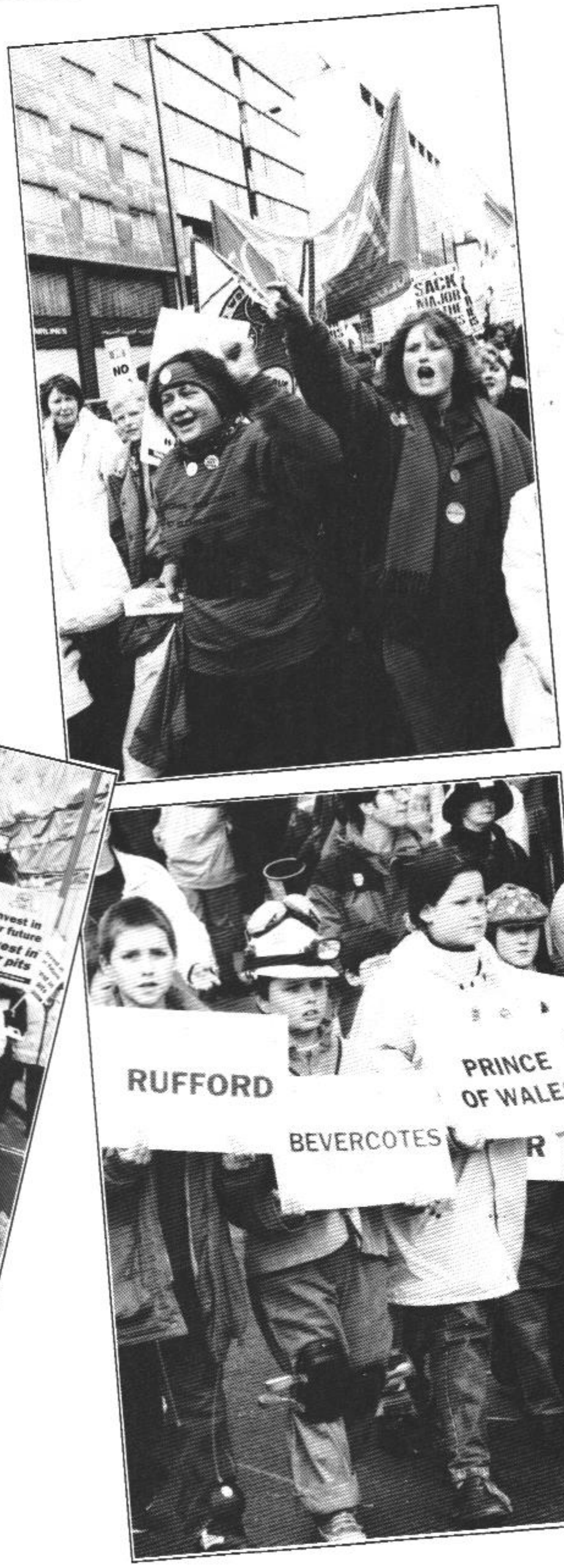
MARCH 1993 £1.00

BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

Save every pit!



inside ...

- Ronan Bennett in Guatemala
- International Women's Day
- Class Traitor of the Month

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

stop press

NF in Bromley

BROMLEY COUNCIL'S decision to rent out the town hall on 27th March to the National Front has been met with shock and anger by local residents, anti-racist groups and town hall trade unions.

The Great Hall, which holds 300 people, has been supposedly booked for "classes" from 6pm.

The Borough Secretary has defended this on the grounds that the NF is a legitimate political party. There will be a protest lobby of the Council on 15th March. For more details call the ARA on 071 278 6869.

Clock this!

TEN YEARS after their historic sit-in, Timex workers in Dundee are engaged in a struggle to defend pay and conditions.

Over 300 production workers met and voted to keep up their opposition to the proposed cuts in pay, despite being locked out with the threat of the use of scab labour.

The dispute started in January over lay-offs proposed by management. Timex insisted that only half of the current workforce was needed, but it was not willing to roster work to share the lay-offs equally. The strike started on January 29th. Since then there have been discussions between the AEEU and management, interspersed with sacking threats.

Harry McLevy, the AEEU Scottish regional secretary, said "At the heart of it is the government strategy that says to compete British workers must take wage cuts".

Watch this space.

Hunger for peace

KURDS IN LONDON have begun a hunger strike to protest against the Turkish state's torture and slaughter of the people of Kurdistan. In solidarity with 750 Kurdish hunger strikers in Brussels, they are calling for international pressure on the Turkish state which refuses to consider a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question.

● **Support to/information from Kurdistan Information Centre, 11 Portland Gardens, London N4 1HU. Tel 081-880-1759**

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Take advantage of Tory turmoil



PANIC AND CHAOS, embarrassment and failure have become the trademarks of the Major government. Its policies on pit closures, rail privatisation, hospital closures, public sector pay, tests in schools, unemployment and general industrial collapse have alienated the majority of the population. The Maastricht farce has seen the Tories dispense with even the semblance of parliamentary democracy and forced it to embroil an already discredited monarchy (via the Royal Prerogative) in its travails. This string of disasters cannot be put down to poor political management. It is the result of the long-term economic decline which compelled the precipitate withdrawal of sterling from the ERM in September. The government's renewed attacks on the working class are not, as in the 80s, a product of overweening confidence, but of desperation.

Arthur Scargill is right to point to "the sense of outrage, anger and indignation" now gripping working people across the country. The disgust with the Tories is palpable. Yet they cling to office, sustained by no strength of their own but by the pathetic weakness of the Labour opposition, which is for all intents and purposes in coalition with the Major government.

Thatcherism's prolonged death agony has left free market economics discredited; the capitalist class, its state and monarchy are in disarray. Yet again and again John Smith and Norman Willis ride (slowly) to the rescue. Leyland DAF goes under, unemployment officially crosses the three million mark and the spectre of redundancy haunts the land - what a time for Smith to discover the glories of "consumerism"! British Rail privatisation threatens not only jobs but also those very consumer rights Smith claims to care for - yet the Labour leader tells us the debate about "ownership" is dead. Economic failure in Britain and mounting global misery have made the search for individual solutions to collective problems seem more futile than ever - but for Smith this is the perfect moment to announce that "individual ambition" is the core of Labour's philosophy, echoing Thatcher's dictum that "there is no such thing as society".

The Labour leadership's reluctance to vote against the government on Maastricht - and thereby exploit Tory divisions - is the single most glaring current example of how Labour's conservatism conserves the Conservative monopoly. Opposition to Maastricht would not be opportunist. On the contrary, coupled with opposition to pit closures, it is the obvious focus for a campaign against the government's economic strategy (the use of mass unemployment to restore capitalist viability) and the waste and inequalities of the 'free market'.

Alas, mass campaigning on anything seems ruled out in today's Labour Party, where the watchwords seem to be drift, drift and more drift - a mirror image of the Tory government! We all know the Party is on its knees organisationally; we know that a decade of defeats - and of Kinnock and New Realism - has stripped the movement and the Party of confidence and resources. Now, of course, is the time to begin turning that around - and any serious Labour leadership, indeed any serious party of opposition, would seize on the current government malaise and the popular discontent with it to do just that.

The uselessness of the Labour and TUC leaders is a familiar theme in these pages, but it is starker and more tragic now than ever. For the first time in nearly twenty years we have the potential strength to bring down a Tory government. Once again the miners are in the van of the struggle but they cannot win alone. What is needed now is a concerted response from all sections of the labour movement, beginning immediately with a day of industrial action combining opposition to pit closures, redundancies and the pay freeze. Imagine if this was accompanied by a major political initiative from the Labour Party on full employment and public ownership! The fact that such an initiative seems a pathetic pipe-dream speaks volumes about the current state of the Party.

The NUM and RMT will soon be balloting for a day's strike action. As soon as that action is called all Labour and trade union activists should make spreading it their top priority. The pits and hospitals can be saved, the pay freeze can be busted, but only if the bulk of the labour movement marches forward together. No Labour or trade union leader should be allowed to disrupt the unity we need to win.

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 March 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 March 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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Self-help or self-deception?

Can the police safeguard women from rape? Can anyone else? **Leonora Lloyd** of the National Abortion Campaign looks at some of the contradictions facing socialist women in a capitalist society.

SOCIALISTS USUALLY see the police as racist and sexist upholders of the status quo, more interested in defending property than human rights.

At the same time, we want someone to be there when we are attacked or our property is burgled. If we are mugged, we want the guilty person caught.

For women, the contradictions are even stronger. In recent years, the attitude of the police towards women has come under intensive scrutiny. Their role in domestic violence and rape cases especially has raised many questions.

The news that nine out of ten police women have suffered sexual harassment - in some cases outright rape - at the hands of their fellow male officers will only serve to increase women's dilemma. Though the police have improved their attitudes towards victims of sexual crimes over recent years, how much trust can be placed in men who consider it normal to harass their fellow workers? How sincere are the statements of the police hierarchy when they are not able to deal with problems in their own ranks?

In the mid-seventies, a nurse I know was raped by a very young black man as she returned to her room. Only when her ward sister investigated her absence the next morning was she persuaded to go to the police and report the case. She discovered that she was not this rapist's only victim. One of my friends protested that she should not have reported the rape - not because of the ordeal facing her as a victim, but because of the known racism of the police.

Some ten years later, I was raped by a man who broke through my window in the early hours of the morning. For some reason, I was convinced this was a 'one-off' and it would be pointless to tell the police. But the women at my Women's Section meeting that evening felt that they were all at risk whilst a rapist was on the loose and one eventually accompanied me to the police station.

There I was questioned by a male officer for over an hour and had to wait another hour to be seen by a male doctor, as they could not contact a woman doctor. I had to return the next day, when a woman officer took me through a long interview. I discovered that this was just one of a number of rapes by a man who posed as an early morning jogger.

He was captured shortly afterwards, following one further rape, and many months later was sentenced to sixteen years imprisonment. He was only nineteen, the son of a Christian fundamentalist.

At about the same time as this event, the famous "Ealing vicarage rape" occurred (I also lived in Ealing and the same woman police officer investigated both cases). The three men involved had used violence and the young woman's father and fiance were both nearby. It was truly horrific. Yet the men got only a short sentence for the rape - shorter than for the burglary they had committed - on the grounds that the woman had made a quick recovery (which was claimed on her behalf by her vicar father). They were white. The man who raped me was black.

I used to work for solicitors and amongst my clients were men (both black and white) accused of rape. In my experience, juries were usually only too keen to believe the men over the women. Frequently, clients that I believed were guilty were let off. As rape is rarely seen by anyone except the participants, it is her word against his. The main problem here is not the police but the legal system.

Communities can and should do some of their own policing. Women can seek to warn other women about certain men. In America, for example, women write the names of "date-rapists" on toilet walls. Women have painted messages on the walls of rapists' houses. This may shame them and warn other women, but it does not punish them.

The alternative to relying on the police is to take the law into our own hands, and history is full of examples of the horrors that can ensue from this - lynching, miscarriages of justice, etc. We know that the police are also capable of such miscarriages, but that is no argument for adding to them. We can all understand what drives desperate women to seek revenge, but such individualism will not solve the problem of men's violence towards women.

The answer is not do-it-yourself, but to fight for fundamental changes in the way the police are recruited, trained and run. It is idealistic to believe that we can somehow 'overthrow' the police - this will only happen when we overthrow capitalism, when all forces in society will change.

Overall, looking back on my own experience, I was well-treated by the police, particularly the woman inspector. I was glad that they were there and glad they caught my attacker so that his career was cut short. I know that the police cannot stop rape - that they are part of the violent, male-dominated society that perpetuates it - but when it happens to you, you want an instant solution.

That is just one of many contradictions which socialists in a capitalist society have to live with, even whilst they fight it! ❑

Stop Strip Searches

Dianne Greystone of the Brighton Anti-Strip Search Campaign recalls the mass strip search at Maghaberry prison one year ago.

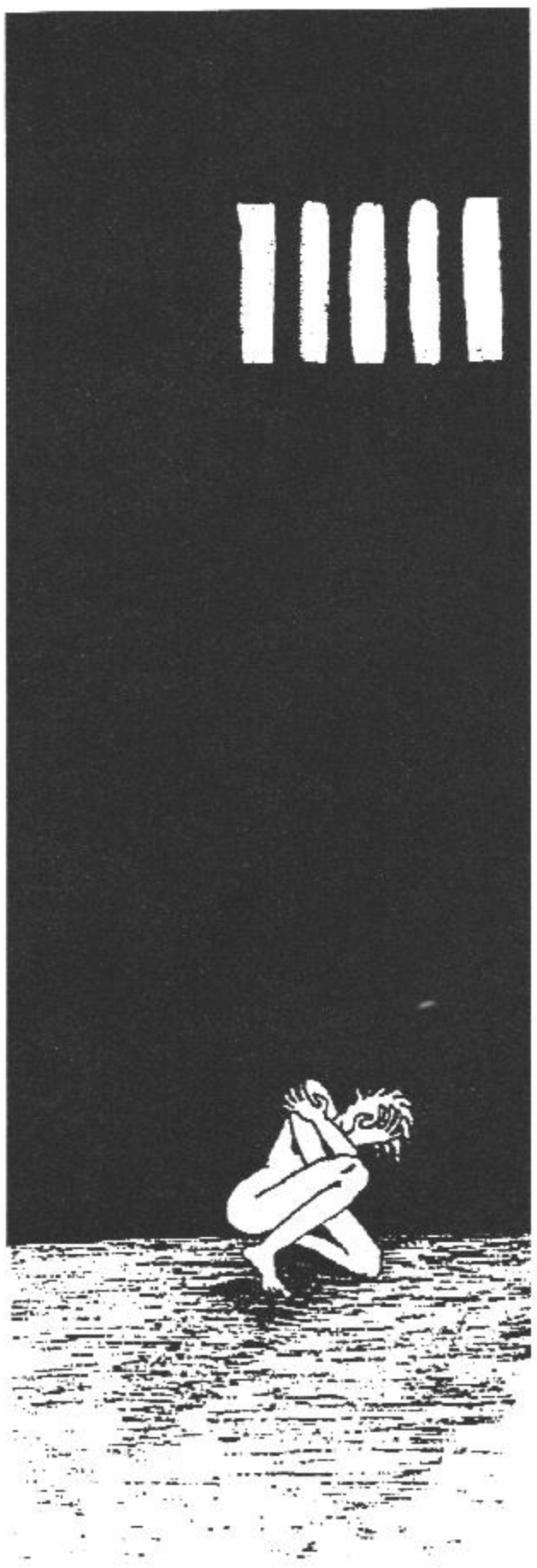


Illustration Martin Gough (Long Kesh prison)

ON 2ND MARCH 1992 at Maghaberry prison in the North of Ireland an unprecedented event took place. Thirty-five women were subjected to a mass strip search which lasted for fourteen hours. Twenty-two Republican women refused to comply, barricading their cells. With batons, shields and helmets, warders in riot gear smashed their way in, gagged their mouths and forcibly stripped them naked. Marie Wright remembers that morning: "a group of male screws arrived to began their search..singing 'Happy days are here again'. I saw another comrade being dragged from the bars of her window. I could also hear the laughter and jeering from the three male dog handlers who stood outside, pointing up to the woman who was being assaulted. The attacks, along with the screams of the women, continued all afternoon, as did the laughter and jeering of our attackers. Later on I heard the male screws in full riot gear trying to get into the double cell, which held two girls. They were calling out orders in a military fashion."

They all sustained injuries. Karen Quinn's experience was typical. "It was like being raped. Luckily no bones were broken, but my eye was black and my face was black and blue and badly swollen. My body was bruised and sore all over. It cannot be allowed to happen again. Everyone gets over their physical injuries, but this will stay in our minds forever."

The 22 who attempted resistance were punished for this with loss of association, loss of remission of sentence, and solitary confinement.

On International Women's Day a women's delegation to Belfast and Derry will show solidarity with victims of repression and protest against strip searching.

● **Contact the Anti-strip Search Campaign, PO Box 104, Sheffield 1. Letters of support for prisoners, protest to Governor, at Maghaberry Prison, Upper Ballinderry Road, Lisburn, Northern Ireland.**

Sisters seek support

At the end of last year, Southall Black Sisters won an award from Liberty for their well-fought campaign in support of Kiranjit Ahluwalia. **Leonora Lloyd** reports on their latest activities.

THEY ARE NOW calling for support for a family fleeing from persecution in the Punjab, India: Bakshi and Surinder Ram and their 10 year old daughter. The family was threatened by Sikh militants because Mr Ram, a former army officer, refused to give information about the army or join the militants in their efforts to create a separate state of Khalistan. He was also tortured by the police for supporting those same militants! Their application for political asylum has been referred back to the Home Office for further consideration following initial rejection.

The family desperately need support if they are to win their case to stay and Southall Black Sisters are asking for individuals and groups to write letters to Kenneth Clark in support. A model letter can be obtained from SBS, and donations made out to The Ram Family Must Stay Campaign are urgently needed.

The group is also planning a campaign against the 'one year' rule. A man or woman coming as a spouse of a 'settled person' can stay for one year, at the end of which the spouse has to sign papers saying that the marriage is still in existence and is is intended to continue. Without this, the incoming spouse has no right to stay.

This is being used by some men to keep their wives from reporting abuse and violence. Some husbands continue this beyond a year by refusing to sign the papers. The women can only stay on compassionate grounds, which are seldom accepted.

