MAY 1993 £1.00

BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

inside ...

- Sinn Fein calls for peace
- Labour's God squad
- resisting anti-abortion terrorists

Spread



the strikes!

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

Stop press

One step forward...

OVER 150 PEOPLE attended the recall conference of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network at Sheffield on April 17th. The Conference addressed the twin themes of fighting Maastricht and organising the left in the Labour Party. The single most important decision was to organise the network as a non-sectarian body of actively campaigning socialists in the Party, with an annual national conference. It was also decided to work for a single left bulletin at Labour Party Conference.

Further resolutions supported the railworkers, miners and all those in industrial struggle against the government, coupled with a demand for Labour MP's presence on the picket lines. Conference resolutions opposed the witch-hunt, supported the retention of the Party's trade union link, defended public services, opposed the Child Support Act, opposed racism and supported the ARA demo on June 12th. Unfortunately a resolution declaring the introduction of PR to be a disaster for the working class was narrowly defeated.

Most of the discussion centred on the Maastricht Treaty. A resolution calling for an internationalist working-class opposition to Maastricht was overwhelmingly passed.

Tony Benn said that in the Commons there is a coalition as strong as that of 1931, because every party leader agrees on everything. He said the leaders of the Party not only do not want power, they now don't even want office. He told us that the flame of hope for a better world can never be extinguished despite all the fire extinguishers from Walworth Road. Alice Mahon said that our leaders should stop being "such damn cowards".

Shut first, ask questions later

THE NEC has suspended Wallasey Labour Party, placing regional office in control. CLP secretary Lol Duffy, angered to have first learned of the decision via the local press, demanded: "Why shut down the constituency party before even asking the officers about the charges?" These mainly arise from minor allegations concerning misconduct of meetings.

Lib-Lab pact ploy

UNLIKE THE parliamentary by-election in nearby Newbury, two reluctant Labour Party candidates pulled out of Berkshire County Council elections at the close of nominations. The local party were always determined to give the Lib Dems a clear run in two key wards, despite NEC directives to contest them.

In this month's

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Demon seed of poison Plant



UNTIL NOW, advocates of proportional representation have asserted rather than argued that PR is somehow intrinsically more democratic than the existing system. But what if PR undercuts, as it clearly has on the continent, the accountability of elected representatives to their electorates? What if it denies the electorate the capacity to recall and replace their representatives?

For socialists, Parliament should not be a mere debating chamber, a standing Question Time panel where all political shades are given weight but no decisions can ever be made and no real power is wielded. One of the jobs of any representative legislature must be to govern the country - that means making choices amongst competing and conflicting policies. When parliaments fail to make these choices, people are disenfranchised. Power remains in the hands of an unaccountable and invisible elite, who invariably act to maintain the status quo. A better recipe for electoral reform might be fixed term Parliaments, an end to moonlighting by MPs, and greater democracy within the parties, starting with Labour itself.

Raymond Plant argues that PR is a more appropriate system for an increasingly fragmented, pluralistic society composed of a welter of separate interest groups. This assumes that there are no over-arching class interests which can and at times do unite one part of this pluralistic spectrum (the majority who sell their labour to live) against another (the minority who control the means of production). Also that PR somehow enfranchises these fragmented interest groups within Parliament. What it does, in reality, is enfranchise a variety of separate political machines. Worse yet, it tends to insulate those political machines from pressures from below because it gives them a permanent grip on a place within the oligarchy. On the continent PR has encouraged the coalescence of a self-serving political class shaped by factional and individual struggles for advancement within fixed party hierarchies. In its extreme form, this is what is now being rejected by people in Italy.

Noises made by Labour and Liberal leaders have made it clear that both regard the debate about PR as an opening to future coalition. The champions of PR in the labour movement have yet to come up with a credible answer to the charge that PR breeds coalition government and that coalition government means that no matter whom you vote for you get the same people running the show.

The British 'constitution' and the British state badly need reform, but PR would only serve to protect the establishment from the onslaught that a majority Labour government committed to radical democracy could mount.

Hand in hand with the move towards PR comes renewed hype about state funding of political parties and the weakening of the trade union link. Both are about severing Labour's parliamentary elite from accountability to any organised mass constituency, leaving us all prey to the dictatorship of a professional political cadre.

Likewise the Labour leadership's refusal to line up with a popular majority in opposition to the Maastricht Treaty. Because Maastricht explicitly stipulates levels of public spending and circumscribes intervention in the market via public investment or ownership, it effectively ring-fences struggles over wages and conditions, over public services and social ownership. By institutionalising deflationary economic policies and mass unemployment, it removes the key decisions from the electoral arena and thus depoliticises them. No wonder hordes of career politicians from all parties across Western Europe are so keen on it.

It has been said often that the Labour leadership wants to turn Labour into a continental-style social democratic party. Certainly, its attitudes towards PR, Maastricht and the trade union link all point in that direction. But what a time for it! 1993 could be to social democracy what 1989 was to Stalinism. Across Europe the old political oligarchies are disgraced. The rule of professional politicians is discredited. Not surprisingly, given the weaknesses of the left alternatives, this has meant a rise in racist and reactionary forces.

But it does not have to be this way. The Labour leadership faces major obstacles to all its current projects. The trade union link, Maastricht and PR are all hard nuts to crack. If the leadership plays the wrong cards, it could destroy any hope of a Labour victory at the next election, and throw the survival of the Party into doubt. In this context, our struggle in the Labour Party is about nothing less than whether or not the working class will have any representation in the electoral arena.

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 June 6th. We are happy to offer a right to 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 May 17th.

***Briefing* is the only magazine on the left which is not funded by any part of the labour hierarchy nor 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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Unite and fight!

Speeches from the rally at the Camden Centre, London on the 16th April day of action.

Join us in action

"IF SIMON Hughes can call for a 24 hour strike, why can't John Smith or Norman Willis? . . . I ask each and

Arthur Scargill

every one of you to campaign within the movement so that when the next day of action takes place it's not just left to coalminers and railworkers but workers in every single industry who become involved. If we do that we will not just save the jobs of coalminers and railworkers, we will create the conditions for the rolling back of Tory policies and a change of government."

They will never break us

"WE AT LITTLETON Colliery have seen the dirty tricks that the government and managers are prepared to use. We are in our third day of action

Di Plant,
Littleton Colliery Women Against Pit Closures

and men's bonuses have already been stopped, union fees are not being deducted from pay any more and there's even been a threat to remove our NUM office from Coal Board premises. All of these ploys are designed to break morale but it just makes us more determined to fight ."

Salute the Miners show
9.00pm, Saturday May 1st
Hackney Empire, Mare Street, London E8
Nigel Kennedy, Jeremy Hardy, Kit Hollerbach
... and many more

Labour — lead a general strike

"ALL OVER THE country people are looking to the Labour Party for a lead. I condemn anyone who says it looks as if I am trying to break away from the Labour Party. The Labour Party was

Chris Brown
Cannock NUM

built by the unions. And if we're having trouble with the Labour Party let's give them trouble back within the Labour Party. When they start expelling socialists, let's start having a go. Because in areas such as mine we have a go about it. There's no way they can expel comrades because we won't allow it. The Labour Party was built by socialists, true socialists. Ninety per cent of these in Parliament now representing the Labour Party are middle class jerks.

They haven't got a clue, they don't know what it's like to struggle. But people in my area are standing now as councillors. At my pit alone we've got nine councillors. If you can't get Labour to take a stand, stand up yourselves and challenge those in the Party who refuse to fight. That's the only way we'll go forward and get rid of the current leadership who aren't showing a lead.

The general strike is there but it needs a lead. The government can't take on more than one union for any period of time. That's why more unions must join us, the railworkers and busworkers and crush the Tories in a way they've never known before."

Don't sloganise — organise

"THIS IS A struggle for the whole of the community. Because when they attack public transport, the health service, education or the miners they attack the whole community. We have to transform it then into political

Peter Gibson
TGWU Chair of London Bus Workers

struggle and not allow it to be identified by anyone as being merely an industrial struggle. That's why I think Arthur Scargill's call for unity around getting everyone out together is something that needs to be worked at. I know it's very comfortable to stand on the sidelines and shout for the slogan for a general strike, the problem is organising it. It's the men and women, the brothers and sisters involved in union after union, industry after industry, who have to work at making it happen. It doesn't happen because you mouth a slogan, it happens because you organise it. And that's what we need to do now."

Solidarity: not a request, a demand

Lancashire Area representative on the NUM National Executive Billy Pye told *Briefing*: "I wasn't surprised that the women took the action of occupying the Parkside pit. We had gone down every other avenue. We had been to court, we had been to Parliament, and by occupying the pit the women were demonstrating that we are serious about defending our industry.

It did a fantastic job. It would be difficult to find someone in the western hemisphere who hadn't heard of Parkside Colliery.

The days of action of 2nd and 16th April have been a boost to our campaign. But it is still not big enough. There are still not the number of unions we would like to see involved in these days of industrial action. We would hope the rest of the labour and trade union movement would learn the lessons of the past and not leave us to fight virtually alone.

Our call to the unions for solidarity is not a polite request, it is a demand."

strikes spread the call

springboard to a **Summer of discontent**

After the April 2nd and 16th actions, we must now broaden the struggle, argues **Greg Tucker** (RMT - Train Crew Grades National Secretary, in a personal capacity)



Kings Cross station on April 16th PHOTO: Paul Mattsson

MEMBERS OF the RMT successfully took action in defence of jobs on April 2nd. With feelings running higher than they have for many years, throughout the country the message was the same - 'no trains moving here'. Only on the Chiltern Line could BR get a train running, and that was only because a non-union signalman came into work. Even there the service was only on part of the line, part of the time - just enough for the cameras, but not much more.

Many workers will recognise the issues which led to the strike - cuts, compulsory redundancies and privatisation. BR said they wanted to cut 5,000 jobs - we believe that the final figure may be closer to 20,000. BR has refused to give guarantees of no compulsory redundancies - the RMT finds that unacceptable.

The final bill to privatise British Rail has now been published together with areas to go under the hammer. It has come under attack from all quarters - the proposals will mean a massive attack on working conditions and a worsening of the service to the public, whilst ensuring massive profits for the privateers. From a straightforward practical view the system will not work. But that would be scant consolation to rail workers once their jobs had been sold off.

In an additional twist the Tories plan to 'do a Maxwell' and steal our pension fund. They propose to take over paying for existing BR pensions with funds going to the Treasury whilst still giving franchisees a massive bribe with the existing workers funds. In effect, they are asset-stripping workers' pension funds to provide sweeteners for privatisation.

BR have 'upped the stakes' by withdrawing from the check-off system. This has actually served to strengthen the resolve of workers, and will make union officers forge closer links with members instead of relying on management to deduct union fees from pay.



All this explains why many rail workers feel the time has come to show this government that it cannot continue to ride roughshod over our rights.

April 16th was a real turning point, ASLEF uniting with us in a positive escalation of our dispute. They are now committed, like the RMT, to a programme of one day stoppages. It is vital that co-ordinated united action continues but we have to recognise that one day strikes will not be enough. It is clear that BR and business users can adjust to a day off every couple of weeks. Without further escalation many rail workers will become demoralised. We must move rapidly to an all out stoppage if we are to win our demands.

And we also have to broaden the fightback. There has been a real change in the mood of the workforce - and with bus workers, Ford workers and others taking action it is clear that this is not confined to the railways. We must encourage this growing confidence and extend the actions to other areas. Our lumbering giant of a labour movement is beginning to wake up. Now is the time for other workers to take action to redress their grievances. We need an alliance of all public sector workers, organised both at rank and file level and at the top, co-ordinating a fightback. With the Tories tottering from crisis to crisis the prospects for a successful fight have not been so good in years. ❑

Flying the flag

Paul Field reports from Hong Kong:

The sight of air hostesses and flight attendants staging pickets and occupations would provoke surprise from even the most committed socialist in the West. Yet this is exactly what happened in Hong Kong recently when the 3,500 strong Flight Attendants Union (FAU) of the Cathay Pacific Airways (CPA) staged a strike for a review of staffing levels, negotiation of salaries and reinstatement of dismissed crew. That 'professionals' employed in the service sector should stage one of the longest strikes in the colony's history (seventeen days) and revive Hong Kong's embattled labour movement in the process is incredible enough. Consider also that this dispute took place in a new industrialised economy with a highly concentrated working class, and involved air hostesses taking the lead in the class struggle and it is clear that this strike further undermines the outdated 'theories' advanced by the prophets of 'New Times'.

Cathay Pacific Airways is owned by the British Swire Group and had an estimated profit of HK$3,200 million (US$416m) in 1992. Maxmium expansion at minimum cost is a general rule in the intensely competitive world of international airlines. In Cathay's case this meant forcing flight attendants to fly more than 90 hours a month when the agreed standard is 72 and accept a 6% pay increase plus HK$150 (US$19.46) per month when Hong Kong's inflation topped 9.5% for 1992. CPA's refusal to reinstate three air hostesses dismissed in December for taking part in a small protest at understaffing was the third factor in the dispute.

The strike coincided with Chinese Lunar New Year - a peak travel period. CPA says it lost between $1.3m and $1.9m daily, while many flights were delayed or cancelled in the first days of the strike. When arbitration chaired by Hong Kong's Labour Department broke down, over 1,000 FAU members began round the clock sit-in protests outside government buildings. Management's insistence on the right to discipline strike participants once the dispute was over led FAU members to withdraw from talks and esculate protest actions.

The strike exposes the lack of legal protection for workers who engage in industrial action, perhaps the single biggest fetter restricting the growth of a confident labour movement in Hong Kong. The significance of the strike was not lost to the best parts of the trade union movement. The independent Confederation of Trade Unions formed the 'Coalition in Support of the FAU' which used its 200,000 members to organise petitions and sit down rallies in the airport, the Governors House and a number of government offices. However, the largest union federation, the pro-Beijing Federation of Trade Unions was slow to support the flight attendants' union.

Cathay Pacific Airways adopted a calculated strategy of intimidation to break the strike by deploying 50 scab crew members who operated from Manila and other Asian cities. Management succeeded in keeping some routes open. As the strike entered its third week, the CPA announced it was "finalising its cabin crew roster" and warned that those who did not report back for work the next day would only "be considered for future duty after an application in writing". CPA claims' 90% of the strikers signed up before the deadline expired. Nevertheless, a hardcore of 300 defiant crew members vowed not to return to work without a management guarantee of an amnesty for all union members. Finally, with management promises to reinstate crew sacked earlier and review the staffing situation, the FAU lifted its strike action.

Vital underlying issues, such as the right of workers to withdraw their labour free from the threat of employer reprisals, are far from resolved. However the strike achieved several important breakthroughs. As the *Far Eastern Economic Review* noted "The glamour of the strikers and their high visibility focused attention on the neglected state of workers rights". Responding to public pressure and dissatisfaction from the liberal United Democrats of Hong Kong, the Legislative Council voted to set up a committee to monitor Cathay's treatment of the returning strikers and to review the colony's labour laws. The strike appears to have made strikes a more legitimate means of redressing the gross power imbalance in Hong Kong's labour relations. According to Lee Cheuk-Yan of the Confederation of Trade Unions, the impact of the strike has meant "we have already had other unions contact us for advice about how to protest against budget cutting exercises by their companies".

As Chris Patten does his best to whitewash over 150 years of colonial rule with a last minute package of face saving reform, the Cathay strike has underlined the ongoing tyranny of capital over labour in one of Asia's foremost 'miracle' economies.

Discontent expected

George Durack, Islington Councillor and retired former branch secretary of UCW, previews the forthcoming UCW Conference:

UCW activists see their elected national officials in chaos, whilst management decimates jobs.

The Post Office, expecting privatisation, is closing Post Office outlets, not informing the UCW, restructuring higher grades and sickness guidelines, relocating staff, reducing hours, and attacking union facility time.

Meanwhile, the UCW finds itself paying for two General Secretaries simultaneously. The 'real' General Secretary, Alan Tuffin, is moonlighting as President of the TUC. So Alan Johnson steps in as 'acting' General Secretary - costing the union two national officers' salaries. However, the UCW still failed to tell its members about proposed job-cuts, leaving staff to find out from management. The union is more interested in recruiting a professional editor of its paper, salary £23,000, than disseminating information to its members.

So discontent is rife. Fewer than 10% of members bothered to vote for the UCW's national officers, contrasting with an average turnout of 65% for local union elections. Post office workers turn to *Team Briefing*, a journal outlawed by the UCW at its last Conference, for the real news. Expect an interesting UCW Conference in May.

