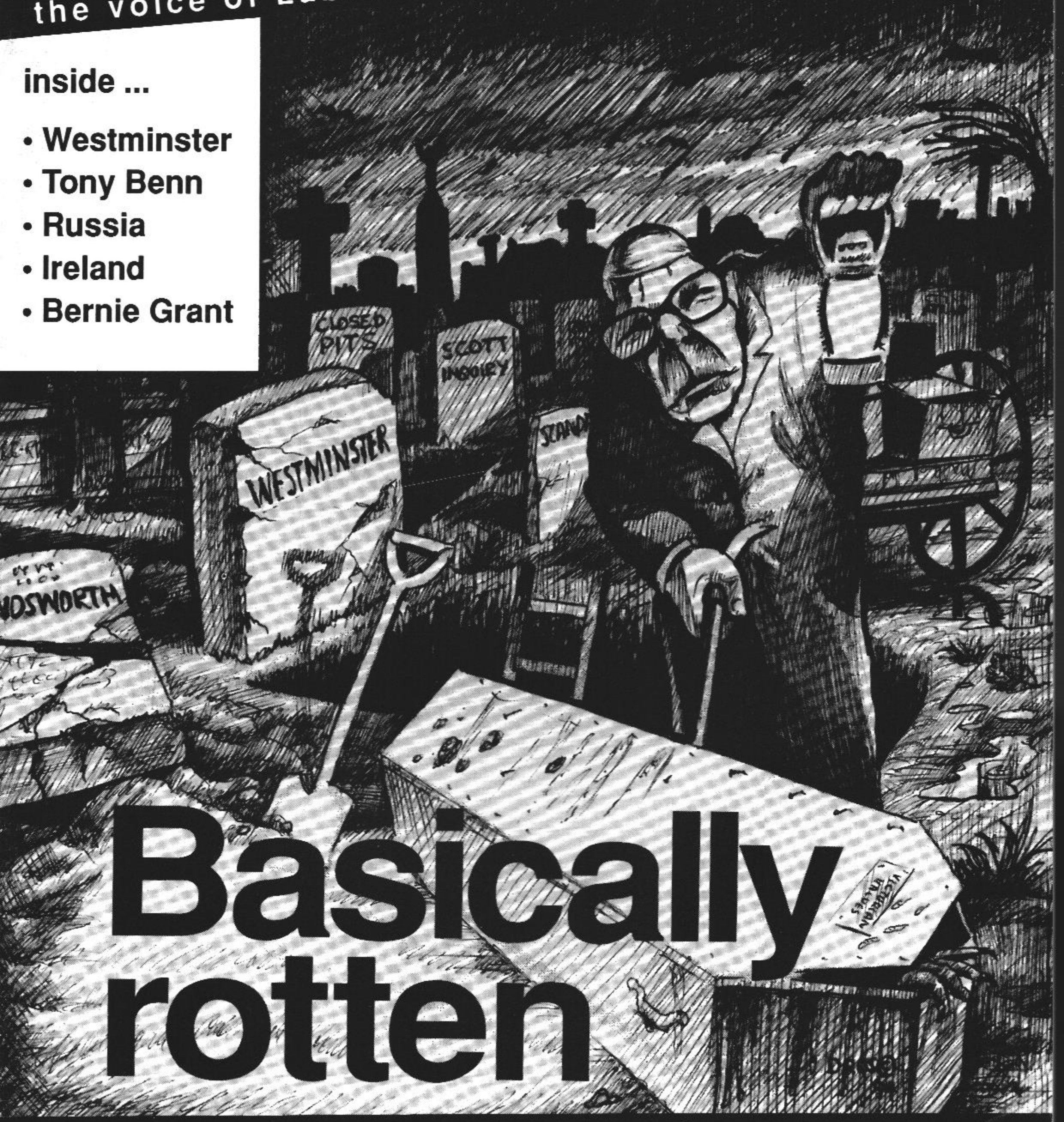
FEBRUARY 1994 £1.00

BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

inside ...

