement capable of mobilising school pupils, students, young workers and the young unemployed, it is now in a woeful state, with only 39 branches out of a possible 634. It was effectively destroyed by the NEC in the late 1980s by a reduction in the upper age limit, changes in structure and timely expulsions. These measures resulted in the right re-claiming the Youth Representative on the NEC, further isolating Benn and Skinner.

There are a number of possible ways forward for the left in LPYS. First, the lessons of the past must be learned and all sectarianism must be set aside. Only unity and effective organisation can build the type of democratic, pluralistic and responsive movement which the right dreads. Secondly, the upper age limit should be raised to 25 (possibly beyond), at one stroke enlarging and enriching LPYS in experience and numbers. This is a point on which, remarkably, Paul Richards of the Young Fabians agrees with me.

Thirdly, every effort must be made by youth activists in the 600-plus CLPs without a YS branch to set one up (take 10 under 23 CLP members, add a Walworth Road bureaucrat and stir gently). Once formed, such branches are autonomous both financially and organisationally and have a vote at Youth Conference.

Fourthly, left activists should try to get their CLP/branch/union/women's section/socialist society to send them as a delegate to the Party's Annual Youth Conference (Bournemouth, January 29th-31st, 1993), where there will be a Campaign Group fringe meeting addressed by one of the Group's MPs. This will serve both as a forum for debate and also help build a national network of left activists.

The National Organisation of Labour Students is seen as a catflap into Westminster. It has developed an incestuous relationship with the Young Fabians as a result of the desperate decision in the mid 1980s to form what was ostensibly an anti-Trot caucus, "New Directions". The political justification (if it ever existed) has now gone, yet New Directions remains as a London-centric recruiting station for the right establishment. It has a sorry record of obstructing, not co-operating with, ignoring and worse those Labour clubs who do not toe its rigid line. I should add that NOLS is the self-annointed repository of truth for NUS. To put it bluntly, the best thing NOLS did last year was arrange 'working entry' to the Glastonbury Festival!

Within NOLS (and, by extension, NUS) left activists have to fight the New Directions caucus, fire with fire. This means a new tolerance among left groups, uniting around the 90% we agree upon, not dividing over the 10% about which we disagree. This is essential to breathe socialist life into currently moribund Labour Clubs and as well as NOLS nationally. The right are divided among themselves and a determined left challenge from the grass roots could make a tremendous difference to the way NUS works. Voluntary membership, loans, the withdrawal of housing benefit and income support need to be opposed with actions and campaigns and not just fine words delivered by the NUS President in a sharp suit to a Royal Commission. As with LPYS, left activists should try to get their Labour Clubs to select them to go to both Youth Conference and NOLS conference (where there will again be a Campaign Group fringe meeting).

If Labour is to expand its membership, gain financial stability and appeal to previously uncommitted young people, new policies and campaigns must be initiated. That is something which we cannot rely on the right to do. We must set aside our divisions, rally around our common socialism and take our arguments into the workplace, the dole queue, the college refectory and all the other places where young people (inside Labour and out) are to be found.

● **Join the Labour Young Socialist Campaign Group by writing to Hamish Renton/Greg Tucker at Red Rose Centre, 129a Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QC, or call 071 263 9450.**

Brent Socialist Campaign Group

Public Meeting with Bernie Grant, Ken Livingstone, Joint Sites Committee

Wednesday, October 7th, 8pm

"The Case is Altered"
(it's a pub would you believe)
High Road, Willesden

Briefing in Blackpool

Conference fringe meeting
Monday, September 28th, 1pm
Imperial Hotel
Yes to internationalism
No to Fortress Europe

Briefing Big Night Out
Thursday, October 1st
9pm till late
Park House Hotel
£2.50 admission
Late bar, quiz, prizes!

Campaign Against the Witch-hunt

Conference Fringe Meeting

Saturday, September 26th, 7pm
Central Library Lecture Theatre
Abingdon Street
Blackpool

Speakers: Tony Benn MP, Dennis Skinner MP, Ken Capstick NUM

Tunnel vision

AS IF HIGH local unemployment, a landscape blighted by Chunnel workings and Michael Howard for an MP wasn't enough, the tiny Folkestone and Hythe Constituency Labour Party (membership 150 in 1987) has created problems of its own.

Three years ago the CLP found its saviour in the person of David Crowhurst, a young ex-Tory Councillor and businessman, who defected to Labour saying, "Mrs Thatcher has gone too far. My membership reflects a shift from the left to the centre-right of the Labour Party. Labour's policies seem to offer what most middle class people would support."

Within months he was a branch chair and CLP vice-chair and publicly urged the police (who wisely ignored him) to ban an Anti-Poll Tax Union meeting: "We do not feel it right to allow a meeting which has the aim of encouraging people to break the law."

A few months later his vigorous complaints led to the expulsion of all the alleged Militants infesting the local Party (well, three members). Right on, David! These days, nobody to the left of Bryan Gould attends Folkestone and Hythe CLP meetings but not many to the right of Bryan Gould do, either.

Alas, after resigning his Party offices (including that of Parliamentary Agent), Crowhurst vanished. It was reported in the local press that he had been charged with seven counts of obtaining property by deception and that his case had been referred to the Crown Court.

Like all tiny CLPs (162 in 1991) Folkestone and Hythe has money problems. Last year it could not affiliate or send a delegate to Conference. This year it can. Benign Walworth Road wrote off four-fifths of the affiliation fee. So nice to have friends in the right places.

Dirty weekend

THE FIRST THREE of 26 suspended Party members in Brighton were expelled on September 12th. The National Constitutional Committee chose a seafront hotel as the venue for their dirty work. Smarmy Council leader Steve Bassam emerged from the hotel to cries of "Judas" from local activists gathered outside. His smug grin betrayed the self-satisfaction of an informant who actually relished his role in the sordid affair. The hearings resulted in the inevitable expulsions of Paul Cadman, member of the NUPE National Executive, former councillor Sheila Hall and the legendary Ray Apps on the charge of being *Militant* supporters.

Ray Apps, who joined the party in 1945 and once served on the NEC's working group on mandatory reselection, faced belated accusations of "entryism"!

Dennis Skinner recalled Ray's hard work defending the Clay Cross councillors in their battle against the Tory government and said, "This is another example of someone who has served the Party well over a long period of time being subjected to a witch-hunt."

Ray argued that he had demonstrated his loyalty to the Party by campaigning for all candidates, left or right, since the age of fifteen. This cut no ice with Joyce Gould and her McCarthyite committee. But Ray vowed to continue to fight for Labour, telling the NCC panel: "If I live long enough, I'll be back."



Naked ambition

This month's double dose of Class Treachery examines the intertwining careers of **Gordon Brown** and **Tony Blair**. The "push-me-pull-you" twins have been joined at the hip, at least as far as the media were concerned, since they arrived in Parliament in 1983. But now that these ever rising Front Bench stars have finally risen - almost - to the top, will they stick together?

THROUGHOUT THE last Parliament Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, the darlings of the media, were touted as the star performers of Neil Kinnock's "new, competent Cabinet-in-waiting". With the aid of spin doctor-in-chief Peter Mandelson, they were sold to the Party membership as articulate, attractive, pragmatic politicians who enjoyed public confidence and were therefore the right people to lead Labour to victory at the ballot box.

In reality, they were and are self-regarding, deeply ambitious career politicians whose horizons are entirely circumscribed by the sound-bite and the photo-opportunity.

Both were known as Tribuneite "soft lefts" when they were first returned to the Commons from safe Labour seats in 1983. They expressed the usual gamut of (then) acceptable leftish opinions: unilateralist, sceptical about the EEC, supportive of the miners without being close to the strike. Both worked assiduously to cultivate reputations as Parliamentary eager-beavers and both were rewarded with rapid promotion to the front bench.

After 1987 they acted together (with last month's Class Traitor, Jack Straw) as Kinnock's hitmen in the Tribune Group, organising leadership loyalists to turn up mob-handed for the annual Shadow Cabinet slate-making meetings to block any deal with the Campaign Group. In gutting the Tribune Group of all political independence, they helped smash the Parliamentary "soft left", then reaped the spoils. In Kinnock's night of the long knives in October 1989, Michael Meacher was replaced by Blair at Employment and Bryan Gould by Brown at Trade and Industry.

With Margaret Beckett, they then formed, under John Smith's leadership, perhaps the most right-wing economic front bench team in the Party's history. They treated Shadow Cabinet meetings with contempt, not least because their direct links to Kinnock's office (where real decision-making power lay) made the meetings superfluous. Brown in particular became an irregular attender who rarely bothered to stay to the end of a meeting.

Both Brown and Blair are sponsored by the TGWU, which is less ideologically selective about its sponsored MPs than the GMB. Together they helped push Jack Dromey into his ill-advised candidacy for the union's Deputy General Secretary post.

Both played leading roles in Labour's doomed 1992 election road show and starred in a number of party political broadcasts, in one of which Gordon Brown was seen to smile. This provoked more comment in the press than anything he actually said during the broadcast.

When the usually scowling Brown entered the Commons at the age of thirty-two he had already been, in effect, a full-time Scottish politician for over a decade. A former student union activist turned television journalist (and author of a slim volume called *Red Paper on Scotland*, which he has in recent years deleted from his CV), he became a leading organiser of the campaign for a 'yes' vote in the devolution referendum of 1979. He voted for Neil Kinnock in the 1983 leadership contest and quickly made a mark as a combative Commons performer. At this time firmly within the mainstream of the "soft left", Brown signed the 1985 "Tribune relaunch statement" which called for "economic power to be made publicly accountable through an extension of social ownership, planning and industrial democracy".

That year he made his way on to the front bench Trade and Industry team headed by John Smith. Seen initially as a "left wing counterbalance" to Smith, as the Party's Regional Affairs spokesperson in the run-up to the 1987 election he was the chief exponent of the "North vs. South" rhetoric which proved such a poor substitute for the "class vs. class" approach Labour needed. Certainly his attacks on the "privileged" south did not help win Labour many voters in the region.

Self-confident and smug, Brown blamed the 1987 defeat on the left, which, an observer reported, "he hates with an envenomed, implacable loathing". The London left was a particular object of his scorn; he accused it of "sending out search parties for ever more discontented minorities."

Brown was the author of a Tribune Group pamphlet which outlined proposals for a "mass membership" drive that formed much of the basis of the disastrous national membership system. At the public launch of the system in January 1989, Brown alone shared the platform with Kinnock, even though he was not a member of the NEC. Brown was also the leading champion of the cut-rate subscription scheme for members of affiliated unions which he claimed would bring a flood of "ordinary working people" into the Party and thus nullify the influence of the left activists. Over the following four years Brown's brainchild only tempted 0.3% of eligible trade union members to join the Party.

He first won election to the Shadow Cabinet on the Tribune Group slate in 1987. As Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury (and John Smith's Number 2) he completed his conversion to monetarism. In 1988, with the budget in surplus and the Tories under pressure to spend on public services rather than tax cuts, Brown opposed both measures, arguing in the privacy of the Labour Treasury team that the surplus should only be used to pay off the public sector borrowing requirement.

John Smith's heart attack in 1988 gave Brown an opportunity to make his name with a wider audience. With a strong press lobby behind him and the full backing of the Mandelson/Shadow Communication Agency mafia, Brown was bound for promotion. As the Party's leading spokesperson on Trade and Industry from 1989 until the general election, he was responsible for Labour's failure to offer any coherent industrial strategy for recession-hit Britain. Instead he gave us "Made in Britain" and endless chauvinist paeans to "British" industry, management, science and research. "Partnership" with private industry became the

be-all and end-all of Labour's manufacturing policy. Any mention of public ownership was strictly forbidden. Self-confident and smug, Brown is one of the most dedicated "haters" in the Parliamentary Labour Party, which is saying something.

