SEPTEMBER 1992 £1.00

BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

who says you can't fight back?

inside ...

- OutRage!
- Joint Sites Committee, building from below
- Labour's lost youth
- Class traitor of the month

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

Lambeth low-down

LABOUR'S NATIONAL Constitutional Committee finally began hearing the cases of the suspended Lambeth councillors in July, fifteen months after the NEC launched its investigation into the Lambeth Labour Group.

After four days of hearings, the NCC panel expelled four councillors and suspended four others for varying lengths of time. There was little rhyme or reason either to the verdicts - all were found guilty of the charge of a "sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the Party" — or the sentences, which were wildly inconsistent. It was very much the revenge of the Lambeth LCC, which having failed to defeat the local left through democratic means leaned on its friends in Walworth Road to clear its path. At several of the hearings, Larry Whitty himself presented what passed for the NEC's case, though he leaned heavily on his adjutant Phil Cole, London Regional Organiser and LCC stalwart.

Steve French, one of those expelled, said, "This is the first time anyone has been expelled form the Party for breaking a Labour Group whip, which was the only concrete example of so-called prejudicial conduct Larry Whitty could cite. Despite the poor quality of the NEC's evidence and the strength of ours, the panel's decision was predetermined. It's an appalling beginning for the new Labour leadership. Along with other expelled comrades I intend to campaign for reinstatement and justice for all Party members."

In its efforts to get out the truth about the Lambeth purge, the Campaign Against the Witch-hunt is meeting resistance from embarrassed Labour full-timers. David Robertson, a Yorkshire Regional Organiser, has officially informed Boothferry CLP that it is not "in its best interests...to be associated with such an organisation and I would hope that the Party will not allow itself to be hoodwinked into believing that this is an organisation which in any way promotes justice within the Party." Contact the Campaign Against the Witch-hunt at 56 Ashby House, London SW9 7SL.

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Cover Photo:
London NHS demo by Bryn Griffiths

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Where's the opposition?



AS HUMANITY PLUNGES into what seems a tailspin of recession, racism, war and hunger, and as the British government renews its attacks on jobs, living standards, benefits, public services and democratic rights, Labour Party members can't help but wonder: where's the opposition?

Certainly, the Tories have problems - an intractable economy, splits over ERM and Maastricht, and slim 21-seat majority - but the new Labour leadership is not one of them. Obsessed with the regalia of Parliamentary opposition, with horse-trading over front bench portfolios, the leadership has offered nothing but lazy platitudes on almost every pressing question, from Bosnia and Somalia to recession and riots. Its refusal to mount any kind of offensive against the government must leave the 12 million who voted Labour on April 9th wondering why they bothered.

A turbulent world racked by inequality and injustice demands a response of sustained anger and indignation. But amidst the cacophony of reaction few socialist voices for hope and sanity can be heard. The Labour leadership does not even try to join them.

The job of the opposition is not to wait four or five years for another electoral tilt at office, but to educate, agitate and organise against the government here and now. At the very least, the Labour leadership should be mapping out an uncompromising campaign of Parliamentary disruption as part of a larger effort to shake the Tories from their precarious perch.

Of course, we're not going to wait for our leaders. We can't afford to. The work of building mass opposition to the Tories - the necessary seed bed for any renewal of socialism in this country - has to go on at the roots of the Labour Party, the trades unions and in our communities and workplaces.

For that purpose, a united, democratic, active Labour left is essential, as we have argued many times. The Socialist Campaign Group conference in Leeds was a small advance towards that goal. The decision to build a national network of SCG supporters was positive, but more important was the clear impatience with sectarian divisions and the determination to breathe socialist life into the Labour Party, despite our leaders.

THE ONE EXCEPTION to the rule of inertia in the Party hierarchy was the alacrity with which John Smith and Jack Cunningham gave their blessing to Western sabre-rattling in the Gulf. Within months of the conclusion of the Gulf War, it became obvious even to supporters of the war that its ostensible aims had been fraudulent. The destruction of 200,000 lives and the disruption of millions more had brought neither peace, stability nor democracy to the region.

The Gulf War inflicted staggering casualties yet left all the powers-that-be in the region - including Saddam Hussein - in command. Another Western attack now will do the same.

The idea that a lethal strike might be engineered to save George Bush's presidential arse has appalled even BBC commentators, but the Labour leadership swallow it without demur. The chain of command from the White House to 10 Downing Street to the Shadow Cabinet remains shamefully unbroken. The bogus US justifications for intervention are crying out to be exposed. Surely someone in our leadership can have the gumption to point out the contrast between the West's miserliness towards starving Somalia and its willingness to spend without limit wreaking mayhem and murder on Iraq.

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 September 6th. 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 September 14th. *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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Contact *Briefing* at PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU. Telephone: 081 985 6597; fax: 081 985 6785.

SIX HUNDRED Labour Party activists attended the Socialist Campaign Group day conference held in Leeds on June 20th. The bulk of those attending were independent grass-roots socialists, including many members of affiliated unions not normally seen at left-wing events. Discussion was open and democratic and impatience with sectarianism was palpable as was the desire for unity and organisation on the Labour left. A resolution calling on the Socialist Campaign Group to build a national network of its supporters in the constituencies was carried without opposition. Towards that end, a Working Party made up of MPs, rank-and-file activists and representatives of nationally organised left groups is being set up. A recall conference will be held early in 1993. For more information on the Working Party, contact Jeremy Corbyn MP, 129a Seven Sisters Road, London N7.

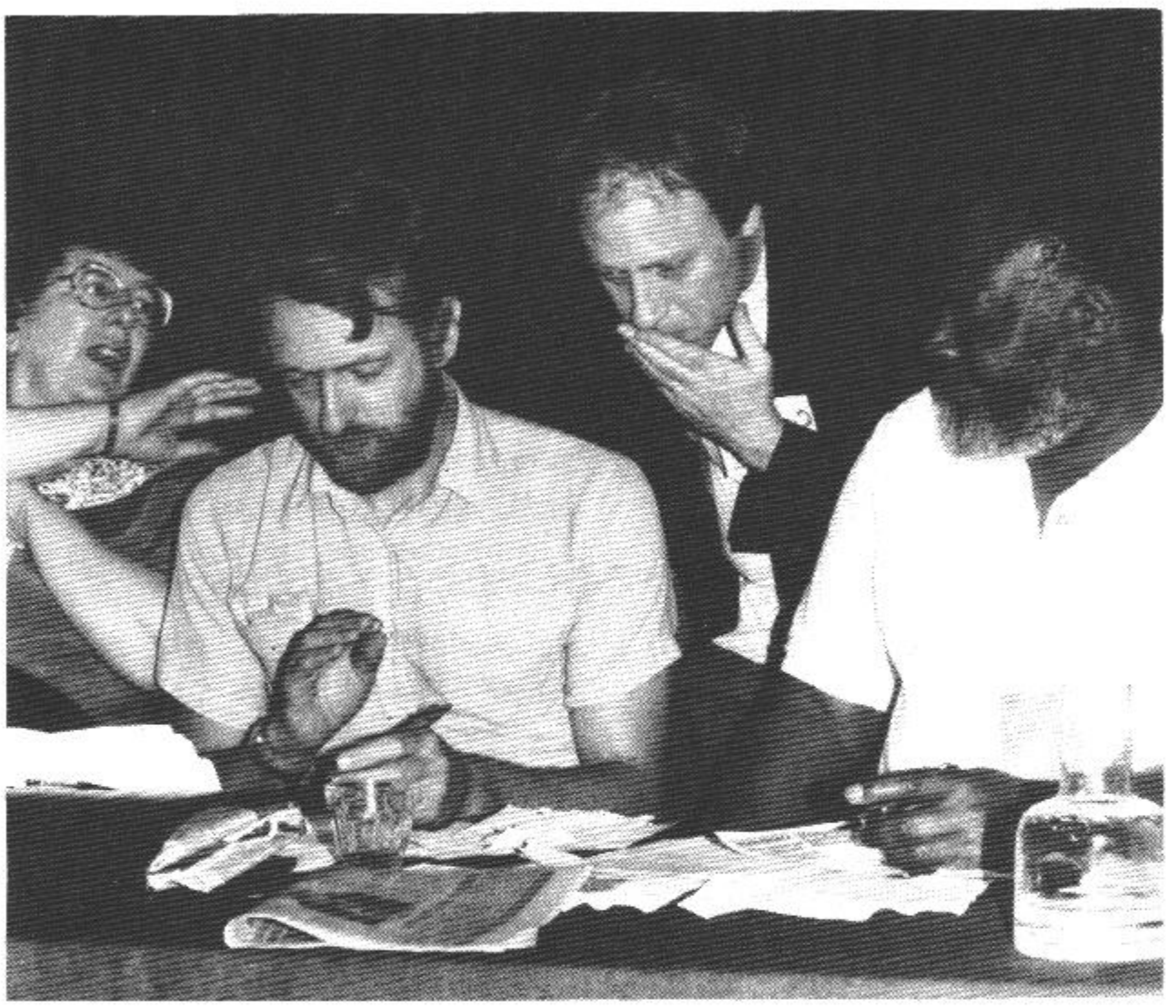


Photo: Bryn Griffiths

Leeds Conference: MPs Wise, Grant and Corbyn with Briefing editor Mike Marqusee.

New blood for the NEC

A FIELD OF twenty-five candidates makes this year's elections to the Constituency Section of the NEC more unpredictable than for several years. Of the present members, only Gerald Kaufman is standing down. Cook, Prescott, Gould and Blunkett are all seeking re-election, presumably proud of their record of support for every one of the disastrous twists and turns of the Kinnock regime. They are joined on the ballot paper by Kinnock himself (though he would clearly prefer a job in Brussels), Blair, Brown, Boateng, Soley, Richardson and Meacher. Although Black Sections are calling for support for Greenwich councillor Andrew Yunge Gordon, all other left organisations are backing this year's Socialist Campaign Group slate: Diane Abbott, Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Ken Livingstone, Alice Mahon, Dawn Primarolo and Dennis Skinner. With such a packed field it is vital that left activists get the message out to the members: only by backing the SCG slate will any distinctive socialist voices be heard on Labour's moribund NEC. The SCG is also backing a full slate of five for the NEC Women's Section: Doreen Cameron, Anni Marjoram, Loraine Monk, Pauline Purnell and Pam Tatlow. Leaflets with details of all the SCG candidates are available now from Jeremy Corbyn MP, 129a Seven Sisters Road, London N7; tel. 071 263 9450.

The SCG is also supporting Gavin Strang for Party treasurer. With Sam McLuskie's welcome retirement, the right is backing Tom Burlison, who has been the GMB's man in the NEC trade union section for several years. So confident is the GMB of Burlison's election as treasurer that it is not bothering to stand anyone else in the trade union section proper, leaving a field of fourteen to contest twelve places. This means that either Ken Capstick of the NUM or Charlie Kelly of UCATT will be joining the NEC, so that for once not all the trade union representatives will bend the knee before the Parliamentary leadership. The replacement of Eddie Haigh by Dan Duffy as the TGWU candidate is welcome, but the rejection of former NEC-member Barbara Switzer in favour of the dismal right-winger Judith Church by the MSF leadership is most definitely not.

Rally for Socialism

Manchester Town Hall

Thursday, September 10th
7:30pm

With: Tony Benn, Bernie Grant, Alice Mahon, Jeremy Corbyn and Pauline Purnell.

Poll Tax hangover

IN THE first half of 1992 3.9 million summonses were issued in England and Wales for non-payment of the Poll Tax. 2.6 million liability orders were issued. 4,980 court sittings were dedicated to Poll Tax arrears.In Scotland the total amount of unpaid Poll Tax is now over £525 million - 20% of projected Poll Tax revenue.

Following the lead given by Brent, Tory-controlled Barnet Council has decided to publish the names of local people who have had warrants for non-payment issued to them. Over in Labour-controlled Islington, chief whip and ex-*Tribune* editor Phil Kelly published the names of six left-wing councillors who allegedly had not paid their Tax in the local paper on the morning of three council by-elections, one of which was lost to the Tories, who thereby secured their first seat on the Council since the 70s.

Camden is to hire private investigators to find out where Poll Tax non-payers work so that attachment of earnings orders can be issued. The private investigators will be paid according to results - a tenner for every workplace located. The scheme is the brainchild of Camden finance chief Steve Bundred, who was, a lifetime ago, left-wing GLC member and *Labour Briefing* contributor. In Haringey, in an attempt to collect 38 million in unpaid Poll Tax, the Labour Council has begun deducting the £384 charge from 8000 local people on income support.

Meanwhile as many as 200 councils may find their Poll Tax collection disrupted as a result of summonsing errors produced by ICLCOMCIS computer software. The summonses are invalid where two years' debts - for both 1990-1 and 1991-2 - have been lumped together, rather than being listed separately.

At least five councils in London have been hit by the problem which first came to light in Lambeth, where prosecutions for non-payment have had to stop. One magistrate accused the council of "dishonest programming" and ordered it to send out 4,000 letters of apology.

The ICLCOMCIS software is apparently used by 60% of the boroughs in England, Scotland and Wales, so watch out for similar discrepancies elsewhere!

The software scandal was highlighted by London Fight the Poll Tax, who are appealing for funds to maintain their informative newsletter. Contact them c/o BM CRL, London WC1N 3XX, or phone John on 081 692 9181.

Anti-fascist smeared

INDEPENDENT anti-fascist researcher Larry O'Hara is circulating a statement supported by a dossier of material in an attempt to clear his name after the July 1992 issue of *Searchlight* called him an "errand boy" of fascist Patrick Harrington.

The article in question, written over the name of Ray Hill, but presumably with the approval of *Searchlight* editor Gerry Gable, attacks a recent piece by O'Hara in *Tribune* and slurs its author as "better known for his praise of Patrick Harrington's 'third positionists' and his attacks on *Searchlight* than for his support of the Labour Party".

In his *Tribune* article, which surveyed the current state of the British far right, O'Hara had suggested that Harrington's grouping, which left the National Front two years ago, had "dropped anti-semitism and moved away from fascism".

Regular readers of *Briefing* will be aware that an article by O'Hara in these pages drew an angry response from *Searchlight* and some sharp exchanges on the letters page. That there will be different assessments of developments within the far right by different observers is natural. However, *Searchlight*'s character assassination exceeds the limits of healthy debate.

O'Hara points out, "It is not just in my personal interests, but those of the anti-fascist movement as a whole that such calumny should not be accepted as truth.

The point is not whether every single thing I say about the far right is correct or not, whether you agree with this or that point.

The point is, *Searchlight* istrying to close me down as an independent researcher outside their orbit."

● FOUR OF THE seven people imprisoned for defending themselves during a police attack on an anti-Poll Tax demonstration in Colchester in April 1990 have had their sentences reduced on appeal. Christine Hammett, who was jailed for nine months for trying to stop a policeman beating a fellow protestor, was released as was Patrick Tyler, who had not attended the demonstration but had been in Colchester on the day to have a haircut and was picked up by a police snatch squad while waiting for the bus home.

The 2,000 strong anti-Poll Tax protest was the largest demonstration Colchester had ever seen. Mayhem broke out when police brought in from outside the area denied the marchers access to the High Street, prevented them entering the park where a rally had been scheduled and mounted an armoured charge into a densely packed crowd.

Messages of support should be sent to:

- Terry Frost, NL1911 D Wing, HMP Wayland, Thetford, Norwich
- Graham Mann, NL2861, HMP Norwich, Knox Road, Mousehold, Norwich
- Dean Mackie, HMP Norwich
- Damien Tomlinson, HMP Norwich
- Paul Gladwell, Youth Detention, HMP Norwich

ST. PANCRAS BRANCH LABOUR PARTY

PUBLIC MEETING

DO WE NEED CLASS POLITICS?

Speakers include:

TONY BENN MP

Andrew Murray (Camden Communist)
Richard Price (Workers News)
Terry Wilde (Democratic Left)
Phil Woodford

Wednesday 9 September, 7:45pm, Van Zuyt Hall, Arlington Road, London NW1

(Behind Marks and Spencers - nearest tube Camden Town)

Burston: beacon for the future

Keith Veness pays tribute to dauntless socialist pioneers Annie and Tom Higdon.

BURSTON LIES just off the A11 near Diss in Norfolk. It is in many ways a typical East Anglian village, with a country church and a pretty village green surrounded by picturesque cottages. What makes it different is the presence on the green of a building that is now a museum and tribute to one of the labour movement's most remarkable struggles and the couple who led it.

