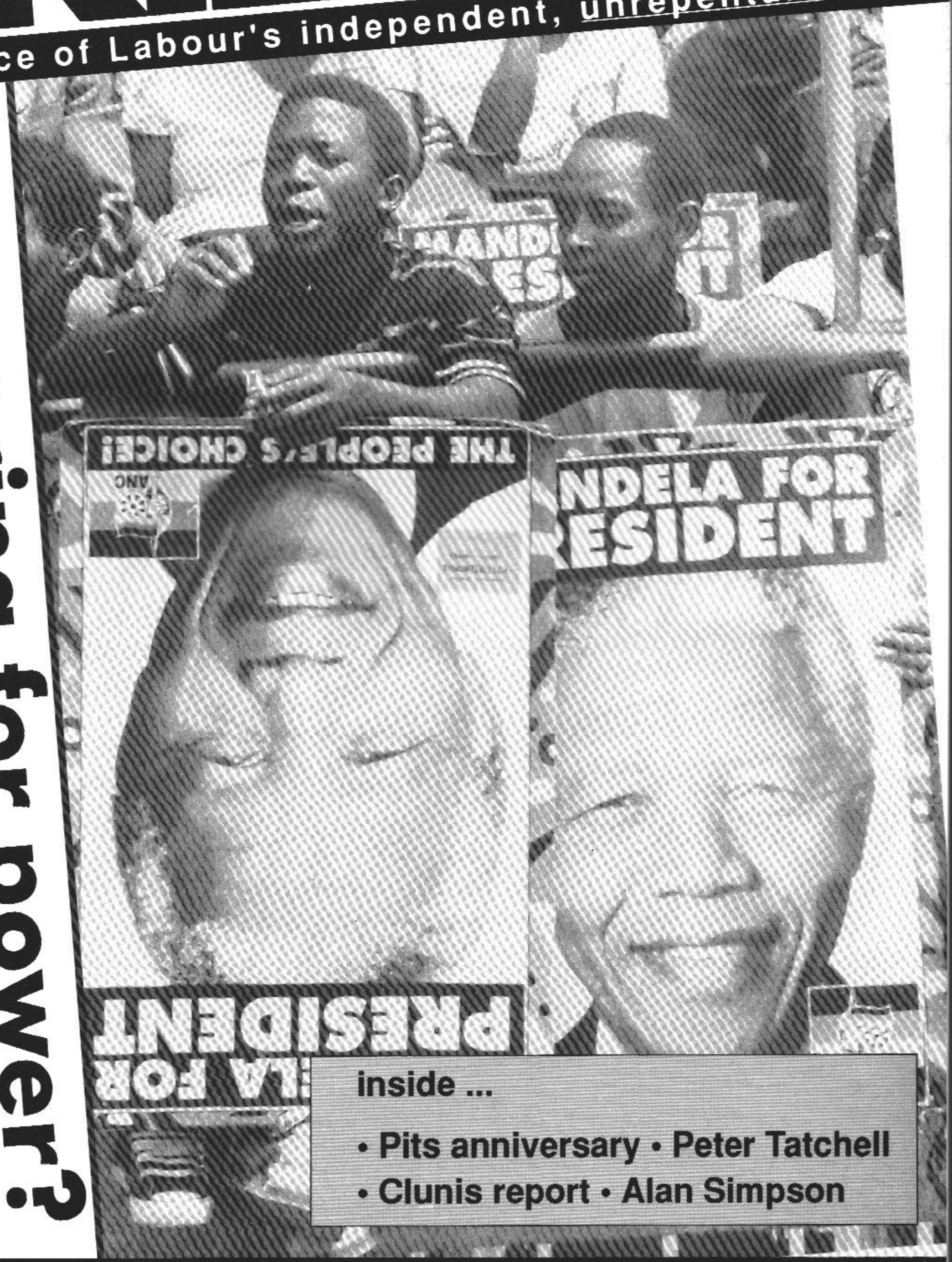
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BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

preparing for power?



inside ...

- Pits anniversary • Peter Tatchell
- Clunis report • Alan Simpson

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

pre-

stop

Hunger strike

Over 100 people are on hunger strike in Campsfield Detention Centre, near Oxford, in protest at their brutal incarceration by the authorities.

Hundreds of asylum-seekers are being detained in centres and prisons across the country. They have not been charged with any criminal offence but are held while the government decides whether they can stay in Britain. Many of them have already experienced detention and torture in their countries of origin - they now face human rights violations in Britain.

The Campsfield prisoners are merely requesting that they be allowed to go free while their cases are being processed; they are not even demanding the right to remain in Britain, although, for many, a return home would mean death.

There will be a demonstration at 2pm at the detention centre at Kidlington, Oxfordshire, on Saturday March 26th in support of the hunger strikers.

● **The Campaign to Close Campsfield can be contacted on 0865 722357. The Campaign Against Immigration Act Detentions is on 071 254 9701.**

Real results

SOME OF THE best schools in Britain are comprehensives in run-down, inner city areas.

Statisticans analysing GCSE results have discovered that many of the comprehensives accused by the Tories of "failing pupils" do much better than schools officially branded "good".

The "best" local education authority is Wirral, followed closely by the London Borough of Camden. Liverpool and Lambeth are also shown to be doing an outstanding job.

The statisticians devised tables which take social factors into account, rather than the raw exam results published by the government, and thus the true performance of schools coping with deprived catchment areas comes into focus.

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Labour Councils: why bother?



IT IS TEN years since the beginning of the miners' strike, and ten years since Labour Councils pledged themselves to defy the Tory government's rate-capping legislation. After a year of bitter and heroic struggle, the miners were defeated, and we are all still living with the consequences. At the same time, Labour's local government resistance collapsed, and that too has had far-reaching consequences for the working class and for the Labour Party.

The result of Labour's climb-down in 1985, and the subsequent adoption of Kinnock's "dented shield" strategy, has been the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs and the gross deterioration of local services. It also depoliticised the debate around local government. Every question is now dealt with as if it were purely an administrative matter, as if the role of elected officials is merely to implement "expert" advice. Any resistance to cuts from trade unions or the community is bitterly resented. Councillors place themselves above "pressure groups" and "special interests", and thereby collude with the Tories in undermining the very idea of grass-roots self-assertion in political struggle. Local democracy has been eviscerated not only by the Tories but by those Labour Councils which have again and again sent out a clear message to their people: leave the decisions to us.

In the late eighties, Labour Council leaders defended their programmes of cuts in services and attacks on workers' jobs and conditions with the Thatcherite refrain: "There IS No Alternative!" Nowadays, they frequently make a virtue of necessity. The empty rhetoric of "quality" is wheeled out to cover political expediency.

The consequences inside the Party have been tragic. The Party is rooted in local government structures, from the council wards which provide the basis for most branch organisation to Local Government Committees and District Labour Parties. At least one out of every ten Party activists is an elected councillor. In some areas, the ratio is even higher. When politics is taken out of local government, it is also removed from the Labour Party. Debate is curtailed and the selection process manipulated to exclude dissenters. In place of socialists committed to serving their communities come careerists and carpet-baggers, the incompetent and the corrupt.

In the run-up to May's council elections, many socialists are asking "What's the point?" Local government, they say, is a lost cause. This abstentionism is merely the mirror-image of the apolitical platitudes with which Labour Council leaders now justify their failure to challenge the government.

Local government is certainly no longer fashionable, as it was briefly in the early and mid-eighties. Many on the left simply ignore its existence. That option, however, is not open to working class people who are overwhelmingly dependent on local councils to provide most of their essential services: housing, education, childcare, social services, leisure amenities, street cleaning, rubbish collection, traffic control, etc. They cannot decide that local government is "boring" and unworthy of their attention. It remains an unavoidable focus of struggle.

The Tories fully appreciate that. Every time they inveigle Jack Straw into debating whether Labour or Tory authorities set higher council taxes, they have scored a victory. They have succeeded in shifting the ground away from the real issues in local services: the need for more financial resources from central government and greater local control over how those resources are used.

We need to elect as many Labour councillors as possible in May, not least to weaken yet further the Tories' grip on power in Parliament. But electing Labour councillors will bring us no closer to a Labour government if those councillors only implement Tory cuts in jobs and services. That is the real lesson of the ten long years since Labour launched its abortive campaign against rate-capping. ❑

Everything you always wanted to know about *Labour Briefing*...

***Labour Briefing* is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. The next EB will meet on March 27th. 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 Friday April 15th.

***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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Myths and

Labour MP **Bill Etherington**, who was an official with the National Union of Mineworkers at the time, recalls the year-long struggle by the miners of a decade ago and its bitter aftermath of betrayal and revenge.

AT THE commencement of the 1984-85 miners' strike against the government's plans to destroy the industry, I was a full-time official of the NUM and had been in this post for only four months.

Ten years on, as an MP for Sunderland North, it is interesting and sad to reflect on that period.

The critics of the strike have attempted to re-write history to justify their mistaken analysis. They have sought to create a legend or mythology built on certain false premises. The principal myth is that the strike was created by a politically motivated union, typified by Arthur Scargill, who sought confrontation.

The facts do not accord with this thinking because it was the National Coal Board which broke the tripartite agreement, Plan for Coal, and in this they were encouraged by the second party to the agreement, the government. The NUM did what any self-respecting body of people would do and reacted against an aggressive move.

The second myth is that public support was lost because of the lack of a ballot and picket-line violence.

The truth is that there was, initially, tremendous public support for action but some of this was lost when both the TUC and the Labour Party failed to carry out their conference decisions to support the miners. If any proof is required on this score it was graphically shown by the magnificient public support that followed the government's proposals in October, 1992, to drastically reduce the coal industry.

If the leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party had insisted upon debating the real issues facing the industry instead of allowing themselves to be dictated to by the Coal Board, the government and the media in 1984, public support would have grown.

These leaders totally failed to address the conspiracy at Cabinet level to set up unwholesome splinter groups, such as the "national working miners group". There were other notable examples of such poor moral fibre, such as the roles played by NACODS and BACM, the coal industry's supervisory and managerial unions, which both failed to appreciate the obvious lesson of history, "united we stand", which has stood the test of

Striking miners picking sea coal in 1984. PHOTO: Press Association.



values

time since the Industrial Revolution. These factors led to the miners being isolated and marginalised in much the same way as in 1926 and were paramount in leading to the defeat which followed almost twelve months' principled endeavour by the miners.

The end of the dispute led to another myth - that the strike was responsible for pit closures!

The pundits who peddle this nonsense fail to grasp that the failure of the strike led to an unprecedented attack by employers and the Tory government upon the workers, the reduction of jobs, worsening of conditions and a new climate of fear not seen since before the Second World War. No better example of this can be seen than the government's attack on the GCHQ employees, deprived of the basic right of combination, contrary to the UN Charter and the International Labour Organisation's conventions and more reminiscent of the actions of Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia than a parliamentary democracy.

At the end of the dispute, many pits doomed to closure were in fact given a short reprieve to enable the coal stocks to be replenished. Once this period was over, however, the pit closure programme was implemented with speed and ruthlessness.

The government and the Coal Board, as always, acted as a single entity, aided and abetted by the scab union, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, an outfit that was set up through government involvement in the "safe" Nottinghamshire coalfield, an organisation that over the years has been involved in many different projects, involving just about anything except looking after the interests and welfare of those it purports to represent.

It was always the intention of the government to reduce the size of the coal industry in its deep-mine form, and we can see that the alteration of the criteria embodied in MPG3 to assist the expansion of open cast mining through the Environmental Planning Procedures was part of this strategy.

While we are informed by the government that there is no market for deep-mined coal regardless of price, it is assumed that any open-cast operator will be able to dispose of their product. There has been no significant reduction of open-cast output in Britain over the last 10 years.

The final move to destroy the deep-mine coal industry was the denationalisation of the electricity generating industry. By splitting the generating capacity into two, National Power and Powergen, and, more importantly, setting up the regional distribution companies on a private, individual basis, the demise of the coal industry became assured.

The regional supply companies soon became dissatisfied with providing a lucrative living to the directors and shareholders of the two power generators and decided to become both generators and suppliers of electricity - a private monopoly of the very worst aspect. The supply companies, almost without exception, became large shareholders in new, "independent" generating plant.

This plant was invariably fuelled by gas. Not because gas was the cheapest of fuels - indeed, the research carried out into the issue by the Commons Trade and Industry Select Committee proved beyond doubt that the electricity produced by the gas plant was to be 30 per cent more expensive than existing coal-fired installations - but because it was cheaper to build. One key feature of all the denationalised companies, be they water, gas, telecommunication or electricity is that return on capital is imperative. Capital expenditure must be reduced to the minimum. It follows that if an industry is sold off cheaply - as it undoubtedly was - any capital expenditure on a fair cost basis must dilute the rate of return on the whole value of that industry. Therefore, they had to go for gas.

While all this was taking place the whole thrust of the government's policy was to weaken by legal and economic strategy the role of organised labour: this has now been almost completely achieved.



Dinnington colliery, South Yorkshire. PHOTO: Press Association

Following the great public outcry after the pit closures announcement in October, 1992, the government played for time.

I was always convinced, and stated so in the Commons, that the government was insincere and involved in political chicanery. Sadly, this insight proved to be only too true. Following five months of intensive research, the government produced a White Paper on the coal industry in March last year which was basically unchanged from the October 1992 announcement.

What lessons can we learn? Certainly, people who have been proved correct should be treated with respect and not disowned. The predictions made by the NUM in 1984 were if anything too accurate. Where are all the people now who ridiculed these predictions as "scaremongering"? Where are the fools who believed the Tory government? Their silence bears its own witness.

If ever we are to prevent further misery being inflicted upon those we are privileged to represent we must learn from, not ignore, the lesson of history.

I am proud to have been involved in the 1984-5 miners strike. Our political enemies have sacrificed a wonderful industry to weaken a great union. What they cannot do is destroy the values and the principles that union stands for because those values reside within us as individuals.

Such values can only be destroyed if either we allow it to happen or if they seek to destroy us. I do not believe either will happen. ❑

NEWS & VIEWS

The new Chartists

Parliament's failure to lower the gay age of consent to 16 is leading to a new campaign for equality. **Peter Tatchell** of the pressure group *OutRage* talks to Graham Bash, opposite, and **James Harkin** gives his view of a very British humbuggery, below.

WHEN LESLIE HALE MP claimed in 1954 that "the *Vice Anglais* is not buggery, but humbuggery", he was a parliamentarian ahead of his time. Hale was responding to the peculiar argument that the legalisation of homosexuality would, in the words of the Earl Winterton, condemn Great Britain to decline through "corrosive and corrupting immorality".

Forty years later, when Britain has declined for other reasons than its bedroom preferences, the Mother of all Parliaments refuses another invitation to grant the homosexual male legal emancipation.

This nation's history of anti-gay persecution goes back to Henry VIII, that paragon of sexual virtue, who passed an Act in 1533 making "the abominable vice of buggery" an offence punishable by "paynes of death". Diagnoses for this national ailment have been very inventive.

Leo Abse MP, a pioneer of sexual equality, compared the stiff upper lip machismo of his opponents to a repression which concealed fears about the holder's own sexuality. An Italian visitor to England in the nineteenth century offered an even more dubious rationale when he concluded that "since English women are so beautiful and the enjoyment of them so general, the revulsion of these islanders against sodomy passes all bounds".

Reasons given by Members of Parliament for their refusal to support reform are scarcely more convincing. They were two-fold; first, that young men mature later than young women, and, secondly, in the words of the *Daily Telegraph*, that a vote for 16 as the age of consent would send the very wrong signal that homosexual and heterosexual relations were "morally equivalent".