● **Southall Black Sisters can be contacted at: 52 Norwood Rd., Southall, Middlesex UB2 4DW. Tel: 081 571 9595.**



International Women's Day 8th March

Don't get caught in the act

In April the new Child Support Agency will come into operation, driving women off income support into desperately low-paid jobs, putting single mothers at risk from violent ex-partners, and confiscating benefits if women refuse to co-operate with the SS in the DSS, warns **Selma James**.

CHILDREN ARE being used as decoys: the Treasury pockets **all** maintenance paid to single mothers on income support. The Child Support Act establishes government's right to refuse to support children.

From April 1993 single mothers who refuse to give information about 'absent' fathers can be penalised £8.80 a week. Legally they have the right to refuse maintenance if they or their children risk "harm or undue distress". But present DSS illegalities - women locked in DSS offices, asked details about their sex lives, told that fear of violence is no reason to refuse maintenance, threatened with and actually having their benefit cut - already cause harm and distress, and promote rape and other violence. Over 30 cases are detailed in our Dossier of DSS Illegalities.

Rather than risk their family's safety, mothers may 'choose' low-waged or illegal work. Add this to the loss of mortgage repayments when women lose income support. "Women and children will be living - and working - on the street" warns the English Collective of Prostitutes.

The average weekly full-time wage for single mothers is £142. Two million women get £100 a week and below. The wages of another million are under £52 a week.

Women are often better off on benefits. Employers can afford to pay less if thousands of women can't afford to say 'no'. The government says it's 'helping' women to get jobs, echoing the oft-promoted view of many socialists and feminists that waged jobs are the road to liberation. The act hides the unwaged work that single mothers do - work for dole - or 'workfare'.

Universal access to income support protects everyone's right to refuse unbearable terms of employment, the lowest wages, the most dangerous and unpleasant working conditions. In destroying universal access the act represents draconian labour legislation, part of the government's strategy to create a flexible, deregulated and disciplined workforce.

Men should pay maintenance if mothers want them to because women almost always have less than men. But the government is tracking down 'absent' fathers regardless of a mother's or children's wishes, father's income or his obligations to a second family. A ceiling on maintenance meanwhile protects men with the highest incomes.

To enforce the act, the Child Support Agency will have new surveillance powers. The DSS has asked women for photos and car registrations of 'absent' fathers, and even names and addresses of his parents and other family. Inspectors can access Inland Revenue and local authority records, enter any workplace, and interview employers and work-mates. Refusal to inform on fathers can result in fines.

The agency can dock men's pay and even benefits. Students on grants and loans will also get a maintenance bill. The agency can propose fines, bailiffs or prison for those refusing to pay - strikingly similar to the poll tax.

The Child Support Act is a racist attack of the financial kind: one in five single mothers on income support are black; black men who are more likely, due to racism, to be unemployed, low-waged or imprisoned, are most vulnerable.

Mildred Gordon's Early Day Motion calls the act "the most draconian and Dickensian piece of legislation for decades". Labour Conference voted overwhelmingly, against NEC wishes, to scrap it. But we still don't know if it's Labour policy. The Campaign Against the Child Support Act has won invaluable support from union members, some inside the DSS, who are working for unions to boycott child support appeal tribunals. More than fifty organisations have affiliated to CACSA.

Our non-co-operation campaign advised mothers that up to April 1993 they have the right not to attend interviews about maintenance. Women have won every time CACSA has supported them against the DSS.

It was reported that Child Support Agency Director Ros Hepplewhite aims to make the act "inevitable, like income tax". CACSA is building a non-co-operation movement to make it unworkable, like poll tax.

● **Send SAE for leaflets and petitions in Bengali, Chinese, English, Gujerati and Urdu.**

Against Redistributing Poverty **(2nd Edition) -£1.20;** ***Dossier of DSS Illegalities - Implications of the Child Support Act*** **- £4.50 (50p p&p).**

PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU.
Tel 071 837 7509
PO Box 14, 1 Newton Street, Manchester M1 1HW.
Tel 061 344 0758
PO Box 196, Bristol BS99.
Tel 0272 426 608.



CACSA picket DSS presentation, Strand Palace Hotel, London PHOTO: CACSA

Dawn of the Red Republic



Amid mounting calls for the abolition of the monarchy, the Royal soap opera tries desperately to clean up its act. Behind these crazy scenes lie crucial questions of constitutional power. Is this the end for the Windsors? What should socialists be doing? **Terry Liddle** (Eltham CLP) provides some answers.

THE PUBLICATION of the Camillagate tapes, in which the heir to the throne expresses a wish to be reborn as a tampon, exposes the smug hypocritical attitude of an institution where the norm is compulsory monogamy, and raises the questions of who made these tapes and why? If they are not the work of an enthusiastic amateur but that of the security services does this indicate that there is a section of the ruling class which now favours a republic? Is the sorry saga of the Windsors, surely a potential success story having made it from minor German princelings to amongst the richest in the world, staggering to a close? Is this the dawn of the Red Republic? If it is then what are the tasks of socialists in this period?

Socialists must resist any attempt to use the misfortunes of the Windsors to support censorship of the press. No institution, no matter how powerful, wealthy or prestigious, must be above investigation or criticism. The people have a right to know and socialists must ensure that right is not curtailed. The truth shall make us free and in a time of universal deceit (and what is more deceitful than the image of the Windsors as paradigms of virtue?) telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

To the cant and humbug of monarchical morality, based as it is on oppressive property relations, we must counterpose our own revolutionary politics which emphasise all that is liberating and life enhancing.

The question of the monarchy is one of constitutional power. The monarchy is at the base of the constitution and the apex of the social pyramid. It epitomises unearned wealth, unwarranted privilege and undeserved power - the very foundations of bourgeois power. If the apex is removed the constitutional base also disintegrates. But what would arise in its place? Socialists must advance the unrealised power of the working class. Only by means of a democratic revolution, led by the working class, can the monarchy be abolished.

Yet despite the upsurge in criticism and loss of faith in the monarchy as a model of morality and property, the left, with a few noteworthy exceptions, has largely ignored the question. It is as if the gathering clouds of constitutional crisis are invisible. Do socialists, as most have done for a long time, ignore the monarchy as irrelevant to the class struggle? Do we confine our republicanism to support for Tony Benn's Commonwealth of Britain Bill, bearing in mind it has little chance of being debated in the Commons? Or do we try to build a republican movement, and if so on what political basis? Would such a movement merely demand abolition of the monarchy and the Lords or would it define the social, political and economic content of a republic? How would English republicanism relate to the national question in Scotland and Wales and the struggle in Ireland? If a democratically elected left government attempted to abolish the monarchy how would it resist destabilisation and a coup d'etat by the security and military forces which are literally Her Majesty's? In the shorter term what would be the reaction of the officer caste, its roots firmly in the aristocracy, if Charles faces a 'fizzer' for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentlemen? Will the bureaucratic terrorists of the Child Support Agency chase him for maintenance? At a time when the concept of universal benefits is threatened by the Tories and abandoned by Labour's front bench, what is the future of the taxpayers' £45 million handout to the Royals? Will the crisis of capitalism threaten Elizabeth Windsor's £3 million stock exchange portfolio?

The resolution passed by a TGWU branch that the money being spent to rebuild Windsor castle be used instead to keep the 31 threatened pits open shows that the class is coming up with some answers to some of these questions. If socialists do not wake up to these issues history may well catch us with our trousers down! ❑

Testing times for schools

By boycotting tests for fourteen year olds, English teachers are challenging the limits of state interference in the curriculum, writes **Paul Foley**, Hackney South CLP and Islington Teachers Association.

"A NATIONAL Curriculum? That's how you order minds, not educate them." This was the spontaneous response of a Russian Intourist guide on learning of the English way of educating children.

This same guide would have recognised the similarities between the political methods employed in British state education and the Stalinism so recently abandoned in her own country. A popular and well-understood system of continuous assessment was abandoned at the whim and fancy of the Prime Minister. A test procedure and test syllabus was developed with a secrecy that nostalgic KGB apparatchiks would envy. They would also approve of moves to police teachers through the fear and insecurity of payment "by results". And John Patten's denunciation of opponents as "wreckers", "militants" and "neanderthals" would certainly bring back memories of a bygone political order.

Patten's political tactics are as quaintly archaic as the curriculum and tests he is attempting to impose in state schools. His reforms seek to turn the clock back thirty years in order to establish a literary canon of the 'musings of dead, white, Englishmen' in English classrooms.

How ironic for a Prime Minister who has declared "that it is where the state has intervened most heavily that communities have been most effectively destroyed", that his government is seeking to nationalise the cultural heritage of the English language by dictating what should be taught and how it should be taught in the classroom.

Of course the voices of dead, white Englishmen have a place in the classroom, as do the voices of women and black people - voices unheard in the corridors of educational power. English literature and language is international but the new English orthodoxy has scant regard for this. Above all, school students must have a voice, an educational right to express their own critical opinions. Alas, a right not well understood by the Tories. We may well ask 'English? Whose English?' - and answer, not the English of the right-wing of the Tory Party to whose prejudices state education is being sacrificed.

What use are pencil and paper tests? They will not tell parents, teachers or school students anything they didn't know already. They will enable the DES to draw up more spurious league tables; introduce selection between and within schools - yes, the 11-plus is coming back next year! They will deprive children of the right to equality of access and opportunity in education and take away resources from the children that need them most.

Through LATE, the London branch of the Association for Teaching English, and the teachers' unions, English teachers are preparing for the first national teachers' action since the pay campaign of the mid-1980s. We have the support of teaching colleagues and parents organisations and we intend to defeat the unpopular education policies of the Tories. ❑

Making London bitter

Pete Marshall
Unison London Health spokesperson

THE GOVERNMENT'S response to the Tomlinson report, *Making London Better* is bitter news for Londoners. Charing Cross Hospital, Barts, either St. Thomas's or Guys, and either UCH or the Middlesex are now one step closer to closure. The Great Ormond St. Children's Hospital, Royal Marsden, Hammersmith, Brompton and all the Special Health Authority hospitals are also under threat.

What will increase Londoners' bitterness is that this is being done in the name of improving primary care, yet the only extra money for primary care is going to improve doctors' surgeries and is spread over six years (the Tomlinson report recommended an immediate expenditure of £140m).

This is justified by misleading statistics suggesting London spends 20% of all health money but only serves 15% of the population. In fact, the inner London population is boosted by over 50% each day by commuters and also serves 8 million tourists each year. Deprivation factors (set by the government itself) are 54% in inner London compared to a 9% average for the rest of England; 60,000 Londoners are homeless and over 10% of inner London hospital admissions are from homeless people (who are not included in the government's statistics). London's costs include costs for training most of the nation's doctors and a large part of the nursing and technical workforce. In fact the government spends less per head of population on health care in London than it does in Scotland.

The casualty units scheduled for closure at Charing Cross, Bart's, and St. Thomas's or Guy's presently handle 200,000 cases a year. Virginia Bottomley does not explain what will happen to these 200,000 cases. I suppose she expects that they will all get treatment at their local GP's surgery. Try going round to your GP next time a bomb goes off at a train station or a serious road traffic accident occurs. London's remaining accident and emergency departments just won't be able to cope.

Bottomley's proposals are not a serious attempt to address the problems of London's hospitals or the health care needs of London's people. They are a vindictive, politically motivated attack on the health service in London designed to increase the private sector at the expense of a rapidly collapsing NHS. They must be forcefully resisted. ❑

Smear first, think later...

Press reports of "unprecedented" corruption in Lambeth council have now progressed to allegations against former council leader, Ted Knight. Are these just the usual Tory smears, or is there something nasty in the south London woodshed? *Labour Briefing* interviewed expelled Lambeth Labour councillor, **Steve French**.

LB: What did you find during your stint as chair of Construction Services in Lambeth in 1986-87?

SF: I found a DLO that was a DLO in name only. The majority of the work was given out to subcontractors. Lambeth Council bid for the work, but all it did was become an agency for handing out work to subcontractors.

LB: Do you think that the previous administration was aware of this?

SF: They certainly were. They didn't seem to have taken any steps to bring work in-house. There was an incredible voluntary over-reliance upon subcontractors, who also overcharged the council.

LB: You commissioned an independent investigation. What did this find?

SF: It endorsed the fears of myself and the vice-chair, Julian Lewis. We had done a lot of preparatory work - we had already taken action to clear some firms off the council's approved list. The management team were disposed of. We had done a demolition job to cut out the rot and were looking for the inquiry to come up with some new procedures.

LB: The inquiry reported around the time that you resigned as committee chair over the council's decision to make massive cuts. Subsequently, the chairs of Construction Services were leading labour right-wingers, Dick Sorabji and John Mann. What was their track record?

SF: Well, it's difficult to say what they did. Dick Sorabji only had six months. I think he was sincere about following the work through. Likewise, John Mann came in with a big bang, talking about corruption and freemasonry and blaming Ted Knight. I think he had a genuine desire to sort things out, but I think he took his eye off the ball because his priority was settling political scores. Sadly some of the companies which myself and Julian Lewis kicked off were reinstated to the DLO's Approved List without any committee approval.

LB: What should the left's response be to allegations against former Lambeth councillors - like Ted Knight - who have been seen as leading socialists?

SF: You have to remember that the Ted Knight administration, although it led a vital struggle against ratecapping, was actually a very mixed administration. The chair of Construction Services was a member of the LCC; whilst we're getting smeared on the left, people seem to forget that nothing was done by Kevin Moore when he was chair. And, whilst I supported Ted Knight's administration fighting ratecapping, I don't think *they* had a diligent attitude to in-house services.



LB: We understand that you and several other councillors are now considering legal action against Jack Straw. Why is that?

SF: He's tried to blame the thirteen suspended councillors and has intimated that we've been suspended or expelled because of corruption and mismanagement in the council, which as he well knows is not the case. It is just a smear.

LB: Do you think the current council administration is serious about investigating what's been uncovered?

SF: I think they're serious about sorting out their media image but that's about it. They don't seem to want to go to the heart of the issues. What they propose is devolving the DLO as a prelude to privatisation. Two of the local MPs - Keith Hill and Kate Hoey - have called for the DLO to be privatised. This is a right-wing, quick-fix, knee-jerk solution. I wish they would get stuck into the nuts and bolts of the issue and try to find out if people have ripped off the council.

LB: The other solution being canvassed by the right is to force the DLO to re-tender for its work. Do you think that is a real threat?

SF: It's a real threat. A dynamic has been unleashed which will be very hard to stop. The only way it can be stopped is if trade unions mobilise to stop it, and if the council takes serious action to get to the root of the problem rather than looking for superficial answers.

LB: You mentioned the need for union action. The only section of trade union officials in Lambeth that supported the witch-hunt against the left was from the manual unions in the DLO. Do you think they are willing or able to mount any fight?

SF: There are some positive forces in the manual unions which have mobilised for key meetings. NUPE locally has been fighting on the issue and their national executive has opposed privatisation as a solution. I haven't seen the convenors who led the witch-hunt against us taking a very high profile. One of the issues highlighted in the report is that workers in the DLO were made redundant even though the work was still there. One of the charges against us at the National Constitutional Committee was that we had called a special council meeting to try to stop these redundancies!

● TWO SENIOR LOCAL government officers have blasted the recent report on corruption in Lambeth.

Having studied the report in detail, they conclude that "far from substantiating the numerous charges about fraud...the report tells another story entirely - of the council being mismanaged by chief officers".

Describing the report as "hopelessly vague, confused and lacking in analysis", the two critics (who do not work for Lambeth) argue that the legal and administrative errors with which it is strewn indicate that its real purpose is to scapegoat manual workers in the DLO for the failures of senior management. They warn Lambeth that a panic response could set dangerous precedents to justify rapid closures of DLOs in other authorities and are scathing on the intervention of local MPs Hoey and Hill, reminding them that "even the government is not so unreasonable as to demand the closure of DLOs/DSOs on unsubstantiated charges of fraud".

INTERVIEW

After Ayodhya: countering communalism in Britain

Briefing interviews **Suresh Grover**, co-ordinator of the Southall Monitoring Group, about the impact of events in India on the black community in Britain and the recent formation of the Alliance Against Communalism and for Democracy in South Asia.

LB: How have recent events in India affected the black community here in Britain?

SG: The impact has been divisive and disastrous. It's estimated that 24 temples and 36 Hindu-owned businesses have been attacked. It's not clear who the perpetrators are. They seem to be a mixture of local racists and frustrated Muslim youth responding to the communal carnage in India.

The VHP, which is the main Hindu communalist organisation operating in Britain, is using the fact that no culprits have been caught for these attacks to bolster its claim that the Hindu community is being ignored by the state because it is less organised, less vociferous, less militant than the Muslims. Within the Hindu community, there is hostility to what the BJP did - people do not condone the destruction of the Babri Masjid - but there is also hostility to what people consider to be the growth of Muslim fundamentalism. People have started to relate to each other in 'ethnic' terms: instead of being Asians they are calling themselves Hindus or Muslims. This undermines the political unity which has been painstakingly developed on the issue of racism over a long time.

In their leaflets the VHP talks about the need for equal opportunities specifically for Hindus and for the need of some organisation to unite Hindus and represent them in negotiations with the state. 'Hindus UK', the main front organisation for the VHP here, claims that it and it alone is the organisation with which the state must discuss all matters affecting the Hindu community. This is particularly dangerous because of the context of official 'multi-culturalism' which divides the black community by talking in cultural rather than social and political terms, by recognising so-called cultural or religious leaders as spokespeople for separate communities.