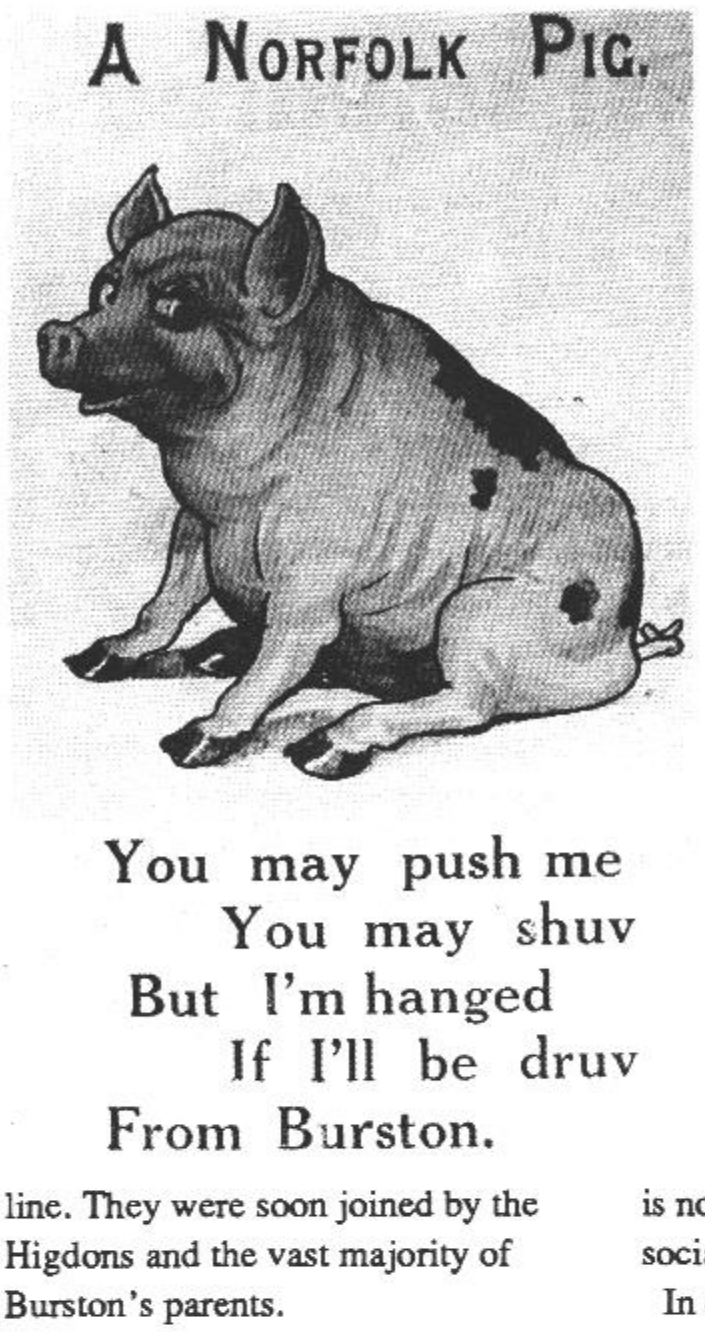
In 1902 teachers Annie and Tom Higdon obtained jobs as "Head Mistress" and "Assistant Teacher" at Wood Dalling in Norfolk. The Higdons, who were "Christian socialists", had already helped found unions and co-operative societies and their jobs in Wood Dalling allowed them to bring this experience to the Norfolk countryside. In those days the villages were dominated by the squire and landowner with the help of the local Anglican parson. Tom Higdon helped organise the farm labourers into a union. They then went on to sweep the board in the parish council elections - to the disgust of the parson and squire who were booted off!

Appalled at this, the Norfolk County Education Committee held a trumped-up enquiry and told the Higdons they either had to agree to a transfer or face disciplinary action. The Higdons were moved to Burston - an action the squirearchy were to regret bitterly.

Once in Burston, the Higdon's battle for social justice started again. In 1913 Tom and his labourer's union allies won control of the parish, once again dumping the local Tory rector and the rich farmers. Annie Higdon became the local community leader and adviser, with families going to her for help rather than to the church and landowners.

Eventually, the establishment attempted to frame the Higdons by alleging Annie had struck a child in class - a sick joke as Annie was a pacifist who opposed corporal punishment at a time when kids were regularly caned, strapped and slapped in most classrooms.

The Higdons were to be dismissed as of April 1st, 1914. On that morning they were met at the school by the authorities who demanded their keys. As they were handing them over, a sound of marching could be heard and around the green came sixty-six out of the seventy-two children at the school - on strike! Led by 13-year old Violet Potter the children formed a picket line. They were soon joined by the Higdons and the vast majority of Burston's parents.



The authorities tried every means to break the strike - including fining the parents. In retaliation, the strikers started an alternative school on the green - and trades unionists all over East Anglia collected money for the fines and school materials. The outbreak of the First World War weakened the hold of the farmers and landowners as labour became expensive and victimisation impossible.

Burston became the focal point of struggle as chartered train-loads of trades unionists arrived for rallies on the village green. Only six children went to the official "county school", whilst ten times that many opted for the strike school - which was temporarily located in an old carpenter's shop.

A national appeal was launched for funds, with the miners and rail unions being the major contributors. Local trades councils, co-op branches and ILP groups held regular collections and by 1917 £1,250 had been raised to purchase a prime site on the village green.

In May 1917 Violet Potter, the pupils' original "shop steward", cut the tape and handed the keys for the new school to Annie Higdon in the presence of a thousand people on the green.

The Higdons pioneered a "child-centred" education which attracted country-wide attention. Gradually the state school changed as well. New Labour governors encouraged friendly contact and rivalry between state and strike schools. In 1922 the two new Bolshevik trade delegation members in London chose to send their children to Burston and brought a signed letter from Lenin which is still on display in the school building. During the 1926 General Strike kids from the Nottingham coal field were put up and educated at Burston.

Tom Higdon died in 1939, after which the school wound down. Annie passed away in 1946. Both lie buried in Burston graveyard next to their beloved school building, which is now a monument owned by a socialist trust.

In early September each year a mass rally is held on Burston Green to commemorate the struggle. Last year Jo Richardson, Bill Morris and a speaker from NAS/UWT (the successor to the union to which the Higdons belonged) spoke to the crowd. The highlight, however, was a stirring oration from Dennis Skinner who started by saying: "It was a bloody good job these Higdons weren't New Realists or they would have packed up and gone home!"

This year's Burston Rally will be held on September 13th. ❑

The backlash against women

Liz Davies, Vice-Chair of Islington Council Women's Committee, reviews *Backlash - The Undeclared War Against Women* by Susan Faludi, published by Chatto & Windus, £9.99.

AREN'T YOU sick of endless articles telling you that feminism is dead, that women no longer need a women's movement? And then, seeking comfort in that movement, what do you find? An inactive, introspective movement many of whose former leaders seem to be proclaiming the joys of motherhood! Seems to proves the media's point, doesn't it?

Now comes a much needed antidote to the poison of post-feminism. *Backlash - the Undeclared War Against Women* by Susan Faludi was published in the United States a year ago and has now appeared in Britain. It is a work that will be hailed as one of the seminal polemics in women's long and definitely unfinished struggle for emancipation.

Faludi exposes the propaganda onslaught against women's rights and in particular the insidious argument that women have achieved all their demands. All jobs are now open to us, at equal pay. The New Man shares domestic responsibilities. Thatcher tells us that women can even become Prime Minister: "the battle for women's rights has been largely won, the days when they were demanded in strident tones should be gone forever".

Behind this celebration is the dark side of the "backlash". We are told, "You may be free and equal now, but you have never been more miserable." The women's movement has succeeded, it is said, but in doing so has made women profoundly unhappy.

Faludi provides examples of the "backlash" propaganda in adverts, theatre, newspapers, television. In the cinema, *Fatal Attraction* grossed millions. It portrayed a psychotic, single career woman so desperate for love and affection and to have a child that she turns homicidal and suicidal after a one-night stand. 1970s Hollywood movies included strong, single women such as Vanessa Redgrave's *Julia*. In the 1980s, we have Diane Keaton's *Baby Boom* in which a successful career woman finds fulfilment bringing up a baby and packaging her home-made baby food.

Faludi also documents changes in fashion, led by the barons of the fashion industry who fought against the "New Look" - a straightforward suit. After all, suits never go out of fashion, so women do not need to spend so much money on clothes. In reaction, designers produced long dresses, frills and puffball skirts. Women had more sense. Sales in suits continued to rise.

In the late 80s, several academic studies in the US purported to show that women who were single or divorced by their late thirties stood no chance of marrying. These studies became front-page news. Faludi exposes their statistical biases and false assumptions. Studies which showed contrary trends - which disproved the idea that there was a "man shortage" - received no media attention.

The "backlash" propaganda promoted the image of the rich, single career-woman who supposedly "has it all" - money, status, sexual partners - whilst underneath is desperate for a child, a husband and a return to happiness peeling the potatoes. Some women give up their status for these values; those who don't are driven mad.

Faludi documents women's real "post-feminist" situation. Women in Britain still earn on average 70% of men's wages, a difference of £42.44 billion annually. There is no evidence of men taking on a significant proportion of housework or childcare. Reproductive rights are under constant attack.

Despite all this, women persist in fighting back. American demonstrations in favour of a woman's right to choose have been huge. In Britain, the number of actions for equal pay or claims against sexual harassment increase every year. There are innumerable grass-roots campaigns led by women to save nurseries and public services.

The book concentrates on women in the US but Faludi has included British statistics for the British edition. There are some omissions which reflect Faludi's American liberal academic background. I would have welcomed some analysis of women's role in the labour movement and Labour Party. The way the Labour Party has combined attacks on women's autonomy and women's sections with proclamations of its feminist credentials via the appointment of a few well-dressed white women to the Front Bench seems an excellent example of the "backlash" in action.

This book is compelling and indispensable. It restores your faith that there is still a women's movement out there. There are still fights to be fought and battles to be won and women know it - which is why the establishment feels the need to continue its attack on feminism. ❑

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"The worst is possible"

Labour Briefing interviewed **Misha Glenny**, BBC World Service Central European correspondent, who has been covering the conflagration in the Balkans from close range.

LB: Where do you think the current steps towards military intervention will lead?

MG: Humanitarian aid is all well and good but it cannot solve the underlying problem. What we are seeing now is an attempt to carve up Bosnia between Serbia and Croatia and finish it off as an independent state. The Croats have an alliance with the Muslims against the Serbs but also, since early March, they have had discussions and even written agreements with the Serbs for a partition of Bosnia. What the Serbs and Croats appear to have agreed is a division of Bosnia which would give 65% of the territory to the Serbs, who make up 33% of the population, 35% of territory to the Croats, who make up 17% of the population, leaving 5% - or even less - to the Muslims, who make up 44% of the population. We will then see the extension of open Serbo-Croat warfare into what used to be Bosnia.

Is there then no hope for Bosnia at all?

The only way Bosnia can survive as a state is as a UN Protectorate. If this does not happen, if the UN refuses or fails to fulfil the function previously filled by the Ottomans, the Austrians and Tito - that of a neutralising, outside force - then there will be permanent war on Bosnian territory. There should be no illusions about Croatian intentions in Bosnia. Tudjman's attacks on the Bosnian leadership and his insistence on the cantonisation of Bosnia make it quite clear that the Croatian regime wishes to dismember Bosnia entirely. But any carve up of Bosnia by Serbia and Croatia would be the signal for Muslim males to launch a guerilla campaign of tremendous ferocity. Conflict would be perpetual.

"You have to get rid of the idea that if you destroy the Serbs the Balkan problem goes away"

To establish a UN Protectorate would be expensive and dangerous. To make it work, you would have to have a ceasefire, you would have to disarm all three armies and you would have to decapitate the three communities politically. At any time there would have been enormous difficulties in this - and now it is probably too late. Nonetheless, a UN Protectorate on this basis would be the only way to save Bosnia, to stop an extended Serbo-Croat War, and to neutralise the danger of conflict in Kosovo, Macedonia and a full-scale Balkan war.

Is there no hope of an internal solution to the conflict?

The internal forces for peace are finished. The tragedy of Bosnia began when communities started organising along national lines; once that had happened, conflict was inevitable. Now all the communities have been traumatised beyond all rational behaviour; the bulk of the male population have been turned into blind killers. The left in Britain and elsewhere must understand that this is not like the North of Ireland or the Basques where an oppressed community is locked in conflict with a state apparatus; in Bosnia, entire communities have armed themselves and are engaged in perpetual warfare without political aims or limits. 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. The central problem not only throughout the Balkans but also elsewhere in central and eastern Europe and the whole of the former-USSR is the question of the relation between majority and minority rights. How can former majority populations be persuaded to accept change in their status? How can minority rights be guaranteed without antagonising majorities? No international forum has even begun to address these root questions.

Is there any resonance for a pluralist, multi-national, federal solution?

No. After the collapse of the Communist regime in Yugoslavia there was a brief attempt to create progressive, civic political parties reaching across national lines. Unfortunately all of them were devastated by the rapid growth of the national groupings whose sole aim was the creation of nation-states. The influence of the others, the democrats and anti-nationalists, is now minimal within all the communities. There is a substantial opposition movement in Serbia but it has found Milosevic very hard to outwit. It is hamstrung because its own political project is too national, too close to Milosevic, whose nationalist premises it largely accepts.

What then should socialists in the west do?

It's no longer a question of what socialists should do; it's a question of what the European and US establishments should do if they want to stop the spread of conflict throughout the region. When I warned of the coming war in Yugoslavia several years ago I was accused of being an alarmist. I want to emphasise to *Briefing* readers that the worst is possible, that a pan-European war in which a host of national and ethnic groupings battle it out for territorial control, with huge migration and refugee crises arising from it, is a very real prospect - if there is not a coordinated effort to stop it now. What is needed is not only a UN Protectorate running Bosnia but also diplomatic efforts to hammer out a framework for a general solution to this broad problem with all the governments in the region. You have to say to the Serbs that Serbian minority rights in Croatia will be guaranteed - but that at the same time Kosovo must become self-governing. Such agreements would have to be repeated with all the regimes throughout the region. Any military intervention would have to be designed to promote political solutions, not just to punish the Serbs, which would compound the problem.

But isn't the cure you're proposing - Western intervention - worse than the disease?

The left has got to get it through its head that the stakes are extremely high. All three populations are now effectively fascisised; on the ground there is no opening for a liberal, no less a socialist solution. We have a choice between stabilising the situation through intervention and a slide into a much wider war which could start very quickly indeed. ❑

Queers with attitude

Peter Tatchell
OutRage!

HUNDREDS OF angry lesbians and gay men besieged the gates of Downing Street on July 25th in a dramatic sit-down protest which blockaded Whitehall and bought traffic to a standstill. They were protesting at "25 years of continuing second class citizenship". Organised by OutRage, the demonstration was timed to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act - a limited and begrudging reform which only partially decriminalised male homosexuality and which did nothing to remedy the broader social discrimination faced by both lesbians and gay men. Responding to the demo theme of 'Make a Noise for Freedom', the protesters created a deafening cacophony with whistles, drums, foghorns and tambourines.

At the gates of Downing Street, a copy of the 1967 Act was torn to shreds after speakers denounced it as a hated symbol of homophobia and inequality: it outlaws gay sex before the age of 21, bans homosexual relations involving more than two participants and criminalises attempts by gay men to cruise or chat-up each other in public places. There are no legal restrictions on similar heterosexual behaviour. Indeed, a quarter of a century after the 1967 Act, thousands of lesbians and gay men are still being sacked from their jobs, beaten up by queer-bashers, arrested for victimless behaviour, denied custody of their children and driven to attempt suicide.

From Downing Street, the high-spirited protest moved to the House of Commons, occupying Parliament Square to the dismay of police officers who seemed totally overwhelmed and helpless in the face of demonstrators determined to exercise their right to protest when and where they liked.

Refused access to the Queen Victoria Memorial in front of Buckingham Palace for a 'wild open-air party' to conclude the march, the protestors led the police on a merry chase down side streets. Eventually, sneaking around police lines and through St. James's Park, they finally made it to Buckingham Palace. It was a classic example of OutRage's unique style of political protest - exhilarating, confrontational, daring, imaginative, entertaining and unpredictable. Determined but non-belligerent, it outwitted the police at every turn.