Steering to victory

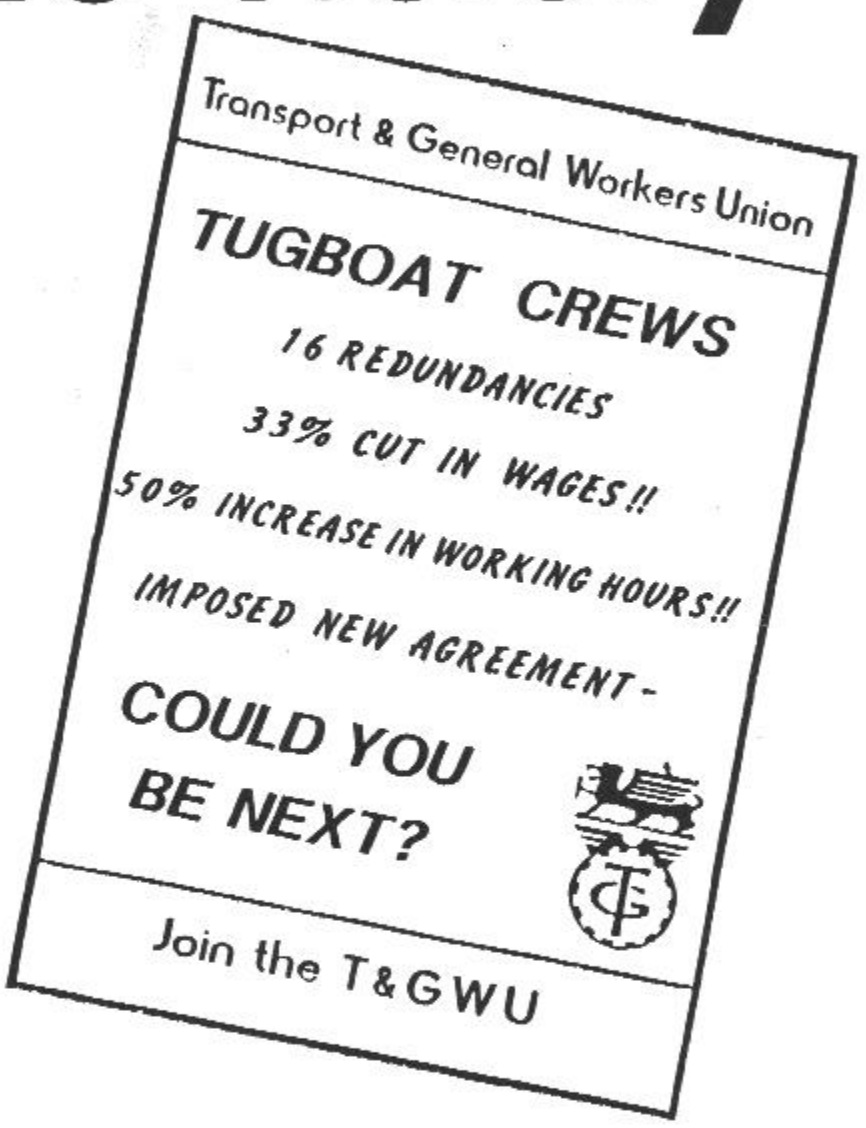
FOR YEARS, the tugboat crews employed by the Cory Towage Company to guide ships through the crowded Bristol Channel benefitted from a negotiated agreement on staffing levels, hours and wages. Then the company imposed new arrangements, reducing the crews from five to four, 16 redundancies over the three ports of Cardiff, Newport and Barry(so one of the tugs would be operated entirely on overtime) and crew members to cover for 72 hours a week each. The T&GWU members balloted and over 40 came out on strike in mid-March. The company recruited agency staff with no experience of the Channel to keep the boats running. The union's fears for health and safety have been amply demonstrated. "Only the other day, I saw a man come off a tug a mass of bruises. There have been Mayday calls from the tugs. Our men are watching the scabs, and worrying about their safety," says Ceri Bush of the T&GWU.

All three docks are being picketed. The company has responded by issuing writs against 13 individuals and the union. The T&GWU will be fighting these in the courts. "We are making every effort to ensure that picketing takes place within the law and cannot condone anything that takes place outside that", says Ceri Bush, "We want the dispute to end as soon as possible and hope that the company will get on and talk to us".

"We have not sought support from Avonmouth and other crews employed by Cory, or elsewhere, but there has been a tremendous amount of spontaneous financial and moral support from all over".

People like the Red Choir and the Cardiff Miners Support Group can claim some of the credit for that. "It is an important local dispute we had to support" says Ed George of the Support Group. The Group called two rallies, one on April 2nd, which brought 100 people to the Cardiff dock gates. The scabs refused to go home without a police escort. They had planned to call two more in April, but have called them off at the request of the tugboat branches. Local activists say that the T&GWU are running scared of the writs, that strikers have been told not to talk to the press, or hold any rallies. "They got told 'Mustn't do that, or you might win" commented an anonymous supporter.

And if the South Wales crews don't win? Tug contracts are awarded by tender. Southampton crews are facing possible redundancies because a Norwegian firm won a contract there at the beginning of April. Other companies are watching Cory's attempt to force down costs at the expense of workers rights and the health and safety of all seafarers: the bosses have no laws to limit their solidarity actions.



● Resolutions in support and money can be sent to Tugboat Crews, T&GWU Wales(Region 4), Transport House, 1, Cathedral Road, Cardiff.

Life Under Lyons

Hugh MacGrillen, London Regional Council Secretary, (personal capacity)previews the MSF Conference opening in Blackpool on 22nd May:

This will be the first opportunity to assess support among the activists for the new Lyons leadership. Since the new General Secretary took office last September, he has moved rapidly to consolidate his position in the union. While cloaking the manoeuvres in populist rhetoric, another personal regime is being established in the style of former General Secretaries Jenkins and Gill. However the political direction has turned sharply to the right in both the political and industrial arenas. The latter is best illustrated by the compulsory arbitration agreement signed with Japanese multinational Toray Textiles in open breach of union policy. It has been made clear by the union's leadership that it is now open season for agreements of this type. Lyons will face criticism at the conference over sweetheart agreements and also over the allegations of scabbing in the Timex dispute, which are denied by the union's leadership. The key political debate will be over links between the Labour Party and the unions; undoubtedly Lyons would like to deliver the MSF vote for John Smith, but there will be a strong drive from delegates to maintain the block vote and union involvement in selecting the Party leader and MPs. This debate will cut across factional divisions in the union and polarise positions along more traditional left/right lines. It will reveal the balance of forces within MSF and the outcome could have a critical influence on the Labour Party conference in October. The Lyons project has been assisted by the current disarray on the left in the union and the main objective at the 1993 Conference is to regroup and develop an attractive alternative to the aimless pragmatism of the new leadership.

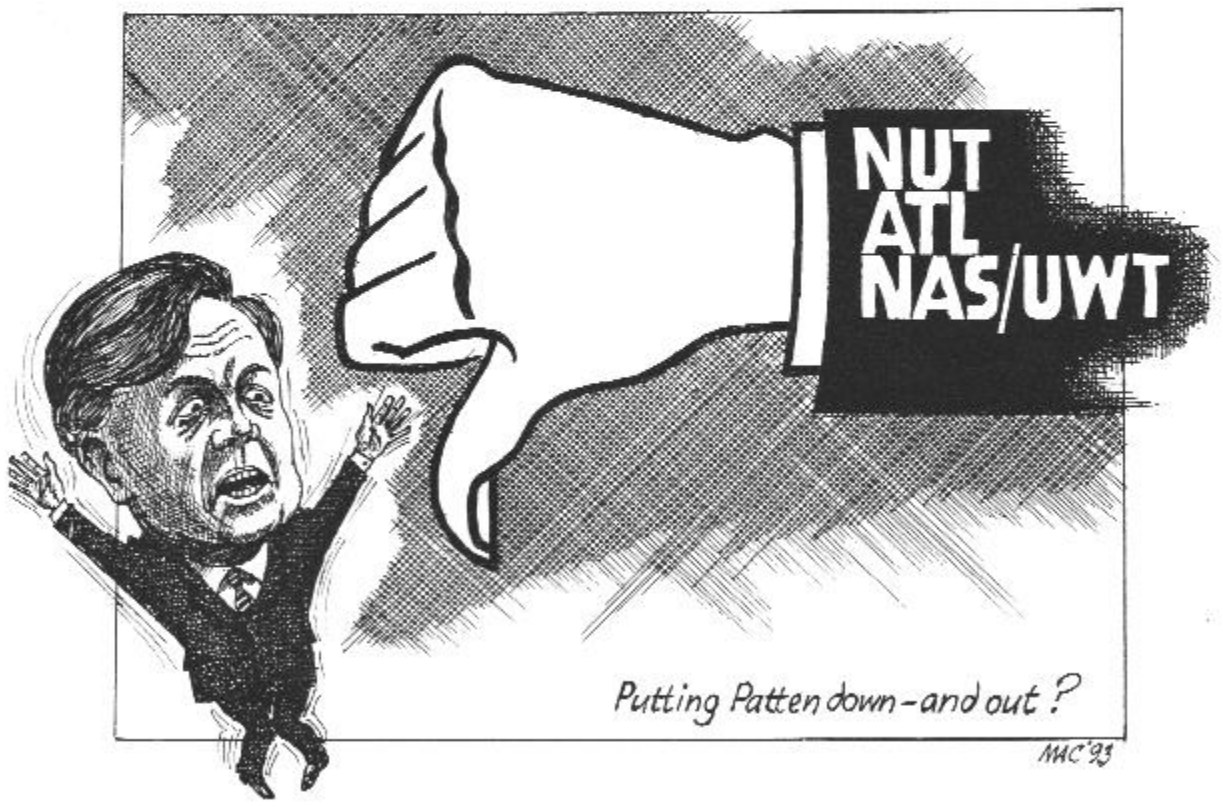
Teach the Tories a lesson

The overdue decision by the main teaching unions to mount a concerted challenge to government policy is to be welcomed by anyone with an interest in education, writes **Glenys Brown**.

THE TORIES attempt to dismiss the proposed boycott of testing and possible strike action over performance related pay as a left-wing plot. It is really the result of fourteen years of government attempts to devalue teachers and create third division schools, forced to peddle Tory propaganda to the majority of our children.

Divide and rule has always been the Tory motto. They have set out to achieve this by creating a tier of moderately well-funded opt-out schools whilst most schools face a shortage of funds for even the most basic equipment.

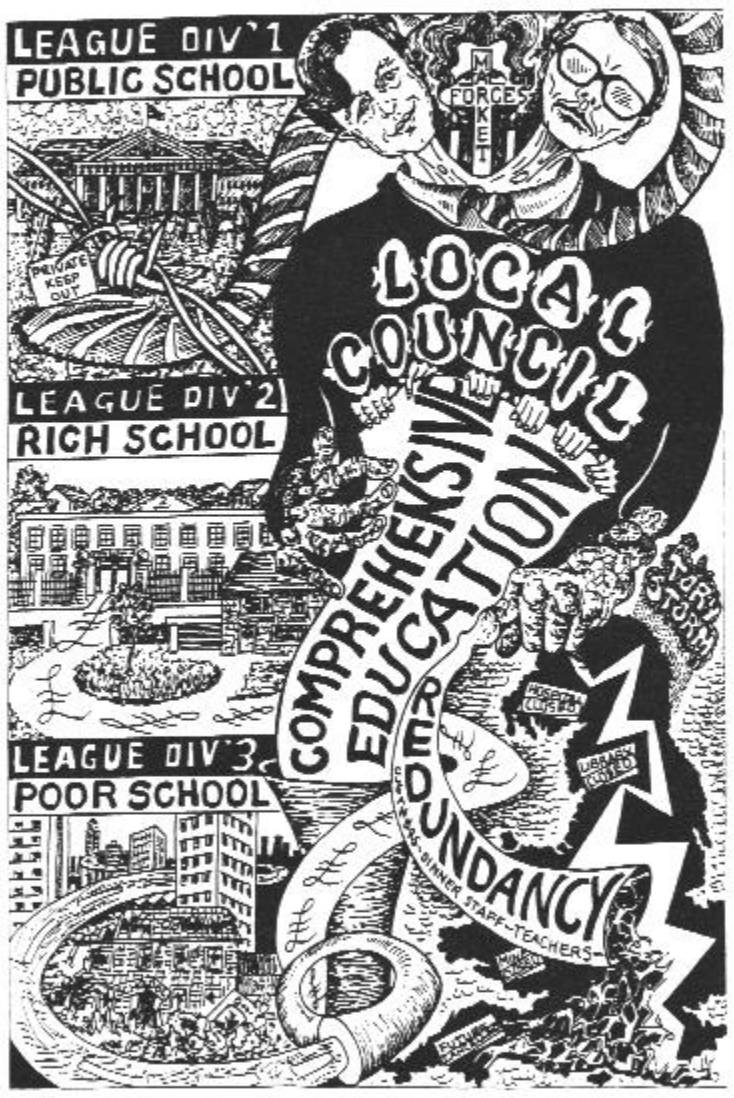
Local authorities have been forced to slash funding to schools with the consequent loss of many teaching posts. For too long many teachers have put up with this, out of loyalty to their students. But now the vast majority of teachers are recognising that the Tories have gone too far this time. The complexity of the National Curriculum and the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) has led to all teachers finding they spend more time as administrators. The attempt to eradicate child-centred learning has been kept at bay by many teachers demonstrating an adaptability which surprised the government. Thus we now see further meddling with the National Curriculum to make it even more prescriptive, thereby stifling the development of imagination and creativity.



Central government dictating which books children should read is really only a more subtle form of book-burning.

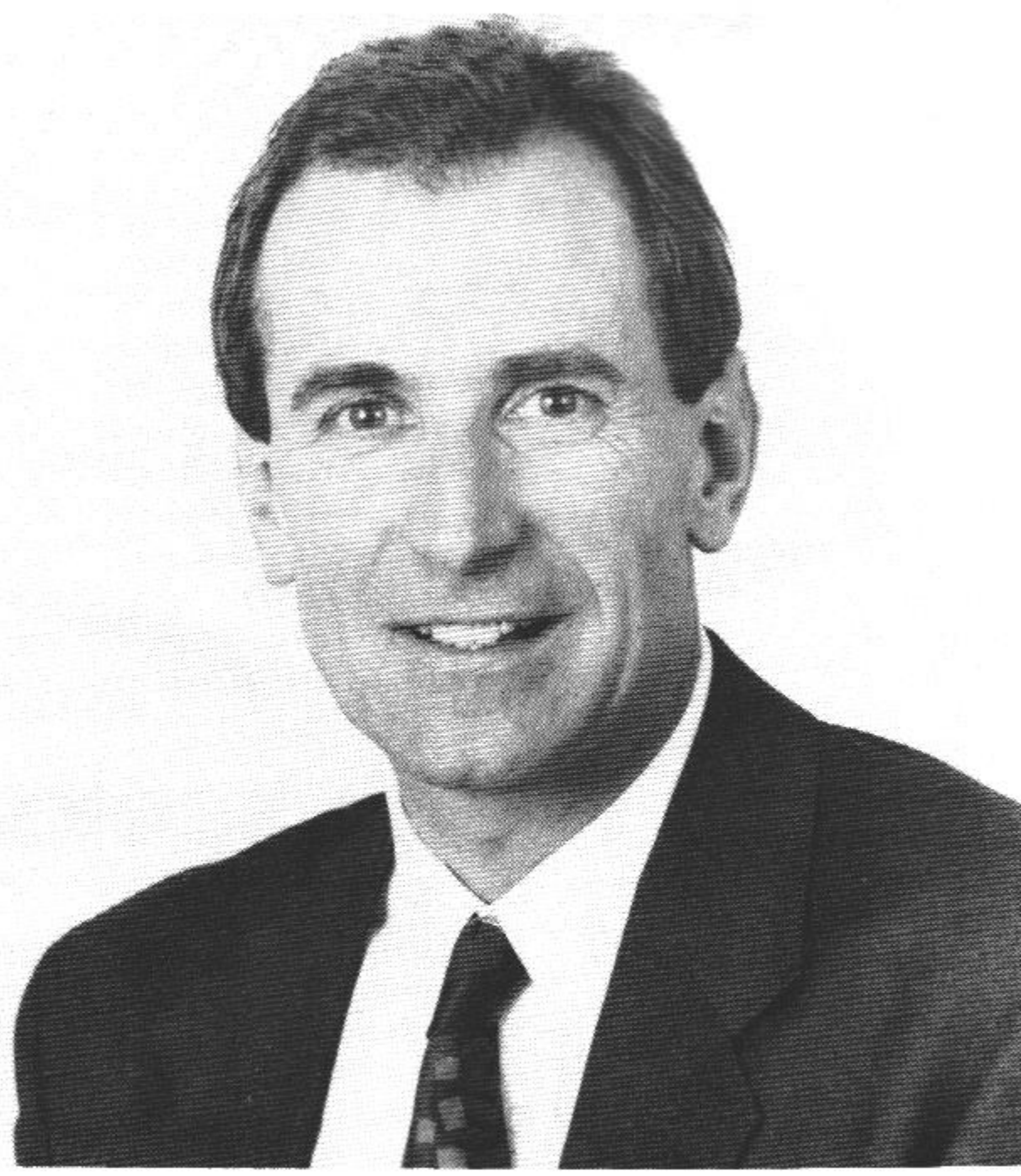
The way forward for teachers now must surely be to unite, not only amongst themselves, but with all other groups of workers involved in struggle against this government. Just as the whole Labour movement should be demanding: no pit closures, no privatisation of the railways and post office, decent wages for all public sector workers and a massive increase in health and social service funding, the following demands must be made:

- a major boost in funding to provide the best learning resources available for all children;
- substantial increase in teachers' salaries and an end to performance-related pay;
- streamlining of the National Curriculum, to reduce the amount of record-keeping to the essential minimum required, and which recognises the benefits of child-centred learning to develop the talents, interests and abilities of all children;
- end to SATs and league tables, placing our trust instead in the teachers' own assessments of their students. ❑



Looking for a left turn

"I had the naive belief that Labour's job was to bring the government down," admits **Alan Simpson** MP for Nottingham South. After a year in Parliament he now knows better.