The first argument is obvious humbug. Expert medical evidence presented to the Wolfenden Committee on homosexual offences in 1957 proved that a young man's sexuality was fully developed by the age of 16, and Sir John Wolfenden admitted that the age of consent of 21 advocated by his colleagues had "an element of arbitrariness" and was a product of its era. Today, every reputable authority from the British Medical Association to the Royal College of Surgeons dismisses such a proposition as ludicrous.

The second obstacle to reform is much more interesting. In this latest debate, and in the last parliamentary tussle over homosexuality 27 years ago, moral arguments have infested both sides of the debate in different ways. In the earlier debate, opponents of reform argued that homosexuality was morally repugnant and could lead to national decadence, and progressives countered that the condition was an illness worthy of moral pity rather than the sanction of our criminal law.

This time reactionaries argued a more subtle case, that homosexuality was simply morally inferior to hetero-sexuality and ought not to be encouraged by giving it equal status, while reformers based their submissions on the need for legal emancipation in order to foster moral equality and combat discrimination.

It is precisely the language of moral humbuggery which I believe to be inappropriate to the homosexual debate, and which may shed further light on Leslie Hales's prescription of a distinctly British vice.

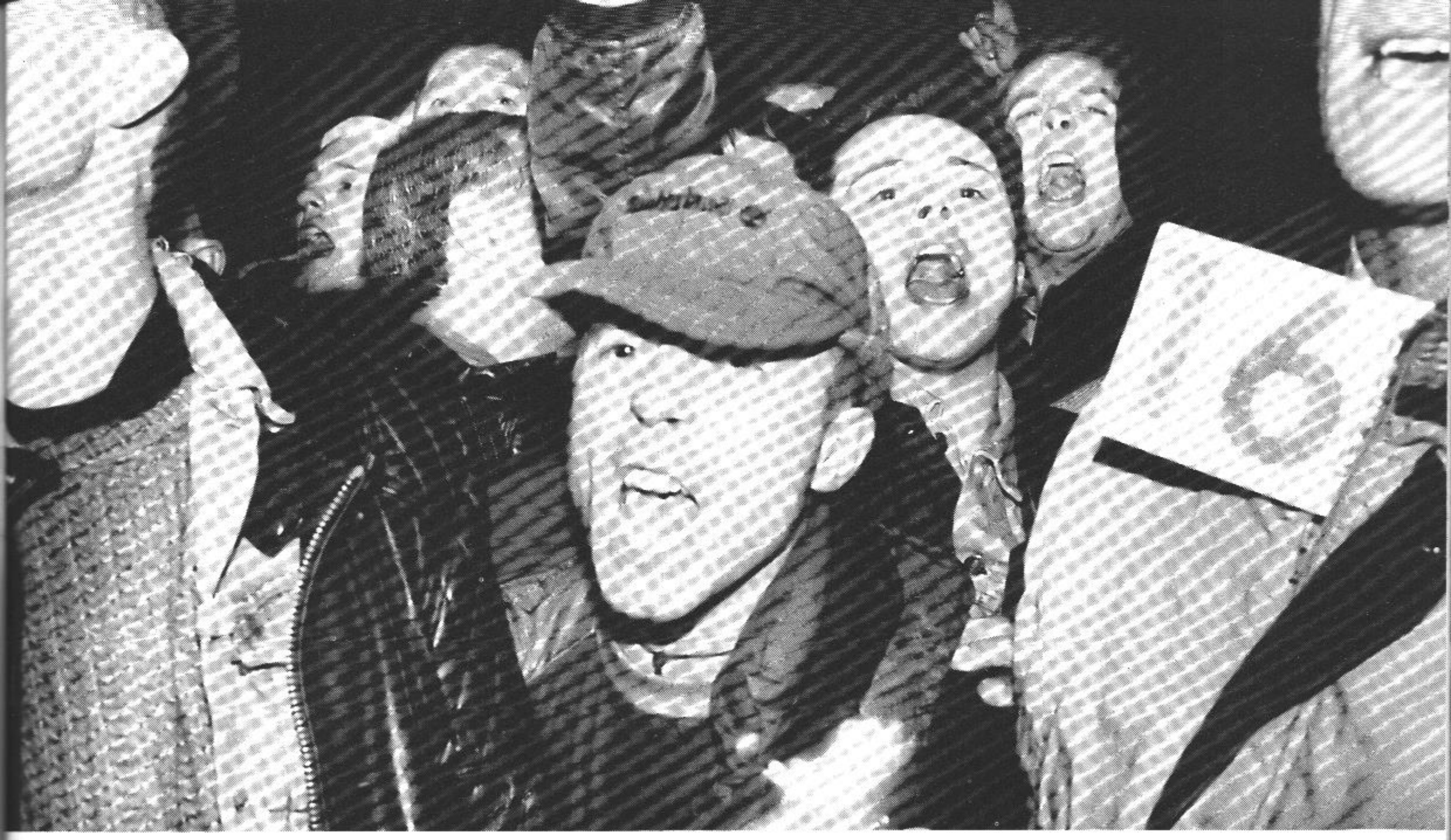
When we look at the newer parliamentary systems of our more tolerant European neighbours, we find constitutions which include Bills of Rights invoking rights for each citizen, including the right of sexual expression, enshrined in the law. How often was the concept of human rights mentioned in the parliamentary debate? If it had been recognised as a debate about basic human rights, would MPs have allowed themselves the luxury of a "free vote", where each member is informed only by his or her private conscience? Neither morality nor private conscience, nor the will of some amorphous *vox populi* (as sampled by specious public opinion polls) can possibly interfere with a right.

Which brings me to the role of the British Labour Party. Here is a party which has a long-standing sympathy for social minorities.

And, it is true, when I look at the results of the debate, I discover that the vast majority of Labour Party consciences told themselves to vote for the homosexual age of consent to be fixed at 16. In a motion which was lost by 27 votes, however, the 39 Labour Members who voted against proved crucial.

Most of those who did support the motion tended to speak the language of diplomacy and morality rather than that of rights, with Neil Kinnock reassuring us that he had no reason to believe that a common age of consent "would lead to decadence". In short, if the Labour Party had considered the homosexual cause as one of human rights, and had whipped its parliamentary members accordingly, the day would have been won.

In the circumstances, I cannot help wondering why anyone at all would want to vote Labour. ❑



Candle-lit vigil for age of consent vote: PHOTO: Gordon Rainsford

Graham Bash: Was the House of Commons vote a partial victory or a defeat?

Peter Tatchell: It was a grudging, half-hearted concession. Although posing as a liberalisation of the law, it effectively perpetuates discrimination.

GB: What was the feeling like on the demonstration outside Parliament on the night of the vote?

PT: The anger on the demonstration outside Parliament was entirely justifiable, given that MPs had just voted to deny gay people basic human rights. After waiting 27 years for a parliamentary vote for homosexual law reform, the lesbian and gay community felt clearly betrayed. Democracy turned out to be a licence to discriminate.

GB: Reducing the age of consent to 16 was defeated by Labour votes. How do you, as a Party member, feel?

PT: The 39 Labour MPs who voted to maintain the second class legal status of gay people reneged on the socialist principles of justice and equality and defied Party policy, which had the backing of more than three quarters of Annual Conference. On issues of equal rights for women and black people, the Parliamentary Labour Party never settles for a free vote. MPs are whipped to support equality. Why wasn't there a three-line whip on this issue?

It is outrageous arrogance for MPs to believe that the lives and liberties of gay men are a matter for *their* consciences. Labour's shadow health and education spokespersons, David Blunkett and Ann Taylor, voted with their Tory opposite numbers, Virginia Bottomley and John Patten, to vote down 16 as the age of consent.

Blunkett and Taylor clearly have no understanding or compassion for the needs of young gay people. They are unfit to be in charge of the health and education needs of teenage homosexuals. They should resign or be sacked.

GB: OutRage has been criticised for being too strident and its methods have been contrasted with Stonewall's lobbying tactics. What is the relationship between the two, and what is the specific role of OutRage?

PT: Every successful movement for social justice has involved a respectable lobbying wing and a confrontational, direct action wing. The two are not mutually exclusive but reinforce and strengthen each other.

As the Chartists and Suffragettes demonstrated, both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary action are necessary to win social change.

Whereas Stonewall has a very limited agenda of legal equality, OutRage has a much wider objective of sexual emancipation. Law reform is not enough.

Our brand of "queer politics" celebrates sexual differences, opposes assimilationism, seeks social transformation and affirms that everyone is potentially homosexual. Stonewall merely wants equality for lesbians and gay men on the same basis as heterosexuals, whereas OutRage argues that heterosexuals are also victimised by sexphobic culture.

GB: What did the recent march on Parliament achieve?

PT: The march on Parliament was the launch of our Suffragette style civil disobedience campaign to demand the repeal of all anti-gay laws.

We defied the Sessional Orders which prevent demonstrations near Parliament whilst MPs are sitting. Haymarket was blockaded with a sit-down protest which brought traffic to a standstill.

We eventually made it to the House of Commons where we staged a noisy protest in support of lesbian and gay equality, despite police warnings that we would not be allowed anywhere near Parliament. We achieved our key objective which was to show MPs that the campaign for equality will continue until we win.

GB: What is the next step in the campaign?

PT: There are plans for an ongoing campaign of parliamentary lobbying, legal actions through the European Court of Human Rights and direct-action protest to keep the issue in the headlines, on the political agenda and in the minds of MPs and the public.

All out for Millwall

Labour Briefing interviewed a left activist in Millwall Branch Labour Party about the crucial council election campaign on the Isle of Dogs.

***Labour Briefing*: How is the campaign going?**

Left Activist: We have had a good start. The two campaign days - backed by Labour Party supporters throughout London - have attracted 70 people each time. We have knocked on every door on the island. The Labour vote is holding up very well, with people declaring their intention to definitely vote Labour much earlier than usual in an election campaign.

The BNP vote is wavering, as many "protest voters" - who voted BNP last time - have realised the consequences of their actions. Support for the Liberals has almost evaporated as people realise that only Labour can beat the BNP. Even true blue Tories have declared their intention to vote Labour for the first time in their lives in order to defeat the BNP.

Dozens of BNP canvassers will be bussed into the Island's streets, so we must keep up our response.

***LB*: What is the role of the left in the Millwall election?**

LA: The right-wing mavericks - the ex-chair and ex-secretary of the branch - have resigned from the Party, as has James Hunt, the defeated by-election candidate. Their right-wing backers in the local Party have realised their errors and have turned to us on the left and implored us to lead the campaign - which we have done.

At the by-election we were ostracised (we could not even get a window poster). We were out of the campaign. We have now been fully rehabilitated and are central to the running of the campaign. The ex-chair and ex-secretary attempted to set up the ELPA, the East London People's Alliance. This so-called "People's Party", has failed inside six weeks. It has dumped its candidates and has found no replacements among its meagre number.

***LB*: What about Ted Johns, the sitting Labour councillor who was re-selected to fight again this time for Labour?**

LA: The ELPA issued a press release stating that Ted was their candidate before he had agreed to be. Ted, like other right-wing members and ex-members of the Labour Party, believes that the only way to beat the BNP is by a Labour/ Liberal election pact which makes no sense when the Liberal vote is collapsing. Put on the spot, Ted has stood down and is now not standing at all.

***LB*: What is the difference in Labour's policies this time, compared to the by election?**

LA: This time, the Labour Party has been fighting on an unequivocal anti-racist platform. This was a big change from the by-election when Labour capitulated to racist pressure.

***LB*: What can anyone outside of Millwall do to help?**

LA: Help is urgently needed for canvassing and leafletting and the usual behind the scenes work. Come to the "Beat the BNP" Campaign Day on Sunday April 10th. Meet some old friends, help to beat the BNP!

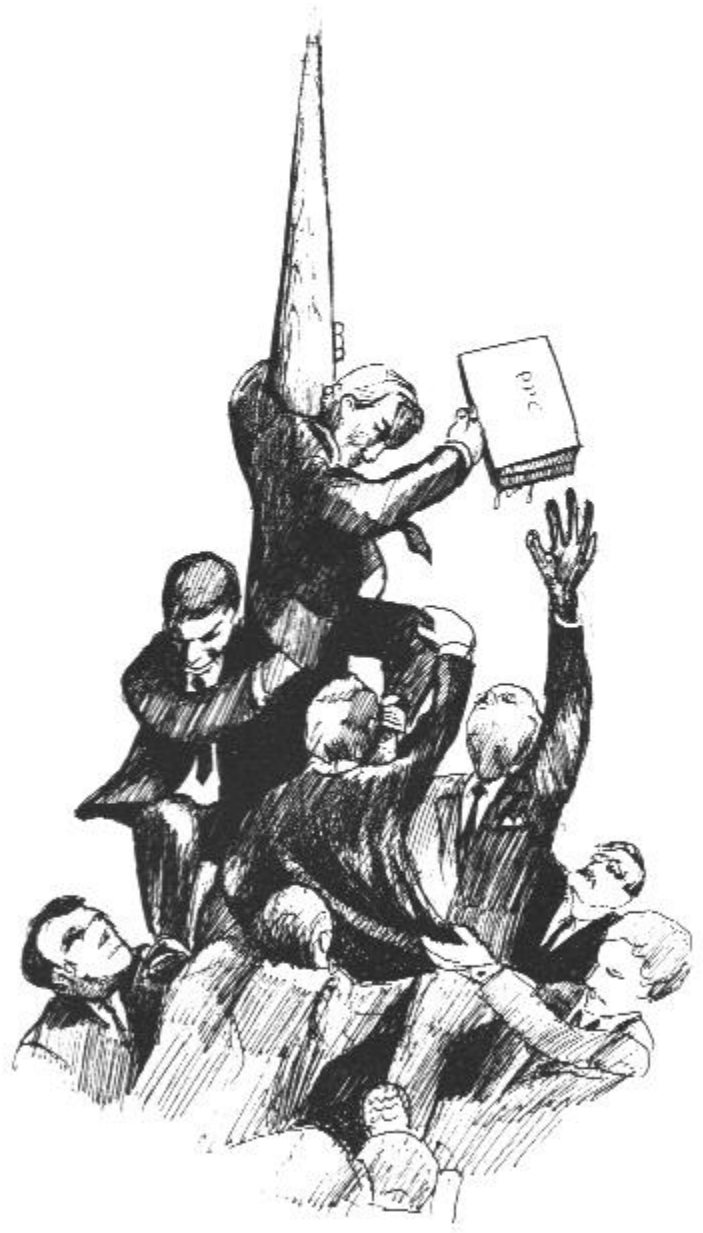
Spring is in the air and the joys of a by-election season are upon us. In east London, what has become known as "the District Line referendum" is fast approaching with Labour defending the three solid, neighbouring seats of Barking, Newham North-East and Dagenham.

The three polls have been caused by the deaths of veterans Jo Richardson and Ron Leighton and the departure to academic pastures of Bryan Gould.

Newham, in particular, has a heavyweight list of contenders lining up for the Labour nomination including former Labour MPs John P Smith, Roy Roebuck and Frank Doran. Martin Linton, the *Guardian* journalist, has also expressed an interest, as has Doreen Cameron, arguably Britain's most senior black woman trade unionist who is just about to take over as president of the teachers and lecturers' union, NATFHE.

Some of the above are also seeking the Dagenham nomination - Cameron is certainly interested, although the likelihood of the Walworth Road yuppies putting a left-wing, black, woman trade unionist on a by-election shortlist is not very likely.