The 25th July protest was the ninth action in the five month 'Equality Now!' campaign. The biggest pro-active civil rights campaign ever organised by the lesbian and gay movement in Britain, it has massively increased the media profile of the homosexual issue and helped generate a lot of public debate about homophobic discrimination - thereby adding new momentum to the pressure for law reform.

Dismissed by some on the Left as 'media stunts', OutRage's actions are deliberately intended to grab the headlines. In an age of modern telecommunications, it is the media, rather than the street demo or public meeting which is the principle means of getting ideas to the mass of the population. OutRage therefore quite consciously uses the media to project its radical agenda. This 'media aware' approach is intended to complement, not supplant, the equally valid efforts of other lesbian and gay activists in union branches and community groups.

Many of the 'Equality Now!' protests received worldwide media coverage, reaching an audience of hundreds of millions. Securing this international coverage was a very concrete way of helping lesbians and gay men in Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa where the homosexual rights movement is still either non-existent or weak and invisible.

Getting a media visibility for lesbian and gay issues is crucial to changing attitudes and challenging homophobia. It's a lesson that the left could usefully learn as it struggles to find ways of repopularising socialism. ❑



Photo: Steve Mayes

Who's afraid of science?

Chris Knight, University of East London and Lewisham East CLP, outlines the background to his sharp on-going polemic with the SWP leadership.

BOTH MARX and Engels knew that science - when fearlessly true to itself - is intrinsically revolutionary, and that it must recognise no other politics than its own. Engels wrote: "the more ruthlessly and disinterestedly science proceeds, the more it finds itself in harmony with the interests of the workers."

It's been all too easy for the left to forget this. Sometimes we're hardly better than the ruling class. We quote selectively, engage in special pleading, subtly tailor knowledge to suit one or other factional need. Right-wing politically motivated ideology is answered with a left-wing counterpart. Once we abandon what Engels termed "disinterestedness" we debase the currency, producing not empowering information but ultimately just myths. Sectional interests may need their various forms of myth. The international working class needs science, and only science.

Nothing is more divisive than a situation in which a "scientific" line can be fixed by bureaucratic manoeuvring, without accountability, the outcome depending on who got to the right meeting or who had sufficient rank in a particular organisation. Equally, nothing is more unifying than international intellectual accountability of the kind to which the scientific community aspires. Scientists make mistakes. They have political motivations like the rest of us. But despite this, genuine science proceeds. There is no natural scientist who can pull enough rank to suppress mistakes or invent some personal or ideological theory and impose it on the world in face of the evidence for long. Science is jealous of its collective store of knowledge, and quite collectivist and levelling in its intolerance of intellectual factionalism and individualism.

Yet science isn't "the truth", acknowledged and replicated identically by all scientists. It's inseparable from the life of a real community - the international scientific community. Whilst at present undeniably elitist, this has nonetheless much of that internationalism, internal accountability and discipline which we socialists must achieve if we are to form ourselves into an International of the kind Marx envisaged.

Because science is the consciousness of a real community, not a "party line" or set of imposed "truths", the crucial rules are those governing the internal life of the community itself. That means agreed rules of debate, institutions to ensure fairness in evaluating rival theories, impartial chairing, equal access to the physical means of publication, freedom of information, etc. Without those, there cannot possibly be any science, because science is above all a collective form of knowledge, which naturally turns into its opposite the moment sectional interests begin imposing their views in violation of the proper collective procedures.

The Socialist Workers Party has a record of taking scientific issues seriously and encouraging wide debate on the left, particularly at "Marxism", its annual summer school. One of its on-going debates concerns the origins of human culture and of the human species. At "Marxism" 1988, 1989 and 1990, sessions were held in which "gradualist" and "revolutionary" perspectives on human origins were set against one another in open debate. The leadership at this stage did not consider it appropriate to impose a fixed "line" on the details of events in the Ice Age, particularly since no inner-party debate on such issues had been held. In 1991, at the Marxism Summer School, the idea of a "human revolution" was still permitted to be argued from the floor. However, it was no longer a position which platform speakers could advocate in a workshop or debate. In 1992, members and supporters learned that the "gradualist" position espoused by Chris Harman, editor of *Socialist Worker*, has become the party "line". It then became still more difficult for the other side to be heard. The new line was signalled by the publication in *International Socialism* of an extremely hostile review by Chris Harman of my book, *Blood Relations, Menstruation and the Origins of Culture*, published last year by Yale University Press.

Harman's argues strongly that there was no "human revolution", gradualist Darwinian processes being sufficient to explain the emergence of human language, labour and consciousness. Although I disagree with it, I accept that his is a legitimate view within science and may even prove to be scientifically validated. Marx and Engels may have got it wrong. Science may come to disprove Marxism's traditional stress on the dialectical, revolutionary nature of all qualitative processes of change, including the transition from "ape" to human forms of social life. Should science demonstrate this to be the case, then we would have to accept it, regardless of politics. But in that case, intellectual honesty would require an admission that Marx and Engels were mistaken. What is surely impermissible is to argue against the dialectical/revolutionary position whilst at the same time claiming that this represents Marxism as traditionally understood. Unfortunately, this is what Chris Harman does.

Harman's stance poses two puzzles. First, why insist that the party must have a line at all on the details in the Ice Age? Second, given that a line is deemed necessary, why adopt the gradualist one, an outdated, minority position from the 1960s and early 1970s which in the last decade has been superseded by the "Human Revolution" idea?

My guess is that the answers are political, not scientific. The moment Marxists start trying to think about a "revolution" in the Ice Age - they're bound to start wondering about the social dynamics, the conflicts, the struggles of conflicting forces. And for certain "Marxists", this is a problem. For it can't possibly be "class" that was at issue at this early stage. So what can it have been?

Well the only theoretically possible answer is Engels' own. The dynamic can only have been sexual. There must have been a sexual revolution which led to what Engels termed the "primacy" of women in the "communistic household". And that's the problem. The difficulty for the SWP is that if you accept Engels full-bloodedly and in the light of modern science, it legitimates the concept of women's self-organisation. True, it legitimates it retrospectively - for women long ago in the Ice Age. But then, how do you stop the oppressed from drawing their own conclusions for today? It seems clear that rather than allow that political logic to begin to unfold, Harman and his colleagues have opted to ignore what science is saying on such issues, stand Marxism on its head - and deny that there was a "Human Revolution" at all!

The SWP can no more deny the human revolution than the bourgeoisie can deny the Russian Revolution - or the Pope in Copernicus' time could deny the earth's revolution around the sun.

Innocent!

Andy Parr
Shoreham CLP

ON DECEMBER 16th, 1975 Frank Johnson was helping his children decorate the family Christmas tree when he felt a gun in the back of his neck and heard an order: "don't fucking move". Ten months after the horrific killing of his friend and employer John Sheridan, he was being arrested for his murder.

His trial began on September 14th, 1976. As well as the murder charge he was accused of conspiring with David Smart and Jack Tierney - the latter a documented police agent provocateur - to rob Sheridan.

The only principle evidence against Frank were the statements made by his alleged accomplices. His counsel Alan Campbell QC moved to quash the indictment but was rejected. Frank, in despair, foolishly sacked Campbell and was left with no alternative but to conduct his own defence. Campbell had already deduced that the trial was a "fix" and a verified note in his handwriting confirms this. At an early stage he claimed Frank's acquittal was a "fait accompli".

The judge gave Frank two hours to prepare his case since "he claims he can do better than his counsel". He then graciously consented to allow him until the following morning. By the time he was back in Brixton he discovered many of his papers were missing. At "lights out" at 10pm he had no alternative but to stand on a chair and attempt to read what was left by the floodlights outside the prison.

The following morning he was assaulted by a prison officer on the grounds that he was being "done for sex". Frank explained that he had been charged with murder - the screw apologised!

Efforts to call his wife as a witness were thwarted by the passing of a note purporting to come from Mrs. Johnson to the effect that she did not wish to give evidence. She later strongly denied writing it.

Inevitably Frank was found guilty on all but one count on September 29th. For the first two years of his sentence he was forcibly injected with at least five different drugs. This at least proves that Brezhnev's Soviet Union did not have a monopoly on this type of torture.

Frank estimates that in the course of 16 years' imprisonment at least 100 letters to and from him have gone astray.

Since *Labour Briefing* took up his case earlier this year considerable interest has been shown. In Germany he was the subject of a TV programme exploring British "justice". Liberty has championed his cause. He has received letters of support from around the country.

His great prison friends among the Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4 have been released and exonerated. Frank waits in hope. For a dossier on Frank's case and suggestions for action to help him, contact *Labour Briefing*.

The fit-up of the M25 Three

On the night of December 15th, 1988, three masked men conducted a series of violent attacks just off the M25 in Surrey which left one man dead, another wounded and two houses robbed and four cars stolen. The tabloid press dubbed the perpetrators the "M25 Gang" and a £25,000 reward was put on offer. A major police manhunt began.

Victims of the robberies stated that at least one of the attackers was white. In a televised appeal the police announced that they were looking for two white men and one black man.

In March 1990, after a six week trial, three black men, Raphael Rowe, Michael Davis and Randolph Johnson were convicted of murder and robbery and sentenced to life imprisonment.

They were convicted on the basis of contradictory, uncorroborated, circumstantial and accomplice evidence. Alibi evidence for the accused was never challenged by the prosecution: it was simply ignored. All three have consistently protested their innocence.

The M25 Three were convicted despite the fact that three of the main witnesses against them admitted in court: stealing the car initially used by the attackers; supplying the masks which prevented positive identification of the attackers; owning the air pistol used during the attacks; dumping the Cavalier and Renault cars stolen by the attackers; and disposing of the masks used by the attackers.

These same witnesses owned the only fingerprints found in the attackers' stolen car and were found in possession of goods stolen in the robberies.

The only forensic evidence was at best inconclusive: blood stains found on a jacket of Rowe's could have come from 8% of the population. In breach of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act the police conducted unrecorded interviews with suspects who then became prosecution witnesses.

For more information contact: Miss J. Rowe, M25 Three Campaign, 105 Fearnley House, Vestry Road, London SE5 8JX; tel: 071 703 0875/071 738 7477.

Stop the Asylum Bill!

National Demo

November 21st
London

Organised by Refugees Ad Hoc Committee on Asylum Bill (supported by ARA)

ERM — no exit?

Dave Palmer outlines the obstacles the European Exchange Rate Mechanism will present to any government wishing to tackle recession and rising unemployment.

THE EUROPEAN Exchange-Rate Mechanism (ERM) was established in 1979 as a regional currency bloc based on the European Community (EC). Through ERM, most EC currencies are tied to each other within semi-fixed rates. Eight countries in the narrow band of the ERM may fluctuate within a 2.25% divergence limit. The United Kingdom, Spain and Portugal are in a broader band and are allowed to diverge by 6% from the other currencies. The ERM currencies move as a block in relation to the US dollar and other world currencies.

EC governments must set interest rates at levels that will keep individual currencies within their ERM rate. If a currency is falling on the financial markets, a government must make it more attractive by raising interest rates. If it is rising, interest rates are cut to make money-traders less keen to hold it.

The bedrock of the ERM is the Deutschmark, reflecting Germany's position as the strongest economy in the EC and the Bundesbank's traditionally strong anti-inflationary stance. To hold their places within the ERM bands, EC members must maintain interest rate differentials with Germany which reflect relative inflation. Because their exchange rates are pegged to the D-Mark, ERM members are forced to accept monetary and fiscal policies effectively dictated by Germany's domestic considerations.

The EC's ultimate goal of monetary union is predicated on the gradual convergence of inflation and interest rates among member countries. The conditions for monetary union are set out in the Maastricht Treaty, which establishes tough convergence criteria on inflation rates, government deficits and long-term interest rates. Only France is anywhere close to fulfilling these.

ERM membership requires that labour costs are maintained at levels which ensure goods and services are produced at internationally competitive prices. If productive investment is insufficient then the choice is between a fall in real wages or, if prices rise, a massive loss of jobs. The Maastricht criteria for fiscal deficits will require large cuts in social spending throughout Europe. The criteria for inflation and interest rates will mean continuing austerity, particularly in the peripheral economies, notably Britain.

The consequences for domestic economic policy of pursuing Germanic 'hard currency' status within ERM can be seen in France. For several years the "franc fort" - strong franc - policy has been pursued by the Mitterand government in an attempt to emulate Germany. The Mitterand government has managed to establish low inflation but at the cost of stymied growth and unemployment hovering above 10%. Readers will be aware of the disastrous impact of such policies, which have directly contributed to the rise of Le Pen. In Britain the costs of adjustment within the ERM, and now adherence to the Maastricht convergence criteria, will be low growth and increasingly high structural levels of mass unemployment for the rest of the decade. Already, membership of the ERM has had the same effects as the pursuit of monetary targets in the early 80s - high interest rates, an overvalued currency and rising unemployment.

In October, 1990, against the bitter opposition of monetarist guru Alan Walters, then Chancellor John Major finally convinced a sceptical Margaret Thatcher that the time was right to join the ERM if the burgeoning inflation resulting from the 'Lawson boom' and financial deregulation was to be constrained. The result was that sterling entered the ERM at a high 'anti-inflationary' parity of DM 2.95. At the time, Major described the ERM as: "a modern-day gold standard with the D-Mark as the anchor". He may come to regret these words.

The enormous cost of German reunification has created large fiscal deficits and rapid monetary growth in the Federal Republic, causing its inflation performance to flag. Seven of the ten ERM countries now have lower inflation than Germany. In response, the Bundesbank has pushed German interest rates to their highest level since 1945, depressing economic growth across Europe, prolonging recession in debt-burdened Britain and putting the monetary system itself under increasing strain.

As German interest rates stay up and UK inflation falls, UK real interest rates become higher leaving the government with no room for manoeuvre on the monetary front. Meanwhile, on the fiscal front, it is preoccupied with controlling public spending to restrain the growing deficit.

Major and Lamont have ruled out devaluation and seem determined to tough out the crisis by being 'firm and resolute'. Divisions are beginning to appear in the mainstream of the Tory Party and sections of big business now openly call for devaluation. The combination of economic fragility, a sliding pound and tensions over Maastricht have shaken confidence in the ERM. In turn this is forcing financial markets to think the unthinkable and test the ability of the government to maintain the pound's ERM parity.

The options facing the government now are:

- **Maintaining the current stance**: This means sitting tight, defending sterling and hoping the economy will turn up or German interest rates will begin to drop. Public spending will be cut back. The government will seek to ride out its social and political problems in the knowledge that there will be no credible opposition from Labour and that mass unemployment will keep the workforce in check.
- **Seek an upwards realignment of the D-Mark**: This is just not on the agenda, which is probably why Robin Cook has been calling for it. Pressure on Germany to revalue the D-Mark will require the support of France which will not be forthcoming given the Mitterand government's pursuit of austerity measures and the "franc fort".
- **Devalue the pound**: A devaluation, possibly along

with other weak ERM currencies (notably the Lira), would allow reduction of interest rates and would help improve Britain's international competitiveness. This is the most popular immediate course both with 'critical' pro-EC 'left'-Keynesians and traditional 'pro-industrial' anti-EC elements of the labour bureaucracy. Opponents of devaluation argue it would actually force interest rates up as financial markets would demand a risk premium for the pound to convince them the government had not softened its stance against inflation. Any limited trade gains would only feed through after a considerable lag. Moreover, devaluation, by accommodating to price pressures, is only a short-term palliative which will solve none of Britain's structural economic problems.

● **Leave the ERM and let the pound float**: This the only coherent alternative. Leaving the ERM would be a leap into the unknown; nobody knows what would happen to sterling or interest rates. It's favoured by Thatcher's 'monetarists in exile' who want to return to targeting the money supply. Irony of ironies, they are merrily denouncing the government for creating too much unemployment!

However, abandoning the ERM would leave the government without a monetary policy and would precipitate a major crisis in its whole relationship with the EC. This is why the 'Euro-sceptics' of the Tory right - who are otherwise delighted to see Major extending privatisation and marketisation of the social sector and taking a harsh fiscal stance - cannot make a comeback on Europe. The fundamental reality is that as a post-imperial junior power the UK simply has nowhere else to go. For the Tory government, further European integration remains the only game in town, whatever the tempo and however awkward forthcoming ruptures in Europe's political economy may make it.