A YEAR AGO I entered Parliament convinced that Labour had failed to win, not because of Jennifer's ear or the Sheffield rally, but because we hadn't offered a clear, radical alternative to the Tories. What I met on the doorstep were traditional Labour supporters who weren't sure whether they would vote because they weren't sure what we stood for. Many had expressed support for the Lib-Dem proposal to raise tax specifically for education, whilst doubting Labour's tax intentions. It was not the principle of paying, but of knowing where the money was going which worried them.

Labour had sunk, having tied itself to the inspirational phrase that it would make a stand 'as and when resources allow'. Yawn.

I repeat this because I was certain that, out of the gloom, Labour had a chance to make a break from double-breasted respectability and head for ground which set out specific socialist commitments - to full employment, planning and public services, democratic rights which are collective as well as individual. I hadn't anticipated the state of the PLP I was about to walk into.

Eight years of blind obedience does things to people. Many MPs seemed to have parked their critical faculties somewhere and forgotten where that was. The PLP had been running hard on empty phrases - 'one last push' - and a hostile intolerance of socialist dissenters - 'if in doubt, throw them out'.

So I joined the Campaign Group - my kids tell me its my 'parliamentary posse' - simply because it was the niche where you could still talk without embarrassment about the fundamental conflict of interest between capital and labour; where the trade union link was seen as an asset not a liability and Clause 4 still sounded like a really good idea not a dirty habit; where the campaigning base of the Party in the constituencies meant something more than an armchair phone-in or a tuppaware sales network.

The trouble is that the Campaign Group is at the margins of the PLP - not so much a mass movement, more a large and boisterous bus queue. The challenge it faces is how to build a broader base for the left in Parliament and how to build links with the new left which is beginning to re-form outside.

Having said this, I've just had to pause for a laugh. The Parliamentary left is now made up of many of those who simply stood still as the leadership line drifted further to the right. It includes some who joined Tribune and others who are in no group at all. The trouble is that we're divided, and that's tragic.

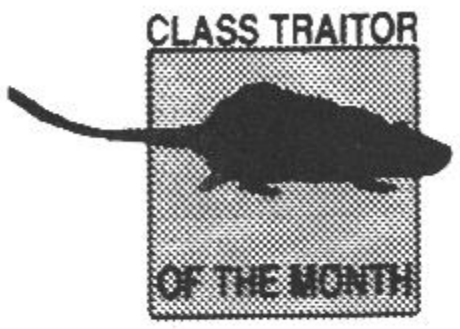
I've never seen a government in such a mess: stumbling from cock-up to chaos, driven along on a precarious cocktail of arrogance and incompetence, unconstrained by an opposition with the will to defeat them.

I had the naive belief that Labour's job was to bring the government down. The Maastricht debate disabused me of that notion. On almost every occasion where we might have defeated the Bill, the whips have been sent out urging a three-line abstention. There hasn't been a single issue that we've taken a stand on. We have refused to side with those in dispute with the Tories, and have failed to make commitments to reverse Tory policies or replace them with clear alternatives of our own. From a grass-roots level, I seem to face a recurrent plea. Often it doesn't come from those who have been traditionally on the left. It is very simple: 'Can't you get Labour to take a stand on something (anything!), that makes it recognisably different from the Tories?'

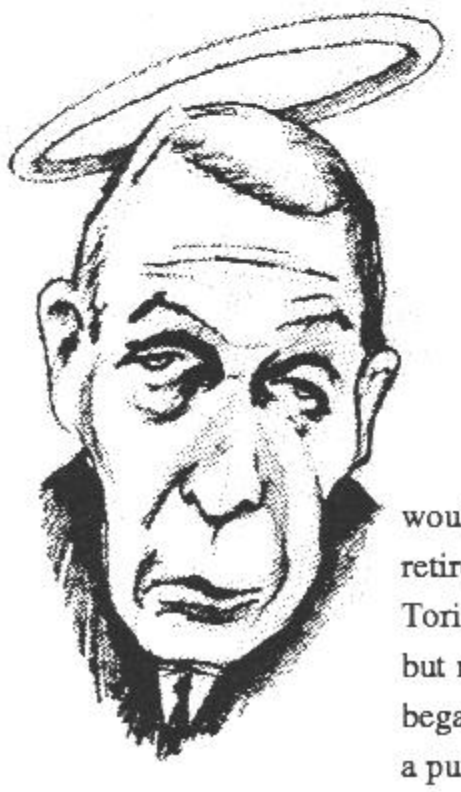
The answer is probably 'no'.

Yet if there was ever a time to be arguing for a return to full employment, surely it is now. Could it be clearer that we need a national energy policy with a renationalised energy supply industry; that the market has failed and that only a planned economy is capable of meeting the human and environmental challenge of the 21st century?

However the left needs something more than slogans. We need to be working on detailed plans for change. We need the strength and ingenuity of the growing network of Campaign Groups at constituency level. We need to harness the imagination of those who were not persuaded to stop thinking critically during our years in opposition. The left inside Parliament has to see itself as more than just a series of unconnected fragments, if it is to offer anything of value to the wider movement, or indeed the electorate as a whole. ❑



Saint Frank seeks reward



A pillar of the establishment posing as an iconoclast, **Frank Field** - this month's Class Traitor - has proved an ever-valiant defender of his own inalienable right to be an MP, regardless of the views of Labour Party members.

AFTER ONE year as a Young Conservative, Frank Field joined the Labour Party at the age of 17. In the seventies, as director of the Child Poverty Action Group, his use of leaked cabinet minutes to force the Labour government to honour its pledge on child benefit won him admirers on the left. Selection for the safe Labour seat of Birkenhead followed in 1979.

In Parliament he joined the Tribune Group but was soon set on the course that would make him (following the 1992 retirement of Sir Patrick Duffy) the Tories' favourite Labour MP. His long but never lonely war against the left began as early as 1980 when he called for a purge of *Militant*.

The next few years were taken up with denunciations of Arthur Scargill, attacks on the block vote, flirtations with PR and coalitions and repeated calls for a return to incomes policy, one of his favourite themes.

After a brief appearance on Kinnock's first frontbench in 1984, he abandoned the PLP hierarchy and instead sought eminence by cultivating the media.

In 1987, he became chair of the Select Committee on Social Security - thanks to help from far right Tory MP Nicholas Winterton, who convinced fellow Tories to back Field over Audrey Wise, the official Labour choice for the post. That the Tories feel so comfortable with Field as chair of this sensitive committee says a great deal about his famous 'radicalism'. After all, this was the only Labour MP to congratulate Norman Fowler on his token 10p increase in child benefit in 1986.

On the married man's allowance, minimum wage, youth training, Field has been haughtily out of step with the labour movement; his alternative to the welfare state is a muddled mishmash of high-tech jargon and poor law logic. Recently he tried to claim that his lecture on employment and taxation was censored by Channel 4 because it was too "radical". In fact, as the TV programmers made clear, it was dropped simply because it was too long, boring and incomprehensible.

His battle with his Constituency Labour Party began in the early eighties, when he first threatened to stand as an independent if deselected. He refused to lift a finger to help local Cammell Laird workers in their struggle against redundancies and denounced their occupation of the shipyards in the local press.

In the run-up to the 1987 general election he appeared on BBC TV to advise voters to back the SDP-Liberal Alliance in seats where Labour came third. Field's call for tactical voting was used by the Liberals against the Labour candidate in Southend West. When the latter asked Field for help in rebutting the Liberal attack, he replied: "I stand by what I said on tactical voting and I don't issue statements in support of anyone."

Nonetheless, he was only too keen to issue statements attacking Lol Duffy, the left-winger who was standing for Labour in adjacent Wallasey. Field's 'private' letter attacking Duffy was published in the local newspaper days before the election, which Duffy lost by 279 votes.

In the selection contest held in Birkenhead in late 1989 Field was beaten in the electoral college by TGWU official Paul Davies, and he stormed to the press crying '*Militant* infiltration'. Field announced that he would resign and fight a by-election if the Party leadership failed to back him. He then embarked on a high profile media campaign to save himself, indifferent to any damage he might cause to the Labour Party.

A bizarre 150-page dossier submitted by Field to the NEC (and the press) was full of preposterous, often illiterate assertions, as well as gossip about sexual liaisons amongst Field's opponents. It noted in passing that one of them was "five feet tall with duck feet". As evidence of his major charge of "intimidation", Field cited incidents in which members of the Birkenhead GC had laughed at him.

Cynically coupling his self-defence with an attack on trade union influence in the Party, Field accused the TGWU of affiliating to Birkenhead CLP on the basis of inappropriate membership (ie. unemployed members who lived in the constituency). Meanwhile, Field himself was a member of the TGWU Dockworkers Branch 6/506.

Even Kinnock's NEC could not bring itself to swallow the Field dossier. It was buried in embarrassed silence, though not before the NEC has used it as a pretext to launch a crackdown on the left in the Wirral. Joyce Gould tried hard but was unable to uphold a single one of Field's allegations.

Nonetheless, the leadership acceded to Field's threats and agreed to hold a new selection contest. This was delayed repeatedly as Field tried to buy time to rally his forces in Birkenhead. Finally, in June 1991, Field won a second selection contest, thanks to some old-fashioned ballot rigging by a new regional officer, presumably at the national leadership's behest.

So Birkenhead was saved for Saint Frank. This High Church Anglican is a lifelong opponent of a woman's right to choose, and he backed the Alton Bill in 1988. Although in the past he backed the ordination of women, now that the crunch has come he is doing his utmost to sabotage it. Ostensibly he is defending the right of bishops opposed to women's ordination to maintain their positions - in reality he is using his place on the Parliamentary Ecclesiastical Committee to make it impossible for any women to be ordained.

Field's one abiding conviction is that he and he alone knows best. Constitutionally incapable of mixing with working-class people, whom he clearly despises, his much vaunted 'independence' is solely an independence from the labour movement and its democratic structures. The press likes to present his gaunt, unsmiling visage as that of a martyred ascetic. Long time Commons observers are unconvinced. One recently described him as "Self-important, uptight, humourless. He likes to tell people how he got beat up at school. Well, he probably deserved it." ❑

With God on our side

We were recently confronted with the public spectacle of a Christian Socialist church service presided over by John Smith and involving a number of other Labour frontbenchers. Labour was heralded as the real party of Christianity, standing for "God and family values"! Avowed atheist **Keith Veness** (Islington North CLP) rejects this as rubbish, believing that secularism and socialism are in fact totally inter-dependent.



POSSIBLY the only explicitly socialist characteristic of previous Labour leaders Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock was their dislike of organised religions. Foot was proudly atheist and Kinnock at least always made clear his agnosticism and his refusal to support any religious body. Not so John Smith. This practising low-church Christian has the effrontery to suggest that his own narrow values should be those of the Labour Party.

The recent spectacle of a church service full of humbug about family values and Labour Christianity shows just how far the retreat from any sort of socialism has gone. Yet this is completely at odds with the actual membership of the Labour Party and indeed of the modern make-up of Britain.

All opinion polls and collated figures show that Britain is now overwhelmingly secular. Some seven to eight million people are practising members of Christian denominations (the majority of them now owing allegiance to Rome rather than Canterbury!) and another four million are at least nominally involved in non-Christian religions (half of these are Moslems with large numbers of Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and Buddhists, among others). Nearly forty million people express no religious views and do not take part in any church or other religious organisation.

However it is clear that religious fanatics hold a totally out-of-proportion influence in many areas of public life, including education and many parts of the voluntary sector. We still have the bizarre spectacle of a state Church which has the power to appoint bishops to the House of Lords, have its affairs debated in Parliament and determine the future monarch of the kingdom.

There is also enforced Christian worship in schools and its direct corollary of various fundamentalist groups of Jews, Moslems and 'Seventh-Day Adventists' demanding their own schools. The state still underwrites the schools controlled by the Anglican and Roman churches and by certain Jewish synagogues. These schools are paid for out of taxes and local rates without regard to the views of the people levied to pay them.

Organised religions still manage to intrude onto our TV screens, though thankfully the wretched God-slot on Sundays appears to be withering away. No discussion on crime, sex, drinking alcohol or playing sport on Sunday is complete without the baleful presence of a dog-collared bigot pronouncing on whether the aforesaid item is in line with his (for it usually is an elderly male) moral precepts.

Yet none of this accords with the reality of Britain in 1993. We are now a largely atheist and agnostic society, averse to having moral theology stuffed down our throats. Ours is also a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society.

For a leader of a political party committed to social change to parade around as a religious figure is daft and dangerously divisive. We do not subscribe to 'family values' - certainly not if they consist of the intolerant, anti-abortion, anti-gay, anti-women's rights values that most people rightly ascribe to Christian ethics.

Recent evidence shows that Christianity owes very little to the teachings of a Jewish resistance leader crucified in Roman Palestine around two thousand years ago. It is mostly derived from the fertile imagination of a certain Paul of Tarsus who clearly invented the whole resurrection myth and the 'son of God' nonsense and grafted it onto a small Jewish sect as a recruitment ploy in the largely Hellenistic and Roman world of the Mediterranean. There were then many other competing religions whose gods were required to come back from the dead - Mithras, Bacchus, Osiris and many others all performed the same trick. The organised Christianity we now know is simply the one that managed to lever itself into becoming the state religion of a Roman Empire already in its death throes.

Socialist attitudes to religions have to be ones of tolerance tempered by a healthy scepticism. Anyone should have the right to privately worship and practise any religion no matter how bizarre or irrational. However, no-one has the right to force anyone else to subscribe to their religious beliefs or to force those moral values of their faith onto other people who reject them. Far from standing for Christian values, Labour should be the party of secular freedom.

We should be calling for the disestablishment of the Anglican Church, for schools and the media to be free from religion, and for science rather than superstition to be the determinant of facts. John Smith's latest call-to-prayer must be rejected. ❑

Is *Briefing* boring?

"*Briefing* is often lots of fun but equally often as dull as a Greater Moscow council state tower block, serving up endless rehashing of the half-baked certitudes of traditional left Labourism. It also gives the disconcerting impression of being produced by and for a rather small clique in half a dozen inner London Labour Parties," wrote Dave Osler in his review of the left press in last month's *Briefing*. **Mike Marqusee**, *Briefing's* Political Correspondent, answers the charges.

WHY DO WE bother? Why do we persist, against the odds, in getting *Briefing* out every month?

Speaking for myself, I know a key motivation is a belief I share with Dave Osler. The left press can be better than it is. Partisan labour movement journalism need not be predictable, sectarian or inaccessible.

At *Briefing*, we have made a point of emphasising hard news and useful information. We don't decide to run an article because we agree with it - we don't even agree among ourselves half the time. The test for us is: is it pertinent, informative, stimulating? Does it come from someone with relevant, first-hand involvement in the struggle? If not, we bin it.

Our focus is on the Labour Party and trade unions, but our field of vision is much wider. We try to give a platform to autonomous campaigns - including in the last year the Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign and the Justice for Women campaign, to name only two - to argue their case and appeal directly to our readers for solidarity. We don't waste precious space (we can never publish all the stories we would like) preaching a 'correct line' to those already in struggle.

When it comes to miscarriages of justice, we have not just hopped on the bandwagon when the fight was all but won. We have publicised hitherto unreported abuses and offered practical support to ongoing campaigns. Likewise, we have let trade union activists speak for themselves - without recourse to an anonymous central committee or deference to the labour establishment. That aim has informed our coverage of the Joint Sites Committee, the miners' struggle, etc.

Our international coverage is not comprehensive but we have steered clear of the temptation to comment on events from afar, concentrating instead on presenting reports from comrades with direct experience of the labour and liberation movements in the countries under discussion. Our coverage of Ethiopia, Central America, South Africa, the USA, France, Thailand, India, Turkey and Kurdistan has raised questions and reported developments often ignored by the rest of the left press.

