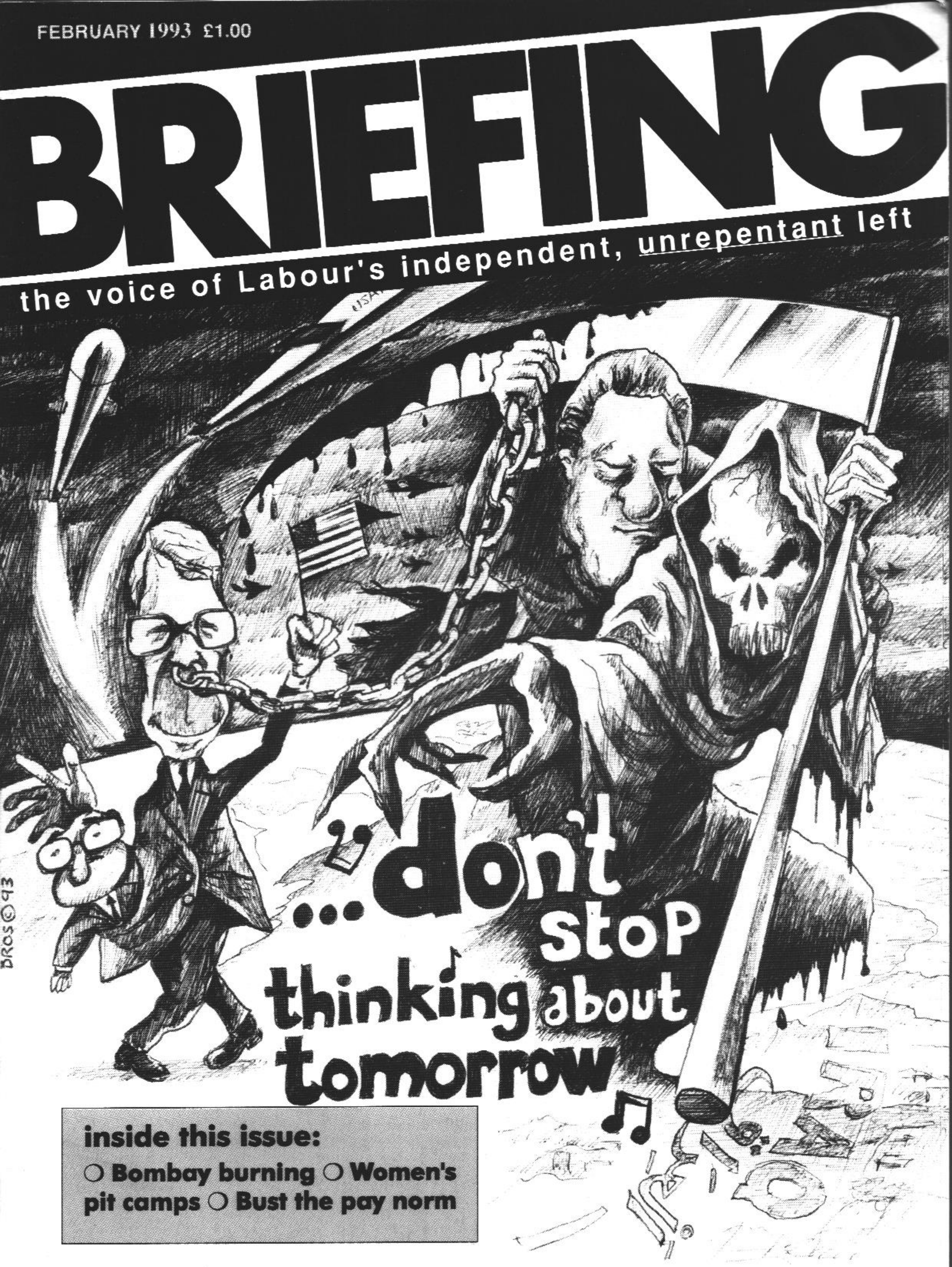
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BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left



inside this issue:

○ Bombay burning ○ Women's pit camps ○ Bust the pay norm

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

Stop press

Lambeth "fraud" fiasco

DEPARTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE Herman Ouseley has bid a fond farewell to Lambeth Council with a 118 page report under section 5 of the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act. This notionally confidential document has been widely leaked leading to sensational press coverage alleging "unprecedented" corruption and acts of victimisation.

This report has been seized upon by the Tory press to bash a Labour council with a long-vanished left-wing reputation. Local MPs Kate Hoey and Keith Hill wrote swiftly to council leader Steve Whaley calling on him to close down the DLO and sack the workforce; this in the same week that Hoey the hypocrite wept crocodile tears to the local paper over the increase in unemployment in South London.

Council trades unions are calling for an independent investigation - a call which was echoed by the Council in the small hours of the morning of Saturday, 23rd January. There is no doubt some of the scams run by private contractors working in Lambeth need to be explored. While hundreds of workers were made redundant last year, council work was still flowing to private sub-contractors under arrangements made by a firm of private consultants.

However, the legal advice being used to declare contracts 'unlawful' is in conflict with advice from elsewhere, and if followed through nationally would affect most other councils. One thing that is obvious is that opportunities for fraud arise where work is put out to private firms. Yet the Chief Executive's report is now being used by councillors and officers whose aim is to close down all Direct Labour.

Left councillors failed by 2 votes in an attempt to confirm that immediate plans did not include automatic re-tendering of DLO work. One LCC councillor, Cathy Ashley, joined with the Tories to vote down an amendment from Labour's Chief Whip. In his usual decisive manner, Council Leader Steve Whaley abstained, torn between a resolution clarifying Group policy and his instructions from Walworth Road.

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Clintonising the universe



AS WE GO to press, the US is once again raining death from the skies over Iraq. Saddam's alleged violations of UN mandates are trivial compared with those committed by Israel or indeed the US itself. The sheer flimsiness of the pretext and the naked double-standards have confirmed that the New World Order is indeed the old imperialism, back with a hi-tech vengeance and smothered in a sickening sugar-coating of phoney 'internationalist' altruism.

The Tory government, of course, has tagged along behind the US, more confident than ever that it will be supported by the Labour front bench, especially given the latter's sycophancy towards the new US President. Once again, only Tony Benn and the Socialist Campaign Group MPs have been prepared to use the Commons to expose the moral idiocy of trying to undermine Saddam by launching Cruise missile attacks on hotel workers in Baghdad.

The one decipherable message in the otherwise vacuous gibberish of Clinton's inaugural address was his intention to uphold the right of the US to intervene militarily at whim anywhere in the world. People who want to 'Clintonise' the Labour Party should ponder what this means.

Clinton has already endorsed a tightening of the US trade embargo of Cuba in an effort to choke off supplies of food and medicines. This move was overwhelmingly condemned by the same UN whose mandate the US and Britain are allegedly seeking to enforce in the Gulf. The aim seems to be to reduce Cuba to a state of deprivation and disease akin to Somalia, which, of course, will then provide the perfect excuse for military occupation.

As for the US intervention in Somalia itself (on which Clinton is also keen) it has little to do with famine relief (food, transport, technical expertise and co-operation with Somalians themselves are needed for that) and everything to do with longtime US strategic interests in the Horn of Africa. These are the same interests which led the US to give arms, money and diplomatic support to ousted dictator Mohammed Siad Barre for thirteen years while he laid waste to the country and murdered 150,000 Somalians. The media has been used to propagate a caricature of Somalia as a land entirely polarised between a gang of gun-toting cartoon 'warlords' and a passive, voiceless, starving millions. Somali self-determination and self-management of relief have been wiped off the agenda. One Somalian socialist told *Briefing*: "In the West they call it 'Operation Restore Hope'; we call it 'Operation Restore Colonialism'."

Clinton has also indicated that he sees the Balkans as a US "responsibility". Under him, the drift towards large-scale NATO intervention there will continue. As in the case of Iraq, the West's military gestures will result only in the strengthening of the most oppressive forces in the region and will put more obstacles in the way of the necessary democratic and secular solutions.

Increasingly, we will see the UN and "the conscience of the international community" (as constructed by the western-dominated electronic media) used to justify military adventures of all kinds. The national, 'ethnic', communal and other conflicts that have proliferated in the wake of the collapse of Stalinism and the apparent historic triumph of the 'free market' will provide plenty of excuses for the rich North, with the US still at its head, to impose its will by force on the earth's poor majority.

Instead of exposing the hypocrisy of US-British policy in the Gulf and across the Third World, warning of the dangers of global militarisation and demanding the peace dividend now, Labour leaders have been eager acolytes of the bogus New World Order. They only complain when the US lets its UN-mask slip. They have not offered an alternative socialist world vision based on democracy and equality within and between nations and peoples. Labour's stubborn loyalty to establishment 'foreign policy' is an attempt to seal the whole area off from public contention. It is based on the (incorrect and amoral) assumption that on this terrain Labour can only lose votes. That, of course, is an old story punctuated by many tragedies. But in an age of global capital, world-gripping ecological crisis and increasing North-South (i.e. rich-poor) conflict, it is more reprehensible than ever.

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 February 28th. 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 February 15th.

***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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Persuasion and power

The campaign against pit closures is rebuilding confidence **Tony Benn**, MP for Chesterfield, told the miners solidarity conference at Sheffield on January 9th.

THERE'S A vacuum in politics today. The war in Ireland, a Federal Europe, market forces, the liberation of capital, the restriction of trade union rights... the political leaderships are converging upon one another with such speed that there might even be an accident.In a vacuum, it doesn't follow that the left emerges victorious. The threat can come from the hard-faced men of the right, as happened in this country - and in Germany, Spain and France - in the 1930s.

The issues facing us therefore go well beyond the miners. The core of our campaign, from which we and the NUM have no intention whatever of withdrawing, is the defence of all 31 of the threatened pits. But when you're closely involved in events, it's sometimes difficult to grasp their significance. What we are engaged upon is probably the biggest, the most important political campaign for half a century.

Ours is an attack upon the whole rotten system of capitalist values and power structures based on class interests. The Labour Party doesn't mention socialism any more. But they don't talk about capitalism either. If capitalism is so triumphant all over the world, with Mr Yeltsin introducing it so successfully in the ex-Soviet Union, why is there mass unemployment, why the terrible poverty, with racism and fascism coming back as in the 1930s?

The Tories talk of economic necessities, but really their policies are those of class. It doesn't make economic sense to shut down the pits. Under feudalism, people were paid a pittance to do work for their employers. Now, people pay you a pittance not to work. Chesterfield, which I represent, is paying out seventy two million pounds a year to keep eight thousand people out of work!

You don't have to be a chartered accountant to realise that the men in white coats ought to come for the people who devise such policies and take them away!

The foundations of our current campaign go back to the 1984-5 miners' strike, which was conducted courageously by those whom the then government labelled "the enemy within". Had the leaders of the trade union and labour movement supported the miners then, the Thatcher government would have been defeated in 1987 and this country would be a very different place. Seen in historical perspective, it's clear that it's because the miners took their principled stand nearly ten years ago that our movement today can hold its head up high, carrying a credibility it would never have had if we had gone along with the policies of capitulation which were then being put forward. The policies of New Realism which were supposed to bring us victory in 1992 led to a catastrophic political defeat for the fourth time running. That was the answer to all those who said you've got to be realistic, you've got to face the harsh reality and come to terms with what the Tories are doing. The answer to all that came in the ballot boxes of April 1992.

So much did we concede that we now have a government which actually believes it's completely above the law. When it turns out that Heseltine didn't even think it necessary to consult the cabinet when 100,000 jobs were to be destroyed, that too is an indication of our weakness in resisting what they wanted to do.

I've never been a great believer in the British legal system. There are too many double standards. Supermarket owners are allowed to defy the Sunday trading laws with impunity; yet so many trade union leaders are saying they can't support a stay-away against pit-closures and redundancies 'because of the law.' What I do know is that the judges are a kind of rusty weathercock. If the winds blow strongly enough, they'll find an excuse for giving the public what they are demanding. The lesson I draw is this: the more you keep up the pressure, the more will the courts give judgements meeting our needs.

That's why it's so wise for the NUM this time round to go for public support. People have seen a direct link with their own experience. Whoever you are, wherever you work, your job is at stake as well.

The High Court ruling that there's a "legal expectation" that you should be consulted before you lose your job is a very interesting doctrine. It means there's a legal expectation you'll have a job - and an implication there's a legal expectation you'll have a home, have proper health care, education and dignity when you're old!

That concept of "legal expectation" has emerged because the courts have measured the mood of public opinion. It's something we can build upon, leading to not just a legal but a political and human expectation that we should live in a decent society.

In beginning to fill the political vacuum which so obviously exists, we're giving leadership in a situation which desperately needs it. The women's pit camps which have been announced are a formidable example of this leadership.

I think the strategy we are following - the combination of persuasion and power - is absolutely correct. Yes, we need persuasion. But the issue is also one of power. Those of our leaders who complain about extra-parliamentary activity forget that the Tories live on their extra-parliamentary power. When one man made a billion dollars in a single day, back in September when the City people gambled against the currency, he was joining in strike action against the British economy. Unless we're prepared to remind those people that such wealth is created by those who work - unless we remind them of that basic truth by occasionally taking strike action of our own, then we will be fooling about on the margins of politics.

What we are doing in this campaign is rebuilding confidence. When you rebuild confidence, people will not accept what they should not accept. We are showing the people a way out from the terrible tragedy which has been afflicting this country for over ten years. We're rediscovering our solidarity. That's the basis on which victory can be won. ❑



Tony Benn addressing National Miners Solidarity Conference in Sheffied, 9th January 1993 PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

● Welcoming Women Against Pit Closures' launch of 'pit camps' at Markham Main, Grimethorpe and Houghton Main was **Yorkshire NUM General Secretary Ken Homer** who said: "Our executive have given the Area unions full support for this courageous and imaginative move. We applaud their initiative in launching those camps at a time when public attention needs to be concentrated urgently on the plight of our pits threatened with closure and the communities which depend on them.

The decision to close these pits has been declared unlawful, invalid and irrational in the High Court, yet there has been no attempt to resume production. Indeed, those of our members who are still being allowed to work at these pits find themselves obliged to take part in dismantling them. The women's camps provide a focus to show the public's outrage at the destruction of their coal industry, as we await the outcome of investigations by the Department of Trade and Industry and Commons Select Committees. We urge everyone to visit these camps to show their support."

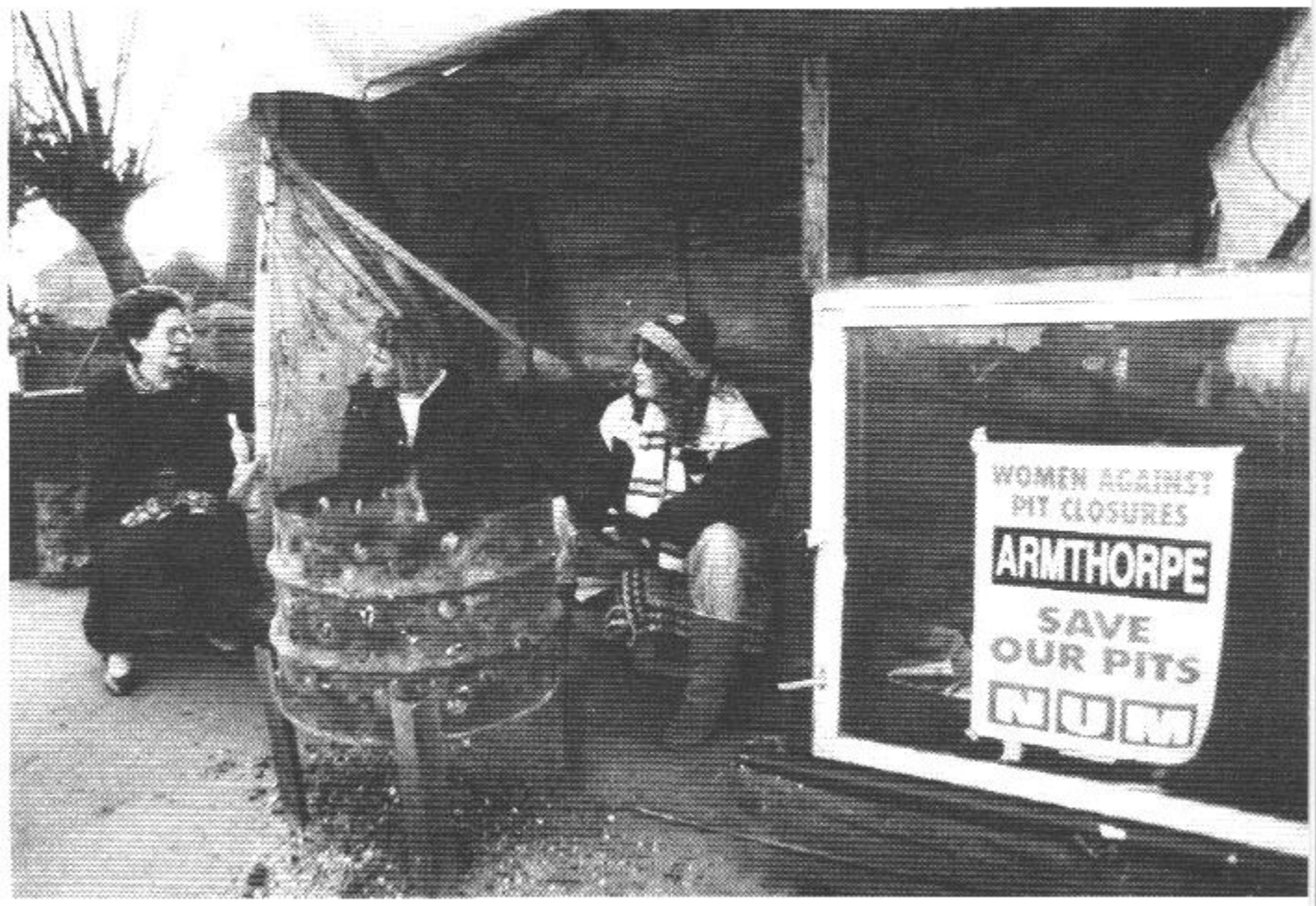
Save every pit!