Nonetheless, for diametrically opposite reasons, opposing ERM membership is the only coherent position for the left. Pursuing the expansionary macro-economic policy necessary to create full employment (which must be our starting point) is precluded by the deflationary bias of the ERM. This is why leaving the ERM is a precondition for all the other elements in a left economic programme. In or out of the ERM, the global financial order would remain equally constraining and hostile, but the radical political impact of a break with ERM would be enormously important. It could be a launching pad for concerted industrial intervention, for an intensive search for new patterns of world trade and for a renewal of public ownership as a means of bringing the economy under democratic control.

Economist Wynne Godley, an ERM opponent who has insisted all along that the recession will not end without a change of government policy, recently wrote:

"How wonderful it would be if, on completion of the its leadership mysteries, the Labour Party were to rediscover that mass unemployment is the most serious problems facing the country and also that there is something that can be done about it.

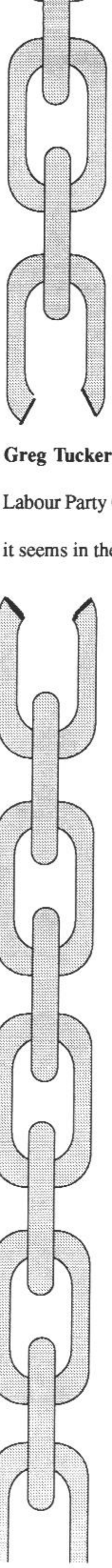
If they have the courage to change tack now and recognise the fact, which is staring them in the face, that the over-valuation of sterling and disinflationary bias in fiscal and monetary policy across the world are the main obstacles to full employment, and also recognise that these are things that can and should be changed, I shall apply for Labour Party membership."

Godley may be waiting a long time to join. It's difficult now to slot a fag paper between the Tories and Labour on the ERM, Maastricht and macro-economic management.

Gordon Brown will call for limited fiscal incentives, but this does not amount to any overall difference in economic strategy. Godley's comments, which ten years ago would have been considered well within the mainstream of Labour policy, are an indication of just how complete is the current capitulation of Labour's leaders (both right wing and 'soft left') to Tory economic priorities. ❑



Stop the City! Photo: Paul Mattsson



Labour's missing links

Greg Tucker, suspended Lambeth councillor and RMT delegate to Labour Party Conference (if not expelled first), warns that not all is as it seems in the current debate on Labour's links with the unions.

IN THE wake of another election defeat the first area of Party organisation to come under the microscope has been the link with the trade unions. Already, an NEC "review committee" has begun meeting to discuss how to "modernise" the link. Four main proposals seem to be on the table.

The first, and easiest to organise, would require unions to split their block vote at conference in accordance with the proportions of union opinion revealed by consultation. Unions could find their votes not being counted if they had not followed Party guidelines on how to consult their members.

A second proposal would extend this procedure so that all Party matters would be decided by a ballot of levy payers.

The third scheme would see levy payers organised as "associate members" bound by Party rules. Presumably current levy payers belonging to other parties, or those expelled by Labour, would be excluded.

The fourth option would see the end of union voting altogether with levy payers being asked to pay a supplement to become full members.

In addition, there is a move to get rid of the requirement that Party members also be members of an appropriate trade union.

All this is being considered ostensibly "to broaden the base of the Party's active support.... and legitimise in the eyes of the electorate the way the unions at conference purport to represent thousands of members."

What the proposals all have in common is that they will lessen organised, collective union involvement in Party matters and increase behind-the-scenes domination of the Party by union and Parliamentary leaders.

In the past decade, the autonomous "Trades Unions for Labour", union contributions to front bench offices, the "Labour Party Business Plan" (funded by the five biggest affiliates), the rise in union sponsorship of MPs (up 20% since 1979) and the influx of trade union officials into Parliament have all helped increase control of the Party by trade union leaders, while lessening their political accountability to their own members.

The apparent willingness of Party leaders to give credence to Tory media attacks on the trade union domination of the Party, unfortunately also accepted by significant parts of the left, should not mislead us. What is at fault is not the block vote per se, but how that vote is used (and by whom).

A decade ago the NUR was able to rid itself of its General Secretary when he was found out casting the union's block vote at Party conference against his mandate. Over the years we have been able to force the NUR and now the RMT to vote in favour of positive policies on Ireland. But examples of such rank-and-file control are few and far between. Most issues are not discussed, except at National Executive level. Where they are discussed at rank-and-file level, information is restricted so that real choices are difficult, and the results of such deliberations are frequently ignored. In any case, on all important strategic issues the agenda has been pre-set behind closed doors with cosy discussions between the Party front bench and key union leaders.

None of this is changed by the "review committee" deliberations. Their proposals on union voting take matters out of the structures of the labour movement, leaving no room for branch or district debate, surrendering to a system of balloting in which the dissemination of the knowledge needed for informed decision-making is dominated by a hostile media, or by the Party/union leaders themselves.

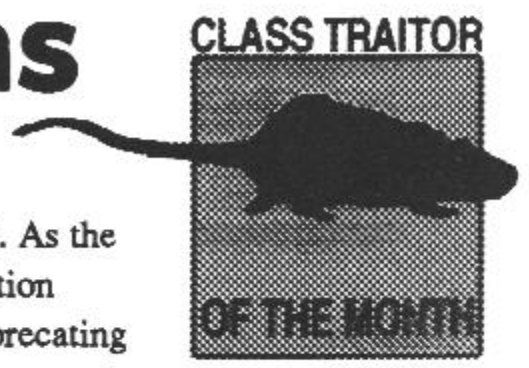
The plan for a new membership scheme for trades unionists is little more than a rehash of the membership drive undertaken a couple of years ago - which failed to attract any members, except in one or two areas where unions, such as the GMB, used the scheme to increase their domination of particular CLPs.

Getting rid of the union membership requirement is a scab's charter. Sufficient safeguards already exist for those very few Party members who have no appropriate union to join.

Labour's links to the unions do need revitalising - we need more, not less, involvement by trade unionists in Party matters. But that will only be achieved - at the political level - by making Labour's policies address the real day-to-day concerns of working people and - at an organisational level - by democratising union involvement in the Party. That can never be done by diktat from the Party hierarchy but only by a fight to develop rank-and-file structures in each union so that union leaders are held to account.

The left should refused to get bogged down in technical discussions on reform of the union link. Instead, we should judge proposals in the light of how they affect our fight in the unions - and get on with that struggle. ❑

A politician for all seasons



Amongst the grey time-serving careerists who have cluttered up the nether reaches of first Kinnock's and now Smith's very Shadowy Cabinets, one of the longest survivors is the uniquely un-talented Jack Straw, *Briefing*'s Class Traitor of the Month.

STRAW FIRST rose to prominence as NUS President between 1969-71, a period of intense student radicalisation. Straw's early reputation as a "left-winger" had more to do with this accident of timing than any concrete support for student militancy on Vietnam or any other issue. It was back then that he first acquired the hatred for "Trots" (particularly the old IMG) which he has carried with him to this day.

Like John Stonehouse, Straw started his climb up the Labour ladder in the London Borough of Islington, joining the local Party at a time when the old-guard right were locked in a death struggle with left-wing new-comers. Straw scrupulously refused to take sides - appearing as a leftie to some and a "moderate" to others. Elected as a councillor in 1971, Straw repeatedly changed sides within the Labour Group as he seized whatever opportunities for advancement presented themselves. Nonetheless, he only slithered up the greasy pole as far as Vice-Chair of Housing - to the horror of then Chair Margaret Hodge, who voted for the left alternative. His sole contribution to the Council's multi-million pound housing strategy was to evict tenants who kept dogs in their flats in breach of Council regulations.

Always ambitious, he stood for unwinnable Tonbridge in 1974 at the age of 27. His luck changed as a result of meeting Barbara Castle, whose husband Ted was then an Islington Council Alderman. He worked as her "Special Adviser" (political hatchet-man) from 1974 until Castle was dismissed from the Cabinet by Jim Callaghan in 1976, when he went to work for Environment Secretary Peter Shore, whose hostility to the EC Straw then shared.

His job for Castle (who praised his "low cunning") took him frequently to her Blackburn constituency. When she decided to retire as MP, it was all too easy for Straw to "inherit" the seat. Within a year of entering the Commons, he was given a front bench job on Shore's Treasury team. In 1981 he denounced Benn's candidacy for the deputy leadership and backed Foot's attacks on Peter Tatchell. That year in *Tribune* (to which he has contributed many boring articles over the years) he celebrated the 600th anniversary of the Peasant's Revolt against the Poll Tax - which didn't in the least inhibit him from denouncing the anti-Poll Tax movement in 1989-91, in stark contrast to his legendary namesake. When a *Militant* defector tipped him off about plans to deselect him in Blackburn he launched a full-frontal attack, stirring up a witch-hunt which resulted in some of the first expulsions of local *Militant* activists in the country in January 1984 (which helped ensure that he was reselected from a shortlist of one a year later).

Always the hard man of the "soft left", Straw made a vituperative attack on the *Militant* EB in the closed conference session in October 1983. In that year's leadership contest he again backed Shore. Kinnock then placed him under Jack Cunningham at Environment, where he helped sabotage the rate-capping struggle of 1984-85.

Along with Blair and Brown, Straw took the lead in blocking attempts to form a joint Tribune-Campaign Group slate for the Shadow Cabinet in 1987 - a key moment in the transformation of the "soft left" into toothless leadership loyalists. He was first elected to the Shadow Cabinet that year (on his fifth try) and secured the prize of GMB sponsorship, reserved only for the most reliable of establishment servants within the PLP. The next year he ridiculed Bennite "flat-earthers" for their failure to understand Marx - who, according to Straw, had favoured workers acquiring private property through the market.

Shortly after he was made Labour's Education spokesperson, a post he occupied throughout the 1987-92 Parliament, he criticised his predecessor Giles Radice for kowtowing to the teachers' unions and proclaimed Labour as "the newly liberated party of educational standards, of quality control and consumer choice". As the Tories dismantled state education Straw sat on the sidelines, deprecating industrial action whilst trying to steal the Tories' clothing by championing "standards" and demanding mandatory, universal teacher appraisal. Since he favoured "schools managing more of their own affairs", grant aid for religious schools, a national curriculum, testing at ages 7, 11, 14 and 15 and differential payments for teachers, he found it difficult to attack the appalling Tory record on education head on. No wonder exit polls conducted on April 9th showed the Tories actually leading Labour by 1% on the education issue.

His final inanity as Labour's Education spokesperson was to urge schools to use the Tory "opting-out" mechanism as a way of stopping the cuts and fending off LMS - a staggering piece of nonsense which perturbed even right-wing teachers' leaders.

Smith has now moved him sideways to the local government brief, indicating the small importance the new leader attaches to both Straw and local government. Here we can expect him to encourage Labour councils to press ahead with cuts and privatisation with the grim, glum arrogance which is his trademark. ❑



Labour's lost youth

Paul Field, Newcastle Central CLP, argues that if the labour movement is to win the underclass of disaffected youth to organised politics, it must develop an informed and intelligent response to events like this summer's riots - acting as neither moral judge nor mindless cheerleader.

THERE IS no better illustration of the gulf that now exists between Britain's disposessed youth and John Smith's Labour Party than the latter's response to this summer's riots. Labour's knee-jerk reaction to the violence that erupted on Blackburd Leys and Tyneside last year was somewhere to the political right of the Church of England (with most bishops at least recognising that social factors like unemployment might better explain the unrest than simply a disrespect for authority). One year and an election defeat later, Smith and Co. no longer feel that there is the same political capital to be made from passing moral judgement on the actions of youth in Wakefield, Salford, Blackburn, Burnley, etc. and would rather ignore the issue altogether.

Predictably, there has been no attempt by Labour to make the basic political point: that at the height of a recession and at a time of deep demoralisation in the official labour movement the majority of those involved are fighting back against the austerity of their daily existence in the only way they know how, with bricks and bottles on the streets of our towns and cities.

The riots have to be seen in historical context. There is a clear distinction between recent clashes with the police and the social explosions that took place in the inner cities in 1981. Those revolts (as well as the uprising on Broadwater Farm four years later) represented a fightback by mainly black youths against the monetarist shock therapy that had forced more than a million onto the dole queues in the space of a few months, supplemented by a daily diet of police racism. While highlighting the failure of Labour to campaign among the most oppressed sections of the black population, the riots also reflected a consciousness that saw the Tories as politically weak and vulnerable to mass action.

A decade later, the situation is very different. Those in the front line of the fight now are not only too young to remember a Labour government, their earliest memories do not even extend to a time when Labour still spoke of socialism. By 1987, when I joined the Party at the age of 16, many of the policy gains of the early eighties had already been effectively abandoned. That year's electoral defeat heralded the final victory of New Realism. The new consensus not only ruled out full employment and free trade unionism, it also persuaded our leaders to follow the Tories in prosecuting the war against "the enemy within", whether against socialists in the Party ranks or militants in the unions or activists in the anti-Poll Tax movement.

The riots are a symptom of a deep malaise, an Americanisation of British politics that is taking place as Labour occupies the centre ground while at the same time turning its back on the mass constituency that exists for radical class politics among the poorest and most oppressed in our society.

In so far as the riots do indicate a fundamental rejection of politics and an acute estrangement from organised struggle, they are occasions for troubled concern, not triumphalism. The left should dispense with romantic notions of an intifada of disposessed youth breaking out on the streets of Britain and look instead to the specific causes and consequences of these events.

Where rioting occurs in response to police repression or, as with Meadowell or more recently Bristol, as a result of police ensuring that 16 or 17 year old joyriders meet with fatal "accidents", we should demand that Labour speak out in defence of those involved. But where it stems from a confrontation between the police and local drug dealers or is racially or religiously motivated it would be a mistake to align ourselves with such forces on the premise that we must take sides with anyone fighting against the state (we wouldn't support the cops either).

We should understand the contradictory nature of riots. On estates with 60% or 70% unemployment, where the youth lack any facilities of their own, are trapped in the family home for much of their adult life and are treated with disregard by everyone in authority, to riot must be wonderfully liberating. The sense of collective reinforcement arising in the heat of a riot can give unemployed youth the sense of unity workers can experience through strike action, in a mass meeting or simply through their daily labour. It has the power to heal divisions. The way rival Hindu and Muslim gangs in Blackburn stopped fighting each other in order to unite against the police is a case in point.

At the same time, the long-term consequences of riots are almost entirely negative. The energies they release are soon dissipated and they usually leave in their wake a stronger police presence, a new spiral of harassment, detentions and beatings and a beseiged mentality within the local community. There is also some truth in the claim that they cause more destruction and distress to the local working class community than to the state and its guardians. Finally, riots are no substitute for co-ordinated political action.

If Labour is ever to reconstitute itself not just as a viable electoral force but as a genuine agency for social change it must reach out to those youth who at the moment see the Party as part of the problem and not the solution. Persuading Labour of the need for an autonomous youth movement that organises the very people the leadership has sought to demonise will not be easy. However, one thing is clear. If we fail to fill the political vacuum among disposessed youth it is only a matter of time before the fascists will. ❑



Tory education policy

Choice & diversity

The new White Paper on education finishes what the Education Reform Act started - the destruction of a democratically accountable education system responsive to local needs and aspirations. **Thea Sharp** investigates.

DESPITE HYPE and handouts only a small number of schools have so far voted to opt-out of local education authority control. The Conservative authorities of Hillingdon, Bromley and Wandsworth do have a majority of grant maintained schools. In order to finance these schools money is taken away from the local authority, including money for "central administrative costs" decried by the government as needless bureaucracy, but seen by schools as vital support services covering personnel, finance, legal, and health and safety matters.

As local authority schools lose jobs and services, there seems less and less point remaining under local authority aegis.

The White Paper seeks to encourage schools left within the LEAs to opt-out. Current proposals - no doubt to be amended - suggest that schools in (mainly Labour) areas strapped for government cash will be funded in order to meet national targets. A government ostensibly opposed to bureaucracy thus proposes a new funding agency to take on many of the current functions of LEAs, including provision of school places within the grant maintained schools. The Funding Agency will also have powers to set up new grant maintained schools and to close council schools if there is a surplus of council places.

This centralising process is also encouraged through the establishment of Education Associations to take over "at risk" schools, sack their managements and turn them into grant maintained units.

All such moves are based on the crudest of educational philosophies: parents know best the needs of their children. The involvement of administrators or teachers should be kept to the minimum. Schools should instil moral values including politeness and respect for property and a knowledge of what is right and wrong.