- Westminster
- Tony Benn
- Russia
- Ireland
- Bernie Grant



Basically rotten

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

Stop press

Right to silence

The Tories' new Criminal Justice Bill, which proposes ending the right to silence, is attracting massive condemnation across the political spectrum.

Jeremy Corbyn, Labour MP and veteran campaigner against wrongful imprisonment, echoed the feelings of thousands of objectors when he told *Briefing*: "Fifteen years of Tory government has seen an enormous erosion of judicial rights.

"The plan to remove the right to silence will mean miscarriages of justice as bad as anything we have seen to date, particularly in respect of Irish people."

Bottomley's basics

Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley has claimed that young, single mothers would be far better off living in hostels than in council accommodation.

This is clearly part of the Tories' justification for stripping single parents of their priority on housing waiting lists.

Mary Honeyball of Gingerbread, the support organisation and pressure group for single parents, said: "Lone parents need a permanent home and children need a stable environment. However good a hostel is, it is not going to provide that."

Conference

Euro-fascism, racism and the 1994 elections

26th February
21 South Street,
Reading

Details:
Reading Labour Party,
81 Kings Road,
Reading, Berkshire.
Tel 0734-573756

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Cover design by Gary Drostle

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Time to fill the vacuum



A YEAR AGO, the Tories were trying to claw their way out of the morass created by the collapse of the ERM, the divisions over Maastricht and the unpopularity of the pit closures. They made some progress, thanks largely to Labour's inertia and failure to offer alternatives. Now, encumbered with multiplying embarrassments (Westminster, Wandsworth, the Scott enquiry, ministerial misbehaviour on all fronts), they are deeper in the shit than ever.

The problem is not merely one of personnel or tactics. It is a symptom of the malignant illness that besets British capitalism. An illness for which no faction of the Tories - and, alas, no one on the Labour front benches - has proposed any credible cure.

The pundits like to draw parallels with the dying days of the Macmillan government in the early sixties, when another long era of Tory rule had gone sour. In those days, Harold Wilson could present his Labour Party as the cure for the British disease - with significant support from sections of the British ruling class. Expanded educational opportunities, the "white heat of technology" and co-operation with the trade unions would "modernise" Britain and enable it to compete successfully once again in the global marketplace.

None of it worked. Thirty years on, British capitalism is that much weaker and that much less able to carve out any independent niche for itself. The failure of the Wilson-Callaghan and Heath strategies led to a new and superficially more radical remedy to the old illness: Thatcher's onslaught on the public sector and the trade unions. Now even that has failed - and been seen to fail. All Major's problems stem from that underlying reality. This country is suffering a massive hangover from the Thatcher era. The free market miracle cure has proved a hoax and now, following the collapse of the pipe-dream of European capitalist unity and the renewed attack on the remnants of the welfare state, no one believes there is any cure at all.

John Smith is right to blame the government for the widespread popular cynicism towards politicians and political institutions. But matching the string of broken promises and ever more naked double standards on the Tory side has been the failure to make any promises or promote any standards on the Labour side. The inertia of the official opposition has become a stand-up comedian's cliche. The words "John Smith" have become synonymous with self-serving hyper-cautiousness. Because so many of our spokespersons still refuse to break with the free market consensus of the eighties, the Major government is let off the hook time and again - on Maastricht, on the miners, on the welfare state.

The effective opposition in this country is now left to the press barons and the Tory right. No wonder people think democracy is an empty shell.

This cynicism may reflect badly on the government in the short-run but in the long-run it is Labour that will suffer. When Wilson posed as the saviour of the British economy in the early sixties he had a mass labour movement with a mass membership to back him up. Thirty years on, Labour Party structures are weaker than at any time since 1945. You cannot have an effective opposition without an effective, democratic mass movement behind (and in front of) it. And without an effective opposition, the Tories may yet be able to weather even this crisis.

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 January 30th. 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 February 11th.

***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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Blue filth

With the Tories fast sinking into the financial mire created by Westminster Council, Labour's housing spokesperson on the council, **Gavin Millar**, asks if ministers knew about the illegal practices.