Ken Capstick vice-chair, Yorkshire NUM, told *Labour Briefing*: "We were not surprised by the High Court decision that the closures were unlawful. It was quite clear that the government had broken the employment laws, acting without any consultation. They clearly believed that they could do as they liked, and the closures were announced with complacent, conceited arrogance. Not only had they had underestimated public opposition, but even the Judges would not back them.

The Employment Select Committee decision was also welcome news. It added pressure on the government, and vindicated our argument. If the 31 pits closed, between 90,000 and 100,000 jobs would go, among clearly identifiable sectors - coal, rail, power stations and suppliers. There will be others, perhaps taking the total as high as 120,000. But this report looked only at employment, deciding the way the closures were being carried out was wrong. We now look to the Energy Select Committee to support our case for coal, and to safeguard a vital resource for this country. If we get the support that our case demands this will prove another embarrassment to the government. They should recognise that there have already been far too many closures, and it would be a disaster if our precious energy reserves were wasted. Every pit must stay open."

Women Against Pit Closures
London Demonstration
Save our pits
Saturday February 6th
Assemble 11am Embankment
March to Hyde Park

● Womens' pit camps have also been set up in other areas. These include Parkside (Lancs), Cotgrave (Notts) and Trentham (Staffs) - see feature overleaf. Rose Hunter of North Staffs Miners' Wives, camped at Trentham, summed up their defiance and determination, declaring "We are not moving until all the 31 pits are saved."



Women's camp at Markham Main Colliery, Armthorpe PHOTO Martin Jenkinson

National Miners' Support Network
Affiliate now!
Send £5 (min) to NMSN,
219 Mare Street, London E8 3QQ
TEL: 081 985 1905

Irish Benefit Night
The Robey Pub, 240 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4
6th FEBRUARY 9-2am (late bar)
(Finsbury Park Tube) £5/£4 (conc)
(All proceeds to National Miners Support Network)

Camp against pit closures

Helen Drummond, TGWU/ACTS member, reports from Trentham, scene of the North Staffs Miners' Wives Action Group camp.

JUST OFF the M6 in Staffordshire, on the A500 Longton Road, is the entrance to the Hem Heath side of Trentham Colliery. There's a caravan parked on the grass verge outside, which has been there since the early hours of Monday 11th January, when it was towed into place by the North Staffordshire Miners' Wives Action Group (NSMWAG) and supporters. Originally it was planned to park it a bit closer to the road barrier where the security men's office is, but once the caravan's wheel sunk into the mud, no further move was possible. Luckily, that turned out to be a happy accident as the camp's position makes it clearly visible from the busy motorway feeder road. Cars, ambulances, buses, farm vehicles, lorry and trailers honk their horns in agreement with the "Save Trentham Now!" banner displayed prominently on the side of the caravan. Supporters warming themselves by the coal-fired brazier wave back in approval.

Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) is working flat out again to maximise opposition to the government's decision to close 31 pits. The decision to set up camps at the gates of the ten immediately threatened pits was taken at a WAPC meeting in Sheffield on 9th January. The women felt that the whole pit closure issue was slipping from the public eye and needed fresh action as a focus, especially in the days leading up the end of the 90 day review period. Less than 48 hours later, the Trentham women's caravan was in place!

Brenda, Bridget, Debbie, Hilary, Rose and Maureen - known up and down the land for their *a cappella* singing group which has given unstinting solidarity to other struggles and raised money for the sacked miners from the '84-85 strike - are providing the focus of the camp. In the years since '85 they've continued to meet supporters and activists, who are now getting in contact and pledging support. A quick glance through the pages of the camp visitors book shows that supporters have already visited from all around the country. Soon after I arrived a delegation of local NUT activists rolled up to present a box of hot water bottles. Donations have been received from NCU, TGWU and NALGO branches; Several miners' support groups have visited, local Labour councillors have been helpful, and a few local Tories have dropped by expressing their support for the miners and disgust at their own government. Miners' wives, families and friends are getting involved and activity is spreading throughout the community, with more and more signing up to put their names on the caravan rota. It was agreed at the very beginning that no less that two people should be there at any one time and that the caravan should never be left unattended. There has been no difficulty at all in filling the night rota. The only problem has been in getting the evening shift signed up as most the women have to pick up children from school, amongst other routine responsibilities. That's where supporters from outside (like me) come in handy!

The camp is not a 'women's camp' in the strict sense. It was set up by women, and is run by them, but was not set up to be a copy of Greenham Common. The main objective is to keep the threat of pit closures in the headlines and to build support for the NUM's fight. This is a common aim of women and men, and it would be wrong to exclude men - especially since the miners are men themselves. The NUM branch at Trentham and the NSMWAG have worked closely together since the October announcement and continue to do so.

When I arrived at the camp there was much excitement about Arthur Scargill's speech at a recent demonstration at Rugeley. There was discussion about the possibilities of action on the 18th February, designated as Jobs Action Day by the TUC in response to the NUM's call for a 'stayaway' day. I pointed out that the TUC had stated explicitly that there should be no strike action on that day - indeed, the TUC's latest press statement went only as far as committing itself to "leafletting jobcentres to show support for the unemployed and to call for a real change in government policy." That went down well with the miner's son of 19 who has just been made redundant for the second time!

The Trentham miners I've spoken to are keen to point out that it's not just their jobs we're fighting for, it's a struggle we're all in together. That's why the Miners' Wives Group, whilst keeping up their presence at the camp, are still travelling the country speaking at meetings and building links.

The current situation is not confined to the mining communities — ask the workers at Ford's in Dagenham, in the NHS, on the building sites, at any number of other workplaces, and in the dole queues too. The camps are providing a focal point for the communities' struggle - Women Against Pit Closures saw a need for them, went ahead and set them up. Good job they didn't wait for the TUC! It is up to the rest of us to be ready, as these women were, when the call for action comes.

Please send messages of support to: The Pit Camp, Trentham Colliery, Longton Road, Trentham, near Stoke, Staffordshire.

The postman told us that the caravan is getting more post than British Coal at the pit! Let's keep it rolling in! ❑

Faceless frontbench failures

COHEN'S CORNER



Harry Cohen, MP for Leyton, presents a view from his corner of the Commons, urging the Kinnockite-Clintonite leadership to back jobs not bombs.

LABOUR IS chronically weak and ineffectual at the moment. The pall of failed-Kinnockism hangs over the Party and the moral decline that accompanied Kinnockite abandonment of socialist principles continues like a cancer.

Consider the latest attacks upon Iraq. From the Labour front-bench came a welcome. "The opposition have supported the objective of this operation... A secure world order must be based on the United Nations. If UN resolutions are passed, they must be adhered to by all sides. That was the reason for the operation and why we are so pleased that it was so successful." Only the left showed that it has moral backbone to oppose such brutal and jingoistic warmongering. The official Labour position is simply tagging-on to the coat-tails of the Tory government, which tags on to the coat-tails of the US in its abuses of power. In supporting such slaughter, one Labour right-winger called it "a spanking." What an amoral description of an operation in which a number of human beings were blown apart.

As well as imperialist power-politics to ensure western dominance of the oil in the region, there is also a distinct whiff of anti-Arab racism in the whole US vendetta. Deaths of Iraqis don't count. If confronted with this the Tory response, echoed by Labour front-benchers, is "don't blame us guv, we only dropped the bombs, it is all Saddam Hussein's fault." Going along with this imperialism and racism is hardly the stuff of socialist internationalism and care for humanity worldwide.

Left MP Alice Mahon raised another moral issue - arms sales to repressive regimes. Where in the past Labour's response would have been clear and bold, it is now extremely guarded and cautious. Alice pointed out that the Indonesian government have illegally occupied East Timor for many years and killed more than a third of its population, yet the British government is continuing to sell it arms, including British Aerospace Hawk combat aircraft. Defence Minister Archie Hamilton replied "there is no doubt in my mind that a Hawk aircraft can do nothing to suppress the people of East Timor." He went on to explain that "the point of selling Hawk aircraft to Indonesia is to give jobs to people in this country". As many Labour MPs, supported by the Shadow Cabinet, keep urging weapons orders for their constituencies, Labour is simply not prepared to face the fact that armaments production for sale abroad now means increased instability around the world and countless unnecessary deaths. It is 'a job in exchange for a life' which is so hard to face. The lesson of the thirties and consequent Second World War is being forgotten, for expediency. Deep economic slump was mitigated by weapons production and militarisation, but that contributed to the inevitability of war and devastation.

Labour needs to be promoting a massive jobs programme far exceeding reliance on existing arms production. In fact for civilian jobs, we desperately need the 'peace dividend' from less military commitments, ending the chronic waste of millions of pounds by the Ministry of Defence on fancy but unnecessary weapons. Appallingly, Labour's front-bench has actually discounted any prospect of a peace dividend in its latest economic policy.

Gordon Brown's 'budget for jobs' provides no such large-scale programme. Dennis Skinner put it clearly to Major: "the biggest problem facing this country at present is the scourge of mass unemployment. It costs £9,000 for the taxpayer to finance somebody out of work. That is a total cost of £30 billion out of a public borrowing requirement of £37 billion... The first step is to save the mines currently under threat". But Labour is not committed to increased borrowing, taxes on the wealthy or the peace dividend to finance new jobs. It will need a lengthy programme of public capital works, investment in industry and individual skills training, and a return to the political agenda of public ownership for job creation.

Labour's almost faceless 'wonders' from the Kinnock kitchen cabinet, despite losing the election with their organisational incompetence and policy retreats, have now discovered Clintonomics. It is their latest way of trying to keep a hold on the Party machine, and keep Labour tilted rightward. Ironically, Clinton won because millions of people voted for jobs - which the Kinnockites had abandoned as the central issue in our election campaign, relying instead upon feeble public relations gimmicks.

Labour needs principled objectives for political direction if it is to gain public respect. Public relations gimmickry of the mock-Clintonites was a failure for the Party under Kinnock, and their power now should rightly be dissolved. But the unprincipled Kinnockite gimmick-mongers who failed us before, and are currently masking as Clintonites, are still in powerful positions to continue their damaging ways. An early test for John Smith is whether he will continue to let them do so.

This row will keep re-emerging as a consequence of Labour refusing to face that the reason for its defeat was its right-wing revisionism. There has been no proper inquest and Kinnock's strategies have been absolved from blame. This 'see no errors' approach with is assumption that Labour has to keep travelling rightward to win the voters, prevents presentation of new radical, meaningful policies.

So Labour is sticking close to the Tories at present, benefitting from disenchantment with the government whilst not venturing too much. That is the name of the game. On Iraq, on Europe, on the economy, Labour is not offering an alternative which significantly breaks with the current agenda. It is close to becoming ridiculous. As I went into the House of Commons to ask my latest question on data protection (computer privacy for individuals - I suggested that they give their consent before data on them is passed around), I was stopped by a man who introduced himself as "from the Labour Party".

"I thought I'd let you know" he said "our position is not very different from that of the government." Surprise, surprise.

INTERVIEW

"Black is a political colour..."



A. Sivanandan is a black activist and writer. He is a director of the Institute of Race Relations an editor of *Race & Class*. His books include *A Different Hunger and Communities of Resistance: writings on black struggles for socialism*. **Dave Palmer** interviewed Sivanandan exclusively for *Labour Briefing*.

DP: How has the nature and function of racism in the metropolitan capitalist countries changed in recent times?

AS: Racism today has become entirely different from what it was. And what troubles me is that the left, especially on the continent, but also in Britain, extrapolates from the 1930s to combat it; they hold on to the same old orthodoxies. Hence they are incapable of understanding the implications of the changes which have taken place and the consequent strategies and actions needed to fight racism.

One of the reasons for this is a refusal by most of the left to consider the deep and cataclysmic changes which have occurred because of the technological revolution and the changes in the level of the productive forces. We are now living in the age of post-industrial capitalism where the relations of labour to capital have radically changed. We have moved from an industrial society to an information society.

But we have to understand information in two ways. Firstly, as data utilised in the labour and production process as the 'brains of the dead' fed into robots and computers. Secondly, as data fed to you and me through the mass media and popular culture, as brains for the dead - the disinformation/non-information which is pounded into us by the TV and tabloids, day in day out, leaving us no time for reflection. In the past, when we referred to bourgeois domination we talked about the ownership of the means of production; today we must also be talking about the ownership of the means of communication.

In that context we should begin to look at two things. Firstly, the way that capital moves to pools of labour in the Third World, instead of moving labour to the metropolis. Secondly, the way capital now has global factories producing different bits of one product (cars for instance). Then, one begins to understand the disaggregation of the working class here in the west and the shift in the centre of gravity of exploitation from the First to the Third World. Capital can now move from free trade zone to free trade zone in Malaysia, Taiwan or Brazil, from one reserve pool of cheap, captive labour to another, at will, extracting not relative surplus value but well-nigh absolute surplus value. That's the economics of the new imperialism if you like. At the same time the information, the data that produces the products, is also the raw material which feeds the media which feeds us and informs our culture. Hence the question of culture, and the question of racism as an aspect of that culture, become intertwined - giving rise to a new symbiosis between imperialism and racism.

DP: You have made powerful criticisms of the New Times/Post-Fordist ideology. Though your conclusions may be diametrically opposed, aren't your base categories similar?

AS: I wrote *Imperialism in the Silicon Age* almost fifteen years ago. I wrote it in the context of trying to understand why the attempts by the 'non-aligned' Third World regimes to develop economic and political autonomy had all collapsed. As a result I began looking at the changes brought about by the technological revolution.

The conclusions I reached were diametrically opposite to the post-Marxists who had declared farewell to the working class and, therefore, exploitation. There is a deep Eurocentric arrogance there which I object to - which, when it speaks of the working class, refers only to the metropolitan working class. And it is the same sort of Eurocentrism of the left which identifies me with this position. My point is that it is the working class of the Third World which is being massively exploited today and not the metropolitan workforce. My second concern is to identify how the composition of the working class here has changed. Firstly, you don't get the working class concentrated in the same numbers, because capital can now take up its factory and walk. Secondly, the working class is no longer composed of all sorts of skilled and unskilled workers but a highly skilled core workforce and an unskilled peripheral workforce which is ad hoc, peripatetic and temporary. That in itself speaks for why there is disorganisation in the working class movement. Thirdly, the ratio of exploitation which you used to have in old industrial capitalism is now higher in the Third World than in the West.

Where I agree with the post-Fordists is in terms of taking on board the facts of the technological revolution: the disaggregation of labour; the decomposition of the labour force; capital becoming relatively 'emancipated' from labour. Those are hard facts which you must face up to. If we don't face up to them then we cannot begin to reorganise and find out what sort of changes are possible, and who are the agents of change.

DP: What are the implications of Fortress Europe and developments on the continent for black politics?

AS: As we move ever closer to Maastricht, a new, common, market racism is beginning to emerge. The countries of Europe are drawing from the lowest common denominators of each other's national racisms to formulate racist immigration laws and policies. And these make no distinction between black settlers,migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers from the Third World. We are all blacks: our faces are our passports.

When black people begin to understand that, they will also understand that their struggles must go beyond the fight to seek entry for their own relatives and families to include the right of entry for refugees and asylum-seekers. We must go beyond the specifics of the Asylum Bill to understand its thrust and purpose. Besides, it's in the tradition and history of our struggle, which claims that black is a political colour, that we should now be helping the new black people who are being thrown out of their countries and are seeking asylum in Europe. We are all refugees now!

Saturday 27th March, 10.00-6.00,
University of London Union, Malet St, London WC1.
Sponsors include Campaign Against Racism & Facism, Haldane Society Of Labour Lawyers, Newham Monitoring Project, Liberty.
Speakers include
A. Sivanandan, Gareth Pierce, Claudia Roth (Green MEP, Germany), Lode van Outrive (Socialist MEP, Belgium), Tony Bunyan, Unmesh Desai.
Workshops.
Registration £6 (£2 unwaged).
Details 081-802-1882 (*Statewatch*)



DP: You have long been a proponent of autonomy and opposed economism and reductionism. Could you explain your views?

AS: In Britain we sought autonomy because we were not made to feel part of the labour movement, because of trade union racism and the paternalism of left groups. We realised that the only way we could fight our own corner was in terms of our own experiences, having authority over those experiences and conceptualising them ourselves - so as to change them. And, because of the undifferentiated racism meted out to us in the community and in the work-place, we came together at a particular moment of time as blacks and not solely as Afro-Caribbeans, Asians and Africans. Black was the colour of our politics, while Asian, African, etc. was the colour of our culture. Autonomy was what separated us from the white left and kept them from telling us how to fight our fights. Let me give you an example. At the time of the Pentonville Five, the Black Unity and Freedom Party was asked by the unions and white left groups to go on the march to protest against anti-union laws outside the prison. We explained that black people had not been consulted about the political issues behind the mobilisation; now our presence was wanted only to add to numbers. As black workers we had specific and special issues to raise - which included worker and management racism. We had organised our own black workers' march for the same day, which would be starting from a black area and coming down a different road, but would be meeting with the main march at the gates of Pentonville. Therein is the metaphor of our autonomy: we were not going to subsume our march, our struggles, under the struggles of the white left movement, but we were in complete solidarity with it.