There are two front-runners for the Barking nomination, Jim Fitzpatrick and Margaret Hodge. The former is an official with the Fire Brigades Union and was Jo Richardson's heir-apparent for many years while Hodge is the right-wing ex-leader of Islington Council.





Liz Davies launching the Zero Tolerance campaign against violence against women with the actress, Charlotte Cornwell.

A little learning

Labour councils are accepting defeat and losing support. But with a bit more radicalism and imagination, they could be attracting much greater working-class sympathy, writes Islington Councillor **Liz Davies**.

TEN YEARS ago, Labour councils all over the country vowed to defy the government over rate-capping and establish a second front, supporting the miners' struggle, against the government. A decade on, many of those Labour council leaders have become prominent advocates of modernism, and the left is accused of living in the past. We are told "there is no alternative" to accepting public spending cuts.

Instead, Labour councillors are bombarded with various different Labour strategies, supposedly against the government and all claiming "a radical approach". All the models, however, take for granted a strategy of implementing the government's cuts.

In 1992, the Labour Co-ordinating Committee proposed "the Haringey triangle". Its "radical" approach was to redefine a council's function as a regulatory authority. Instead of directly providing public services, the LCC preferred that councils should contract out all their services. The only form of public accountability of these services would be through the council's power to award contracts. Other right-wing models include "doing fewer things better", which is simply code for closing certain services.

A third approach is not the subject of debate and has never been glorified with a theory. I call it "muddling through" - each year councils faced with ever-decreasing finances make real choices between services, but not in any planned way. Simply they choose to cut whatever they can get away with. This approach is based on the political will not to make cuts in direct public services. If the town hall photocopying budget can be cut rather than a local library or jobs, so much the better. In practice, however, the days of cutting out waste and inefficiency are over. Council cuts mean closing direct services, and so the "muddlers through" are still making harsh decisions, but with no rationale.

All three approaches fundamentally attack any image of Labour as a party committed to public services and accountability to the community. In each case, the Labour council presents itself, rather than the government, as the main decision-maker and therefore the focus of local opposition. Left Labour councillors, nowadays invariably in a minority in Labour groups, feel collectively responsible for public spending cuts by the council, even if within the Labour group they argued against those cuts. As a result, the left feels tainted and tries to withdraw from the process, by simply no longer participating, not standing for the council.

Unfortunately, the left may abstain, but the working class cannot abstain and there will be public protests against council cuts. Campaigns against closing local services are most successful when the left in the Labour Party and the Labour council are actively involved in those campaigns.

In Islington, we have just won a year-long battle to keep a council nursery open. That battle was won by a two-pronged attack on the council - a consistent occupation of the nursery by the community which won public support and media attention, along with pressure from the left and the community on the Labour Party.

So one role of left Labour councillors is as fire-fighters - working with community protests and campaigns against the worst of the cuts, to defend whatever public services can be defended.

Today, if a council refuses to set a balanced budget, the Director of Finance has the power to step in, set his or her own budget, and make cuts that the councillors have refused to make (Section 114, Local Government and Housing Act 1989). The right use this to argue that councils no longer have the power to defy the government, and to justify their own cuts on the grounds that Directors of Finance will make much worse cuts. These days, since the Director of Finance can use his or her power to intimidate councillors, in practice councillors make whatever cuts the Director advises anyway so the latter argument holds no water. In addition, ring-fencing the Housing Revenue Account has given councils less discretion over the level of rents set, and the level of Council Tax is purely a mathematical exercise. The spending cap combined with the Section 114 powers sweeps away any political decision-making whatsoever.

A truly "radical" approach is not defeatist. Protest movements succeed when people find creative ways around restrictions. In the nineteenth century, strikes were outlawed, but workers still combined and found alternative methods of protest. In 1990s local government, we have to discover creative methods of protest, not just accept defeat.

One approach must be to look again at protesting against the Section 114 powers on the grounds of local democracy. What if the Director of Finance stepped in and set his/her own cuts? Couldn't the Labour Party then join with the community in protesting - both against the cuts and against the attack on local democracy? ❑

Kilroy was here

Knowsley North Labour Party was closed down last November after years of attacks by the national party. Here, a local activist recounts the appalling tale.

ROBERT KILROY-SILK was the Labour MP for this constituency at its inception in 1983. He had previously been the member for Ormskirk, which disappeared under the 1983 boundary changes. As Knowsley North contained part of Ormskirk, the NEC of the Party, contrary to the wishes of local members, imposed Kilroy-Silk.

It soon became apparent locally that Kilroy-Silk, who had never been democratically selected by the local party, never would be. Kilroy-Silk, after failed attempts to flood the General Management Committee with delegates from sympathetic unions such as the EEPTU, gave up the ghost and looked to pastures greener for his future career.

The local party was poised to select Les Huckfield as the candidate, judging by the number of nominations received, by an overwhelming majority. However, once again the NEC took it upon itself to impose a candidate with virtually no local support, George Howarth. Howarth had the support of only one of the 10 branches, and this was won by the narrowest of margins: 7 votes to 6. This time, the local party sought an injunction to prevent the imposition of Howarth, and to establish the rights of CLPs to select their own parliamentary candidates. Again, the passage of time prevented the matter being dealt with, the writ for the by-election being moved in the House of Commons while we were waiting for a decision from the Court of Appeal.

The rules have gradually since been amended to give almost total control of the selection procedures in by-elections to the National Party.

Following the by-election in 1986, many members of the local party had disciplinary action taken against them, many were suspended or expelled. Appalled by the injustices seen locally, disillusioned activists allowed their membership to lapse.

The latest attack on the party is its suspension following a report which was presented to the National Executive Committee on November 24th. This document is so full of glaring inaccuracies, half-truths and outright lies, that at least two members named in the report are consulting a solicitor for advice on a libel action.

The report includes the damning indictment, for instance, that Dave Kelly, the CLP vice-chair, lives with an independent councillor - surely members of the Labour Party are free to live with whoever they choose.

Why has the CLP been closed down? The most outrageous allegations are reserved for the current CLP secretary Alan Kelly. Although most of the allegations against him go back up to 10 years, he made the mistake of being democratically elected CLP secretary at the Annual General Meeting in February 1993, ousting the MP's agent from the position.

This was the turning point. Kelly, who had instigated the legal action against the NEC's imposition of Howarth in 1986 had been suspended from holding office for two years following that. It was the third time that he had stood for the position, being beaten by only one vote at the previous years' AGM.

Following the AGM result, it was reported in the national press that Howarth would now be in trouble. It is obvious that someone took these reports seriously and decided that the new One Member, One Vote system could not be relied upon to produce the "right" result in Knowsley North. The CLP was disbanded.

Allegations that the CLP was being badly run are known locally to be nonsense. If this was the case then surely the members of Knowsley North CLP would have democratically removed any officers causing problems at the AGM. Again, democracy has been sacrificed.

A local branch of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network has been set up. Members are determined to continue the fight for democracy. We appeal to your organisation to support us. Whatever support you can give us will be greatly appreciated. We need financial assistance urgently, for leaflets, legal advice, publicity etc. Please make cheques payable to Knowsley North Socialist Campaign Group. Also please send in resolutions/letters of support to Walworth Road, and send us copies to:

● Knowsley North Socialist Campaign Group at 1, Avis Walk, Fazakerley, Liverpool, L10 4YT. We can supply speakers.

A shot in the foot

HILLINGDON COUNCIL in west London has been controlled by the Tories since before the first Thatcher government came to power -until, that is, last summer when Labour gained an overall majority of one.

Far from creating scenes of unparalleled joy in the upper echelons of the Party, the leadership of London Labour Party has responded by suspending one of Hillingdon's councillors, Wally Kennedy.

Kennedy has an excellent reputation for hard work and great diligence, which is not easy as he is disabled and poorly paid.

His wife, Pat, recently commented in a letter to a local newspaper: "Anyone who knows him well will bear witness to the tremendous amount of work he has done and the time he has given freely to people in need, not just since the poll tax, but for many years before.

"We are not eligible for rent rebates, council tax rebates, free prescriptions, school meals or uniforms. My husband now receives a long overdue bus pass because he is disabled."

In a letter to Labour leader John Smith, Kennedy writes that he had been "suspended from Labour representation for allegedly 'bringing the Party into disrepute through a sustained course of conduct prejudical to the detriment of the Labour Party'. (sic)"

The spectre of links with Militant Labour has been raised. Kennedy points out in his letter to the leader: "I do interviews with many papers and I did an interview with the newspaper, *Militant*, on the issue of domestic violence and the number of cases with which I was dealing."

Kennedy also says that he was told (second-hand) that he was in trouble with Labour's mandarins because he had not paid his poll tax. He points out that he and his family, along with millions of others, simply cannot afford to pay up.

Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act, which prevents councillors from voting when they are in poll tax or council tax arrears, has effectively removed Kennedy from his proper role on Hillingdon council.

But this legislation has caught out scores of councillors across the country, including Tories and Liberal Democrats - in Plymouth alone 13 councillors are excluded from voting.

THE CRY for One Member One Vote has always been associated with David Owen and the Gang of Four who went on to form the SDP. OMOV always had a superficial democratic ring about it, but it was the right that realised gutting democracy of any participation could strengthen its hand against the Party activists. Norman Tebbit has always known this and, in the early eighties, he railed against the union mass meeting and legislated for compulsory secret postal ballots.

The argument against OMOV is lost in the Party and this year will see the further extention of OMOV in the annual elections for the National Executive Committee.

OMOV will even include a battle among household names for the position of constituency representative on the Conference Arrangements Committee. In a further centralisation of the voting system, votes will be counted at Walworth Road and not in the local constituency party.

There are still pockets of anti-OMOV resistance. In the recent Rotherham by-election selection, local activists realised that keeping the Party together and winning local elections counts for nought at Walworth Road.

First, the favourite local nominee was excluded from the ballot paper and then the selection of the candidate was determined by people who didn't even attend meetings. The Rotherham activists deserve our support but we must also think tactically, just as the Labour right did in the late seventies and early eighties.

While OMOV has been inflicted on the local parties one major section of the Party, the NEC trade union section, has remained strangely immune.

Now let's not be romantic about this, as the trade union section is certainly not the last remaining bastion of participatory democracy, with trade union reps keenly representing their members' views as expressed by local branches and annual conferences. If this was really the case, the introduction of OMOV would be something to be fought tooth and nail.

Unfortunately the reality of the trade union section is one of sordid horse-trading and manoeuvring as the union barons share out the spoils between a bunch of mediocre nonentities.

The introduction of OMOV to this section of the party would be no bad thing. In the current circumstances, the introduction of even the limited democracy of an individual ballot would be a modest step forward. I can't name more than three or four trade union representatives on the NEC, can you?

Did you know the National Union of Mineworkers hasn't had a representative for years because they can't make deals with the other unions? Whose your union got on the NEC (okay, it's Tom Sawyer to the clever dicks in UNISON)?

Imagine a situation if an NUM rep had stood during the coal battle just over a year ago. Who would ordinary trade union members have voted for in an individual ballot? My money would be on the NUM.

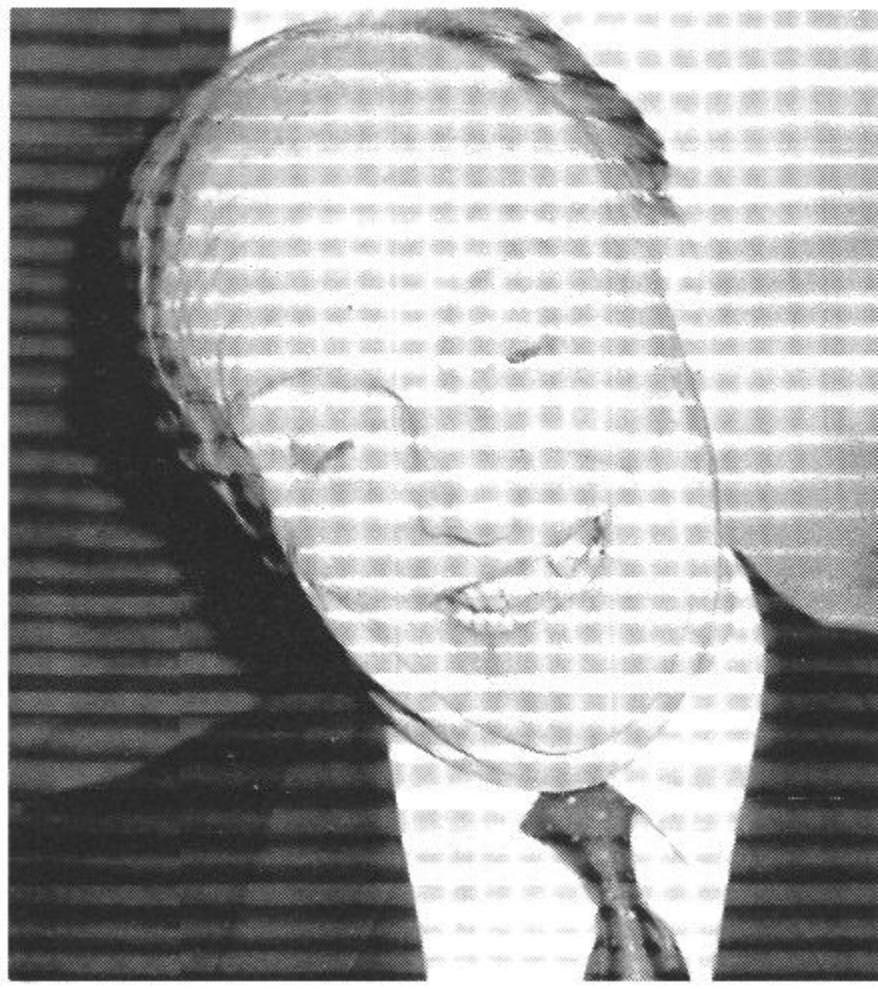
Imagine the pressure that could be brought to bear on a Labour government if the trade union reps on the NEC had every political levy paying member in the country breathing down their necks.

In those circumstances I think trade union reps on the NEC would find it impossible to repeat their disgraceful role in voting against supporting striking healthworkers at Neil Kinnock's behest. So next time OMOV comes up at your local party meeting or trade union branch meeting why not point to the hypocrisy of the trade union leaders and argue for a bit of OMOV for their reps on the NEC? ❑

Drop the horse-trading

Bryn Griffiths examines the reality of trade union democracy and argues for OMOV in elections to Labour's ruling body.

WHATSISNAME: Dodgy methods of electing the NEC helped this man abandon the health workers. PHOTO: *Newsfocus*.



NEWS & VIEWS

An open door

Paul Donovan looks at the rainbow alliance forming around protests against the government's brutal roads programme and asks if Labour will take up this inviting challenge.

"HOUSING, POLLUTION, the provision of a cheap, affordable public transport system, protecting the environment and the economic and social well-being of communities." This statement was not that of a politician seeking office but a campaigner outlining the issues involved in opposing the M11 Link Road in Wanstead, just east of London.

The breadth of social amenities threatened by the government's £23 billion road-building programme has brought together a diverse coalition of forces. Among the protestors are environmentalists, homeless groups, civil liberties organisations, medical practitioners and even some former bastions of the establishment.

In Wanstead, local people - many former Conservative voters - have been outraged at what is happening. In what was once Winston Churchill's constituency, local anger has been stoked by the seeming indifference to the road protestors of a non-resident Tory MP, who greeted the award of the latest construction contract on the link road route as "excellent" news.