LB: A lot of people, including many on the white left, see secularism as something to be imposed from outside on black communities, as a value alien to them.

SG: From the time of the independence struggle the question of secularism has been a major theme of discussion in the Indian community, with large numbers mobilising around it, pro or con. The current struggle is being waged on the basis of a very rich tradition that owes nothing to values allegedly championed by local authorities or the British state.

Let me give you a concrete example. There is a high school in Southall called Villiers which has an overwhelmingly Asian enrolment. The school governors, many of whom were highly communalistic supporters of the demand for Khalistan [a separate Sikh state in the Punjab in India], realised that if they opted out under the Tory legislation they could create a separate Sikh religious school de facto at state expense. One of these, the Chair of Governors, was actually a Labour councillor!

They went round to the parents and got enough of them to sign a petition to compel the Secretary of State to hold a ballot. At that point we intervened. We talked to teachers, students and parents and said that we must oppose this opting-out. In the run-up to the vote we went to every parent's home and explained what the real agenda of the communalistic governors was. We went to houses where people had pictures of Bhindranwale [the Khalistani militant who was killed in the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 1984] on the wall, but they did not want a separate religious school. When it came to their children's education they were very clear that all that mattered was that they received the best possible education, without religious interference. Our campaign involved public statements by parents and teachers, a strike by students, weekly leafletting and two visits to every parent's house. As a result we won the biggest vote against an opt-out anywhere: 93% voted 'no'.

We did not stop there. We decided that when the elections for parent governors came around we would stand our own secular slate. Again we went to all the parents and explained what the incumbent governors had done. The upshot was that we removed all the communalist parent governors and replaced them with secularists. The lesson is that if there is no campaign, if there is a vacuum, the communalist forces will fill it; if there is a strong and united campaign, they can be swept aside.

LB: Tell us about the Alliance Against Communalism.

SG: In the light of the effects of Ayodhya both in India and here, the SMG took the initiative of bringing together organisations and individuals committed to secularism. Amongst these people there have been and will continue to be many political differences, but we now recognise that we have to create one united body to stand up against the growth of communalism in our own communities. We will be going to every temple and asking them if they support the BJP or the destruction of the Babri Masjid. We will be demanding that the temples clearly endorse secularism. If the BJP or VHP enjoy support in a particular temple then we will insist on debating them; we will not run away from any area of life in which the communalists may have influence. The strongest thing going for us is that the Asian community here is much more secular than many people realise.

● **Contact the Alliance Against Communalism and for Democracy in South Asia, c/o SMG, 6A South Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB1; tel. 081 843 2333.**

Communalism, religious fundamentalism and secularism:

Day conference

Saturday, March 6th
Dominion Centre, The Green, Southall

9:30am-5pm
Admission £2.50
creche, food

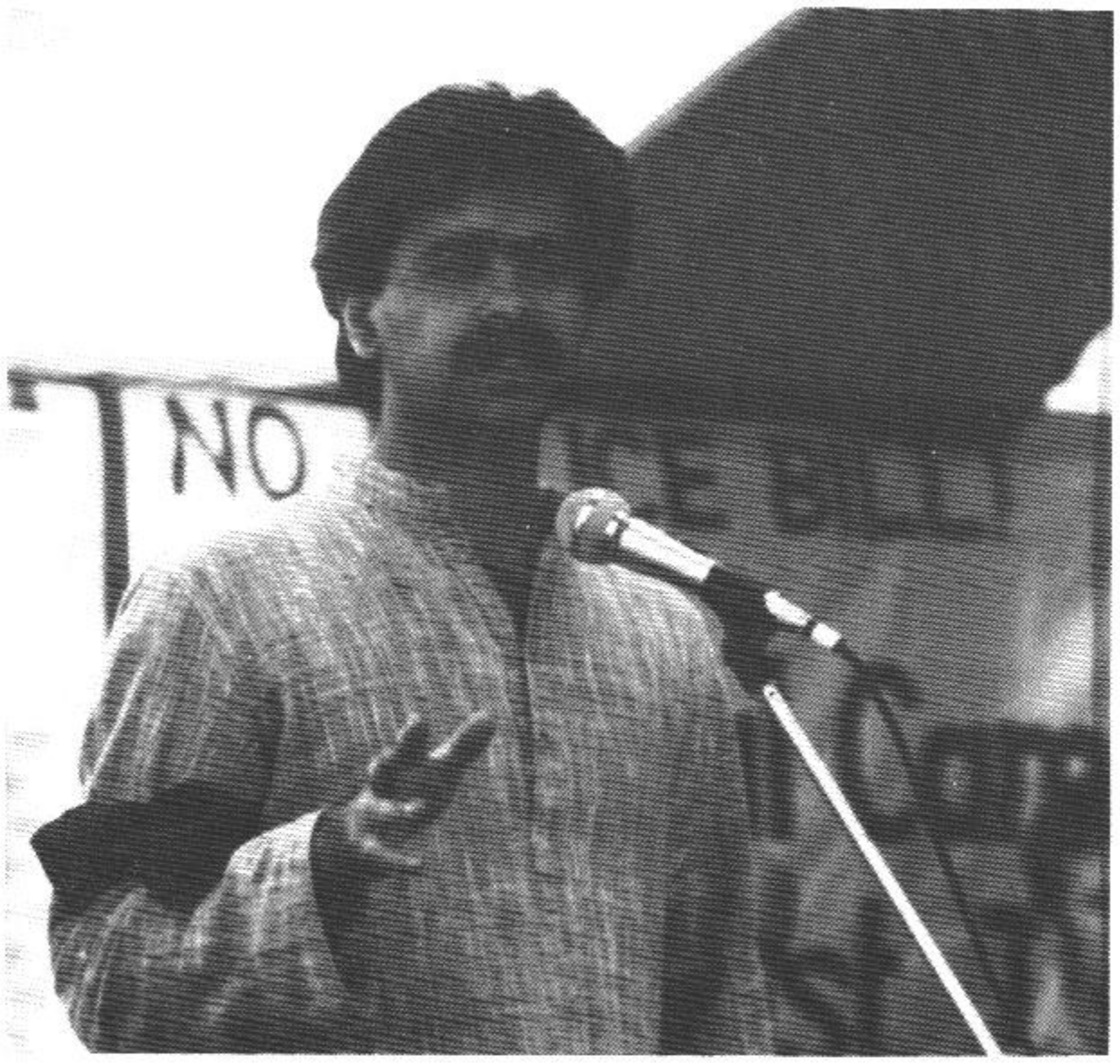
With: Achin Vanaik (author, journalist), Tanika Sarkar (Fellow, Nehru Memorial Library, Delhi), Mushirul Hasan (Vice-chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi), Bano Das (civil rights activist, Bombay).

For information, contact: SMG 081 843 2333

Crisis in India: a briefing for the British labour movement

Thursday, March 11th, 7:30pm
Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1

Achin Vanaik, Tanika Sarkar, Mushirul Hasan, Alan Roberts (COSATU), Jeremy Corbyn MP



Suresh Grover, co-ordinator of the Southall Monitoring Group addressing Blair Peach memorial meeting 1989

Brent cuts protest

WEMBLEY SHOPPING centre came to a standstill on Saturday 13th February when thousands of teachers, parents and children marched against education cuts. Brent's Tory Council is planning to cut £3.5 million from the education budget, a 10% cut in real terms.

The march, packed with schoolchildren and home-made banners, was organised by Brent Parents Against Education Cuts. It followed a lively lobby of Brent Council two weeks before and was much larger than the organisers expected. The movement's rapid growth shows the ferment in Brent's schools, 34 of which have voted to ask their governors to quit as a protest against the cuts.

Among the many speakers at a mass rally afterwards was Brent East MP Ken Livingstone. "Brent Council contains some of the most corrupt people I've met in 22 years of politics," he declared, referring to the deals allegedly done to put the Tories in office with the votes of Labour defectors, one of whom recently enraged women's groups by calling for the legalisation of female circumcision.

Winston waits

JUSTICE

THE TOTTENHAM THREE are regularly cited as a victory for the judicial system. This is misleading. As long as Winston Silcott remains in prison, the quashing of their conviction is only a partial victory.

Silcott is a victim both of our racist judicial system and of the inadequate support for those on legal aid. It is ironic that the Law Society uses the Tottenham Three on its poster campaign to save legal aid, for it was the inadequate legal aid which resulted in a thirty year prison sentence for Winston Silcott.

Support at this time is particularly important as an investigation into his application for leave to appeal is now in process. Despite being innocent and having spent the last seven years in prison, his spirit is not broken.

● **A booklet of his poems and letters is available from The Winston Silcott Defence Campaign, Selby Centre, Selby Road, London N17 8JN. Tel: 081 365 0448 (Enclose SAE A5 envelope and 2 second class stamps).**

Free Kate Magee

JUSTICE

A YEAR AGO, Kate Magee was arrested at gunpoint after an armed siege of her house. The media named one of Kate's brothers as wanted in relation to a shooting in Derby. Kate was detained and interrogated for a total of nine days. While she was held her only contact with the outside world was one phone call. Her child was taken away, she was placed in Durham prison and only allowed to phone her relatives on the condition she didn't reveal her whereabouts.

After sixteen days, her address was given to the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas. The media announced that Kate was on hunger strike. In fact, anxiety brought about by her ordeal had made it difficult for her to eat. It seemed as if Kate was being held hostage to induce her brother to come forward.

At the first four remand hearings Kate was left handcuffed in the dock. She was strip searched before and after each hearing, and after every prison visit.

Kate is now awaiting trial on the charge of "withholding information which would be of material assistance under section 18b of the PTA". No date has yet been set. When Kate was first granted bail she came back to a home that was ransacked and wrecked by the police.

Kate's brother has now been arrested in Ireland and the British government has applied for his extradition. Kate's solicitor Gareth Pierce has asked if the charge against Kate can now be dropped.

There has been no response from the Crown Prosecution Service so it is feared that they may wait and try Kate along with her brother, which could take some time as he is fairly certain to appeal against extradition.

● **Send affiliations and donations to the Kate Magee Support Group, PO 158, Derby DE1 9NB.**

Drift to right, rifts in left

Andrew Coates (Ipswich CLP) provides an update on the state of the parties in the French elections

AS THE FRENCH elections draw close the right seems assured of a crushing victory. They have managed to draw backing from two sources. Firstly from widespread anger at the economic failure of the Socialists. Secondly, through the backing of populist and nationalist demagogues, such as Charles Pasqua and Phillipe Seguin. Like the British Tories in the early 'eighties they have talked of "understanding" people who vote for the neo-fascist Front National. Le Pen's party remains stable at around 10% in opinion polls.

More detailed surveys of voters reveal some surprises. At one point the ecologists scored higher than the Socialists (at 19.0%, to 17.5%). The two ecologist parties, Generation Ecologiste (GE) and Les Verts, between them have the largest share of favourable working class opinion (around 30%). This contrasts with their party organisations, which are overwhelmingly middle-class. That the ecologists are unable to clearly decide on their own future can be seen in the often dubious agreements made between local ecologist groups and the right for council control. Some figures, like Harlem Desir, former leader of France's anti-racist group, SOS-racisme, have joined the green bandwagon. He has signed up with GE. The nature of this alliance is bizarre: many GE leaders backed the Gulf War while Desir was a prominent opponent.

While more up-to-date polls give the Socialists around 20% they are in a poor way. Their potential allies, in the Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche, now led electorally by the cut-throat entrepreneur, Bernard Tapie, are unlikely to score more than a few percentage points. The French Communist Party stands at around 9%. A prominent member of the leftist Alliance Rouge et Verte (AREV) spoke of the French left being "absolutely ill." His own comrades, he remarked, were following the general "rightward drift" and dropping their socialist ideas for ecology.

Minerals and markets

Liz Philipson
Vice-chair, War on Want

IT IS A country with a long and living oral tradition of powerful poetry which has recorded its history for thousands of years. Its people are one of the most racially homogenous in Africa and, though it is a Muslim country, its women are not veiled and unseen. Despite the harsh climate and inhospitable terrain of much of the land, pastoralism has dominated the economy and its people are renowned throughout the continent for their camel herds. It was the first independent African country to transfer power democratically and peacefully between rival politicians.

There is no society or infrastructure and warlords loot food from the population and the aid workers. The people are dying from starvation and there is no hope that they can resolve their problems.

Two descriptions of Somalia. The second is more familiar nowadays and this set the scene for the commencement of 'Operation Restore Hope.' The forces of the New World Order were to bring more guns and order, not food and medicines.

When the industrialised countries closed down their embassies in Mogadishu they knew exactly what they were leaving behind. The satellite pictures had already accurately forecast the severity of the drought. They knew full well the extent of the arms deals, initially headed by the USSR and then by the US, that had provided the massive collection of hardware with which the so- called 'warlords' were to terrorise the population. They did nothing until public opinion, fuelled by press reports, forced them to do so. The United Nations programme in Somalia was a disgrace and Mohammed Sahnoun, the UN special envoy to Somalia, was forced to resign because of his criticism of it. Africa Watch reported that three quarters of the country is peaceful with civil structures in place, and that the US military intervention followed gross misrepresentation of the situation.

We were invited to believe that the US marines are needed because people are looting food - not that more food is needed, and it is because of its scarcity that people are looting! Efforts were concentrated upon revitalising the markets, rather than feeding the hungry. Now more guns are the answer. This is another US invasion just like Panama, Grenada or Nicaragua. Its real objectives are not humanitarian - the US withheld all food aid from Somalia for over two months last year - but to secure a base in the horn of Africa. It is an area rich in unexploited minerals and desperate for foreign currency. It is in an area of spreading Islamic fundamentalism - the current enemy of the New World Order. The US, having secured their markets and positions in South America , Asia, the Russian states and of course the Middle East, are asserting themselves in this continent too.

In a Pentagon report leaked last year,which seeks to set the nation's destiny for the next century, the US military planners' first objective is to prevent the emergence of a new rival to a global empire. Somalia is merely one victim of that empire and the Somali people will continue to be depersonalised either as 'famine victims' or 'warlords.' The figure of the US marine, no doubt, will enter the haunting poetry of the region which records all the major tragedies of the people.

Guatemala — the army fulfils its mission

When human rights activist Rigoberta Menchu won the Nobel Prize for peace she put Guatemala back under the spotlight. **Ronan Bennett** reports on a recent visit to Santiago Atitlan, scene of an horrific massacre.

THE MOON IS what people remember most vividly, apart from the killings. It was full and high, and in its video wash the volcano across the inlet was clearly visible, as were the skulking vultures going to roost. A dry wind from the north swept in across the lake; the air, as ever, smelt of woodsmoke.

At the time of the massacre, Lieutenant José Ortiz Rodriguez commanded the military base at Santiago, a town of some 40,000 on the southern shore of Lake Atitlan, three hours west of Guatemala City. Although supposedly rebel territory, no one can remember when the base last lost a soldier to guerrilla action. Still, the soldiers had chalked up an impressive body count: 2,000 townspeople in the eleven years since the base had opened. There are a lot of widows in Santiago.

Ortiz had been on a two-week bender. His drinking companion was Sergeant-Major Efraín García Gonzales. Like his lieutenant, García was a Ladino, of partial European ancestry. The people of Santiago are Tzutuhil Indians. The quickest way to provoke a fight with a Ladino is to call him an Indian: it means nigger, shitbag, animal rolled into one. What the army thinks of Indians, some 80% of Guatemala's population, came home to me when a senior officer told me the Tzutuhil had been "infected with communism, tourism and venereal disease"; the officer paused before adding, "they are not pure".

Santiago offers few distractions. Its bars are miserable holes in the wall set aside for men gloomily intent on getting head-splittingly drunk. Which is what Ortiz, García and three NCOs did all through the day and into the moon-bright night. The last bar they visited was the Luky, where they abused the locals and fired their weapons into the air.

The shots alerted the townspeople, who roused themselves from bed and poured on to the street. By the time Diego Ixbalan arrived at the scene, things were confused. Someone threw a rock and hit a soldier in the face. The soldier opened fire. Diego Ixbalan fell, the first casualty of the night. The soldiers hurriedly retreated to the base. The church bells tolled, and hundreds of people streamed from their homes to gather in the dusty plaza.

By now, it was near midnight. Tempers were high. Led by the mayor, several thousand unarmed but angry people set off shortly after midnight, 2nd December. They shouted and chanted as they walked the dirt path that snakes along the bank of the lake. Accompanying the mayor-elect were Diego Mendoza and his friend Pedro Damian Vasquez.

A stone wall, about five feet high, formed the base's perimeter. Diego noticed a machine-gunner behind the wall take up position overlooking the path. For the first time, he began to feel nervous. Across the way was a grove of coffee trees. Before the entrance to the base, the path widens into a clearing, which filled with demonstrators. Diego stood there with Pedro while the mayor asked to speak to the commander. Suddenly, there was a single shot. It was followed by a silence that lasted only a second, yet seemed much longer. No one moved. Diego was filled with foreboding.



Road sign — "The army fulfils its mission - the people trust in the army"

A crash of rifle fire cut like a swathe into the crowd in the clearing, slicing people down, toppling one on to the next. At the same time, the machine-gunner opened up. There were cries, screams. In the stampede, men and boys were knocked down. Someone stepped on a wounded man's leg; the fractured tibia splintered - he screamed.

Diego went down. Later, he was unable to work out if he had been pushed or had thrown himself to the ground. He lay in the dirt, face down. Pedro landed partially on top of Diego's legs and lower back. The shooting continued, a ragged, undisciplined trail.