As I said at a congress in South Africa recently: there are two ways of fighting the same enemy. One is for you to come over to my side and help me beat him up. But in the process, you'll tell me what to do and how to do it, and once again remove my authority over myself. The other is for you, who knows him so much better, to hold him, weaken him (from within, so to speak) so that I can beat the shit out of him. That way we achieve the same end without forgoing our different histories. We make the conditions to make a common history together in the future.

DP: What do you think are the current strengths and weaknesses of black politics and anti-racist struggles in Britain? What do you think the priorities should be?

AS: We have had a series of setbacks in the last few years. Everything, including the Left, has moved so far to the right.

A small section of the black community has, as a consequence of the uprisings of 1981 and 1985, become upwardly mobile. So we have now got a black petty bourgeoisie and a petty managerial 'class'. But, at best, this lot have addressed themselves to the question of equal opportunities - for themselves, and not for their clients or their constituents. And such equal opportunity programmes have been based on quotas and headcounts - on the arithmetic of equal opportunity not on the politics. It's the power equation we want changed, the system, and not just the colour of the people working the system.

But we must take the situation as it is and work from there. I see the black middle class as composed of both antagonistic and non-antagonistic components. There are black people working for the system - the Uncle Toms - who are feathering their own nests, taking advantage of the individualism being afforded them in the new Tory dispensation. Then there are black people who are trying to use the system for the benefit of the community. They feel that they cannot fight the system barehanded, that, in a time of reaction, they have to get the tools from the system to fight the system with. As to priorities, these never really change, but the way we tackle them does. The black community has become fragmented and broken down, compared with the 1960s and 1970s, into much more class stratified communities and into ethnic groups, through state sponsored ethnic funding and multi-culturalism. Despite this, the black community can act to make common cause with refugees and asylum seekers, who are the new blacks if you like.

Confronting this new Euro-racism has to be the first priority. Secondly we need to look at how the new Tory dispensation in the areas of social work, education, housing, health care, for example, has affected the black community even more than the white working class. We need to look at what, for instance, constitutes black health. Why are so many African-Caribbean kids diagnosed schizophrenic the moment they step out of line? That's just one example. Education is another - where black children are being excluded from school on the basis of disruptiveness or ineducability, or being relegated to inferior schools in the manner of the ESN schools of the 1960s and 1970s. The same in housing. Why are Bengali families forever over-represented in bed and breakfast accommodation - and their children kept from schooling? Wherever market forces prevail, it is the most disadvantaged who suffer. And racism disadvantages those whom class has already disadvantaged.

"We are all refugees now..."

Council workers face double whammy



PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

Jon Rogers, Lambeth NALGO Secretary, argues that the struggles against job losses and the pay freeze must be linked.

WORKERS IN local government now face both a pay freeze and massive job losses. Many of these job losses will be imposed by Labour councils, acting on the advice of Larry Whitty, who are refusing even to give the minimum guarantee of "no compulsory redundancies".

Devising a strategy to fight these twin attacks is difficult because of the confusing political situation. The government is strong because of its election victory but weak because of its share in the "annus horribilis" of the entire ruling class.

The leadership of John Smith is still in a honeymoon period - but although the adherents of Clinton-mania are riding high their inability to exploit the weaknesses of the government is patent. At a local level, Labour councils are ever more in the thrall of the dogma that there is no alternative to legality even if services have to be demolished and sold off.

On the trade union side, the leaders are practising a strategy of masterly inactivity in the face of mass unemployment and the pay freeze. This can, however, be shaken by pressure from the rank and file - particularly since the upsurge of opposition to the pit closure programme. For example, NALGO's General Secretary, Alan Jinkinson, was happy to risk the jobs of hundreds of his members in Lambeth by repudiating unofficial strike action to support the NUM lobby of Parliament in October, but - under pressure from NALGO's Metropolitan District - he turned a blind eye to similar action in a number of boroughs on the Day of Action against cuts on November 4th.

At the rank and file level within the unions something does appear to be stirring. But the level of strike action remains at an exceptionally low level. In NALGO some major disputes - such as the Islington and Newham strikes - have been sustained by the payment of strike pay at the level of full take-home pay, an option that is not open to most of the trade union movement and probably not to NALGO members again in the foreseeable future.

A good example of the confused position in the unions at present is provided by the Sheffield branch of NALGO which balloted in favour of a proposal to take three days unpaid leave to help the Council out of a financial mess, but then also proposed strike action in a dispute over car allowances.

Workers hit hardest by job losses will probably be harder to mobilise against the pay freeze, since the employers will be only too eager to "open the books" selectively in order to illustrate the trade-off between pay and jobs. However there are two reasons why the struggles against job losses and the pay freeze have to be linked. First, because both have their roots in the same deliberate policy of the government - to make public sector workers pay for the recession. Second, because the argument for national industrial action can only be won on the basis of opposition to both pay freeze and job losses. Opposition to cuts which is fought at the level of individual workplaces or councils cannot go beyond defensive rearguard actions which at best mitigate job losses and at worst simply redistribute them. In order to win the argument for national strike action it is necessary to focus on the national attack on living standards threatened by the pay freeze, as well as the more localised threats of redundancy.

Can this argument be won? The pathetic timidity of the TUC General Council does not augur well. The argument for national action is not likely to be won in the short term, but in the meantime Labour Party members can play an important role in political campaigning in defence of public services and the workers who provide them. Wherever initiatives to defend services emerge we should be actively developing these and, in particular, demanding that the Labour leadership, both locally and nationally, joins the fight to save what's left of the welfare state. This is the practical way to engage in the struggle for the soul of the Labour Party against the so-called modernisers chasing after Bill Clinton's coat-tails. ❑

Bust the pay norm!

Pete Marshall (COHSE London Regional Secretary) urges support for health workers whose struggle is in danger of being overlooked by left activists and undermined by New Realist leaders.

THE "INTERNAL MARKET" in the NHS is leading to hospital closures accompanied by a huge loss of jobs, threatening health workers in a way in which most have not been threatened before. While the job security of public sector workers has already been undermined by privatisation of ancillary services, most health staff (nurses, technical staff, clerical staff, etc.) have until now only been peripherally affected. But the latest round of cuts directly threatens their jobs.

In London alone between 10,000 and 28,000 jobs - over a third of London's health workforce - will be lost during the next year. The national figure is, as yet, unknown, but will certainly exceed 50,000 in the next couple of years.

The reaction on the left to this devastation has been muted. The concentration on miners' jobs, to the apparent exclusion of all else, only appears to reinforce the argument that many on the left do not think of a low paid, mainly women workforce as a serious trade union force. This is despite the fact that there are now some 25 health workers for every miner, and the job losses in the health service will have every bit as severe an effect on the British economy as the pit closures.

This tunnel vision has led to campaigns all across London being set up to support miners in Yorkshire, while local hospital workers are often left to fight on their own! Calls from hospital workers and their unions for the TUC to take on board the issue are apparently falling on deaf ears. Honourable exceptions were the handful of senior health union officials who ensured that the TUC's response to Tomlinson was firmer than the Labour front bench's cringing acceptance of "the inevitable" (as they like to call Tory policies). If you think the TUC hasn't done much to help miners, then it has done even less to help health workers. On top of all this comes the public sector pay freeze. In recent years most of the health service has been covered by various pay review bodies. While these have not delivered huge pay rises, they have certainly kept pace with the rest of the economy, and in the nurses' case have significantly improved their pay in comparison with other sections of the workforce. This year, if these bodies recommend more than 1.5% the government has already announced it will ignore their reports.

In the past, health workers have been severely hampered by the fragmentation of their union organisation. The single largest union (until the coming of UNISON in July) is the RCN (Royal College of Nurses), who have not only scabbed on every dispute in the health service, but in recent years deliberately attacked COHSE and NUPE nurse members who have dared to take action. The last major nurses' dispute in 1988 featured Neil Fletcher (later to work in Kinnock's office), as press officer to the RCN, feeding the media with anti-union stories, including how striking nurses could be "struck off" their professional register. This of course never happened, but it did have the effect of scaring many nurses away from action.

All this doesn't paint a positive picture for a fightback over pay and jobs in the health service. However, both COHSE and NALGO have now adopted militant positions over pay. This should have the effect of bringing even the so-called New Realists of NUPE's leadership (personally I can't see what is so realist about constantly waiting for a Labour government that never seems to come!) into the fight. Pay claims are being co-ordinated at national level, something that hasn't really happened among all groups since the 1982 dispute. An opinion poll on the public perception of the pay freeze and their feelings about



industrial action by health workers is being commissioned. This may sound a waste of time, but the idea that the public are not concerned with issues such as low pay in the health service and that they always oppose action by workers is strong among health trade unionists. The ambulance dispute proved the wealth of public sympathy for workers taking action, but its lessons were not learned by many in the movement. Hopefully this opinion poll will show that health workers fighting for their jobs and a decent standard of living will enjoy public support.

All nurse members of UNISON are soon to be balloted on the issue of the pay review body being usurped by the government. This action at national level is to be linked to local pay claims being submitted to all the NHS Trusts (who are not tied to national pay rates). COHSE has stated clearly that they intend to break the 1.5% in the trusts if possible. Localised action by small groups of well organised workers in trusts may achieve this quite quickly, opening the way for and giving confidence to other sections of the workforce.

While these actions may hardly mark the coming of the revolution, they are certainly a huge step forward for the leadership of major public sector trade unions. One of the biggest problems in the health service is the lack of confidence workers have in being able to change anything by their own actions. This has not been helped by the defeatist attitudes of large parts of the trade union leadership. These moves to more active leadership may mark the first step to a genuine realism, an acknowledgement that improving members' pay and conditions is a union's prime function. This means leading the sort of determined action that has been marked only by its absence in recent years. ❑

Countdown has begun

I AM OVERWHELMED by the ferocity of the present reforms. I listened to Virginia Bottomley pontificate recently about reasons for a two, or is it three, tier health service. She said that if health authorities spent their money as efficiently as GP fundholders this would create a one tier system.

The truth is that financial inducements were provided to attract GP fundholders. The first few who signed up received sufficient for luxury surgeries with hi-tech equipment. Have money will spend! These financial inducements were at the expense of acute hospitals.

The funding of trust units have also been at the expense of those acute hospitals which have not applied for trust status or whose applications were turned down. The funding for these hospitals continues to be reduced.

Mrs Bottomley tells us that contracts are not being negotiated correctly by acute hospitals in the market economy of the NHS. Too much work is being achieved too quickly, work must be spread evenly over the year. Yet in the next breath she insists waiting list times must reduce. Make your mind up Virginia, we have the beds, nurses, and patients waiting, all we need is the money. The government tells us they spend more money on the NHS every year. Indeed they do, on drug bills not hands-on direct patient care.

Looking to the future, I am filled with doom and gloom. Last year's general election sounded the death knell for the NHS. Apply for trust status or die. Or in the case of London's hospitals, die anyway. Hospitals such as St Thomas' only saving grace, after many campaigns which have been waged in sight of Parliament, has been that it is a more viable trust than the government's flagship Guys, so now they are to merge.

What do trusts mean for patients and staff? Bad news. I envisage an increase in current trends. Staff will be employed on fixed-term six month contracts to enable trusts the flexibility

> On top of trusts comes the Community Care Act. Clinical Nurse Manager **Jean Marsh**, who has worked in the NHS for over thirty years, forewarns of this timebomb for the health service.

to terminate staff and close beds when contracted work is completed. As a result there will be no opportunity for continuous employment, for advancement in the pay scale or grading system. The trusts will dispense with Whitley scales and conditions and pay what they wish. All protection will be gone.

Less beds and less nurses will be available to patients. I predict that if you are elderly and have an acute episode of your chronic condition you won't be admitted at all, because acute hospitals are for acute episodes of care. In fact beds will be blocked (occupied by cured patients who have nowhere to go) and patients who are acutely ill will be left at home, or lying for hours on hard trollies in casualty departments.

The reason for this bed blocking is the Community Care Act 1990. This act comes into force on 1st April 1993, when Social Services become the gate keepers of community care. They will decide who receives a package of care in their home, a residential home placement or a nursing home placement. At present the DSS provides funding for these placements on a means test. After 1st April even if you pass the means test you may not be funded, if you don't meet the criteria. I am told that the Act won't cause a big bang. I feel it will be a time bomb which explodes around October. This is when all the hospital beds are fully blocked with patients awaiting assessment and placement and Social Services have run out of money - something they do every year. The funding the government has provided for the new act is already known to be inadequate.

More choice, John Major tells us. If you are elderly this means more choice to be lonely and frightened, unless of course you are rich. Even if you want to go into a home because you feel unable to cope, if you don't pass their 'frail assessment' you won't get in, not with public money. Never mind that you paid your national insurance contributions for fifty years. If you give up your home and go into residential care with funding and then your condition improves, you will no longer be eligible. I wonder where you go then? Out onto the streets, or perhaps bed and breakfast accomodation. If it takes something like a lion mauling a psychiatric patient to initiate a review of the Mental Health Act, what will it take to get a review of the Community Care Act in the years to come?

The Community Care Act's funding is ring fenced so that 70% of it will be spent on private care. If you live in an area with no private care provision I hope you enjoy your old age miles away from your home and relatives.

Overall the future is bleak, especially if you are elderly. Fewer acute beds, fewer staff and social service funding which is already famous for running out half way through the financial year. ❑

Fight for a better future for people with HIV

Voluntary HIV organisation for the north west, *George House Trust*, is currently recruiting as volunteers people with **organisational** skills to work in areas such as fund raising, **campaigning**, training, information and publicity.

If you are interested call us on **061-839-4340** before 5th February 1993.

Tories' Tomlinson — the truth

Hackney GP **Dr Miriam Beeks** gives the Tomlinson Report a thorough examination.



PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

TOMLINSON IS about closing hospitals and cutting services. It is not about rationalisation or redistribution as it would claim. The government has created an internal market which makes big teaching hospitals financially non-viable. Tomlinson is trying to justify closure of these hospitals, claiming to release more funds for community care. This is a cover up. They are being closed because of market forces. No attention is being paid to the needs of the population.

Under the new reforms the government has used cash incentives to encourage hospitals to take on trust status. As a trust its income is generated by competing among other District Health Authorities and fund holding GPs for 'contracts.' Contracts with London Teaching Hospitals cost more than those with District General Hospitals for two main reasons. Firstly, teaching hospitals have greater overheads related to highly specialised and expensive clinical work. Secondly, they pay capital charges on the overvalued central London land they occupy. Therefore, because an expensive hospital such as Bart's cannot attract enough contracts it is deemed to have insufficient funds to keep all its beds open, or in fact to stay open at all. However, its available beds are insufficient for the number of ill people who need admission. Therefore, to say that London has too many hospital beds is a nonsense. This is a pure fiction based on the ability or not of its hospitals to attract contracts. Clearly, existing contacts are not providing enough funds for Bart's to keep enough beds open for local needs. Not that GPs don't want to send their patients to Bart's and such hospitals. Some District Health Authorities are already saying that they cannot refer to a London teaching hospital, if there is a roughly equivalent service in a cheaper hospital. So much for choice under the Tories. It's a great patient's charter which forbids people to choose the best hospital for their condition.

How can Tomlinson justify this plan? It is needed as a smokescreen for making cuts. It is making a ridiculous claim that if the funds released from closing hospitals are used to improve community and GP care, the need for such hospitals will decline. The very opposite is true. The better GPs are at spotting illness early, the greater the need for specialists. In truth, the whole NHS is underfunded. Tomlinson needed a scapegoat for the ills of the service rather than looking for a real cause of the shortages - the government. The best scapegoat to choose was obviously the London teaching hospitals, whose pruning would produce the most savings, and who could also be accused (like all scapegoats) of taking more than their fair share of scarce resources. Perhaps Tomlinson and Bottomley also think they have struck a chord with those who have had bad experiences with some elitist and arrogant consultants. But do the public want to lose the best of medical services altogether? Certainly as a Hackney GP I have found most Bart's doctors dedicated and excellent. If some specialists do behave undemocratically towards patients, the answer is to adequately fund the NHS so that consultants no longer have scarcity value, with the power and ever growing private practice opportunities that go with it. Maybe they thought they struck another chord, in that teaching hospital consultants certainly do more private practice than others. Naturally, consultants in the best hospitals always attract the most private practice. But private practice will not be curtailed by closing these hospitals - quite the opposite. Private practice mushrooms as NHS resources dwindle. Indeed, some consultants have been positively encouraged to do more private practice by closing beds and reducing their theatre and outpatient time in NHS hospitals. There is indeed a cruel irony in Tomlinson and Bottomley's thesis that a significant amount of disease can be prevented at GP level by changing individuals' smoking, eating and exercise habits. In truth, this government continues to allow high levels of unemployment and environmentally disastrous transport policies which have a far more detrimental effect on health.

They hypocritically claim to be supporting the primary care cinderella against the powerful bastions of the teaching hospitals. In reality, their policies will make specialist services less and less accessible to the population as a whole. As ever, private practice will mushroom under the Tories. The best in medicine will again be the prerogative of the rich, as it was before the NHS.