Yes, we have published things Dave might consider "half baked certitudes of traditional left Labourism" - defence of Clause 4, the NHS or the trade union link, opposition to Maastricht, the witch-hunt and local government cuts. But we don't leave it at that. We want *Briefing* to be used (along with as many other papers as possible) to help organise the Labour left. We want it to be used by activists to raise new issues, explore areas of doubt, assess the toll of defeat and plot new strategies to victory.

As is well known, we also try to keep the antics of the Labour and trade union hierarchies under the microscope. We can only hold our leaders to account if we know what they're doing in our name with our money. That's what Class Traitor of the Month is all about.

Of course, while we're at it, we also try to have fun. Our readers are not political automatons. If we smother our anger and laughter, irony and doubt, we may lose the best parts of ourselves. So we mock our enemies but we also mock ourselves. I think even our severest critics would concede that when it comes to taking the piss out of ourselves, *Briefing* has few rivals. Of course, many might say that we have more to take the piss out of than others!

Briefing has been a trail blazer in several respects, notably in its attempt to wed partisanship with pluralism. We don't claim to have an answer to all the working class's ills; we don't claim any privileged organisational or ideological role. Some people have found our coverage of Yugoslavia, for example, inconsistent and inconclusive. But those left periodicals which made their minds up in advance what the 'lessons' of the war in the Balkans would be have been unable to fulfil the left's single biggest need in regard to Yugoslavia: open, informed, uninhibited debate. So we have printed opinions that have offended people on all sides of the controversy.

Such are the penalties of pluralism. Not everyone took kindly to the portrait of Sendero Luminoso which Ronan Bennet drew in his moving article in the July *Briefing*. We were happy to print it, not because the editorial board endorses Ronan's perspective on Peru (which he himself, in any case, advanced in a tentative, personal idiom) but because it was a thought-provoking contribution to a necessary discussion.

We were among the first to carry the criticisms of *Searchlight* made by black organisations and by journalist Larry O'Hara. We also provided *Searchlight* with a full right of reply.

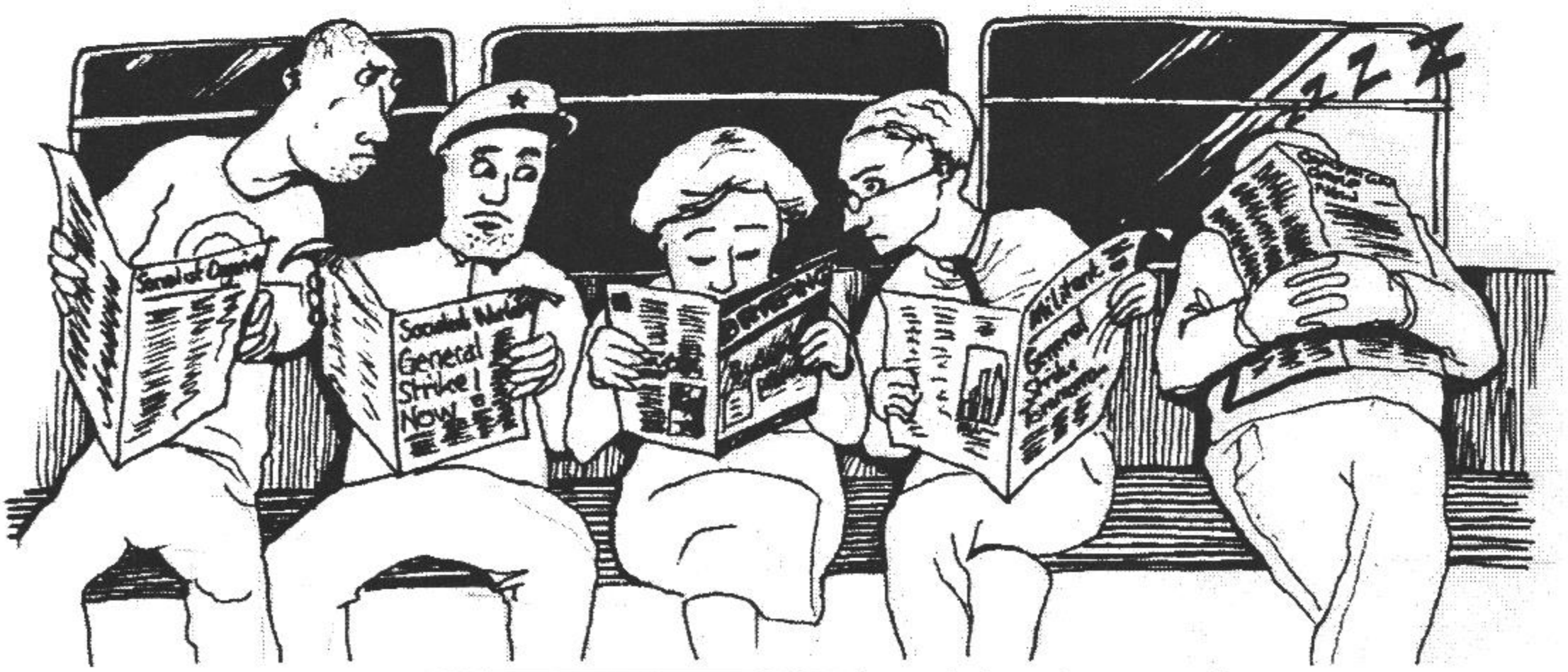
In an editorial we strongly endorsed the formation of ARA. In a subsequent issue we ran an interview with Unmesh Desai who made strong criticisms of ARA. I know this made a number of people active in ARA very angry with us but I am not sorry we ran an interview with a leading black activist which allowed him to make serious, if contentious points about the future of

the anti-racist movement.

Critical and open debate is a sine qua non for the left. Of course, that debate ought to be conducted in a responsible manner, aiming at achieving greater clarity and unity in action. Often, however, left journals either pretend that nothing is happening on the left in which they are not involved or indulge in factional critiques devalued by distortion or caricature of rival positions. Our motto is 'always pick on someone bigger than yourself'. So our main targets have been the minions of the ruling class in the labour movement. When it comes to that lot, our battle cry is 'No quarter!'

None of this does wonders for fund-raising. We cannot rely either on an organised group committed to street-corner sales, nor on friends in high places able to bankroll us through paid adverts. We can safely boast that our resources are amongst the most meagre on the left. Yet in the last year we have run articles by over 100 contributors (hailing from 35 Constituency Labour Parties - and from none), letters from forty readers, and covered everything from RSI to OutRage, police corruption to HIV, football to the Asylum Bill. To do this, our one full-time worker and occasional copy typist have to call on extensive voluntary help from people already up to their necks in campaigning socialist activities in and around the labour movement. Given these limitations, the breadth, variety and quality of the coverage we offer is remarkable.

Finally, is *Briefing* boring? Well, maybe sometimes, but I'm confident that in the boredom stakes we've been lapped several times by most of our sister papers on the left. ❑



The *Briefing* board

What is to be done on the *Briefiing* Editorial Board
Co-Chair Sue Lukes outlines the role of the EB.

The function of the EB is to produce the magazine, and to raise the necessary money, by sales, subs, and fundraising activities. Obviously, those involved in *Briefing* share a commitment to the principles outlined in the magazine itself, but we are not an 'organisation' with a line on everything. The editorial board meets monthly on Sunday afternoons, in London.

What do members of the editorial board have to do?

We do have some expectations of EB members. They should:

- turn up to meetings regularly, or send in their apologies;
- abide by the code of conduct during meetings;
- sell the magazine and pay promptly for the magazines they sell;
- write and commission articles on request;
- support the magazine financially according to their means; selling it, taking out subs, etc.

Why should you go on the Editorial Board?

- because you want to make *Briefing* work;
- because you have experience, ideas and enthusiasm to contribute;
- because you are a socialist committed to learning from others as well as promoting socialist ideas and action in the working class and its organisations.

Elections take place at the AGM.

Bolshevism or bust

"A long shot for would-be socialist millionaires? Labour Briefing, the cash-strapped organ of the extreme left, is offering its readers the chance to invest in `Briefing Bearer Bonds' to help support the newspaper. They pay an impressive 15 per cent interest - redeemable `24 hours after the revolution'".

This is how The Times Diary described our most recent money-making initiative. The wealthy organ of the ruling class has never been slow to spot a bargain. As the Labour movement awakes, Briefing Bonds may well prove to be the snip of the century.

Get yours now!



BRIEFING INTERVIEW

Militant march out

Following Scottish Militant Labour, launched last year, Militant Labour has now been established nationwide. *Briefing* Editor **Richard Hanford** questioned **Ray Apps**, National Committee member of Militant Labour, on what Britain's newest political organisation is all about.



LB: In the very first issue of *Militant* in 1964, Peter Taaffe's editorial stated that certain tendencies have played into the hands of Transport House by their sectarian and hooligan attitudes. Instead of trying to win the sympathy and support of the labour rank and file...they have alienated this sympathy by going outside the movement with futile adventures. Isn't this just another futile adventure?

RA: No, because we will still adopt the same sympathetic, friendly, comradely approach to the trade union and Labour Party rank and file. We certainly haven't given up on the idea of fighting to transform the trade unions or the Labour Party. But we live in the real world, and we have to work in the situation as it is, not as we would like it to be.

LB: But won't your evacuation of the Labour Party just make it more difficult for those remaining in the Party to transform it from within?

RA: We're not evacuating the Labour Party, although of course many of us have been expelled. We're asking no-one to resign from the Party, and we'll be working very closely with Party members. It's not us who are making things difficult for those fighting in the Party, it's the right-wing bureaucracy and the fact that membership, according to a secret NEC report, has fallen to 90,000. In 1964, indeed up until recently, we and others had the opportunity to argue and debate within the Labour Party, but now you can't. You don't have to be a Militant, but as soon as you raise any opposition to the right-wing's policies or suggest any campaigns they think might embarrass the leadership, you get expelled.

LB: *Militant*'s 'What we stand for', which described *Militant* as a "growing trend" within the Party and "the largest organised force on the left", stated bluntly that "the right wing...are moving heaven and earth in an attempt to remove the Marxists from the Party. Their efforts are doomed to failure. It's impossible to stamp out ideas through organisational measures." Surely your formation of Militant Labour now represents an admission of defeat?

RA: It's just a recognition of the realities at present. In all wars there are times to change strategy and tactics, times to advance and times to retreat. We've reached a conclusion that there are now hundreds of thousands who want to fight, to struggle, and see no opportunity for this in the Labour Party. We're going to win them to Militant Labour. We will return to the task, in a big way in the future, with the thousands of members we then have, in transforming the Labour Party.

LB: Steve Nally's 336 votes in the Lambeth by-election - do you see this as a significant result that can be repeated elsewhere?

RA: We think we inspired a whole layer of people who wouldn't normally vote in elections. It's not just a question of counting the votes. If out of that figure we get thirty or forty people to join Militant Labour and become active in struggles, then that's an advance.

LB: Is this new move an act of desperation borne out of frustration with the Labour Party?

RA: No, we've had almost a year of thorough discussions and debate and reached a democratic decision of the necessity of establishing Militant Labour in order to hold together those who still maintain their faith and belief in socialism, and those who realise that things have to change. They're not being attracted to Labour at present because of the leadership's policies, and we can win them. What determined our decision was the recognition that for the immediate years that lie ahead, the Labour Party's not a sufficient pole of attraction to those who want to fight. We think that will change in the future.

LB: Does that mean that you're seeking to rival or emulate the SWP, which has found it easier to recruit outside the Labour Party? Then surely you too will merely consign yourselves to the role of cheerleaders on the sidelines of struggle?

RA: No, because the SWP has an entirely different approach to the Party than we have. It says that the Labour Party is a bourgeois party, and all the other slogans of that particular character. All it does is reproduce articles making criticism of this or that particular leader. You never see an analysis of the policy or programme, or any meaningful alternative put forward. We can't be compared with the SWP, which is sectarian through and through.

LB: It's bigger too.

RA: Who knows...?

LB: To clarify the position: Is Militant Labour a new party?

RA: It would be a bit much, frankly, to call ourselves a party. ML is an organisation, but we wouldn't describe ourselves as a party. The SWP calls itself a party, with a few thousand members. But a party is really hundreds of thousands.

LB: So you're not completely divorced from Labour, still having supporters inside the Party. But hasn't their position become untenable now, left clearly exposed to the witch-hunt? You are surely putting their membership at risk?

RA: You see where that question lies. You stay in the Party at all costs, you keep your head down, your mouth shut, you don't argue against the right-wing drift. But frankly what's the point of that for a socialist? You should argue boldly, whether you are a member of Militant Labour, *Briefing* or any other organisation, for the ideas you hold.

LB: So what would be your message to *Briefing* readers and others on the left of the Labour Party?

RA: They must reach their own conclusions. They have their own policies and ideas, and we've worked together

with many of them in the past, and if they remain within the Party we hope we can work with them in the future. Whether they remain within the Party at the present is a decision for them to make. They have to ask themselves these questions. How best can I preserve the fundamental ideas that the Party used to hold? How can I best defend the ideas of socialism? How can I bring people together? How can I save people from despair? Whether it is best to keep one's head down and not put up a real struggle in order to remain in the Party, or to continue to fight for their ideas with the possibility of inviting expulsion. I'm not asking anyone to leave the Labour Party.

LB: Critics could argue that now the Liverpool experiment of 'socialism in one city' had failed, you've got no parliamentary representatives left, and this move is perceived merely an act of despair?

RA: It is not an act of despair. We remain extremely confident of the future. We retain our faith, despite all the difficulties. We are doing this out of a realisation of the real situation in which we are working.

LB: So you may reconsider re-joining the Labour Party at a later date?

RA: The future will determine that. It cannot be denied that at some time in the future the working class will draw the conclusion of the necessity for struggle. They will move to their traditional organisations, the trade unions and the Labour Party. But we can't say under what conditions this will happen, when and how it will happen. So we can't say in advance how we will participate in that. It may be in the form of affiliation...

LB: It won't involve joining the SWP?

RA: No. We don't agree with its policies, its programme or its sectarian approach towards the official organisations.

LB: This is the centenary year of the Independent Labour Party, who dwindled away into obscurity after disaffiliation from the Labour Party. Doesn't that show the potential dangers that lie ahead?

RA: The ILP split away on the wrong issues and at the wrong time. But it is the policies which are essential and determine the future for a revolutionary Marxist organisation. We are extremely confident.

Fire bell tolls for NOLS

By our correspondent at the recent National Organisation of Labour Students Conference in York.



The conference was good for the left all things considered. Day one saw PR booted out - much to the chagrin of NOLS right wing and *Socialist Organiserr*. The sabbatical elections were a shock for the right: soft leftist David Blunt gained 30 votes to bankrupt bureaucrat Tom Watson's 47. Hamish Renton gained 43 votes to the right wing candidate's 48.

Renton was seriously worried during the count that he might have to spend a year in Walworth Road! He needn't have worried - he would have been carved out straight after the conference when the tanks rolled back down the A1 to Walworth Road.

Motions on the miners campaign were carried as were commitments to full employment - via the market and social chapter. The most positive outcome of the conference is that it further exposed the bankruptcy of the New Directions caucus. Eight bog standard middle class woollies were steamrollered onto the NC. Blunt and Renton, the principled anti-establishment candidates came close but the right wing did their best to convince the waverers and independents that both were fronts for 'discredited Left Unity etc etc'. Fitzkinnock was on fine form when she accused Renton of setting off a fire alarm to disrupt events. "What a sad bunch of Stalinist bastards," commented Renton ruefully. Nevertheless, the left vote showed there is a groundswell of opposition to the NOLS leadership throughout the colleges and that the dustbin of history eagerly awaits Lorna and Co.

Jumping through hoops

Dorothy Macedo, Hendon South CLP, reviews the National Conference of Labour Women, in Llandudno on 3rd-4th April.

The attendance was good, but the atmosphere was low-key. The standard of debate was generally high even though most resolutions were not contentious.

The NEC Women's Committee (NECWC) were defeated on three issues: they asked for composites re-affirming commitment to a Ministry for Women, for women-only shortlists, and no cuts in the women's organisation to be remitted. The movers refused, and they were carried. The NECWC would probably also have been defeated on the vote for women's conference to be held every year but the mover, Anni Marjoram agreed to remit, much to everyone's amazement.

The first animated debate was on the Women's Organisation. This was preceded by Margaret Beckett's address. Her late arrival ate into the one hour allocated to this crucial debate. Her speech wasn't really worth waiting for either. Larry Whitty was present as usual for this debate, indicating that it is the only one that counts at women's conference (a point I made in my speech). The right of the National Conference of Labour Women (NCLW) to elect the 5 women's places on the NEC, surprisingly supported by the NECWC, was carried overwhelmingly. Seconding this composite, I pointed out that there would be no problem attracting women to the NCLW if only it had some power. Later Clare Short said we still could not have this right as the NCLW is not "representative" enough. This is a damn cheek: the very poorly attended LPYS conference was allowed to elect their NEC rep. No other section of the Party has to jump through hoops like this. Our esteemed leader John Smith sent a message to the Conference.