Francisco Mendoza, a twelve-year-old boy, was at the edge of the coffee grove when he felt something like an ice-cold splash of water chill his thigh. He started running, got some way, then collapsed. A man picked him up and carried him to town.

Most people fled into the coffee grove, and in their panic some scrambled up the steep hill facing the base and returned home the long way. This is what Diego did, scrabbling out from under Pedro. Pedro was dead. Twelve others died in the volley, including two boys (of ten and thirteen). Twenty-three wounded lay among the dead, moaning in pain, until the soldiers agreed they could be carried to town. Ortiz, meanwhile, went to sleep off his hangover.

The massacre confirmed Guatemala's position, against stiff competition, as Latin America's worst human rights abuser. Faced with an international outcry and anxious to keep its US aid,

Continued on next page

Continued from page 13

worth about $900 million in the last five years, the government withdrew the garrison from Santiago. Guatemala, the government promised, would clean up its act. But to date, no soldier has ever been convicted in a major human rights case.

Although in recent years the death toll in Guatemala has fallen, the country continues to live through an extended and gory nightmare. After the CIA-backed coup of 1954, a succession of generals ran the country for thirty years, using the US-trained and equipped army to crush 'subversion'. Such is the breadth of the Guatemalan definition of subversive that the equivalents of Lord Jenkins of Hillhead go in fear of the death squads.

By the late 1970s, guerrilla insurgents were seriously threatening the regime. Then came General Efraín Ríos Montt, a man with a mission. The general belonged to a bizarre evangelical church, la Iglesia del Verbo, set up by a group of crackpot Californian ex-hippies. Taking orders from God alone, the general went to work. During his eighteen months in power 30,000 Indians were killed. The guerrillas were annihilated.

In time, the army permitted an election. This brought the Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo to power in 1986. Nothing changed. The terror continued, and the army made sure that Vinicio never got the impression that because he was president he could actually do anything. No soldiers were to be punished for anything they had done, were doing, or were going to do.

Vinicio was replaced in January 1991 by Jorge Serrano, an old Ríos Montt man, who declared on the hustings that nothing would be served by bringing soldiers before the courts. With its immunity reconfirmed, the army continues as before, and the bodies of its victims turn up grossly disfigured with depressing regularity.



Bar Luky Santiago Atitlan

In Guatemala City my first stop is the office of Cerj, the rural human rights group, to see its leader Amílcar Mendez, a wiry, nervy Ladino. Cerj members are murdered regularly, and Mendez lives under constant threat of death. Mendez and three men from Quiché province are leaving for an appointment with Fernando Hurtado Prem, the new Minister of the Interior and another old Ríos Montt man.

It takes a certain savoir faire to sit in the luxurious chairs in the minister's office. Hurtado Prem is suave, and he sits with grace, listening to Mendez and the three campesinos. They are here to complain about abuses committed in their village by Civil Patrols, the army's auxiliaries. The men are dark-skinned, small and dressed in their best clothes, tatters instead of rags; they do not know about the chairs. One sits, shoulders hunched, hands pressed between his knees, feet not touching the floor. The china cups clink in the saucers, the air-conditioner hums. The gulf between Ladino and Indian could hardly be starker.

Hurtado Prem says he knows about the abuses: the government intends to deal with them. But first the police must be trained; soldiers must be taught the role of an army in a democratic society. "All I ask is a little more time." There is an uncomfortable silence. "I know that is a lot to ask," he has the sense to add. Outside, I ask Mendez about the soldiers involved in the Santiago massacre: are they under arrest? Supposedly, Mendez replies, but no one knows.

The US embassy is on Avenida Reforma, a couple of blocks from Ríos Montt's Iglesia del Verbo, and practically next door to the old officer cadets' college. The embassy is the kind of blast-proof concrete and mirror-window stronghold you see everywhere from London to Bangkok. I talk to Diplomatic Source, on condition that Mr Source is not referred to by name.

Coy about his identity but forthright in his views, Source describes himself as a right-wing Republican and National Rifle Association member. He smells of stale cigar smoke, and a US-male gut bulges over his belt. We discuss Guatemalan human rights groups.

"I'm not real impressed with them," Source says. "I'm afraid it's become a way of life, a way of making money."

He goes on: "All the human rights you need are enshrined in the first ten amendments to the US constitution: the right to bear arms, the right to keep the state out of the citizen's private life. The trouble is, the concept of human rights has been perverted by leftists and Marxists. Now they talk about homo rights, the right to housing."

We discuss the violence. Conservative estimates put the number of politically-motivated murders in 1992 at 500, disappearances at 600. Who's behind it?

"There are army officers at senior level directing the violence," Source says. "I don't think it's the minister of defence ... well, let me back off. I don't put my hand on my heart for this minister of defence [General Luis Mendoza García]. Gramajo [Cerezo's minister] never really gave a shit. I don't think he drew up lists of people to get killed. This minister, I don't know yet. The jury's still out on him."

What would it take to improve things in the long term? Extensive land reform?

No. "Some people want that as a vindictive way of getting back at the rich. The basic problem is you have to make a society in which land ownership does not determine whether you live or die. For example, I just sold my house a year ago. I'm landless, but I'm not going to die because of it."

Source is a troubled man. As I prepare to leave, he starts to speak earnestly about the decline of western civilization.

"I look at what's happening in the States now and it makes me very sad," he says. "The universities are cesspools - all this emphasis on black writers, women artists. It depresses me. Western civilization is in decline. It used to be taken for granted that Western civilization was superior. That's gone. They say everything's relative now. Crap. Western civilization was the best. Look at Africa, what's Africa produced? A few masks. South America's the same. It's a



Crosses marked where victims of the massacre fell outside the entrance to the army base.

parasitic culture. They have invented nothing, just taken from us."

It is one of those rooms every trade unionist or Labour Party activist knows as home from home. The lino on the floor is broken; there are cigarette burns on the plastic seats on the chairs; the walls are covered with posters commemorating a thousand days of protest; the windows are so grimy there seems to be a fog outside.

The press gathers, the show begins. A youth, who looks about fourteen, is led to a chair to sit beside Amílcar Mendez. The boy's name is Julio Choalcu, his black hair stands up in splayed tufts. His story is told by Mendez. Julio, actually aged 22, was kidnapped in December 1990 by civil patrollers and taken to the army base at Sololá, where, among other things, he received multiple stab wounds and a severe blow to the left side of the head, after which - blackness and void.

It turns out that, thinking the blow had killed him, the soldiers drove 140km to Escuintla and dumped Julio by the side of the road. Julio was discovered and taken to hospital, where he remained unidentified until he recovered enough to write out his name. After five months, he was reunited with his family.

Mendez hands out a neurologist's report. It is flat, technical, but one word stands out. Espástico. Massive damage to the left side of his brain has rendered Julio's right side spastic. The stab wounds have severed his vocal chords. As Julio acts out his torture, the conference degenerates into a freak show. Julio - saint-like in his muteness - is all over the next day's papers. The day after, he's forgotten.

At another interview with the minister of the interior, I ask again about the soldiers. The investigations are continuing. Ortiz and García will be prosecuted. Where are they? He's not sure, but thinks they are in military custody somewhere.

I check with Source. He tells me the two men are in Sololá, back on active service. They have been charged though with being drunk and disorderly.

On the way to Santiago, I drive past Sololá army base. The observation post is in the shape of a pair of twelve-foot high army boots, topped by a huge camouflaged helmet. Around the corner from the base, the volcanoes surrounding Lake Atitlán come in sight. It is a place of spectacular and dramatic beauty. The views are grand, the colours are blue and green.

Since the massacre, Santiago has been transformed. The townspeople have taken over law enforcement: the police are not allowed out of their squalid quarters, and the ronda, an unarmed patrol made up of villagers, tours the town to keep order. There has not been a single violent death since the soldiers' departure. The massacre has united this traditionally fractious and feuding people to an extraordinary degree. The atmosphere, once laden with menace, is now relaxed. Everyone is agreed: the army must not return.

At the height of the insurgency, the army proposed bombing Santiago, Guernica-fashion, as the only way of dealing with the Tzutuhil, long-time and stubborn resisters of conquest. The Tzutuhil are proud of their achievement, the only community in Guatemala to have ejected the army, and Santiago stays free. But for how long? An officer told me the army "must return".

In the coming months, as the Central American peace process continues, those with an interest in justice and democracy in Guatemala will have their gaze fixed on Santiago Atitlan. ❑

Talking about talks

Continuing the series of articles on the political crisis in South Africa, **Sean Coyne** reports on why both the government and the ANC have vested interests in continuing the negotiations.

THE BIG question on everyone's lips over the last month has been what the outcome of the discussions between the De Klerk regime and the ANC will be. This week activists have scrutinised the statements made by both sides, and tried to fill in the gaps left by the sometimes arcane generalisations of the principal players.

What is very clear is that the leadership of both sides, for their own reasons, desperately want the talks to continue. De Klerk can no longer risk a frontal assault on the liberation movement, either politically or economically. Of course this has not stopped him from turning a blind eye to the undercover forces of the state, who continue to act on orders to destabilise and undermine support for the ANC. A whole range of international observers have now confirmed the role of the security services in deliberately encouraging the violence which is tearing the heart out of the townships. It has also not stopped De Klerk from continuing to provide very real material support to the anti-democratic forces in other Southern African states, notably Angola and Mozambique.

The ANC also needs the talks. It has to show that the talks can deliver. There are several reasons for this, not least that there are cracks appearing within the liberation movement caused by the frustration of activists on the ground who have patiently waited for the new South Africa to be born, and who just see conditions and the reality of daily life getting worse. Furthermore, the ANC is less confident than at any other time of securing a large enough electoral majority to wield real political power.

The beginning of a political realignment is underway, and many now say openly what was unthinkable just one year ago. Namely, that while a majority of the African population may well support the ANC, a significant minority will not, and that within the so-called Coloured community, ANC support shows signs of faltering. Entrenched historical and religious attitudes have begun to surface, and are openly being exploited by De Klerk's Mark 2 Nationalist Party. The announcement that the ANC is ready to accept that it will be part of a coalition government is in part a recognition of this.

It is within this context that Winnie Mandela's recent comments have had some impact beyond her following amongst the township youth. It was not accidental that she chose to go public on the question of elitism within the liberation movement, and described the negotiations being nothing more than a power struggle between competing elites. She also made damning accusations about the lifestyles and accumulated wealth of those at the apex of the liberation movement. Of course the irony was not lost on everyone. Winnie herself has hardly been discreet about her own 'conspicuous consumption' in the past.

But there are grounds for some of her concerns. Indeed, one of the most depressing developments to date has been the rapid growth of a bureaucratic elite within the ANC itself. There is an ever expanding layer of senior functionaries who are well paid and who live in a style more befitting the rich white community than the people they are supposed to represent. And that is why demands for more accountability are gathering pace within ANC branches.

Of all the released veterans who endured imprisonment on Robbin Island, it now appears that only Comrade Walter Sisulu still lives in the township. Many of the others have moved to more salubrious areas where most township dwellers would fear to tread for fear of being eaten alive by private security services. Comrade Mandela for example, now lives in a part of Johannesburg once reserved for extremely wealthy mining magnates. It is an area which oozes wealth and unabashed power. But this is part of a more generalised phenomena. The absence of any sensitivity by these crude displays of wealth must indicate the extent to which certain leaders have been seduced by it.

There are countless examples within the ANC, some within the trade union movement, and within the Communist Party. Comrade Chris Hani, the General Secretary, is able to shrug off the fact that he sends his children to probably the most expensive private school in Johannesburg by stating the time-honoured excuse of just wanting the best for his children. Don't we all Comrade Chris, don't we all! Needless to say, these are easy targets for the enemies of progress.

Clearly, leaders of the liberation movement who have made life-long sacrifices for the struggle should be able to live out the last parts of their lives in security and free from want, but surely this does not justify the adoption of a lifestyle which wholly contradicts the type of society that we are supposed to be constructing?

The effects of this type of ostentation fuel the cynicism that Winnie Mandela was able to exploit, and provides credence to the fears of the Coloured community and others that the ANC is only interested in feathering its own nest.

When so many around the world have been impressed by the sacrifices of ordinary women and men in the liberation of South Africa, it would be a terrible spectacle to watch their expectations dissolve into thin air. Fortunately, the role of the masses in South African politics is still a critical one, and it will take more than a few slick suited bureaucrats to undermine this power. ❑

Resisting repression

The Intifada is far from over, as students from World University Service workcamps in the Occupied Territories told **Ian Bell**.

"HEBRON HAD BEEN put under curfew but there were some children still around the town centre. The soldiers forced them over to their military base, tied their hands together and blindfolded one of them. Whenever the children moved they were pushed back to the ground."

Philip, a history student, also recalled another incident at a cafe in Bethlehem. "We saw soldiers grab four Palestinian men and force them to lean against a wall for about twenty minutes. Then they set them free. The only purpose seemed to be intimidation."

Shireen, who is studying law, visited the refugee camp of Dheisheh. "There was a heavy oppressive feeling about the place. It was surrounded by barbed wire and the military were always present in a look-out tower."

She visited a family whose father had been shot dead on the camp by an Israeli soldier. "Despite their grief and sorrow they were not defeated. They had the backing of the rest of the camp and still supported the Palestinian struggle."

Shireen was struck by the strong sense of community amongst Palestinians, the high level of education that had been achieved by the alternative schools and the degree of politicisation. "This is something not often found here in Britain."

Human rights abuses, which increased with the Intifada, still continue. **Julia**, a researcher, met a Palestinian woman called Mezzina who had been held in prison for forty-five days. Accused of being an activist, she was interrogated for thirty-three days. "They arrested her at midnight and forced her to sit on a low stool with her hands tied behind her back for several hours. At other times she was put in a room where there was only enough space to stand. It was very cold and there was little to eat or drink. They also regularly tied a sack over her head for long periods of time and when she fell asleep she was kicked awake."

The Palestinians are not passive victims though. **Sam**, a philosophy student, also visited Dheisheh refugee camp. He was shown the dental centre and alternative health care centre that the Health Committee had built. Such attempts at independent activity are often undermined, however, with buildings sometimes being demolished by the Israeli authorities.

In recent weeks there has been an increase in military operations in the occupied territories, despite the continuing peace talks. Shireen was told by a Palestinian that "it feels like the early days of the Intifada again. Activity decreased when the peace talks began, but now there is a feeling the talks are going nowhere and there's more repression too."

Now more than ever Palestinians see activities such as the workcamps at Bir Zeit University as vital.

One Palestinian student observed: "Israel is sensitive to international pressure. It is important that people publicise the reality of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation."

● **Anyone interested in participating in a workcamp at Bir Zeit University can contact the World University Service at: 20, Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN.**



Children in Balata Refugee Camp on top of a house demolished by Israeli troops

TUC — prepare for a general strike

Graham Durham, Secretary, Brent Miners Support Group, argues that the labour movement must shake off the legacy of defeat and build "a general strike demand".

"WE FACE A government ferociously determined to wipe out all that we stand for. For us, this is a struggle which may well take many forms, including public campaigning, civil disobedience and industrial action. We can't run away from it, nor do we wish to. It's our future too, and we have no choice but to fight for it." - Arthur Scargill, 31st January, 1993.

Arthur Scargill is right to set out in clear terms exactly what is at stake in the current series of attacks in the trade union movement. The October 1992 announcement of the pit closure programme was a deliberate attempt to destroy the single most powerful trade union of the last two decades, and by such destruction to behead the trade union movement and make the defeat of 1984-85 into a long-term decline of organised labour.

The response of trade unionists was tremendous in October and a slow renewal of confidence has seeped through the trade union movement. Thoroughly alarmed at having their sleep disturbed, the TUC leadership set up an emergency committee and called on everyone to switch off their lights for five minutes. Undeterred by such ridiculous ideas trade unionists and miners support groups have continued to rebuild our weakened movement. The TUC General Council meeting in early January heard worrying reports that militant trade unionists were beginning to link up struggles and resolved... to monitor the position.

The Tories are going for broke. Weakly led and hit by crisis they have decided to press on full blast with rail privatisation, Post Office privatisation, pit closures, hospital closures, bus privatisation, education cuts, renewed attacks on local government and a wage cut for every public sector worker. Encouraged by TUC and Labour Party leaders' 'Even Newer Realism', Major has unwrapped plans to use the reserve army of labour to destroy hard won workers' rights with workfare schemes and to cut state benefits to the unemployed.

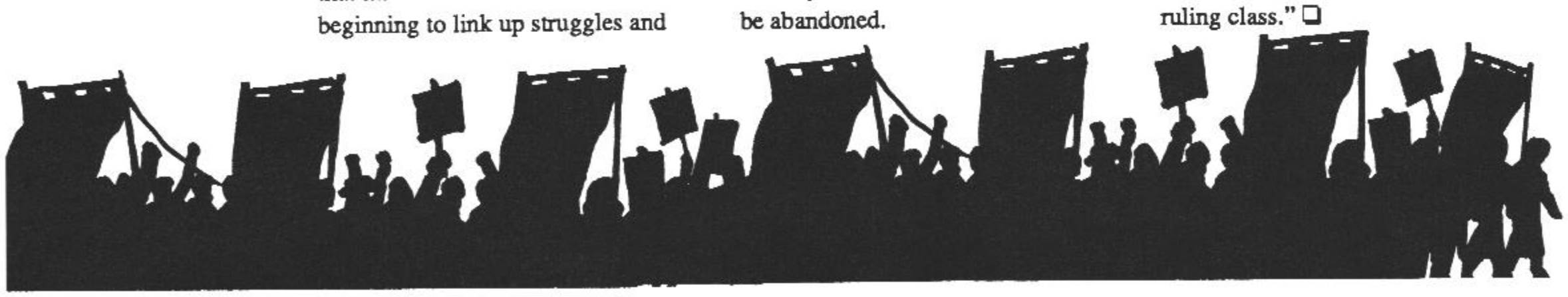
The Tories have no choice. The world's capitalist economy is in recession. At the root of this is a global crisis of over-production and newly competitive emergent capitalist economies. Investment is at an all time low and the instant Keynesianism of reduced interest rates has no possibility of producing a revival. With economic growth across the advanced capitalist economies frozen (0% growth in Japan and Germany forecast for 1993) a period of increasingly bitter trade wars has begun. Hence the Tories' desperation to enter the Euro-capitalist state. If necessary a constitutional crisis will be faced down to achieve this.