In contrast, Blair is famously affable, perhaps because he has always been a comfortable establishment figure. Privately educated before moving on to Oxford and qualification as a barrister, he had no serious background of Labour activity before standing for Parliament. He did, however, have excellent connections. He specialised in trade union law in the chambers run by Alexander Irvine, the QC who helped Kinnock out of the legal mess created by the *Militant* expulsions in 1986 and was subsequently made a life peer at Kinnock's suggestion.

In 1982, Blair stood as the Labour candidate in a by-election in Beaconsfield, a safe Tory seat. At that time, he emphasised to *Labour Weekly* that trade unionists had a perfect right to take illegal industrial action to defend their interests. He came a poor third in Beaconsfield but connections with the trade unions helped him get selected in the safe Labour seat of Sedgefield for the 1983 general election.

He was appointed to the front bench as a junior spokesperson on Treasury Affairs within a year of being elected to the House. At the time it was observed that Blair had made the fastest rise within the PLP since David Owen in 1968. In the Commons he pleaded for an understanding of unemployed youth: "They do not consider themselves as citizens of the state. They regard the state as the property of others." We can be sure to hear no more of such subversive sentiments from Her Majesty's Shadow Home Secretary.

In 1987 he was second runner-up in the Shadow Cabinet ballot at his first attempt. He was given the City affairs brief within the Trade and Industry team but failed to exploit the opportunity presented by the share collapse that October. He chose to take up the cudgels for "small investors" who received a "third class service" from brokers.

The next year, with heavy backing from Kinnock's office, he won a place on the Shadow Cabinet and took over the Energy portfolio from John Prescott, who was temporarily out of favour with Kinnock. Clean-cut, simpering, ever eager to bend with the prevailing wind, Blair was picked out by Mandelson as the perfect embodiment of the media-friendly, apolitical party he wanted Labour to become.

Suddenly Blair's name was everywhere; he was regularly touted as the hottest property in the PLP. Without convictions, intellectual depth or even the kind of aggressive eloquence which Brown can command, his meteoric rise within the PLP was attributable only to his televisual appearance and willingness to say and do whatever the leadership wanted.

After a year as Energy spokesperson, where he achieved little opposing the Tories' electricity privatisation legislation, he was considered the ideal person to replace Meacher at Employment and carry through the leader's planned reversal of Party policy on trade union law. Between March and October 1989, Meacher became the subject of a sustained, hostile whispering campaign orchestrated by Mandelson and Charles Clarke. After that year's Shadow Cabinet ballot, he was finally removed from Employment and replaced by Blair, who was never in any doubt about his remit from the leader.

In December, Blair declared in an on-the-record public interview that Labour's support for the closed shop was at an end. In a letter of protest to Larry Whitty, Gordon Colling of the NGA said, "a major policy statement was made by the spokesperson without reference to the NEC, to one of its committees or to the Policy Review process". The letter was endorsed unanimously at the January meeting of the NEC, with Kinnock's assurances that there would be no repetition of the abuse, but, sure enough, Blair's abandonment of the closed shop became Party policy when his contribution to "Looking to the Future" was rubber-stamped by the NEC the following May.

Having overturned Labour's commitment to free trade unionism, Blair spent the rest of his stint as Employment spokesperson treating the nation to happy but ineffectual blather about "training" and "skills". At the 1991 TUC Blair was on hand to welcome Scargill's defeat on the repeal of Tory anti-union laws as "laying to rest the arguments of the past".

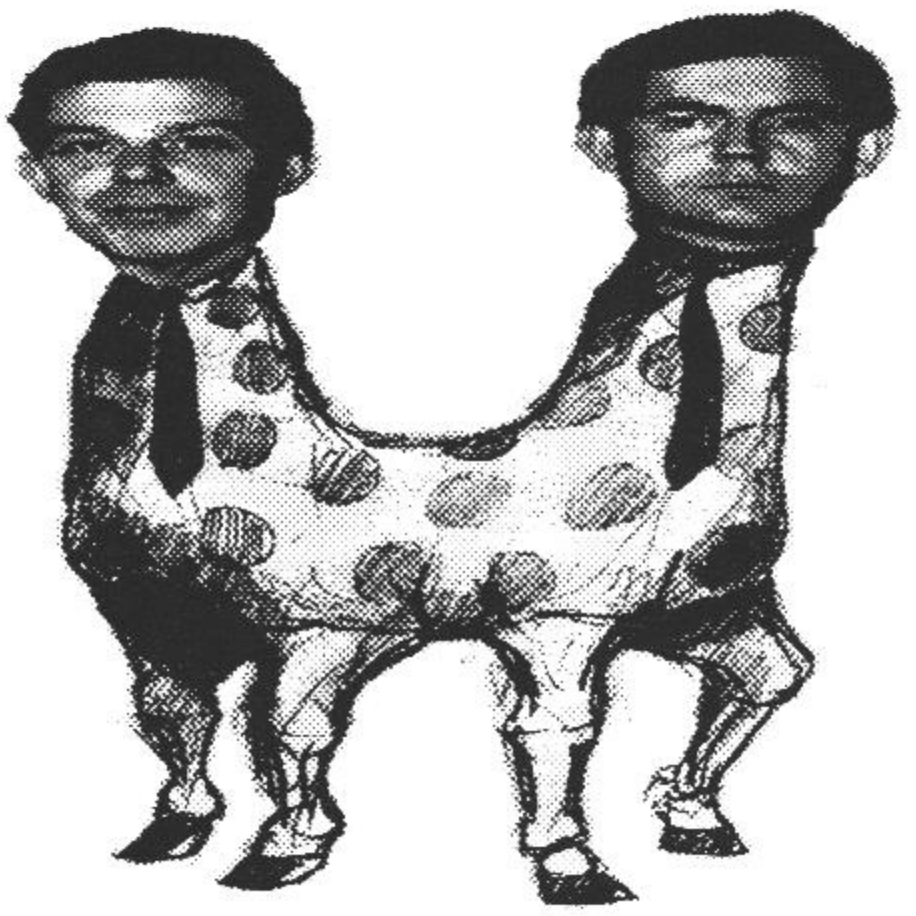
During the election campaign he failed abysmally to put any fire into the issue of mass unemployment and shied away from any focus on the Party's commitment to a minimum wage.

After the defeat, the *Sunday Times* and other Tory papers touted him as "the leader Labour should have had". Ever modest, Blair explained, "I'm only thirty-nine. I can wait ten years."

Meanwhile his endless appearances with wife and children in colour supplements have enabled him to steal a march in the future leadership stakes over the unmarried Brown.

Expect nothing from Blair as Shadow Home Secretary. He has no previous known interest in criminal justice, civil liberties, immigration, racism or prison reform. He never supported the Guildford Four, Birmingham Six or Tottenham Three and is alleged to have said in private that the Six were released "on a technicality". He has already made clear that his main strategy will be to out-Tory the Tories on law and order.

A mediocre speaker who fails to



shine even at Party Conference where he enjoys the services of the Campaigns and Communications Directorate, he often fumbles in unscripted discussions and relies heavily on his stiff but ready smile and what passes, in the Shadow Cabinet at least, for personal charm.

Brown has already proved a disaster as Shadow Chancellor, despite his willingness to make himself available for twenty second TV sound-bites day or night. His recent attempts to score points against the beleaguered Tories by making vacuous demands for economic "co-ordination", "action" and "competence" have impressed nobody. Perhaps the only British politician who has come out from the recent ERM debacle looking worse than Brown is Lamont himself.

With John Smith looking less than a racing certainty to stay in post for a full Parliament, Blair and Brown are now squaring up as potential rivals for the leadership. God help us if either succeeds.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

How the left bungled on Bosnia

John Turkie is not surprised that Misha Glenny sounded exasperated with the British left in his interview on the Balkans in the last issue of *Briefing*.

SINCE THE most serious European crisis in 45 years broke out 18 months ago, *Briefing* has not managed one word of editorial comment. Typically, *Socialist Worker*'s knee-jerk response has been to oppose Western intervention and call for "workers' unity". At least *Briefing* hasn't gone in for this mindless sloganising, but the fact that it has not said anything suggests that it does not know what to say.

This point is amply illustrated in *Briefing*'s last editorial. Whilst it contrasted the West's inaction over Somalia with its action over Iraq, it failed to make the obvious connection with Bosnia. Partly, this is because the left is confused about the issue of intervention. But from the moment the former Yugoslavia began to disintegrate, the left has failed miserably to come to grips with the gravity of the situation.

Misha is right to argue for Western intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina to prevent Croatia and Serbia carving it up and with the clear political aim of addressing the issue of minority rights and not simply to punish the Serbs. The choice is (and always has been) between stabilising the situation through intervention and a slide into a full-scale Balkan war. A regional war, featuring (Muslim) Turkey on one side and (Christian Orthodox) Greece on the other, is a real possibility, as is the pan-European war Misha warns of.

But this begs a question. Why wait until the Yugoslav civil wars hit Bosnia to support intervention? A year ago, when Croatia's 'civil war' was raging, I warned in *Briefing* that continued inaction by the West meant that the war would spread to Bosnia and beyond. The problem in only supporting intervention now is that it may be too late to intervene on the desired political basis.

For the last 18 months, the West's 'intervention' - epitomised by the 'even-handed' approach of the UN in Bosnia - has massively favoured the Serbian regime, most obviously through the arms embargo on all the former Yugoslav states. From the moment the West made it clear it was against Serbian expansionism but would not oppose it (the green light that led to the Serbian invasion of Slovenia), the dye was cast. First, it rebuffed Slovenia and then Serbian tanks were deployed in June 1991. Second, it rebuffed Croatia until full-blown slaughter began in Autumn 1991. At the end of 1991, Bosnia was told the West was too busy with Croatia to think about Bosnia.

Now it is the turn of Kosovo, the Albanian-majority Serbian province, to bang on the door worried it's next in the firing line. Yet Douglas Hurd, on his recent visit to the area, did not even visit the province - an extraordinary omission. On Macedonia, too, there seems a determination not to address the growing difficulties.

The West's declared position on Bosnia, once it finally turned its attention to it in April 1992, was against ethnic cantonisation and for preserving it as a nation state. By the summer, Carrington concluded that a unitary constitution was no longer tenable and proposed a Federal Bosnia in which Serbs, Croats and Muslims would still be able to live in mixed communities, while at the same time having their own communal authorities. Once this proposal was rejected by the Croat and Serbian nationalists in Bosnia, the London Conference began to seek "a settlement acceptable to all three parties". In other words, the West would appease the two strong parties in the conflict and agree to the ethnic cantonisation of Bosnia, because the Bosnians are too weak to oppose it.

In adopting the politics of appeasement, the West has allowed might to prevail over right. It is easy to side with the Bosnian government given the near genocidal treatment meted out to Muslims by Serbs. But it is also right to distinguish between the so-called warring factions and support the multi-ethnic Bosnian government. With nineteen ministers, six of whom are Serbs, it stands in stark contrast to the nationalist Serbian and Croatian regimes.

The tragedy is that after what has happened, it will be difficult for Muslims to live with Serbs as they did in the past. As the Bosnian *Yugofax* magazine admits: "Bosnia-Herzegovina's ethnic tolerance is rapidly being eroded. It is true that 20% of Sarajevo's defence forces are still Serb and the majority of Serbs ignored Karadzic's call for them to attack their neighbours. But those who did respond have caused so much torment that they have created an anti-Serb atmosphere which did not exist in B-H even during World War Two." Karadzic's ludicrous claim that Bosnian Muslims want to create an Islamic state could well become a reality brought about by the policies of Serbian nationalism. Given the weak Western response to the plight of the Bosnian Muslims who have become 'Europe's Palestinians', many will turn away from identification with Europe and towards the Islamic world.