His apology for absence was greeted with derision.

Rescue revealed, rescue resisted

After the stormy scenes caused by the arrival of American anti-abortionists, *Labour Briefing* sought the full facts from **Leonora Lloyd**, Convenor of the National Abortion Campaign.

LB: Who are these anti-abortion terrorists?

LL: The Americans are mainly from a small group called Rescue Outreach, headed by Don Treshman. He and his group were present at the picket of a clinic in Florida just before Dr Gunn was shot. He says he regrets the killing, but he perfectly understands it. Some of those who have come over this time, like Kathy O'Keefe, joined Rescue UK's leader, Catholic priest James Morrow, four years ago. They stayed a few weeks, then most went to other parts of Europe to conduct rescues - as they plan to do this time.

LB: Why did they come to Britain?

LL: They've come again because Morrow has failed to gain enough support within the UK. Morrow set up his group in the first place because parliamentary and other mainstream anti-abortion activity had totally failed. LIFE and SPUC have half-heartedly condemned their activities, but they totally agree with their aims and some of their members actively support them. Both organisations have conducted pickets of clinics for many years: they stand quietly, holding placards and praying. They do not try to prevent women going in, so in terms of violence they are not on the same scale, but in terms of unpleasantness they are.



Leonora Lloyd

LB: Can you describe a typical 'rescue'?

LL: They try to arrive at the clinic before the staff to prevent them, and patients, from getting in. They try to padlock doors or glue locks. No-one can get out either, so any patients or staff who have been in the clinic overnight are trapped. They may invade clinics. In one case, a woman on crutches was assisted to enter by staff, but once inside, she threw away the crutches and her friends on the picket ran in behind her. In Liverpool, Morrow tried to take patients' files and in a court case claimed that he had the right to see them in order to prove that the abortions were illegal. In another case, he was accused of upsetting women by displaying disturbing photographs, but he argued that he genuinely believed that they did not upset women. The Appeal Court accepted that he believed this and he got off! Obviously, he can't use that argument again!

LB: How has NAC responded to Rescue?

LL: We organised two meetings for supporters, set up an early morning clinic watch and a telephone tree. We have contacted all the clinics and try to respect their wishes. The patients and staff are our first priorities, in that order, not NAC or any other organisation. If people start screaming and shouting on pickets, it upsets the women going in, whoever does it. After all, when there are demonstrators there, women walk in quickly with their eyes on the ground, and don't distinguish between anti-abortion and pro-choice pickets. So I don't think we should escalate our activities outside clinics until the other side do. Our supporters should work with us on that basis which is the only way we will get the trust of the clinics. In Birmingham, members of Rescue who invaded a clinic on 3rd April were arrested, but their colleagues were allowed to continue to mount a picket, whilst our members were not allowed by the police to help patients get into the clinic. One of our supporters - a Sikh - was also arrested. Our members escorted patients in through the back door. Actually, Rescue has concentrated more on media publicity rather than doing much in the way of activity. Our main response has been to counter all their publicity and seek to make clear the links with the mainstream anti-abortion groups - they use much the same arguments. For example, they argue that abortion is dangerous to women's health, but that the dangers of illegal abortion - including the death rates - are exaggerated!

Treshman and Morrow's groups go further than this, arguing that women who claim to have had an abortion must be lying, as anyone who has had one would be too ashamed to admit it. They also argue that 'abortionism' is actively promoted, and is part of a eugenics programme. The reality is that when abortion is illegal, it is overwhelmingly black, poor and third world women who die.

Rescue's members do not hesitate to lie. For example, on every TV appearance, they claim to have had 'thousands' of phone calls from supporters, but the reality is that there are no listed phones for Rescue and even journalists contact us for their phone numbers!

They have had far more publicity than when they last came over, before, but it has really helped us. Whenever the issue is raised, the public has to make up its mind and each time more are in favour of choice.

LB: What about Treshman's right to free speech?

LL: Treshman has been arrested for public order offences in the States over fifty times and convicted at least thirty-five. He is a criminal who intends to commit crimes here. He has never been arrested for what he says, only for what he has done. I object to SPUC and LIFE mounting peaceful pickets, but I wouldn't be in favour of arresting them - I accept that my enemies have rights to free speech as well as my friends, but attacking women and clinics is another matter altogether.

LB: What has the Labour Party's reaction been?

LL: I took an emergency motion to Labour Party Women's Conference calling on the Labour Women's Organisation to work with the Labour Abortion Rights Campaign and NAC in opposing these people, and it was passed overwhelmingly. Some Labour MPs and MEPs

contacted us before Treshman entered the country to get information to take to the Home Office. The Labour front bench has missed the boat on this issue. There have been massive media coverage and massive public response against them, and the Party could have shown that it is responsive to women's issues. The women MPs must grasp the nettle and introduce a pro-choice bill as soon as one of them can introduce a private member's bill, so that the debate in Parliament is for once around extending abortion rights, rather than restricting them.

LB: What is NAC planning for the future?

LL: We understand that Operation Rescue, a much larger organisation, is coming in September. They give their members military-type training for pickets. We are now discussing having a public speak-out, which has been very successful in America. If we can get lots of well-known and ordinary women talking about their legal and illegal abortions, we can counter the argument that all women are traumatised by abortion, when we produce a lot of healthy, well women, who may regret having to have an abortion, but whose lives have not been destroyed.

LB: What can *Briefing* readers do?

LL: Join NAC and get your organisations to do the same! Countering Rescue has cost us a lot of money and we are still working on setting up a telephone tree ready for the bigger invasion in September. We don't have the resources to keep contact with people who are not members. I think this whole episode has underlined the importance of keeping NAC going: if we did not exist, every time anything like this happened, a less effective response would have to be built from scratch.

● **Contact NAC at The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL. (Tel 071 923 4976)**

Imagine if there was no legal abortion. Imagine if there was no National Abortion Campaign ...

You need NAC & NAC needs you.

Phone 071 923 4976 for details

Council cuts put women in peril

Louise Kawakami reports: Cuts in grants by local authorities have resulted in many women's refuges being forced to function at a crisis level.

This is happening at a time when the numbers of women and children seeking help from refuges have reached unprecedented levels. According to Home Office statistics, reported incidents of domestic violence have more than doubled over the last five years.

For those working with Asian women, the lack of funding - or the long-term insecure funding - compounds pressure from within the communities such as the system of 'bounty hunters' (networks of Asian men often co-ordinated by private detectives who work to track down women in refuges and to intimidate women into returning to their families). Financial insecurity means refuges cannot change location or provide additional security in the face of such danger.

According to Hannana Siddiqui of Southall Black Sisters, it has been the qualitative work that has suffered from the lack of caseworkers. Crisis work has become paramount and she feels that support to Asian women may suffer in the long-term.

For some Asian women's refuges, the dangers are more immediate. Racist motives are suspected in the decision by the Labour run council in Manchester to cut funding to two Asian women's refuges, while sparing the other refuges in the area.

Over thirty thousand women turned to refuges for help last year. Increasing numbers may have to be turned away in the future. Those working with women and refuges fear women will be paying with their lives.

May Day greetings

from Billy Power (ex-Birmingham Six)

Keep up your sterling work on behalf of victims of miscarriages of justice

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Selfish activism or equal rights for all?

Challenging black, disabled and women's rights activists over their "selfish separatist" political agendas, **Peter Tatchell** calls for a collective campaign for social equality.

WHY IS THE black community promoting a Racial Harassment Bill that protects only their own members against victimisation, but not women and those with HIV?

Why are feminists in the Labour Party demanding a Ministry for Women to combat sex bias, but relegating the fight against racism to the relatively powerless Commission for Racial Equality?

And why is the disability movement pressing for legislation to outlaw discrimination against disabled people, but offering no protection to the victims of homophobic prejudice?

These separatist demands are undermining the campaign for social equality. They are setting one disadvantaged community against another, as each seeks to prioritise its own legislative agenda. The result: division, acrimony and disempowerment.

Surely it's high time there was a common campaign to challenge all forms of discrimination and unite everyone suffering social exclusion and injustice.

The deficiencies of the current sex and race discrimination laws have been obvious for many years. Despite protective legislation, women and black people still don't have equal rights. Other communities are not deemed worthy of even this flawed protection against bias. Lesbians and gay men, the disabled, and people with HIV have no legal redress at all against discrimination.

A major shake-up in equal opportunities legislation, to ensure it's effective and comprehensive, is long overdue. For discriminated communities to pool their resources and work together around a joint agenda for equality has got to be the best way to increase their collective political influence.

The legislative reform that could provide a focus for this shared agenda and common campaign is an all-embracing Equal Rights Act: guaranteeing equal treatment to all citizens and outlawing discrimination and harassment on the specific grounds of sex, race, class, religion, political opinion, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and HIV status. It would do more than any other single reform to tackle discrimination across the board.

In contrast, if we campaign for separate legislation to deal with the particular needs of women, black people, the disabled and lesbians and gay men, we set one community against another and create a legislative log-jam. How will we decide who gets priority?

This approach would also make it much easier for right-wingers to accuse us (falsely) of demanding special privileges. However, by arguing for legislation to protect everyone against discrimination we avoid this danger and make it more difficult for the right to mobilise against us.

The special significance of an Equal Rights Act would be its establishment of a legal framework through which all aspects of discrimination could be challenged and overturned. Once the principle of 'equal rights for all' is established in law, it would be hard to sustain any form of discrimination against anyone.

The desirability of an Equal Rights Act is suggested by the experience of France, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands. In these countries, the left has already won similar comprehensive equality legislation which has been shown to be effective in remedying discrimination and giving individuals practical redress against bias. Although it doesn't mean that all prejudice is eliminated, it does lessen overt discrimination and make unfair treatment easier to stamp out when it arises.

There is, of course, little value in an Equal Rights Act unless it includes mechanisms to ensure its effective implementation. That requires the creation of a powerful government Department for Equal Rights - headed by a Minister of cabinet rank - to monitor, promote and enforce equality of opportunity for everyone.

Within this Department, there would need to be separate secretariats to deal with the different forms of discrimination. Each have distinctive causes and effects. They require different remedies. Homophobia is not the same as racism, hence the need for a specific Lesbian and Gay Rights Secretariat, Race Equality Secretariat and so on.

To ensure that everyone can exercise their right to non-discrimination, one of the Department's functions must be the provision of free expert legal advice and representation for those seeking to challenge victimisation. Individuals must be given the legal power to take out injunctions to halt discrimination and to sue for damages and compensation.

The Department for Equal Rights should be empowered to scrutinise the practices of all public and private institutions and, where necessary, to issue legally-binding recommendations to rectify discrimination.

An Equal Rights Act along these lines would enable many diverse forms of discrimination to be combatted simultaneously. All citizens would have a swift and effective legal mechanism for asserting their right to equal treatment. For that reason, a united campaign for an Equal Rights Act is in everyone's interest and ought to be a priority in any left campaign for social justice. ❑



Troops Out Movement PHOTO Bryn Griffiths

Give us peace!

"The last few weeks have seen a re-awakening of interest in Ireland by all sorts of self-proclaimed `peace activists' and acres of newsprint being devoted to the expressions of shame and sorrow from Ireland towards Britain," writes **Gerry MacLochlainn**, Sinn Fein's representative in Britain.

WE HAVE SEEN a concerted attempt to turn the tragic and horrific events in Warrington into a propaganda assault not just on the Republican movement but on the entire Irish democratic call for the independence of our country.

Genuine grief by the family and friends of Jonathan Ball and Tim Parry are being drowned by the cynical anti-democratic forces who see in these shattered families a chance for advancement of their cause, the continued denial of human rights to the Irish people.

The state responsible for the murder of more than 120 young children in the past 25 years of its war on Ireland are not worried about the death of two more. The tabloid press which turned its back on the families of children like Carol Ann Kelly, who at the age of eleven was shot dead at point blank range by a British soldier, will not be concerned for the aching loss of the Ball and Parry families. Likewise the sinister Workers Party linked groups like FAIT and New Consensus are more concerned with their battle against Sinn Fein than they are with the events in Warrington.

The politics of the last atrocity is used as always by these groups to silence discussion, to block any genuine peace process and to prolong the war in Ireland, thereby ensuring that there are yet more tragedies in the future.

I think all decent people wanted the deaths at Warrington to be the last deaths in this bloody war.

Sadly that cannot happen for within days eight Catholic workmen, one of them a seventeen year old boy, were cut down in loyalist gun attacks - six were killed. The homes of several nationalists have been bombed and there have been numerous gun attacks and petrol bomb attacks on nationalists and nationalist areas.

In the midst of this horrendous onslaught the nationalist community was to find out just how alone we are. There were no editorials, no floral tributes, and certainly no state visits to these grieving families. Indeed when such families attempted to join the self-styled peace rally in Dublin to call for an end to all violence they were abused and assaulted by a section of the demonstration. Clearly, there are some children more precious than others to these self-styled peace movements.

However, the families persisted with the stoicism and dignity that is learned by centuries of oppression and they have raised again the demand for a just peace to end all violence in Ireland, and between Ireland and Britain. Their peace march in Belfast on 4th April was the largest of all the peace events organised throughout Ireland on that day in response to the call by the Peace 93 organisation.

A recent opinion poll in the *Daily Telegraph*, taken since the Warrington explosion, showed that the majority of British people want peace in Ireland and that they know this will come about through dialogue. Such dialogue could unlock the present impasse. It could lead to the development of a genuine peace plan and a demilitarisation of the conflict.

Republicans desire peace as much as, if not more than, anybody else. Sinn Fein has suffered more than any other political party in this conflict. Since 1990 alone we have seen twelve of our party members murdered and numerous wounded or narrowly escaping death. We will not be intimidated from conducting our legitimate political activity, but we do want to end this conflict on just terms that can sustain a lasting peace in Ireland and between Ireland and Britain.

Sinn Fein asks everyone to work for a lasting peace in Ireland, an end to Warringtons, Bloody Sundays, plastic bullets and Shankill Butchers. Let this become a turning point by joining together to build a genuine peace movement which values all children and rejects the partisan or cynical use of a family's grief to perpetuate a failed system which has been the root cause of this conflict since its inception.

This solution can only come about by negotiation involving all parties to the conflict. The majority of people in Britain think this, the majority of Irish people think this. The British government say they are opposed to this. Let the peace activists join us in asking: Why? ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

France: collapse of the new revisionism

"Contrary to what some people have declared, classes still exist. Politics remain tied to the relations between classes," Francois Mitterrand unexpectedly admitted to his last Socialist Council of Ministers, following the heaviest defeat of the left this century. Will Labour learn from these French lessons? **Andrew Coates** (Ipswich CLP) examines the electoral defeat of the French Socialists, symptomatic of the wider disintegration of the social democracy across Europe.

A MERE 67 Socialists and 25 Communists now face 485 deputies from the UDF, RPR and Independents. With Edouard Balladur as Prime Minister it has been said that the new government is moderate, pro-European and prepared to avoid social conflict. Mitterrand knows better. The choice of Charles Pasqual as Minister of the Interior is more than symbolic. This heavy-handed Gaullist was famous in the 1986 Chirac government for the repression of student protesters and a crack-down on immigrants. In fact both the RPR and the UDF stand for the neo-liberal class politics we know only too well in this country. The government quickly revealed its intentions with a plan to lower social charges on employers and weaken workers' rights. Presented as a means to combat unemployment, this is the beginning of a serious assault on welfare and employment protection.

For the international left the setback for France's Socialists has far-reaching consequences. Amongst the ruins we can discover the results of a decade of new revisionism. For believers in the main 'post-social democratic' alternative to Mitterrand, the non-election of Michael Rocard was also a heavy blow. Nor do the results hold out much comfort for believers in Eco-Socialism: the two Green parties, Generation Ecologie and Les Verts, at 7.5% had a much lower vote than expected, and did not gain a single seat. Only the Parti Communiste Francais remained stable at around 9% of the vote and 25 seats. This enormous debacle raises serious questions about the reasons for the Socialists' failure, particularly since the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and Spanish Socialists (PSOE) seem likely to suffer a similar fate. Perhaps we can learn ways to rebuild an effective left.

The Socialists won the 1981 elections on the basis of a radical programme, the Projet Socialiste. It intended to resolve the 'crisis of capitalism' by a 'class front', 'self-management' and expanded socialisation. Only the objective of economic growth stayed as the basis of the Socialists' platform throughout their years of office. Jacques Delors tied this to the objective of creating a European-wide regulatory body that would resolve economic problems within the limits of the world market. In the meantime capitalism was rediscovered. The former Trotskyist Henri Weber was typical in declaring that "the message of the working class movement has become blurred. Suddenly our feelings about pleasure, about worldly-goods, have changed". Class solidarity went out the window. The series of corruption scandals which have since erupted, not sparing the Prime Minister, Pierre Beregovoy, shows indeed how the Socialists' attitude to worldly goods has turned out.