"A LITTLE LOCAL difficulty," said Miles Young, the leader of Westminster City Council when asked for his instant reaction to the district auditor's report into the gerrymandering of the borough through designated sales of council flats.

At first sight, this was an odd response to what former Tory premier Ted Heath described as the biggest scandal to hit the Tory Party in living memory.

But perhaps not. Councillor Young may have been dutifully towing the party line. Since the report, the Tory damage limitation campaign has been designed to distance Dame Shirley Porter and her co-conspirators from the Thatcher-Major governments.

"If these allegations are proved correct, of course I will condemn those responsible," John Major told Parliament on the day of publication - as if the villains resided on the planet Mars instead of 400 yards down the road in Westminster City Hall.

But will these attempts to place Chinese walls around the Porter gang stand the test of time? The clever money says not.

The best evidence of government complicity lies buried in the evidence painstakingly acquired by the auditor during his five years' inquiry - comprising transcripts of hundreds of interviews and 10,000 pages of documents. A full set of all these papers was given to each of the 13 objectors, as well as the 10 individuals liable for surcharge and the council itself on the same day that the report was published.

However, a week before publication the auditor announced that anyone who revealed the contents would be liable for criminal prosecution under an obscure section of the Local Government Finance Act of 1982. The council went along with this and thus far the documents have been kept from public scrutiny.

Snippets of the evidence have, however, appeared in the national press. Reference has been made to an invitation to Brian Griffiths, head of Margaret Thatcher's policy unit, to attend one of the secret meetings held in Camberley in 1988 to monitor the progress of the sales scheme. The names of the borough's two Tory MPs, Peter Brooke (chairman of the Conservative Party at the time) and John Wheeler, have also been mentioned in connection with the planning and execution of the strategy.

Until this evidence emerges in full (as it surely will) the circumstantial evidence will have to suffice.

First, there are the events of 1986-87 when the plan was hatched. Porter and her colleagues were told by Westminster's housing officers as early as May, 1986, that "were we ... to go forward with a policy of wholesale disposal of stock ... it will be virtually impossible for us to meet our statutory let alone our socially desirable rehousing commitments". The result would be hundreds of families in temporary accommodation at vast cost to the ratepayers.

Yet one year later Westminster did exactly this, designating just under half of its 24,000 homes for sale with a view to selling 500 flats per year to people regarded as more likely to vote Tory. To speed things up, one-off payments of £15,000 were to be offered to tenants to persuade them to move out of their homes, enabling them to be sold.

Is it conceivable that the Westminster Tories would get themselves into such a position without first extracting informal assurances from ministerial colleagues that they would get government help with the financial and human cost of the strategy for "Keeping Westminster Conservative" when the time came?

Secondly, there is the response of the Department of the Environment when "officially" notified of the designated sales plan in the summer of 1987. No attempt was made to echo the initial concerns of the council's officers - even though the civil servants knew better than anyone that Westminster has a responsibility to a large number of homeless families because of its location in the heart of the capital. No attempt was made to dissuade Westminster from launching the scheme.

Stranger still was the civil servants' response to the £15,000 payments. They advised (correctly) that the council did not have the legal power to spend the money in this way unless it was to "benefit some or all of the inhabitants of the area" rather than "individuals". No one in his right mind could say that £15,000 bunged to one individual to enable another individual to buy a council flat at a massive discount and thereby add to the number of homeless families in bed and breakfast at the ratepayers' expense could meet this test - as the auditor has since confirmed in ruling that the payments were illegal. Yet in 1987, the DoE did no more than advise Westminster that it might "like to consider" whether this was the case. No attempt was made to lay down the law. Nor has any attempt been made to do so since. Indeed, between 1990 and 1993 Westminster was allowed to use millions of pounds of government money to top up these payments with the full knowledge of the DoE.