Taking sides between the Croatian and Serbian regimes is less straightforward. Though no socialist can support the Croatian nationalist regime of Franjo Tudjman, it is Serbian nationalism, not Croatian nationalism, that is responsible for the murderous mayhem enveloping the region. Serbia's aggression towards Croatia strengthened the hand of Croatian nationalism as did the West's failure to prevent this war starting in the first place.

Returning to the question of intervention, it is hard to imagine it being able to play a constructive role in Bosnia at this late stage. Given the history of Western intervention in the former Yugoslavia, it is more than likely to legitimise the ethnic cantonisation of Bosnia. Let us hope (though I am sure it is forlorn) that the West learns its lessons in time for Kosovo and Macedonia and that a full-scale Balkan war is avoided. ❑

Voices from the other Yugoslavia

Peace campaigner **Tony Smythe** reports on the hard-pressed individuals and groups working on the ground against war and for democracy in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia.

ALMOST A year ago I travelled by bus up from Montenegro, where the strutting young men were off to wreak havoc on Dubrovnik, through the Bosnian garrison town of Cetinje, from which I was hastily ejected, and across the snow covered mountains to Sarajevo.

The city was still beautiful. A group of young women singers rehearsed for a charity show and everyone seemed involved in collecting medicines, clothes, and food for Dubrovnik. Vukovar, under siege, seemed far away. The currency touts were thick on the streets and only oblique references were made to the inflow of arms and all that this implied.

The children's hospital had, however, already run out of supplies. I was given lists of what was needed and urged to go home and plead for international action to stop the spread of the war from Croatia into happy-go-lucky, ethnically mixed Bosnia.

Back in Belgrade I joined the nightly candle-lit vigil for peace outside Milosevic's office. Communications with Zagreb and Croatia had long since been severed and everyone was in despair. There was not much evidence of the war apart from the fanatics in fatigues playing tapes of martial music on the street and young men being rounded up and marched away. A few days later a gang of thugs ransacked the Anti-War Centre.

Although the path to catastrophe was blazed well in advance, (indeed, it was a popular theme for NATO war games) its ferocity seems to have caught virtually everyone unawares and left European governments reeling in confusion. The damage done so far has been, if anything, underestimated here in Britain. Within weeks, as winter approaches, it will be multiplied. Macedonia and Kosovo are lurching towards the edge of the precipice over which Bosnia has already fallen. The implications for the whole of the Balkans, for the fragments of the Soviet Empire and for Europe hardly bear thinking about.

Public opinion is compassionate towards the victims but is encouraged to believe that what we are witnessing is a war between ethnic gangs with convenient names like Serb, Croat or Muslim who are all equally to blame. The fact is that the wars were started by cliques within the political, academic, and military establishment in Belgrade, which has constructed its own brand of national socialism from the ashes of Communism and is approximately mirrored by the unpleasant Tudjman regime in Croatia with which it intends to carve up Bosnia.

Outside governments have to deal with these people but this should not mean excluding the rest of the political and civil community in the states and regions of former Yugoslavia.

An opportunity was tragically missed during the London Conference at the end of August and continues to be missed in Geneva. Ten leading opposition figures and minority representatives attended an 'Alternative Conference for a Balkan Peace' which was all but ignored by the press. They were denied observer status at the official conference.

The alternative report (published in *Balkan War Report* No. 14, September) reveals common principles and problems and the sort of integrity which is in short supply at official negotiations.

'Democratic forces are ready to work for [peace] and will do anything to achieve it,' the report declares. 'Peace is the only possible environment for democracy; real peace will not be achieved without political change and regeneration.'

As long as such people are denied Western recognition and material help, they will be pushed further to the margins and, I suspect, ultimately eliminated. For example, Dr Milorad Pupovac, leader of the Serbian Democratic Forum in Croatia, is facing criminal prosecution, with other prominent Croatians, for the 'slander' of detailing repression of Serbs.

In Belgrade, Milosevic's control of the media is his remaining strength. On most other counts, he is in deep trouble. Prime Minister Panic, introduced as a comic stooge, is surviving with unexpected resilience. President Cosic appears to be supportive as do a number of ministers and establishment figures. There are credible opposition parties and leaders, a determined peace movement, and independent journals like *Vreme*. Apart from the prospect of a Milosevic crackdown, the biggest danger they face is from indiscriminate imposition of sanctions, which hit ordinary people rather than the power structure, and in so doing bring both closer together. Vacuous talk about direct military intervention does not help either.

International broadcasting media should be giving a platform to all who oppose Milosevic and Karadzic, within and outside the administration. Sanctions should not be permitted to cut off the means to publish. Telephone and fax lines must be kept open.

With mounting unemployment, inflation and shortages of basic (including medical) supplies, the critical question is whether ordinary Serbs, particularly outside Belgrade, start to blame Milosevic for their troubles or whether they will turn against the international community itself and rally behind him.

On the military front, the Croatian experience should be sufficient to reject Bosnian appeals for arms. The surfeit of arms in the region is a critical part of the problem. Their decision to import mercenaries and supplies from the Islamic world, though it follows the pattern established by Croats and Serbs, is a desperate and futile reaction to disaster.

The British military contingent of 1800 troops, minimal though it is, should set alarm bells ringing. After all the British government's other mistakes (like allowing itself to be bludgeoned by Germany into premature recognition of Croatia), this is the most profoundly awful. In anguish, I cannot hold out much hope for what is left of Bosnia. It would be prudent to be more pro-active in Macedonia, threatened by Serbia in the North and the chauvinistic mobilisation of both left and right in Greece in the South, and in Kosovo where the Albanians were the first victims of Milosevic.

The only thing we can do with assurance and commitment is to provide aid where it is needed, a refuge for the displaced, care and treatment for the injured and sick, money, supplies and support to civil societies and anti-war centres in all regions. Would it not have been appropriate for the Labour Annual Conference to invite or give a platform to the sane and sensible leaders of the 'other' Yugoslavia who remain the only hopes for peace and progress? ❑

Editorial: Western arms will compound Balkan tragedy



THE IMPOTENCE with which the British left has observed the unfolding horrors in what used to be Yugoslavia has led some to support the call for military intervention by the UN or the EC. While the ostensible purpose of that intervention would be to stop or at least curtail the violence, the result would certainly be to escalate it further, compound the tragedy and place yet more obstacles on the path to a political solution. Any serious attempt by the Western governments to pacify the region would end up strengthening the most wanton chauvinist elements and lead to extended and yet more brutal warfare.

What long-term strategy could or would guide the West in such an adventure? The imposition by unaccountable force of arms of a "democratic solution"? The indefinite occupation of the Balkans? Or the "ethnic" cantonisation of the whole region, which would inevitably erupt again and again into war? The only lasting solution for the former citizens of Yugoslavia - and indeed for many others besides - would have to be a political one based upon principles of secular democracy, rigorous respect for minority rights and opposition to any communal states or regimes based on religious or "ethnic" identity. Such principles are inimical to the Western interests which would guide any military intervention whether under the aegis of the UN or the EC. Even as the West poured tanks and bombers and troops into an enlarged Balkan war-zone it would turn away from its own borders millions seeking refuge from it.

However one chooses to apportion blame, the core of the problem is that, in the context of the failure of Stalinism and the corruption and gross irresponsibility of world capitalism, the peoples of the region have been torn asunder by aggressive rival nationalisms under demagogic leaderships. The only antidote to this poison is socialist internationalism - yet the forces on the ground committed to it are small and apparently powerless. Worse yet, the forces committed to it outside the region, in the rest of Europe or further afield, which might have been able to contribute to a solution, are also small and apparently powerless. That appalling reality lies behind the left's confusions on the issue, the desperate groping for practical or even hypothetical solutions. Our calls for a federal, multi-national, democratic resolution of the Balkan crisis sound forlorn when there seems to be no one capable of responding to them. Nonetheless, they are right and necessary and inescapable - there is no other solution possible.

The shattering of Yugoslavia - like the economic turmoil and racist resurgence gripping the rest of Europe - has revealed the stark choices facing humanity. The only force that can tilt the balance away from barbarism and towards socialism is a democratic movement from below stretching across many lands, a movement that can challenge the anarchy of capitalism with a new internationalism. Dauntingly remote as it may appear, this goal must inform all our political activity.

While the left should unite in opposition to Western military intervention, we cannot allow that to be the end of the matter. Our muddled responses to the disintegration of Yugoslavia have shown the urgent need for honest and sustained debate on a wide range of questions, from the nature of contemporary nationalism to the role of the peace movement in the post-Cold War world. *Briefing* hopes to continue to publish (see preceding pages), diverse socialist views on the complex issues thrown up by the Balkan tragedy.

Somalia: aid goes to market

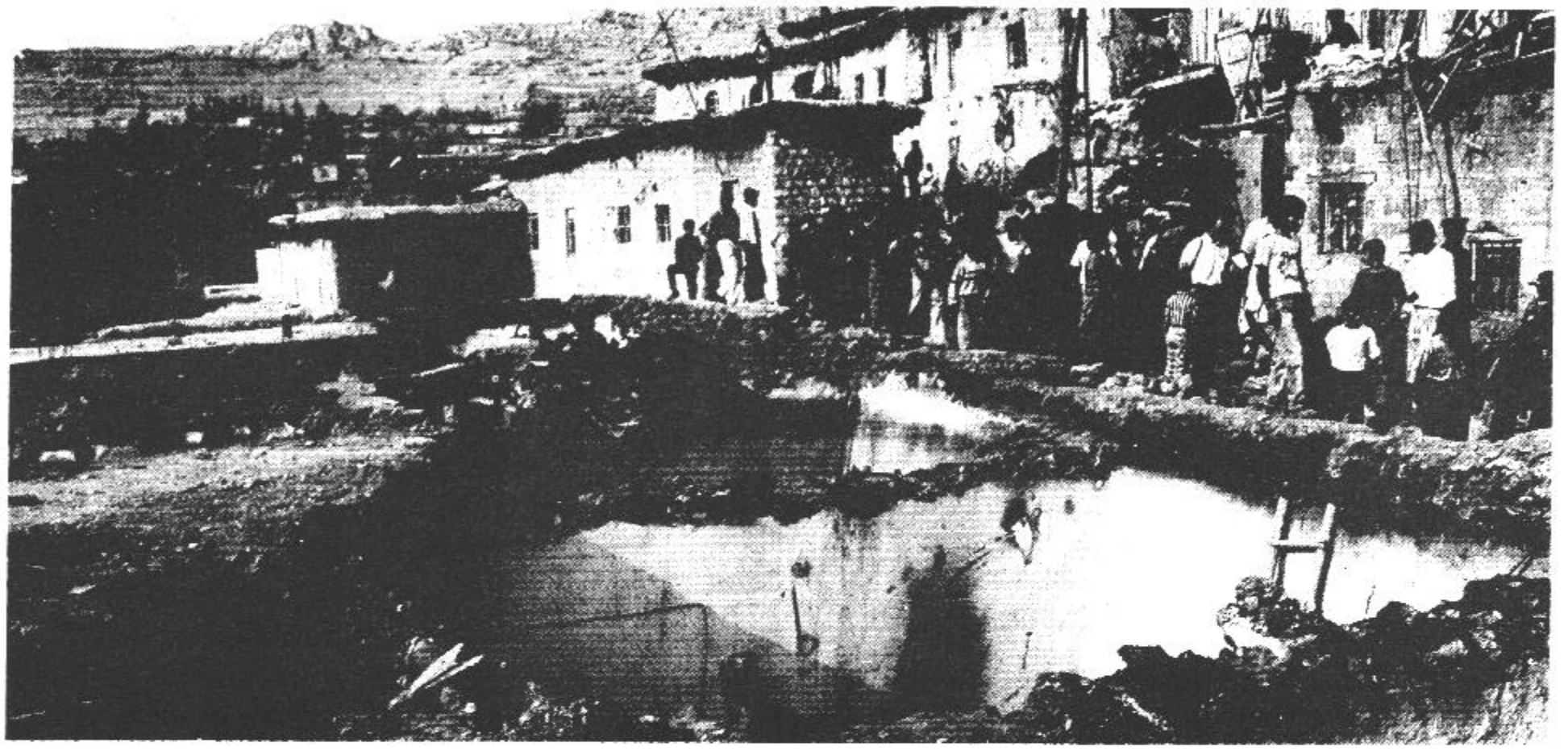
Liz Phillipson reports: A woman leaves a food distribution centre, walks down the road with her meagre parcel, and, while still in sight of the relief workers, is shot dead. Her food is then stolen. This is Somalia today. Only one incident in that war torn, drought-ridden country's litany of death, starvation and degradation.