The tactics of the police on the day of the felling of the now-famous Chestnut tree also helped consolidate local support. Few of those around the tree on December 7th had encountered the police in riot mode before. Old and young alike were bundled aside in the early hours of the morning as the first contingents from the Territorial Support Unit arrived.

The Criminal Justice Bill further threatens protestors' rights to peacefully protest and opposition to this legislation is likely to be swelled from the ranks of the road protestors.

In the case of the M11 Link Road, the High Court has been used by protestors to obtain vital delays in the work.

First, there was an injunction on the Chestnut tree granting it the status of a "legal dwelling." Then, in January, there was further delay by the courts in granting eviction notices for the four Edwardian houses that became known as Wanstonia.

In other parts of the country the law has proved less of a friend to road protestors. In Newcastle, trade union legislation has been utilised and at Twyford Down civil law was employed to impose damages on protestors for damage done to contractors equipment. The use of armies of security guards and surveillance equipment has also been a feature of both the Twyford and Wanstead protests.

While at the M11 Link site, young eco-warriors tie themselves to the construction workers' equipment, so in



Oxfordshire Lord and Lady Bullock are among those threatening to do likewise to oppose a pending bypass.

Peaceful direct action has been the major campaigning tool to emerge as a result of the lack of response from central government to citizens' protests.

Patsy Braga, a founder member of Wanstead Against the M11 Link Road, has spent years writing letters and attending public inquiries. She likens her experiences to being "continually hit in the face with a wet fish." The swell of popular support for the roads protest and direct action tactics are a response to a crisis that has grown deeper over 15 years.

Many groups, like Transport 2000 and Road Alert, have pointed to the absurdity of a transport policy that is based on the premise of providing road space for twice the number of cars by the year 2025.

The question of the capacity of the country to absorb such a surfeit of vehicles does not appear to be on the Whitehall agenda. A major reason for this seeming amnesia is simple party economics: the Tory Party is bank-rolled by the roads lobby. Put simply, the more roads that are built the more funds there will be flowing into Central Office.

The roads programme, it has been suggested, is the logical extension of the "no-society" conservatism of the Thatcher era. However, for the opposition, the protest movement offers a unique opportunity to capture a politicised and active constituency.

Health, housing, the environment, transport, employment and the criminal justice system are all impacted by the pursuit of the roads programme.

Whether the government will listen to increasingly voluble calls to stop the roads programme or continue to plough down its very own cul de sac remains to be seen. For the Labour Party, the door is wide open to place itself at the head of this growing movement of disaffected people. Whether Labour will seize the moment should become clearer over the coming months.

● For further information about the No M11 Link Road Campaign contact PO Box 956, Leytonstone Delivery Office. E11. Tel 081 558 2638 or Road Alert 0703 237809.

Howard and the Hornies



Alan Simpson, MP for Nottingham South, recently went charging around the countryside to find out what hunt saboteurs are all about. His impressions do not bode well for Michael Howard's absurd new legislation.

FORGET ABOUT the Yardies, I want to tell you about a new bunch of criminals who are about to create huge upheavals amongst everyday life in Britain. They are bright, single-minded and well organised. In a short while we will probably come to know them as the Hornies. But at the moment you might find them more recognisable under the heading of "hunt saboteurs".

I'm calling them the Hornies because, under the Home Secretary's current proposals, their tactics of blowing hunting horns to confuse the hounds in a fox hunt will become a criminal offence. So, too, will the act of spreading themselves out and barking like hounds, or cracking hunting whips in the air in order to summon the dogs or distract them. At the moment, all of these are perfectly legal ways of trying to give the fox a slightly better chance of avoiding being torn limb from limb.

When the Home Secretary introduced his proposals to Parliament he painted a picture of widespread violent conflict between the hunt and those who oppose it. On the principle that you should never trust a Tory, I thought I'd better check it out for myself. So I went out with "the Sabs" to see what happens in practice.

Make no mistake about it, there is an unbridgeable gap between the hunt and those who oppose it. The gap is about the acceptability of killing for fun. It is also about whether an activity which subjects animals to a protracted "chase" and a painful and brutal death, deserves the sanitised title of being a sport. The two views will never meet, but, to my surprise, they have been able to establish a "dialogue" which is a million miles on from the confrontations that the Home Secretary claims make his new laws necessary.

The Sabs now talk with the police and the masters of the hunts. The tactics are diversionary rather than confrontational. And the initiative of the Leicestershire Police in having the country's first (and only) Hunt Intelligence Officer has helped to turn something which was once an event which required intensive policing into one which can be covered by two to five officers. Astonishingly (predictably?) the Home Secretary never asked the advice of the Leicestershire Police before formulating his new proposals.

Let me explain a little about the Sabs and their tactics. First of all, they are fit. Running around the countryside all day is no joke, and doing so along tracks of ankle deep mud requires real stamina as well as ideological commitment. Secondly, they are incredibly knowledgeable. I listened in awe as they described the countryside we were heading into, the likely choices open to the hunt, the effect of the weather on both the foxes and the hounds, and how best to deploy themselves. This was a battle of minds more than muscle.

If you can get ahead of the hunt, predict its movements, distract or confuse the hounds, why bother with pointless confrontations? But the law will change all this.

Within a year, an event which required three officers to police it will probably need 300.

It will be an unenforceable farce. Officers will have to go in pursuit of people running across fields in case they intend to blow a hunting horn or bark. The sight of hundreds of police officers gambolling around the countryside and arresting people for doing dog impersonations hardly bears thinking about. The Home Secretary is dragging us all into the politics of the absurd. And he is doing so at the behest of an element of English feudal history which is long past its sell-by date.

But this isn't the worst of it. Call me naive if you like, but I thought that the most serious aspects of crime we now face are those which most threaten people's lives and livelihoods. Ram-raiding of shops, armed robberies, burglaries, car crime and attacks on people.

The police don't want this change in the law. They know that it will cause a collapse in the relationship they have painstakingly developed with both the hunters and their opponents. They know that there will be no new resources to back up the Home Secretary's act of folly. They know how far it will deflect them from the real priorities of crime prevention and crime detection that they wish to address.

Even at this stage it would be better for the Home Secretary to ask the police how to proceed. At worst, he ought to make it clear that the hunt would have to pay for its own policing, in the way that football has to. ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Control and coercion

September of this year will see the first major international conference on population for 10 years, to be held in Cairo. **Leonora Lloyd** kicks off the debate in the pages of *Briefing* on this vital issue.

THE LAST International Conference on Population and Development, held in Mexico in 1984, was notable for an announcement by the United States representative that the US would no longer fund any family planning programmes that included the provision of legal abortion.

At least that has changed: Clinton announced the turn-around shortly after coming to office. But every aspect of population politics is a matter for debate and division, between different religions, funding agencies and recipients, governments and within the feminist community.

In the 1960s, population growth was a big issue. There were grim forecasts about a future world out of control. Novels such as *Move Over! Move Over!* (later made into a film) showed a future United States where only those with money could buy space, fresh water or even clean air, and where the dead were processed to provide proteins. Birth control was unknown.

Since then, the provision of more effective forms of contraception, together with changing attitudes on the part of many governments, has resulted in a real slowing down in the rate of population growth in many parts of the world.

Despite this slowing down, there will still be large increases in population in the future. For example, the population of Tanzania will double in the next 23 years at the current rate of growth. The debate aroused by such forecasts covers two issues: can those countries affected and the world in general cope with this level of growth, and what, if any, is the difference between population control and family planning? Between encouragement and coercion?

In many European countries, however, the worry is quite different - that an ageing population will not be supported in future years because of a drop in the birth rate. In most European countries, the average family size is around 1.3 children - Britain, at 1.7 has one of the highest rates of growth in Europe.

Women are starting families later and the one-child family is coming about without any of the coercion thought necessary in China. While in pre-industrial societies, children were seen as productive and adding to a family's wealth or wealth-creating possibilities, now they are seen as an expensive luxury. Not only are they unable to earn a living, they cost more and more to provide with the apparent necessities of life.

But the biggest change of all has been in the status of women and their working patterns. Most women now work for most of their lives. Most European countries have facilities for pre-school child-care, maternity allowances and child-allowances.

Many European countries, faced with the prospect of falling populations, have developed their policies in order to counteract the trend, with little success. A few years ago, the French government ran a campaign to encourage births. A poster and post-card campaign showed blond, blue-eyed babies, with slogans saying that polls showed that a majority of the population agreed that France needed more French babies.

There is a strong racist aspect to the falling population rates. If so-called "guest workers" in Europe were to be given full political rights and allowed to have their families living with them, the trend of ageing populations would soon be reversed.

Immigrants all over the world show a similar pattern. Because they are younger than the resident population, they have a higher birth rate than the natives. In addition, when they come from developing countries, it usually takes one to two generations for them to adopt the same models of family planning. In the developed countries, women gradually find more freedom and there is much better access to health care, including family planning.

To a lesser extent, the same patterns apply in the large cities of the Third World. For example, around 80 per cent of Indian women - most of them living in villages - never see a doctor throughout their lives. In that context, even though local health workers may develop good family planning initiatives, if anything goes wrong the woman may just stop using birth control, rather than seek an alternative method. Where specialists are easily accessible, she will be encouraged to try something different.

In the past, the greatest increases in population were found in Europe. The same factors which apply to large parts of the developing world were at play.

The most important was what has been called "death control" - particularly changes in the care of women and babies that enabled more infants to live beyond their vulnerable first year. The move from rural to urban living was a result of, and a factor in, increased population growth. One result of this change was that many old solutions to unwanted pregnancy were lost, sometimes for ever - folk methods of contraception and abortion.

The reduction in population growth in the west is the best hope the world has if the world's resources are to be preserved and developed for future generations. It is western peoples who are destroying the world at an ever faster rate. A baby born in the USA today will use over 80 times as much of those resources as a baby born in a developing country, and twice as much as the average European child.

● **The second part of this article, next month, will look at the issues raised by the 1994 population conference for the developing world and the debate between feminists.**

Victims of policy

The killing of Jonathan Zito by a schizophrenic, Christopher Clunis, and the subsequent report has brought the government much unwelcome attention. **Geoff Mann** looks at the issues involved.

THE DEBATE surrounding the Christopher Clunis report has been polarised between the "lock 'em up and throw away the key" brigade and those who advocate more spending on care in the community.

Last month, the report on Christopher Clunis's case was published, fourteen months after Clunis, a schizophrenic who had been a patient in several psychiatric hospitals, stabbed Jonathan Zito to death at a London Underground station.

It is remarkably brave and compassionate for the wife of Clunis's victim to say of care in the community: "It's failing so many people and ultimately it is the government that has to be held responsible. I think Christopher Clunis is just as much a victim of government policy as Jon was."

But, then, Jayne Zito knows more about care in the community than Virginia Bottomley, the Health Secretary, will ever know. It is a sad irony that she worked for three years at a "halfway house", helping patients to adjust to life in the outside world, but left her job because she saw the flaws in the current system.

The Tories have never really been interested in "caring" for the mentally ill; they merely saw an opportunity to save money in the health budget and implemented reforms with the pretence that their policy was more understanding of the needs of psychiatric patients.

The inquiry, chaired by Jean Ritchie QC, concluded that "a considerable injection of funds is the only answer."

So what is Bottomley's response to this? Well, she has promised an extra £10 million for community-based mental health care in London from next year.

As Tony Roddis, from the Psychiatric Support and After-Care Workshops, wrote to the *Independent*, "Ten million pounds for community-based organisations in London will perhaps scratch the surface of a failing mental health system in the capital; it will do nothing for mental health services in the rest of the country."



The Health Secretary has also promised an extra £45 million for 1,000 more medium secure beds by 1995-6. So the government is planning to spend an extra £55 million, whereas the National Schizophrenic Fellowship recommends that the current £2 billion spent on mental illness services needs to be raised by £500 million a year.

More funding is only part of the solution, it is equally important to consider how the money is spent. Hard-line Tories would want more locked wards, egged on by the gutter press. The Health Secretary wants to implement policies which will force patients to take their medication. There is no denying that the drugs currently being prescribed by psychiatrists have an important role to play in the treatment of the mentally ill, but equally important is the provision of intensive and long-term therapy, counselling and support, which can only be provided by well trained and highly motivated mental health carers.

Unfortunately, the Clunis Report failed to recognise this and, instead, called for a network of voluntary "befrienders". The use of drug therapy is relatively cheap and has more to do with controlling patients than helping them to keep well.

The need for proper aftercare can only be addressed by employing well-qualified psychiatrists, community psychiatric nurses (CPNs), psychotherapists and counsellors and undertaking much needed medical research into mental illness.

The Clunis Report made several recommendations in this area which are to be welcomed. The most important of these are the setting up of special teams of carers with earmarked money to supervise and support the most disturbed of patients when they are returned to the community; ensuring that CPNs have the resources to follow patients across health authority boundaries until care plans have been firmly transferred; and the provision of well-staffed "havens" for patients making the transition from institutionalized care to community care

An effective community care policy would raise levels of awareness and understanding of mental health issues in the public, especially as one person in ten experiences some form of mental illness in their lifetime.

In extreme cases the mentally ill do become violent, but a genuine understanding of their condition would recognize that the way society has treated them often contributes to their violence. If we don't provide a warm, comfortable supportive and non-threatening environment for vulnerable people, it isn't surprising that they become violent.

● **For more information about mental illness contact National Schizophrenic Fellowship, 28 Castle Street, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, KT1 1SS.**

Trade



Strikes in Britain have been rendered virtually illegal, and certainly unworkable, by a High Court ruling on February 24th against the university and college lecturers' union, NATFHE.

The union had properly balloted its members for a one-day strike against the employers' attempts to introduce draconian new contracts for lecturers - the workforce was balloted at all 335 further education colleges belonging to the national Colleges' Employers' Forum.

Lecturers voted overwhelmingly for action and the date was set for March 1st. However, Blackpool and Fylde College promptly took NATFHE to court under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act of 1992. Mr Justice Morrison ruled that, under the Act, the union must supply the names and categories of those employees to be balloted.

NATFHE argued that if Parliament had intended that unions should be required to name particular employees the law would have stated that and that the requirement to describe employees meant the category of workers, not their actual identities.

Morrison's judgement was upheld by the Appeal Court, which means that strikes are now just about impossible. The ruling also denies the right of privacy to trade unionists and means that bosses can now interfere in the union/employee relationship.

NATFHE's chief negotiator, Sue Berryman, said after the decision: "If this decision is not overturned, these sections of the government's new employment laws represent an extraordinary attack on the civil liberties of trade union members. This is a disaster, removing the rights of people to privacy in respect of their union membership and exposing trade union members to harassment and victimisation.

"Parliament will be seen to have been misled by Ministers who resisted amendments to the new laws on the grounds that trade unions would not be expected to reveal the names of their members to employers."

At three colleges - Handsworth in Birmingham, Tower Hamlets in East London and Southwark in South London - lecturers defied the national union's instructions to call off the action and walked out on 1st March. Lecturers at those colleges could now face legal proceedings by their college authorities, which would take labour relations back to the 1900s, with the prospect of bosses suing workers simply for withdrawing their labour.

Nora Gresham, a NATFHE branch secretary in Islington, north London, pointed out, "We are left negotiating new contracts locally and people will have to take action locally. It precludes national action.

"Either ministers misled Parliament or this is a very quirky judgement. I tend to think that Parliament was misled."

The Durham Miners Gala will go ahead this year after fears that we had seen the last of one of the greatest Labour movement events.