If Maastricht is ratified then there will be immediate European bank pressure to drive down workers' living standards to the lowest level in Europe and beyond and the social chapter will be abandoned.

We know what their plans are. We have a duty to reorganise unity at all levels of the working-class and force the TUC to respond head on to these attacks. Structures like the Miners Support Network need to be built quickly to unite all workers in a common struggle and prevent action being postponed. The ballots for a joint strike by miners and railworkers are a start. This opportunity must be built on and a general stoppage organised. Our 'leaders' will only act when forced from below.

Arthur Scargill, speaking to RMT and TSSA members asked, "Why not nationalise railways, mines, building work and place them under workers control?" We might add that a wholesale programme of nationalisation, employment for all, abolition of the monarchy and massive redistribution of wealth are achievable goals. They require that all workers and unemployed feel their combined strength and shake off the period of defeat since 1984. The trade union movement needs unity above all and this will transform the consciousness of millions of trade unionists in action. As Scargill regularly points out: "One day of industrial action educates workers more than a hundred newspapers!"

Briefing supporters know that a huge task lies ahead in the next weeks. A catastrophic defeat remains a possibility and would bring with it a rampant ruling-class determined to wipe out all the historic gains of our class and ultimately heighten the prospect of another cataclysmic world war. Such a defeat can be avoided and the building of a general strike demand is our first task. *Briefing* supporters need to shake off the mentality of defeat and play a key role with other left groups and militants in forcing our leaders in the TUC and Labour Party to act. As Arthur Scargill put it this month, "The time of spin-doctors, backdrops and sound-bites is over. Now we need a leadership to act on behalf of our class as ruthlessly as the Tories work for the ruling class." ❑



Miners Support Network: getting the job done

The miners need united support from the labour movement, argues **Jim Clayson**, a member of the *Trade Union News* Editorial Board, who has been co-ordinating work at the National Miners Support Network office.

THE MINERS SUPPORT Network has now attracted over 500 affiliates spread throughout the trade union movement, Constituency Labour Parties, community organisations and local support groups.

This diversity reflects the deep and widespread feeling of solidarity for the miners and their communities. The sheer arrogance of the government's pit closure plan provoked an angry backlash that put 250,000 people on the streets of London twice within one week. The primary task of the network has been to co-ordinate and sustain this protest through a difficult period whilst the government sought to dissipate it through a biased DTI 'Review'.

The anger is still there; the government has not been able to hide the issue. When the NUM and RMT ballot for strike action on March 5th they will do so with the knowledge that a broad section of the population supports them. Crucially, they will be aware that this support is becoming stronger and better organised.

Above all, links are being forged with struggles in other sectors. NALGO, NUPE and other public sector union branches have affiliated to the Network and invited NUM and Women Against Pit Closures speakers. Local miners support groups have campaigned against cuts in local government.

In the National office, our prime role, so far, has been to help with the formation of local groups. We have avoided setting them tasks or a programme of action. We felt that it was our job to supply the basic information and material needed for local initiatives. We have sent out posters, badges and a regular bulletin for use on street stalls. We have arranged speakers for rallies and meetings. All of this has enabled miners supporters to take the fight into otherwise inaccessible Conservative bastions.

Where do we go next? To a large extent the answer is not in our hands. We are in existence to support the NUM and WAPC. As a support network, we cannot do other than follow their lead. They will bear the heaviest burden in any forthcoming struggle against British Coal and, inevitably, against the state.

Moreover, it is local activists who do the groundwork. They are the people who will be out with collecting buckets, getting harassed by police as they tap into a rich vein of popular solidarity. The network must respond to their needs, not direct them from afar. The left in Britain has never lacked armchair generals willing to throw working class people on to the barbed wire of industrial action with the flick of an odd theory or two. The network should not become a plaything in their parlour games.

Neither do we want to hide in the shadows. With the NUM and RMT ballots for industrial action, there is now a more definite focus and added momentum. We should urge our trade union affiliates to mobilise their workplaces and then try to spread aciton by going into nearby shops, offices and factories to seek support from workers there. The potential is there. It needs only action to ignite it. But it must be solid, practical action, not the stuff of empty rhetoric.

The eclectic composition of local support groups, generally based on a broad consensus of support for the NUM and WAPC, often bridging many political antagonisms, gives them a volatile nature. Yet they are able to take initiatives where more cautious feet may fear to tread. They can also draw in neglected sections of the community, particularly unorganised and non-waged people. At the Network office we have been delighted to encourage such moves. Yet it occasionally happens that in doing we discomfit more formal sections of the labour movement. I would urge both sides to be aware of each others' sensibilities, making use of each other's strengths and compensating for each other's weaknesses.

We will only succeed in saving our threatened coal industry if the entire movement is united behind the NUM and WAPC. ❑

On meaningless slogans

SOME COMRADES active in miners solidarity work have begun to advocate the slogan 'prepare for a general strike'. Demands that the TUC call a general strike and calls to build councils of action

Mike Phipps
Brent South CLP

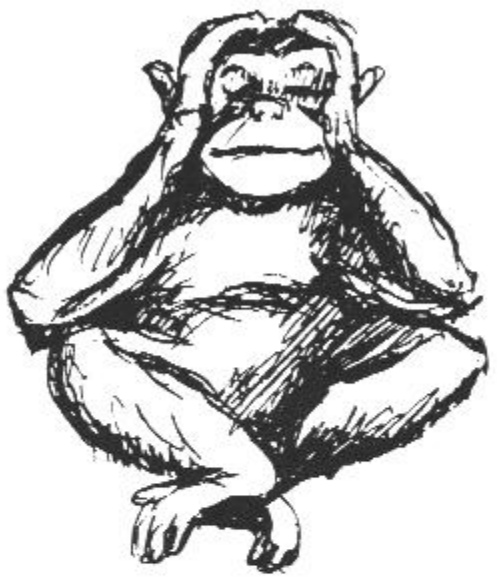
are at least intelligible, if wrong, but I'm at a loss to understand the meaning of 'prepare for a general strike'.

The last time I called for a general strike was when the dockers came out during the 1984-5 miners' strike. Here at last was the scenario the government had worked might and main to avoid: another core section of industrial workers making common cause with the miners. There was a genuine possibility at this time of bringing the country to a halt - a dock strike needs only a few weeks to have an immediate effect on the economy. The ruling class recognised this, as their spokespersons subsequently admitted, and the government was obliged to come up with a settlement which they could disown later, long after the miners' strike was defeated.

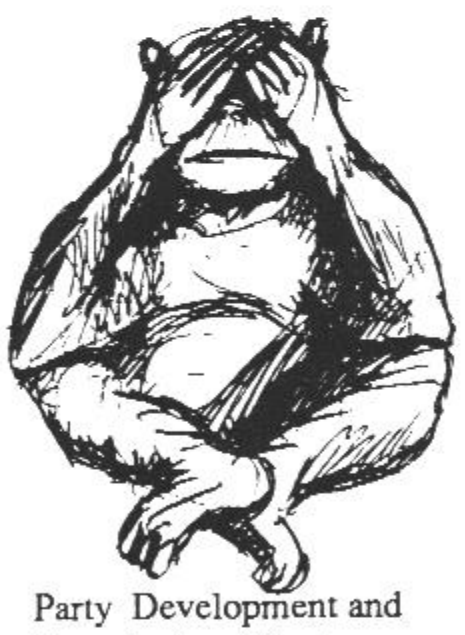
The call for a general strike at that critical point of heightened class struggle was then opposed by some of the organisations which now put it forward so enthusiastically. Yet conditions for a general strike are far less propitious than in 1984. Miners themselves are not on strike; their numbers have been reduced by over two-thirds; overall industrial conflict is lower than at any time in the last fifty years; union membership, and more worryingly the number of shop stewards, has fallen by over one-third in fifteen years; the whole trade union movement has been thrown onto the defensive by recession-fuelled unemployment, speed-up and wage cuts.

What is needed now is a painstaking rebuilding of the movement at all levels and with it the confidence to take action, not empty sloganising. Demands for a general strike reflect the frustration of a section of the left out of touch with and isolated from the very organisations - the only organisations - with the capacity to carry out these demands.

Which leaves the call to 'prepare' for a general strike. How? By filling the larder, organising picket practice, rehearsing walkouts? This meaningless slogan is merely an insurance policy put forward by those too sensible to demand a general strike immediately but too frightened about what the ultra-left may say about them if they drop the idea altogether. ❑



Financial and Commercial Director



Party Development and Organisation Director

Cutting up the corpse

Just about everyone outside the Shadow Cabinet will acknowledge that the Party organisation is on the verge of collapse and that somehow life must be re-injected at the grass roots. But our NEC hasn't a clue where to begin. **Richard Heffernan** and **Mike Marqusee** report.

A BIG CUTS package in Labour's Walworth Road and regional machinery has been agreed by the NEC. The aim is to reduce expenditure by one third - the effect will be the loss of some 40 jobs at HQ and a further reduction in regional and constituency support.

Cost-cutting moves include making regional, local government and youth conferences bi-annual and closing the Walworth Road library. The English regions will be cut from nine to six, with only three organisers in each office.

Though Blunkett and Cook were unhappy with the package only Tony Benn voted against it at the NEC. No one there wanted to recall 1985 - when many of the same people had voted through the big shake-up of the Party apparatus that accompanied Larry Whitty's arrival as General Secretary and which Kinnock boasted would transform the Party.

One of the eventual casualties of the 1985 restructuring was the Party's worthy if dull newspaper, *Labour Weekly*, condemned for its allegedly excessive costs only to be replaced by the far more costly and unspeakably insipid magazine *Labour Party News*. *LPN* is being given a long-overdue burial and will, Whitty assures us, be replaced (at some unspecified future date) by - wait for it - a newspaper!



Elections and Campaigns Director

Local government observers will find the 'restructuring' proposals accompanying the cuts package drearily familiar. The guiding principle of the reorganisation of the central directorates appears to be random. The new division of the Walworth Road spoils leaves three directors working under the General Secretary: their jobs would "not be inflexibly defined but would broadly cover... elections and campaigns", "party development and organisation" and "financial and commercial".

The long-serving Geoff Bish and Joyce Gould are to be squeezed out. Few tears will be shed by socialists. Whether or not walking disaster Mike Watts will finally be shown the door after years of abject failure as Labour's finance and membership supremo remains unclear.

Mandelson's Campaigns and Communications empire is being broken up, with current director David Hill being demoted to Chief Media Spokesperson (sic). His job will be to brief the press on behalf of the leadership - any broader mass communications strategy having been ruled out some time ago. The whole media apparatus is being slimmed down. Much of the work will be farmed out to the PLP and the ubiquitous 'consultants'.

All of this is a continuation of trends set under Kinnock, as is the downgrading of policy work, which will also now be put out to tender. The contract has already been awarded to the Institute for Public Policy Research, which is now acting as the secretariat for Smith's Commission for Social Justice. A flavour of the kind of 'radicalism' the well-endowed (thanks to Kinnock's crony Lord Hollick) IPPR will dish up for us can be gathered by its three newly appointed fellows: Margaret Hodge (also working as a consultant for Price Waterhouse), Barbara Follett (self-styled intellectual) and hard right-winger David Milliband.

Of the 90 employees left at Walworth Road, half will be involved in membership processing, administration and finance. However, expectations of future recruitment remain low: by 1996 the NEC expects to recruit only 35,000 new members a year. The real target of the new arrangements at Walworth Road is to put the financial squeeze more systematically on the (dwindling) existing membership. An increase from 75,000 to 125,000 in the Party's 'donor base' is projected. Members' subs will be split three ways: between regional offices, national HQ and CLPs - leaving CLPs an even smaller slice than at present. No improvements in the agency service are planned. Cuts in regional staff combined with the enlargement of their patches will, in the words of one regional official, reduce regional offices to "answering telephone queries from the media".

Walworth Road will become a clearing house whose sole real aim is to maintain a level of passive membership sufficient to pay its own wages. It's all part of the attempt to turn Labour into a post-political party without ideology or a mass base. It will become, even more than it is now, a magic circle ordained by the media and restricted to a few MPs, trade union bureaucrats and free-lance self-appointed experts. If you are not "a player" - a full timer at a union or a 'think tank', a council leader or MP - forget it.

None of this will solve the Party's financial crisis, it simply postpones collapse. That financial crisis can only be solved by rebuilding the Party at the base - having more and more active members reaching into a wider cross-section of the working class. Nothing in the NEC's cuts package will contribute to that. It will simply make matters worse, continuing the suicidal trends of recent years - which is one reason why no one wants to mention 1985! ❑

Brent Miners Support Group meeting

Fight for jobs
Unify the struggle

Tuesday 2nd March, 7.30pm
Learie Constantine Centre, Dudden Hill Lane
London NW10

Not very tricky, Dicky

Being chair of the House of Commons Select Committee on Trade and Industry in the midst of the coal crisis gave **Richard Caborn** MP the chance of a lifetime. He fluffed it. His willingness to make life easy for the Tories by giving the nod to pit closures makes him a runaway victor in the always crowded field of entrants for Class Traitor of the Month.

FIFTY YEARS ago Dick Caborn was born into the heart of Sheffield labour movement politics. His father, George Caborn, was a leading local Communist, operating from a powerful base in the AEU District Committee. Young Caborn trained as an engineer before becoming an AEU shop steward and for over ten years convenor at Firth Brown, one of Sheffield's major engineering works. After a brief stint in the YCL, Caborn switched to Labour and in the seventies became chair of the District Party. He was also vice-president of the then powerful Sheffield Trades Council and along with David Blunkett, Clive Betts and others of his generation, became one of a secret cabal which met regularly to carve up the spoils of Sheffield Labour politics.

In 1979 he was elected Sheffield's first Member of the European Parliament and was chair of the British Labour Group in the EP for the next four years. During this period he was a common or garden Labour leftie, regularly denouncing the iniquities of the EC, backing Benn against Healey in 1981 and inveighing vociferously against council house sales. In February 1982, in one of the left's biggest coups of the period, Caborn succeeded in deselecting Fred Mulley, the former Labour Defence Secretary, much to the chagrin of the then AEU boss, right-winger Terry Duffy, who pressed Caborn not to stand.

He was elected to Parliament for Sheffield Central in 1983. Sponsored by the AEU, he almost immediately began backtracking on the EC, arguing that Labour should change Brussels "from within". In 1984-85 he backed the miners and even dared to criticise Kinnock's failure to appear at miners' rallies. But after 1985 he drifted with the tide and as chair of the Tribune Group through most of the last Parliament presided over the most dismal days in the group's long and chequered history, allowing it to waste away as a fan club for the Kinnock leadership.

After much lobbying, he secured a place on the front bench as a junior member of Labour's Trade and Industry team. He then blotted his copybook with the Kinnock machine by co-chairing John Prescott's ill-fated deputy leadership campaign in 1988. Befitting his terminal lack of flair or foresight, he has always been just a step or two behind, struggling to catch up with the trendsetters, always making a priority of tending his Sheffield base. He cannot abide any threat from below and accordingly encouraged the local witch-hunt against *Socialist Organiser*.



In 1990 Kinnock removed him from the front bench. Caborn let journalists know that he felt hard done by; indeed, one of the only times the LCC felt compelled to complain about anything Kinnock did in recent years was when it took up Caborn's self-pitying complaint that the leader had failed to use his talents fully.

After last year's general election (in which his majority was reduced), he became chair of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. This elevation was not achieved through long service (he had never been a member of the committee) but through the fortuitous retirement of several sitting members and private negotiations through the 'usual channels' (i.e. the whips' offices).

The coal crisis gave Caborn a unique chance to prove his mettle and redeem a lifetime of mediocrity. He blew it. Though quick off the mark, declaring his committee would look into coal policy before the Tories had agreed that it should, he then led an extraordinary Labour sell-out. The NUM response to the Select Committee report says it all: "We find it incredible that the Select Committee has refused to recommend the phasing out of expensive nuclear power...and has inexplicably failed to recommend a halt to subsidised coal imports...Even more inexplicably, the committee has refused to recommend stopping the 'dash for gas'...[These] would in themselves not only save all 31 pits, prevent the destruction of 100,000 jobs in mining, power, rail and engineering, but would save taxpayers £2 billion per year...In light of the evidence we expected a firm recommendation that all 31 pits should be saved from closure because it is not the individual viability of the pits that is in question but the rigged market which even British Coal admits was responsible for the closure announcement."