Months before the famine in Somalia hit the headlines the Western embassies and consulates had already emptied. The diplomats knew just what they were leaving behind. They reported the forthcoming disaster to their governments. Yet it was only after the disaster happened, when public opinion, inflamed by terrible scenes on TV, demanded action, that any sense of urgency was detectable.

Food distribution in these circumstances is always difficult. Conventional wisdom dictates that flooding a developing country with free or even cheap food undermines indigenous agriculture and market distribution systems. However, Somalia's infrastructure no longer exists. Social relations are shattered. At the moment food, not money, is currency. What is needed now is to open the floodgates, to get food pouring into the country - in order to devalue it as a scarce commodity of exchange worth killing for. If enough food were pushed into Somalia, by whatever means, it would cease to be currency and women could collect food for their families from distribution centres in safety.

The UN now talks of the monetisation of aid: reserving a part for free distribution and selling the rest at a low price to local merchants for them to distribute by their own means. The argument is that the merchants have their own protection (i.e. they are allied to one or other of the warring parties) and that, in any event, those with guns are less likely to use them against the merchants because they need the merchants to continue to bring any goods at all into the country. Those who can afford will then buy food from the merchants and those who are hoarding food (though there is not a great deal of this) would be persuaded to release it.

In Somalia's current condition it seems unlikely that merchants, markets and consumers will behave as the UN envisages. The reason that people kill for food in Somalia is simple: there is precious little of it around. More food, lots more, now, is the only answer. International institutions' obsession with markets will contribute little to the feeding of Somalia today or the reconciliation and rebuilding process in the future.



Pogrom in Sirnak

Ihsan Qadir
Kurdistan Focus

MANY PEOPLE in Turkey had high expectations when the coalition government of Suleiman Demirel and Erdal Inonu came to power in October 1991. The new government had promised radical changes in relation to human and trade union rights and, most importantly, a "just" solution of the Kurdish problem which was threatening to tear Turkey apart. Even more promising, for the first time in Turkey's history, a political party closely identified with the Kurdish national movement had managed to secure representation (over 20 members) in the Turkish parliament.

But it was not long before the rhetoric of compromise and tolerance was replaced with the reality of armed repression. In the face of mounting evidence of torture and harassment by police in Kurdish areas, the government did nothing. This weakness and indecisiveness benefitted the security services. In Kurdistan, democratic rights of all kinds were curtailed by local commanders and the Turkish army was allowed to intensify its war against Kurdish civilians.

The early double talk about "democratic values" and "the rule of law" gave way to "shoot to kill" orders. "We recognise Kurdish reality" (Suleiman Demirel in a speech last year in Kurdistan) became "No more reforms, no more niceness and softness" (President Ozal after the recent Sirnak events).

The Turkish army now has a completely free hand. The government has branded the whole of the Kurdish national movement as "terrorist".

In the last eight months the government has actively encouraged the killing of journalists who dared to report on Turkish atrocities in Kurdistan. So far eight have been assassinated - all the killers are walking free. The Prime Minister excused the killings saying, "They were not journalists but militants."

Worse was to come on the night of August 18th, when the inhabitants of an ancient town near the Iraqi Kurdish border, Sirnak, woke to the sound of artillery fire. The electricity supply was demolished by an initial strike. Then the Turkish army went on the rampage. The town was closed to visitors for days. Eyewitnesses saw the army setting fire to houses and shops, forcing the people to flee. The ground troops were supported by aerial bombardment.

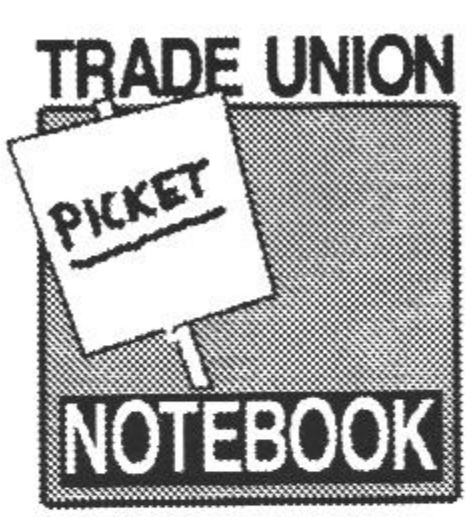
The bombardment of the town continued for fifty hours. In the end not a single building was left untouched. Virtually the entire town - over 30,000 people - fled their homes, seeking refuge in nearby towns and villages. Sirnak suddenly became a ghost town with only soldiers and dogs prowling its empty streets.

What has happened in Sirnak is an escalation of Turkish efforts to suppress once and for all any Kurdish demand for self-determination and self-rule. Another pogrom took place in Cukurca only two weeks after the Sirnak massacre. It is now clear that the army is engaged in faking PKK attacks on towns so that it has an excuse to unleash a full offensive on the Kurdish people. An inhuman, barbaric destruction of Kurdish population centres is now underway on a daily basis in Turkey.

The West is openly conniving with Turkey. Due to geo-political considerations in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and I believe in the Balkans, Turkey is held up by the West to emerging Islamic and Turkic nations as the example of an ideal Islamic country.

The British government is intent on keeping its criminal silence on Turkey's policy. In the past this silence was excused with the argument that in order to protect Kurds in Iraq, the West needed Turkish co-operation in using allied air power operating from US bases inside Turkey. But since last year the Turkish army has itself staged repeated air raids on civilian areas in Iraqi Kurdistan, killing many innocent people. The best protection for Kurdish people in Iraq will be the withdrawal of the Turkish army from Kurdish areas in Turkey.

The British labour movement must raise an outcry against John Major's complicity in the massacres at Sirnak and elsewhere. It has to make the cause of Kurdish self-determination its own. ❑



Most Boring Trade Union Journal of the Month (continued)

GAVIN LAIRD, General Secretary of the newly merged AEEU has called on the TUC to "face up to reality" and in particular to review its Bridlington procedures - which other unions might use to stop the AEEU poaching their members. After the merger with the hated EETPU, Laird clearly has his sights on other trades unions.

Amidst adverts for such essential trade union services as "How do I buy or sell shares?" and sexist drivel from *Sun* columnist Richard Littlejohn, the latest edition of the AEEU *Journal* includes an astonishing outburst by Tony Blair in which the Labour Shadow Home Secretary promises to "pursue the Tories relentlessly," "attack them" and "prosecute our role as an opposition vigorously," using, of course, "the new life and heart in the large number of new MPs."

Comment of the issue, though, must go to Charlie Whelan, the AEEU's Press Officer, who berates BBC correspondent Nick Jones for quoting private conversations in his book on the 1992 general election. "I must say that as one of those working in the Labour Party press office during the election, I spoke to Nick and it was not until later I discovered he was writing a book. Once I realised this I was obviously more circumspect with what I said." And the AEEU pay this wally to work for them?

The outrageous refusal of *Locomotive Journal* to heed *Briefing*'s past criticisms means that once again this month the ASLEF vehicle has shunt its way into the vanguard (or possibly guard's van) position. The front page picture features a group of old men sitting around a table. Page five is enlivened with a photo of John Prescott with his mouth open.

Then there's the out-of-focus colour pic of a branch banner at Tolpuddle. It's OK to elect a General Secretary who looks like Herman Munster but why include his picture in what appears to be a mortuary? Pride of place, though, must go to page six, most of which is devoted to reprinting a list of the circulars sent out from Head Office.

The most exciting union paper to find its way to the *Briefing* office in recent weeks is the OILC's *Blow Out* which reveals offshore "blacklists" of union activists along with - heavens above - tales of successful strike action (even if it is in the Norwegian section of the North Sea).

A successful inaugural conference pledged that OILC would be "run by the members, for the members with a mininum of bullshit." The paper brings home the dangers faced by workers in the oil industry, but with a freshness and combativeness missing in the rest of the trade union press. ❑

Strike at 10 Downing St.

AT 10 DOWNING Street, Smethwick, Burnsall Ltd pays low wages for women to work long hours in dangerous conditions in its electro-plating factory.

Some months ago, eleven of the women workers lodged equal pay claims with an industrial tribunal. They were being paid £20-£30 per week less than their male colleagues, but were fully supported by the men. In June, Burnsall's mainly Asian workforce voted unanimously for all-out strike action, which is still continuing. The company quickly sacked the entire workforce and now survives by using scab labour. The workers demands include: equal pay; a clear up of the many factory hazards; recognition of their union, the GMB; an end to excessive overtime (60 hours weeks were not uncommon): and reinstatement of a worker sacked for protesting against this.

The DSS has decided to pay unemployment benefit, having declared the workers on justified though "unauthorised leave of absence". The strikers have been touring the country seeking support from the TUC and Labour Party conferences at Blackpool.

Donations and information from Jo Quigley, GMB, 021 550 4888.

Construction Safety Campaign

Lobby of Parliament

November 25th

supported by Joint Steering Committee

Hackney Trades Union Council

Sends greetings to the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool

— and calls on all delegates to support a decent retirement pension for all workers equal to two thirds of the average wage!

Derek Kotz (President)
Peter Shield (Secretary)
Keith Veness (Treasurer)

Piccadilly Four vs. BR

British Rail has sacked four RMT activists in Manchester. **S.R. Driver** reports on local strike action accompanied by vacillation by national union officials.

IN WHAT appears to be a confrontation deliberately set up by British Rail, four Guards LDC representatives (eg. shop stewards) have been sacked at Manchester Piccadilly station. Whilst local support is strong, with a two-to-one vote in favour of strike action to defend the four, the RMT nationally has vacillated.

Having pledged full support the RMT General Grades Committee (i.e. the rail section national executive) bowed to legal "advice" to call off a planned local day of action on September 11th. Attempts at behind-the-scenes deals have failed so the GGC must now bite the bullet. If the four are to win reinstatement the RMT nationally must be prepared to accept a legal risk and extend the dispute across the country.

It is clear that BR see this dispute as far more than a local issue. The RMT must do the same. If BR can get away with sacking the Piccadilly activists no union representatives would be safe anywhere else.

The origins of this dispute go back to February 1991 when a local agreement was reached over rostering arrangements. On August 19th, when it appeared that the agreement was being contravened by BR, the Piccadilly LDC asked management to abide by existing procedures. Management agreed.

The next day supervisors were once again contravening the procedure. So when the LDC asked management to sort things out they thought it would be straightforward. Instead management went into hiding. When guards understandably refused to start work until the situation was clarified management suddenly reappeared with four letters, previously prepared, instantly dismissing the four LDC representatives.