The two last pits in the whole of the north-east - Ellington and Wearmouth - are closing down although both are likely to be snapped up by a private sector hungry for the large profits available. The Durham miners' magnificent headquarters is up for sale and the area's leaders said that the NUM could no longer finance the gala without help.

Clearly, extra finance has been found but it is not yet known where from - there have been rumours that other unions, and even some private companies, were expressing interest.

The event's long-term future is not secure but at least it will be going ahead in 1994.

The TUC has announced that it has hired Des Wilson - the former Liberal Party president and director of the Liberal Democrat campaign at the last election - as a consultant on public relations and campaigning. The move had been accurately predicted by *Tribune*, the left Labour weekly, a week before the announcement.

Under the leadership of new general secretary, John Monks, the TUC seems determined to leave the rest of the Labour movement behind and become merely another multi-party pressure group. Monks has already abolished most of the key committees in Congress House and last month the Treasury minister, Stephen Dorrell, became the first Tory Minister to address a TUC conference for 20 years.

Incredibly, Dorrell told the trade unionists that workers had to accept either wage cuts or redundancies - without a murmur of protest. Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown has met with Monks and the TUC president, Rodney Bickerstaffe. They agreed to continuing contacts.

Des Wilson secured the TUC deal - worth at least £50,000 over six months - for the PR agency for which he works, Burston Marsteller.

The richest irony is that the TUC is spending a fortune on slick, trendy PR at least a couple of years after the rest of the country began to see such methods as unfashionable and associated with the casino eighties. Things have moved on. Trade union members want to see tangible, solid returns for their cash - such as good legal representation and committed support in the event of industrial action - not a load of glitz from the eighties' versions of the bomb-site spiv.

Coventry appears to be the scene for an attempt by the Engineering Employers Federation to crush the extremely healthy shop stewards' movement in that city.

Traditionally, shop stewards enjoyed powerful support in Glasgow, Liverpool and Coventry. With the massacre of engineering jobs in the first two, only the Midlands city is left as a real bastion of industrial trade union activism.

But the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union says that it has seen many of its activists victimised. At JS Chinn, over 50 workers walked out after it was announced that shop steward John Watkins would be among the first to take compulsory redundancy.

This came after the same thing had happened to three stewards at Rolls-Royce and one at GPT, formerly GEC-Plessey.

Mike Robinson, area organiser for the MSF in the Midlands, said that it seemed there was "a concerted drive to attack the shop stewards' movement in Coventry."

union news

TRADE UNION PICKET NOTEBOOK

A government-funded study has shown that Britain is rapidly reverting to Victorian industrial relations as the influence of workers declines.

The *New Industrial Relations*, part of the government-sponsored Workplace Industrial Relations Survey, says: "Britain is approaching the position where few employees have any mechanism through which they can contribute to the operation of their workplace in a broader context than that of their own job."

Growth in inequality of earnings, which, according to the study, is greater in Britain than almost all other developed economies, is matched by a "widening in inequalities of influence" at work and access to key employment decisions.

The study, based on interviews with 5,000 managers at a representative sample of 2,000 workplaces, says that there is virtually no evidence of any growth in progressive management techniques in Britain - many managers see Britain's descent into the sort of brutal industrial relations reminiscent of the last century as necessary for economic success.

However, others see this as a "reversion toward the type of economy that gave rise to trade unionism in the last century."

Unpublished information gathered for the study, but revealed by veteran industrial correspondent Philip Bassett, of *The Times*, gives an indication of what happens to union membership when an employer fully derecognises the union. It shows that membership density averaged 54 per cent before derecognition but afterwards fell as low as 15 per cent.

The WIRS series of surveys is widely regarded as having tracked accurately the massive changes in labour relations in Britain since the first Thatcher government came to power in 1979.

The Graphical, Paper and Media Union has forced print bosses to concede a national pay settlement after the British Printing Industries Federation ended talks in an attempt to force the print union into submission.

The BPIF has agreed to a 2.8 per cent cash increase, which the GPMU will recommend to its members in a national ballot. There will also be working parties set up to look at a series of issues including the restoration of a common basic rate of pay, holiday entitlements, differentials and a review of machine classification and photocomposition rates and trainee rates.

The union made its pay demand over a year ago but national negotiations collapsed when the employers withdrew. But the GPMU met with considerable success in seeking deals with individual companies - many firms which turned down the deal succumbed when the issue of industrial action was raised. This led to a sheepish return to the negotiating table by the BPIF.

There are three major firms still in dispute as a result of the pay and conditions demands.

Workers at Arrowsmith's in Bristol and Revell and George and Harvest Print in the north are on strike and have the full backing of the union's general secretary, Tony Dubbins.

Arrowsmith's in particular has had something of a high profile. The firms management, led by the somewhat medieval figure of Victoria Arrowsmith-Brown, used the dispute to throw 121 people out of their jobs by demanding that they sign a statement dissociating themselves from the union's actions.

After some months, Arrowsmith-Brown offered what she imagined was a weakened and demoralised workforce new contracts with worse pay and conditions. In the event, only three workers walked back through the factory gate.

The workforce continue to fight on heroically, with the voluble support of Dubbins and local MPs Dawn Primarolo and Jean Corsten.

A new round of pit closures looks certain as Bilsthorpe, Kiverton Park, Prince of Wales, Point of Ayr and Tower collieries are about to be put through the review procedure. This is basically a method whereby the government can shut down pits and then try to argue that there was some sort of justice about the whole sordid business.

There are now only 15 working pits left under British Coal management but a number of firms are already buying up the closed mines, itching to get their hands on the very rich pickings available.

Former Coal Board manager Malcolm Edwardes, who now has his own company, Edwardes Energy, controls Coventry and Trentham collieries in the Midlands. Potentially, Coventry colliery is particularly profitable as it is underneath the city's Homefire plant, which produces smokeless fuel for domestic use.

The management at Homefire was forced to import Polish coal when the pit closed two years ago but has consistently expressed a wish to again buy from the local mine.

Other firms which are expressing a strong interest in British pits include Caledonian, Budge and Ryan while there is also a management buy-out bid being co-ordinated by the British Association of Colliery Managers.

The former Coal Board chief, Ian MacGregor, is in Britain sniffing around for a large US mining firm.

The news agency, Reuters, has announced that its television arm is to derecognise the media technicians' union, BECTU.

The news agency, which is one of the world's five biggest and the only one based in Britain, will continue to recognise and negotiate with the National Union of Journalists and the Graphical, Paper and Media Union.

A House of Commons Early Day Motion condemning the derecognition has been signed by over 30 MPs.

The Construction Safety Campaign is organising a march to commemorate the many building workers killed through on-site accidents.

The march will assemble at Euston station in central London at 11am, departing at 12 noon, on April 28th. There will be a lobby of Parliament from 2pm at St Stephen's entrance, followed by a meeting at the Church House Conference Centre, Dean's Yard, Westminster from 2.30pm to 6.30pm.

The Irish union for blind and partially sighted people, the National League of the Blind, has mounted pickets in Dublin outside the Department of Health and Blindcraft, a firm which makes beds and some furniture. The union is demanding pay rises larger than that allowed in the national agreement and is arguing that three-day shifts fail to provide a decent working wage for its members.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Roads to freedom

Laura Sullivan visited Sinn Fein's recent national conference, the *Ard Fheis*, and came away invigorated and full of hope.

I SAT AT the back of a cold, under resourced community hall in Tallaght in the Republic of Ireland. It was an historic occasion. Photographers lined the back of the wall behind me and the front rows were filled with journalists. The hall, and the marquee attached to it, were crammed full with Sinn Fein members and visitors.

The interest of the media was focused on two men. When Gerry Adams appeared there was a flurry of activity from camera crews that was only relieved by the appearance of Martin McGuiness. The capitalist media persists with the illusion that decisions are made by single men in parties like Sinn Fein. That it is only we, in Britain, who have real democracy.

In fact, the opposite is true - the media were waiting with baited breath for a decision about the Downing Street Declaration. Sinn Fein is still consulting its party members and the wider community about the next moves in the peace process.

Ireland is a censored issue in England, not just because of the voice-overs on TV. The media distorts and misleads with the dissemination of misinformation.

The general public is inclined to believe this because of the pervasiveness of anti-Irish racism. Even when one is politically active around the campaign for British withdrawal, first hand knowledge is not always accessible. The *Ard Fheis* confirmed for me that Sinn Fein was still a united party. There was a unity expressed through speeches from the ruling *Ard Chomhairle* members, in the speeches of delegates and in the messages of support from the prisoners of the Irish war. Rumours of a likely split in Sinn Fein because of the declaration seem unfounded, as does the rumour of a split between Adams and McGuiness.

The highlight of the weekend was Gerry Adams's speech. He was in a confident mood, having got used to being in the glare of the international media spotlight. He talked of the collusion between the Loyalist death squads and the British counter-insurgency forces. He pointed to the myth that the IRA is the instigator of violence: "We are told Loyalists' actions are reactive. Yet the first post-war riots in Belfast, in 1964, were incited by Ian Paisley."

He went on to give other examples. He talked of the spiral of Loyalist reaction. He put this background before us, then discussed the British government's position over the Downing Street Declaration. While assurances have been made to Unionists, the northern nationalists aren't mentioned in the declaration. He showed the British government's present posture to be a sham, as they have negotiated with Sinn Fein for three years.

Adams ended by spelling out Sinn Fein's commitment to a lasting peace, analysing the financial and human cost of the Irish war. He talked of the dividends that the end of partition could bring to Ireland, including the benefits of integrating the two economies. Generally at this conference, it was clear that the younger delegates and prisoners are making the most progressive demands on the party. The strongest motion on women's issues recognised that a large proportion of women in Ireland want a constitution that embraces a secular state which provides safeguards for gender equality.

Daisy Mules addressed the issue of women in the general debate. She said that "when we hear about the peace process the perception of the public is that women are not in there." She asked Sinn Fein to address a broader spectrum of women.

A lot of the agenda was taken up with specific issues like anti-drug campaigns, local government, education and childcare. I imagine that the international media was surprised at how much time was given to such issues.

I came away hopeful and invigorated. The Irish struggle has moved on to a new phase. Most importantly, for me, was seeing people who give their lives to this struggle filled with hope and confidence that the achievement of a just and lasting peace is not so far away. ❑



Sinn Fein conference in action.

Europe: a bumpy ride

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

With Chancellor Kohl in trouble, opportunities are opening for both left and right in Germany. **Peter Thompson**, a lecturer in politics at Sheffield University, assesses the situation.

GERMANY'S BIGGEST ever round of elections has kicked off with the state elections in Lower Saxony in the old West. The issues which were raised in that election, and the outcome, show quite clearly the nature of politics in post-unification Germany. The state was previously governed by a coalition of the SPD with the Greens - the former can now form a majority government.

The main losers of this election were Chancellor Kohl's CDU which lost about 7 per cent of its support, and the liberal FDP which failed to pass the 5 per cent hurdle for representation. Significantly, these two parties form the national government in Bonn and if this result were to be repeated at the national elections in October there would be a change of government.

What sort of government would emerge after October depends on the performance of another party which stood in the Lower Saxony elections, the Republicans, the hard-right nationalist party led by Franz Schonhuber. Although they, too, failed to gain the 5 per cent necessary for representation, they did double their 1990 vote to nearly 4 per cent.

This election has taken place at a time when two issues are dominating the political agenda. The first is that of the recession and rising unemployment and the resulting pressure which business is trying to put on workers in Germany. The opening up of the East has led to an increased readiness on the part of capital in Germany to threaten its own workers with a relocation of investment. Capital in Germany is beginning to endorse whole-heartedly the Thatcherite neo-liberal agenda.

The other issue is that of German nationalism. This is most clearly represented by the growth in support for the hard-right-wing parties and a new scepticism about European unification. The Republicans have deliberately profiled themselves as the party which will "put Germany first" and are reaping the benefit from this, not only in terms of increased electoral support, but also because they have managed to shift the CDU onto their ground.

All of the major parties, the SPD included, have adopted a more nationalistic stance which has resulted in changes to the asylum laws and the pandering to racist sentiments.

It is a mistake to lump all the right-wing parties together with the Republicans and to describe them all loosely as neo-nazis. To understand where Germany is likely to head in the next few years it is important to recognize that there are significant differences between the parties to the right of the ruling CDU/CSU coalition.

When Germany unified, it was not a case of simply a bigger Federal Republic of Germany. The new Germany is a qualitatively new country which is struggling to find a fitting role in the new world order. It is this search for a new role rather than the existence of a few skinhead thugs which poses the main threat to stability in Europe. And it is the way in which the CDU/CSU reacts to this trend which will determine the future of Germany in Europe.

The political image the Republicans have tried to build is far from that of the beer-swilling skinheads who have dominated the debate recently. Schonhuber openly copies Mrs Thatcher's campaign against "Brussels bureaucrats" as a way of mobilizing German fears for the Deutschmark and he claims that the Republicans are the only anti-Maastricht party in Germany and that, to paraphrase Nicholas Ridley, the European Exchange Rate Mechanism is an anti-German racket.

The new leader of the Bavarian CSU, Edmund Stoiber, has mimicked almost exactly Schonhuber's language about the EC and Maastricht and has spoken out quite clearly against a grand coalition. This may well be a tactical ploy to win support back from the Republicans but so far it doesn't seem to be bearing much fruit. The CDU/CSU continue to fall in the opinion polls while the Republicans continue to rise.

A Republican surge would pose serious problems for the CDU/CSU because the issues which Schonhuber raises find a resonance deep within the established parties, and the political programme he is creating will fill a yawning gap in the spectrum of post-unification Germany.

The CDU won the elections in the GDR in March 1990 for purely pragmatic reasons. The people there wanted reunification as quickly as possible and had to vote for Kohl in order to get it. The CDU had no electoral or traditional base in that area of Germany and the economic disaster which has followed reunification has drastically reduced support for the CDU there.

The left needs to develop the greatest possible unity against austerity programmes and the exploitation of national chauvinism. The strong showing of the SPD and the Greens in Lower Saxony and the rising tide of support for the PDS in the ex-GDR show that on paper this unity could be a powerful antidote to the creation of a bosses' Europe. That unity now needs to be transformed into one of action rather than theory. If it fails, then Germany and Europe will be in for a very bumpy ride. ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

A new

Louis Sibeko, general secretary of the Thokoza Civic Association in the East Rand, recently presented a special paper to an international meeting sponsored by the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid. Here are some extracts.

IN ORDER TO understand the conflict between hostel and township, it is necessary to understand the history of hostels over the past decade. While many township communities were convulsed by widespread mobilisation against apartheid policies, many hostels remained isolated from the political developments of the eighties and increasingly became bastions of traditionalism often interpreted as conservative.

In some ways this was the result of a failure by political organisations to make substantial inroads into the hostel community. With the abolition of influx control during the mid-1980s, the composition of hostel residents began to change rapidly. The hostels became increasingly overcrowded as people came to the urban areas to seek work.

There was a history of social and economic interaction between hostel residents and surrounding communities. Prior to the increased politicisation of hostels in the 1990s it was common for residents to visit hostels and vice versa.

This was illustrated by hostel residents frequenting townships shebeens, hostel and township football teams playing one another and residents hawking their wares inside the hostels. Divisive political activity inevitably eroded such interaction.

There is no single cause for the escalation of the violence in the area despite the view by some political commentators that the violence rises in relation to important political events or announcements.

This view is too simplistic and fails to take into account local conditions which are very often the catalyst and engine to upsurges and the perpetuation of violent acts. It is clear that the causes of the violence in the East Rand are diverse and cannot always be attributed to events within the wider political arena.