This was one of the rare occasions when Labour members of a Select Committee could have made a real difference. Caborn made sure they didn't by stitching up a deal aimed at achieving 'consensus' on the Committee but which effectively gave the so-called Tory Coal Group (Winston Churchill et al) a veto over demands to keep all the pits open. By accepting too many of Heseltine's premises, Caborn (also influenced by the AEU's championship of nuclear power) let the divided and discredited government off the hook and paved the way for pit closures.

As an inveterate backroom manoeuvrer, Caborn found it natural to spurn the political opportunities offered by the Select Committee. He allowed its deliberations to be used to push the coal issue off the front pages instead of keeping it on them. Throughout, he had little contact with the NUM, whose national HQ lies in the heart of his constituency. In recent weeks he has been meeting with the UDM leadership, and associates report that he has been shocked that the NUM has not been more appreciative of his efforts. This boring second-generation Stalinist has kept his nose pressed so close to the bureaucratic grindstone for so long that he is now clearly incapable of seeing beyond it. His betrayal of the miners in their hour of need will never be forgotten. ❑

Sheffield United

Unity is the key to building a strong Labour Left, urges **Dorothy Macedo**, a co-ordinator of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network.

THE SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN Group conference in Leeds last June showed that there are still thousands of socialists in the Labour Party who want a non-sectarian united left organisation. It voted unanimously to hold a recall conference this spring and to set up a network of SCG supporters.

A working party has been meeting regularly to implement these decisions. Proposals for the Network's structure are being drafted for approval at the recall conference on 17th April in Sheffield.

The left will be immeasurably strengthened by the creation of structural links between the SCG in Parliament and their supporters in the CLPs and trade unions. Ad hoc campaigns are all very well, but we need to get away from reinventing the wheel every time there is a political crisis. Knowing they can mobilise grass roots activists will strengthen the left MPs' hand, just as being able to call on the MPs' expertise will enable local campaigns to be more effective.

There are still various problems to be ironed out. The left has been divided along sectarian lines. This had reduced our effectiveness, helped the witch-hunters pick groups and individuals off one at a time, and alienated many who would otherwise support us. We cannot wave a magic wand and make our political differences disappear, but it is certainly possible to lay down basic principles we can agree on, and campaigns we can unite around. The need to get Dennis Skinner back on the NEC is a case in point.

Many people were impressed by what Audrey Wise said at Leeds: we can go on talking to the same dwindling groups in the slogans we've been using for years, or we can make our socialism relevant to those people, outside the Party as well as inside, who would agree with our message if we spoke to them in language they could relate to. We need to start working out what we're for, as well as what we're against. People don't like what the Tories are doing, but few are inspired by the Labour leadership's sleepwalking opposition. The SCG Network could sponsor local or regional dayschools where we could start the discussions about our positive alternatives.

But to fulfill its potential, we must ensure a good attendance at the recall conference.

The political situation is simply too critical for us to allow past sectarian rivalries to get in the way of left unity.

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
Students Union,
Sheffield Hallam University
Pond St (2 mins from Sheffield Station)
11am - 5pm
Socialist Campaign Group MPs speakers, debate and workshops
Registration £5/£2
Contact Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network c/o Jeremy Corbyn MP, Red Rose Club, 129a Seven Sisters Road, London N7.

National Conference of Labour Women 3rd-4th April in Llandudno.

TWENTY-ONE resolutions critical of the party's attitude to the women's organisation have been dispersed among five different sections. This has the effect (unintentional I'm sure) of disguising the level of disgust. Four more resolutions attack the abandonment of the Ministry of Women.

Dorothy Macedo
Hendon South CLP

Many of the resolutions are worthy (even if they do tend to consist largely of a litany of the sins of the Tories) but seem to overlook the fact that the conference has no input into Labour Party policy structures. Some call on the next Labour government to do something, a trifle prematurely perhaps. Even more bizarre, some ask the present Tory government to act!

They key debates will be those about getting real power for the women's organisation. Without that, it will wither. The right wing don't even want to use it as a showcase for Folletted women candidates, as it has proved impossible to purge of dangerous feminist ideas, even though it is a shadow of its former self.

Labour Party Youth Conference report

IN MANY WAYS it was an encouraging conference for Clause 4, the Campaign Group Network's youth wing. Between David Blunkett declaring himself "a Stalinist "in the middle of his pro "social conscription" (workfare) speech and the Young Fabians' Derek Draper, being condemned for intimidating an MSF delegate, Clause 4 made effective interventions.

Hamish Renton
Cambridge CLP

What shocked us *Briefing* readers was National Youth and Student Officer Ian Howarth surpassing even Roy Hattersley's ability to sink pints.

The organisation outcome of the conference appears appalling: Clare Ward, the right-wing NEC Youth Rep was re-elected and LPYS branches voted themselves off General Committees. This has yet to be ratified by National Conference so Clause 4 is mounting a campaign to save the LPYS. What the leadership want is for young people to put in campaigning legwork, yet have no rights or representation. But there was a bedrock of support for the left's position - the left candidate came within 12% of winning the NEC position. Clause 4 fringe meetings were well attended and there was a determination to take the battle to NOLS, NUS and National Conferences.

COHEN'S CORNER

Who pays for social justice?



asks Harry Cohen, MP for Leyton, wondering whether John Smith or the new Commission dare to find the answers.

WE HAVE recently seen an interesting example of the idea of 'compromise' that mainstream and right-wing Labour MPs have these days. On Select Committees they try to agree unanimous reports with the Tories as this allegedly puts pressure on the government. On the Defence Select Committee, therefore, they agreed a report to save all the regiments threatened with disbandment, whatever the cost. Yet the Trade and Industry Report on the mines still means the closure of half the threatened pits. This, with the Tories on the rack and public opinion overwhelmingly demanding that every pit should be saved.

The Tories are panicking as state borrowing soars to £50 billion and beyond to pay for the dole (it costs £9,000 per annum in benefits and lost taxes for every person unemployed). Treasurer Minister Portillo announced a review that will target policing, schools, the health service and particularly benefits. Child benefit and the state pension are amongst those at risk. At the same time, in his Carlton Club speech Major promoted 'workfare' - "I increasingly wonder whether paying unemployment benefit, without offering or requiring any activity in return, serves unemployed people or society well." The Tories plan to cut dole payments within a year or so, whilst enforcing cheap labour. The truth is that jobs simply aren't there because they have been butchered by the government's 'leave it to the market' capitalism and failure to invest.

Yet John Smith, in his 'major' speech at the Labour local government conference, drastically limited the state's role to get us out of this mess. "I speak about replacing dogma", he said - his team let it be known that this means no public ownership. Instead of a government for jobs as an absolute priority, John Smith talks of "always being pragmatic and practical". Exactly what does that mean for the mines - privatising them?

I am sad that this speech was full of stale platitudes, offering few practical commitments for the unemployed and the poor. "Dynamic markets and active government" would be promoted through "active citizenship". This is defined as the "empowered consumer" and the "participating electorate". Oh yes? How are citizens to direct effectively the market to create jobs without using the state? A few more elections at regional level still leaves power firmly in the hands of the few - in business, in the establishment, and those in political control. John Smith exposed the limits when he said that this "real democracy" amounts to "a dialogue between the people and their elected representatives". That does not mean empowerment, and it is certainly not a substitute for a political leadership for jobs, which is what most people want.

"I want to see a fair tax system based on people's ability to pay." What does this mean exactly? I bet that we do not find out until the election is upon us. Then Labour's plans will probably be seriously undermined.

Western economies are suffering a debt ridden slump caused by increasing military spending and cutting taxes for those who can afford to pay them - the rich. As a result, there is a growing shortage of private capital. What a time for Labour's policies to become increasingly dependent on it.

The Commission for Social Justice may well provide the basis for the party abandoning those aspects of the welfare state that still remain. The commission is to provide a sort of 'Which' report on employment, tax and social security. Its sixteen 'independent' members include SDPers and Kinnockite trimmers. Not much empowerment for party members, let alone the electorate, is envisaged in its deliberations. It is planning to report in eighteen months, by which time the Tories will have almost certainly inflicted severe damage upon benefits. Labour's opposition will amount to 'wait for the commission'. Without the political (and financial) commitment to create work and protect the poor, this 'independent' commission could lay out a course which the Tories themselves may use to justify their cutbacks, and even provide the basis for their next election manifesto. It could very easily become an albatross for Labour, plunging the party into bitter rows about ending the universality of child benefit - hinted at by Harriet Harman - and introducing a form of workfare. Peter Mandelson felt so strongly that this shouldn't be ruled out that he penned a letter to the *Independent* newspaper.

I do not find that this commission is grabbing the public's attention. It is jobs and income security that they want. Labour must provide political commitments, not some airy-fairy consumers' report. This commission looks nothing like the Beveridge report of 50 years ago, which identified the five evil giants of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness which stalked the land. The Beveridge-Keynesian approach failed to slay these giants because of the refusal to recognise and tackle their class causes. John Smith's commission of 'professionals' will not want to recognise them either. That after all, is `dogma' which the modern Labour Party must replace. ❑



Sexual harassment victory in the building industry

CONGRATULATIONS TO former Greenwich Council bricklayer Tracie Simpson for sticking with a four year campaign against racial and sexual harassment which resulted in a £15,000 payment from the council.

In a case which resembled that of the women firefighters taken on by the GLC, a paper policy of equal opportunities proved useless when throwing women into all-male trades with no back up and no training or instructions to fellow workers. In a frank admission of its own members' involvement in making her life hell, *UCATT Viewpoint* reports interminable verbal and physical harassment on such a scale that Tracie was made ill and eventually made redundant following a period of sick leave. Tracie explained, "As a UCATT member I went to see my convenor to complain. He was sympathetic, but frankly, did not know what to do about it. Incidentally, I was harassed by a convenor of another union, which goes to show how bad things were.

"The council's equal opportunities policy was great. The problem was that no one seemed to have been trained to implement it."

UCATT General Secretary George Brumwell has promised action within the union including an audit of female and black employment in the industry and a stepping up of educational work with UCATT members. A code on sexual harassment already exists. "UCATT will do its utmost to deal with this issue head on to convince members that behaviour of this sort is not only objectionable in itself but ultimately destroys the unity of workers and benefits only employers."

Mass murder on building sites

UCATT has revealed that nearly 700 construction workers have been killed at work in the last five years.

In what can only be described as "mass murder" without parallel in any other job (even the British Army!), there are plenty of victims, the guilty parties are known, but no-one has yet been jailed.

On top of the 683 workers who have died 63 members of the public have also died on building sites. The 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act gives the courts power to jail people for a range of offences.

Trades Councils Conference

Trades councils are still with us and still provide lively forums for debate and action, as proved by the recent Conference of Trades Councils which voted:

- against restructuring by the TUC;
- complete opposition to anti-union laws including a national demonstration;
- opposition to jailing poll tax non-payers;
- an end to US interference in Cuba;
- to keep the trade union voice in the Labour Party.

TGWU backs lesbian and gay rights

Britain's largest union, the TGWU, has voted to affiliate to the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights. TGWU Conferences have consistently voted in favour of lesbian and gay equality since 1989. It is hoped that the decision will enable the establishment of a self-organised group within the union along the lines of those already formed in NALGO and NUPE.

Disabled action

NALGO's national conference of disabled members has voted to take direct action in order to win civil rights for disabled people. Howard Wynne told the conference, "I hope to get arrested and taken to court - not that they have accessible courts or prisons!" They will be joining up with the Direct Action Network which was involved in organising the demonstrations at the TV Telethon charity event. Tony Reddish stated, "People who think direct action doesn't work should tell that to the women's movement and to black activists."

Health worker to win £1/4 million payout?

Well, no - not really a worker, but one of the two chief Executives from St Thomas's and Guy's Hospitals will be out of a job when they merge, and both have years of their contracts left to run. COHSE has slammed the deal as a scandal when thousands of London's hospital staff face redundancy.

Redundancy ballot

Along with 40 job cuts at Labour's Wally Road HQ comes the suggestion that two of the departmental Directors may be asked to take early retirement. As a service to Labour Party members, *Briefing* has decided to ballot the Party membership on who should be asked to go. Send your vote to "Joyce Gould Competition", c/o the *Briefing* office.

Get your eyes tested!

No, referees can't yet, but since 1st January VDU users can demand eye tests at the expense of their employers, provided a formal request is made by the workers concerned. Minimum standards in the workplace are now compulsory too, under the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992.

UNDEFEATED

* Attila the Stockbroker * Roy Bailey * Tony Benn * Boyes, Coope & Simpson * Billy Bragg * Nick Burbridge & The McDermotts * Martin Carthy * Chumbawamba * Pip Collings * The Grimethorpe Colliery Band * Sue Harris * Ray Hearne * Maggie Holland * Robb Johnson * The Johnson Collings Band * Ron & Miriam Kavana * John Kirkpatrick * Liberty Cage * Joan & Dave Malloy * Liz Manfield * The Price * Press Gang * Jock Purdon * Tom Robinson * Leon Rosselson * Janet Russell * Stalking Horses * TV Smith * Dave Swarbrick * Taffy Thomas * Velvet Fist * Mike Waterson * Roger Watson

A BENEFIT TAPE FOR THE MINERS

Mail Order: Fuse Records, 32 Nethergreen Road, Sheffield S11 7EJ.
Please make cheques payable to Fuse Records,
£10.00 inc. postage and packing.

Bringing the members back in

The *Keep the Link* campaign concentrates on the constitutional link between the Labour Party and the unions. **Sheila Cohen**, editor of *Trade Union News*, examines the wider aspects of the relationship between the two wings of the labour movement.

THREE MAJOR ASPECTS of the Labour Party/trade union link are currently under attack:

- annual conference votes;
- leadership election input;
- selection of parliamentary candidates.

On the 'block vote' the proposal is that the unions' current 70% proportion of conference votes should be further reduced to 50%. On the leadership election it has been suggested that the unions' share in the electoral college, now 40%, should be reduced to 33% - though a further proposal for a 50% share for MPs would cut out the unions altogether. And finally, while selection of parliamentary candidates is now based on votes cast by trade union branches, the latest proposal is that union votes should be cast by registered supporters voting on an individual basis.

The body making all these recommendations is the official Review Group into Labour Party and trade union links, expected to present its draft report to Labour's next NEC meeting on 24th February. Proposals from the report will go to 1993 conference.

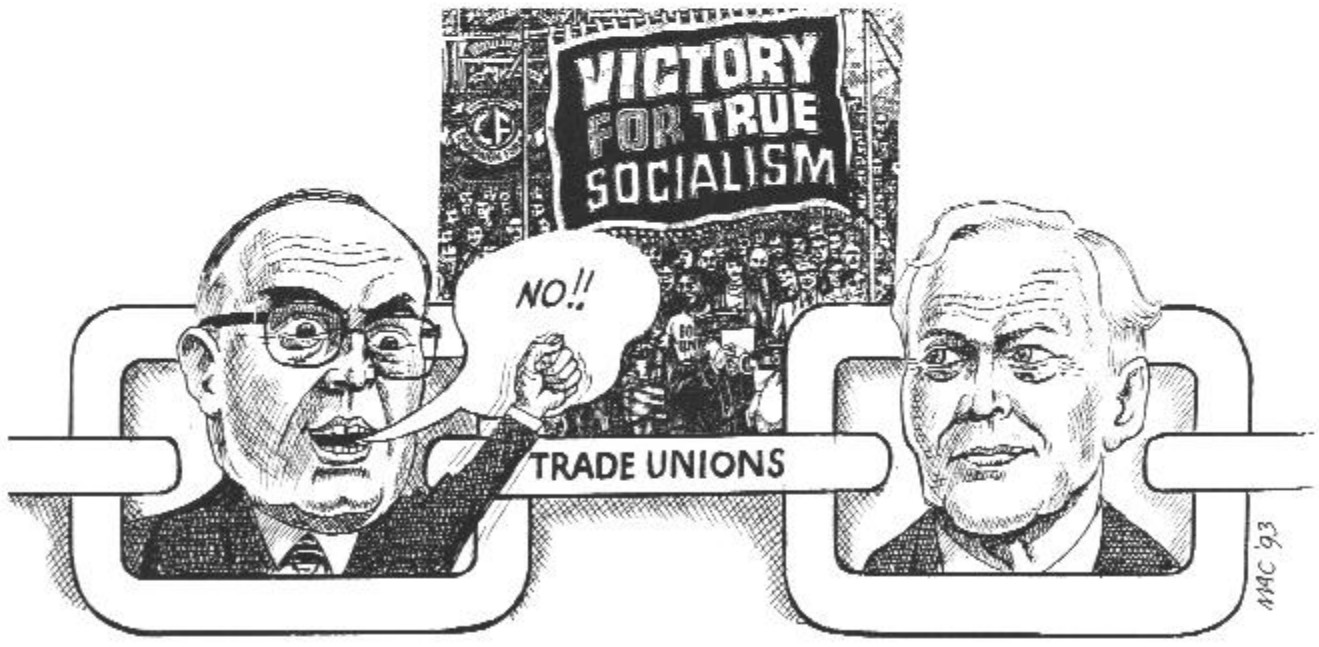
What do we think of these ideas? Perhaps the most difficult issue for socialists is the block vote. Appearing to symbolise the most bureaucratic, monolithic face of trade union power, the unions' right to cast votes on bloc on behalf of their membership must surely be questioned by anyone with a commitment to grassroots democracy based on real participation and discussion by members themselves. Yet it is obviously essential for unions to have an organisational voice at conference.