One dismissal letter was hand delivered to the representative's wife, alone at home late at night. It was the first she knew of the issue. In all four cases agreed disciplinary procedures had been deliberately broken.

The local response was swift: an immediate walk-out followed by an all-day strike. But after national intervention the guards reluctantly returned to work to await a ballot to make their action legally "safe" for the union to support. At the same time they were promised a national ballot if local action failed to resolve the issue.

Despite further management intimidation and harassment the local ballot result was magnificent. Over two-to-one in favour of action up to an indefinite strike. The GGC approved a series of 24-hour strikes to start on September 11th.

Then the legal officers got to work in earnest. In hastily called national negotiations BR offered to allow the LDC members to go before an appeal hearing on condition that the strike action was called off. Given that the four should have had the right to appeal in any case this was hardly a major compromise. But following advice from the union's legal officers the GGC shamefully voted 11 to 7 to accept the deal. The action was halted.

To add insult to injury, the union's national officials had already decided that in order to be legally pure they could not send out any details of what was happening to the rest of the union. Only a month after the sacking was any official communication on the issue sent from Unity House to RMT branches. It has been left to the Manchester No.1 Branch itself and union activists across the country to raise it.

The Manchester Guards have asked for a recall of the Traincrew Conference (the RMT's national sector-based organisation covering their grade) and have the support of the Conference's officers in this, but the move has so far been blocked by the national officials.

Predictably, the appeal hearings merely confirmed the dismissal notices. BR had got what they wanted, the dispute sidelined for another week and those involved demobilised. The GGC has now agreed to reinstate the 24-hour strike programme but as this is being written BR are in court trying to get an injunction.

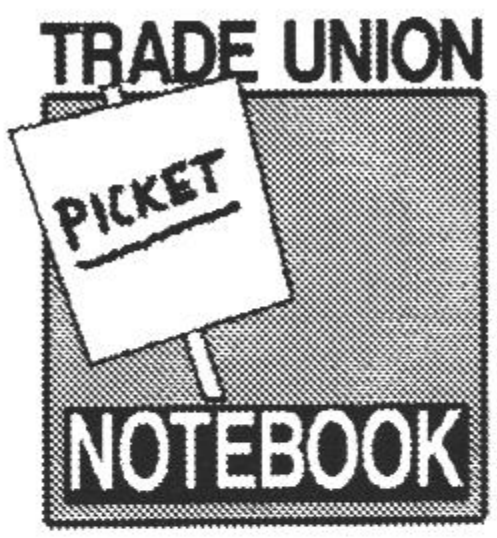
Despite the national vacillations the Piccadilly workers remain strong. Support is coming in from the union's rank-and-file around the country. Special meetings have been called in Sheffield, London, Bristol and elsewhere.

Now the union leadership must decide whether it is going to make a stand. As the sacked workers have said, "Sacking the Piccadilly Guards LDC is not just a local issue. It goes to the very basis of trade unionism on the rail: the right to elect LDC members without fear of intimidation or victimisation. This dispute must be fought nationally. The campaign for a "yes" vote in the national ballot must begin now."

Union officials argue that we cannot afford to ignore the law, but it is clear that we cannot afford not to. The GGC must accept the risks and extend the action. Anything less will not only fail to defend the four LDC members, it will give the green light to BR to attack any activist who tries to oppose management plans.

● *STOP PRESS: RMT suspend action as BR obtain injunction.*

● **Messages of support, requests for speakers and financial help urgently to: Manchester Piccadilly Guards c/o 9 Shelford Avenue, Gorton, Manchester M18 7DE; cheques to Manchester Piccadilly Guards Hardship fund.**



Nalgo bashing: sport of Labour Councils

NEWHAM LABOUR Council has been in dispute with NALGO since January 1992 over compulsory redundancy proposals. Selective strike action began in the Poll Tax and finance sections, joined by housing benefit staff in May.

In July the Poll Tax and finance sections were forced back to work when the Council sent out letters threatening them all with the sack, despite the national policy of the Labour Party (stated in *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change*) that Labour Councils would not use the Tory anti-union laws to sack strikers.

Housing benefit stayed out and in August the strike became all-out. From the beginning of the school term in September, between 13,000 and 15,000 Newham staff have been on strike.

The Council took NALGO to Court, using the Tory anti-union laws, claiming that NALGO had not balloted for all-out strike action. The Council won at the first hearing, but the decision was overturned in favour of NALGO by the Court of Appeal, who ordered the Council to pay court costs estimated at £100,000. The Council is seeking leave to appeal to the House of Lords, but NALGO has received legal advice that the Council is unlikely to succeed.

Meanwhile, the Council is bringing in agency staff to scab, but cannot possibly cover the entire striking workforce. Agencies have received advice from their professional organisation that the Employment Act 1974 prohibits agencies supplying staff specifically to do jobs normally done by people on strike.

The Council has been issuing weekly bulletins to the staff and the public, hiring a PR firm at an estimated cost of £10,000 per week.

Facing court costs, agency bills, PR costs and massive embarrassment, the Council is finally beginning to negotiate.

Meanwhile, in Islington, as part of its drive to make over £12 million cuts, the Council introduced a new redundancy package, cutting redeployment periods from six to three months, and introducing sickness, conduct and "performance" criteria into the selection of staff for redundancy. Alongside this, the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Personnel Committee publicly attacked the workforce in the local press, claiming that staff sickness time - not the Tory government - was responsible for the cuts.

In response, NALGO started selective strike action which may soon escalate into all-out action. The Council is refusing to negotiate. It is sending in agency staff to scab on the strikers, taking out hostile weekly adverts in the local press, planting headlines attacking the strikers and writing to the rest of the workforce condemning the strikers.

All the usual NALGO-bashing demagoguery has been deployed: the union's not affiliated to the Labour Party, it's infested with the SWP, its members are over-privileged compared to manual workers, etc., this time bolstered by a new, more open contempt for workers' rights and trade unionism in general. The Council is misrepresenting the NALGO action as a strike against the cuts. In fact, it is over the two distinct issues of redeployment/redundancy and the twinning of the neighbourhood offices Islington likes to pride itself on. It also claims that other unions do not support NALGO, but the NUPE branch is awaiting the result of NALGO's strike before it agrees to the redeployment/redundancy deal. Meanwhile, the Council attacks the NALGO strike for hurting the poor and vulnerable - which is rich coming from politicians who are drastically cutting all the services these people rely on.

Margaret Hodge's strategy is clear: she wants to deflect public anger over cuts in services away from either the government or the Council on to the workforce. As in Newham, Camden and too many other Labour-controlled authorities, NALGO is being provoked and made an example of in an attempt to establish arbitrary management dictatorship - the only answer to local government's prolonged financial crisis the New Realists can come up with. ❑

NUPE Hackney Officers Branch

sends greetings to the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool —

- ***Repeal all Anti-Union Laws***
- ***Start the Fightback in Local Government***

Keith Veness (Secretary)
Terry Sims (Chair)
Tony Cordell (Treasurer)

Euro-legacy of Pergamon strike

This time last year, delegates to Labour Party Conference were treated to the gratifying sight of an NEC recommendation to "oppose" a motion being overturned by a virtually unanimous vote. Five minutes of Larry Whitty pleading, promising, carping and pleading again had been to no avail. The issue? Robert Maxwell and his behaviour towards the NUJ at Pergamon Press. A **Pergamon striker** reports.

IN THE run-up to last year's Labour Conference, there remained the strong possibility that an early election date might be announced at the Tory Party conference the following week. Labour's leaders decided they would prefer to brave the humiliation of being turned over by Conference rather than risk ruffling the feathers of the owner of the only pro-Labour mass-circulation daily. As David Blunkett was reported to have put it: this is no time to open up a second front.

Alas, the Labour leadership were soon to be cruelly rewarded for their loyalty. A month later, Robert Maxwell plunged to his death. The revelations that followed of massive theft, fraud and financial mismanagement laid Labour wide open to charges of guilt by association, forcing an abrupt 180 degree turn-about to try to create as much space between the Party and the disgraced tycoon as possible.

There is little doubt that had the Labour leadership agreed to put its full weight behind the Pergamon 23, Maxwell would have been forced to come up with the goods. Indeed, just before he sold Pergamon Press to Dutch publishers Elsevier in May 1991, Maxwell's offer of up to 12 jobs at Pergamon was the direct result of the first and only intervention by the Labour leadership which, after two years, had finally decided the episode was too much of an embarrassment to be allowed to continue.

Yet even then, the intervention came not in the form of an unequivocal support for the principles being defended by the Pergamon 23, but only as an offer to help find a neutral mediator. When the negotiations hit the rocks at the final hurdle - with Maxwell insisting on victimising the strike leader - the Labour leadership maintained a publicly neutral stance while privately pressing the chapel to "do a deal".

After Maxwell's death, the Labour leadership washed their hands of the fate of the 23 despite the paper position passed by last year's conference pledging continued support. The strikers focused their attention on Amsterdam, headquarters of Pergamon's new owners, Elsevier.

Here they met with initial resistance from the official trade union movement which argued that as Pergamon had the legal right to sack strikers under English law, there was nothing they could do. As for the Dutch Labour Party, the PvdA, it hid behind the trade unions, claiming that the matter was an industrial issue into which they could not intervene. The PvdA group in the European Parliament went further, effectively sabotaging the work being done on the issue by the British Labour Group.

For ordinary Dutch trade unionists, however, it was not hard to see that if Elsevier could get away with exploiting the lack of worker protection in Britain, there would be little incentive for the company to employ staff in Amsterdam where wages and benefits are better and collective bargaining rights stronger.

With support at the grass-roots of the movement the Pergamon strikers began to build a constituency at the top of the movement willing to speak out in support of the principles of union recognition and the right to strike.

However, Elsevier top management remained confident that Dutch labour leaders, buried to their armpits in "pragmatism" and "social partnership", would never give the green light to the kind of action necessary to win the dispute. They finally presented an ultimatum to the NUJ - accept £85,000 in full and final settlement by August 12th or the offer will be withdrawn. In the days leading up to the deadline, the strikers mustered a powerful campaign involving four international federations and scores of journalists' unions which created divisions within Elsevier management and more flexibility on the question of reinstatement.

In contrast, the British Pergamon management stuck to its guns, and just when the final stage of brinkmanship required a steady head, the Chapel lost its nerve and accepted the offer.

Seven of the 21 Chapel members who remained opposed the settlement and are continuing to insist on their right to return to their jobs. They



Pergamon strikers in Amsterdam

believe, as do many of the Tilbury dockers and the Justice for Mineworkers Campaign, that the labour movement must not be allowed to walk away from these issues.

The demands for union rights and reinstatement at Pergamon have been taken up by an independent Dutch campaign "Justice for the Pergamon 23", which has been motivated in part by the perceived dangers cheap, non-unionised British labour poses to Elsevier employees in the Netherlands.

A similar campaign being set up in the UK deserves the full support of anyone who believes that our future lies in joining with workers elsewhere in Europe to defend our rights whenever they come under attack. Waiting for crumbs from the Maastricht table is no solution. The labour movement has to be made to find ways of defending the people who have been victimised for standing up in its defence.