We already spend a lower percentage of GNP on health than any comparable industrial country, we have relatively fewer specialists and we are 'lower tech'. We need more funding for health across the board, at all technological levels. ❑



PHOTO: *Steve Mayes*

A few inches of flesh

That's the only real difference between straight and queer sex, says **Peter Tatchell**, who argues that we all face sexual apartheid and we all have a 'queer potential'

TO REJECT out of hand the idea of falling in love with someone of the same sex is irrational and illogical. It doesn't make sense to automatically exclude the possibility of relationships with half the population. Nevertheless that's exactly what a majority of people do, and it's queers who pay the price for their sexual phobias and repressions. We have to suffer the devaluation and denigration of our lives, in order that those heterosexuals who are anxious about their own sexual identify can feel secure and superior in their exclusively opposite-sex relationships.

Thankfully, most lesbian and gay people are more generous that these heterosexual supremacists. We are fighting for queer equality not only for our own sakes, but also for the sake of heterosexual men and women. For they too are diminished by the system of sexual apartheid which preaches the supposed superiority of heterosexuality, and which seeks to justify itself as 'normality' and 'human nature.' Exclusive and compulsory heterosexuality is neither of these things. Nor is it humane or civilised: it requires the perverse suppression of all sexual feelings towards people of the same sex.

The struggle for sexual liberation is ultimately about the right of all people to express the full range of emotional and erotic desires - both heterosexual and homosexual - which are intrinsic to the human condition.

The new queer politics of the 1990s therefore has a vision of a sexually emancipated society in which the bisexual potential of all people is recognised and accepted. A society where individuals no longer feel the need to repress their attraction to people of the same sex, and where everyone feels free to express their queer desires without being racked by guilt and humiliated by discrimination.

Is that really such a shocking idea? If not, why is society so hung-up about people 'promoting' and 'flaunting' their homosexuality?

Perhaps it's because, deep down, even arch homophobes recognise that the human capacity for emotional tenderness and sexual fulfilment is not limited to male-female relationships. Indeed, their hysteria against homosexuality is an implicit acknowledgement of the fragile and tenuous nature of exclusive heterosexuality. After all, if queer love really is so unnatural and loathsome, why does it have to be repressed by the combined forces of Parliament, police, press, and pulpit? And why does heterosexuality have to be so vigorously promoted with special privileges, such as the monopoly of moral validity and financial and legal advantages?

The anti-gay bigots are right. A positive affirmation and acceptance of queer sexuality is likely to lead to an increase in the proportion of the population having same-sex relationships; not necessarily for their entire lives but certainly for significant periods. The number of people who are exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual would probably decline. For the majority, bisexuality would become the norm.

Where's the evidence for this suggestion? Despite the vilification of homosexuality, same-sex relations are already incredibly common. This is borne out in research by Kinsey, Masters and Johnson and others. Their findings suggest that in western societies about:

* 10 per cent of the population is exclusively or predominantly queer
* 15 per cent are bisexual for all or part of their lives
* 25-35 per cent have at least one homosexual experience leading to orgasm during their lifetime
* 50 per cent experience emotional attraction and/or sexual arousal towards people of the same sex

If queer desire is this widespread in a homophobic society, imagine how much more common it would be in a gay-positive culture.

There's no rational reason why exclusive heterosexuality should be the majority sexual practice. With artificial insemination by donor, the argument that we need straight sex to reproduce the human species is no longer tenable. Even if there was never again a single act of heterosexual intercourse anywhere in the world, the perpetuation of new generations could readily be assured by the technique of donor insemination.

The liberation of heterosexuality from the function of human reproduction, together with the equal validation of homosexuality, would mean that sexual free will could at last triumph over biological necessity and social repression.

Male-female relationships would become more of a conscious choice and a rational pleasure, rather than a traditional expectation and moral obligation. Queer love would cease to be a minority desire and instead find expression in most people's lives.

The creation of a society which celebrates sexual fluidity, ambiguity and diversity is in everyone's interest. Without it, prejudice and repression will continue to thwart enlightenment and emancipation to the detriment of human happiness. With it, free ranging desires can transcend the exclusivity of the hetero/homo divide to the erotic and emotional enrichment of us all. ❑

The tragedy of time

Neil Taylor, former youth rep on the Labour Party's Southern Region Executive, looks back in anger at wasted pre-election years.

AFTER BEING endlessly patronised, ignored or even expelled by Walworth Road there comes a time when it all seems beyond a joke for socialist youth. Our lousy leaders refuse to learn the lessons of our defeats. In the years preceding the General Election, we were told time and time again by our superiors that an election couldn't be won in four weeks; to win nationally we would need to win substantial parts of the South, especially by gaining the support of the million first time voters. It all seemed to make sense and some very fine speeches were made around these points. However, no amount of fine words can make up for the hard practical work which was required from every area if this was going to become reality.

The period between the elections was a crucial one for many young people. YTS, student loans, housing, unemployment, cuts in benefits for all 16 and 17 year olds and the Poll Tax all had dramatic effects on our lives. Only the superficial effects reached Westminster, but for a while it seemed as though the PLP had some understanding of our anger. What did the Party decide to do? Did it try to channel this anger into action, building a strong youth labour movement regionally and nationally? No, it systematically smashed the youth structures in the Party, closing down branches, the *Socialist Youth* newspaper, reducing the LPYS age limit to 23 and failing to give any financial and practical support to the regions. The bureaucrats' suspicions that every young member was a Militant did nothing for morale, trust or confidence.

I first became aware of this on becoming Youth representative to the Southern Region Executive Committee (REC) in 1990. What I discovered during my first year came as a shock. I had no specified role or job description. None of my initiatives received any support from the Executive or Regional Office. Not only were relations weak between Regional Office and Young Socialists, no youth policy existed and the YS branches that were active in the region had declined from 48 in 1988 to 12 by 1990. The Southern region covers over 70 constituencies and seven counties but has a staff of three full time organisers increased to five during the election. I soon realised that the rhetoric of winning the South and the support of young people was going to remain rhetoric. At no time were any initiatives, backed by resources, received from Walworth Road. To be fair to the regional staff it is hard to imagine the pressure that they were under to co-ordinate the work of all CLPs let alone develop an election strategy. However, wasting these valuable resources attacking the grass roots by launching witch-hunts in Brighton and Eastbourne is no way to create goodwill or win an election.

Acting alone, I contacted all of the CLPs and remaining YS branches. I compiled and distributed an action pack, addressed meetings of several CLPs, building up good contacts. We also managed to get a youth motion passed at Regional Conference which was to be the cornerstone of our regional youth policy. Youth days in the target seats of Slough, Crawley, Gravesham, Southampton and Dover were planned. However it all began to go wrong as soon as the question of resources and funding was raised. Regional office refused to pay for any activities.

Another bitter blow was the failure of the REC to act upon any of the resolutions passed at their conference even though they had been mandated. I was fobbed off with the excuse that it wasn't the place of the REC to act upon motions passed and anyway they were far too busy to concentrate on building up the Youth section. The recently formed Regional Youth Campaigns Committee was supposedly the place to discuss these issues, but this was merely a cynical attempt by Walworth Road to keep the remaining young activists in check.

So by September 1991 the attempts at getting an active youth base had failed. Six months later we lost the election and youth support and involvement had collapsed. Short sightedness had triumphed over the foresight which some of us had shown.

Defend state education

Defeat the challenge of the right

Saturday 6th February, 10.30-4pm

North Westminster School, North Wharf Road, London NW1

Sessions on: Anti-racism, Post-16 education, What's happening in the curriculum?, Selection and testing, trade union links, local democracy and opting out.

Speakers include: Keren Abse, Bhaljeet Ghale, Mildred Gordon MP, Carole Regan, Michael Rosen, Carolyn Sikorski, Colin Waugh

Cost £3. Further details from the conference steering committee on 081 533 3792

Students plan fightback

Hamish Renton (Cambridge CLP) reports: The Clause IV Inaugural Conference met at a time of unprecedented levels of attacks on students and educational workers by the government. The future of student unionised higher and further education is hanging in the balance. Yet there was high level of resilience and hope amongst the delegates. There were lively workshops on the Miners Support Network, addressed by Jeremy Corbyn MP, and on NOLS and NUS, Maastricht and the Campaign against Racism and Fascism.

The Conference was aimed at building the Socialist Campaign Group Network among students and young people. It decided to challenge the right wing Labour Students leadership of NOLS and NUS by standing socialist candidates against them, and by using logic, arguments and hard campaigning begin to turn the tide in student unions and Labour Clubs back towards the left. Watch this space.

From commitment to capitulation

Former full-time Labour Party agent **Stan Nattrass** (Arundel CLP) contrasts the commitment of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) one hundred years ago with the careerist Labour Party today.

THE BRADFORD Labour Institute had been newly acquired by the local labour movement, comprising a local Labour Church, Trades Council, Fabian Society, and 23 Labour Clubs. It was one of the most enthusiastic and better organised areas in the country at that time.

Members of the Bradford Labour Union hastily cleaned and redecorated the hall in order that the inaugural conference of the ILP could take place there on the 13th January 1893. They furnished the hall with benches and tables carefully decked out in scarlet cotton cloth.

There were 120 delegates present, mostly earnest working class men. Not politicians for the sake of politics, but wanting to change the face of Britain. Their enthusiasm and good humoured discipline certainly impressed those observing the proceedings. The only MP present was James Keir Hardle, who had been elected for West Ham South the previous year.

The majority of the delegates were from the industrial north of England or from Scotland. The Scottish Labour Party and the Marxist Social Democratic Federation were both represented. A small group from London included Aveling, Marx's son-in-law, George Bernard Shaw and Ben Tillett. The preponderance of northerners showed the phenomenal rise of the labour movement in this area, shifting away from London as the political centre.

The motion that the party be named the Independent Labour Party was carried, signifying a complete break from earlier Liberal Party working class representation. The motion "to secure the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange" was also carried by an almost unanimous vote. A limiting amendment omitting all reference to socialism was heavily defeated. The conference drew up a strongly socialist programme, supporting the restriction of the workday to eight hours, the abolition of overtime and piece-work, the prohibition of employment of children under 14, provision for the sick, disabled, aged, widows, orphans and the socialist objective of collective ownership of the land and all means of production, distribution and exchange. Two other important things were added by conference: for "free, unsectarian primary, secondary and university education" and "provision for properly remunerated work for the unemployed." With the help of Aveling and Shaw, the conference also agreed a motion for the "abolition of indirect taxation, and taxation to extinction of unearned income." This was carried with only one against. The party now had clear and concise programme on a socialist basis.

Compare their programme with what we have in the Labour Party today, after a hundred years of struggle. We still haven't achieved most of the objects of those comrades in 1893. Why is that so? We have had seven Labour Governments since that time, two of which were admittedly minority governments. The reason is, I believe, that we have been plagued by careerists and opportunists.

In 1993 we have a Tory government full of the biggest twisters ever known. In order to give their friends a nice rake-off, they have privatised everything they could lay their hands on, and for which we paid the previous owners for, and the money they received has been squandered. The last straw was the announcement of the closure of the thirty one pits. People from all walks of life came out onto the streets, not only to support the miners, but because they were completely sick of this incompetent government. But where was the Labour leadership in all this, and for that matter, where are they now? People in my street, knowing I am a lifelong member of the Labour Party keep coming up to me and asking "Where is the Labour Party? Why aren't they attacking the government for the mess they have got us into?" and I must say, it makes me ashamed sometimes. We let this government get away with murder. I watch the TV Parliamentary coverage, and I cannot say the Labour frontbench are much cop. During the past few years, the message coming from Labour leaders has been "Anything you can do, we can do better." I am certain that if the leaders explained to the people what a socialist society could do for those on the dole, or waiting to be sacked, saddled with mortgages and sky-high debts, Labour would have the solid support which would win an election. On the other hand, people look at the watered down pseudo-Tory policies put forward, and settle for the real right-wing administration rather than the substitute.

When we dumped the programme of taking everything back into public ownership this effectively gave the green light to continued privatisation. Similarly the policy of condemning but paying the Poll Tax was tantamount to saying 'go ahead and pass the lousy legislation, you'll have no trouble from us.' Our forebears broke bad laws to achieve changes. As George Lansbury said in the twenties "better break the law than break the poor." Have the modern leadership never heard of extra-parliamentary action? Properly organised demonstrations, rallies and strikes can get rid of wicked governments like this one.

How many of the present Labour MPs know that the Socialist Resolution submitted to the House of Commons by Keir Hardie on 23rd April 1901 was as follows: "That considering the increasing burden which the private ownership of land and capital is imposing upon the industrious and useful classes of the community, the poverty and destitution and general moral and physical deterioration resulting from a competitive system of wealth production which aims primarily at profit-making, the alarming growth of trusts and syndicates, able by reason of great wealth to influence government and plunge peaceful nations into war to serve their own interests, this House is of opinion that such a state of matters is a menace to the well-being of the Realm and calls for legislation designed to remedy the same by inaugurating a Socialist Commonwealth founded upon the common ownership of land and capital, production for use and not profit, and equality of opportunity for every citizen".

Instead of prancing off to the USA to learn how to win elections, it might not be a bad idea to stay at home and look up the history of the movement which many of our MPs so badly represent. ❑

Don't Clinton - campaign!

John Nicholson (Manchester Gorton CLP), convenor of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network outlines the campaigning priorities for the organisation.

OUR AIM is to co-ordinate and sustain a non-sectarian network of actively campaigning Labour Party members who want to turn their Party to socialism.

It is vital that socialists in the Labour Party campaign, because the leadership of the Party is not going to do it for us. Indeed, the present direction of the leadership continues to be American presidential-style media promotion based on Clinton-type 'good looks.' The 1987 and 1992 General Election TV broadcasts were compared to Oscar winning films. Unfortunately they flopped at the box office. Clinton is supposed to show the way forward for Labour, yet on the bombing of Iraq he says: "there is no difference between my policy and the policy of the Bush administration."

But the Labour leadership has not learned the lessons. Instead it continues to jettison the last remnants of socialist policies and to expel socialists who campaign for them. It has capitulated to Tory ideology and exchanged parliamentary deals for political opposition.

We must campaign in new ways ourselves, not just on knocking doors at election times. We should fight alongside others prepared to struggle against the Tories, drawing people into the Party. We must act in a democratic and participatory manner, working together co-operatively and encouraging the same values within our campaigns as we would wish to see in our policies. Also we must support the left MPs and secure links between them and the grassroots of the Party. Parliament is designed to alienate its members from their origins (if they are on the left, that is). Socialists who work in the Party to ensure representation must not then allow their representatives to vanish behind the veneer of Westminster. We should not leave our MPs to become isolated individuals but should enable them to be accountable to the rank and file which supports them.

Most of all, socialists in the Labour Party must never forget why we are campaigning. It is not just to fight against the Tories, but to transform the balance of wealth and power, to strive to eliminate disadvantage and to improve the institutions of society so that they work in favour of the people they are supposed to serve. In short, we are campaigning to fulfil a vision of socialism and our actions must be judged against this vision.

The Labour Party is not an island (although it often feels like it). The Socialist Campaign Network must therefore turn local Labour Parties into participatory and campaigning organisations reaching out to new forces - in the community, the country and the world. We must not be afraid to assert principles which have been submerged by the PLP's increasingly frequent claims that the Tories' plans are not wrong, just that Labour thought of them first. Public ownership and control of the economy, restructuring wages and benefits, abolition of nuclear missiles and the consequent reliance on nuclear power, self-determination for Ireland as much as for Southern Africa, the freedom for women to control their reproductive rights - all of these are campaigning issues which will be supported by large numbers of people. What is needed is the leadership to put them forward.

The Labour Party should be providing that leadership. The job of the Socialist Campaign Network is to make the Labour Party provide that leadership - and make it a party fit for socialists to be in. ❑



NEW DIRECTIONS
for the democratic left

Tribune/Labour Co-ordinating Committee

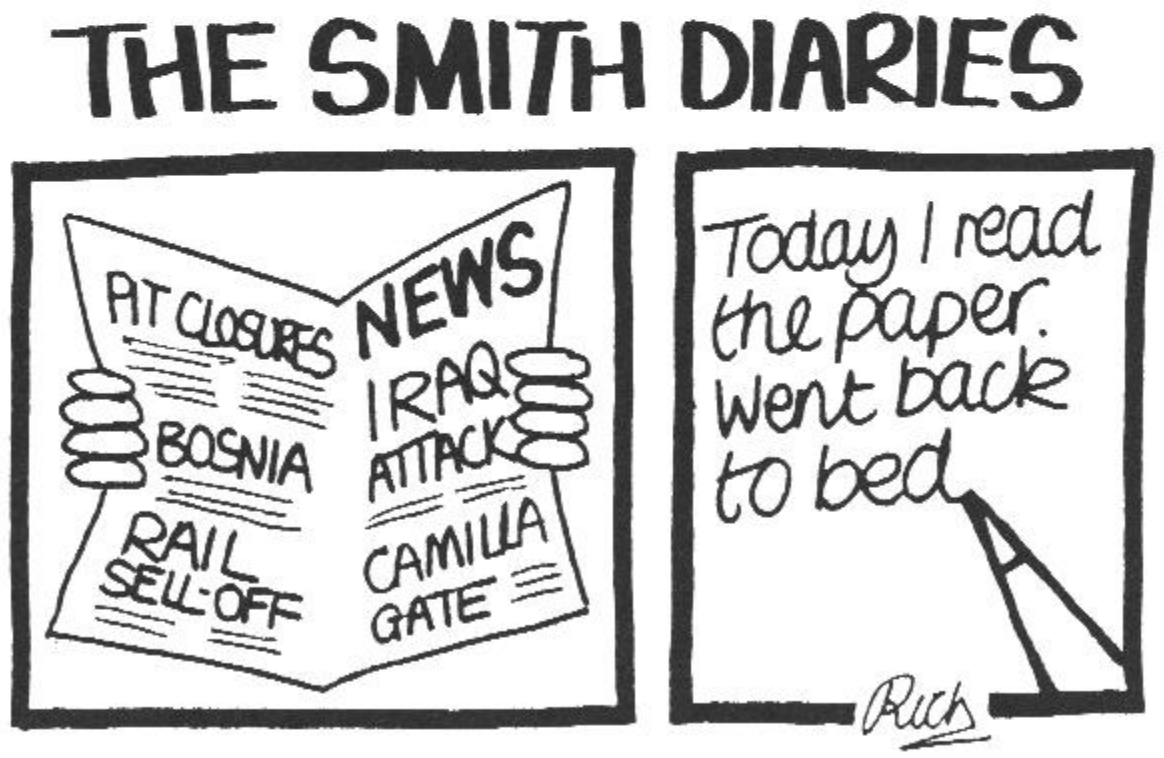
PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

Recall Conference of Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network

Maastricht and the Future of Socialism
Organising the Left in the Labour Party
— Building the Network

Saturday 17th April, 11-5pm
Sheffield Hallam University Students Union

Registration (£5/£2) and details from
Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network
c/o Jeremy Corbyn MP,
129a Seven Sisters Road,
London N7.