Violence has impacted on already appalling socio-economic conditions. Squatter camps are without adequate drinking water and proper sanitation. The refugee problem has not been tackled adequately, although there have been a number of informal efforts which have alleviated the suffering for some. The communities themselves have borne the brunt of the problem as many people sought accommodation and relief within the townships themselves.

Unemployment is high and schooling in the area has been seriously disrupted. The social and moral fabric of the Thokoza/Katlehong community has been shattered. Death is an everyday occurrence that seldom shocks. The sound of gunfire can be heard day and night. The question as to whether the conditions for free and fair elections exist in the East Rand is debatable.

I come from the East Rand township of Thokoza which, along with Katlehong, has accounted for over 80 per cent of political deaths in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging area over the last year. I am a schoolteacher and I work in Katlehong.

Since the implementation of the "peace plan" negotiated at the Transitional Executive Council, which included the replacement of the notorious Internal Stability Unit (Riot Unit) with members of the South Africa Defence Force (SADF), there has been a noticeable decline in the violence. However, more recently we have had several reports of serious abuses of power by the SADF in the area which resulted in eight Thokoza residents, two of whom were 14-year-olds, being severely tortured.

The "peace plan" has not been accepted by all sectors of the community. The Inkatha Freedom Party, for example, were against the removal of the ISU and its replacement with the SADF because it believes that the SADF is sympathetic to the ANC.

There are serious problems in the East Rand regarding the attitude of the security forces in general. The Crime Information Services (CIS) - the old security police - are hell bent on causing maximum disruption in the township.

The most serious problem facing us in the East Rand is intolerance. There are, for example, "no-go areas" where one political party or another is not welcome. In Thokoza, residents living opposite the hostel complex have been forced to flee their homes because they refused to become members of the IFP and pay taxes to the hostel warlords.

Intimidation is rife, people often join political parties not out of choice but out of necessity. They join to survive - failure to produce a party card can mean instant death. Because of the violence in the East Rand, it has been difficult to get voter education programmes off the ground.

It is clear that the possibility for free and fair elections in the East Rand is remote because of the lack of discipline in the security forces as well as the fact that perpetrators of the violence are not brought to book. Ordinary criminal activity is becoming politicised.

Propaganda is a serious problem in the area. Some people claim that, since the SADF has replaced the ISU, there has been no decline in the violence. This is incorrect: in fact there has been a significant decline in the violence on the East Rand. These confused messages tend to frustrate the community and leads to a lack of confidence in the "peace plan". Obviously, the plan is not infallible but it is the only one we have and we need it to work if we intend to have any kind of normal life on the East Rand. ❑

dawn?



ANC supporters armed with a variety of weapons give Nelson Mandela a rapturous welcome at a rally in Sebokeng near Johannesburg during his election campaign in the Transvaal. PHOTO: Popperfoto.

Veteran South Africa political activist **Charlie van Gelderen** assesses the build-up to polling day in that country and sees major problems ahead.

THERE CAN be no doubt that the events in Bobphuthatswana, or Bop, in March have boosted the hopes of the ANC for a massive victory at the polls on April 27th.

Even before the debacle for the far right when its motley Boer army invaded the Bop capital, Mmabatho, to prop up the regime of its Freedom Alliance ally - the old apartheid regime's puppet, Lucas Mangope - the ANC were well ahead of their opponents in the opinion polls.

A recent poll gave the ANC 67 per cent of the votes; the (white) National Party, 17 per cent. Buthelezi's Inkatha Party (IFP) will win only 6 per cent, the Pan-African Congress 2 per cent.

The right, in the shape of the Conservative Party, and the far right (the AWB, etc) together would only get 7 per cent.

These figures show why the white right and Buthelezi fear the elections like the plague. Even in his own Natal fiefdom, Buthelezi can count on the support of only 32 per cent of the votes against 51 per cent for the ANC.

A fresh poll today would probably up the ANC and NP votes.

But, whoever wins the elections, the agreement reached between the ANC and the NP is that a coalition government will take office for five years during which time a new constitution would be devised. All parties with more than 5 per cent will be represented in the government, proportional to their vote in the April elections.

While, undoubtedly, there will be more outbreaks of violence before polling day, the government and the Transitional Executive Committee (TEC) now believe that they can rely on the security forces to control this. The real problems, especially for the ANC, will come after the elections.

The mass of the people, after nearly four centuries of political, racist and economic repression, is expecting a rapid change in their circumstances after a government with an ANC majority comes to power.

The ANC is making massive promises - two million jobs in ten years; ending VAT on basic foods; reducing taxes on earnings less than R4,000 a month; immediate introduction of a single educational system with guaranteed free education for the first ten years of schooling; doubling the availability of free text books for pupils within a year; building one million homes and providing electricity to 2.5 million urban and rural homes as well as running water and flush toilets to over one million families within five years; immediate introduction of free immunisation; basic nutrition and free health care for children under five.

While there is great exaltation at the disarray in the right, the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance is also having problems. This is especially the case inside the South African Communist Party, where there is a feeling that the leadership is being too uncritical of the reformist tendencies of the ANC.

The ANC has a few other major problems to overcome before the elections, quite apart from having to convince the voters that it will be able to implement its promises.

The still-powerful white farmers are making unconcealed attempts to frustrate the voting and electoral rights of farmworkers. Dries Bruwer, president of the Transvaal Agricultural Union, has written to Joe Slovo, chair of the SACP, stating that farmers intended to prevent canvassers and educators from visiting farms.

Despite protests from the ANC, the NP government has done nothing about this threat to the democratic process. ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Sao Paulo Forum: seeking the common ground

PLANS ARE NOW taking shape for initiatives later this year to publicise the Sao Paulo Forum, when leading members are expected in Britain. Jeremy Corbyn MP has issued a statement of support,

Mike Phipps
Brent South CLP

agreed by Socialist Campaign Group MPs - the only part of the Labour Party to have shown interest.

The Sao Paulo Forum was formed in 1990 as a forum for dialogue across the new left in Latin America. Its participants include the Brazilian Workers Party (PT), the Mexican Revolutionary Democratic Party, the FMLN of El Salvador, the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and the Cuban Communist Party.

At its recent conference in Havana, 112 different organisations took part from across Latin America and the Caribbean, including Communists, social democrats, Christian Socialists and Trotskyists. In addition, 25 observers attended from outside the continent.

That meeting agreed to send a high-level delegation from the Forum to Europe this summer to host a conference of the European left in Manchester to coincide with the Global Forum environmental event, a follow-up to the Rio summit two years ago. With the cancellation of Global Forum, however, the Sao Paulo Forum's plans are being scaled down, but leading members are still expected in Europe at the end of June to meet Euro-MPs and a number of smaller meetings in Britain are being sketched in.

These initiatives could not be more timely. Presidential elections are due later this year in Brazil, where PT candidate Lula, who lost narrowly to the now-disgraced Collar in 1989, is currently ahead in the polls. As we go to press, the FMLN is taking part in the first free elections in El Salvador since the civil war. Elections also take place this year in Mexico, Panama, Argentina, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. In many of these countries, the left is expecting to do well, and for many the relatively new experience of participating in elections will be a fruitful basis for exchanging ideas across the Sao Paulo Forum.

The Sao Paulo Forum does not lay down a line for its participants in these processes: it is not a new 'International'. It is a forum seeking common ground on issues faced by the whole left in Latin America: how to defend workers and the poor in the face of the neo-liberal offensive and indebtedness and how to forge a new relationship with the North. The Sao Paulo Forum is coming to Europe to seek the help of the left in doing just that.

Support groups are already active in a number of cities where it is hoped to hold meetings to coincide with the delegation's visit. This is more than a routine international duty: the left here has a lot to learn from the Sao Paulo Forum's united and inclusive approach!

● **For more information, contact the Sao Paulo Forum Support Group, P.O. Box 1, Birch Vale, Stockport, SK12 5DE.**

Zapatistas battle on

ON SUNDAY March 6th, thousands of Zapatista supporters marched through San Cristobal de las Casas

Jacqui Brown
Mexico

in Chiapas state to demonstrate their support for the demands of the EZLN which led to the original uprising early this year.

Two other marches took place elsewhere in the state. After the bloodless uprising, the army sent 14,000 soldiers into Chiapas and many deaths have followed. Death squads in the pay of the big ranchers are reputed to be targetting the leaders of the Zapatistas.

After 10 days of talks in San Cristobal de las Casas, an agreement was reached between the government and the Zapatistas on many of the demands.

Outstanding issues are calls for the resignation of the president, reform of the electoral system and the rescinding of the NAFTA treaty.

Support for the Zapatistas is not confined to Chiapas. On the march here were 300 people from Oaxaca, a neighbouring state 600 kilometres to the west. Both are largely rural states with very similar problems.

Great distress has been caused by the reform of Article 27 of the constitution which had previously forbidden the sale of family land. The fear is that many big landowners will force peasants to sell up.



Divide and rule

Daisy Arago looks at the wildly varied history of the trade union movement in the Philippines, where bosses have used a mixture of stealth and brutality in their treatment of the workers.

THE LONG history of the Philippine labour movement is woven with traditions of radicalism as well as conservatism, a characteristic which divides the movement itself. Despite the division, trade unions remain one of the formidable forces pursuing economic and political struggle. Yet in May 1992, there were 5,172 active unions representing 3.1 million workers, or 11 per cent of the total workforce.

Although different union centres claim memberships of hundreds of thousands, figures are often inflated for political and propaganda purposes. In reality, low levels of unionisation persist.

This can be primarily attributed to two factors. One is the absence of a genuine industrialisation programme. The manufacturing sector for instance, employs only 10.33 per cent of the workforce.

The second factor is restrictive labour legislation. Philippine labour law only allows permanent workers to form unions but permanent workers comprise only a small fraction of the working class. Farmers comprise the majority of those considered employed but are not allowed to form unions.

The low unionisation rate, notwithstanding the challenge it poses, is not the only problem the labour movement must face; it must contend with its own fragmentation.

Trade unionism started to surface in 1899 when wage earners in Manila, mostly from the printing, tobacco and wood industries began to organise. This union formed the nucleus of the first labour federation Union Obrera Democratica Filipina (UODF). UODF formation marked the early politicisation of the labour movement and the birth of militant and nationalist unionism. At the height of the anti-communist campaign in 1951, a significant transformation occurred. From what was largely a class-based, politically-oriented movement, a conservative economistic unionism emerged.

The drift towards economistic unionism was largely due to the disappearance of peasant and agricultural workers' unions which were banned by the government. Driven by a survival instinct, the remaining industrial workers' unions adopted the word "free" in their names, such as National Association of Free Labour Unions.

Other federations which also used the word "free" in their organising activities included the reactionary, Catholic-backed Federation of Free Workers (FFW). At the same time, the government-backed National Confederation of Trade Unions (NACTU) was created.

NACTU's heavily-criticised relationship with the government and the absence of "leftist federations" however, beefed up the FFW's position.

The economistic trend in unionism continued until the 1960s despite efforts to revive militant unionism. In 1974, two years after President Marcos declared martial law, a new labour code was introduced. This saw the formation of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) which helped the Marcos government in disseminating the idea that labour rights existed under military rule.

Dissatisfied with existing national union centres and fuelled by Marcos's anti-labour policies, independent workers' unions grouped together to form the Kilusang Mayo Uno (May 1st Movement) in 1980. In its founding congress, supported by 50,000 workers as members, KMU signalled the revival of militant, nationalist and class-based unionism. KMU's organising line proved to be successful until the period following the overthrow of Marcos in February 1986.

Threatened by growing militancy, the government of Aquino quickly tried to divide the labour movement. The government succeeded, at least in Metro Manila, the country's capital. New labour centres emerged such as Lakas ng Manggagawa Labour Center.

The 1980s were particularly important to the country's labour movement. Not only did this period see the revival of militant and political or even ideological unionism, but also sharper and polarised unions.

In the national elections of May 1992, all centres campaigned for their selected candidates. The FFW will perhaps enjoy a better position after supporting President Ramos's candidacy. Trade unions in the country function in a multi-layered structure. Leaders claim that such a structure is needed to facilitate different levels of struggle, thus there exist unions at the enterprise level, a federation and a national centre.

Shopfloor unions take care of day-to-day economic demands from management, a federation co-ordinates and supports other programmes such as education and organising, while the national centre tackles issues which require government decision such as wage legislation or the campaign against foreign intervention.

As the effect of economic recession, aggravated by elitist politics, gets stronger, all trade union centres are actively campaigning for wage increases and job creation. Indications of broader co-operation are apparent but whether this will be realised remains to be seen.

● **This article was first published in *Asian Labour Update* by the Asia Monitor Resource Centre, 444 Nathan Road, 8-13 Kowloon, Hongkong.**

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Uncle Sam again

Regional election results in Nicaragua could indicate a shift which may scupper the Sandinistas' hopes of returning to power.

THE LATEST regional election results in Nicaragua confirm a trend toward new political alignments which may cut across the Sandinistas returning to power.

Elections on Nicaragua's ethnically diverse Atlantic coast at the end of February produced no overall majority, with the right-wing Constitutional Liberals (PLC) ahead and the FSLN a close second. The polls were for two regionally autonomous councils but they are widely seen as a rehearsal for the 1996 general election.

In the North Atlantic Autonomous Region, the PLC and the Sandinistas each won 19 seats on the 45-seat council, with the separatist Yatama, previously in power, reduced to seven. A few days after the election, the council building in Puerto Cabezas was burned down: arson is suspected on the part of Yatama members attempting to destroy evidence of their corruption on the outgoing council.

In the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region, the PLC won 18 seats, the FSLN 14, Yatama six and other parties seven. The Sandinistas claim that armed groups prevented them from campaigning in more remote areas.

Ben Gregory, who visited the region on behalf of Wales Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, was accredited as an observer by the Supreme Electoral Council and monitored the elections alongside other international observers, chiefly from the UN and OAS. He confirmed that the Sandinistas had not been able to canvass in some areas and that there had even been rumours of people buying voter registration cards.

But he told *Briefing*: "It was, nonetheless, a rigorously well-run election - all the observers agree on this." The result, he argued, could be explained by the nature of the campaigning.

"Only the PLC and the FSLN ran high-profile campaigns and the PLC had more money. Schoolchildren, for example, at a school we visited had been given writing books by the PLC with 'Vote for the PLC' written across them."

Other reports suggest that the PLC opened temporary clinics and handed out free medicines in what is one of Nicaragua's most deprived regions.

The strong showing for the PLC boosts the presidential election prospects of its ruthless leader Arnoldo Aleman, mayor of Managua. Despite facing corruption charges, a commonly expressed view in the capital is, "The mayor steals but at least he gets things done. The government steals but it doesn't do anything."

The result also indicates the shifting political alignments within Nicaragua.

Four years ago, the right-wing UNO coalition removed the FSLN from office. Last year, that coalition fell apart and the country faced a crisis of governability. Although the army is still under the command of Sandinista Humberto Ortega, the FSLN have always said that they would respect the 1990 election result and seek a negotiated political solution to the crisis. Earlier this year they formed the Group for National Stability with UNO, Christian Democrats and social democratic groups.

The group is proposing a drastic revision of the constitution, reducing terms of office, restricting presidential decrees, abolishing military service and guaranteeing private property. Its formation buried UNO and seemed to isolate the hard right - which is now gravitating around Aleman.

Signs of a long-awaited shift in US policy have emerged, too, with the US Ambassador to Nicaragua supporting dialogue and the Clinton administration at last releasing 48.5 million dollars of aid to Nicaragua, frozen since last July.