● **Justice for the Pergamon 23 — founding meeting. Wednesday October 27th 6.30pm, Sols Arms, Hampstead Road, London N1 (Warren Street tube). Call Mark Metcalfe, Hackney Trade Union Resource Centre, 071-249-8086.**

REVIEWS

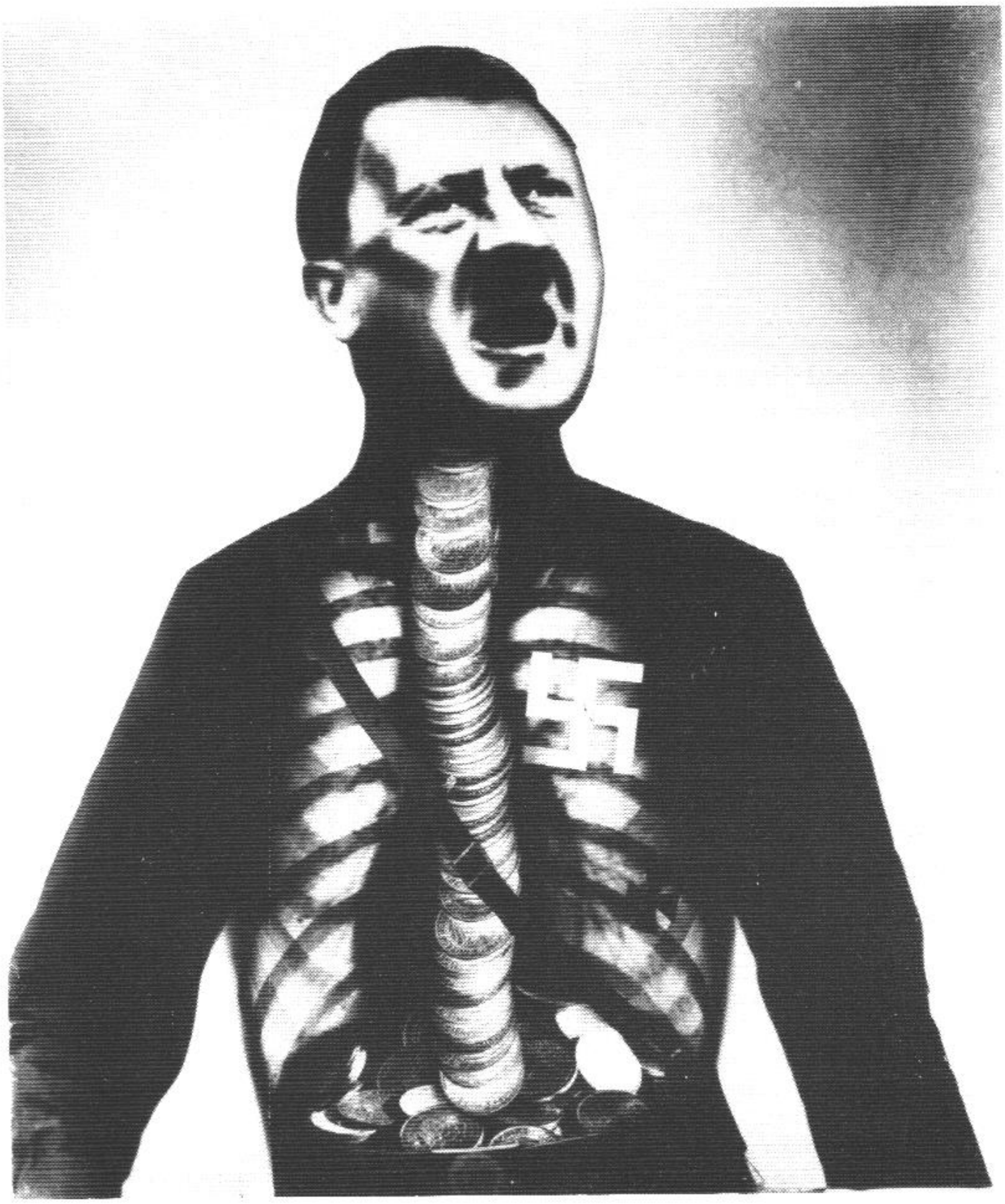
the art of attack

Richard Hanford urges socialists not to miss "John Heartfield" and "The Cutting Edge", two exhibitions of satirical political imagery currently at The Barbican Art Gallery, London.

"Use photography as a weapon," proclaimed John Heartfield (1891-1968), pioneer of political photomontage. Born Helmut Herzfeld in Berlin, he anglicised his name as a protest against German xenophobia.

This most comprehensive collection of his work opens with an authentic re-creation of the First Dada International Fair of 1920 in Berlin. This is surprisingly dull but a documentary video, "Zygosis - John Heartfield and the Political Image" brings the exhibition to life. Some 300 photomontages are on display, covering an astonishing range of manipulated imagery with which the artist served the Communist cause and bravely attacked the rise of Hitler's Nazis.

Throughout the thirties he worked for *AIZ*, the Workers Illustrated Newspaper. His prime target was always the capitalist class. After years in exile in Prague and London - where he worked for papers such as *Picture Post* and *Reynolds News* - he returned to Berlin in 1950 and worked on stage designs with the playwright Bertolt Brecht. Eventually he achieved the recognition he deserved in East Germany and beyond. Heartfield's influence is evident in much of the work included in the wide-ranging accompanying exhibition "The Cutting Edge". This selection of satirical material by contemporary British artists features some instantly recognisable exhibits. Fluck and Law's "Spitting Image" version of "The Last Supper", with Thatcher in the unlikely role of Christ at table with her Cabinet disciples, brought accusations of blasphemy from some outraged Church worthies. There are excellent, hard-hitting cartoons by Ralph Steadman, Gerald Scarfe and others, but apart from Peter Kennard's photomontages, most lack the incisive political insight of Heartfield. They serve to ridicule rather than retaliate.



It is well worth negotiating the maze of The Barbican to find the Art Gallery and paying £2.50/£4.50 to view these exhibitions. They end on October 18th. The John Heartfield retrospective then moves on to the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (November 20th -January 10th, 1993) and National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (January 30th - March 28th, 1993) and thence to the USA.

Adolf the Superman swallows gold and spouts junk
17 July 1992 - John Heartfield



Good old New Realism?

Mike Phipps reviews *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-91* by Willie Thompson, Pluto Press, July 1992, £12.95 paperback.

THIS BOOK is everything you would expect from someone who joined the Communist Party thirty years ago and served on the editorial board of *Marxism Today*: myopic, one-sided and defeatist.

For Thompson the CP's biggest problem was not the policy of the Soviet leadership so slavishly followed by the CP for decades but the link with the Soviet Union itself. At the time of the CP's founding, British workers were apparently just too narrow and provincial to see themselves as part of an international movement. It comes as no surprise when Thompson explains the defeat of the 1926 General Strike not in terms of betrayal by the TUC leadership (largely glossed ever by CP chiefs) but as "the last hopeless stand of a labour movement which had been outmanoeuvred and defeated years earlier."

The book runs through the CP's grotesque line of the thirties, charting the enthusiasm of the *Daily Worker* for the Moscow trials and the way the Left Books initiative was used to give them intellectual legitimacy. But there is no real analysis of how or why this happened - only hand-wringing about how shameful this was in retrospect.

Thompson's history ignores the clashes during the war between sections of workers and a party committed to supporting Churchill's coalition government - although it is better on the internal crisis provoked by the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

Paradoxically the period in which Thompson was himself active receives the least overtly political treatment. Without a grasp of the wider social forces at work from the sixties, his narrative becomes an endless list of cabals, factional publications, bannings and expulsions. Clearly this is deliberate: Thompson, as a partisan of the "iconoclastic", "ironic" and "experimental" *Marxism Today*, wants to set himself above these vulgar squabbles.

There is little here of the commitment and sacrifice of rank and file workers who gave the party their trust and loyalty only to see it cynically exploited.

Culture shock

● THIS YEARS' SHELLEY bicentennary celebrations have been refreshing parts other revolutionaries cannot reach. True-blue Tory Horsham (the poet was born nearby) has played host to a variety of events, including a stirring lecture from "Red Shelley" author Paul Foot and a vegetarian school dinners day.

The venue for the international Shelley symposium in early October is Rostock, Germany - scene of recent neo-Nazi riots.

VERSO

Books for intelligent socialists (also available to the Shadow Cabinet)

Kevin Flack reviews *First Flight - the Origins of Anarcho-syndicalism in Britain* by Albert Meltzer, KSL Library, BM Hurricane, London WC1 3XX.

SOCIALISTS WHO have been impressed by the contribution of anarcho-syndicalists to the class struggle in recent years - the work of the Direct Action Movement in both the Poll Tax campaign and Anti-Fascist Action springs to mind - will be intrigued by this alternative angle on the history of the working class movement in Britain. Those of us lucky enough to have benefitted from discussions with Albert Meltzer, whose seventy years of struggle can produce an anecdote to put down any argument you put up, will recognise that there are lessons to be drawn from the rank-and-file traditions of anarcho-syndicalism and its healthy mistrust of the self-appointed leaders of the labour movement (who, of course, receive equal criticism in the pages of *Labour Briefing*).

However, reading *Direct Action* and other publications, I can't escape a feeling of loss. These comrades are setting themselves apart from a collective challenge to the bureaucracy in the unions and in the Labour Party, rather than fighting with us in the struggle for power.



Following our leader

MAJOR DAILY and Sunday newspapers have taken up the trail-blazing editorial, "Where's the opposition?", in last month's *Briefing*.

Under the headline "Mr Smith's over-loyal opposition", the *Guardian* reminded our invisible leader of his promise of "an attacking opposition, constantly calling the government to account for both their actions and their inactivity. This summer we will begin that sustained attack." The *Guardian* then asked: "When does summer begin for Labour?"

The *Mail on Sunday* demanded: "When will Labour find its voice?" The *Daily Express* ventured: "Perhaps Mr Smith should claim credit for creating a new political tactic - the summer inoffensive."

Undaunted by Fleet Street's stampede to *Briefing*'s corner, the Labour Party's official *Conference Guide* reports that "already, throughout the summer, with the new Shadow Cabinet in place, Labour has sustained a concerted onslaught on the government's economic record..."

It's this kind of unyielding consistency in defiance of fashion that will make **John Smith** one of Labour's greatest leaders.

Stand up for Terry!

THE BACKSTABBERS at Labour Party Head Office are continuing their underhanded attacks on affable London Region General Secretary **Terry Ashton**.

Having failed to pin the blame on him for the poor electoral results in London in 1990, they're now refusing to fill the vacancy for his PA/Office Manager. In a confidential memo, Terry describes this situation as "unacceptable and grossly damaging to the Regional Office."

Yes, we've got files on you, too, Terry!

Rumpole rumbled

SOCIALIST AUTHOR and barrister **John Mortimer** has disgraced himself with an outspoken defence of what he would term "fieldsports" and the rest of us would denounce as bloodthirsty butchery of Britain's wildlife.

Claiming Tolstoy as an ally (an inappropriate choice, as Leo eventually came down against hunting), he is quoted in *Wildlife*, journal of the League Against Cruel Sports, saying, "Hunters are, strangely enough, those who know most and care most about animals." And Herod would make an ideal nursery school teacher.

Ad nauseam

LABOUR'S OFFICIAL *Conference Guide* is graced this year with one of the ugliest covers in recent memory and more typographical errors than the *Grauniad* in its heyday.

There are full page adverts for drug multinational Merck, Nuclear Electric, BA, B&Q and the Labour Party's own "biodegradable pen" made of "corn starch material" and described as "easy to hold, warm and soft to the touch."

But even this is not as revolting as the interview with the ludicrously self-important **"Lord Healey of Riddlesden"**.

Reflecting on his long political career, Healey omits to mention his time in the Communist Party, describes his stint as defence Minister under Harold Wilson (collaborating with the American war against Vietnam and selling arms to all and sundry) as the "most exhilarating" period of his life, moans yet again about how he had to queue up with all the CLP delegates to speak at the 1976 Conference, is silent on the 1981 deputy leadership contest where the votes of a dozen MPs about to defect to the SDP saved him from defeat by Tony Benn and blames the 1992 general election defeat on "winters of discontent and extremism".