Thirdly, as the numbers of Westminster's homeless began to rise in the late eighties and early nineties, central government did begin to meet the cost of providing council flats outside the borough. As the *Guardian* has revealed, the most glaring example occurred in 1991 when the Housing Corporation offered Westminster the nomination rights to a 350-flat Peabody Trust estate due to be built (using £12 million of taxpayers' money) in the Tory-controlled London Borough of Hillingdon. No reason has ever been given for why normal procedure was not followed and the rights given to Hillingdon. Not only did Hillingdon have its own homeless waiting list but it would have to meet the cost of education, social and other services which the incoming families would need.

The housing officials at Westminster could not believe their luck. As one of them put it to me, the offer was made "out of the blue" at a routine meeting between themselves and officers of the Housing Corporation. No doubt, but was the blue in question that of the Tory Party?

Since 1992, Westminster has acquired over 750 flats outside the

The final onslaught



TWO YEARS ago, when the government announced the terms of the new Asylum Bill, many refugees and some housing organisations feared it was the beginning of an attack on all homeless people. Once the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act was passed, they lobbied for local authorities not to implement it. Very few even considered this option: it would not, they said, be politically acceptable to be seen to be "favouring refugees" by according them the same rights as other homeless applicants.

On January 20th, the government issued a consultation paper innocuously titled Access to Local Authority and Housing Association Tenancies. It is a proposal to remove the duties of local authorities in providing permanent homes for homeless people. It states: "Sections ... of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 were in many ways a precursor to the proposals set out in this paper."

Sue Jones reveals an underhand attempt by the government to mount a brutal attack on the homeless.

Having tried it out on one vulnerable group, and met no resistance from the "dented shield" so many local authorities continue to be proud to provide, the government is now targetting a wider group with similar measures.

The proposals are:

• To allow councils to turn homeless people away if they have any accommodation available to them, however temporary. This includes not only where they are staying now, but where they could be sent: a specialist hostel for young, single mothers, for example, or a flat offered by a landlord somewhere, possibly out of the area;

• To remove the right of those accepted as homeless to get *permanent* accommodation even if the council takes them on. They have only the right to *temporary* accommodation, most of which will be in privately rented houses or flats. Of course, rents there will be high but people can claim housing benefit, says the Department of the Environment. However, the Department of Social Security is continuing to look at ways it can refuse to pay such high rents. In any case this traps households on benefit, whether they work or not and is just a barely hidden new subsidy to the private sector at the expense of all of us.

Landlords, knowing that they are essential to the local council's housing policy, will, no doubt, feel freer to harass tenants or leave repairs undone. Tenants will fear seeking help from the council that put them there.

• To provide more advice on preventing homelessness. Unfortunately, while good advice clearly helps those advised, the number of homeless people largely depends on other factors which the government refuses to address: principally the lack of appropriate, affordable, secure housing for so many in Britain.

The proposals also include other unpleasant provisions and comments targetted at those already battered by the "back to basics" campaign.

In effect, the interests of the homeless are counterposed to those on waiting or transfer lists. In particular, they point out that "establishing a home - particularly as a place to raise a family - is a matter for which married couples want to feel personally responsible".

Obviously, those without the all-important wedding ring do not really want a home for their children at all.

There is a proposal to reinforce the current law refusing emergency housing to some families whose children have recently arrived in Britain: the law lobbied for so effectively by Tower Hamlets Council in its attempts to avoid housing Bangladeshis.

With local elections coming up in May, we urgently need to develop a socialist housing policy as an alternative to this prejudiced, populist nonsense. ❑

Continued from page 4

borough to house its homeless. Most have been bought with government cash. As a result, it has been able to make significant inroads into the homelessness backlog created by the illegal designated sales scheme. By 1996, the total will have almost doubled to around 1,500. No other London authority has received such largesse.

Fourthly, there is Westminster's, and Porter's, place at the heart of the Tories' policies for local government - and the almost sybaritic relationship between the Tories at the Palace of Westminster and those down the road at City Hall.

Recent revelations about her slush fund have made clear that Porter bankrolled the Tory campaigns to abolish both ILEA and the Greater London Council by raising corporate cash through a bogus charity. The Charity Commission has reopened its investigation into the latter.