Hitch in Fitch stitch-up

ROD FITCH, who stood as Labour's candidate in the 1983 General Election in Brighton Kemp Town, appeared before the National Constitutional Committee accused of membership of Militant, support for a non-Labour independent candidate, and involvement in an anti-Poll Tax union. Brighton Council Leader Steve Bassam and former Councillor Gill Haynes (also former Brighton Kemp Town Parliamentary candidates) gave evidence against him.

Rod, who moved to Northampton over a year ago, "freely accepted" that he was on the left, but said he was not aligned to any particular group or tendency.

After a six hour hearing, the NCC found him guilty. However, unlike others found guilty on similar charges, he has not been expelled, but has been suspended and barred from representing Labour or standing for public office for two years. They must have realised the charges were so unsound that their entire case was about as much use as a chocolate kettle.

"It's totally illogical to find me guilty then simply suspend me," commented Rod. "If they had really thought I was guilty they would have had to expel me. I call on the National Executive Committee to stop this process now and allow other members of Brighton Labour Party who are awaiting hearings to carry on with the business of fighting the Tories."

Former Lambeth Councillor Steve French, of the national Campaign Against the Witch-hunt, who was himself recently expelled from the Labour Party, said:

"Rod's result is a partial victory which shows that a serious defence campaign can pay dividends. However, we still need to build the national campaign to defend the hundreds of socialists facing expulsion from the Labour Party."

Contact: Campaign Against the Witch-Hunt, 56 Ashby House, Loughborough Road, Brixton, London SW9 7SL. Tel. 071-733-3403.

Obituary: Tom Painter — socialist plumber

TOM EXEMPLIFIED the best traditions of grass-roots trades unionism. A working plumber throughout his adult life, he never accepted the merger of his beloved Plumbing Trades Union with the old ETU and when Chapple and the EETPU walked out of the TUC, Tom helped found the EPIU. When certain left-wingers who should have known better criticised him for leading a "break-away", Tom told them bluntly, "They left the trades union movement, we didn't leave them!"

Tom joined the Labour Party in 1973, at a time when the old Islington North CLP was a byword for sectarian corruption and reactionary politics. He was one of the activists who helped clean-up the Party and create the socialist organisation that it became. It was one of life's ironies that Tom's EETPU lodge was a bastion of the left on the GMC when the old right were in control. Active in the tenants movement and in campaigns in support of Irish freedom, he was appalled at the rise of Kinnock and the New Realists. In response to the rightward drift of the Council in the middle 1980s, he commented, "Looks like we'll have to do it all over again."

Tom was perhaps one of the best examples of a generation of socialists with little formal education but a fierce class understanding forged on the shop floor. He was never demoralised but often surprised by the lack of will-power shown by trades union leaders. He was a true fighter for his union and his Party and will be sorely missed by his friends and comrades.

Antics in Islington

BRIEFING READERS will recall the political demise of Margaret Hodge as Leader of Islington Council - bequeathing to local people an £8 million cuts package and a bitter three-month old NALGO strike.

In the succession contest, the left candidate for the leadership, Liz Davies, shocked the right by achieving the highest number of votes on the first ballot. In order to prevent the hard-right LCC candidate from winning, she then withdrew and the left vote swung to "centre-left" Derek Sawyer, who was duly elected. In the days before the ballot, Sawyer was so drunk for power that he agreed to sign a list of commitments with Davies, thus ensuring the left's vote. The day after the election, he arranged for a Labour Group meeting to overturn his professed "commitments". Thereafter, he announced his hands were tied by the right-wing.

Sawyer's commitments were to resolve the strike, not to harass people who could not afford to pay the Poll Tax and to reverse a £300,000 cut in grants to black and ethnic minority groups. But within days of Sawyer's election, Council negotiators dug their heels in and spurned overtures from NALGO, needlessly prolonging the strike by two months. In the interim, some strikers' jobs were given away to scabs in a "re-organisation" designed to weed out activists.

Nothing has happened on Poll Tax. People one month in arrears are receiving summonses. Single parents are being threatened with jail. The £300,000 cut in grants to black and ethnic minority groups was renegotiated - the final cut was "only" £297,000.

The Hodge legacy remains. Sawyer continues to protest that his hands are tied. Surely the gentleman doth protest too much?

Annual Women's Delegation to Belfast and Derry

March 4th-7th, 1993

to mark International Women's Day and protest against strip-searching. Women interested in joining the delegation should contact the London Branch of Women in the Troops Out Movement, PO Box 353, London NW5 4NH; tel. 071 609 1743.

Braindead

CLASS TRAITOR OF THE MONTH

Like so many others in Labour local government, Manchester City Council Leader **Graham Stringer** has made the transformation from bolshie Bennite to Town Hall tyrant. Only sheer mediocrity has held back this month's Class Traitor from the career heights achieved by so many of his peers.

STRINGER WAS one of an army of young, eager, angry leftwingers who joined battle with the Manchester old-guard Labour right in the late 70s and early 80s. In 1979, he was instrumental in forcing former Labour minister Harold Lever to stand down from his Manchester Central seat. The next year, at the age of 30, he became chair of the then leftwing Manchester City Labour Party and was elected a councillor. Over the following four years he was centrally involved in a struggle which led to him being expelled from the Labour Group, along with other lefties, in 1980, 81, 82 and 83 - on the last occasion following his voting against the official Labour budget in full council.

In 1984, following left gains in local elections, Eric Heffer, then chair of the national Party, intervened to unite the divided Manchester Labour Group. Stringer was elected leader on the left slate. He took his place with the Blunketts, Livingstones and Hodges in Labour's new municipal elite, though he was always one of the dimmer stars in that firmament. In a feeble attempt to cover his tracks and rid himself of the taint of his socialist past, Stringer has recently claimed that back in 1984 he was already working on Manchester's over-hyped Olympic bid. No doubt he hopes no one will remember that at this time was also attending football matches in the delightful company of one Derek Hatton, Esq.

Having hedged his way through the rate-capping climbdown of 1985, he gradually moved to the right, making the final break with his former left allies in 1987, when he pushed a cuts package through the Council. Recently he was quoted in the local press as "being proud" of losing twenty Council jobs every week for the past five years. Lesbian and gay rights was pushed out of view and anti-racism downgraded as Stringer dug himself into his City Hall bunker. He proved himself an assiduous collector of the Poll Tax and willing jailor of non-payers. He has played the familiar divide and rule game with the unions, using the GMB as a political base and castigating NALGO and other unions which make any attempt to resist cuts, privatisation or job losses. He grows ever more addicted to what he has called the "excitement" of attracting private investment into the city.

In the late 80s Stringer formed a close political relationship with his old enemy, Gerald Kaufman. Whatever their differences, the two men found that they were bound together by a shared loathing of the left. Increasingly Stringer has intervened in the internal affairs of local Constituency Labour Parties, though the strings are pulled behind the scenes, as they are on the Council. He uses the local press to bounce and manipulate the Labour Group and has regularly leaked Labour Party documents to journalists in order to put pressure on his opponents within the Party.



Last year, Stringer revenged himself on left-wing councillors John Clegg and Margaret Manning - who had had the temerity to defy him on the Poll Tax. They were "caught" in the wrong place at the wrong time - visiting a jailed Poll Tax non-payer in Liverpool during the Walton by-election. Through Kaufman, Stringer pressed the NEC to uphold the ludicrous charges. After all, dissent could not be tolerated in his Brave New Mancunian World.

In running the Council, he has struck up a partnership with fellow North Manchester councillor Pat Karney, who described the 1984 Labour Group as "adolescent". Known locally as "the Hit Man and Her" (after the dreadful TV series), Stringer and Karney are said to enjoy "clubbing it up" during the early hours of the morning. Recently they licensed 400 extra taxi drivers, reportedly on the basis that they could never find a cab when emerging from Manchester clubs at 3:00 am.

Outside Manchester, Stringer's profile is deservedly low. The grandiose Olympic bid and the hoopla Stringer has tried to generate around it, shamelessly disporting himself in the company of Tory politicians, are little more than an attempt to convince himself and the world that he is anything other than the braindead custodian of a local political fiefdom.



INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

An important step towards the formation of a Labor Party in America was taken in December when Labor Party Advocates held its first educational conference. The event attracted 247 participants from 13 states, 23 unions and from Canada where the advance of the New Democratic Party holds important lessons for US activists.

It is ironic that at the very moment key union figures in the US are breaking from the Democratic Party to chart an independent way forward, the Labour leadership in this country is sending out scores of researchers and calling conferences to find out how to 'Clintonise' the party.

Tony Mazzocchi of the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers union, who founded Labor Party Advocates two years ago, is calling for 100,000 members to join prior to the holding of a founding convention. The conference was especially successful in strengthening links with the miners' union in the South.

Racism claimed the lives of at least 59 people in Western Europe in 1992, according to a special investigation carried out by the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism.

'Death in Europe - the toll for 1992', a four page report published in the January 1993 issue of CARF magazine, details 59 cases of racist and extreme-right murders, police killings and deaths caused by official maltreatment or neglect, in the past year.

In Germany and Italy, victims of neo-nazis extend beyond black people, immigrants and refugees. One German who was mistaken for a gypsy, refused to give a nazi salute and was killed. In France and in Belgium there have been a number of police shootings of 'immigrants' allegedly caught in petty crime. A French baker was acquitted of the fatal shooting of an Algerian whom she caught stealing croissants; her action was seen as legitimate defence of property. In Holland a 7 months pregnant refugee died in a detention centre through lack of medical attention, and the practice of sealing deportees' mouths with tape led to another refugee suffering severe brain damage.

For further details contact CARF or BM Box 8784, London WC1N 3XX, Tel 071 837 1450

A new opening in Nicaragua?

Mike Phipps, Brent South CLP, writes:

After a long constitutional crisis, Nicaragua President Violetta Chamorro has appointed two Sandinistas to her cabinet. Fernando Guzman has been made Minister of Tourism and Alvaro Fiallos Vice-Minister of the Agrarian Reform Institute

The crisis began in September when Sandinista deputies boycotted the National Assembly in protest against the illegal actions of Alfredo Cesar,the protege of the American far-right and leader of the National Assembly. Following a decision of the Supreme Court on 30th December that National Assembly proceedings were null and void since the Sandinistas walk-out, a new National Assembly directorate has been elected, comprising Sandinista and centre group deputies. The move may be a reflection of Bill Clinton's election, which Sandinistas have cautiously welcomed.

One of the last acts of ex-President Bush was to pardon six figures in the Iran-Contra scandal. This completes a two year process of putting US foreign policy entirely above the law.

In another skirmish with the far right, Minister of the Presidency Antonio Lacayo has told Mayor of Managua Arnoldo Aleman that the city is not authorised to levy taxes on services such as water,electricity and the airport. Aleman has said he will ignore Lacayo and will hire one hundred people to collect taxes from house to house.

At the same time the government has tried to crack down on growing labour unrest. Managua was practically militarised for several days at the end of last year in an attempt to intimidate workers demonstrating for wage increases and job creation. Dozens of union leaders were violently arrested for "illicit association." Meanwhile, health workers have stepped up their two month partial strike for a 100% wage increase and more government funding for health. And thirty-seven ex-soldiers have ended their five day hunger strike in favour of redundancy terms.

Privatisation continues apace. Nearly half of the 351 state enterprises have been sold off and the programme should be completed by the end of the year.

Over the Christmas period, recontras killed fifteen people including a pregnant woman and five children. On 28th December, the army launched a new offensive aimed at wiping out 400 recontras.

It is too early to say how far the appointment of Sandinistas to junior Government posts marks a major change. In fact, there is a danger that it will drive a wedge between the Sandinistas and the people. Overall, the future of Nicaragua is still very dependent on the attitude of the US White House and Congress.

Labour Focus on Eastern Europe

Peter Gowan The European community and the countries of Eastern Europe.
Andrew Glyn Wages and Restructuring in Eastern Europe.
Milka Tyszkiewicz Jacek Kuron's New Economic Policy.
Catherine Samary Yugoslav Crisis.

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The end of Euro-Socialism?

Andrew Coates (Ipswich CLP) provides an analysis of the forthcoming French elections and their wider political implications.

IN SEPTEMBER Francois Mitterrand won the Maastricht referendum by a whisker. But the French Parti Socialiste, which he helped to found in 1971, looks almost certain to lose the March elections for the Assemblee Nationale. Its leadership is already in disarray. Laurent Fabius, the party secretary and former prime minister, is embroiled in a complex legal wrangle over his responsibility for the importation of AIDS-contaminated blood. His organisation, and its allies on the centre-left, will be unbelievably lucky to win over 25% of the vote. Pierre Beregovoy, one of the few leading socialists with a background in the labour movement, has not fulfilled his role as Mitterand's trusted man and restored the Socialists' fortunes. There is increasing speculation about how the president will be able to survive another period of 'cohabitation' with a right-dominated parliament.

The state of ideological exhaustion of the Parti Socialiste is best illustrated by the stand of one of the few remaining popular members of the cabinet, Bernard Kouchner, minister for health and humanitarian affairs. Kouchner, who opposed the Algerian war, is now at the forefront of a campaign to assert the West's right to impose its ethical order on the rest of the world, from Somalia to Bosnia. This new moral imperialism appears to be the only issue that gets media intellectuals agitated.

Although the decline in Socialist support is long-term the Maastricht referendum played a fundamental part in its disintegration. The media blitz in favour of a 'Yes' played heavily on the idea that any alternative would be catastrophic. But these were not the only voices. On the Left, Jean-Pierre Chevenement (the ex-Defence Minister who resigned in protest at the Gulf War) and his allies in what is now the independent Mouvement des Citoyens, argued against the EC building a "financial dungeon". Their appeal, for a "No from the Left, for a Europe against Maastricht", received support from Communists, the Trotskyist Alain Krivine, and some ecologists. On the Right the official leaders of the RPR and UDF half-heartedly supported a 'Yes' vote. Phillipe Seguin of Chirac's RPR disagreed with his master (which is rather like a bagman for the Mafia saying 'No' to his Godfather) and succeeded in mobilising a nationalist vote independently of the neo-fascist Front National. A French comrade recently described the results to me as showing "the middle class and financial winners of the eighties backing the government, and the rest - farmers, peasants, workers, unemployed, nationalists -showing their discontent by a rejection."

This social split forms the background to the forthcoming election. The Socialists enter it handicapped by the acceptance of what Jacques Delors calls the "interdependence" of the EC. That is, the constraints of finance and trade in a capitalist world. The government's project has been to forge a common will for economic development on a European basis, and to encourage supply-side socialism in France. In a recession both objectives have proved elusive. Industry, while not in the UK's condition, is in profound crisis. Unemployment is well over three million. In the process the popular base of the entire Left has been eroded, leading to what is widely called a 'crisis of militantism', that is less and less active support for traditional forms of politics. The labour movement, already weak, has declined from 10.5% of the working population in 1978 to just over 5.5% today. Movements of protest by farmers, railworkers and others have tended to escape the control of either unions or parties. The agricultural sector in particular has shown that it is not willing to lie down and die to suit the GATT negotiators. Since they are the chief losers in any programme of restructuring it is not surprising that wage-earners see little future in the Socialists' call for a modernised France.

The French ecologists, Generation Ecologiste (GE) and Les Verts (Greens), have been the chief beneficiaries of the Socialists' decline. They have now reached an electoral accord. Brice Lalonde, leader of the GE, is a former environmental minister who has long tried to build a centre-Left that is free of 'archaic' socialism. He initially called for a grand alliance of the centre-Right, socialists and his own supporters. Lalonde's grouping is a collection of personalities who only really emerge during elections. The Verts are led by Antoine Vaetcher, an Alsatian who supports the idea that the ecologist movement is 'neither Left nor Right.' There are some Greens who believe that their movement has inherited the values of socialism. But their political programme is dominated by generalities about the global problems of industrial development, presenting no coherent way of dealing with more immediate difficulties caused by a decline in economic growth. They attempt to appeal beyond class interests. Les Verts have only around 5,000 members, which indicates the limits of this call. Even the smaller socialist Alliance Rouge et Verte (AREV) has not been able to solve the problems of how to combine ecology with working class politics.