Four principal factors undermined the Socialists. They are features which are by no means limited to France. Firstly, the promised economic growth never materialised on a sustainable basis. Europe became a continent dominated by neo-liberal financial rigour and the French state proved unable to resolve the economic downturn by training and schemes for the unemployed. The Rocardian Left was given a chance to work out a 'new social compromise' - co-operation with employers in exchange for greater autonomy and mutual aid - and was equally unsuccessful.

Secondly, grand schemes of constitutional reform and decentralisation had little effect in transforming the ability of the state to respond to the needs of the population.

Thirdly, the party itself was increasingly run on the basis of patronage - often uncannily similar to the arrangements described in Richard Heffernan's and Mike Marqusee's *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory*. 'Kinnockism' in France meant being a courtier to Mitterrand, just as Gonzalez and Craxi ran their parties in Spain and Italy as personal fiefs.

Fourthly, the Socialists relied on two sources of external support. An obsession with opinion polls (which surpasses anything even Peter Mandelson dreamt up) and communication agencies ruled at the centre. Outside - public relations cost money - finance was raised from firms and individuals, and often illegally through false invoices and consultancies.

None of this was inevitable. Since the early eighties radical socialists and

communists in France have been criticising the economic choices of the Socialists, their failure to change the state, the pattern of patronage and inability to create a trade union or social base. But to no avail.

While those on the left became thoroughly disillusioned, few turned to class politics and left socialism. As in many European countries environmental politics become fashionable. The Greens organised in Les Verts have long stood out in Europe as believers in a pure 'global ecological project' independent of left and right. By the end of the eighties many former socialists, communists and new leftists joined them. Alain Lipietz has not hesitated to compare the movement for ecological politics with the foundation of a new mode of production. Les Verts organise only 5,000 people and a fragile 'associative network' to carry out this task. The other ecological party, Génération Ecologie, led by Brice Lalonde, has the same paper membership but its main idea has been to form a left entirely free of socialist influence.

Many on the French left feared that the ecologists would emerge as major rivals to the Socialists and Communists. Fortunately the lack of a clear identity - the green parties being torn between leftists, centrist liberals, and the fundamentalist Khymer Verts - helped to destroy their chances. Michael Rocard's call for a 'big bang' and the formation of a new all embracing left, from centrists and Greens to dissident Communists, rested on their having some electoral clout. Without it the prospect of a Clintonised left looks less probable. A figure with the self-importance of David Owen, Lalonde is now skulking in his tent. Antoine Waetcher, Les Verts' leader, has to be restrained from openly mauling his former electoral partners.

The Socialists staked everything on modernising French society, from the economy to the legal system. Felipe Gonzalez's Spanish Socialists (PSOE) reduced socialism to an even more minimal content based on Spain's entry into the European Community. Like Craxi's PSI, these organisations rapidly became 'state-parties' with an interest in adapting to the administration rather than changing it. Surrendering economic power to the market, in the hope of a kind of supply-side



Francois Mitterand PHOTO: Morning Star

miracle, has proved to be the biggest obstacle to socialism. The Labour Party's Policy Review simply refused to see this evidence when adopting a basically identical strategy. The corruption now endemic in these countries is a product of free-enterprise. The British Conservative Party, with its own secret funds, patronage in unelected bodies and financial rewards for individuals and companies who support it, is part of a Europe-wide process in which the free-market left has participated. Far from modernising society, this has created a gulf between governments and peoples.

Jean-Pierre Chevenement's Mouvement des Citoyens (which stood a few independent candidates in the election and won some seats under the Socialist label), stands for popular sovereignty and control over the state. Centralised changes in the administration of society are a precondition to representing class interests, from trying to establish an equal welfare system, to action against the anonymous forces of international financial markets. France shows how parties run around the 'chief' are incapable of doing this. The need for wide social links - with trade unions -is underlined by the collapse of the French Socialists who lack them. In tandem with a socialist government a broad movement could have played an important part in dampening down the panic that led to financial austerity in the early eighties. It is not simply popular mobilisation that was lacking. In both Spain and France the main parties of the left lack any structural tie with organised labour. Collective power has to come from collective bodies.

The future of the French left will depend on many factors. Mitterrand's role in the coming months has been compared by his conservative biographer, Franz-Oliver Giesbert, to a "U-boat in deep water". Constitutional wrangles will doubtless erupt. Two underlying currents are at work to shape his actions. The first is frankly disturbing. The racist Front National won a high 13% of the vote. It organises over 100,000 members (compare this with the ecologists!). The inability of the state to satisfy any but its more immediate supporters could mean that many who backed the UDF-RPR will turn to Le Pen in disappointment. Anti-parliamentarianism in general will probably rise. Secondly, Mitterrand is unlikely to play a determinate role in the inevitable reconstruction of the French left. Having destroyed one socialist project he is not in any position to found a new one. Yet the deep crisis of his Socialist Party will affect the whole left. A new collectivism that is based on class politics and the satisfaction of collective needs and not market drives has to be forged. ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Right-wing offensive in Nicaragua

THE OCCUPATION of the Nicaraguan Embassy in Costa Rica and the taking of 19 hostages there in March is part of a broader right-wing offensive

Mike Phipps
Brent South CLP

in Nicaragua. The gunmen were demanding the removal of Antonio Lacayo as Minister of the Residency and the sacking of Sandinista Humberto Ortega as head of the army.

Ambassador Alfonso Robelo, a former contra leader, was one of the hostages, yet sympathetic to the demands of his kidnappers, describing them as "Nicaraguan patriots."

As president Violeta Chamorro now 'co-governs' with Sandinista support, the UNO coalition with which she won the elections three years ago has collapsed. Its ultra-right wing has spawned the Patriotic Opposition Alliance which held a significant demonstration of 15,000 people recently. Their demands: the resignation of Lacayo and the sacking of Humberto Ortega.

Meanwhile evidence mounts of increasing police brutality against strikers. San Antonio sugar mill workers protesting against the government's reneging on a privatisation agreement were attacked by 200 riot police. Two were brutally beaten, five suffered bullet wounds and women were threatened with rape.

'Recontra' attacks continue in the north. In a barbaric attack in Waslala, two co-operative members and their eight year old child were shot dead recently. The increase in terror is clearly linked to the ultra-right's loss of power in the National Assembly in January, yet the Sandinista led army has been reduced from 90,000 to 16,000 over the last three years. The danger remains not only that it lacks the resources to protect peasants in areas where the Contras are active, but that it may be eclipsed by a growing police force, hostile to the interests of workers and peasants.

Swim for Nicaragua

THE NICARAGUA Solidarity Campaign, together with the Camden-Nicaraguan Association, are organising a sponsored swim on Saturday May 22nd at the Oasis Pool, near Tottenham Court Road.

The money raised will go to support bilingual teacher-training on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, the most ethnically and linguistically diverse region of the country.

All swimmers welcome - more details available from the NSC, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG, tel 071 272 9619

China: market claims more lives

ACCORDING TO official government figures, 9,819 miners were killed in industrial accidents in China in 1991.

At a recent press conference in Beijing, the Chinese Vice-Minister of Labour admitted that most of the mines ran by private companies in towns and villages, operated below standard safety provisions. Around 70% of the 238,000 mines in China are privately owned. An estimated 70% of the 9,819 deaths occurred in these mines.

The government has failed to get the commitment of foreign investors to implement safety provisions. In the first half of 1992, 81 workers in three toy factories in Zhuhai (a special economic zone in south China) became sick after being exposed to poisonous gas. Another 42 garment factory workers were poisoned by inhaling toxic chemicals in Dalian, a northeastern city of China. In the economic and technology intensive development area of Dalian, none of 122 local-foreign joint ventures had been monitored by the local public health administration.

Gold strike

GOLDMINERS AT Vatukoula in Western Fiji have been on strike for the past 19 months as part of their struggle to get the Australian multinational Emperor Mines Ltd (EML) to recognise the Fiji Mineworkers' Union. Despite the Fijian government's recognition of the union last September, EML has maintained its hardline stance towards the union and has even gone to the lengths of setting up a ghost union (the Vatukoula Mineworkers' Council) to which it granted negotiating status. The strike scored a political victory in November when the chair was sacked by the company's board as a result of EML's poor performance since the strike, deaths at the workplace and intense political pressure to resolve the dispute.

The leaders of the strike have called for an independent commission to investigate the company's strike-breaking tactics, but Prime Minister Rabuka has ruled out government intervention, saying attempts by the government to enforce the law against EML would frighten foreign investors away.

Red Aid for Bosnian refugees

A NEW CAMPAIGN calling for asylum and material aid to victims of ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia has been launched. Red Aid for Bosnian Refugees is calling a national demonstration on Saturday 5th June and a conference the following day. Jeremy Corbyn MP criticised the government for closing its doors to asylum seekers from the area, adding: "I welcome this initiative, which seeks to convert British socialists' horror into action on this issue."



A death in the suburbs

In the aftermath of the assassination of Chris Hani, **Sean Coyne** analyses the options facing the liberation movement in a climate of explosive tension, distrust and waning optimism.

IN A SOCIETY undergoing a profound crisis, where competing interests have blurred historic dividing lines, it sometimes takes a solitary act to bring everything into sharp focus. The assassination of Comrade Chris Hani has done just that.

Activists are asking basic questions. Should the armed struggle have been wound down, given the unequal distribution of weapons in the country and the ease by which arms can be 'transferred' from the state to groups like the AWB and until recently to Inkatha? What exactly is to be the distinct role of the South African Communist Party when its leaders, who are deeply embedded into ANC structures and who are among the most strenuous in arguing for caution, are still regarded as deadly enemies by those who have benefited from apartheid? What can be delivered from the whole negotiations exercise to satisfy or even forestall the anger and frustration of the youth in the townships, and the people generally?

Within COSATU, the largest union federation, this last question has been discussed intensively in recent months. Retrenchment, the continuing and debilitating effects of violence in the community, and a new-found confidence amongst employers have curtailed much effective worker action. As a result, COSATU has developed and endorsed its own Reconstruction Accord, an attempt to gain at least basic improvements in the lives of millions of workers who are suffering the harshest consequences of the worsening economic climate. Some, including a small minority within the Transport Union, fear the Accord is just class collaboration by another name and pose instead a 'politically correct' list of worker-based demands, including nationalisation without compensation and the establishment of worker-defence units. There seems to be broad agreement, however, on the need to rebuild worker confidence and to provide a distinct trade union perspective on the economy and other issues regardless of the alliance between the ANC, the SACP and COSATU.

The untimely death of Comrade Hani appears to have been carried out by the White Wolves, an ultra-right supremacist outfit with links deep in the underbelly of the apartheid regime. It has been instructive to listen to the different responses to Hani's assassination from key figures in the liberation movement. Desmond Tutu praised Hani's abandonment of the armed struggle, and wondered who could now 'control' the extremists in the townships. Comrade Mandela spoke of the need to continue in the direction chosen by Comrade Hani, towards a negotiated settlement, and for 'discipline' to be exercised within the townships. Mandela has also repeatedly stated that it was a white woman who reported Comrade Hani's murderer to the police, to re-emphasise the non-racial approach of the ANC. Both Tutu and Mandela have invested heavily in the negotiations with the De Klerk regime. They have both committed themselves to an electoral strategy, albeit with power-sharing limitations imposed upon it. Both men understand the arithmetic. Tutu has a critical role in helping to deliver the 'coloured' vote of the Cape to the ANC, and Comrade Mandela must show that the negotiations have produced concrete results for his own, frustrated supporters. The stakes are high. On the fringes of the liberation movement, the youth committed to the PAC have found a new resonance for their 'one bullet, one settler' sloganising while Winnie Mandela struck a chord with many by denouncing the talks with De Klerk as distracting from the central task of taking power, "through mass action and other means".

But whatever the outcome of the current crisis, the blood on De Klerk's hands cannot be allowed to dry with impunity. There is now a real opportunity to tear away the mask of humanity which De Klerk has been able to construct with the help of his international friends, and sadly, the disarray within the liberation movement as a whole.

Why was the recent theft of large amounts of arms from under the noses of the security services, and which swelled the arsenals of the likes of the AWB, not properly investigated and the results made known? Why was personal security denied those whom De Klerk has said were essential players in the peace process? Why is action against the far right and its supporters within the state apparatus never taken, while measures to protect those who have wilfully attempted to subvert any moves towards democracy are implemented? Why do the police continue to act unilaterally, and contradict all the recognised norms of basic policing?

These questions demand answers. The test now is how far they can be answered within the confines of a strategy which accepts that power sharing, constitutional rule, and elections present the only way out of the present morass.

The signs, for the moment at least, are that millions of the impoverished are beginning to draw their own conclusions based on the super-exploitation which is still very much part of their daily lives. The canonization of Comrade Hani will not dissipate the anger and frustration, but it remains to be seen who best will be able to give it voice and the means to exercise real power. ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Is socialism dead in Asia?

Randolf David from the Third World Studies Centre of the University of the Philippines argues that socialism still remains the only answer to the problems of Southeast Asian countries.The following abstract from an article first published in *Solidaridad*, appears as a follow-up to the interview with Indian Marxist Achin Vanaik in April's *Briefing*.

THE SOCIALISM which has collapsed in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China, is one type of socialism - statist authoritarian socialism which has as little respect for workers' capacity for self-management as has capitalism.

What has failed is not the socialist idea itself, but rather the pairing of socialist economics and repressive authoritarian politics. What has also clearly failed is excessive central planning in production and distribution, which left precious little room for local control and initiative.

The collapse of the state or bureaucratic control of the instruments of production does not invalidate the concept of social ownership. There are many other ways that producers can exercise control over the production and the disposition of resources. Many of these, such as those pertaining to the management of forest resources, are indigenous to the people of Southeast Asia. The cultural base for co-operative action remains strong, even if market incursions are rapidly dissolving rural communities.

Moreover, local communities in many Third World countries have been reconstituted around principles of self-reliance and popular participation with the assistance of community organisers and non-government organisations. A decade of such experiences has many valuable lessons for socialism.

Even so, why socialism in Southeast Asia? The Southeast Asian economies have yet to be touched by the modernising wand of capitalism. Won't the under-developed character of the productive forces in this region drive any socialist project into the authoritarian mould of the flawed socialist experiments of the Eastern bloc?

If the goal of the socialist state is the most rapid economic growth within the shortest span of time, then authoritarianism and dictatorship are indeed inevitable. However, if the objectives are to end poverty, attain food sufficiency, institutionalise popular participation, and preserve ecological balance then the scope for inventing socialist forms would be much wider.

In order to understand the potential of socialism, it is important to look at what capitalism has done to Southeast Asia. Has it produced sustainable economic growth? Has it improved the lot of the vast majority? Has it allowed the people to live in freedom and dignity? Has it improved the prospects of the generations yet to be born?

The record of capitalism in Southeast Asia has not been uniform. The strategy of export-orientated industrialisation based on cheap labour, export-processing zones, foreign investments, and import-dependent manufacturing has resulted in high growth rates in most of these countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia) and stagnation for others (Philippines in particular). Incidentally, this strategy is also readily adopted by some countries claiming to be socialist, such as China.

Rapid growth was supposed to be the principal virtue of this strategy, which was premised on close integration into the world capitalist system. The emphasis on growth was such that many countries expressed readiness to absorb the attendant risks of industrial pollution, marginalisation, dislocation, and foreign indebtedness in exchange for the promise of rapid growth.

It is well-known that this export strategy also depends heavily on imports. It induces governments to borrow massively from abroad to finance the infrastructure requirements of the export producers: modern telecommunications systems, highways, bridges, ports and power-generating systems. In addition, one must mention the massive dependence upon imported raw materials of these export-oriented industries.

Yet the market for these products in the developed countries has always remained unsteady. Protectionism in the advanced countries aggravates this problem further. In the meantime, the debt service must be paid without fail, and rising interest rates can multiply the original loan several-fold.

As if things were not bad enough, governments relying on the miracles of the export-orientated strategy also frequently find themselves abandoned in midstream by the same foreign investors they had spent billions to attract. Most of these industries rely heavily on a well-trained but inexpensive and docile work force. They have sometimes been called 'footloose' companies because they do not hesitate to move their operations overnight when labour becomes a little more vocal than usual.

On the other hand, local exporters, to remain competitive abroad, must resort to all the known tricks to cut costs. They neither pay the legislated minimum wage nor provide sickness benefits. They don't observe legal working hours. Their workplaces are horrendous sweatshops, with minimal ventilation, lighting, and no protection against harmful chemical and industrial accidents.