How far this will help the country's beleaguered economy is less certain. The cotton growing area of the west faces economic devastation due to the collapse of the world cotton market. In the 1970s the cotton industry used to earn an average of 73 million dollars annually. Today, no cotton is under cultivation in the region, a crisis made worse by the government's restrictions on credit to small farmers. Unemployment locally is at 80 per cent.

Industry is also in crisis. Railworkers are the latest casualty with the closure of the entire 150-year old railway.

Over all this looms the debt. In 1994, Nicaragua will receive 150 million dollars in loans from the IMF and World Bank. But it has to pay back interest of 226 million dollars, a net loss of 76 million dollars - a massive leeching of the country's resources.

The political focus is now shifting to the 1996 elections. Sandinista ex-vice president Sergio Ramirez has said he is willing to stand. But whether the FSLN can see off the US-financed vote-buying of the far right is far from clear. ❑

PAST POWER: Sandinista leader Tomas Borge addresses supporters in the eighties. PHOTO: Morning Star.



Taste of things to come?

Haiti is still under the iron heel of military rule while the international community does nothing, writes **Charles Arthur** of the Haiti Support Campaign.



IN CHARGE: A Haitian soldier. PHOTO: Leah Gordon.

"IN ALL MY 30 years, my country has never been in as bad a situation as it is now", lamented Veronique Aurelus, a street trader in Port-au-Prince, the capital of the small Caribbean republic of Haiti.

Considering that during those years she lived under the brutual dictatorships of "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude, and a succession of military governments, and then, in September 1991, saw the country's first democratically-elected president overthrown after only seven months in office, Veronique's despair highlights the depth of the current Haitian crisis.

Recent events have left the beleaguered population of this, the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, feeling betrayed and abandoned.

Thousands of political activists, peasant and community leaders, trade unionists, priests and students were killed, tortured and beaten before early in 1993 the United Nations finally involved itself in the business of restoring democracy to Haiti. Diplomatic pressure, and then an oil and arms embargo, were applied in an attempt to get the Haitian army to respect the 1990 election result and allow the return of the exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The Governors Island Accord signed in July by the army leader, General Cedras, and the president, provided for UN supervision of the reinstatement of Aristide on October 30th. For the majority of Haitians there was reason to believe that Aristide, their symbol of genuine grassroots democracy, would at last return. This hope was dashed when the army and its paramilitary assistants launched a new wave of terror which successfully subdued the population and derailed the UN plan.

When the army cynically reneged on the final points of the accord and signalled its intention to remain in power whatever, the international community needed to act decisively. It failed to do so and, as a result, the Haitian crisis has gone from bad to worse.

The reimposed UN embargo on the trade of fuel and arms to Haiti has failed to force the army to backdown and is now causing widespread suffering. In rural areas transport has all but stopped, there is no electricity supply, and what food there is has rocketed in price. A sharp increase in cases of severe malnutrition indicates that a growing number of families have used up whatever food reserves they had.

For the majority of Haitians, the already desperate struggle to survive is now immeasurably harder. In the southern town of Jeremoe a Catholic priest said, "People supported the embargo because Aristide asked for it and they thought it would force the army to leave. But after all these months of embargo, we have a catastrophe."

Others, though, still see the embargo as the only way to make the Haitian army respect their desire for change. "We tasted a little bit of democracy," explained one man. "We tasted it and it tastes pretty good. That's the reason we're willing to die for it".

The army has so far been largely unaffected thanks to the continuing supply of fuel coming across the Dominican Republic border. Further action needs to be taken - and taken quickly. As a carpenter in the coastal town of Leogane put it, "If you're going to have an embargo, have a real embargo."

The question now being asked is if the UN is serious about supporting democracy in Haiti why doesn't it cut air links, apply a total embargo on all products, and force the Dominican Republic to respect it?

But for all the diplomatic manoeuvres the fact remains that, twenty-nine months since the coup, the army and its killing machine is still firmly in control.

At this rate it seems that negotiations alone will not bring democracy back to Haiti. Perhaps, just as they did 300 years ago in the only truly successful slave revolt ever, the Haitians themselves will have to organise and mobilise to overthrow a cruel and brutal tyranny.

● **The Haiti Support Campaign can be contacted at Trinity Church, Hodford Road, London. NW11 8NG. Tel 081 201 9878.**

REVIEWS

Cabbages and princesses

Keith Veness reviews
Survival Amongst the Kurds - A History of the Yezidis, by John S Guest,
published by Kegan Paul International, £65.00.

A magnificent book - at a magnificent price! First published in 1987, this book on the Yezidis, a vital and integral part of the Kurdish nation, has now been drastically revised in the light of the author's visits to both Free Kurdistan and "post-Soviet" Armenia.

Despite chronicling all the various misfortunes to befall this religious group, he manages to end on a surprisingly optimistic note that shows the Yezidis are now more secure than ever before with communities of over 100,000 each in Free Kurdistan and Armenia/Georgia and 20,000 "exiles" in Germany and other parts of western Europe.

The origins of the Yezidis lie in an ancient dualist faith based on the teachings of Zarathustra ["Zoroastra" in western parlance] that became the dominant religion of not only Kurdistan but also Persia, Afghanistan and large tracts of Northern India. The basis of this philosophy was that "God" and the "Devil/Satan" were defining and opposite forces in the universe.

The Yezidis developed a set of beliefs that included avoiding the colour blue, not eating cabbage as the devil dwelt in its leaves and never speaking the name of "Satan". Because of these taboos, the community was often unfairly accused of being "devil worshippers" but they generally enjoyed toleration by their Moslem Kurdish neighbours.

In the nineteenth century they came under serious attack, both by the Ottoman Sultans aimed at enlisting them into the army, and by various western missionaries who aimed at converting them. Many Yezidis were either exiled, slaughtered or forcibly converted. Many fled to the Caucasus to seek protection of the growing power of Russia. These provided the basis of the now thriving community in Armenia.

At this time of great trouble, the Yezidis threw up a remarkable leader in the "princess" Mayan Khatun who guided her threatened people through all its storms until her death in 1958.

The extra chapter on the Yezidis in the ex-Soviet Union is also remarkable for unearthing new facts. The Kurdish battalion in the Red Army was the first one to battle its way into Berlin in 1945 - and it was a Yezidi that actually raised the red flag on the ruins of the old Reichstag.

Now, after years of living peacefully on the slopes of Mounts Ararat and Agrafats, the Yezidis are once again fighting in the ranks of the Armenian Army to repel the Azeri attacks and liberate Karabakh. A strong bond of friendship now unites Armenian Christians, Moslem Kurds and Yezidis in their secular republic.

Drink their wine

Mike Marqusee reviews
Foul Play: a Class Analysis of Sport
by Dave Hammond, £4.75.

Forget about religion, the trade unions, pensioners' organisations or the Rotary Club, sport is by far the biggest component of what is fashionably termed "civil society" - and it deserves a much more informed and interventionist approach from socialists than it has hitherto been given. Dave Hammond's book is a welcome foray into this fascinating but poorly charted territory.

Hammond reviews the history of organised sport, focusing on the role of the state and the presence of racism and sexism. He shows how sport reflects the priorities of capitalist society and how it has been and is being used to serve the interests of the ruling class. But Hammond refuses to write off sport as a capitalist ruse to keep the workers under control. He insists that sport should be valued for its own sake.

The paternalistic Fabians who condemned sport as a corrupting influence on the masses are mirrored today by some radical feminists, who dismiss sport as a pillar of patriarchy. In his most original chapter, Hammond analyses the origins and function of the single most notable feature of sport in our society: it is perhaps the last bastion of unapologetic gender segregation and subordination. Hammond argues that under socialism sport will be transformed by egalitarian and integrated relations between male and female. New aesthetic values and technical skills will be injected into old games - and new games will be created.

Hammond also observes that this does not mean that women should wait for the millennium to claim new roles in sport. He calls on socialists to intervene in sport here and now, citing the campaign against Thatcher's ID scheme, anti-racist campaigns at Elland Road in Leeds and the fight to keep Charlton FC local as examples to be emulated.

However, Hammond's version of the history of sport is somewhat one-dimensional. Almost all key developments are presented as the product of ruling class manipulation, rather than mutual class struggle and the interaction of conflicting interests within the sporting arena, leaving Hammond sounding at times like the "vulgar Marxists" he rightly criticises.

What I liked most about this book was its underlying commitment to the human value of sport. As Hammond says, "After a socialist revolution, surely the idea is to raid the wine cellars of the bourgeoisie. Not to smash their vats, but to drink their wine!"

FOUL PLAY: A CLASS ANALYSIS OF SPORT

Dave Hammond's study of sport from a class perspective. Looking at the relevance of sport as a part of working class culture this book considers race, gender and education in a sport setting, and asks what relevance sport has for socialism.

£4.75 +£1 p&p from **UBIQUE (LB), Box 3104, London, SE13 6EU.** Cheques payable to UBIQUE.

Greatest sorrow

Paul Field reviews
The Sorrow of War, by Bao Ninh,
£8.99, published by Secker & Warburg



Vietnamese soldiers going into battle in a war too often seen through western eyes. PHOTO: *Morning Star.*

THIS AWARD-WINNING book is the first novel about the Vietnam war to come from a member of the winning side. As such, it ends 20 years of state-imposed silence over the psychological effects of the war on the liberation forces and explodes the myth perpetuated by the Communist Party that their soldiers never suffered post-war trauma. Having first appeared as an underground text published by a group of Hanoi writers taking a stand against the reigning censorship laws, it leaves you in no doubt as to how the ban has served as a denial of the immense suffering experienced by the Vietnamese in their struggle for self-determination.

Hanoi's decision to finally loosen its grip and allow this book's publication in 1990 may have stemmed not only from the punitive effect of preventing Vietnam from collectively coming to terms with the war, but also from the fact that such a stance has proved counter-productive. For example, it has actually assisted the racist portrayal of the Vietnamese by a plethora of supposedly "anti-war" films to come out of the US, from *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* to *Full Metal Jacket*. Obsessed with the effects of the war on the American psyche to the exclusion of all else, they depict the strength and defiance of the enemy as not so much superhuman as subhuman. It has only been by denying the humanity of the Vietnamese, and the crime against it perpetrated by the US, that Hollywood has been able to account for America's defeat, and still remain true to the liberal imperialist framework in which it operates.

That said, the significance of this book far exceeds the fact that it is the first account to come from the victorious side.

As a testament to war in general and the Vietnam war in particular it is without parallel. Indeed the stature of the book has unleashed a massive wave of public support and has made it a best seller in Vietnam since publication.

The Sorrow of War is the semi-autobiographical story of a soldier called up days after his 18th birthday to be sent down south as part of the northern forces. The author, Bao Ninh, was that young man: one of 500 who made up the Glorious 27th Youth Brigade, one of ten to survive from his battalion and one of the four who still remain alive, the other six having killed themselves.

The opening scenes of the novel are set in the immediate aftermath of war with Kien, who represents the author, engaged in the grim business of retrieving and burying the dead as part of a Missing In Action body-collecting team. From this macabre opening the book flashes back to his youth and adolescent love for Phuong, and forward to his attempts to re-establish his relationship with her as a shell-shocked veteran burdened with the memories of war. At the centre of the book is the story of how the war has altered everything, not only Kien as a combatant, but his personal relationship with Phuong and even Phuong herself. At one point, Kien says he has had two loves in his life, Phuong before and after war.

In a long sequence, intercut with memories of his own narrow escapes from death, Kien recalls the loss of innocence that they both experience shortly after the outbreak of war. Having completed his training, Kien finds himself with a three-hour break in Hanoi before being despatched to the south. At the station he runs into Phuong and misses his train, risking a charge of desertion. In a nightmarish scene, they both travel south towards the front line in a desperate bid to catch up with Kien's unit. They stow away on a rough goods car filled with "unseen but shadowy" figures and in the midst of an air attack by US planes. Phuong is multiply raped until Kien murders one of her attackers with an iron bar. Kien recalls that it was from that moment "when Phuong was violently taken from him, that the bloodshed truly began ... "

Kien's failure to rebuild his relationship with Phuong after the war, despite their unquestioned love leads him to put his experiences into writing. He realises that this will be like "smashing granite with fists" and "turning myself inside out", but knows he must "to rid myself of these devils, to put my tormented soul finally to rest."

The sense of catharsis here is not only of one man struggling to overcome his experiences, but of an entire people facing their immediate past and the enormous loss suffered in their war of liberation. As the author himself concludes: "Justice may have won ... but the psychological scars of war will remain forever."

This book conjures up many images that I will never forget. From the eerie description of Victory Day in Saigon to his account of the veterans who gather in the all-night coffee-shop to reminisce and recount their attempts to piece together their shattered lives, this book is both bleak and poetic.

For a left that all too often talks about human suffering in terms of statistics, this book provides a psychological and emotional insight that is both intimate and immediate. ❑



Foyle's frolics

This year's **Foyle's Literary Luncheon** is in honour of the former Labour leader, **Michael Foot**. Guests include **Baroness Castle, Lord Healey, Roy Hattersley** and **Neil Kinnock**. The guests should be aware that Foyle's is a medieval employer with a long history of union-busting.

Poor chap

Browsing through that noteworthy publication, *The House Magazine*, *Periscope* chanced upon the musings of **Edward Garnier**, the esteemed Tory MP for Harborough.

Lost in the middle of two pages of a staggeringly dull diary column, the following passage sprang forth: " ... I will then have to be in the chamber asking the question of the session and making the speech of the decade, and get ready for the **Home Affairs Select Committee** and **Backbench Foreign Affairs Committee** and then ... I must go to the **Temple** to earn my crust."

So there you have it. The **£30,000**-odd per annum, plus expenses, which our representatives in Westminster earn does not even add up to "a crust" in Edward Garnier's world. To earn what he regards as his due, he, like many Tory MPs and a handful of Labour ones, resorts to the courts where the pickings are, to say the least, rich.

Illy's rise

The appointment of **Ray Illingworth** as English cricket's new Chair of Selectors has been welcomed by many who feared that the favourite for the job, **MJK Smith**, would simply maintain the less than satisfactory status quo.

True, Smith was very much one of the old school tie brigade who have ruled and ruined English cricket for generations, but Illingworth represents no real change.

As a long-time opponent of the boycott of apartheid sport, Illingworth welcomed the decision of **Mike Gatting** and his rebels to tour **South Africa** in 1989. "We've been dictated to by these countries overseas for too long," he explained to BBC TV viewers.

Last summer, contemplating England's pitiful performance in the Ashes, he opined: "English cricketers need more training than West Indians, who have looser shoulders and are bigger." It seems unlikely that anyone who believes **West Indies**' cricket supremacy is down to the athletic equivalent of "natural rhythm" will bring anything of value to English cricket.

Barking mad

Margaret Hodge, one of the leading contenders for the Labour nomination in **Barking** and a former leader of **Islington Council**, has lapsed as a councillor owing to her failure to attend a council meeting for six months.

The former *enfant terrible* of north London's left justified the error with the extraordinary explanation that no one had let her know she was about to lapse.

Really, Margaret, this is quite beyond the pale. Are we expected to believe that a woman who led one of the country's most high-profile councils for a decade was unaware of the rules regarding the lapsing of councillors? Is Hodge idle, stupid, or does she merely hold ordinary Labour members and voters in contempt?

Talking of Maggie in such glowing terms reminds *Periscope* of her spell at the head of the **Association of London Authorities**. The day after the **Guildford Four** were released, back in 1989, she rang up the organisation and ordered that campaigning for others unjustly languishing in gaol, such as the **Birmingham Six**, be abandoned.