If these proposals become law there will be less choice for parents. Grant maintained schools will be able to pick and choose the easiest children to teach and those with parents able to afford "extras". No longer will parents be able to choose the local neighbourhood school. Schools will increasingly be able to choose which children to take and which to reject.

The proposal will lead to the demise of local education authorities. There will be few powers left to local councils. There will be no local democratically-elected body able to represent local opinion to central government. This legislation will take education out of the democratic process and ensure that the quality of schooling reaches an all-time low.

Schools will have neither the financial resources nor time and energy to provide support services currently run by LEAs. Public provision of school meals, cleaning, building maintenance, transport will be things of the past. Power over the day-to-day running of an individual school will rest with the individual headteacher. LEA attempts to introduce equal opportunities policies or organise fully comprehensive schools will be finished off once and for all.

Whether any of these dangers will be grasped by the Labour front bench remains to be seen. Individuals, unions, and education organisations could still be galvanised into a joint campaign against the new threat but whether Labour's leaders are aware of this challenge seems doubtful. ❑

To hell with the Chief

John Smith embodies the deathly politics of the Party's old-fashioned right-wing. *Briefing* editor **Mike Marqusee** argues that Labour's new leader is incapable of rousing the Party for any fight against the Tories.

SMITH'S CRUSHING victory in the electoral college owed more to a gut rejection by all wings of the Party of Bryan Gould's gimmickry and double-talk than to any positive endorsement of the colourless and cautious Smith. A number of left-leaning unions (and over 100 CLPs) supported the unlikely ticket of Smith and Prescott precisely because they saw these two candidates as the ones most likely to preserve Labour's links with the unions and its class identity. Correctly, they identified Smith as the traditional "Labourist" politician, as opposed to the classless careerist Bryan Gould.

So Smith's support is a mile wide but an inch deep - and it could well evaporate if the Tories establish a steady lead in the polls. At the moment he is untainted by the inner-Party battles, the vendettas and purges, the finance and membership debacles and the tyranny of the PR professionals - all the discredited features of the Kinnock years - but that is simply because as a traditional Parliamentarian without a seat on the NEC he has never bothered much with such matters. Up till now, he has shown no distinctive approach to the Party's internal affairs apart from a belief that the PLP and its leadership always know best and should be left by the rest of the movement to get on with the job.

Smiths' election represents the less than triumphal return of the traditional Parliamentary right - a reversion to the status quo ante 1979 predicated on the abject failure of the "soft left" and thirteen years of devastating defeats for the labour movement. His willingness to reinstate Gulf War rebels and give front bench jobs to MPs who backed Gould has led some to predict a new era of tolerance in the Party but this is certain to be confined to the PLP, where the patronage machine can be counted on to keep political order. In fact, the spread of votes among those elected to the Shadow Cabinet was relatively narrow, indicating that in effect they were elected as a block. Clearly, the spoils had been shared out in advance behind closed doors.

His Front Bench may appear rather a political pick and mix, but it is loaded with talentless dross whom even Kinnock would not favour. Old "soft left" warhorses like Gould, Meacher and Prescott have been effectively put out to pasture. Dobson at Employment is making noises about "full employment" but it remains to be seen how long he keeps this up. He is in any case surrounded by a reactionary economic team run by the deadly duo of Gordon Brown and Harriet Harman - a team committed to fiscal rectitude, the ERM and nothing else.

The elevation of John Cunningham to Shadow Foreign Secretary has to be one of the worst and most insulting appointments ever made by a Labour leader in government or out. Coupled with the promotion of right-winger David Clarke to Defence spokesperson, it is a clear indication that Smith's lifelong loyalty to Whitehall and Washington will be maintained. His decision to appoint an ex-MI6 officer as one of his chief personal assistants gives a further flavour of the kind of politics we're in for. Where Kinnock turned endless eager tricks to win the establishment's blessing, Smith feels no need to perform for his masters in this manner. He has always been an establishment politician to his fingertips.

In response to criticisms of his election budget, he has promised to set up a "Commission for Social Justice" - a grand title for a body charged with figuring out a way for Labour to maintain its commitment to wealth redistribution without actually taxing anyone. In all probability this will be done by dropping universal benefits and resorting to means-testing. Among Smith's crowd this passes for a "new idea".

Smith has also talked of making "common cause with the majority of the electorate who did not want a Conservative government. We must form alliances with the new movements that share our concern for social justice, a democratic constitution and a sustainable environment." To the extent that this means anything, it is a hint that in certain circumstances Smith will make a deal with the Liberals.

Smith has insisted he has no intention of breaking the Party's link with the trade unions but his first act as Labour leader was to turn down an invitation to speak at this year's TUC. He will maintain close ties with top trade union leaders but they will be cemented in secret meetings over off-the-record lunches. Of course, his preference would be for a PLP cut loose from all ties to outside bodies - but someone has to foot the bill and, besides, Smith knows he can rely on the trade union bureaucrats to back him up should constituency activists ever get out of hand.

Smith will be a cork bobbling on the sea of the PLP and union hierarchies. He is more confident and competent but not as ruthless and single-minded as Kinnock. He has no mission.

The only reason he appears to want to be the leader of the Labour Party is that this position is the accepted career-goal for someone in his profession. The Tory press built him up as part of the process of tearing down Kinnock. They will do him no favours in the future - unless he faces a serious challenge from the left.

In the coming years, Smith is likely to become a by-word for political tedium. The one thing he is clearly unwilling and unable to do is challenge Major's Tories either in or out of Parliament. If mass opposition to the government's barbaric economic and social policies emerges while he is Labour leader, he is sure to turn his back on it. ❑

Coventry 127 vs. NEC

Old scores are settled by the right in the latest Coventry witch-hunt, reports **Dave Spencer**. A list of 127 Party members targeted for suspension by a cabal in Coventry Council House has been ratified by the NEC.

THE 127 are accused of helping either Dave Nellist or John Hughes during the general election. The members themselves learned their fate in the usual way - through the local Tory press.

Some on the list were not even Labour Party members. Several of the prominent names published, like Toni Cardinali and Will Reese, had already resigned. Ex-councillor George Ready was photographed on crutches after his heart operation during the election campaign - hardly fit for canvassing!

But the list is no joke. It consists of members, past members and potential members who might cause trouble. It is the culmination of 15 years of right-vs.-left in the Coventry Labour Party. The right's objective is to ensure there is no criticism and no fightback against the Labour Council and against the two careerists who are now MPs for Coventry South East and Coventry North East. Jim Cunningham MP and Bob Ainsworth MP are also, respectively, leader and deputy leader of the council. They both gained their candidacies by undemocratic methods. Jim Cunningham was appointed by the NEC after Coventry South East CLP re-selected Dave Nellist. It is alleged that Bob Ainsworth owed his selection to straightforward ballot-rigging.

It needs to be emphasised too that during the General Election the Coventry Labour Party campaigned against Dave Nellist, not against the Tories. For 25 years we have been without a full-time organiser, then suddenly one was appointed - ostensibly to fight the South West marginal against Tory John Butcher. But canvassers and resources were diverted to Coventry South East to campaign against Nellist; telephones were commandeered; loudspeaker vans toured the South East complete with a hack in the back taking photos of Nellist canvassers and noting who was talking to whom on Nellist's stalls. Even Geoffrey Robinson, millionaire Labour MP for Coventry North West, was for once seen in Coventry, canvassing in his chauffeur-driven Jaguar in Coventry South East. Recently Coventry South West CLP executive asked the full-timer for a list of the 127 names to see which of their members was due for suspension. They were refused. His line management, the full-timer explained, was Walworth Road, not Coventry Labour Party members.

The Labour Party now vets membership. Coventry North East CLP refused applications recently on the grounds that they were known active members of the Anti-Poll Tax Campaign. These six comrades live in the Wood End area where this summer's riots began. Bob Ainsworth is their MP. He doesn't want any campaigns from below spilling over into the Labour Party. After all, he was a councillor for the area and as Chair of Finance promised to pursue non-payers "with the utmost vigour of the law". Bob also used to be on the left (around the old IMG) and he got Militant to support him in 1987 against Ted Knight. Many of the new right are former members of left Groups - and they know about campaigns from below!The 127 members under suspension are not a homogeneous group. Some want reinstatement. Others say stuff it. A Coventry Socialist Alliance has been formed to draw together everyone on the left in or out of the Labour Party. Its first major event will be a day conference in Coventry on September 26th.

● ***Dave Spencer** is on the list of 127 accused of supporting both John Hughes and Dave Nellist. He was a West Midlands County Councillor for Coventry South East until abolition in 1986. He has been a member of Coventry Labour Party for 30 years.*



INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

ON JUNE 11th, the Nicaragua National Assembly passed Latin America's most repressive legislation against lesbians and gays. The amendment to the penal code passed by a vote of 43 to 39 reads as follows:

"An individual is guilty of the crime of sodomy if he or she induces, promotes, propagandises or practices sexual intercourse with individuals of the same sex and the said individual will face 1 to 3 years in prison."

The law now goes to President Chamorro to ratify, amend or veto. Hundreds of letters and faxes have already been sent to the President's office from all around the world urging her to veto the legislation which is a clear violation of human rights.

To keep up the pressure, fax a letter direct to President Violeta Chamorro, Casa Presidencial, Managua, Nicaragua; fax 010 505 2 627911.

Or fax, phone or write to Sr. Roberto Parales, Embassy of Nicaragua, 8 Gloucester Road, London SW7; tel: 071 584 4365; fax: 071 823 8790.

HIGH FASHION trainers selling in Britain for over £100 cost around £9 a pair to produce and the women who make them earn as little as £3 a day.

The Rangsit Footwear factory in Bangkok produces top brand trainers like Reebok, Nike and Adidas at the rate of more than 100,000 every month. Last year 7.2 million pairs of Reeboks worth £70 million were shipped out Thailand and Reebok sold over £2 billion worth of trainers worldwide.

Rangsit is one of ten factories operated by the Bangkok Rubber consortium. Around 800 Thai women work there. They earn around £3 a day plus overtime, bonus and staff facilities. And few can afford to buy the goods they produce.

One Thai factory manager told reporters: "Reebok is our main customer but it's a very competitive business. Like all businesses we are under pressure to produce the highest quality shoe at the lowest possible price. Shoes that used to be made in Korea are now being made cheaper in Thailand".

Czech witch-hunt

NEWS FROM Czechoslovakia has been dominated by the likely secession of Slovakia from the Federation, *our Prague correspondent tells* Briefing. This has concealed the government's harsh market reforms, which have included a doubling of rents and the passage of a draconian law on labour unrest.

The drive towards separation was fuelled by the high vote for Slovak nationalist groupings, especially the HZDS (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia) in the spring election. But this was as much a vote against Thatcherite privatisation as anything else: Slovakia has much higher unemployment and a weaker economy than the rest of the country and the HZDS is to the left of the Czech leadership. Attitudes hardened after the election, however, when the HZDS began to block parliamentary activity.

In the Czech lands, although the Christian Democrats and other right-wing parties have overall control, the left block (Communists and reformed communists) and the social democrats did better in rural areas where unemployment is higher. The extreme right-wing Czech Republican Party also did well in the countryside and smaller towns, particularly those with a high gypsy population.

Political life here is dominated by the continuing ferocious witch-hunt, which is more anti-left than anti-communist. Many ex-Stalinists within the state apparatus and industry are actually doing quite well.

RECENTLY PUBLISHED figures show that religious discrimination in Northern Ireland is rising again. Male Catholics are now 2.6 times as likely to be unemployed as Protestants - back to the position they had in 1971.

The male youth unemployment rate, which is high for Protestant workers at 19.6 is double for Catholics, with a staggering rate of 39% in the 16-25 age group. Catholics are only half as likely as Protestants to be in managerial or professional jobs, and are over represented in semi- and unskilled manual work.

Famous last words..

Have you ever heard of a trial where the defendants admitted to potentially violent acts but were subsequently acquitted? Let's say it again, this was an absolutely stupendous verdict and your job is make sure everyone knows it!- **Bernard Misrahi on the Bradford 12, *Labour Briefing*, August 1992**



"Privatisation is not inevitable ... the alternative is to resist!"

"I REJECT ABSOLUTELY and completely the notion that privatisation of our industry is now inevitable," said NUM President Arthur Scargill, opening the debate on the government's coal sell-off at this summer's NUM conference. "How can any trade unionist adopt such an attitude when our own history tells us what it would mean? Privatisation would mean more pit closures, more jobs lost and more communities destroyed. It would mean - by definition - a reversal of everything achieved by our union and the MFGB before it, in a century of struggle.

"Safety standards, wages, working conditions, including shift systems and working week - privatisation would attack them all, to say nothing of job security and trade union rights. In the privatised coal industry of America and South Africa the death rate is five times higher than that in our own industry, where nationalisation and strong trade unionism have, over the past 45 years, achieved the highest standards in the world.

"Participation in management buy-outs won't protect our members, pits, jobs or communities. It seldom if ever has. Britain's miners have attempted 'buy-outs' or co-operative ventures before - with disastrous results. The co-operative were operating in a hostile capitalist environment where both suppliers of goods and purchases of coal had vested interests in seeing the ventures fail.

"It was partly these experiences that led to the MFGB recognising that the real answer to privatisation was public ownership and in 1947 the objective and the dream became a reality. Our forerunners fought too hard for us to sacrifice nationalism whilst a fight."

The NUM conference unanimously decided on a campaign to fight any sell-off, whether to multi-national companies, management buy-outs or "worker co-operatives".

The union is seeking a ruling from the European Court that British Coal or any successor must pay back to the Mineworkers Pension Scheme £800 million taken over the past three years in the form of an employers' "contribution holiday".

The union has written to the rail union, RMT, suggesting a joint campaign against the proposal to sell off the coal and rail industries. A Special Delegate Conference will be held in the next few months to decide the next step in campaign.

"If we get a decision from the European Court that all pension fund monies have to be repaid - you may suddenly find that the tremendous number of people who want to buy a share of the industry diminishes to zero," said Scargill. "It will become an unattractive proposition."

Taxpayers will have to foot an enormous bill for pit closures if privatisation goes ahead. Losses would include: the write-off of huge sums invested in the industry; the direct cost of redundancies, pit closure costs, pension make-up and covering the industry's past liabilities - a total of over £5,000 million; the knock-on costs of closing the industry, in lost taxes, unemployment pay, etc.

"It is a fundamental error to believe that the NUM doesn't have power. You can have the same impact with one colliery on strike that you had with 10 or 15 in 1983 because of the massive concentration of resources on single-unit coal faces," Scargill told the *Guardian*'s Seumas Milne.

Management has put "all its eggs in one basket. The propaganda claim that the reduction in numbers means less power has had an effect on our members, but it's not true and it's not new. Exactly the same arguments were used in the 1960s [when NUM membership more than halved because of pit closures] and in 1972 and 1974 we were able to bring about some of the most dramatic industrial and political changes ever seen in Britain."

He points to other small groups of workers with industrial muscle, like the train drivers and the power workers.

"The NUM was not at its strongest when it was 1 1/4 million members strong but when it was just under 300,000. We have got to convince our members of the strength they have."

Reports courtesy of The Miner *and the* Yorkshire Miner. ❑



Thatcher, Maxwell and Kinnock have left the field, but Arthur Scargill and the NUM battle on.

Barron gets the boot

KEVIN BARRON MP, coal spokesperson in Neil Kinnock's Front Bench, has been expelled from the NUM.

The union's National Disciplinary Committee found that he had breached rules by disclosing confidential information to Gavin Lightman QC - who also fell foul of the NUM National Executive by publishing the report had commissioned from him as a Penguin book without the union's agreement.

Justice has been done.

JSC

WHO SAYS there's nothing to be done now the Tories are back for a fourth term?