Whether one is talking of large-scale agribusiness plantations of bananas and palm oil, or of export-processing zones for garments and semi-conductors manufacturers, the initial process of accommodating these enterprises has often entailed displacing local communities and settlers. The first contradiction is usually the struggle for scarce resources like land and municipal waters, between the existing communities and the advocates of industrial development. Yet outside of the jobs they are expected to generate, the export-orientated enterprises contribute little in public revenue.

They are, after all, the recipients of all kinds of tax exemptions.

This new industrial strategy under the direction of global capitalism often requires setting aside existing environmental restrictions in a bid to attract investors to relocate their operations there. As favoured enterprises they are treasured for the jobs and the foreign exchange they are supposed to generate, they can often get away with discharging poisonous fumes or smoke into the atmosphere, and untreated effluent into local streams and waterways. In effect, their pioneering status becomes a licence to use the environment as one gigantic rubbish dump.

The local communities are often helpless before them, that is, assuming that the community is able at all to marshal unified opposition. For the intruding enterprise often finds local support from those who benefit from its presence - workers and their families, and politicians who often act as their intermediaries.

A necessary corollary of the strategy of dependent industrialisation has been the export of rapidly dwindling natural resources and of contract workers, primarily as a way of raising the foreign exchange necessary to pay the foreign debt service and the growing volume of imports.

But why blame all this on capitalism? There are at least three reasons. Firstly, the stress on the individual or corporate entrepreneur as the principal engine of growth promotes the kind of irresponsibility which results in gross iniquity, marginalisation of the poor, dislocation of communities and the destruction of the environment.

Secondly, under capitalism all natural resources, including land and water, are placed at the disposition of the capitalist state rather than the local communities. Thus, the law of the market places these resources in the hands of those who, while they can pay more for their use, do not have any real concern for their long-term usefulness. Capitalism emphasises what is profitable for the individual owner, not what might benefit the entire community.

Finally, in the absence of strict and enforceable state limitations on the use of property, private ownership - liberated from community sanctions - becomes an instrument of destruction.

Is socialism the answer to the problems of Southeast Asia? Yes, it socialism aims to place control of the instruments of production in the hands of the direct producers, rather than just the state. Yes, if socialism means participatory and comprehensive planning of the use of resources instead of leaving their disposition to the vagaries of the market.

There are major problems facing Southeast Asian societies today. There is inadequate food and housing. There is massive displacement of communities by government infrastructure programmes. There is gross inequity in the distribution of wealth.

The economic performance is fragile, subject as it is to the twists and turns of the global capitalist market. There is deterioration of public services like education, transport, health services, water supply and sewage and garbage disposal. There is destruction of the ecosystem, alienation and degradation at both work and at home. There is growing distrust in democratic and pluralistic ways, as people become more enamoured of autocrats who appear to produce quick results.

There is a great loss of identity and autonomy, as nations become homogenised under the impact of transnational lifestyles and consumerist culture. And finally, there is growing political violence and oppression, both state and private, in response to the restiveness in the ranks of the superexploited and the underprivileged.

Capitalism has no answers to any of these. What we seek is not a simple system of welfare and charity, nor of patronage and dole-outs for the poor, but rather access to those resources and instruments of production by which all human beings can develop their human capacities for freedom. It is not welfarism that we desire but rather meaningful and productive work on which people can build a life of dignity in solidarity with others.

What we seek is not just an effective system of state protection as embodied by the military and police, but rather communities made strong by their own unity and collective resolve and able, by themselves, to resist the tyranny of individuals or of agents of the state.

Finally, we seek a way of life that is respectful to the ecological system, whose guardians are not the state forest agencies or forest rangers hired by the state, but rather the members of the community themselves nurturing and wisely using the resources that support life.



Victims of Thailand's economic miracle
PHOTO Paul Field

The key to this quest lies in the reconstitution of the civil community, from the debris of the excessive commercialisation of almost all human relations and the pernicious dependence fostered by a political system based on patronage.

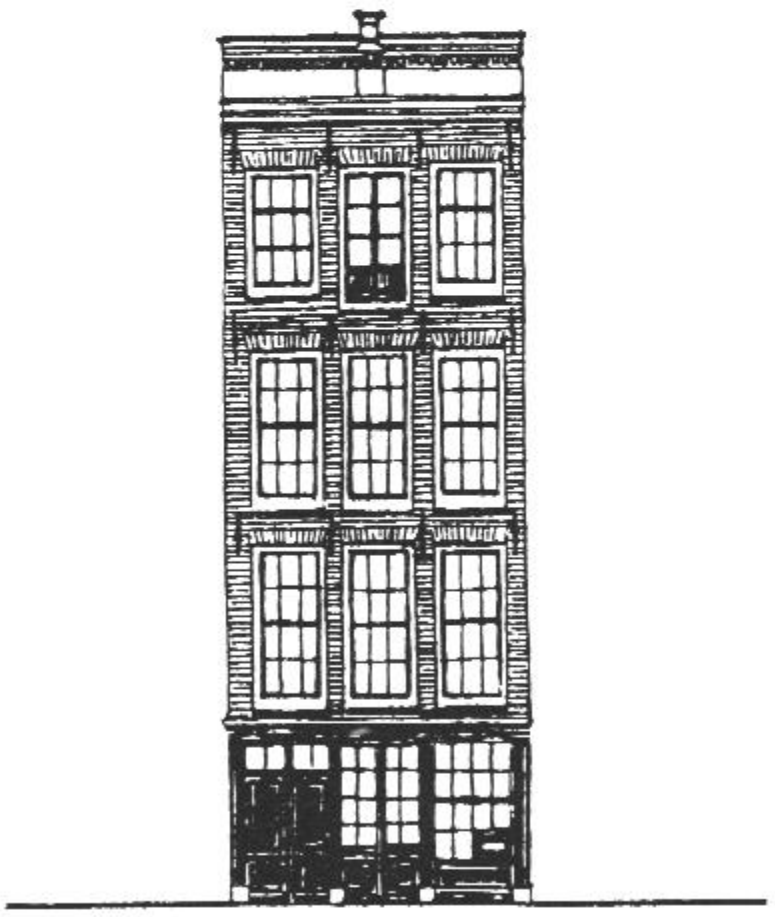
The nation state in these parts in unable to command support and respect from the population, mainly because its power has been based on its control of natural resources, especially land and forests. The nation states and the regimes that have run them have either bought off their constituencies or coerced them into silence of submission.

The reconstitution of local communities at various levels, preferably following the logic of natural ecological zones, would pave the way towards transforming the nation state into a popular mechanism of participatory planning and co-ordination.

How this is to be done, and whether the damage is irreversible, are questions for which there are no complete answers at the moment. What is clear is that the local experiments in alternative forms are actively being pursued by local communities in Southeast Asia, unmindful of the objections and fears of ideologues and theoreticians.

The results of these experiments could well be the building blocks for a people's socialism; respectful of cultures and of people's indigenous knowledge, democratic and participatory, emancipating, and truly sensitive to the possibilities and limits of the natural environment. ❑

Europe today: the ugly face of nationalism.



Anne Frank Huis

Michele Scott visited the Anne Frank House, Amsterdam.

THIS current exhibition at the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam attempts to explain and combat the nationalistic sentiments that give rise to racism. From the holocaust of which Anne herself was a victim, through to present-day neo-Nazi thuggery and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, it contains many first-hand harrowing accounts from those who have suffered from nationalism and racism. It quotes an actor from Belgrade, Boro Todorovic,who in a dramatic speech on television during the war in former Yugoslavia stated boldly: "Well comrade secretaries, don't count on me: I won't go along with you. You won't teach me to hate anyone. And to tell you the truth, the more you call on me and remind me of my nationality, the less I feel I belong to it. The more you appeal to my patriotism, the less patriotic I feel because of you. There you have it. That's my stand."

The content of this exhibition vividly reminds visitors that we have a hard struggle ahead to achieve the real peace which Anne Frank longed to see. The exhibition Europe today: the ugly face of nationalism, can be seen at the Anne Frank House,Prinsengracht 263, Amsterdam, through until 5th September, open daily.

Green shoots for global recovery

Terry Liddle reviews *Beyond The Limits*, by Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, Jorgen Randers; Earthscan Publications; £9.95

SOME READERS may remember the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* , a bestseller twenty years ago which overturned many of the ideas cherished by socialists and capitalists alike about the beneficial aspects of industrialism and industrial growth. The realisation that the Earth's resources are finite and that the expansion of production is not the answer to everything brought forth some doom-laden pessimism and shocked socialists into some serious rethinking.

This book is its sequel. It demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that many of the limits defined in the earlier report have already been reached and that if present trends continue humanity faces the near certainty of a global collapse. It starkly points out that we face a choice between a rapid and uncontrolled decline or a sustainable future. Although it does not say so, it provides ample proof that we are faced with the question "Socialism or Barbarism?" and must come up with an answer soon. Given the marginalisation and isolation of socialism as both a movement and a philosophy the barbarians are winning hands down. We need look no further than a rush hour traffic jam to realise this!

But all is not woe and sorrow. This book does show that a sustainable economy is both technically and economically feasible. What it does not show is the political basis of that economy. Clearly capitalism geared as it is to the maximisation of profit at any cost cannot create such an economy. Only a resumption of communism can do this: production for use, which has been the experience for most of our existence as humankind. And if we are to survive it must happen soon or it will not happen at all!

The last two decades has not only seen the growth of the global crisis but also the growth of new forces and new passions such as the Green movement. The media superstars may or may not like it but the thinking of this movement is informed by socialism, particularly that of such 'utopians' as Morris and Kropotkin, and despite the dogmatists, it in turn informs a very necessary rethinking of socialism. Although this book contains no mention of Socialism, it can provide ammunition for this process. To paraphrase an old slogan, Reds and Greens unite - we've a world to save!

Capitalism's stinking underbelly

Mike Phipps reviews *Year 501 . The conquest continues*. by Noam Chomsky, Verso, £11.95.

Five hundred years after the conquest of the 'New World', the plunder and exploitation of the world continues, spearheaded by a system matured in and re-exported from America itself.

IN A BOOK of breath-taking scope, Noam Chomsky explores the history of US involvement in Cuba, Haiti, Vietnam, Japan, Indonesia and many other countries, in search of the threads of US policy. He finds continuity in the US's outlook over the course of a century on two particular points: the primacy of US state and business interests above all other considerations, and the state's propensity to tell ruthless lies to safeguard these interests.

So devastating and immoral is the economic oppression meted out by the US that it can never be publicised enough. Chomsky reports that US drug and seed companies stand to gain $61 billion a year in royalties from the Third World for the use of seed to grow basic crops. He highlights the patent laws which prevent poorer countries from making life-saving drugs at a fraction of the cost charged by the rich countries. The same rules the US once rejected when applied to itself are now imposed on poor countries to protect Western cartels. "The hypocrisy is breath-taking", says one Indian official. "They call for competitiveness, but what they want is monopoly. It is blackmail."

Another example: concerned at how swine fever in the Caribbean might effect the US pig industry, Washington initiated a $23 million extermination and restocking programme aimed at 1.3 million pigs in Haiti.

In 1984, two years later, well after traces of the disease had disappeared, there were no pigs in Haiti. The marginal economy among peasants was devastated and school registrations dropped by half. Two years later a US aid programme sent pigs from Iowa that could only survive on expensive feed, the market for which was quickly cornered by the Duvalier dictatorship.

The Cold War - "scarcely more than a pretext to conceal the standard refusal to tolerate Third World independence" - exposed US policy most starkly. Chomsky quotes George Kennan of the US State Department in 1948: "We should cease to think about vague and unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards and democratisation but instead deal in straight power concepts."

Little commentary is needed on this, or the many other unpublicised admissions by officials unearthed by Chomsky. There is the adoption agency director who said, "Poland has one of the most serious markets of white babies" or the banker who described poor countries as "under-polluted", adding, "the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable."

One wonders how much the US policy towards Cuba today is still based on the outlook of the 19th century military commander who described the population as "a lot of degenerates... no more capable of self-government than the savages of Africa." Certainly the attitudes held by US military leaders in Haiti 80 years ago ("real niggers...coons") find a modern expression in the US's present contempt for the island's political refugees which it forcibly repatriates. Only the language has changed: the policy remains the same.

Chomsky picks up the statistics passed over by the mainstream media - the ones that show the stinking underbelly of international capitalism. Twenty thousand children illegally sent to the US every year as part of the traffic in vital organs, for sex exploitation or experimental tests; 220,000 people killed in a year by pesticides; 87% of children below the poverty line in Guatemala; a halving of per capita GDP in Africa in the last 30 years; 250,000 drug addicts in Nicaragua where there were none five years ago ("Ten year old children sniff glue on the street, saying that 'it takes away the hunger'.")

And finally the USA itself. The country with the world's highest rate of imprisonment, where three-quarters of the population do not expect life to improve for the next generation of North Americans. Where a blind faith in the power of prayer and a vengeful God underpins a 'culture of cruelty' in which the middle-class taxpayer is portrayed as the victim of the grasping, undeserving poor.

Chomsky has subtitled this bleak but panoramic book 'The Conquest Continues'. Read it - and be forearmed. ❑

Special offers for *Briefing* readers! 30% off cover prices!

Order Noam Chomsky's new book, *Year 501. The Conquest Continues*, for only £10.46 , including p&p, per copy.
Also available at discount rates:
Branka Magas's new book, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, for only £10.57, including p&p
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Bardot in St Tropez Shocker

Brigitte Bardot's new husband, **Bernard d'Ormale**, is to run for Mayor of St Tropez on an allegedly 'apolitical' ticket. **D'Ormale** just happens to be Le Pen's right-hand man in the Front Nationale.

Just another bunch of corporate bankers

The recent expose of Jacques Attali (former adviser to Mitterrand) and the **European Bank for Reconstitution and Development (EBRD)** is proof at last that there are right wing social democrats out there with a greater ability to waste money than Neil Kinnock! The **EBRD** was founded in 1991 to help eastern Europe 'build on the ruins of communism' with private investment. In less than two years it has spent £128 million on salaries, overheads and travel costs, while providing only £101 million in loans and investment in eastern Europe. The banks expenditure includes £18 million of UK government funds on equipping its previous office which it occupied for less than two years before moving to its new offices in the City at the cost of £55.5 million. The bank, which is exempt from paying UK taxes, justifies its expenditure of £750,000 on imported marble from Tuscany to fit out the main lobby on the grounds that "it is our duty to provide them (employees) with a very good environment" to compensate for the reduced pay they earn at the bank. The average salary is £65,000 p.a, while the 23 directors, their 23 alternates and 23 secretaries each earn £100,000 p.a. As bank president Attali is on even more dosh than he received for overseeing the economic ruin of Mitterrand's government, with a gross salary of £240,000 p.a. - £75,000 more than the Governor of the Bank of England. In addition, he spent £600,000 last year on private jets visiting the debt-strangled countries of Eastern Europe. Attali is always at pains to prove his credentials of a model socialist employer, hence his decision to spend £52,000 last year on the Christmas party.

As unemployment hits 40% ineastern Germany and looks set to reach the 3 million mark in Russia before the year is up, its good to know they have their priorities in order.

A throng for Europe

Over fifty would-be MEPs have sent in CVs for consideration by London Central Party members. Ten work full-time for the Labour Party or unions. The rest are the usual gaggle of media professionals, lawyers, lobbyists, 'experts', consultants, failed Parliamentary candidates, members of the Fabian Society and supporters of the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform. In addition there is a market analyst, foreign exchange broker, a lecturer in hotel management and someone who boasts of having spent "ten years serving on nuclear submarines".

Strange the things people think qualify them to be an MEP. Apart from the large numbers who list "travelling" or "holidaying" in Europe (not to mention having "relatives in Denmark and Italy") there is the comrade who declares "I am very interested in the United States". At least one has the modesty to sum up, "I have had the usual growing up, family and work life experiences." Only four applicants bother to mention the Maastricht Treaty (two are for it and two are ambivalent).

Among those keen on representing Labour in this high-profile seat are Michael Cashman (whose sole qualification appears to be that he played the gay character Colin in Eastenders some years ago), Labour Party campaigns officer Jim Parrish and Kinnock assistant Janet Royall.

The chief opposition to Stan Newens is likely to come from **Judy Mallaber**. A former NUPE full-timer pushed out by Rodney Bickerstaffe because of persistent sabotage of union initiatives, **Mallaber** as director of the Local Government Information Unit spent far more time aiding and abetting the persecution of poll tax non-payers than campaigning against the tax itself.

Always a fair-weather socialist, **Mallaber's** two-facedness and gutless opportunism marks her out even amongst the stiff competition in London Central. Her CV mentions membership of CND, but unlike Stan Newens she refused to speak out against the Gulf War and did not lift a finger to defend Labour's unilateralist policy in 1989. She also claims to be a member of ARA, though that organisation has no record of her ever joining. Certainly in Haringey, where she has lived for many years, she was never seen at any Tottenham Three event. As she makes the rounds in pursuit of Euro-glory, **Mallaber** will try to tailor her politics to the perceived prejudices of her audiences and will cynically play the feminist card whenever possible. She loves to try to blind comrades with pseudo-science and jargon, but her ambitions way out-strip her abilities, which are modest to say the least. Watch out, this phoney is nice as pie to your face, while covertly indulging in the worst practises of innuendo, smear and backstabbing.