For the moment it is not clear if the Parti Communiste Francais (PCF) and the Mouvement des Citoyens will be able and willing to mount any effective challenge to the Socialists. What is certain is we are witnessing the last stages in the unravelling of southern Euro-socialism.

A politics which came to the fore in the early eighties with the promise of radical measures of nationalisation, popular control and social justice, ended in a largely unsuccessful strategy of compromise with industry and international markets. The electoral results will have international significance. They will invite us, elsewhere, to ask where does this 'realism' lead to? ❑

Saddam and Major — partners in crime

Examining the background to 'Saddamgate', **Keith Veness**, Hackney NUPE, shows that both Saddam Hussein and John Major have blood on their hands.

IN 1988 THE Iraqi airforce destroyed the Kurdish town of Halabja using chemical poisons - both mustard gas and the new nerve agents - wiping out at least 5,000 people, mainly women and children. Such an act put Halabja alongside Lidice and Guernica as bywords for the massacre of defenceless civilians. Afterwards, the Iraqi army tried to dynamite the town and wipe out the evidence.

Jeremy Corbyn MP asked Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd to condemn this act. Hurd attacked Corbyn for "undermining British efforts at exporting in a key market."

This was a blatant example of the love-affair between the Tories and the hell that was Saddam's Iraq in the 1980s. For years arms manufacturers, construction firms and technology businesses earned fat profits selling to Baghdad, backed by export guarantees from a British government only too happy to turn a blind eye to the embargoes in force as a result of the Iran/Iraq Gulf War.

Iraq had long been seen as a good place for British exports. It was a 'British Protectorate' in the twenties; it used British systems of electricity wiring and generation. Also, Iraq was the only Arab state that was both oil-rich and populous. Unlike Saudi Arabia and the petty Gulf Sheikdoms, the Baghdad regime did not have heavy restrictions on westerners and was fairly laid-back about the social activities of ex-patriates. Firms such as British Aerospace, Ferranti and Taylor Woodrow rushed to export technology and make profits.

In fact, the Iraqi state was a dictatorship of the Baath Party based on a mish-mash of Arab nationalism, one-party rule and a vague anti-imperialist rhetoric that was switched on and off as needed. Vast sums of money were ploughed into the armed forces to keep the generals happy and a secret-police established (the Mukhabarat) which resembled the KGB and infiltrated every section of Iraqi society.

No political opposition was tolerated and a vicious revenge was exacted on anyone opposing the regime. Members of the powerful Iraqi Communist Party were publicly hanged in Baghdad. Shia clerics were beaten up and murdered. Trades unionists were tortured and incarcerated in appalling prisons on the outskirts of the capital.

The one major opposition that Saddam never succeeded in either bribing or coercing into support were the 4,000,000 Kurds, who for decades had waged a struggle for an autonomous democratic state and staged a series of rebellions. In the 80s, the war with Iran was used by the Kurds to establish political control in the Zagros mountains and whole regions became 'no-go' areas for the Baathists.

Saddam stepped-up his frantic buying of arms in the West, relying on new heavy weaponry and air-power to counteract the numbers of Iranian ground troops and the popular support for the Kurdish resistance. Britain became the main supplier of technology, particularly after the Soviet Union stopped supplies. Up to a fortnight before the invasion of Kuwait export licences were being issued for armament and chemical warfare technology.

Amongst the British ministers who were aware of this sanction-busting was John Major, then a rising star at the Foreign office. To this day there is no public acknowledgement of the blood on the Tories' hands - despite the revelations of the Matrix Churchill affair, which show how deeply these criminals were implicated and how they were willing to send others to jail to cover up their crimes.

On my last visit to now-Free Kurdistan last year, the KDP took our party to visit the notorious Dohuk Prison, a fortress that was used to massacre at least 6,000 Kurds. It was built in 1986 by two leading British building firms. Amongst its features are: underground cells with no light or ventilation - just ducts for gas to be piped in; large metal hooks pile-driven into ceilings for garroting suspects; and a series of sluices to wash blood away from execution areas. It is impossible for any construction firm or architect to have any illusions about what these devices were intended for.

Amongst the grisly items found by the Pesh Merga guerillas when they captured the prison were hundreds of videos showing torture and executions of prisoners. These genuine horror videos were sent weekly to Baghdad to demonstrate that the camp commanders were keeping up their quota. Apparently Saddam himself viewed them at private parties held with his police and army chiefs.

Major should now be forced to watch these and explain why he helped subsidise this holocaust.

● **Paul Field writes**: The Gulf War did not end in 1991. Over the last two years thousands of Iraqi children and adults have died due to the allied embargo on food, medical equipment and technology. Major General Perry Smith on CNN News called it the most successful peacetime economic blockade ever.

The recent allied airstrikes are not so much a renewal as an intensification of imperialism's war against Iraq. This war has nothing to do with destroying the Baathist dictatorship or defending the Kurdish or Iraqi populations of Iraq. The objective is not to overthrow the Baathist regime but to precipitate an internal coup within it that would replace Saddam with a more manageable figure. If we accept Bush's analogy of Saddam with Hitler, this amounts to replacing the Fuhrer with Goebbels because he would only kill Communists and Jews without threatening US and British interests.

The west was complicit with Saddam's bloody repression of the uprising that followed the Gulf War. It allowed Saddam's helicopter gunships free use of airspace to massacre the insurgents. When asked about the allied indifference to the slaughter, John Major said, "I don't recall asking them to stage this particular rebellion." John Pilger has pointed out that the allies directly assisted the repression by their blanket bombing of the routed Iraqi infantry, whose poor Iraqi Kurd and Shia conscripts would have used their arms to support the revolt had they survived. Only Saddam's Republican Guard, busy dropping phosphorous bombs on Kurds and Shias, survived unscathed.

The latest attacks have shown once again that imperialism's attempts to provoke a palace coup in Baghdad by displays of lethal military might only end up strengthening Saddam's position. It will be the Shias and Kurds who will end up paying the price of the west's combination of aggression, arrogance and ineptitude.

Bombay burning



ON DECEMBER 6th, Hindu nationalists systematically demolished the Babri Masjid mosque in the north Indian town of Ayodhya. That wanton act of communal hatred and the violence which

Mike Marqusee
Islington North CLP

ensued have traumatised India as nothing since partition. As the ruling Congress party dithers and the right-wing Hindu communalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) steps up its offensive, alarm has spread amongst even the most cautious observers: secularism and democracy in India are under threat as never before.

For a whole week in mid-January, Bombay, India's sophisticated commercial metropolis and one-time bastion of militant trade unionism, was engulfed by a pogrom waged against the minority Muslim community by right-wing political forces in cahoots with organised crime and the local police.

In the space of a few days, the pogrom claimed at least 600 lives, 6000 injured, 60,000 made homeless and inflicted as yet untold millions of pounds of damage on property. Muslim homes and businesses were targeted. "Rioters" were seen moving through blocks of flats with prepared lists of names and addresses. In full public view, Muslim families were assaulted with stones, clubs, acid bulbs, swords and knives. For the most part police either stood by or actively participated in the attacks.

The "Hindu" gangs organised by politicians and criminals were composed not only of the usual "lumpen" elements but also of respectable middle class students and shopkeepers. Shiv Sena, the Bombay-based semi-fascist Hindu communal party, whose influence had been thought to be on the decline, was clearly in charge of an operation whose purpose was nothing less than the expulsion of the Muslim community and the destruction of Bombay's complex multi-cultural social fabric.

The whole affair was yet more grist to the mill of Shiv Sena's senior political partner, the BJP, whose long-running campaign over the disputed mosque-temple site in Ayodhya provided the framework for the riots. Once again they were able to pose as the dynamic and decisive force in Indian politics while the centre and state Congress governments put on a quite spectacular display of complacency and inaction. While Bombay burned, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao indulged in petty factional manoeuvres designed to weaken internal Congress rivals.

Dogged by corruption and factionalism, the Congress has ditched lip-service to socialism and embraced free market ideology. It is now engaged in sweeping financial "liberalisation" and privatisation. This has led to both increased expectations and increased insecurity - a combination tailor-made for the BJP, whose 119 MPs now make it the official Opposition. An opinion poll in *India Today* showed 43.5% of all Hindus in the country approved of the demolition of the mosque.

What is happening in India is not a spate of atavistic religious violence; it is not a clash of rival fundamentalisms or ancient irrational identities. It is the result of the rise of a sophisticated, right-wing social movement which seeks to construct and exploit modern religious identities for its own political ends. The BJP, founded in 1980, is the electoral wing of this movement; its leaders are slick demagogues adept at exploiting the mass media. But their real strength lies in their relationship with the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS), a 4 million-strong cadre-based Hindu social and "community service" organisation that is a combination of the Boy Scouts, the Orange Order and the Brown Shirts. Through a network of recreational, cultural and community front organisations (including a major national trade union federation) the RSS has penetrated large areas of India's civil society. It can now boast supporters in every walk of life, including high up in the civil service, academia, the media, the armed forces and commerce and finance. This RSS-BJP combine has demonstrated the power of the interplay of electoral and extra-parliamentary activity in a manner which should be a lesson for the left everywhere.

For decades Indian big business has relied on the Congress to govern India in its interests. Now however key sections of the business community are looking to the BJP as the only force capable of providing "stability". Multi-national capital, still a relative newcomer to the Indian scene, will of course accept whatever government can best discipline the workforce and provide security for investments.

The major left parties - both Communist and non-Communist - have been as unable to respond to the RSS-BJP threat as the Congress. They have failed as yet to mount a single mass counter-demonstration. The trade unions, mesmerised by the menace of privatisation and mounting unemployment, have also done little.

The grass-roots fight against Hindu nationalism on the ground has been left to small, embattled bands of brave secularists. One Delhi-based group, the Sampradayikta Virodhi Andolan (SVA - "movement against communalism"), has concentrated on counter-acting the RSS-BJP "Big Lies" and providing practical relief in violence-stricken districts. For their pains, SVA members have been harassed at work and threatened by the police. "We must recognise that a salient feature of the present challenge is its mass character, i.e. the depth of mobilisation amongst the Hindus," says the SVA. "There is no answer other than a massive counter-mobilisation at the popular level based clearly on the principles of the equity of all religions and the right to dissent... We know that this situation on the ground has become polarised on an unprecedented scale. The enormity of our struggle is everywhere in sight." ❑

● Please contact the SVA and send donations: SVA,5/24 Jangpura B, New Delhi, 110014, India.

Rape camps in the Balkans

Camilla Power, NUJ Haymarket, reports on Bosnia, scene of the most appalling institutionalised abuse of women since the closure of the Nazi concentration camps.

WOMEN and girls have been subject to prolonged beatings and repeated rape - and in some cases enforced impregnation - as part of a system of 'rewarding' Serbian soldiers. Estimates of the numbers of women involved range from 20-60,000. Many women have not survived their ordeal, either because they have been cold-bloodedly murdered, or through lack of medical attention to appalling internal injuries. An interim report to the EC Council of Ministers stated that rape was being used "as a weapon of war". Evidence collected in Croatia suggested that girls between seven and fourteen years were being singled out for abuse. The state responsible is pursuing a policy of 'ethnic cleansing' indistinguishable, in principle, from Nazism. But it should be emphasized that women and girls are being raped and murdered by male nationalists on all sides.

Never has the hypocrisy of Western imperialism been more nakedly exposed than in recent weeks. Saddam Hussein pokes a couple of missile heads across an imaginary line in the sand, and incurs the wrath of US forces and their puppet Gulf allies, resulting in civilian deaths from bombings. Meanwhile tens of thousands of Bosnian muslim women are raped. They have no oil, nor any other valued international resource worth guarding. The only reason mooted for drafting more British soldiers to the Balkans is to protect the British troops already there. Meanwhile, the longer it hangs around, the more the UN contingent provides useful income from prostitution to women in Bosnia. Here we have the nub of the difference betwen capitalism and barbarism - a difference between exploitation of sex as a cash commodity and the violation and torture of women through sexual means.

Without doubt, the majority of Muslim women involved would call for large-scale Western/Islamic intervention on their behalf. It is impossible to stand by and advocate no form of intervention; but it is equally impossible to envisage that an onslaught by Western or Islamic powers, bringing yet more 'armed bodies of men' to the region, can lead to a solution rather than escalation. The Balkans War is a chaotic conglomeration of mini wars with no clear battle lines drawn. There are certainly grounds to call for the formation of `armed bodies of women' - and the provision of arms to the women victims in their own defence.

In fact, the issues leads to a stark choice: either women activists in the West relinquish responsibility and demand active Western intervention now for the sake of the women in the camps; or we must adopt an explicity internationalist revolutionary stance, which is antagonistic to all ethnically based states and all state claims backed by male violence.

For women to fudge the issue and be satisfied with parliamentary and legalistic means is to kowtow to patriarchal institutions which never have and never will prioritise women's suffering. Remember, the capitalist western powers have no material or political interest in getting involved in the Balkans; they certain have no 'moral' inclination to do so. To campaign for the recognition of rape as a war crime is worthy and useful. It is correct to call for the setting up of an international tribunal - women-led and organised - for cases of rape, torture and murder of civilians. If they are not meaningless utterances, however, these demands amount to a call for Western/Islamic intervention, because there is no way such prosecution will be practically pursued without that intervention. Women should be clear about this.

Short of women-led global revolution, what can we do to combat these most appalling male inhumanities to women? At a recent Womens London meeting Maja Korac, a Belgrade representative of the European Forum of Left Feminists, reminded us that the violence of men against women and children permeates this bitter conflict all levels. From military abuse of civilians to domestic abuse within households, it becomes the endemic, lived experience of women. She stressed the importance of keeping in contact with women's and peace groups in Serbia which have been resisting the war.

Two women reported from the Southampton group, Women's Aid to Former Yugoslavia, which has been carrying lorry loads of humanitarian supplies to Croatian refugee camps. The group will help set up rape crisis counselling projects in Slovenia and Croatia. They have been specifically asked to collect books on the subject of rape, women and war - the classic being Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* - as well as on counselling, in English and German.

An action group, Women Against War Crime, has been set up, involving a broad coalition of organisations and individuals. WAWC aims i) to support practical aid to women in war crisis by fundraising; ii) to take all possible action against the abuse of women as a strategy of war; iii) to press for the recognition and prosection of rape as a war crime; iv) to maintain links with women's groups across international boundaries; and v) to campaign against immigration restrictions for war refugees, addressing particularly women's rights to refugee status in war.

WAWC will be launched with publicity material on Peace Sunday, 31st January. We will focus on Saturday 13th February as a day for collections and leafletting. We plan to call a women's demonstration against rape and the abuse of women and children in war for 6th March, the Saturday before International Women's Day.

● For further details contact Camilla Power (home, 071 350 0598) or Shirley Nelson (work, 071 700 2800). Donations are particularly needed for Women's Aid to Former Yugoslavia — 20 Tennyson Road, Portswood, Southampton, SO2 IGW.

New realism — South African style

It now seems highly likely from the latest interviews and announcements by Comrade Mandela that one of the last remnants of the international campaign against apartheid is to be traded off in a jobs and recovery package with the De Klerk Government.

Sean Coyne reports.

CHRISTMAS AND New Year is the main holiday period in South Africa. Factories and offices close down for two to three weeks. The headquarters of trade unions and political organisations are virtually deserted. Government buildings stand empty. Workers who have migrated to the cities try to return to their home towns and villages.

But like everywhere else, the close of one year and the opening of another give time for reflection on what the next year has in store.

The 'sanctions' question' has increasingly been an uneasy one for the liberation movement. Maintaining its effectiveness as the British Government and others shamelessly tried to undermine it, was a major political success for the international apartheid movement. But with New Realism South African style, the radical policies of the past, rooted as they were in the underground movement and historic Cold War divisions, have all but been exorcised. Many former radicals have been traumatised by the latest reports of the woeful state of the economy into accepting what was once unthinkable.

These days potential investors are given assurances by leading comrades that nationalisation for example is no longer considered an appropriate measure. Efforts to establish even a minimal amount of popular control over the commanding heights of the economy have been ditched for the



same sort of pragmatism that dominates much of Western European social democratic thinking. The market is seen as the main mechanism for the development of the economy, with intervention attempted only within a framework of available resources. Mass actions are labelled counterproductive.

All of this may sound remarkably familiar to readers of *Labour Briefing*. Were not these effectively the centrepiece economic policies on which the Labour Party in Britain fought and lost the last election? Now there is food for thought.

It is within this context that Comrade Mandela's willingness to discuss the dropping of remaining economic sanctions in favour of a jobs and recovery package can be located. The fact that sanctions were to remain in place until a democratically elected government had been elected is no longer seen as politically tenable, or economically viable. It is indicative of the scale of retreat from radical policies, that the once central issues of jobs and land are now being tied to the amount of investment which can be attracted into the economy. This may help the rich and powerful in South Africa to sleep more comfortable in their beds, but it will be a difficult message to sell to all those who have sacrificed everything for a more equitable society.

For millions of people, the fine print of the latest communique on economic development remains a secondary issue. The first priority is surviving in a society still dominated by the machinations of apartheid.

The hunt for David Webster's killers

ON FRIDAY 22nd January, Judge Michael Stegmann spent over four hours summing up the evidence gathered during the marathon inquest into the unlawful killing of human rights activist David Webster on May Day 1989. As reported before, it was a remarkable case because of the way it shone a light on the murderous workings of the Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB).