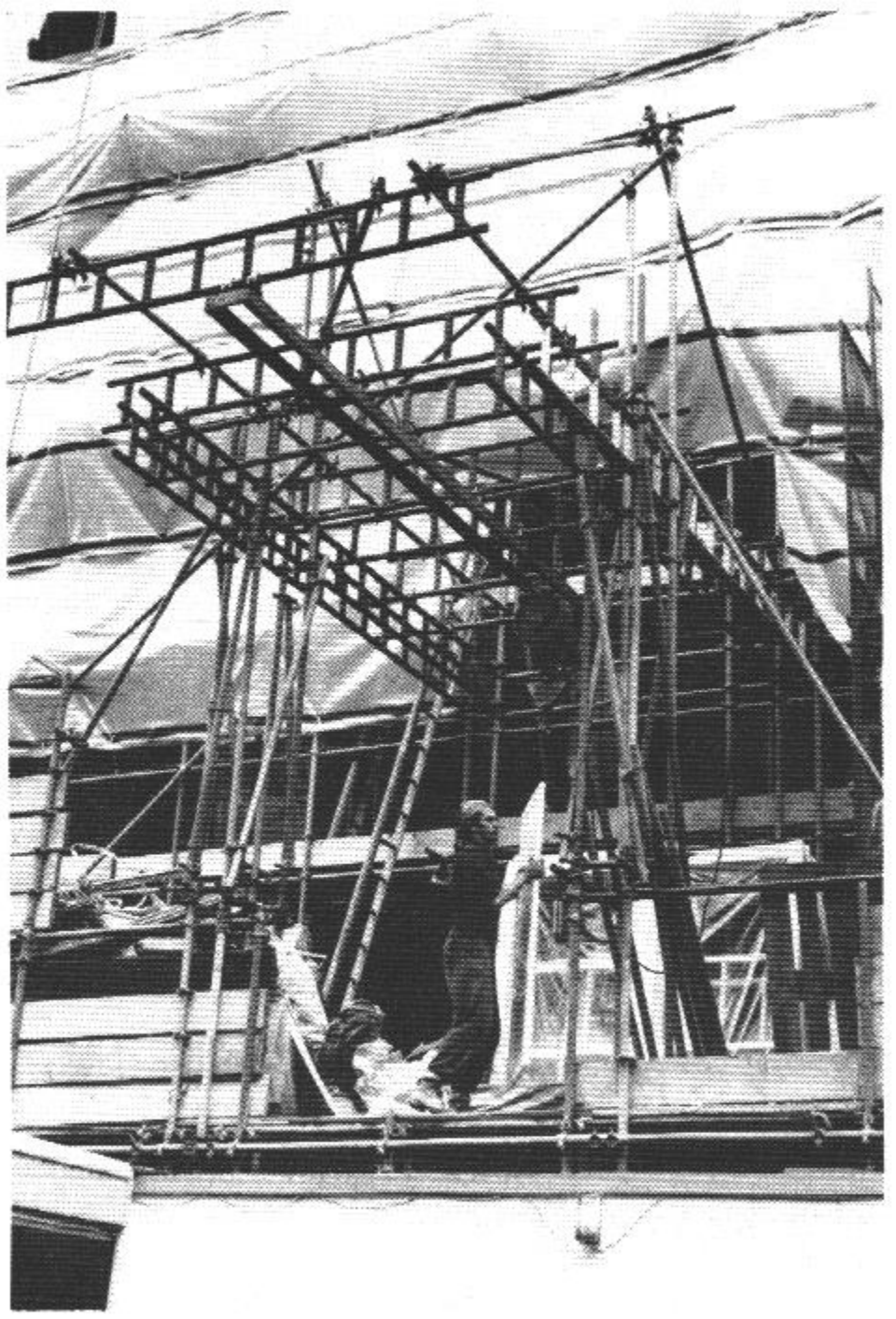
In London the newly established rank-and-file Joint Sites Committee (JSC) has carried off a series of successful actions in recent months.

At Guy's Hospital, sub-contractor WS Brickwork went into liquidation owing its workers two weeks money. A JSC activist working on the site helped co-ordinate a sit-in in the canteen. The men were taken on by another sub-contractor, but told they would not get their back pay - so they came out on strike and won not only their fortnight's money, but recognition of UCATT and the appointment of safety representatives.

When contractors *Barratts* threatened a pay cut of £5 a day, the JSC co-ordinated a walk-out and picketing by 200 workers at two separate *Barratts*' sites. After negotiations with the unions, a minimum wage of £55 a day was agreed.

At Trafalgar House in Whitechapel the sub-contractor was paying three weeks in hand. The morning teabreak, normally half an hour, was only 15 minutes. There was a lot of ill-feeling on the site, which culminated in the sacking of the shop steward, who was also the safety rep. A picket line was set up with support from TGWU members on other sites. The shop-steward was reinstated, the contractor ceased paying three weeks in hand and the half-hour morning tea-break was reinstated.

At the Vascroft site in Gloucester Road, take-home pay was £23.62 a day. There were 150 men on site, working from 8am to 6:15pm, with no canteen, no proper toilets, and appalling health and safety standards. Several men had fallen through scaffolds. Welders were working above other workers. One man broke his arm and was off for 10 weeks with no compensation.



Chris, a member of the JSC, began to give out trade union application forms - and was sacked with five minutes notice.

The JSC and Chris went back onto the site, asked the workers to elect shop stewards and sat-in in the canteen until their grievances were recognised. After five-hours, they got trade union recognition, safety reps and proper facilities.

The next Monday one of the new shop stewards was sacked. He stood on the gate on Tuesday and 130 workers came out. About half the workforce (with support from the JSC) picketed for two weeks.

A strike at Balfour Beatty's in Hangar Lane was less successful. Sub-contractor Baseform has disappeared owing 25 carpenters five weeks wages - the third time sub-contractors on the site have disappeared owing men money. Despite picketing, the wages have still not been repaid.

At another Vascroft site in west London, the sacking of a shop steward led to a succesful two week strike. But three weeks later a trade union official was thrown off the site by police, leading to another walk-out. It was then learned that Vascroft had signed a single-union deal with the EETPU and derecognised UCATT and the TGWU. When the shop stewards were sacked a crane was occupied in protest. When the occupation ended after seven days (having cost Vascroft some £100,000) one of the stewards was bludgeoned by the company into signing a document stating that UCATT had encouraged him to occupy the crane (which would make the union vulnerable to prosecution under Tory anti-union laws). He repudiated the statement the following day - besides, he happens to be a TGWU member!

Contact the JSC: 403 New King's Road, London SW6 4RL.

● THE CONSTRUCTION Safety Campaign reported ten work-related deaths on sites in the second half of July. On July 13th, one man was killed and two others seriously injured when a Birmingham access cradle collapsed. The following day in Kings North, a scaffolder died after a fall. On July 21st, two workers were turned into human fireballs after being caught up in an explosion on a south-east London power station. The pair were thrown across a road by the force of an 11,000-volt blast. A day later, massive electrical shocks claimed the life of another site worker, this time in central London. Co-workers trying to take time off as a mark of respect were threatened with dismissal by sub-contractors.

In the late eighties, site deaths claimed around 150 lives each year. The recession may have cut back the overall figures but the accident rate per worker is rapidly rising as firms slash costs and safety measures to stay in business. 70% of site deaths are due to management incompetence or neglect.

Health and Safety Executive research shows that in one 18-week spell on a single large site, there were 3,600 accidents. HSE inspectors are currently halting work on one building site in three they visit where roofing work is being done. In Manchester, half of all such sites have been deemed so dangerous as to have work immediately halted.

Contact the CSC, c/o Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Office, Unit D, Mill Harbour, London E14 9XP; tel: 071 538 0507.

Building from below

Three JSC activists, Mick, Tim and John, discussed the struggle on the building sites with *Labour Briefing* reporters in a noisy pub in London's West End.

"THE JSC WAS formed to give back up to individuals who felt uneasy and isolated on the sites," Mick explained. "There's a desperate need for co-ordination and action. The JSC is there to get out information, build confidence among the workforce, create a new layer of activists."

"We've been made itinerant," said John, "We're mostly self-employed, which is just a way for the employers to hire and fire at will. We're coming and going. The miners live in communities where you get more solidarity. We have to create that through other methods. I've been going about for twenty years trying to convince workers to do something about their conditions. I've been left out on a limb plenty of times. The JSC is about changing that."

"We don't ask people to join the JSC. We go onto a job and try to get people to organise in whatever unions they're in," said Tim. "We're not an alternative to the trades unions. We're trying to put pressure on trade union officials to do what we want them to do, but if they fail to do that we'll show the employers that we're quite capable of taking action on our own. We're quite prepared to break any laws they put in our way. After all, the anti-union laws are really only any good if people obey them, aren't they? We've got no assets for them to sequestrate."

"A lot of subbies physically intimidate workers," said John. "We have minders hanging around the job, keeping an eye on how much we're doing and what we're saying. It's really barbaric stuff as far as I'm concerned. There's no other industry in the country where you get someone who beats you up - but they can't beat us all up."

The three activists reckon the average rate for labourers on London sites is about £35 a day before stoppages. "You can't live on that," they say, "People have to sign on as well. So the state ends up subsidising the building employers."

Victimisation is extensive in the industry but the JSC activists say there are ways around it. "A lot of the subbies are so small they can't afford to subscribe to the blacklists," said Tim. "Being self-employed can help us out. We can use any names we like."

"A lot of the things they used against us we can turn to our advantage," Mick added. "We've no career structure, no steady employer. It's an anarchic situation. Well, if they want anarchy, we'll give it to them."

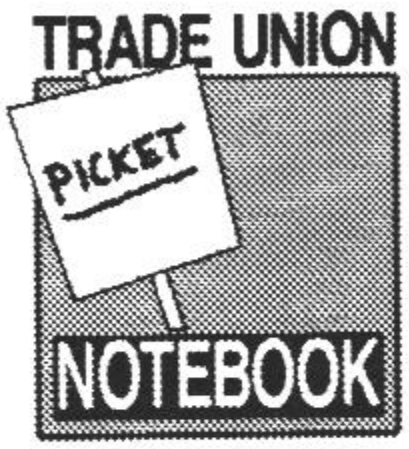
● AT THE Styles and Wood site at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in the West End conditions are poor, pay is low and there is no union organisation. Mick, a JSC activist, mounted a milk crate and began talking to a small group of workers who drifted over from the site. "A couple of years ago if anyone ha told me I would be standing in the r in Aldwych talking to a meeting I'd have told them they were stone mad. But a few years ago we wouldn't ha accepted the conditions they're forci on us now. We know there's a lot of fear among building workers but you've got to remember this hotel is due to open on September 1st and th contractors will lose hundreds of thousands of pounds in penalties if i delayed. So action can work. Manag ment don't have the whip hand."

A CSC activist follows Mick on th milk crate. "You've got no money, n safety, no fucking nothing on this sit Are they giving you helmets, footwe training? It only needs one or two people, one or two leaders and if the come forward we'll help them. The JSC will help them. The employers a pissing all over us. Every single one of you knows it. It's time we started pissing back at them."

Mick urges the workers to demand the union negotiated rate for the job. He is a practising Catholic who is at pains to emphasise that the JSC is not "a left-wing club". His message to the Styles and Wood workers was unambiguous: "Management won't do anything for us. The only people we can rely on are the people we work with. Let the governors know there's people here prepared to make a stand."



Photo: Paul Mattsson



Are you kidding?

A FORMER UCATT executive councillor has had a claim for "unfair dismissal" against the union thrown out at a preliminary hearing of an industrial tribunal.

Jack Rogers (hard right ex-member of Labour's NEC) had been re-elected to UCATT's executive council in 1990 despite a strong challenge from left-winger Peter Lenahan, but the union had to rerun the election when irregularities came to light. In the Hand Inquiry later commissioned by the executive into the union's affairs, it emerged that there had been a concerted attempt to submit fraudulent ballot papers during this election.

The poll was rerun last year and Lenahan emerged victorious. Although Rogers accepted the decision to hold the second poll, he subsequently claimed that his failure to get re-elected constituted "unfair dismissal". The tribunal ruled (reasonably enough) that "the type of employment under consideration is very different from the norm in that democracy has been injected into the employee-employer relationship". Meanwhile, UCATT's auditors, West Wake & Price, have been replaced. One reason being cited for the change is that, in the discredited 1990 union ballot, the returning officer and scrutineer was Michael Peters - a partner in West Wake & Price.

George Brumwell, the union's general secretary, has also launched an inquiry to track down the whereabouts of several key financial reports which the Hand Inquiry has reported missing.

Woolworth's cashiered

A FORMER Woolworth's cashier has been awarded £10,000 for unfair dismissal after USDAW took her case to an industrial tribunal.

Jackie Taylor, who was in charge of accounts at two stores, was sacked after she refused to allow a manager to search her handbag when she was alone in the store with him.

The tribunal at Exeter heard that Taylor ran to catch up with colleagues who had just left the store so that they could inspect her bag. Woolworth's claimed that she had failed to obey company rules, but stressed that there had never been any suggestion that she had stolen anything.

But the tribunal ruled that it was the company which had broken its own rules. The £10,000 award was agreed as an out-of-court settlement.

ANOTHER INANE move by John Edmonds of the GMB saw him waste his members money by buying-up blocks of shares in the privatised water industries and then trying to get chosen GMB people elected onto the boards. Presumably he reckons getting the sack or your pay cut by one of your own union officials is less traumatic for the members.

NUJ MEMBERS: Don't vote for Jake Ecclestone for General Secretary. This high-handed, right-wing autocrat is a menace to everyone in the industry. He pays no heed to the wishes of annual conference or the union executive; he sabotaged the Pergamon strike repeatedly and opposes all industrial action. Support Miles Barter and use your second and third preferences for anybody but Ecclestone.

GOOD NEWS: the overwhelming vote by the Chartered Institute of Physiotherapy to affiliate to the TUC. A massive 85% of the voting membership supported the move - believed to be motivated by the attacks on bargaining rights by hospital trusts and experience of closer working relationships with health unions like NUPE and COHSE.

UNION LEADERS representing Ford workers in Belgium, Britain, Germany, Portugal and Spain met jointly to press their demands on the management of Ford of Europe. The move was in response to Ford's parent company in the US trying to sub-contract key parts of the work to small, unorganised firms. Despite differences over works councils (the German DGB wants elected factory-based ones whereas British unions still want full-time union officers to sit on them), the move is a positive step for unions confronting the dangers of Maastricht.

Newham Nalgo strike gathers pace

THE ALL-OUT strike by Newham Nalgo members in opposition to compulsory redundancies and the threat by Newham Council to sack strikers is gaining momentum.

The strike has attracted support from local people who have witnessed the closure of schools and cuts in housing, social services and leisure over the last few years.

On August 6th, 1,000 people attended a march to East Ham Town Hall in solidarity with the strikers. Delegations from Islington, Hackney, Greenwich and Tower Hamlets Nalgo attended the demonstration, as did hundreds of local people.

The strike committee which meets daily to co-ordinate the action is calling on activists to pass motions of support at trade union and Labour Party meetings and to attend the London-wide demonstration called for August 27th. For more information contact Newham Nalgo on 081 519 0799.

GOOD TIMING from the Co-Operative Wholesale Society. Just days before the massacre by South African police at Boipatong, they announce the resumption of trade with South African. "We believe that the referendum marks the appropriate point at which to re-establish trade links with South Africa." You may like to question any Co-Op sponsored MPs and MEPs in your area about this decision.

Local government's long hot summer

A wave of industrial action has engulfed councils, particularly in London, as cuts packages rail-roaded through in March and April begin to take effect.

● ISLINGTON - NALGO has called a succession of one-day strikes both selective and branch-wide to protest about the Council reneging on a redeployment procedure and attempting to bring in compulsory redundancies. Massive cuts are education cuts are threatened as results of government withdrawal of the "ILEA taper" take effect.

● TOWER HAMLETS - The troubled Liberal regime, where two of the ruling group are subject to separate police actions over fraud allegations, has attempted to cut back on the school meals service. NUPE responded with a day of action, made official for once, and a large protest march on July 28th.

● BASILDON - Massive union action has occurred over the cuts to leisure centres and social service establishments as the new Tory Council showed what they were about.

● SHEFFIELD - 2,500 teachers in the NAS/UWT and NUT struck in protest over 26 compulsory redundancy notices served on their colleagues. The Labour Council refused to negotiate and further strikes are planned.

● HACKNEY - The Council attempted to cut facility time for the unions, including for the officers of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee. A rally of 150 shop-stewards called at two days notice was followed by a half-day strike and a thousand strong rally outside the Town Hall. The Council subsequently changed the proposals!

Since then a joint NALGO/NUPE ten-day strike has occurred in the housing benefits section over management attempts to impose a new structure. The 85 strikers are solid and if the Council does not re-negotiate, both unions intend to ballot for all-out action.

RMT in crisis

A RAILWORKER reports: In a close vote members of the RMT's General Grades Committee (GGC) have voted to accept a new Machinery of Negotiation for British Rail staff after BR threatened to impose the scheme unilaterally. The new machinery will seriously weaken shop floor organisation and give increased power to BR's new "business sector" management structure. Rail workers who previously organised together will find themselves split up and having to negotiate with what is now in effect dozens of separate companies.