Some of Stan Newens's political positions (for instance on Maastricht) may be out of step with left opinion, but on the Gulf War, arms cuts, the witch hunt, Kurdistan, international human rights, pensioners' and trade union rights, local campaigning and accountability to the grass-roots, he has an exemplary record. The likes of **Mallaber** are not in the same league.

Sheffield steal

Briefing earlier reported on the ludicrous decision of **Sheffield NALGO** members to work without pay to ease the Council's financial plight. The councillors have paid back their misguided generosity by voting themselves an above-inflation increase in their own expenses.

Sophie's choice

We are indebted to the *Irish Post* for informing us of the plight of student Sophie Rimmington, forced to give up her studies at University college, Swansea to return to London to help her Irish boyfriend, picked up under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Not an unusual occurance, except that Sophie's mum is of course **Stella Rimmington, Head of M15.**

Clinton's cunning plan

Clinton plans to fund his health care 'reform' by introducing VAT, thereby ensuring that the cost-burden will continue to fall on those least able to pay. **Mega-profits** for insurance companies, hospital chains and the drugs industry will remain untouched, as will doctors' average earnings ($150,000 pa).

Fink tank

Demos must be the most misleading name for a political initiative since the National Socialist Party.

Brainchild of Geoff Mulgan, former researcher for Gordon Brown, and Martin Jacques, former Communist Party hack, **Demos** claims to be a new type of non-party policy think tank. According to Mulgan, the aim is nothing less than to "reinvigorate political thinking" by looking for "the best ideas" from "the peripheries of political power" such as (wait for it) the "multinationals". Not surprisingly, multinational media giant Pearson provided much of the lucre for **Demos'** widely publicised launch.

A clearer idea of just what **Demos** is all about can be gleaned from a recent Jacques column in the *Sunday Times* where the former editor of *Marxism Today* (whose mid-eighties interviews with Edwina Currie and Norman Tebbit boldly challenged the prevailing political consensus of the day) opines that what Britain needs today is "a new start. We must break with the past . . . the old divisions between labour and capital are no longer an appropriate way to organise politics. We need new coalitions . . ."

What Jacques calls the "new mood", it seems, requires that a single prominent individual "speak up", break from existing party loyalties, to stir the nation out of its current malaise. "This is a moment . . . when politician must speak unto nation."

Once a Stalinist always a Stalinist. What **Demos** is about, then, is offering ideological cover to power-hungry would-be national saviours willing to undertake a task dear to the heart of the British ruling class for many decades: the break up of the Labour Party.

Of course, **Demos** also has the inestimable advantage of providing a comfortable livelihood for deadbeat pseudo intellectuals like Jacques and Mulgan. After all, it would be cruel to expect people who couple such limited talents to such unlimited ambition to work for a living.

Women's only meeting

to discuss:

where is the women's movement?

to be followed by a women's social

Friday 7th May 7.30 pm
Durham Road Community Centre
London N4

(Women from outside London who require accommodation for the *Briefing* AGM should phone 081 985 6597.)

Joint Fundraising Event

Proceeds shared between *Labour Briefing* and East Ham 2 Campaign

Saturday 22nd May 8pm
Venue: Kennedy Hall, Irish Centre, 30 Murray Street, Camden, London NW1

(nearest tube - Camden Town)

Irish music, singers and dance group, plus bar
Tickets - £2, £1 unwaged
Tel 071 254 5582 or *Briefing* Office

Maastricht, Major and the miners

Labour Briefing AGM 1993

Speakers include Tony Benn MP, Suresh Grover, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Rose Hunter (Women against Pit Closures), Dorothy Macedo, John Wilton, Casement Park Accused Campaign.

Debate, resolutions, election of editorial board, discussion on *Briefing* and Socialist Campaign Group Network, bookstalls.

Saturday 8th May
10.30 - 5.30
Durham Rd Community Centre
Durham Rd, London, N4
(Finsbury Park Tube)

Creche places must be booked by 2nd May.
Resolutions by 2nd May also.
Contact *Labour Briefing*
P.O. Box 2378, London E5 9QU.
Tel. 081 985 6597

Support Sam & Prem

PRESSURE IS mounting to get Sam Kulasingham and Prem Sivalingham's case referred back to the Court of Appeal.

Sam and Prem were convicted for murder in 1987. But Essex police were forced to hold an enquiry into the case in view of the large number of anomalies and contradictions in the Metropolitan Police's original case.

Essex police have now completed their investigation, although the Home Office has not disclosed the findings. Key questions remain to be answered. How did two prosecution witnesses, originally arrested as suspects, become transformed into Sam and Prem's accusers whilst in police custody? Why does the Metropolitan Police have only two hours of interview recorded with one of these witnesses despite the ten days he originally spent in custody? How are the contradictions in the records of police interviews with the large number of Tamil suspects 'rounded up' in the wake of the firebombing to be explained?

Serious doubts hang over the convictions of the East Ham Two. The evidence needs to be re-examined in open court, not by the secretive Home Office method where the police investigates itself. Maximum pressure should be applied to get Sam and Prem's case referred back to the Court of Appeal.

Contact the East Ham Two Campaign, Room 8, 219 Mare St., London E8 3QQ.

Famous last words . . .

Ten years ago, Graham Stringer - now right-wing leader of the Council - condemned the expulsion of 27 anti-cuts councillors in Manchester. Another vociferous opponent of the witch-hunt was one Tom Sawyer: "The door is now wide open to expel anyone the NEC thinks has been involved in *Militant*. Trade unions, the majority of whom voted at their conferences against witch-hunts, are seeing the first steps in what may be a wholesale purge. Do they realise? We cannot stand back and watch a purge; it has to be stopped. (We must) bring all possible pressure to bear on the national executive of the Labour Party to halt the expulsions (and) reinstate the editors of *Militant*."


LONDON LABOUR 30p
BRIEFING
No 29 MAY 1983

CAMPAIGN DOCUMENT: TONY BENN says

'WITH THIS PROGRAMME WE CAN WIN!'

Tony Benn gave an interview to BRIEFING on the day after Labour's Home Policy sub-committee gave its full approval to the campaign document, "The New Hope for Britain." The interviewer was Chris Knight.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

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



Sight of the word "cake" in Mark Fischer's letter last month forces me to write - this is something I know about.

He says looking at the CPGB's slogan to 'prepare for a general strike' is like explaining "cake" by writing the word on a piece of paper, not talking about the recipe. But his call to 'prepare for a general strike' is actually like a call to 'prepare to eat cake'. The idea is that the working class, if not too full of junk food or more inclined to go for a curry, will arrive and sit down obediently, plates at the ready.

This assumes that the CPGB has the cake ready - enough for all and the right flavour, so that the working class will be so grateful for the excellent cake only the CPGB makes that they will immediately choose to stay on for dinner and, if the CPGB get really lucky, breakfast.

There are a few problems with this.

There are a lot of the working class and not many of the CPGB (or others shouting 'Prepare to Eat Cake'), and, the chances are, the class realises this and so will not turn up (they are not stupid and they have had these irritations before). This leaves the CPGB slaving over a hot stove, complaining.

Furthermore, a lot of us don't rate the CPGB's recipe. It contains ingredients we either cannot or will not eat and tends to be indigestible.

Some of us want to eat, and cake would do fine. But we think that if the whole of the class are to get some a more useful slogan would be 'Let's get a lot of flour'.

Others would say, 'Forget the slogans, what have we got in the larder and what can we make from it?'

All this is not to say that there are not times when only cake will do. These are easily recognised. The working class, shouting 'Cake Now!' storms the local bakeries and then marches on the Knightsbridge patisseries. If they keep the taste for it, they set to baking for themselves. All our recipes may be welcome, but we probably won't recognise the result.

May I also point out to Mark Fischer that dumb people are not stupid, they just can't speak, and it is offensive to associate speech disability with stupidity.

Fraternally
Sue Lukes
Islington

It is ironic, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, its east European satellites and the hated Berlin Wall, that the methods of Stalinism seem to be thriving in Britain, as Mark Fisher's letter in April *Briefing* shows.

Mark, an official of the Communist Party of Great Britain, objects to my piece 'On Meaningless Slogans'. He complains that in criticising the slogan 'prepare for a general strike', I don't engage "the one organisation on the British left that has consistently advocated and fought for this slogan" - ie. the CPGB. Quite right - I don't. Because this slogan is not the personal property of that grouping and it's a megalomaniac distortion for Mark to claim this.

More substantively, I reject his view that to understand this slogan, or any slogan, one must make a study of the history and politics of the current promoting it. The whole point of a slogan is its mass appeal, its relevance to large numbers of people irrespective of its creators. Mark would hardly suggest, I suspect, that the Russian working class and peasantry of October 1917 should have hesitated to support the slogan 'bread, peace and land' until they had studied the overall context of the Bolsheviks' policies, and understood how this slogan was "the crystallisation of a unitary approach to a political problem", as Mark rather opaquely puts it.

The point is: if the slogan has to be explained, contextualised and complemented by other policies, it is self-evidently not a relevant mobiliser but meaningless. 'Prepare for a General Strike' falls indisputably into this category, and no amount of name-calling from Mark will change that.

Yours
Mike Phipps
Brent

I was interested to read in April *Briefing* yet another version of Dave Osler's pipedream of starting a new mass circulation left paper. However it should be emphasised that such papers, desirable as they may be, spring from periods of mass working-class struggle. The early *Daily Herald* is a good example. If Osler thinks we are on the brink of another such period, as I do, then he may be on to something. But this is nowhere made clear in his analysis.

Yours sincerely
Keith Flett
Tottenham

Why does the Co-op only ever have a bad press from *Briefing*? If more socialists supported the Co-op both physically and financially, instead of the Thatcher multiples, we would have a movement more representative of its members and not its managers.

Yours sincerely,
Alan Coomber
Milton Keynes

April 1st and the poll tax is dead. It claimed many victims.

Imprisonments, young people kicked out of home, bailiffs knocking at three million doors. But the biggest fish - this Tory government - got away with it. The community charge may be dead but community care has just been born. An appropriate coincidence, except that community charge has so deprived local councils of services that community care will be introduced without any realistic support for the six million people in need.

Poll tax/community charge dead. Community care/council tax newly born. But what's this? Labour councils still collecting poll tax arrears from those who couldn't pay in any case.

Surely it's time, just on this one issue, that Labour councils stopped battering the weakest in their local communities, started defending care in their communities, stood up to the Tory government, and declared an amnesty for all poll tax debtors.

Let the ghost of the poll tax rest - forever.

Yours in solidarity,
John Nicholson,
Manchester

Since its inception, India has been a forerunner of the secular ideal. Despite many pressures India has been able to maintain its stand.

The recent Ayodhya Rama Mandir tragedy has spread controversy across India and throughout the world. This is not a sudden development at all. From time to time all fundamentalist groups had tried their best to pull down the secular spirit but have never succeeded in their attempts to achieve this goal.

The solution to the crisis lies in all Indians understanding:

• secularism is the key to peaceful co-existence in a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual society and it eventually leads to human progress in all its aspects;

• fundamentalists should be stopped forthwith because they create barriers between communities and thus darken the future;

• there must be a prevailing situation where minorities would feel safe and encouraged to partake in all activities of the land but at the same time be prepared to compromise with the common priorities by which the country will grow and prosper;

• any controversy or problem should be solved through discussion and reasoning.

This may not come about overnight but will surely succeed if pursued with total determination.

I would further suggest the formation of an all-party all-faith consortium to look at the present unrest and division and start research on all underlying issues. Eventually this will bring about a true society of human order eliminating all small right forces now trying to focus on unrealistic provocative dogmas.

We let others live, so we too may live.

Yours in comradeship
Pranab Chakrabarti
Islington

Keith Veness (Letters, March), is right in saying that considerable confusion still exists on the left with regard to the 'dismemberment' of Yugoslavia. What a pity that there is nobody more confused and ignorant that Keith himself. Keith asks why members of the left have supported independence for Croatia and Bosnia. We shall list the reasons.

The people of Croatia and Bosnia were threatened by a Serbian nationalist campaign of expansionism which began three years before the present Croatian regime was even elected. The Serbian invasion of Kosovo in 1989 showed the people of Croatia and Bosnia what they could expect if they stayed in Yugoslavia.

The overwhelming support for independence shown by the Slovenes, Croatians and Bosnians in referenda. Anyone who believes in the right of nations to self-determination was bound to respect their wishes.

The fact that the centralised Yugoslav state was by 1991 a bankrupt Stalinist monstrosity that belonged in the dustbin of history together with the Soviet Union, East Germany and Nicolae Ceaucescu. Yugoslavia could have survived as a loose confederation, which would have been acceptable to Croatia and Slovenia. It was the Serbian regime's refusal to countenance Yugoslavia's decentralisation, coupled with its expansionist aspirations, which forced Croatia and Slovenia to secede.

The fact that the British, French and American imperialists wanted Yugoslavia to stay together, as is shown by their refusal to recognise Croatia and Slovenia until forced to do so by Germany. These countries, and particularly the first two, have given continuous tacit support to Serbian aggression, most recently in the Vance-Owen 'peace' plan which gives half of Bosnia to the Serbian aggressors, and in the West's condemnation of Croatia's recent attempt to recapture part of its lost territory. Keith ignores this fact, and condemns Germany for respecting the wishes of the Croatian, Bosnian and Slovenian people. Whereas the anti-imperialist opposes his own country's imperialism first and foremost, the chauvinist is most hostile to the rivals of his own country's imperialism.

Yours,
Attila Hoare,
Cambridge

Mike Marqusee's article on the expulsion of Greg Tucker from the Labour Party was essential if depressing reading; and familiar reading for anyone who has been involved with the National Constitutional Committee, as have many of us in Brighton.

But it was disappointing that, after heading the article 'The NCC- a suitable case for investigation', Marqusee did not conclude with any suggestions as to how we can stop this sort of thing happening again.

So, what can we do? Well, we can get our Labour Party or trade union branch to pass resolutions calling for investigation and reform of the NCC, like the one from Lambeth which attracted 205,000 votes at the Greater London Labour Party AGM.

These resolutions should highlight the following points:

• the 'defendants' should be given the same amount of time to prepare their defence as the 'presenter' gets to prepare the 'prosecution' case. At the moment the former gets two weeks, the latter months or even years;

• defence witnesses, and legal representatives, should not be subject to veto or restriction by the NCC as they are at present;

• there should be a deadline after which the case is dismissed if no hearing has been arranged. At the moment people can be kept in suspension for years awaiting their hearing; they are effectively being presumed 'guilty until proven innocent';

• the 'prosecution' case frequently relies on unsubstantiated, uncorroborated statements. The NCC should insist on every statement being substantiated;

• the NCC must cease the practice of asking leading questions which it is impossible to answer without incriminating oneself, such as the one which is routinely asked of comrades accused of membership of a proscribed organisation;

• the NCC must be required to give reasons for its decision;

• the 'punishment' should take account of time already spent under suspension;

• there must be a right of appeal against NCC decisions.

Of course, all this presupposes that it is necessary for the NCC to become involved in the first place. This too should be questioned. The NCC and NEC should not be permitted to become involved until all reasonable steps have been taken to try to settle the dispute at local and regional levels.

In comradeship
Jim Grozier
Brighton

Socialist greetings from Manor Ward, Brent South CLP

Free Frank Johnson campaign
Thank you for your support - keep it up
Contact the campaign at 129a Seven Sisters Road, London N7

Quadrant Branch, North Islington Labour Party
sends May Day greetings to all our friends and comrades

National Union of Mineworkers North East Area



sends comradely greetings to all our colleagues in the labour and trades union movement

Fire Brigades Union

May Day greetings

to all in the labour and trades union movement

Ken Cameron
General Secretary

Ronnie Scott
President

Hackney Trades Union Council

sends May Day greetings to all trades unionists and calls on everyone to support the right of self-determination for the Kurdish people!

NUPE Hackney Officers Branch

calls on all East-Enders to help save Barts Hospital

Strike, March & Rally
April 29th
Hackney Town Hall to Barts Hospital

Terry Sims (Chair)
Keith Veness (Secretary)

Alf Lomas MEP

sends greetings to *Briefing* readers

Let's campaign together to defeat the European bankers' (Maastricht) treaty

May Day greetings

to the labour movement

Support the struggle against pit closures

Frank Cave
Assistant General Secretary, Yorkshire Area NUM
and Vice President, National Union of Mineworkers
Ken Homer
General Secretary,
Yorkshire Area NUM
John Walsh
Assistant General Secretary, Yorkshire Area NUM

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