Despite four witnesses (including former colleagues) admitting in court that CCB operative Ferdi Barnard had openly boasted in detail about his role in the killing, and a positive identification of Barnard as one of the killers, the judge ruled this to be circumstantial evidence. The ruling stated that there had indeed been a murder conspiracy but the assassins were unknown. Barnard walked out of court with his appalling reputation intact - a hired killer, employed by the Government, protected by De Klerk's amnesty and answerable only to himself and the dirty tricks department.

The David Webster case is far from over. New attempts will be made by his family and friends to have it re-opened, and to eventually find those who made the order, who hired the killers, and who are now frantically trying to cover their tracks by dismissing a few top officers from military intelligence.

REVIEWS

The limits of Russian liberalism

Mike Phipps reviews
The Disintegration of the Monolith,
by Boris Kagarlitsky, Verso, £10.95.

"The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, formed by the Boisheviks in 1922 to consolidate the gains of their revolution, disintegrated in December 1991, a few days before its seventieth anniversary. Amid the clamour about the triumph of liberty and the eradication of communism, the country simply fell apart. The liquidation of the Union has not solved a single national conflict nor has it altered the imperial essence of the state. All of the former Soviet republics... contain the same inherent contradictions as the large Union. At the helm stand local leaders, who as a rule have come to power through semi-free elections and the manipulation of public opinion." **— Boris Kagarlitsky.**

IN THE introduction to his new book, Boris Kagarlitsky tells how street stalls which have sprung up in Moscow in recent years are now doing a brisk trade in Russian dolls, painted to look like Boris Yeltsin, inside of which can be found one of Gorbachev, then Brezhnev, Stalin and Lenin. Not the full story, he acknowledges, but in recent years people in Russia have good reason to be suspicious of omniscient 'leaders'.

The *Distintegration of the Monolith* is a downbeat and sober analysis of the end of perestroika and the events leading to the current impasse. It traces the roots of the current pillage of state resources that passes for privatisation, back to the 'bureaucratic pluralism' fostered by Brezhnev in the 1970s. This created a framework for today's bureaucrats to convert their power into property and divide up the wealth of the state among themselves.

This imposition of a new property-owning class from above has little in common with fashionable chatter about encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit from below. Indeed the break-neck pace of economic 'reform' - "the most grandiose social experiment since Stalin's collectivisation" - is directed at giving those in power a headstart in the great grab for private property.

It is disconcerting that where the new market capitalism has run into popular opposition, many liberals, including former dissidents, have called for democracy to be restrained in the economic interest. This has emerged in calls for the dissolution of parties and the Soviets.

Kagarlitsky is scathing on the abdication of responsibility of much of the intelligentsia in this regard. The shift to liberalism as the dominant intellectual ideology can be traced to the changed social base of the opposition from the 1950s. After an initial cultural pluralism under glasnost, crude pro-communist propaganda in art and ideas has been replaced by equally bad anti-communist propaganda. Deviations from the new liberal dogma are marginalised. It is not easy to be a socialist in today's Russia. Marxist ideas are under greater attack than at any time since Stalin.

Liberalism monopolises organised politics too. There may be a plethora of parties, based on different personalities, but most stand for the same free market ideas. Here Kagarlitsky sees the essential continuity of the policies of Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

Yeltsin's popularity, he argues, was due to his consistent opposition to Gorbachev. Yet "Yeltsin was not only Gorbachev's most implacable enemy, but also his double." In both there is the same striving for office, the same demands for extra powers and wider authority. Yet "while the leaders publicly reviled each other, functionaries migrated unconcernedly from one camp to another. They knew very well that their tasks would be the same on both sides."

More controversially, Kagarlitsky suggests Yeltsin had prior knowledge of the August 1991 coup, the eventual upshot of which might have been an authoritarian government of national unity, himself included. This may explain why no serious attempt was made to immobilise the Russian president during the coup itself — even his phone was not cut! Yeltsin seized the initiative to destroy most of his opponents, outlaw the Communist Party and assume unprecedented power.

The eighteen months since have seen fierce austerity, a seven-fold increase in prices in a year, matched at best by a threefold increase in wages, a widespread witch-hunt and a curbing of democracy and the powers of elective bodies at all levels.

The alternative Kagarlitsky advocates is a restriction of the market to an economic regulator and generator of information, for self-management and democratic planning, political democracy and respect for human rights over national demands. This is the programme of the left bloc, a small force in Russian politics. The newly-formed Party of Labour, to which Kagarlitsky belongs, is a component part.

Ultimately, as he himself recognises, whether these forces have a role in the next phase depends on their ability to link up with the discontent of the multi-millioned working class, the largest in Europe. ❑

The first modern campaign

Leonora Lloyd reviews *The Purple, White and Green: Suffragettes in London 1906-14*, an exhibition at the Museum of London.



THIS EXHIBITION shows that women's fight for the vote was the first "modern" campaign. The suffragettes made striking use of images and slogans in ways which every successful campaign since has echoed. Almost everything they produced was in their campaign colours - purple, white and green - and they excelled at creating newsworthy stories and photo opportunities before the phrase was invented.

There are a multitude of original publications: postcards produced by suffragettes and their opponents, pamphlets, artifacts such as tea-sets, card and board games and magnificent banners. But despite a short film (narrated by Glenda Jackson), the exhibition would mean little to anyone not already familiar with the history. The explanatory material concentrates on the visual aspects of the exhibition. In fact, the whole things seems designed to make you want to buy reproductions of designs on scarves, badges, t-shirts, posters and postcards. Perhaps it was conceived as a marketing ploy!

I would have liked a little more background information, especially about the relationship of the suffragettes with the various political parties. Explanations as to why the socialist Sylvia Pankhurst fell out with her mother and right-wing sister Christabel, and why the latter two gave up the struggle when war broke out in 1914, would have been welcome.

Do not be put off by these criticisms. It is a fascinating collection and well worth a visit. Admission cost £3.00/ £1.50 but as you can reuse your ticket as many times as you wish over a period of three months, it is a bargain.

The Museum of London is at 150 London Wall, EC2, and the exhibition runs until 13th June 1993.

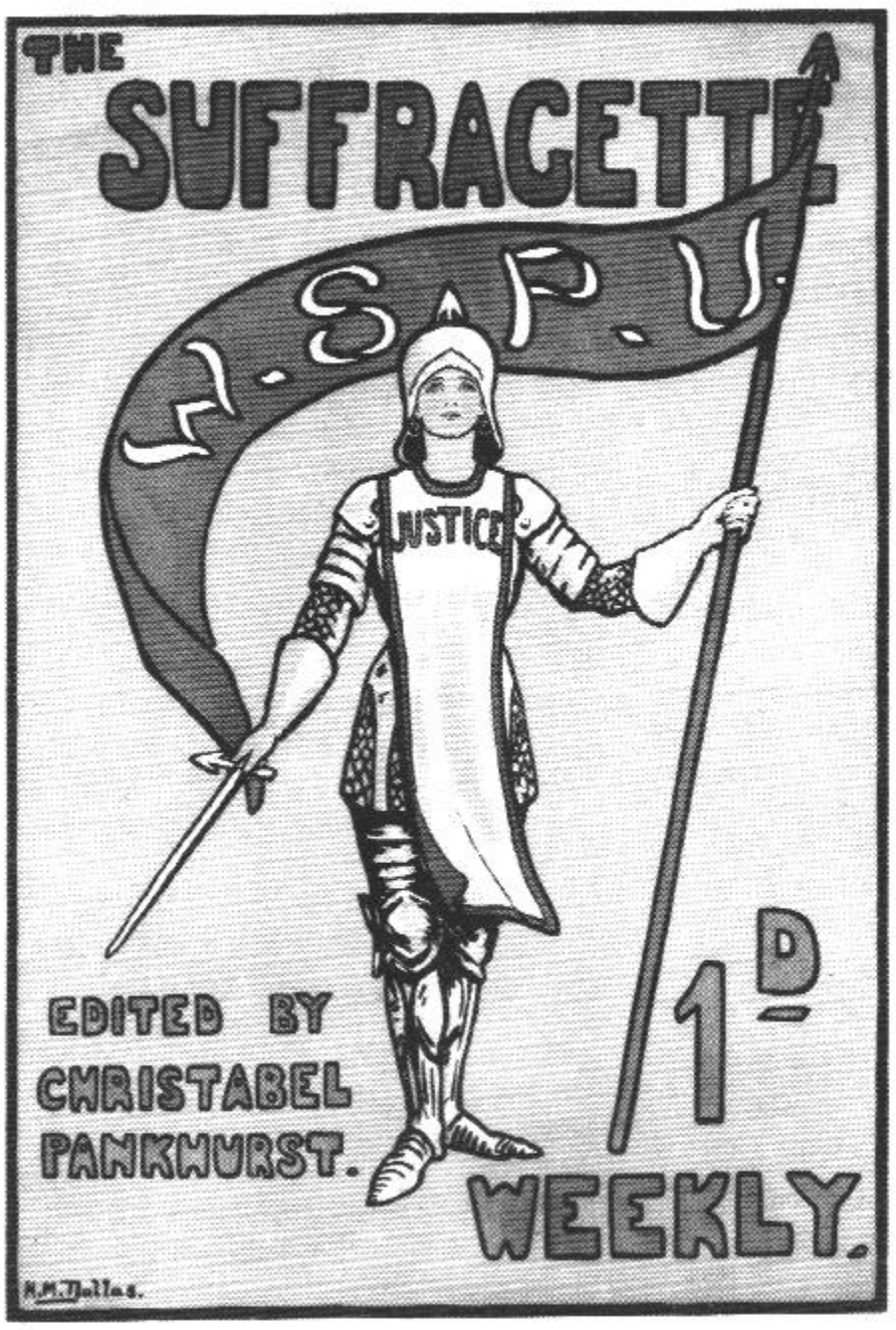


PHOTO: Museum of London

Rich pickings

Mike Marqusee reviews *Poor Things*, by Alasdair Gray, by Bloomsbury, £14.99.

THIS WONDER-FILLED, moving and thoroughly entertaining novel represents a spectacular return to form for the Scottish author of *Lanark* and *1982 Janine*, two masterpieces of the early 80s.

The bizarre tale of Victorian Glasgow purports to be the autobiographical narrative of a working class medical student turned public health officer whose destiny entangles him with a mutant scientific genius and an upper class woman reborn as a superchild with a flair for blank verse. Mixing science fiction and sociological documentary, Gray indicts and satirises class and sexual and racial oppression, analyses the meaning of imperialism abroad and at home (literally, at home) and celebrates the socialist spirit that would cleanse the world of all forms of injustice and brutality. The narrative, interspersed with Gray's own illustrations and typographical inventions, is full of unexpected yet utterly logical twists and turns. It is rehearsed in Gray's crystalline prose, which manages to be high flown and down to earth, warm and hard-edged at the same time. The whole thing is uplifted with the most marvellous contempt for exploiters and cynics.

Read it and be inspired!



Carnivores

We understand that Greater London Labour Party regional official **Margaret McDonagh** is miffed that credit for some of her witch-hunting dirty work has been wrongly assigned to her former colleague **Phil Cole** in the recent Heffernan-Marqusee opus on Kinnock's Labour Party.

McThatcher (as she is called among friends) has complained bitterly that her role in strangling the life out of the London Labour Party has not been given due weight by the authors. The latter have assured **Periscope** that this omission will be corrected in future editions.

Meanwhile Phil Cole himself is prospering in his new job as Parliamentary officer for the **RSPCA**. Displaying the political nous that catapulted him to such dizzying heights in the Labour Party, he scandalised the RSPCA Christmas nosh-up by ordering veal.

Apres Margaret, le deluge...

Our informant at the **Association of Labour Authorities** reports extraordinary scenes at the ALA meeting held on January 5th. The Haringey Chief Whip, **George Meehan**, announced he could no longer see the point of being in local government (this after over 20 years). Southwark's **Sally Keeble** (of all people) said they were just doing the Tories dirty work for them, and why should they? There then followed the nearest thing to a proper political discussion the ALA has had for many moons, and harsh words were said about our beloved **John Smith**. Not quite as dramatic as the Supreme Soviet after Krushchev denounced Stalin, but possibly a straw in the wind?

Renewal regurgitated

One shock in the launch of the much-heralded Labour Co-ordinating Committee's *Renewal* magazine - no sign of the promised keynote article by **Tony Blair** on 'Labour and the Union Link'.

Did Blair bottle it or had the LCC caught sight of his 1983 election address with a committment to creating two million jobs. Other highlights: withdrawal from the EEC (which has "drained our natural resources and destroyed jobs"); a 50% increase in house building; and scrapping Trident.

He said it!

"I would suggest an annual quota for immigrants...Asylum seekers should forfeit the right to immigrate." - **Detler Samland**, German Social Democratic Party MEP (Socialist MEPs' Newsletter, November 1992).

Roses by moonlight

Whilst **Periscope** was obviously delighted that so many Labour Councillors were elected to Parliament last year, their ability to do two such strenuous jobs at once must be questioned. How can Labour MPs' protestations about Tories' second jobs as barristers and company directors be taken seriously when Labour MPs find time to turn up in the Council Chamber to vote through cuts in jobs and services? **John Denham** of Southampton Itchen, come on down...

Whilst dallying in the halls of the Palace of Westminster, we must mention **Gordon McMaster**, Labour MP for Paisley South. Despite being locked in fierce battle with the Tory scum, Comrade McMaster has found time to set up a Parliamentary gardening club - complete with slideshows, speakers and horticultural trips.

"This is the best news I've had all year," said **Rhodes Boyson**. Admittedly the date was January 7th.

By the compass, Camden Square

Those who delude themselves that freemasonry was no longer a threat in the Labour Party need to look closer at recent revelations from **Camden**.

Seven leading Party members have been named as having links with the organisation which makes the RCP look open and democratic. Councillor **Jerry Williams**, a former Mayor, admits, "I enjoy being a Mason." Another former Mayor, Councillor **Jim Turner**, refused to confirm or deny the challenge.

Quizlings

Congratulations to the 'Rotten Block', an assortment of hacks from across London, who astounded everyone with their knowledge of the obscure and irrelevant to take first prize at the recent *Briefing* quiz.

'Dinamo Cricklewood' came a close second followed by the 'Teamsters Union London Regional Equal Opportunities Committee'. For the first time there was no prize for the *Socialist Outlook* team, who masqueraded under the moniker 'Trivial Trotskyists'. For those who couldn't attend, what's the difference between Chairman Mao, Peter the Great, Robert Maxwell and Sharon Davis?

Walking vacuum

"...and **Harriet Harman**, we didn't have many expectations there - and they've been fulfilled" - **Vincent Hanna** on a TV round-up of 1992.

Welcome to the new party...

Labour Party members may be concerned to know that they have now been signed up to another party.

Since 9th November, all members were placed 'en masse' in the 'Party of European Socialists', the latest brainchild of the EC-fanatics whose only sensible decision to date was to refuse to have **Neil Kinnock** foisted on them as President.

Low profile

Imagine our contributor's delight at receiving a copy of the National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs' *Labour Club News* from his local hostelry. A broad range of contributors beckoned. On page 2 we learn that the publisher is one **John Evans MP**. A form to order more copies of the magazine can be sent to **John Evans MP** at the House of Commons. On page 3, the editor has a picture and full page article...it's **John Evans MP**!

Page 4 has a seasonal greeting from none other than **John Evans MP**. Further on there is an invitation to send delegates to Labour Women's Conference from **John Evans MP**, Political Secretary, an article on Labour Party Conference stating that - you've guessed it - **John Evans MP** chaired the Conference "in exemplary fashion", and a picture of Bass brewery chiefs with, of course, **John Evans MP**. John Evans, of course, is the MP who has managed to avoid going through a proper reselection process since the system was introduced.

Other gems include the Labour Club at **Rowley and Blackheath** in the Midlands which proudly admits women were only given full rights as members of the club in 1989 and a comment that club rules on signing in guests do not apply to the "wife or lady friend of the member." Enough to drive anyone to drink.

One solution!

Welcome news from the *Sunday Telegraph*: one quarter of Labour MPs want to see the monarchy abolished! Another 32% want it "reformed". 13% oppose any change and 30% (predictably) make "no comment".

Smith is in a dither about how to deal with the upsurge of republicanism. According to one (unnamed) Labour MP: "He knows it is sensitive and wants to duck it like a number of other issues. "

With his customary egregious sycophancy, **Keith Vaz** declared, "I absolutely support the monarchy. There should be no change."

It was left to **Joe Ashton** to defend the classical Trotskyist perspective: "I would get rid of the royal family...sadly it is not going to happen unless we have a revolution."

We told you so

So farewell then, *socialist* ... But, armchair activists despair not! The team that produced the much-self-hyped organ of the Socialist Movement is promising to return to the hurly-burly of left journalism with *Red, Green and Radical*. Apparently, the new mag will downplay associations with the "outdated" rhetoric of "socialism" - and, indeed, with the Socialist Movement.

Crown heads droop

Mike Marqusee writes: Just because the heir to the throne is a laughing-stock and the institution of monarchy itself seems about to implode is no good reason for Labour politicians to address themselves to the issue, is it?

At least that seemed to be the view of Graham Allen, Labour's spokesperson on constitutional affairs, when he was interviewed on BBC's Newsnight. Astonished to learn that Labour's new panel on constitutional reform would not consider even reform - no less abolition of - the monarchy, the interviewer pressed Allen again and again. Surely Labour would have to deal with the question the whole country was talking about? No, repeated a grim-faced Allen, expressing more than passing annoyance with his colleagues Mowlem and Straw, who had dared to make modest public interventions in the royalty debate.