The General Grades Committee decision leaves major questions unresolved, which, according to the motion agreed, "if not concluded to our satisfaction, will lead to a review of our whole position and involve any necessary action as this GGC sees fit." In practice, all sides know that the RMT leadership has capitulated on all fronts to an offensive from BR paving the way for privatisation.

In 1989 similar proposals were seen off after a token strike. BR knew that RMT members has been mobilised and were ready to fight. This time, despite calls from the Broad left for the union "to develop a counter strategy and end the defeatist policies" little has been done to explain the issues to ordinary rail workers. Having managed to safeguard the role of national officials by retaining a semblance of continued national negotiation, the reality of local and regional negotiation has been abandoned.

Coming soon after the sell-out of London Underground workers this new capitulation is a serious blow to the RMT. Many battles lie ahead - not least the threat of BR privatisation. The union leadership, also facing serious financial problems, seem to be banking on keeping their heads down and hoping public opinion, and their sponsored MPs, will be enough to force the government to back down.

It won't be! As the Broad Left has said: "The only way to tackle the union's problems is not to be introspective and seek the remedies proposed by accountants but face the future and address the needs of our members... the future of the union lies in fighting for the members... improving their conditions and wages, and ensuring their futures. No to imposition of a new Machinery. No to privatisation, sell-offs and franchising. Yes to national action now!"

Banking breakthrough on 'sexuality'

THE BANKING union BIFU has been successful in amending the Midland Bank's new equal opportunities policy booklets to include opposition to discrimination based on a person's sexuality. The booklet now states that the bank aims to "provide a working environment free from discrimination, victimisation and harassment on the grounds of sex, age, marital status, disability, race, colour, sexuality, ethnic or natural origin." This is the first time sexuality or sexual orientation has been included in such a statement from a major clearing bank.

Anti-Fascist Action

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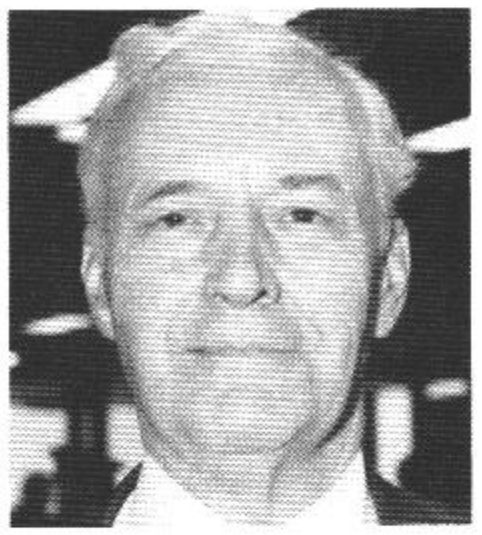
Sunday, September 6th
1-7pm

Hackney Downs, London

REVIEWS

Benn bound

Karl Statton reviews *Tony Benn, a biography* by Jad Adams, published by Macmillan, price £20.



FROM START to finish this is an enjoyable and readable book. The early chapters give insight into Benn's childhood and teenage years, an area I had no knowledge of and even expose a skeleton in the Benn closet - you'll have to read the book to find out what it is.

A chapter is given over to Caroline Benn, whose role is too often neglected. The selection process in Bristol and Benn's initial election to the Commons are also given a whole chapter, as are the Cabinet years and Benn's remarkable year as Party chair.

But the most interesting part for me covered the late seventies to the present day - which happens to coincide with my own introduction to what has come to be known as Bennism. The accounts of Benn's opposition to the Malvinas war, his defeat in Bristol in 1983, election in Chesterfield the following year and subsequent support for the miners are excellent.

Also notable is the section cataloguing the rightward shift of the LCC and Benn's split with it. This chapter includes some of his criticisms of the Party (mis)leadership. At this point however I have to say that an error leaps out from the page; a little research by the author would have shown that the Policy Review was actually entitled "Meet the challenge, make the change", "not face the challenge" - but this is really my only criticism.

After reading this biography I felt I'd known Benn for years. It's an ideal companion volume to the indispensable diaries and last year's excellent *Never a Yes Man* by Eric Heffer, although at £20 the price is a little restrictive.

Brainwashing for the under threes

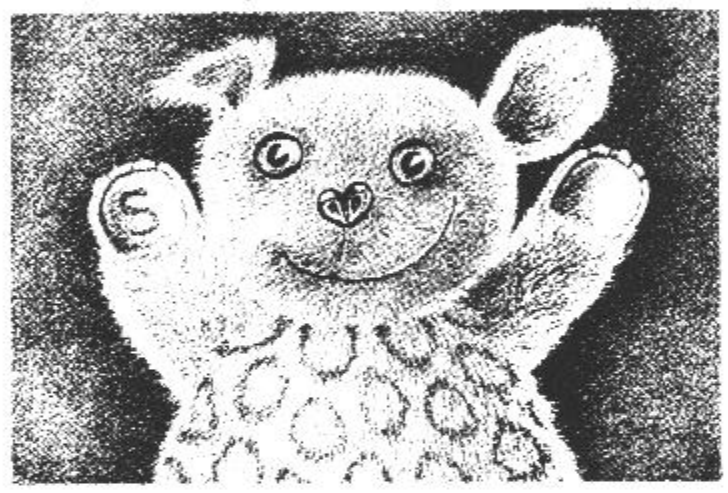
Sue Lukes offers a round-up of bedtime reading.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS have certainly improved a lot in the last few years. They teem with positive images, inner city life, amazing girls and hardly a talking animal in view. But it is not enough: great though it is to have the choice, most of the books are essentially multi-cultural rather than anti-racist, and some are sickeningly liberal. As a socialist, I want my children to understand some of the values that underpin my politics, and once I apply that test, few books measure up.

So I was glad to discover *Ruby* by Maggie Glen: apart from being a recognisably different bear, Ruby is gutsy, made in a real factory and solves problems by organising her fellow "seconds". The pictures are good and every child I know likes the book. And there is a sequel...

Before I met Ruby, we had *Elizabeth, The Paper Bag Princess*.

Although set in the rarefied world of royalty, Elizabeth's courage and cunning, and especially her rejection of the horrible Ronald ("you may be a prince but you are a toad") compensate. This is a real modern fairy tale.



And there was always the *Piggybook* by Anthony Browne (whose surreal *Walk in the Park* is a nice introduction to ideas about class). I must have given this book so often, usually to pregnant friends living with men. It says nothing about the struggle, but it is beautifully drawn, and, as the abandoned slobs turn into pigs, so do the wallpaper, furniture, taps and teacups.

But my favourite is a book I have read aloud for 11 years, and, I was shocked to find, was written in 1972. This is a real surprise, because *Dinosaurs and All that Rubbish* by Michael Foreman seems so modern. Twenty years ago, this book told the story of how the greed and power of the dominant class would wreck the planet and only collective power could rescue and keep it safe. I am still often moved by the end, as it shows how the earth belongs not to one of us but to all of us. It is talking animals again: but since the fashion now is to call anyone with principles a dinosaur, I hope the children get the point.

Libraries should have copies of these books. Letterbox Library, a co-operative mail-order bookclub, supplies some. Tel: 071 226 1633.

Mandel in toy-town

Mike Phipps reviews Ernest Mandel's *Power and Money*, published by Verso, £12.95 paperback.

SUBTITLED 'A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy', Mandel's new book might reasonably have been expected to provide some understanding of the Stalinist bureaucracy after the collapse of the Soviet state and its Eastern European satellites.

Instead we get the trite assertion that the momentous events of 1989-1991 fully confirm Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet system 50 years ago. But even that analysis is immensely richer than the pedestrian reworking Mandel offers us here, where the entire trajectory of a world-historical process - the Russian Revolution - is explained in terms of the hesitation and bad timing of a few individuals.

All Mandel's worst tendencies are here. They include his rehashing of old disputes, his patient debating with the 'works' of the paid hacks of police regimes and his proclivity for arguing with quotations rather than realities. He is particularly suspect whenever he wanders onto factual terrain. For example: "The Romanian bureaucracy under Ceaucescu, for example, was certainly more divorced from the working class than its counterpart in the GDR." Really?

Positively the worst part of this book is the final chapter on the withering away of the state. Here Mandel calls for the abolition of the ministries of health, education and transport and for the introduction of part-time work so everyone can do four hours' public administration a day. A more mechanical, unscientific and uninspiring vision of socialism would be hard to imagine.

But perhaps the absence of a political understanding of the bureaucracy is not so odd in a book in which the transition to a socialist society is presented as a curiously well-ordered affair, rationally conducted, sanitised of class struggle, physical conflict or winners and losers. Some hope!

The book ends with a two-page quotation of "what Engels wrote in 1876, anticipating the whole ecological movement". Once again, we get the unhelpful but characteristic notion that all world problems were essentially dealt with in advance by 'the greats'.

Mandel's 'theory' is toy-town stuff. He would do better to make a detailed, concrete study of the revolutions in the Stalinist states rather than serving up pompous generalisations on what he has not yet understood.

Town Hall

OUR LEWISHAM correspondent writes: So now you all know what comrades in Lewisham have been complaining about. Thanks to TV's compelling "Town Hall" series you too have seen the arrogance of the council leadership, the power of officers over elected members, the lack of ambition of a council leader who stood for election because he thought he "could do as well" as those who went before. So why did Lewisham Council let the cameras in? In the words of (former) Deputy Leader Dave Sullivan, they didn't just want Lewisham to be the best council in the country - they wanted it to be "legendary".

Along with its entertaining 'fly-on-the-wall' style, the programme has performed a service by showing just what the council cuts mean in terms of real services to real people. The resilience and anger of a workforce trying to do their best in the face of management incompetence also comes across.

Faced with the chaos, the contempt for the workers, Party members and fellow councillors shown by the deputy leader and his cronies (and now exposed before the TV-viewing public), the Labour Group this year did the right thing for once. It consigned them to the dustbin - or rather the wheelie-bin - of history. The new leadership team, with Steve 'Mr Interesting' Bullock still as leader, has opened up procedures, planned a strategy of real decentralisation, and appears to be consulting with the workforce and Party better than for many years. The witch-hunting atmosphere of the old Labour Group has abated, at least for a while.

Dave Hammond reviews *Big Boys' Blues* by Mark Urban, published by Faber and Faber.

MARK URBAN'S study of the secret war between the IRA and the British state is the best to date. Using interviews and publications from both sides he analyses in depth British Special Forces 'contacts' with the IRA during the period 1976-87.

Starting with the admission that in 1969 the RUC had lost control of loyalist violence Urban concedes that the only way the government could attempt to control the republican backlash was to "violate the principles on which the rule of law is based". Urban notes that the tactic of using the Special Air Service for ambush purposes, which commenced in 1976, was and is used only on republicans despite the fact that informer intelligence has given the opportunity for such tactics to be used against loyalists terrorists.

The ambush tactic has had periods of disfavour, such as after the SAS killing of 16-year-old John Boyle, when the regiment went five years without registering a kill. Instead the intelligence gained from informers was used to foil IRA actions rather than engage Active Service Units in a fire-fight.

When the ambush was reinstated it gave the SAS the chance to engage in the sort of action that it is renowned for, bringing massive fire-power to bear following long periods of observation on IRA ammo-dumps. Always the aim was the 'clean kill', with no IRA survivors. Their idea was that the IRA had decided to play the killing game so therefore they must play by 'the big boys' rules'.

Urban concludes after much research that the ambush tactic does not, as is claimed, lower the level of overall violence. While showing an admiration for the professionalism of the SAS over the 'orange bigots' of the RUC, Urban concedes that such military actions will not dim the aspirations of the republican freedom fighters.



Pay up, pay up... and play the game!

PERISCOPE HAD vowed to lay off detestable parasite **Philip Gould**, the Shadow Communications Agency supremo who has come under (belated) fire from everyone from Roy Hattersley to Kim Howells. But we simply cannot refrain from informing readers that Gould, one of four most powerful individuals in the Kinnock regime, didn't even bother to pay his Party sub last year. So much for the drive towards a million members!

Bosses' hysterical outbreak

BUSINESS LIFE, a magazine published by **British Airways**, is worried about Repetitive Strain Injury.

The magazine claims "hysterical influences" play a part in "outbreaks" of RSI. "Employers increasingly live in dread of RSI breaking out in their typing pool or at work stations. RSI has become a highly emotive topic and its supposed symptoms are so widely discussed there now seems to be a real risk that 'if one gets it they'll all get it'.

"Unfortunately, no treatment seems to be on hand for harassed managers struggling to keep staff tap-tapping away without protests."

Readers who wish to suggest suitable treatments for these poor, oppressed managers should make their views known directly to BA.

Bailiffs redeemed

IN THE last *Labour Briefing* we reported how bailiffs had impounded a police car in Yorkshire. Now we are happy to report that in Hackney too the scoundrels have found at least one worthy object of their intentions - the Director of Housing.

Angry Council tenants turned the tables on the Hackney Housing boss **Bernard Crofton** when they went to court to sue the Housing Department for failing to carry out repairs. Bailiffs were sent round to the Council's legal department with summonses to appear in court. But the council solicitors refused to accept the court orders and directed the bailiffs to Crofton's office, even telling them to use the staff entrance! Crofton was none too amused when the bailiffs barged into his office - now he knows what it's like.

Snoring Norm (part 24)

"SNORIN' NORMAN" Willis, shortly to get the thoroughly-deserved heave from the TUC, has sunk to new depths of infamy by inviting Howard Davies (the CBI's new Director-General) to address the TUC at Blackpool. The *Financial Times* gleefully reported that this act of class treachery was an historical first!

Meanwhile, **Norm** was a speaker at the TUC's farewell dinner for retiring MSF General Secretary **Ken Gill**. Towards the end of proceedings, some of the more well-lubricated comrades began singing the Internationale. Not one of the stony faces on the dais responded - except our Norm, who delivered a flawless rendition of all four verses of the workers' anthem.

Perhaps Norm had been rehearsing with his new minder, **Charles Clarke**, who has been given a temporary contract at the TUC, presumably as a favour to Clarke's former boss, Neil Kinnock. Clarke, whose only known talent is for ruthless back-stabbing, has been charged with a "communications" brief at Congress House, redesigning the TUC's "image". Staff are none too amused at having to put up with Clarke's highly-paid but superfluous presence at a time when financial crisis is supposed to be forcing the TUC to shed up to 20% of its regular staff.

Foibles of high-tech franchise

A PLAN to use information technology to bolster democracy in **Paraguay** has been foiled.

The US government donated fifteen computers to the Paraguayans to generate a new electoral register and count up votes. The systems were first used in last year's municipal elections accompanied by confident predictions that vote-rigging was a thing of the past.

A triumph for democracy! After all, how could anyone fix elections with the might of US technology safeguarding voters' rights?

However, with fewer than twelve months to go before the presidential elections the systems have been stolen. Their location is a mystery, though informed sources suggest the hardware has been kidnapped by the military and is being held under armed guard.

So if someone in a uniform offers you any second-hand computer hardware complete with user manuals in Spanish, donate them to **Walworth Road**, whose membership processing system is, according to *Computing* magazine "well and truly up the spout".

Wrong again!

NEIL KINNOCK's vendetta against the NUM knows no bounds. He now seems to believe that one reason he lost the 1992 general election was that he wasn't hard enough on the miners during the 1984-85 strike.

Asked by TV AM interviewer David Frost if he had any regrets about his years as Labour leader, **Kinnock** said he wished he had called for a national strike ballot sooner than he had.

"I said it in 1985, but I said it months too late, I guess," he told Frost. Apparently the former Labour leader is suffering from selective amnesia. On Friday, April 13th, 1984 he did call for a ballot - on the front page of Robert Maxwell's *Daily Mirror*.

Tory Blur

THE *INDEPENDENT* reports the first initiative by new Labour Shadow Home Secretary **Tony Blair**.

"Young criminals are threatening to destroy democratic freedoms, Labour will argue in an autumn campaign...Tony Blair...will make it clear that while social deprivation is a contributory cause, there can be no excuses for crime, marking a shift on Labour's approach to the law and order issue."

Come back **Roy Hattersley**, all is forgiven?

Front Bench at posh trough

JACK CUNNINGHAM has been organising overpriced slap-up dinners again, this time at the Savoy. Where does the money from the Shadow Cabinet's £150-a-head meal go to? On the food, booze and leaving presents for Messrs **Kinnock** and **Hattersley**. With Kinnock's legacy to the Party now amounting to a £2.5 million overdraft with the Co-op Bank (£600,000 of which is financed by interest payments at 2% above normal rates), couldn't they have found something better to do with their spare dosh?