"When I was young and first involved in politics in the 1930s," Healey opines, "private enterprises were mainly owned by very rich men. Now they are owned by you and me through our pension funds, building societies and so on."

Protection money

BRIGHTON RESIDENTS are put out enough at having half their seafront cordoned off for the **Tory Party Conference**. They also have to bear half the costs of the biggest security operation ever seen on mainland Britain, almost twice as expensive as the last Tory Conference in the town in 1988. The colossal £2.2 million police operation works out at £275 spent protecting each Tory delegate.

On the job training

HAMPSTEAD AND Highgate residents who have been politely concealing their anxieties about the (lack of) political experience of their new Labour MP, **Glenda Jackson**, will have been relieved to read her response to a question from the local paper.

Asked if she would be working in forthcoming council by-elections in the constituency, Glenda replied, "I don't know what will happen until I have seen my diary commitments."

Durban duo

PROOF POSITIVE that the Cold War is over!

Mike Terry of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and **Mike Walsh** of the TUC International Section visited Durban together to participate in a high-powered conference on "the future of South Africa" sponsored by the British-South Africa Friendship Society, which in the past has been mainly concerned with staging junkets to persuade politicians, businessmen and journalists that apartheid wasn't really as bad as it was painted.

Still scabbing after all these years!

PAUL GALLAGHER, Eric Hammond's worthy successor as EETPU General Secretary, recently had the gall to describe his set-up as "the major union in the construction industry" - a big surprise to UCATT, the TGWU and the other building unions desperately trying to organise building sites in the teeth of opposition from fly-by-night contractors, Tory anti-union laws... and EETPU sweetheart deals with employers. At the TUC **"Snorin' Norman" Willis** meekly suggested that the EETPU should wind-up its building section to promote harmony. To date he has had no response, nor is he likely to.

One law for the rich — restraint for the rest

CONGRATULATIONS TO the BBC's *Panorama* for its September 14th programme exposing the obscene pay rises enjoyed by the **Captains of British Industry**.

There can be few more disgusting sights than watching the head of Argyll Ltd (owners of Safeway) leering over a checkout operator earning £3.50 an hour and then watching him justify his own salary of seven figures. Even worse, however, was the twit who is "Chairman" (sic) of North-West Water. He stormed out of the interview when the *Panorama* reporter dared to ask him what sort of example he thought he was setting the workforce by urging them to accept 4% wage rises and then voting himself 88%.

A nice touch was the conclusion, where they asked senior US business consultants to assess these people's worth. They found that most of the heads of Britain's biggest 30 companies were useless and would be unemployable in the USA, Japan or most of Europe. Trades unionists could have told them that - but it was nice to see it confirmed!

Cure thyself

THE CONFERENCE of Socialist Economists does a valuable job promoting debate in the labour movement. But can you trust the organisation to prescribe remedies for the country's dire economy when it paid out £500 in bank charges last year and lost £1,750 in bad debts?

Endless story

WE AWAIT with delight the proposed autobiography by Euro MP **Janey Buchan**. According to *Tribune*, its provisional title is 'Shits I have known'. Knowing Janey's somewhat critical attitude to the direction the Party has been heading in recent years, it could be a long volume.

Kellnet

THE FAX, they say, is becoming mightier than the sword. After Michael Parkinson flubbed his negotiation for a new multi-million pound radio programme conducted by fax, we now hear **Peter Kellner**, political columnist for the *Independent* (he isn't, nor are we) has been sacked by fax.

Yet another superfluous Kinnockite on the dole, it seems.

New kid on the block

Briefing readers will want to know the worst about our new managing editor, **Richard Hanford**, who next month takes over from the exhausted Mike Marqusee. After combing through the Walworth Road databank, we produced the following digest of some of the more unsavoury details.

OUR NEW managing editor lives in Henfield, Sussex, with Michele and dog Emma. An experienced grass-roots activist, he spent several years as secretary of Mid-Sussex CLP leading campaigns against privatisation and supporting strikes, animal welfare and building the LPYS.

Banned by Tory Councillors from staging rallies in local parks, he denounced them as "Jackbooted Jackasses" and gave a public reading in a park of the banned book *Spycatcher* at the height of the controversy.

He led an anti-Poll Tax march of 300 through the streets of commuter-belt Haywards Heath. As an anti-Poll Tax candidate he quadrupled the Labour vote in a by-election - only losing by a single vote. For this he was condemned by HQ bureaucrats for "seeking to damage the Party." As threats of a witch-hunt loomed, a Party officer was presented with a witch's hat at Halloween. It was marked: "Evidence to assist with your inquiries." Outraged by the lack of leadership opposition to the Gulf War, he branded Kinnock and Kaufman "as effective as Pinky and Perky", which achieved prominent local press coverage.


THEY'RE JUST LIKE PINKY AND PERKY

Local Labour man slams Kinnock and Kaufman

THE Mid Sussex 'looney left' have been given a dressing down by Labour Party chiefs for failing to tow the line on the Gulf War.

The constituency Labour party wants Britain to pull out of the war and give sanctions more time. This is at odds with Labour Party policy.

A spokesman for leader Neil Kinnock said:

Quick response to health emergency

SUPPORTERS OF North Oxfordshire Socialist Campaign Group have launched Banbury Health Emergency to defend the local Horton General Hospital, currently threatened with severe cutbacks. Tonsil operations have already been moved 23 miles away to Oxford and few if any staff who leave are being replaced.

Under the Slogan, "The fight for the Horton is a fight for our health service" BHE - within 36 hours of its launch - printed and distributed 1200 leaflets and collected hundreds of signatures on a petition. Future activities including street stalls, public meetings and lobbies are planned. BHE appeals to all individuals and organisations concerned with defence of the NHS to affiliate and/or make donations. Contact BHE, 33 Valley Road, Banbury, Oxon.

CONFERENCE OF THE LEFT

October 17th-18th

Hosted by the Socialist Movement and Chesterfield Labour Party.

The Winding Wheel, Chesterfield.

£2 unwaged, £8 low waged, £20 high waged/organisations.

Contact: Conference, Trades Council, Unit 15, The Arches, Span End, Coventry CV1 3JQ.

North London Troops Out Movement

A veto on peace — democracy and the unionist veto

Wednesday, October 28th, 8pm
Speakers: Geoff Bell (author) and Ron Finlayson (Fords shop Steward)
Roger Casement Centre
131 St. John's Way
London N19

Famous last words...

"These and all other Tory attacks must be totally resisted by Labour MPs and councillors who must also give complete support to each group of workers as they come into conflict with the government."
- Ken Livingstone

"There are no hidden secrets about being a lesbian. Any woman can be one. No qualifications are needed and we're not fussy! Actually we are very fussy - you have to be a woman. So if you've ever been tempted, try it."
- Mary Evans

"I'm simply a man who wears skirts. Not such a big deal you might say, but in our culture it rates as one of the cardinal sins."
- Les Tate

All from *London Labour Briefing*, October 1982


LONDON LABOUR 30p BRIEFING No 23 OCTOBER 1982

RESIST THE REGISTER

DON'T LET THEM SPLIT US!

by Audrey Wise

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

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



As a long standing reader of *Labour Briefing* and also an SWP member, I would like to claim the right of reply to Lisa Thompson's letter in the September issue (before Keith Flett jumps in!). A debate between socialists is always welcome and is a constant feature of *Briefing* but many of Lisa's points are misleading and some plainly vituperative.

Firstly, Lisa, we support the retention of Labours' union links because we are socialists, not anarchists. Labour without its union links (the bloc vote, political levy, etc.) would be a party without any organic links to the working class and Britain would then be returned to a parliamentary system akin to the 19th century. Also many of the best socialists and trades unionists continue to look to Labour in elections - they may not join it any more, but they continue to vote for it.

We might prefer the workers to storm the barricades, but we have to start where people really are and not where we would like them to be. This, I hope, self-evidently, does not preclude the building of a really socialist party.

Secondly, we don't believe it is "still 1968". We haven't noticed anything much kicking off in the Sorbonne and I'm not still playing with my rattle. I can assure Lisa that nobody need impress upon us how hard the Thatcher years were. I am one of those people Larry Whitty described so poetically "as really Thatcher's children". I was on the dole for six straight years after school. Lisa is no doubt aware that in those same years the Labour leadership did precious little for any of us. They reversed no trade union legislation, signally failed to protect us against the Poll Tax, failed to support the strikers and the health service, etc. Need I go on? In Liverpool where local Labour Party democracy was strong, the Party was atomised. Few people, even here, now consider working within Labour as a viable proposition. Lisa, however, goes further than attempting to pinpoint what she considers to be the SWP's false analysis over the last years; she attacks the party members themselves. Apparently nothing "pisses her off" more than a group of "predominantly middle class individuals" telling her what to do. Well, Lisa, as a working class socialist, nothing pisses me off more than the hoary old right-wing myth that all revolutionaries, Marxists, etc. are middle-class. To me, it's right up there with the view that all working class people wear flat-caps and shove whippets down their trousers. Just for the record, in Liverpool, the SWP is made up, of among other things, firefighters, nurses, plumbers, Ford workers, a whole glut of public and private sector workers and quite a few students. Our district, from what I've seen, is in no way unique.

Many of Lisa's other misguided and misleading statements I will have to leap over for lack of space, but here are a few facts:

1. Our membership is 7,000 not 3,000
2. The nature of the Eastern bloc is not "an abstraction". Think of what happened to the Western CPs. How are you to explain real socialism to a fighter in Eastern Europe?
3. We do support the absolute right of oppressed groups to organise independently - however, we believe in unity of all the oppressed (a position, Lisa, remarkably akin to one V.I. Lenin).
4. We do debate, in fact we actually encourage it (come to "Marxism" next year) and we believe democratic centralism compares very favourably to the modus operandi of a Labour ward - think about it.
5. The SWP did grow in periods of real struggle - Right to Work campaign, Pentonville, the rank-and-file movements - unlike the Labour left which grew primarily as an internal phenomena from 1980-81 onwards.
6. If we are "hopeless sectarians" how did we manage to organise over 1500 trade unionists with the affiliation of upwards of 200 trade union branches (including RMT, NUM, UCATT, NALGO, UCW, TGWU, MSF, etc.) to demonstrate at this years TUC?

This has been a longer letter than I would have liked, but as somebody once said "a lie is halfway round the world, while the truth is putting its boots on". Charges like those Lisa made cannot in all fairness be left to pass unanswered.

Briefing is a useful magazine for the whole left, but as such it has a responsibility not to be hijacked by any kind of sectarianism, by any organisation, and that includes the Labour Party's own.

Yours fraternally,
Pat Riordan
Liverpool SWP

I am sorry to see that *Briefing*, like sections of the tabloid press, does not want to let the facts get in the way of a good story.

I did not "publish the names of six left-wing councillors who allegedly had not paid their [poll] tax", as *Briefing* claims in its September issue.

I wrote to six comrades who have publicly advocated non-payment as a tactic to defeat the Poll Tax to point out that this political stance was neither acceptable to the Islington Council Labour Group or the Party, nor a relevant position now that the Tax had been abolished.

I made it clear when I later met four of these comrades at their request that I do not know whether or not they have paid their own poll tax; it is their public political position of support for deliberate non-payment which confuses voters about Labour's anti-Poll Tax policies. I wanted them to give assurances that they would not support deliberate non-payment.

This is what I put in my letter. It did leak to the local paper, and I suppose with hindsight that this is inevitable in town halls full of photocopiers. I have told them that I accept responsibility for this leak.

During the by-election campaign, I and other canvassers were challenged on the doorstep over what Labour intended to do about councillors who vote on how the Poll Tax revenue should be spent, but support non-payment by those able to pay. It is clear that this political stance harms our party; I hope comrades will reflect on the effects of their actions.