There is less difficulty in arguing for a retention of the unions' role in the leadership election, and perhaps most of all in totally resisting the watering-down of union branch representation into the individually-based registered supporters system. These two proposals perhaps come closest to the overall direction towards individualism rather than collectivism in which the review group, and indeed the Party leadership itself, is moving - shown in the (somewhat inept) moves towards "Clintonisation", the drive for of one member, one vote, and most recently in John Smith's "new" ideas on individual aspiration.

It is this move towards individualism which must be resisted by socialists, whatever its organisational form. We must, of course, as *Keep The Link* rightly urges, "submit strong responses defending the undiminished input of trade unions and their branches" to any consultation exercise, however bogus, on the review body's proposals. But what we must keep in mind in all this activity is the urgent need to increase rank and file participation in the Party in order to provide a real basis for the formal relationship.

One issue which has begun to focus attention on the union-Party relationship from this direction is the growing anger among unions at the way their members are being treated by Labour local authorities. Widespread sackings, pay standstills and attacks on pay and conditions have incensed the TGWU and GMB in particular. At the recent Labour Local Government Conference a joint TGWU-GMB stall promoting a Public Sector Alliance could be spotted - and the aim of any such alliance would not be to go along with the anti-union activities of our brothers and sisters in the ruling Labour groups. At a more rank and file level, the GMB's London Region recently refused to pay its affiliation fee to the Greater London Labour Party after Islington's Labour council closed down its DLO and sacked both convenor and deputy convenor. The region has now renewed its affiliation, but only so that it can submit a resolution to this year's GLLP AGM - which promises to be a hotbed of revolt over just this type of issue.

Trade union activists have a long and honourable record of involvement in the Labour Party, now threatened by disillusion and anger over the local government issue. More intractable, perhaps, has been the failure over many years to really engage ordinary union members in political activity and discussion within the Party. Back in the '70s, the idea of workplace branches was briefly mooted as a way of involving unionised workers direct from the shop floor. Perhaps the idea should be revived - along with any other proposal necessary to secure real, and not merely organisational, involvement of trade union members in the Party. But unless the moves to destroy formal union/Party links are successfully resisted, any possibility of securing such involvement - and with it much-needed unity between the two traditional wings of the labour movement - will clearly be still further weakened. ❑



The Left is right - *KEEP THE LINK*

REVIEWS

The Battersea Bolshevik

Richard Hanford reviews
Keeping my head — the memoirs of a British Bolshevik
by Harry Wicks, Socialist Platform, £5.95.

BORN AND BRED in Battersea, Harry Wicks gives a vivid and valuable account of the progressive local Labour movement in the twenties. He became a Marxist, despite attending an off- putting Socialist Party of Great Britain class in 1922: "It wasn't really a class, more a mere reading from 'Capital'. The only interruption in the deep monotonous voice of the reader came when the gas mantle flickered in the draught from the opening door, or when an old man started winding his large pocket watch, unthinkingly out of boredom." This was, however, a rare moment of boredom in an otherwise lively political education. His 'university' was his workplace, a



signal box, scene of much political debate. He attended Herald League and Plebs League events, and joined the Communist Party.

His education continued at the International Lenin School in Moscow, where he discovered the privileges of the professors and students sharply contrasted with the privations of others. The induction course was "almost entirely about the errors of Trotsky". Upon his return however, he became a pioneer `Balham Group' Trotskyist, and in 1932 spent a short time with Trotsky in Copenhagen. He was on the platform from which Trotsky delivered his first public speech for five years. "He had obviously lost none of his verve as a speaker. I have been privileged during my life to hear many revolutionary orators: CLR James, Tom Mann, Bukharin, Saklatvala... yet allowing for all the extraordinary impact that Trotsky has had on my life, his Copenhagen speech was the most impressive".

This book is a very genuine account of a very genuine activist's political development. It is a shame we learn little of his life after the war. Unfortunately Harry Wicks died before his recorded memoirs were complete. This left Logie Barrow with a tremendous transcription task, which has produced an inevitably partial, somewhat awkward but very rewarding read. ❑

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booke nds

Mike Phipps reviews a selection of recently-published books and pamphlets.

● *Don't throw it all away!* by Friends of the Earth, £2.95.

The average British householder throws away one tonne of rubbish a year, a third of it packaging. Most of it is buried in landfill sites and about 10% is incinerated. FoE's case is not just about the colossal waste of resources involved, but that this burning or burying contributes greatly to pollution.

The Environmental Protection Act of 1990 requires all councils which collect waste to have a recycling plan on how to reuse local domestic waste. You have a right to see this plan and have your views taken into account. Is your council doing enough to recycle and to help the public do the same? Given that a recent survey found 94% of people thought recycling important, yet 64% usually throw all their rubbish away, the answer is probably not!

● *The events of May 30th 1992 and the politics behind the banning of the James Connolly march*, by the Scottish Democratic Resistance & the James Connolly Society, £1 (PO Box 4, Prestonpans, East Lothian).

Details the events surrounding the banning of a Connolly Memorial March in Edinburgh by the Lothian Labour Council, and the alleged sinister police harassment of its organisers. The pamphlet spotlights the links between Ulster Unionism and far right groups in Scotland and raises important issues about civil liberties for activists south of the border too.

● *Black Tribunes* by Terri Sewell, Lawrence & Wishart, £14.99. Traces the recent rise of black political participation in Britain. It's a useful overview, flawed, however, by her hostility to Labour Party Black Sections' growing ties with the left after 1985 - a "millstone dragging it down". Approvingly quoted are the attacks on Black Sections, "appalling tactics" by MP Paul Boateng, who writes a foreword to the book and is treated almost reverentially throughout. Despite her antipathy to the left, however, Sewell is forced to concede the "elements of truth" in *Labour Briefing*'s 1987 claim that "in just six weeks, the (Labour) leadership has alienated trade unionists, black people, peace campaigners, and lesbians and gays. All in a frantic bid to be more patriotic than the Tories and more moderate than the Alliance."

● *Poetry Handbook* by Dinah Livingstone, Macmillan, £8.99.

This poetry handbook for readers and writers is much more than its title suggests, combining technical analysis with committed argument. Livingstone scorns the notion that poetry should be insulated from politics, arguing that poetry should be judged "not only by its technical skill but by the truth and scope of its seeing". Drawing on the rich experience of writings from revolutionary Nicaragua, which the author's own translations have brought to a wider audience here, this book reinstates in poetry its subversive and visionary qualities, as well as offering a number of guidelines to first-time writers. ❑

The politics of sport

Dave Hammond reviews
Sport, politics and the working class (organised labour and sport in the interwar years)
by S G Jones (Manchester University Press)

WHAT SETS THIS book apart from the large number of studies available on sport and politics is the fact that Stephen Jones never departs from a neo-Marxist analysis. He kicks off by noting "that sport in industrial societies is an important economic, social and political activity in its own right, able to provide ... evidence about labour markets, capital investment, class, gender and even international relations". From this starting block Jones maps map out the history of working class involvement in sports organisation in Britain prior to World War Two.

Our attitude to sport has changed over the years. The commercialisation of sport dates to Victorian times when attendance at sporting events like soccer, horse racing and cricket become paying events when working class leisure time was being increased alongside a relative growth in affluence. Together these produced a proliferation of betting, the setting up of sports papers and the massive expansion of commercial enterprises based on sport as a commodity. This was the genesis of modern mass sports, with many working class games of a previous epoch being outlawed, such as street football.

Jones looks at the involvement of various labour bodies in sport: the attempts of communist-based organisations to draw workers away from 'bourgeois sport' and into such organisations as the Red Sports International, but recognises the overall failure to lure people away from commercial sports arenas. This failure was partly because workers were still imbued with ideas of'king and country', so workers' sports organisation only reflected the level of class struggle overall. This also explains why those Fabians with ideas of 'religious socialism' could not draw workers away from sport completely, as they would have wished. Industrial workers had taken such sports as professional soccer as their own and had grafted their own ethics onto the whole event. Old middle-class ideas of 'fair play' were replaced by a win-at-all-costs attitude that accepted some aspects of cheating. Regional partisanship was so great that soccer teams were representatives of their local working class areas.

Jones also highlights that sport and international politics are inextricably linked. In 1930 British authorities banned a Russian workers' soccer team from entering the country and seven years later officially blocked an English team travelling to Spain. Yet in the same period matches were arranged against fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, when players were even being forced made to make the Nazi salute before kick-off.

Jones' study is not complete, but he has managed to indicate the correct methodology for looking at the role of sport in capitalist society. Since the twenties and thirties commercialism has taken a stronger hold and many workers organisations have either folded or been more fully absorbed into the cultural mainstream.

The establishment of the Sports Council in the sixties attempted to regulate government involvement in sport, and organised labour has taken less interest. Anybody wishing to understand the complex relationship between sport and politics should read this highly accessible book.



Behind boring Arsenal

Keith Veness reviews
Fever Pitch — fan's life
by Nick Hornby (Gollancz, £14-95)

AS A FELLOW Arsenal supporter, Hornby's amusing book had a particular attraction, but for anyone enslaved to a football team this story rings all too true. Even by the abysmal standards of football club boards of directors, Arsenal are notorious. They never listen to the fans, do not appear to give a damn about the local community in Islington and live in a 'time-warp' still located around the mid-1930s and Herbert Chapman.

Arsenal have hardly courted popularity over the years - earning various prefixes like 'lucky', 'boring' and worse. Hornby shows why he fell in love with this outfit, charting his work, his sex life and his mental state against the fickle fortunes of the 'Gunners'.

Like me, he finally moved to Islington because that was where Arsenal is based. He now realises how much his moods and enthusiasm is determined by the success of the 'team in red and white'

The book is also worth reading for its insights on the new breed of club chairmen (yes - they are all men!) who are slowly strangling the game in pursuit of a non-existent middle class audience, and the hatred of Thatcher for what she saw as an independent and uncontrollable facet of working class life. One aspect he does cover in depth is racism - both on the terraces and the field. Arsenal does not generally suffer the sort of deep-seated racism prevalent at other clubs, and has delighted over the years in such players as Rocastle, Thomas and Wright who became role models for kids black and white. He recounts his rather pathetic gratitude when a hulking brute sitting behind him in the stands rose to abuse a visiting black player by calling him a "wanker" and letting lose a torrent of invective that skilfully avoided any racial overtones!

"Its a funny old game Brian!"



He said it!

Auberon Waugh, the man who blamed Blair Peach for his own death at the hands of the SPG in Southall ("he should have stayed at home") has been at it again.

"I think it would be true to say that Mr and Mrs Joe Public are pretty well fed up with education," he announced in *Today*. "It never did them any good, and in a society where professors are paid less than long-distance lorry drivers, there seems no point to it. Perhaps it is time we went out and trapped them in their holes in the ground and gassed them like badgers."

Patrick Murphy - suitable for framing?

Do you believe the IRA would use as one of its key undercover operatives a 53-year old devoted family man with a severe alcohol problem? The **Metropolitan Police** clearly do - they have charged Patrick Murphy with the recent Downing Street bombing.

At the time the incident took place Murphy was in an advance stage of DTs after a blaze of drinking. On the night of the bombing he was attending an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Witnesses are currently being traced.

Partially illiterate - he was unaware of different political parties and had not heard of the Birmingham 6 - Murphy is represented by **Gareth Pierce** who has asked that everyone work to ensure he does not become yet another miscarriage of justice. "Let's get him out before he's in," she told *Briefing*.

Cole, no dole

A marvellous passage from *Labour Organiser*, the in-house magazine of Labour's full-time apparatchiks:

"A fond farewell was given to **Phil Cole** (Assistant Regional Organiser, Greater London Labour Party) on Friday 20th November...The festivities were only matched by a street party outside held by *Labour Briefing*. There is of course no truth in the rumour that the large attendance was swelled by people who came to make sure it was true that Phil was leaving. Phil was especially touched by the gesture from **John McDonnell**, who came personally to give Phil a farewell gift. Colleagues were mystified when Phil asked someone else to open the gift 100 yards down the street."

Citizen Smith

"We have had many criticisms from Conservative Members, based principally upon their ideological opposition to the extension of public enterprise in any form. One of the things that strikes me as curious about this House is that when the Labour Party brings forward proposals for public enterprise it is regarded as doing that in the cause of ideology, and so it is. We bring forward proposals for public enterprise because we are **socialists**. The Conservative Party opposes our proposals root and branch because it is the Conservative Party and believes in private ownership and control, but show how that is not regarded as ideology of any sort."

Eloquent words delivered in the Commons on 30th April, 1975, by the then Under-Secretary of State for Energy, **John Smith MP**.

Clash of the class traitors

At Labour's Local Government Conference in Bournemouth, **Jack Straw** made a speech supporting elected mayors and celebrating the Tory concept of local authorities as "enabling bodies" rather than service providers. For his pains he was roundly attacked by **Dick Knowles**.

Straw also came a cropper in a recent *Tribune* interview in which he announced that Labour would retain Compulsory Competitive Tendering and the Council Tax. After being congratulated on this "conversion" by Tory Ministers, Straw demanded *Tribune* make clear that he had never said the words attributed to him. *Tribune* editor Paul Anderson obliged by explaining to readers that it was only Straw's opinion that Labour should keep CCT and the Council Tax. He had never said it was Labour policy!

Either Jack has a cunning plan or simply a unique ability to put his foot in it.

Dole not Goal

Spare a thought for Chester City supporters (including our editor).

Labour Research revealed that Morrison Construction Ltd, which owned 91% of the football club, donated £14,512 to the Tory Party in recent years. One (other) fan wrote "It makes me feel ashamed to think any money I pay to watch City is indirectly contributing to decent working people being made redundant". Both teams in blue - Tories and City - are bottom of their respective leagues.

SWP on the wrong road?

Below the ad in *Socialist Worker* for SWP meetings in Manchester and Leeds on British justice is the following footnote: "plus speakers from local campaigns against injustice including the M25 Three Campaign." Huh?

Tory scum

For those readers who complain we don't spend enough time attacking the Tories, how about **Somerset County Council**'s way of saving a massive £32,000 a year? Scrapping the 25p daily allowance for people with learning difficulties to attend day centres.

Roll up, roll up!

Anyone reading last month's Class Traitor will already be under the impression **Manchester Council** is something of a circus. Certainly, its Council Tax payments are now turning into a lottery - literally. In a feeble attempt to get people to pay their whole year's Council Tax upfront, it is putting all those who do into a prize draw - with a £1000 first prize (that's fifty monkeys, John!).

Emily's pissed

You've got to hand it to **Barbara Follett**. She generated more publicity (for herself) out of the launch of Emily's List UK than John Smith managed for his much-hyped speech in Bournemouth.

For those of you living in extreme isolation, without access to newspapers or television, Periscope must explain that Emily's List is ostensibly a device to get more women selected and elected as Labour MPs. It is, of course, nothing of the kind.

Money is to be raised to finance prospective women candidates approved by a two-thirds majority of an anonymous panel of twenty. What criteria are to be used in this vetting process have yet to be divulged. And despite reading at least a dozen interviews with Follett on this subject, Periscope still doesn't know just what the money will be spent on besides travel and childcare expenses. We do, however, all now know that Follett considers herself "an intellectual" and that all her domestic servants are members of the TGWU.

Among the sponsors of this charade are the usual culprits, **Patricia Hewitt, Barbara Roche, Harriet Harman, Margaret Hodge** et al but also some who should have known better, notably **Dawn Primarolo**.

Travel expenses and childcare help are welcome but it shouldn't take a mega-endowment of the kind Emily's List is seeking (at least £30,000 in the first year) to secure them for rank-and-file Labour women. If money is to be given to Labour Party members to enable them to pursue their rights within the Party then it should be dispensed equally to all under the aegis of the Party itself, not a secretive outside clique.

Of course, the whole thing is nothing but a ruse to create a politically approved list of would-be Labour women Parliamentarians. The real effects will be felt by those kept off "Emily's List", not the politically correct few admitted to it. Will aspirant MPs be asked to swear an oath to the Self-Selecting Sisterhood at meetings of the High Council of Emily's List?

Periscope was under the impression that it was against the Party rules to interfere in selection contests. Certainly it is against the rules to spend money campaigning in them. Will Larry Whitty please investigate?

"Emily" is said to be a (blasphemous) reference to suffragette Emily Davidson and to stand for "Early Money Is Like Yeast". More apposite would be "Elitist Money Inters Labour's Youth".

Outlawing a way of life

Laura O'Sullivan,worker at the SHAC housing pressure group, calls for the travellers legislation to be halted.

THE DECISION TO repeal the Caravan Sites Act 1968 came from the 1992 Conservative manifesto, which claimed that illegal camping by gypsies and other travellers can affect the lives of whole communities.

The proposed bill would do more than tighten measures to deal with illegal encampments, they will outlaw the way that travelling and gypsy communities live.

Local authorities will no longer have a statutory duty to provide sites for gypsies and travellers.

It aims to take away any special privileges gypsies and travellers have got in applying for private sites in Green Belt areas.

Research shows that gypsies and travellers want to settle in permanent accommodation,it is claimed. The National Gypsy Council disagrees. Newcomers can face harassment from a settled community. Given the housing shortage, if they were forced to settle tensions could be exacerbated.

When a caravan parks illegally without the landowners permission the owner will be charged with criminal trespass. As a penalty for persistent trespass people can have their caravans seized.

Government funding will shrink, so local authorities will not be able to afford to develop new sites and maintain old ones. There are currently 3,200 travelling families without an official site. It will become even more difficult to get a private site. Travellers will be forced to move from one county to another because they will have had to park illegally.