Hainous

THE TRIBUNE Group in the Commons could soon find its fragile finances under threat.

Publicity-seeking **Peter Hain**'s attempt to get the PLP to put up some opposition to Maastricht has got the Tribune Group Secretary into hot water (eau chaud?) with the MEPs' Tribune Group, made up primarily of Euro-fanatics. Hain plans a trip to Strasbourg to try to save the links between the two groups - not to mention the Euro-dosh that flows from one to the other.

Briefing readers put to shame!

ACCORDING TO the magazine's own publicity, *New Statesman* readers are "educated, opinionated, affluent, non-conformist and culturally active." A survey reveals that 74% of readers hold a university degree; 62% take two or more holidays a year; 74% own their own home and 23% have capital tied up in stock and shares. With the average household income of his readers at £28,401, it's little wonder that editor **Steve Platt** placed so little value on a majority Labour government. Clearly this is champagne socialism of the Dom Perignon variety.

Never a yes man!



Sculpture by Ian Walters

JULY 10TH saw the first Annual Eric Heffer Memorial Lecture at Banbury Town Hall. The event, organised by the North Oxfordshire Socialist Campaign Group, was addressed by Tony Benn and attended by 250 people, some from as far away as Eric's beloved Liverpool. They made the event a hugh success which looks certain to become a regular feature in the socialist calendar.

Sharon Pope
Banbury CLP

Eric's publisher, Colin Robinson of Verso Books, paid tribute to a man of whom he was clearly very fond. He spoke of Eric's courage and steadfastness and of his rebelliousness from an early age. He was thrown out of the Boy Scouts, orchestrated a choirboys' strike at the age of eight, and was eventually expelled from the Communist Party. Colin reminded us that Eric was the first MP to speak out in the Commons against the despatch of troops to Northern Ireland and also one of the first to oppose the sending of troops to the Gulf. Eric never shirked from supporting unpopular causes if he believed they were right.

Tony Benn, seated next to a marvellous bust of Eric by sculptor Ian Walters, then delivered the main lecture entitled 'The Moral Basis of Socialism and its Relevance Today'. He also began by paying tribute to Eric and said that the packed hall was an indication of the power of Eric's life and ideas, "And this for a man who was widely described by the media as isolated, marginalised and irrelevant!" He spoke of Eric's love of Liverpool, his deep dislike of bullies and how his belief in collective strength never stopped him from maintaining his individuality.

Benn then went on to discuss a wide range of topics including the Russian Revolution, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the English Revolution and Christianity. He disputed the popular notion that socialism is dead and criticised the adherence of some Labour Party members to the famous Thatcher dictum, "There Is No Alternative". He said this resulted in the de-mobilisation of all those, who, like Eric, believe that an unjust world needed to be changed.

He criticised Labour for distancing itself from class struggles and said that as a movement we have to show, with the benefit of our socialist ideas and the strength of our collective organisation, that we are capable of articulating the needs of people and campaigning to bring about the changes they require. In order to do this we need a leadership which is a little less dictatorial. He finished the lecture by citing a favourite Chinese quotation which ends "...and when the best leader's work is done, the people say, 'we did it ourselves'."

The meeting ended with a question and answer session covering everything from the new Labour leadership to school and hospital opt-outs, Japanese working practices and the role of violence in revolution.



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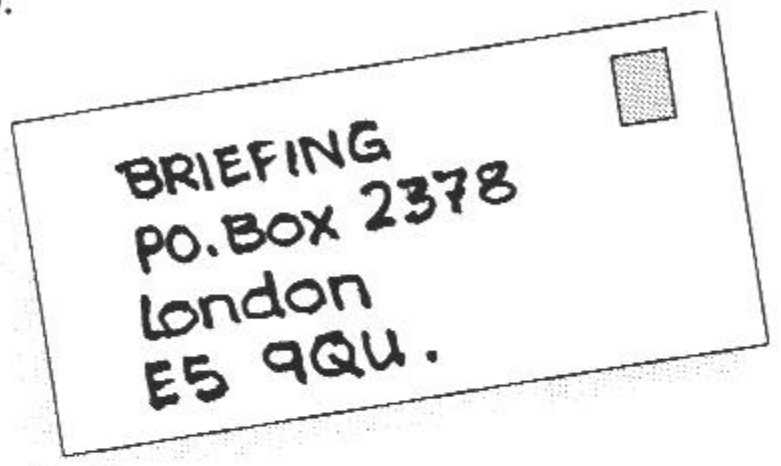
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Your letters are welcome, but please keep them short.
Write to:



I usually enjoy reading Keith Flett's monthly missive to your letters page. But when he suggests that taking out a sub to *Socialist Worker* and leaving Labour for a group like the SWP (July, *Briefing*) is the way forward for socialists I begin to lose patience.

If the fight for socialism really does lie outside of Labour as Keith claims why did his paper dedicate a number of issues after the election to explaining the need for Labour to retain its links with the unions? Why did *Socialist Worker* (wrongly) express critical support for Prescott in the deputy leadership contest?

As an independent member of the Labour Left (not allied to *Briefing* by the way) nothing pisses me off more than a group of predominantly middle class individuals like the SWP telling members of the Labour Party how they should use their votes in the leadership contest - particularly when I recall how they've spent the last 12 months exhorting members to leave the Party. But then I forgot how Flett and comrades are in a position to instruct those of us who have not yet had the courage to break with reformism in the correct response to the manoeuvres of the right wing because they are the true vanguard of the working class.

1993 is the 25th anniversary of 1968. The SWP behaves like it's still the summer of love. It may have escaped your notice, comrades, but the 1980s were a very different period to the 60s and 70s. The labour movement was under systematic attack and the only way to defend it properly was and still is from inside the Labour Party and trade unions. Your attempt to do it from outside led to ideological incoherence. The way in which you told trade unionists in 1985 that it was in their interests to maintain the political levy and continue to finance the Labour Party, even though it had lost all socialist credentials and does not have the potential to ever act progressively is a case in point.

Keith is correct when he says that membership is at an all time low at just under 300,000. But he is not seriously going to suggest that 3,000 or so active members of the SWP can compare with this? Equally the Party is more middle class than ever before. Its social composition is, however, immeasurably more healthy than the SWP's largely student constituency.

The tragedy with Tony Cliff and his disciples is that they are not even good Trots. Referring to Burnham's and Shactman's description of themselves as Trotskyites, one Lev Davidovich commented (echoing Marx before him), "There is one thing I am certain that I am not and that's a Trotskyite."

The SWP are such hopeless sectarians that they even reject Trotsky's demand to unite around a common programme with others of their ilk and instead make membership conditional on whether you follow their own convoluted logic on such ideological abstractions as the social nature of the old eastern bloc. On fundamental questions of the self-organisation of women, black people and lesbians and gay men they are similarly neanderthal. Given the iron discipline with which the line is imposed and the fact that there is not even the exchange of ideas and level of debate which exists in Smith's Labour Party it is hardly surprising that they have such a rapid turn-over of members.

Finally, Keith is deceiving himself if he believes the SWP's growth in the late 80s has placed it in a unique position. The SWP is no stronger now than Militant were in the early 80s and the SLL/WRP were in the early 70s. It is considerably weaker than the ILP during the 1930s. Left sects grow to a point and then go into crisis when they realise that the working class have more sense than to be won over in any real numbers to sectarian outfits.

The only thing that separates the SWP is that it lacks the comfort of knowing that it grew in a period of revolutionary opportunity and on the basis of real struggle, like the Militant and WRP. The SWP's ascendency on the left has taken place in a vacuum. That it should have reached a position of pre-eminence on the left is indicative of just how weak and disorientated the real left is and not as they seem to believe a vindication of their reductionist politics and sectarian practice.

Yours in solidarity,
Lisa Thompson
Manchester

Many of us on the left of the Party have for years tried unsuccessfully through numerous resolutions or debate within the Party to get Robert Maxwell's membership card torn up. This all went on long before the press reported his crooked ways, but also unfortunately at the same time as many of Labour's top brass were fawning all over him at annual conference.

I suppose what really sticks in my throat now is that after all the attacks on Arthur Scargill through his *Mirror* newspapers, urged on, no doubt, by our own wonderful leadership, not once, not even on a middle page somewhere, have I read of any apologies for the lies that were printed.

At the last Labour Conference in Blackpool, two years ago, Arthur Scargill should have been at the

London Briefing Group

Open discussions

Monday September 7th
Can there be justice under capitalism?
How should socialists use the law?

Monday October 5th
Is science socialist?
Is socialism scientific

7.30pm
Marchmont Community Centre
62 Marchmont Street
Russell Square
London WC1

Campaign Group's evening, but was instead ill in bed. Who knows? Perhaps the constant battering did get to him, because we are all well aware that he does not miss the chance to speak at a rally.

Well, this year conference is in Blackpool again, and I, along with many others, look forward to hearing Arthur at the Campaign Group rally, which usually livens up an otherwise demoralising week.

Fraternally,
Cllr. Royston Jones
Blackpool

Towards the end of 'Inside the Met Mentality' (July *Briefing*) former police officer Dave Gray poses the question in quasi-Leninist form of "What can be done?"

Here is the way forward to British police officers in the rank-and-file presented to the 1992 Police Federation Conference in Scarborough in a valedictory speech by a Metropolitan representative:

"The loss of the absolute right in Police Regulations to the eight-hour day is a severe set-back for police workers whatever the sugar coating to that bitter pill. That to some extent it has been brought about by your own hands reflects the continuing retreat by organised labour in this part of Europe although not elsewhere in Germany and in the police hunger-strike in Liege.

You would all do well to reappraise. Regional deals wanted by this government of land-owners, lawyers and businessmen could bring about a further demise of this painfully won but great organisation.

As I leave you this year I leave you with this food for thought.

The crisis of any mass organised body is that of leadership and correct class-orientated politics. The principles of Inspector Syme (founder of the free police union in 1913), the politics of the Marxist Marston (President of the Union and leader of the 1918 and 1919 police strikes) and the Labour Party efforts of Hayes (victimised sergeant) are your legacy. Follow them and you won't keep going wrong."

Yours,
John Hayball
Brussels

John Nicholson is critical of CLPD's position that the Left should "prioritize issues which are potentially acceptable to Party members." He claims this became CLPD policy in 1987. In fact it's always been CLPD policy. What demands are potentially acceptable to Labour Party members is a matter of judgement. In the *CLPD Newsletter* of April 1982 Victor Schonfield and I wrote an article on CLPD's alternative strategy for socialists: "At first CLPD found itself at odds with many of those committed to conventional Labour Party politics. CLPD alone... identified constitutional issues as being decisive while the establishment at every level - Right, Left and Centre - preoccupied with glamorous but empty gestures, dismissed CLPD's proposals as irrelevant. Slowly but surely they have increasingly come to recognize that a majority of trade unions and constituency parties are prepared to support policies which go some way towards the realisation of the aims stated on our Party cards..."

This proved wishful thinking. We mistook the left establishment's lip service for a change of heart. Nevertheless, back in 1973 we identified mandatory reselection as a potentially acceptable demand, and the CLPD-led campaign won it in 1979. Subsequently, as CLPD's influence grew, other demands were added. The Electoral College was won in 1981, and "at least one woman on every shortlist" in 1988. At 1991 Conference the NEC bowed to our demands and itself put forward proposals for positive discrimination in its own composition.

Mobilization behind winnable demands is a precondition for more far reaching victories. Success with more radical demands will only come after we have gained support for a series of transitional ones. It's the Left's failure to understand this ABC of socialist strategy which has led to its disastrous loss of influence since 1981.

John's claims that CLPD "instead of attacking the right... spends far too much time attacking other left-wingers." In fact all our demands aim to undermine the present right-wing domination. But it is not possible to understand the causes of the left's decline without a critique of its actions, past and present. Those who cannot learn from their mistakes condemn themselves to repeat them.

John also believes that our criticisms of Socialist Campaign Group comrades were "geared to alienate MPs, making them less likely to listen to anyone in the Party at large." Originally the LCC believed that by toning down their criticism they could make Kinnock more receptive to their arguments. They ended up Kinnock's obedient servants. Unless John is careful his obsequiousness to the SCG establishment will bring him to a similar end.

Yours,
Vladimir Derer
CLPD

Editor's note: this is the second half of Vladimir Derer's letter in response to John Nicholson's article in the March *Briefing*.

I look forward to seeing Part II of Vladimir's reply to my article replying to his article *(Briefing* November 1066). Meanwhile, I am grateful that this has given *Briefing* readers the chance to again consider the points I made:

1. That the wide-ranging left membership of the Party which is not in "national groups" want to see the mobilising of non-sectarian left activity (such as through the successful first steps taken at the Leeds Conference on June 20th). They (we) do not want this process to be prevented by existing "national groups" trying to keep a franchise on left activity all for themselves.

2. Vladimir makes clear that CLPD's own criteria for the NEC slate are in fact subjugated to their own political prejudices. Thus he justifies Anni Marjoram's promotion because "Pauline Purnell and Leonora Lloyd are not CLPD supporters".

He then claims that "credibility" means CLPD "still argues for inclusion on the slate of comrades who don't meet all our political criteria but enjoy significant personal support" - that is, provided their names are not Jeremy Corbyn, Leonora Lloyd, etc.

3. Vladimir reaffirms by all this that CLPD's slate for the NEC last year was a "silly list".

Hopefully this year CLPD will come clean on their political differences with the rest of the left, especially with the left outside of London (i.e. those of us not the so-called "national groups").

CLPD has a worthy track record and should be prepared to debate its position openly, honestly and politically - within the open, honest and political discussion of the Labour left which the Leeds Conference has enabled to start - rather than hiding its true motives behind bureaucratic formulas for internal party slates.

Yours,
John Nicholson
Manchester



Photo: Bryn Griffiths

On August 21st, the first joint demonstration of COHSE, NUPE and NALGO - soon to be merged in UNISON - saw 2,000 nurses, health service workers and trade unionists voice their anger at Tory attacks on London's NHS jobs and services, including the proposed closure of the women-only Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital. Delegations from hospitals in Sheffield and Birmingham attended the demonstration as did staff currently involved in action at the UCH, Middlesex and Charing Cross hospitals. After the police attempt to stop the march reaching the Department of Health failed, the demonstration assembled outside the Department buildings where speakers demanded that Minister Virginia Bottomley justify the closure of hospitals and axing of services.

Market wreaks havoc with London's health

LONDON HEALTH-worker H. Levant reports: The devastating impact of the Tory government's so-called NHS reforms is now becoming apparent. The internal market dividing the health service into purchasers and providers of health care means that a price tag has been attached to each item of health care. It is now only a short step to the complete tyranny of profit and loss accounting.

However, a more immediate crisis has now surfaced. London's hospitals have been severely affected as budget holding GPs and health authorities ("purchasers") shop around to find the cheapest possible care on offer.

The high costs prevailing in the capital (private companies estimate that costs in London are up to 20% higher than elsewhere) mean that the London health service - in free market terms - is uncompetitive. Basic items such as wages and salaries are higher because of London Weighting agreements. In addition, London's teaching hospitals have historically employed a larger number of doctors and consultants because they tend to treat a larger number of patients with more complex medical problems.

The government had recognised the capital's particularly vulnerable position by introducing a special subsidy for London, but that was before the Tories' fourth general election victory. Now the Tories have withdrawn the subsidy! The resulting high prices for health care has forced health care "purchasers" to look outside of London for "providers".

This means that London Health Service is facing a massive crisis as the market demand falls away whilst patients' demand, as measured by the length of waiting lists, increases.

The management response to the market-induced crisis is to cut back jobs. Provision of services will inevitably be reduced. Patients will suffer needlessly.

However, health workers and their allies are fighting back. This summer, at Charing Cross Hospital, MSF members struck for three days with support from other health unions on the final day.

What is needed now is a genuine focus for this anger. A delegate based body bringing together London's health service trade unions to stimulate and co-ordinate action should be our top priority.

John Lister of London Health Emergency has presented the full facts on London's NHS crisis in a new report, "Pressure Drop", available from the COHSE office, 112 Greyhound Lane, Streatham, London SW16 5RN (081 677 3622).

COHSE London Regional Secretary Pete Marshall commented, "The harsh reality is that front line services in London are being ripped apart by market forces."

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