With or without help from the Labour leadership, the monarchy remains in deep trouble. During Elizabeth Windsor's forty-year squat in the easy chair, the royal family have preserved and protected their interests by an adroit use of the modern mass media. This feudal remnant turned themselves into a fairy-tale bourgeois nuclear family for popular tabloid and TV consumption. No surprise then that as the epitome of bourgeois domesticity they should end up displaying in extreme forms so many of the ills of nuclear family life - alienation, antagonism, cruelty, adultery and divorce! Those who live by the mass media shall die by the same and the Windsors are now reaping the whirlwind they sewed for so many years.

Over whose crowned head will the next royal scandal break? The Fleet Street hacks keep getting closer and closer...first Fergie, then Di, then Charles. Who's next? The racist autocrat Philip? Or EW herself? After all, the fish stinks from the head.



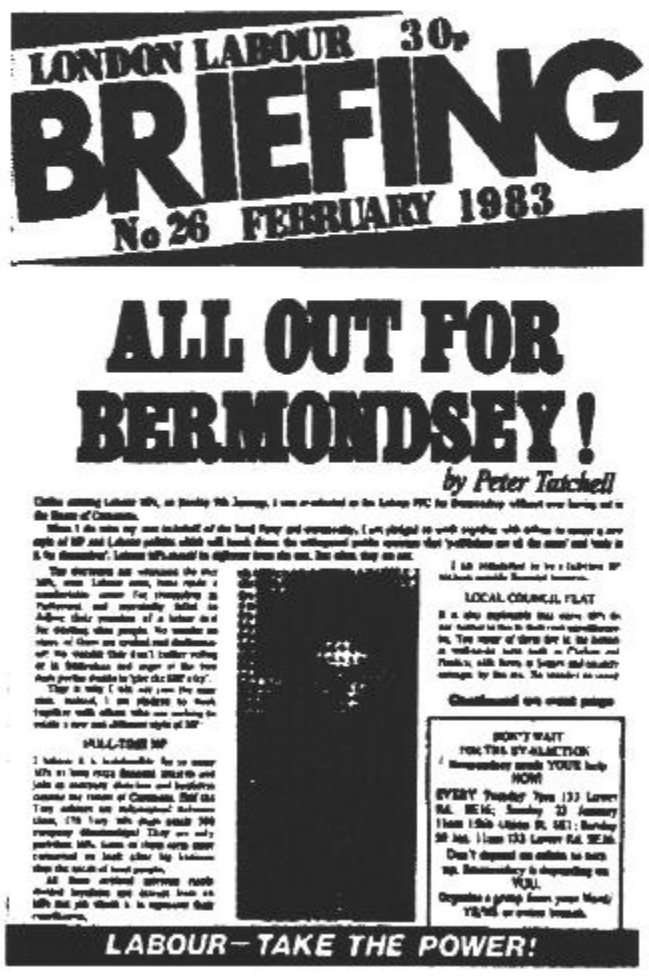
the man who would be king

Famous Last Words...

Ten years ago *Briefing* supporters were rushing around the streets of Bermondsey campaigning for Peter Tatchell in the now infamous by-election. The first National Network of *Briefing* supporters was set up, with a National Supplement planned for insertion with the local papers. And a GLC radical defeated a sitting Labour MP in Newham North West's reselection contest. Writing in *Labour Briefing*, February, 1983, PPC Tony Banks argued:

"At such a crucial time Labour's parliamentary leadership should be pulling out every stop to campaign for the socialist alternative to the monetarist lunacies of Thatcher. Instead we have the unwholesome spectacle of some Labour Front-Benchers attempting to change Party policy, and the NEC involved in a criminally irrelevant witch-hunt against Militant that would be laughable if it were not so tragic for the rest of us.

During the forthcoming election campaign public attention will again be centred on crucial domestic issues and our task then, as now, must be to offer fundamental change rather than a jumble of half-baked expedients based on an estimate of our daily political fortunes as expressed in the deeply hostile editorials of Fleet Street."


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BRIEFING
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ALL OUT FOR BERMONDSEY!

by Peter Tatchell

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Legal aid reforms —

how they will affect women, ethnic minorities, immigration cases, civil rights...and you?

Public meeting
Conway Hall, London
February 3rd, 7:30pm

Organised by Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign

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



I write in reply to your somewhat scurrilous article "Class Traitor of the Month".

I accept that as a great honour. I forgive you for the inaccuracies in it. I was the Labour Party Organiser in Sevenoaks in 1950, I then went down to Dover, where I was the Organiser for nine years and then up to Leeds where I chased the "trots" for another eight years or so.

I came down to Birmingham not as a Regional Organiser.The Labour Party nationally would never employ me as one, I was too left-wing and Marxist for them. The other points which you make are woefully wrong as well. I have never lost a seat on Birmingham City Council, I did lose my seat on the West Midlands County Council and came back on the City Council again.

I have never voted in support of Sunday trading. I voted with Chris Kirk, the husband of Lynne Jones, against Sunday trading and the Tories may have voted with us, I do not know.

I have fought for the last forty years for the comprehensive system and against the grammar school system. Otherwise, your article is I think a commendation of the work that I have tried to do and the sort of socialism that I have advocated.

The difference between your newspaper and the works of Leon Trotsky is that his works translate into good English and yours are a travesty of the English language.

Yours fraternally,
Cllr Sir Richard Knowles
Leader
Birmingham City Council

Dave Osler's defence of PR as "the closest approximation to democracy" is particularly silly. It is a contradiction to say that the electorate and Parliament are "powerless" and then to argue in the next breath that the system socialists support for appointing people to this impotent body determine whether or not they are democrats.

Osler treats PR as a principle, an abstraction divorced from the class context to which it applies. This is completely alien to Marxism. The only principle that Marxists have is that of advancing the interests of the working class (see *Their Morals And Ours* by Leon Trotsky). As the balance of forces alters and struggles are won and lost then tactical questions like which electoral system to support will also change.

Italy is a good example of this. For decades its system of PR enabled the bougeois parties to stitch together coalitions that prevented the communists' from gaining "power", despite receiving the largest vote of any party at successive elections. Any socialist in their right mind would have argued for a majoritarian voting system in these circumstances. The situation in Italy has now changed. The PCI has now split into the social democrat PDS and the left wing party of Communist Refoundation which won 5.6% of the vote and 35 seats at the 1992 election.

In this new context any move to first past the post would be a grave defeat for the left, wiping out all left wing representation in the national assembly and massively boosting the fortunes of the xenophobic Lombard League (which despite being based exclusively in the north still achieved 8.7% of the national vote and 55 seats in last year's election).

It was Osler's "democratic" system of PR that enabled an opportunist alliance of fourteen parties ranging from Stalinist to Christian Democrat to defeat the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections. Although the FSLN received the largest vote of any one party at just under 41% (the same as the Tories in their 1987 landslide victory) PR and imperialism denied them re-election.

Once you stop treating PR as an abstract principle and begin to consider what the implications of its introduction to Britain would be, Osler's advocacy of electoral reform seems even more misplaced. It would undoubtedly mean an end to majority Labour governments and could well lead to a break up of the political alliance which the Labour Party embodies. I would consider this a defeat.

Best wishes,
Paul Field
Newcastle

In response to Dave Osler's eulogy in favour of proportional representation there are two fundamental points to be made. A system that leads to sordid back room deals with minor parties, and which denies the mass party of the working class majority governments, is not more "democratic" than first-past-the-post.

Also Dave doesn't seem to understand the basics of Marxist thought. The simplistic, static and idealist notions in his letter fall far short even of the Hegelian outlook. As Marx made clear, the ideas and beliefs of the mass of the population, certainly of the majority, will always be those engendered by capitalism as long as that is the dominant mode of production. Only as the economic and social relations are fundamentally transformed will a more rational (socialist) understanding of society gain ground.

Majority Labour governments are a necessary precondition for such a transformation.

Yours fraternally,
Pete Willsman
Plumstead

Winston Silcott is an inspiration to fellow prisoners, journalists and supporters. However the Home Office is still "considering the representations in order to determine whether grounds exist on which the Home Secretary would be justified in intervening in this matter".

He is now starting his eighth year in prison.

These are some of the activities needed to win his release:

* Write to the Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT requesting a review or a retrial.
* Write to Winston Silcott Defence Campaign, The Selby Centre, Selby Road, London N17 8JN.
* Write to Winston Silcott B74053, H.M.P. Cartree, Market Harborough, Leics, LE16 7RP.
* Read 'A Climate of Fear' by David Rose, Bloomsbury Publishers 1992.

Yours,
Julie Boston
Bristol

Dave Osler (December Briefing) reminds us that power lies with the capitalist state machine. He then adds: "By its very nature, it is not something Labour can ever 'take', regardless of the slogan gracing the cover of Briefing each month".

Briefing has traditionally taken the opposite line for good reason. To say Labour leaders must unavoidably remain powerless excuses their role as capitalist instruments. The truth is the reverse. More than anyone else, John Smith, Norman Willis & Co. have at their disposal an organised working class force which, fully mobilised, could smash through all obstacles to power. That's what makes their refusal to act such a betrayal.

Britain's Establishment is now so class-ridden we can't exclude an early election. Should Labour win, the incoming Government would remain a prisoner only for as long as it refused to join the growing republican tide and finish off the tottering Monarchy, granting trade union rights to servicemen and using extra-parliamentary action to dismantle the Unionist state. Activists who want power for our movement rather than mere office must insist, therefore, that Labour take precisely such measures - or make way for those of us who will.

Incidentally, once we had established a republic, I would join Dave in advocating PR as part of a new democratic constitution. But not before.

Yours,
Chris Knight
Lewisham East CLP

The Child Support Act, promoted by Margaret Thatcher and many others including the right in the Labour Party, is without a doubt a major attack on children and lone parents, on all our civil rights, and an attempt to dismantle the benefits system. You can fool all of the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time - Abraham Lincoln.

This year's Labour Party Conference in Blackpool voted for the immediate scrapping of the Child Support Act - this was despite the National Executive Committee support for the Act.

Many women throughout the country have already suffered harassment at Child Support Unit interviews - women have been locked in interview rooms, put back in touch with violent ex-partners, had their books withdrawn for not attending interviews which they didn't legally have to attend, forced to go for DNA tests etc. If the DSS threatens single mothers now, what will they do when they can legally demand compliance after April 1993?

What is needed now is for the NEC to implement Labour policy publicly calling for the Child Support Act to be scrapped and to promote the policy of the right of single mothers to benefits without any threat of withdrawal. It is urgent to get information to single mothers in isolated areas who will find it difficult to find out their rights, to help stop this widespread illegal harassment.

An increasing number of Labour Party branches, union branches, students unions, and many other groups, are affiliating to the Campaign Against the Child Support Act (CACSA). For more information contact CACSA on 061 344 0758 or 071 837 7509.

Yours sincerely,
Christine Clark
Ashton-under-Lyne

As a fully paid up member of *Class War* I feel it is my revolutionary duty to congratulate *Labour Briefing* on December '92's issue. A very good politically inspiring read which normally is only found in the pages of *Class War*. I'll finish with a political joke: John Smith!

In solidarity,
Dave Clark
East London Class War

I must write and respond to Terry Liddle's rant against Labour Party Organisers helping the Clinton/Gore campaign in America. Terry is wrong to suggest that the Democrats will mean "business as usual" for American business.

As one of the organisers who worked in Pennsylvania it is clear that a fundamental re-alignment of business interests in underway after the Cold War.

The challenge to politicians and business is how to cope with the mass unemployment as the war machine reduces. In the case of the Democrats an agenda has been set by Al Gore and others such as the environmental lawyer Bobby Kennedy Jr. They argue that the industrial base must be radicalised to provide for the green economies of the next century, the scientists and producers must turn their attention away from weapons of destruction and towards clean air, clean water technology. The challenge of heavy industry in Eastern Europe demands new answers to the pollution and Al Gore will be at the leading point of the debate.

Bill Clinton and Al Gore may not be socialists, they may not be left wing liberals but I believe the world is a safer place for their election. I suppose Terry would have preferred Bush as he wouldn't cloud the issue by doing anything positive to reduce nuclear weapons in the world. I personally would have preferred to work for a socialist but I will always work for the candidate adopted by the organised trade union movement.

I and my colleagues learned that European political organisation is better than the American model and we will be arguing for more local organisers and less 'spin doctors'.

I am proud of the contribution made by Labour Party organisers and we wait for the benefit to the ecological debate and for Clinton to show the British government (and the Labour leadership) that a green agenda is crucial in modern day politics.

Terry and I could have conducted this debate over a pint after the ward meeting but the issues he raised are important to understanding new thinking in modern politics.

As a local Labour Party member I also pledge to visit Terry in prison when the courts end his defiance over the Poll Tax - it's the least I could do.

Yours in solidarity,
Paul Harrington
London Labour Party Organiser

If you have not done so already, I fear it will not be long before you have to feature Ken Livingstone as Class Traitor of the Month.

Although he could not find time to speak to Cambridge Labour Students or any other left group in Cambridge, Red Ken was pleased to accept an invitation to speak at the Cambridge Union Society. Was it because of the three course dinner with wine, the generous expenses or the chance to hob-nob with tomorrow's Tory cabinet? You too can join the Cambridge Union Society if you are a Cambridge student and can cough up just £60 out of your grant.

Yours in solidarity,
David Blunt
Cambridge

Hampstead & Highgate Socialist Campaign Group
Public Meeting
Europe — a socialist future?
23rd February, 7.30pm
Swiss Cottage Community Centre
Speakers: Tony Benn MP, Kate Allen, Co-Chair Asylum Rights Campaign



Force the Tories to back track

The time for lobbying is over, warns **Greg Tucker** (RMT - Train Crew Grades National Secretary, in a personal capacity). Rail Unions must start to fight back against privatisation.

THE FINAL Bill to privatise British Rail has just been published. Coming under attack from all quarters the proposal has already been dubbed "Poll Tax on Wheels". Even the Tory dominated House of Commons' Transport Committee has called into question the plans, unanimously agreeing a highly critical report which noted that the privatisation could "jeopardise the integrity and continuity of the passenger network currently relied upon by the travelling public."

Rail privatisation was hailed in the Tory election campaign as the major unfinished business, alongside selling off British Coal, to be completed by a new Tory government. Since the election a "paving bill", a white paper and various consultation documents have begun to set out precisely how privatisation will be achieved.

The threat of rail privatisation is not new. Indeed, since 1980 large parts of the rail industry have already been sold off and other services have been put out to tender. In ten years core BR staff have been cut by over 23%.

But no further privatisation move is now possible without dealing with the core of the rail service. For four years the Tories have argued over different methods for privatising the core, from a single sell-off "BR plc" a regional division (as with the regional electricity companies), a sector based sell-off eg. Inter City, Freight, Network South East etc. to franchising of independent train companies.

Each option has come up against a simple problem. Whilst they are prepared to strip out the assets and take what they can from the profit making parts of the industry, the private sector is unwilling to take on the core service without cast-iron guarantees of continuing public subsidies and investment in modernisation.

To get round these problems the government has been forced to accept that privatisation will be a slow process (over another ten years) and instead of a total sell-off, is proposing a gradual franchising of the service.

But this is not a government defeat. The proposals will still mean a massive attack on working conditions and a worsening of the service to the public, whilst ensuring massive profits for the privateers. Due to the slowness of the scheme, the government gets away with hidden support for the privateers for longer.

Under the government plans BR will be split into two organisations - a track authority Railtrack and a train operating company. Freight, parcels and major stations will be sold off straight away.

Railtrack will manage the infrastructure, track, signalling etc. While the ultimate aim is to sell off Railtrack, at first it will stay in the public sector. However it will be expected to make a profit without subsidy, by charging the train operators.

The BR train operating company will operate passenger services. But progressively parts of the service will be put out to franchise. BR will not be allowed to bid and the private sector will take over. However it is clear that privateers like Richard Branson will only be interested in the more lucrative routes, creaming off the profits. Even now they are complaining that they would not be prepared to pay the charges likely to be raised by a profit-making Railtrack. The government response has been to guarantee a continuing subsidy to the train operators to support them.

At the same time the government has had to accept that in most cases it would be impossible for more than one franchise to run services over the same line. In effect a number of local monopolies will be set-up — a license to print money!

The RMT has an AGM mandate to ballot for industrial action if necessary to defeat privatisation but so far the union campaign seems to have been restricted to lobbying Tory MPs. Although Jimmy Knapp has shared public platforms with Arthur Scargill, and discussions between rail unions and the NUM have been regularly taking place since last year's TUC, no practical steps have yet been taken.

The RMT leadership must get off the fence and immediately support industrial action, linking up with the NUM. At the same time we should be working with the thousands of council workers threatened with redundancy over the next few months and with all the public sector workers threatened with a pay freeze.

Stop press: After much fudge and mudge the RMT has at last begun to act. At a meeting between the mining and rail unions representatives of the NUM, NACODS, RMT and ASLEF agreed to propose to their respective Executive Committees a ballot for industrial action, starting with a day's protest stoppage on March 17th. The ballots would be synchronised to take place on March 5th. As part of a campaign to win the ballot RMT District Councils in London are organising a rally open to all railworkers on 9th February (Friends Meeting House, Euston) with Arthur Scargill and Jimmy Knapp. ❑

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