She also ordered the winding up of the **Irish Issues Sub-Committee**. Which leaves one burning question - why?

Well co-ordinated

Following the House of Commons vote on lowering the age of gay consent, the right-wing **Labour Co-ordinating Committee** issued a press release attacking those Labour MPs who failed to support 16.

"Party members are shocked and disappointed that leading members of the Shadow Cabinet, with portfolios which have particular reference to the need for equal treatment for gay men, should have voted against equalisation of the age of consent," said the statement.

It went on, " ... the Labour Co-ordinating Committee strongly urges those who voted against Party policy to reconsider their position."

Good, solid stuff, one might think. However, there were two names at the end of the press release who could be contacted for further information. Both work for Labour frontbenchers, both gave House of Commons numbers and both are employed on the "Short money" - government cash used to employ people to carry out work for the major political parties, not for interest groups within those parties.

This was drawn to the attention of **Michael Martin** MP, the Chair of the Administration Committee. The pair then had to write grovelling apologies to Martin.

String 'em up!

Good to see engineering union boss **Gavin Laird** has got his priorities right. Asked recently (in the *New Statesman/Society*) what one law he would like to see introduced, this mighty workers' leader had no hesitation.

A 35-hour week? Work-sharing on full pay? A minimum wage? Restoration of all union rights? No chance. Laird opted for the reintroduction of **capital punishment** for cop-killers. Happily, there's no chance of him forming a government.

Poll position

Haringey's **West Green Ward**, which covers the **Broadwater Farm** estate, will have a particularly notable candidate standing in May's local elections.

George Silcott has announced his candidature as the Free Winston Silcott candidate. Winston was jailed for murder in the mid-eighties after PC Keith Blakelock died in the Broadwater Farm riots. While that conviction has been overturned and the other two members of the **Broadwater Three** freed, the older Silcott brother languishes in prison for an alleged earlier crime, the murder of a former boxer, Anthony Smith.

The grounds for his conviction were always extremely suspect and the case went to court amid the post-Broadwater Farm frenzy of hatred, during which bearing the name Winston Silcott was itself a guarantee of an unfair trial.

Counting the cost

Labour's former economics spokesman in the Lords, **Meghnad Desai** -who was sacked, by the way, for mentioning the possibility of raising taxes - came up with one or two interesting figures the other day.

He was told by a minister that the House of Lords costs the taxpayer **£38,000** per active member whereas the Commons costs **£261,000** per active member. Our representatives in Brussels, however, are, as ever, going a few steps further. Each MEP costs a staggering **£919,000**.

Thank God the good people of Britain can bask securely in the warm glow of the Treaty of Rome, which enables us to shell out nearly **£1 million** a time for the services of the likes of Ian Paisley and Lord Bethell.

Laird strikes

A recent speech by Employment Secretary **David Hunt** apparently extending the hand of conciliation to the trade union movement even drew the fire of the exasperated engineers' leader, **Gavin Laird**.

Hunt had welcomed the relaunch of the TUC and advised unions to "purge themselves of their class war delusions" and become efficient businesses, providing expertise and services to their members.

Laird responded pithily: "Your government is about the destruction of the trade union movement. You're going to fail, but you're going to destroy people like me. The kind of person who will take over from me will be the kind you deserve."

However, the general secretary of the TUC, **John Monks**, provided yet more evidence of his astounding inadequacies. "I am disappointed he does not acknowledge the major contribution which unions are making to the success of British companies," commented the leader of over 8 million men and women.

Actually, in case anyone's missed it, British companies are taking something of a hammering at the moment, with record bankruptcies and four million people out of work - that's why there's such a terrible fuss over our economic condition.

What colour is the sky in your world, Mr Monks?

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with Tony Benn on
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Famous last words

"Almost a year ago the hard right took control of Westminster City Council in the form of one Lady Porter, who has since become notorious for her dogmatic approach to privatisation and the abolition of the GLC. The first the staff heard of her was when she sent them all a letter (sent 1st class) to their own homes. It contained such threats as 'anyone who is considered lazy or inefficient will be either demoted or made redundant' ... What we have found amazing is the way Chief Officers will go out of their way to justify privatisation and fiddle the figures in favour of whatever the councillors' political wishes are."

Ian Wingrove,
Branch Secretary,
Westminster NALGO.


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Frank Johnson: a gathering force

Mike Marqusee reports: The Free Frank Johnson Campaign is gaining momentum. Support has been pouring in from Irish groups, trades unionists, journalists, civil liberties campaigners and even a handful of Labour politicians (not Tony Blair). A vigil for Frank will be held outside the Home Office in central London on March 31st, between 12:30pm-1:30pm.

Two years ago, the case of the Irishman, who at that time had already served 17 years in prison for a crime he did not commit, was unknown outside the walls of Britain's prisons. But the newly-released Birmingham Six were determined to campaign for the man whose innocence had become clear to them during the many years they had known him in gaol. Billy Power alerted *Labour Briefing* to Frank's case and after visiting him in prison, *Briefing* was the first to expose in print one of Britain's most appalling miscarriages of justice.

Since then, the campaign has held several public meetings and benefits, secured publicity in both Irish and British newspapers and arranged for Gareth Peirce to act as Frank's solicitor.

"Free Frank Johnson" leaflets have been distributed outside cinemas showing *In the Name of the Father*. It has now emerged that Frank was close friends with Giuseppe Conlon, featured in the film.

The Birmingham Six and Guildford Four recall how Frank visited Giuseppe in his cell every day and helped the older man cook the precious fresh eggs which he was given because of his ill health. Gerry Conlon has come out strongly in support of Frank's innocence.

● **Contact: Frank Johnson Campaign, c/o 129a Seven Sisters Road, London N7.**

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



Leonora Lloyd is too kind. Her tribute to Jo Richardson rightly praised Jo for her contribution to women and the working class but was practically silent on Jo's capitulation to the right in her final years.

In this period, Jo supported Kinnock's moves to gut the Labour Party of any class content, supported the witch-hunt and the Gulf War. She disgracefully refused, as Chair, to call Tony Benn to speak in the Conference debate on the Gulf War.

Historical accuracy is needed not as a matter of academic record or to speak ill of the dead. It is required so that future generations can learn from Jo's mistakes instead of being doomed to repeat them.

Yours,
Graham Bash,
Hackney North CLP.

Full marks to *Briefing* for publishing a story about Millwall Labour Party that "other publications refused to touch" (*Periscope, Briefing* March '94). But why have you consistently failed to review the pamphlet "Comrades and Friends", which was sent to you five months ago when it was published?

Is this "irresponsible journalism"" or just "incompetent journalism"?

I enclose a further copy and await the next issue with interest.

Yours,
Jim Grozier,
Brighton Pavilion CLP.

Briefing's *Periscope* diary is a right rivetting read, except on the rare occasions that you get things wrong. You managed that in spectacular fashion in your piece about racism in Tower Hamlets.

You said that *Tribune* had been scared off the story and chose not to cover the Labour candidate's dubious role in that racist campaign. *Tribune* was in fact the first paper to break the story. You say that *Tribune* was guilty of not publishing the truth, whereas my recollection is that we did on a number of occasions. I recall our headline on 10th December which read "Labour to police racist ward" and which dealt with allegations of the candidate's racism in some depth.

In fact, *Periscope* should thank *Tribune* for exposing the story.

Just thought that I would set the record straight! No hard feelings, we get as much stick for some of our diary pieces.

Fraternally,
Mark Seddon,
Editor Tribune.

● ***Briefing*'s political correspondent replies:** *Briefing* revealed the racist sympathies of Labour's candidate in Millwall at the end of September and offered the story and the means of verification to both *Tribune* and *New Statesman*.

Both publications ultimately produced excellent and detailed reports on the Millwall mess, but not until several months after *Briefing*'s expose - and after the story had emerged in the mainstream media.

The anti-racist credentials of *Tribune* and *New Statesman* are not in question. However, in this case, their reluctance to pursue *bona fide* stories originating from the left press led them to delay when urgency and prompt action were called for.

Thank you for printing my article on the pensioners movement, or at least part of it. But I regret that you omitted the evidence of comparative pensions in Britain and Italy. Unlike someone else noteworthy in regard to pensions (Maxwell) I do not expect that "you'll just have to trust me". More than that, however, you omitted my final punch line and printed a picture whose implication was almost its exact opposite.

The person in your picture is actually a great campaigner, I know him well. However he is in his eighties when age is usually taking its toll on activity. Why are our images of pensioners so often of the oldest ones? My final lines appealed for activists to get into the pensioners' movement on retirement in their sixties. Most pensioners are, in fact, in their sixties.

Returning to Italy, trade unionists are automatically transferred into the pensioners unions on retirement and many of them spend a quarter of their active political lives there.

This movement thus exerts enormous power in shaping not only pensions but Italian society as a whole and the lifelong needs of the working class in the new age in which we live.

The right wing "modernisers" do realise that we live in a new age but not one fit for pensioners to live in. To defeat them we need both a counter vision and a counter strategy. The needs of this and future generations of pensioners is not a bad place to start.

Yours in comradeship,
Hugh Lowe,
London W3.

I see with interest that *Briefing*'s last issue carried yet another article from Bob Cryer MP, the same Bob Cryer who voted against equality in the age of consent debate. Equality for lesbians and gays is a policy agreed by the vast majority of Labour MPs (see the vote); most CLPs; most trade unions; and is Labour Party policy. Even the likes of Kinnock and Hattersley support it.

Yet socialist Cryer is incapable of even voting for simple equality when actually put to the test, preferring the security of his homophobic prejudices.

Many in the lesbian and gay movement, who see the Labour Party as their natural ally, are asking that left activists withdraw political support from those MPs who have voted for prejudice and inequality . . .

I would be interested to know how *Briefing* sees itself in this context?

Yours,
Tobie Glenny,
Islington North CLP.

Peter Bowing (*Briefing* March 94) attacks Danny Nicol as "an embarrassment to the socialist left" Bowing himself has all the hallmarks of a moderniser.

He has swallowed whole the Smith/Blair line that if Labour opposes a Bill of Rights it'll drive away potential supporters. Strange - because where our supporters have heard of it, recognition of the need for it is minuscule. The Labour Party advocates of Charter 88 are part of the tiny chattering class, devoted readers of the *Guardian* and *Independent*. They ignore more pressing problems, for example that since 1966 Labour has lost 15% support among unskilled manual workers and 18% among skilled workers. These groups make up three-fifths of the population: plainly our policies have not earned their support.

Bowing panders to the discredited belief that human rights are best defended by the judiciary. Are the miscarriages of justice, the GCHQ case, the miners' strike case law, the Brighton sadomasochists, the Fares' Fair case, the Thameside judgment, not to mention the litany of cases restricting strike immunities, just unfortunate aberrations?

Constitutions are not politically neutral. They either make socialist change easier or more difficult to achieve. Bills of Rights and written constitutions are all about giving our judges the right to declare Acts of Parliament illegal. This is why Tony Blair is set to introduce one the moment a Labour government is elected. Bowing makes out this is in the left's interests. What left has he in mind?

"The socialist struggle is about how the judges are selected and what is written in the constitution" says Bowing. How are we to win this struggle? Is Bowing or armed workers going to write the constitution and appoint the judges? Danny Nicol forces us to face reality: the constitution would not be of our choosing. Drafting would be done by enemies of socialism and would entrench capitalism either explicitly or implicitly probably under a smokescreen of upholding "individual" rights. Most written constitutions are far more difficult to amend than ordinary legislation, and deliberately so. Once landed with such a constitution it would be the devil's own job to change the status quo should we get a socialist government which really wanted to do so.

Similarly judges, once appointed, are almost immoveable. Yet all experience in our own Party shows that it's not the initial selection that counts: it's accountability through the "threat" of reselection that ensures that MPs carry out their mandate. Judges by their very nature ought not to be accountable to any one group as this prejudices their independence. It's said the US constitution is based on "checks and balances", but in fact the only restraint on the Supreme Court is its own sense of self-restraint. They can invalidate any law they like. What's democratic about that? And why should we introduce this extra hurdle against socialist legislation here?

Yours,
Vera Derer,
London NW11.

Patriotism is a funny business. It has no place in the lexicon of socialism, yet many a well-clued class fighter has slipped into some form or other of it. Of course, Chairman Mao's obtuse observation that there is a difference between patriotism and nationalism is an extreme example, but how many socialist activists take the night off to watch the football on the telly, hoping for an England win?

I'm always amazed at the response to the World Cup, and the pathetic excuses I've heard for supporting England: 'they have a multi-cultural side', 'they play attractive football' (?), they've got a Man Utd player and I'm a Man U fan'. All these excuses are cover for the simple fact that people sit on the edge of their seat willing a win for their national side - a team that plays for the glorification of a nation state that occupies the north of Ireland, attacks its own working class and has military hardware as its main export.

The fuss that was made over Torvill and Dean recently however, plumbed new depths. In 1983 these two spectacularly won an Olympic gold, and were acclaimed as the best thing since sliced bread. Fair enough. They realised that they could make a living skating, so that's what they did. There is nothing unusual in this. Scores of Olympic athletes have used the Games as a launch pad to a successful career. Mohammed Ali and Geoff Capes spring readily to mind. What neither Ali nor Capes did, however, was return to the Olympic arena.

Torvill and Dean did not, as the media would have us believe, retire in 1983. They turned professional. Thus they spent 10 years doing nothing but honing their skills on the ice. Now, I know that the amateurism of the Olympics is a sham at the best of times, but come on. The Lillehammer Olympics must have been the best advertising package ever. Torvill and Dean are now due to play Wembley Arena in July. How many will pay to go? How many would have gone if it had not been for the great advertising coup of the Olympics?

So, this retirement lark, Olympic come back and then a Wembley appearance was all a con. Nothing wrong with trying to work the system, you might say. But hang on. What was our part in all this?

The media told us what an amazing thing these two money grubs were doing ... for Britain! Returning after ten years to the Olympic arena. Nobody had ever been that good before. We all had to be proud and take an interest. And we did. Even people with no interest in skating watched the finals. On their inevitable defeat (anybody who knows about skating knew they were too old, too slow and over weight), the entire nation screamed cheat! People who don't even pretend to understand the scoring in skating competitions were saying the two were done out of gold, simply because the media told them to. It was jealousy on the part of the foreigners who could not match the Brits. Our team were ahead of their time. Anything except the truth that they were no longer good enough.

National competition brings out the worst. Torvill and Dean's antics were the pits, the media played up to it. When are people going to realise that nationalism and patriotism are an evil that has no benefit for the working class? Sport at an international level, in a capitalist setting, serves only the interest of capitalism. We should have nothing to do with it.

Yours,
Dave Hammond.

Dave Hammond is the author of *Foul Play: A class analysis of sport.*



Labour unites against racism

OVER 30,000 marchers demonstrated in east London against racism on Saturday March 19th.

The protest started at Spitalfields market, near Liverpool Street, and ended with a rally near Bethnal Green where speakers included TUC general secretary John Monks, Transport and General Workers Union leader Bill Morris, Labour MPs Diane Abbott, Peter Shore and Mildred Gordon and local community leaders.

Hundreds of placards were in evidence from all the major unions, the Anti-Nazi League, the Anti-Racist Alliance, the Labour Party, Communist Party, Socialist Workers Party and many other organisations.

Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown was not invited to speak owing to Lib Dem Tower Hamlets Council's refusal to allow the rally on its land, but Monks said that he would have been very welcome if he had been prepared simply to come and listen.

PHOTO: Paul Mattsson

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