This is a gross over-reaction to an alleged problem created by a small minority of travellers. It will greatly increase the discrimination and harassment which gypsies and travellers face. Liberty is organising a lobby of the House of Commons on 10th March at 2.30 pm. Please come along, or write to your MP in support of travellers.

Outlook
for Socialism '93
Europe's crisis: Socialist Answers

Saturday 13/Sunday 14 March 1993
Saturday 9.30am-7.30pm Sunday 10.30am-5pm

South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1 (Kings Cross/Euston)

Price: *(Advance)* £15 (waged)/£7.50(unwaged) *(on the door)* £17/£9 *(one day)* £10





• Speakers include:
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For further details contact: Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London, N4 2UU

A weekend of debate and discussion in Central London organised by supporters of the Fourth International

Famous Last Words...

"The Street Life Supplement has certainly produced a reaction in the press. For example, the October issue that had several articles by gays, according to the *Daily Mail*, had 'MPs Shocked by Explicit Sex Pamphlet'. More recently an article in the December issue that talked about children being parented and brought up in a more collective environment than at present was quoted at great length in the Court Circular page of the *Daily Telegraph*...The Supplement has obviously hit a raw nerve somewhere. The irony is that the articles published in *Briefing* are considerably less radical than many articles published by other magazines such as *Spare Rib*, which has a circulation countrywide at least ten times that of *Briefing*. The difference is that *Briefing* is a magazine that people like Council leaders and MPs are also writing in." - Cath Tate, *London Labour Briefing*, March 1983.

"We think that the journal closest to the views we shall be advocating is *Socialist Organiser*, particularly since it amended its previous editorial position on the Falklands War. With patient work and discussion we hope that the efforts of *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Organiser* can be united." - Alan Freeman, Editor, *Socialist Action, London Labour Briefing*, March 1983.


LONDON LABOUR 30p
BRIEFING
No 27 MARCH 1983

A SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN FOR VICTORY!

by Reg Race

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

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



Judging from some of the letters in last month's edition, proportional representation is not flavour of the month with most *Briefing* supporters. In answer to Pete Willsman, PR does not automatically generate "back room deals with minor parties", any more than First Past the Post automatically guards against coalition governments. Remember 1931. A Lib-Lab coalition would almost certainly have been in prospect after 1992's (FPTP) general election if voting had gone differently in a mere handful of seats. Most left PR backers, such as Ken Livingstone, Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform sponsor Arthur Scargill, and yes, Dave Osler, would have argued vehemently against it.

Pete's conception of the only possible road to socialism is frankly laughable. Could a future majority Labour government - elected by a minority vote under FPTP, on a programme presumably corresponding to prevailing levels of class consciousness - transform economic and social relations, only thereafter bringing the masses to "a more rational (socialist) understanding"?

All historical experience suggests otherwise. Every serious democratic challenge to the capitalist order, without exception, has been built on majority working class support. In advanced countries such as Britain, this would mean an absolute majority of the population.

PR did not lose the Nicaraguan elections for the Sandinistas, as Paul Field believes, any more than FPTP lost four successive British elections for Labour. The truth is, both the FSLN and the last Labour government pursued austerity policies that drove their popular support into the arms of the right.

Paul rightly fears the break-up of the political alliances which the Labour Party embodies. But the Labour-union link will almost certainly undergo serious dilution at this year's party conference. FPTP is clearly no safeguard.

And why wait until an undemocratic monarchy becomes an undemocratic republic before advocating PR as part of a new democratic constitution, as Chris Knight suggests? The two demands surely go hand-in-hand in the here and now.

Yours comradely
Dave Osler
London

Do I spot a deviation in the making in your February issue? Firstly, there is a letter from that veteran purveyor of political deviations, Chris Knight, who seems to be telling us that he is not planning to do anything until a republic is established. Then quite rightly, you criticise Keith Vaz and other Labour MPs for grovelling to the monarchy.

Yes, of course, roll on the Red Republic, as the Chartist G.J. Harney proclaimed in 1850. But the Red Republic is a radical plebeian democracy, not socialism. I hope that this matter will be made clear.

Yours sincerely
Keith Flett
Tottenham

I am writing to let you know the people that the Campaign Group of MPs plans to support for the Constituency Section of the National Executive in 1993. They are: Diane Abbott MP, Tony Benn MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Ken Livingstone MP, Alice Mahon MP, Dawn Primarolo MP , Dennis Skinner MP.

I would particularly like to draw your attention to our campaign to put Dennis Skinner back on the NEC. He is an outstanding comrade who has given sterling service, and it is very important to give him nationwide support in this year's National Executive elections.

Yours
Diane Abbott MP
Secretary, Campaign Group

My Brighton home was recently visited by two Mid-Sussex District Council employees. They came before 7am, when it was still dark, and banged on my front and back doors and windows continuously for about twenty minutes. A week later they called again, again in the morning when it was still dark. I had been one of the leaders of the anti-poll tax non-payment campaign in nearby Mid-Sussex.

The Brighton Council sent me a poll tax bill not only for the time I have actually been living in Brighton but for three months when I was not. When I questioned this I was told I had been living then in some road here I have not even heard of! The Conservatives won the General Election after driving more than a million of the poorest people, those most likely to vote Labour, off the electoral register through the poll tax. They have no right to govern now. No democrat can accept such a law.

Brighton Labour Council leader Steve Bassam can. Criticising Labour councillor Hilary Metcalf who had not paid, but has in the end done so, he made clear his belief that paying it is "the decent thing" to do.

The witch hunt against the left in Brighton, which continues with sittings of the National Constitutional Committee taking place here every few weeks, cleared the way for the right to do "the decent thing" of implementing the poll tax and introducing extensive cuts. Incredibly the latest service under threat from the right-wing Labour Council is the Unemployed Centre. Its council grant has been suspended and it is being investigated.

Despite the present ascendancy of the right here I find there is a real potential for a recovery of the left. Proposals I have put forward to my Labour Party branch, such as for a mass demonstration during the Conservative Conference, for re-opening closed public lavatories, for increased funding of the Unemployed Centre, have been agreed to. The branch has even called for the government to be brought down.

There are a lot of left-wingers in Brighton, a town where in the 1840s the Chartists were led by members of the organisation with which Engels and Marx were connected, the Fraternal Democrats. What is needed now is a stepping up of activity in the unions, those who have dropped out of the Party to again pay their subscriptions, and for a united front of various left tendencies and individuals in the party to be established.

Yours fraternally
David Harris

Considerable confusion still exists on the left about the dismemberment of Yugoslavia. The simple question must be asked as to why the creation of a Croatia and a Herzog-Bosnia appeared attractive and even more so why it seemed possible. Without the financial and political support of German and Austrian capitalism the issue could not even be broached. There were genuine minorities in Yugoslavia - principally the Kossovo Albanians, the Turks of the Sanjak, the Slovenes and the Magyars of Vojvodina. Of these, the Slovenes had by far the best deal and enjoyed a considerably higher standard of living than the rest of Yugoslavia, based primarily on tourism. The ethnic groups most oppressed are precisely those still inside the Yugoslav state. There was no 'national oppression' of Catholics or Muslims and no basis for any nation of Croats or Bosnians. The bogus lure of secession followed by membership of the EEC has proved to be a sick joke. Without unwarranted intervention from outside, Yugoslavia would still exist and the lives of thousands of civilians would have been spared. Socialists should oppose the establishment of Catholic or Islamic fundamentalist states and any military intervention by the west.

Yours
Keith Veness
Islington
London N1

Serious concern has been voiced from many quarters about a series of cases in Belfast which have become known as the Casement Park Trials. Groups such as Amnesty International, the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers and Liberty have all produced reports critical of the trials.

In March 1988 Mairead Farrell and two other Republicans were shot dead by the SAS in Gibraltar. Then the funeral for the Gibraltar Three was attacked by the Loyalist Michael Stone and three mourners were killed. The funeral of Kevin Brady, one of Stone's victims, was disrupted when a car containing two undercover soldiers drove into it at high speed. The soldiers brandished their service revolvers and a shot was discharged. Fearing a repeat of Stone's murderous attack a group of mourners (all unarmed) rushed the car and disarmed its occupants moving them to the nearby Casement Park. At some point later the two soldiers were shot dead by the IRA.

As a result of these events over two hundred mourners and spectators have been arrested and questioned by the RUC with forty-one being charged. To date five men have received life sentences. None of those accused, even according to the prosecution, were directly involved in the shootings. Three of these serving life - Pat Kane, Michael Timmons and Sean Kelly - were not even at the scene of the soldiers' deaths. The convictions rest on an alarming interpretation of the legal doctrine of common purpose only hitherto seen in apartheid South Africa. Normally in the case of murder this doctrine applies to those who have formed a prior criminal plan which results in an unlawful killing, all the conspirators thereby being equally culpable. Clearly in these cases, self-defence was the motivation of those who went to the car. The mourners were acting in the not unreasonable belief that they were under another Loyalist attack. No one could have predicted that the occupants of the car would be killed. While none of the Casement Park accused have been charged with actually shooting the two soldiers, it is obvious that this is what they are being punished for. Common purpose is therefore being used to criminalise those who attend republican funerals.

Other disturbing features from these trials include the use of poor quality video film from an army helicopter (the Heli-Tele) as a primary means of identification. The exercising by Sean Kelly of his right to silence was cited by Mr Justice Carswell as a reason to help justify his conviction. All of these dubious legal practices are being played out in the Diplock Courts which function without juries and so have special responsibility to interpret the law with great care. They seem instead to be playing ducks and drakes with due process to the great detriment of those who end up in prison as a consequence.

A Justice for the Casement Park Accused Campaign has been established to raise these and other issues. They can be contacted c/o Green Ink Bookshop, 8 Archway Mall, London N19 5RG. We must not allow a Birmingham Six Part Two to take place.

Yours sincerely
Steven Hepburn
Southall
Middlesex

Many Scots workers rightly condemned the opportunism of Labour MPs who "believe" in a Scottish Parliament, but lack the courage to do anything about it.

This was also seen when these political reps reneged on the poll tax struggle, allowing local authorities - often controlled by Labour or the SNP - to hound nonpayers with sheriff officers and law courts on behalf of the Tories.

Then there was the case of Ron Brown, until recently the left wing MP for Leith, who argued early in 1992 at a Edinburgh meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee for a return to the principles of the John MacLean, the great Marxist revolutionary.

In particular, Brown said that all the Scots MPs after the election would have a fresh mandate to decide the future of Scotland, and that they should set up a Parliament in Edinburgh, with, hopefully, a government committed to socialist policies. But, of course, "Rebel Ron" had no backers within the committee, for obvious reasons.

In any case, Neil Kinnock's red-rose plotters had already decided to replace him with someone more acceptable to Labour's London bureaucrats; yet Brown - who continues to fight the poll tax -had won fairly in the first round of a democratic reselection in a vote of individual party members and local trade unionists.

My point from this is how can we trust Labour "leaders" to back self-determination and socialism if it doesn't allow basic democracy within its own ranks? Or is Stalinism something that just happened in Russia?

Fraternally,
James Ross Adams
Edinburgh

Advance notice !

Labour Briefing AGM

Saturday 8th May
10.30am - 5.30pm
Durham Road Community Centre,
Durham Road, London N4

Put the date in your diary! For further details call Labour Briefing on 081-985-6597

Day of action: "Join us!"

ARTHUR SCARGILL, addressing a Hackney Miners Support Committee meeting, said:

"Last October we saw a sense of outrage, anger, indignation the like of which we haven't experienced in our country for over 50 years...

If the leadership of the Labour Party is listening, instead of improving your image, instead of a soundbite or a spin doctor, what is really needed is some of the same kind of commitment and dedication that the Tories show to their class. Next time Labour gets power, let's show commitment to our class...

"The miners' struggle is not confined to the potential closure of 31 pits. It's not merely an attack on 30,000 miners' jobs. This is a struggle to defend our health service, our education system, our social services and our local government...

"There is a dimension in our struggle that is one of the most historic in British politics for over a century. In 1984 we saw the emergence of the magnificent Women Against Pit Closures movement. Women from all walks of life in mining communities banded together in defence of the pits, jobs and above all their dignity and self-respect. That movement has never gone away. Women were transformed. They came out in a way that was unbelievable to take their rightful place alongside men in the struggle for social justice...

"You can protest as much as you like, you can hold demonstrations, rallies and meetings and all of them will have some effect. But in reality it is only the power of working men and women that will make a society like ours change course...

"On 5th March we're asking our members to vote for a 24-hour stoppage as part of a rolling programme of industrial action. I'm confident we're going to win the vote. When the miners have won the vote, I am asking every other trade unionist and every worker to join us.



PHOTO: David Hoffman

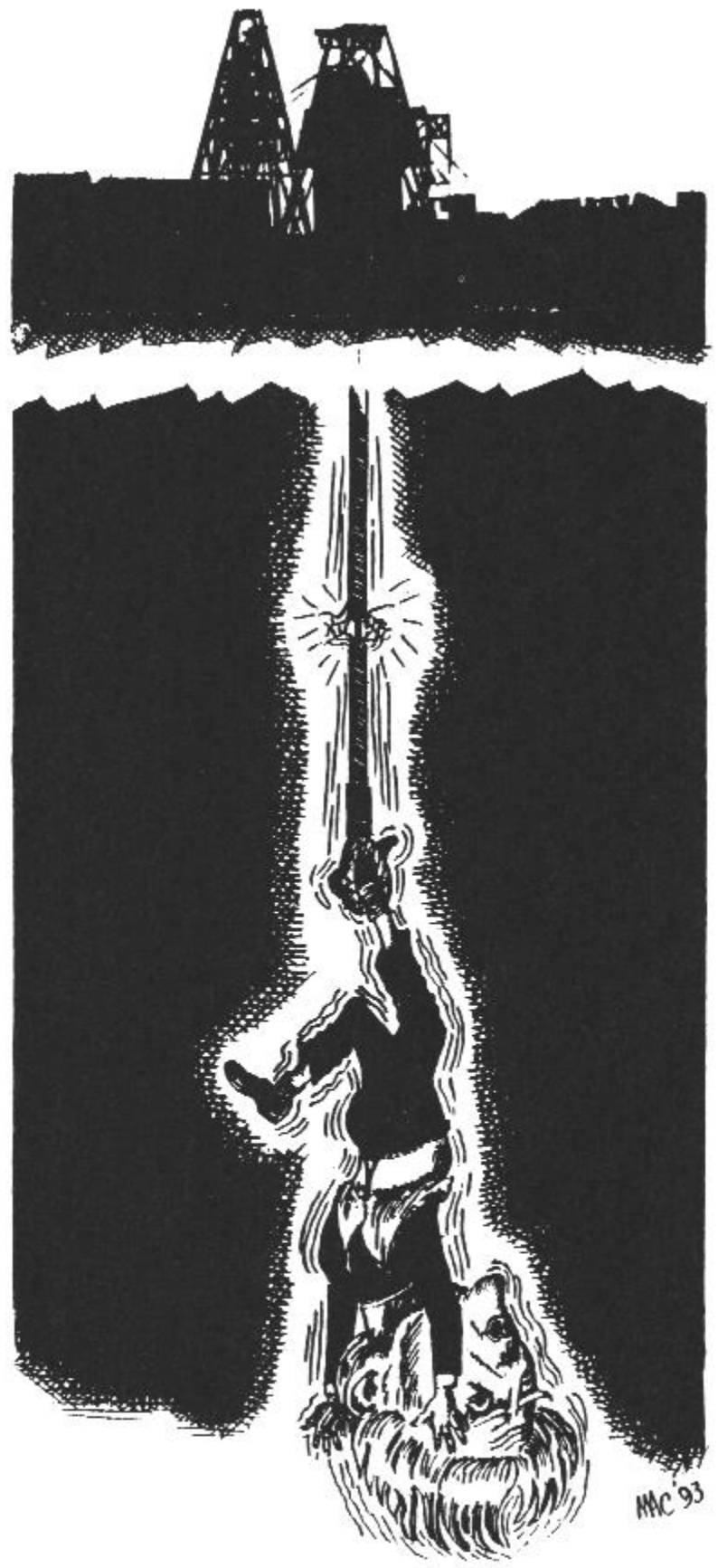
National Miners Support Network

219 Mare Street
London E8
081 985 1905

Affiliate now!

Trentham and Silverdale Rally
With Arthur Scargill, Paul Foot and Rose Hunter
Saturday, 6th March, 10.15am
Park site, Scotthay Road
Silverdale.

David Jones-Joe Green Memorial March
Saturday, 13th March
10:30am
South Kirkby Industrial Estate
March to Frickley football ground



Women's pit camps

Donations, delegations and messages of support needed urgently!

Grimethorpe: 0831 666713, Grimethorpe Colliery, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire, S72 7NB.
Houghton Main: 0831 436550, Houghton Colliery, Little Houghton, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire, S72 0HP.
Parkside: 0850 747309, Parkside Colliery, Winwick road, Newton-le-Willow, Merseyside, WA12 8DS.
Rufford: 0831 803546, Rufford Colliery, Rainworth, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, NG21 0ET.
Markham Main: 0850 747477, Markham Main Colliery, Armthorpe, Doncaster, S. Yorkshire, DN3 2BW.
Trentham: 0782 644467, Trentham Colliery, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST4 8HW.
Vane Tempest: 0860 328568, Vane Tempest Colliery, Seaham, Co. Durham, SR7 9TN.

Twin your Labour Party, trade union or local miners support group with one of the women's pit camps.

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