Yours fraternally,
Phil Kelly
Chief Whip
Islington Labour Group

I have been reading your paper for some five years now and was surprised to say the least to find an interview with the BBC's Misha Glenny in the pages of the September issue.

Is the level of political discussion so low on your Editorial Board that you have to seek assistance from sections of the bourgeois media on a subject as important as the current situation in the Balkans? I thought a serious socialist journal would have been able to come up with some conclusions of its own without subjecting its readers to patronising remarks such as "The left has to get it through its head". Indeed a serious socialist journal would be able to.

Can we look forward to a right of reply from Balfour Beatty to the JSC article? I hope not.

Marxism Today fell by the wayside partly because of its liberal editorial policy, i.e. interviews with David Owen, Edwina Currie, etc. and I fear the same fate befalling *Briefing* unless it ceases playing the class collaboration game.

Yours for socialism,
Mark Stratford

"You have to get rid of the idea that if you destroy the Serbs the Balkan problem goes away. Anyone who indulges in the demonisation of the Serbs - which is not to say that they have not been involved in appalling atrocities - is only compounding the problem and further encouraging the fascist forces within Serbia itself. This is not a tragedy caused by one psychotic nation but a structural problem pertaining to the dilemma of minority and majority rights within multi-national, multi-ethnic states and communities. The recognition of Croatia by German and other EC states without first seeking guarantees for the Serbian minority within Croatia was the critical mistake - it was certainly the death sentence for Bosnia." - Misha Glenny, *Labour Briefing*, September 1992.

How should socialists react to the Balkan war? How should we look at the role of the United Nations and the European Community? These are extremely intricate problems and it would be tempting to ignore the whole affair. But if we do we have abdicated our international responsibilities at a time when Europe is facing its greatest crisis since 1945.

The majority of the British left is now against any form of military intervention in the war, and is opposed to all the nationalist forces. This is to be welcomed. I would suggest that the Socialist Society should follow the stand of the Socialist Workers Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party in opposing all outside intervention. Misha Glenny makes a strong case for turning Yugoslavia into a UN protectorate. However, experience is now showing that this is unrealistic and - in the face of resistance from the warring parties - will result in a Lebanon-type debacle.

The Socialist Movement and its newspaper *Socialist*, with which the Socialist Society is closely associated, have possibly the worst record on the left for their stand on the issue. It has been suggested that supporting the Serbs is the equivalent to backing South African Boers (actually the left did once support them - against British imperialism). In its latest issue (September), *Socialist* has published what can only be called an extraordinary article comparing the condition of Bosnian Moslems with that of European Jewry in the death camps. As Simon Weisenthal has pointed out, this comparison is both obscene and politically highly dubious. It would be interesting to know of the author's opinion on the war of extermination being carried out by Islamic fundamentalists against the Christian and animist Africans in Sudan. Or indeed the role of Islam in the first genocide of this century, against Armenians, which some believe is now being repeated. Other articles in *Socialist* have consistently failed to report the true context of the war, as described (above) by Misha Glenny.

Socialists should oppose intervention not because they admire the Serbian leadership (far from it) nor because they wish to wash their hands of the matter. It is because we are internationalists that we should try as far as possible to stop the war being turned into a 'World' versus Serbia combat.

Yours,
Andrew Coates
Ipswich

If the SWP was really the sectarian monster that Lisa Thompson's absurd caricature suggests (September *Briefing*), this letter would be a 97-point rebuttal of her letter.

Briefing readers will be pleased to realise that I will confine myself to just two points.

Firstly, even sects have their uses. The Social Democratic Federation was an appalling sect but it held the banner of organised Marxism in this country for nearly 40 years and many of its members played central roles in the class struggle, perhaps because of their SDF membership, but more likely in spite of it.

Secondly it sometimes helps to test theoretical models in practice. If the SWP really was the sect Thompson suggests then it certainly would not have the impact and influence that it does have. That influence is earned by respect for political theory and practice and respect was never won by somebody handing down a line from on high to be followed robotically from below.

Finally, Thompson is right. It is a sign of how "weak and disorientated" the left is that such discussions have to take place. Your editorial which asks "Where's the opposition?" is closer to the mark.

There is opposition from council workers, from the unemployed, from those fighting racism and fascism and much else. I would suggest that you won't find much echo of the opposition or the fightback in John Smith's Labour Party. But that, for the moment, is not the central point. Rather, socialists of all kinds should be doing what they can to help build working class resistance to the Tory attacks to come. I hope that Thompson agrees and that, in future, the sectarian debates, which I enjoy as much as the next, can be left for the bar after the protest, march and meeting.

Yours fraternally,
Keith Flett
Tottenham

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Labour Party Conference Fringe Meeting
SCRAP THE CHILD SUPPORT ACT
Wednesday 30 Sept, 6.15pm
Lecture Hall, District Central Library
Queen Street, Blackpool

Labour Party Europe Conference
COUNTING WOMEN'S UNWAGED WORK- EUROPE & THE WORLD 1492-1992
Saturday 7 Nov, 1.15pm
Brighthelm Church & Community Centre
North Road, Brighton

Both meetings wheelchair accessible refreshments
Wages For Housework Campaign
71 Tonbridge Street London WC1H 9DZ
Tel (071) 837 7509 Fax 833 4817

"Not a single penny!"

THE IDEA seems simple - get ten people to tell their stories of how a local group fought the Poll Tax - but what emerges is much more.

The anti-Poll Tax Campaign was and is a grass-roots movement of thousands of ordinary people, not the political property of left groups. In the ten accounts in *Cause to be Proud*, the unique motivation and contribution of each individual is clearly stressed - the leaflet writers, designers, organisers, hecklers, singers and stallholders. "I've seen a woman who could scarcely walk, standing barring the door from sheriff officers," recalled one activist. "That to me is a political lesson." Another tells how she was arrested for fly-posting on her seventieth birthday!

The book is also a practical guide. The group's local leaflets are reproduced, along with photos of and commentaries on its main activities (pickets of the Labour Council, demos and disruption of bailiffs' poindings).

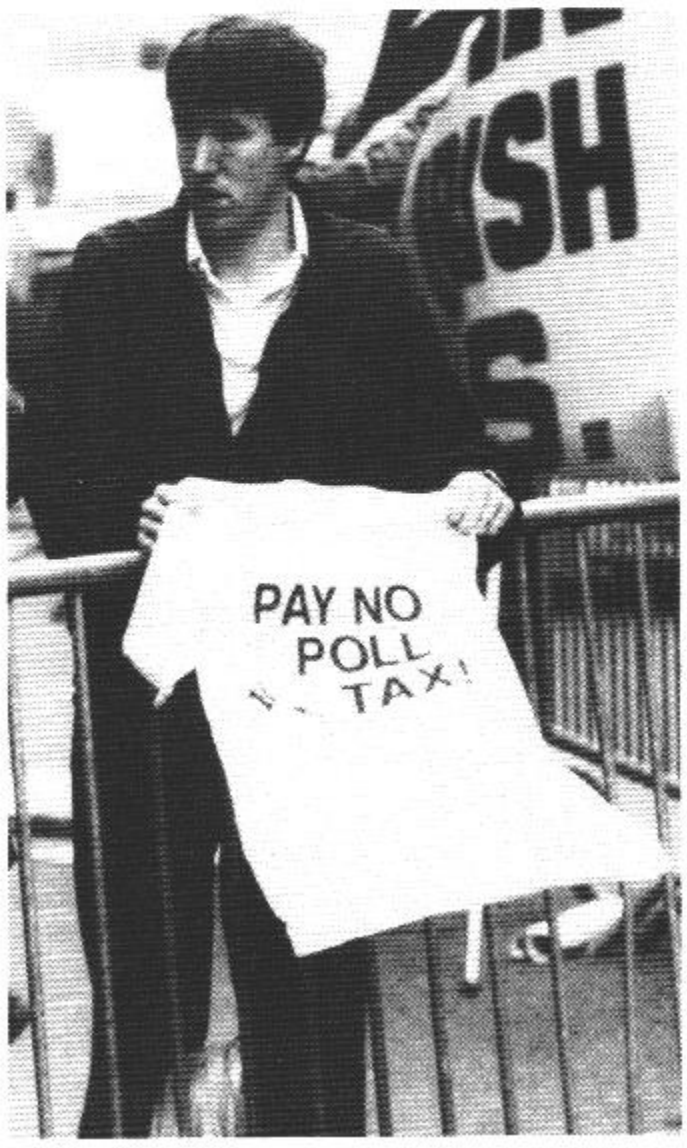
The contributors all mention the sense of solidarity the campaign generated, confirmed and strengthened by the eventual victory - a victory due to their own work and commitment.

"I've been both unable to pay and able to pay, and I've never paid a penny of it - I couldn't do it to myself, I couldn't bring myself to pay a single penny. It's precisely because I care about local services and local representation." - member of the Broughton/Inverleith Anti-Poll Tax Group in Edinburgh.

Where now? The group is still active against the bailiffs - but beyond that, when the Tax has been well and truly buried? Whilst many people remain disenchanted with Labour politicians and left group sectarianism, their enthusiasm for community-based campaigning has grown: "There's talk of local action groups and community newspapers in the air".

The Broughton/Inverleith group is clearly something special, but the experiences of the individuals involved will be familiar to many throughout the country. They confirm the simple truth that it was the actions of thousands of ordinary people that stopped the Poll Tax.

Cause to be Proud, a local group's struggle against the Poll Tax, edited by **John Dickie**, Gecko Press, £3.50 from 22 East Claremont Street, Edinburgh, EH7 4JP.



Poll Tax defiance

Coastal disaster

OVER 100 PEOPLE were killed at the start of September when a tidal wave hit Nicaragua's Pacific coast. Just two years after a hurricane flattened its Atlantic coast, the country must again count the cost to lives, agriculture and infrastructure.

One woman described what happened: "A sudden wind whipped the electricity cables into the air and the lights went out. Then I heard a horrifying noise, a deep fearsome roar so I went outside to see what was happening. I couldn't believe what I saw. Huge waves as high as the sky were heading towards us. I ran back into the house and screamed at the children to run, run for their lives. Suddenly I was drowning being tumbled around, crashing into posts and trees and walls. A nightmare experience. I don't remember very much until it calmed down and I set about looking for my children. I've found three of them, but I haven't seen the eldest since we ran out of the house."

Hundreds of houses have been destroyed along with drinking water systems. As always it is the poor who are worst hit.

Despite the disaster, long-term aid promised after the election of the Chamorro government is slow to materialise. The US suspended $100 million of aid as a means of forcing a more right-wing policy on the country, a tactic which has divided even the new regime.

An extraordinary Sandinista assembly held in August condemned the continued interference by the US in Nicaragua and highlighted covert attempts by the US to reorganise the "recontras" and unite them with extreme right-wing groups. The assembly also took a much sharper position on the government's economic policies which it called "a recipe for instability". Interviewed after the meeting, former president Daniel Ortega said the FSLN rejected "the capitalist model" and called for a policy that "benefited the popular sectors."

In a separate development, President Chamorro has ratified the revision to the penal code which gives Nicaragua the most repressive anti-lesbian and gay legislation in Latin America.

The law has been widely condemned around the world, including by Amnesty International. Its constitutionality will now be challenged in the Supreme Court.

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign is appealing for funds to provide shelter, food and clean water for those affected by the tidal wave. Nicaraguan people, especially those who have very little themselves, have already responded with enormous generosity and solidarity - now it's up to us!

Donations to: Earthquake Appeal, NSC, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG.

Further information from: Nicaragua Health Fund, 83 Margaret Street, London W1N 7HB, tel 071 580 4292, fax 071 436 1129.

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