Porter's long-time political adviser, Roger Rosewall, is a leader writer on the *Daily Mail* and reputed to be popular with Major and other national figures.

Her council has, of course, always been officially prized by the government as a flagship. When the first poll tax calculations for Westminster were produced by the DoE in November 1989, they indicated a massive £450 per person. The Tories realised that all of their efforts at gerrymandering the borough over the preceding three years might come to nothing if their supporters had to pay nearly £1,000 for a two-person household.

After pleas to the government, the grant rules were then changed allowing Westminster to charge only £195. The borough duly recorded a swing to the Conservatives in the otherwise disastrous May 1990 "poll tax" elections. If the government was willing to do this for the political benefits of keeping its flagship afloat, who is to say it would not have given its tacit support to the wider strategy to gerrymander the city?

And over the years Westminster has bent over backward to house as many Tory MPs as it can in bijou *pied a terres* near the House of Commons - and even handed over the freehold of Tory Party Central Office at a knock-down price.

Perhaps it is only a matter of time before the "little local difficulty" becomes a national one. Perhaps Heath, in all his wisdom, could see this coming. ❑

NEWS & VIEWS

Right on

Shadowy millionaire David Hart has just entered the government in an unofficial capacity. ***Labour Briefing*** looks at his ultra-right record.



Malcolm Rifkind, MP. PHOTO: Newsfocus

WHEN DEFENCE Secretary Malcolm Rifkind took on property millionaire David Hart as an unpaid adviser towards the end of last year the right-wing press expressed their approbation in fulsome terms.

Hart was described as "an ideas man," "a handsome millionaire". In fact, he is ultra-right wing, obsessed with "the enemy within" and has mounted smear campaigns against anyone who does not entirely go along with his idea of Thatcherite orthodoxy, including one former Tory Cabinet Minister.

The tycoon began to figure prominently in the Thatcher government in 1981 when he made the acquaintance of Sir John Hoskins, then head of the Number 10 policy unit, and the late Ian Gow MP, a close friend of the former premier.

In the 1983 election campaign, Hart was an adviser to the Prime Minister but in the miners' strike, which began the following year, he played a vital role. He was a go-between for Thatcher and Ian McGregor, the Coal Board chief. According to the *Observer* newspaper, he was also a foil to the "wet" energy secretary, Peter Walker.

Shortly before the 1987 election campaign, he formed the Committee for a Free Britain. During the run-up to polling day, the CFB organised and paid for a series of ferociously anti-Labour adverts in the national press, which purported to represent the views of ordinary people frightened at the prospect of a Labour win.

The Prime Minister wrote to Hart shortly afterwards thanking him for "all your contributions which you sent me during the campaign for speeches. As you know from the newspaper headlines, these contributions were used to very good effect."

The CFB went on to publish a series of pamphlets in which Hart's extreme views became apparent. In one of them, he called for huge reductions in public health care and education.

In 1988, Hart paid for a visit to Britain by Adolf Calero, a notorious, ultra-right Nicaraguan Contra leader. He had even wanted Calero to speak to a CFB fringe meeting at the Tory conference but this was regarded as potentially too controversial.

The Thatcher favourite began publishing two virulently right-wing magazines, *British Briefing* and *World Briefing*. In the former, he was able to smear Labour MPs, writers and others with alleged "communist" sympathies. It was edited by Charles Elwell, a former head of MI5's domestic subversion branch.

British Briefing smeared former Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Leader of the House of Commons, John Biffen, because he gave an interview to the *Morning Star* newspaper. It attacked Labour politician Bryan Gould for contributing an article to *Marxism Today*.

Other targets have included the MP and journalist, Chris Mullin, and the World Council of Churches.

In 1988, with his activities expanding on many fronts, Hart was running short of money. It was then that he pulled off something of a coup - he persuaded Rupert Murdoch, the world's most powerful media boss and a U.S. citizen, to hand over a lump sum of £150,000 followed by £40,000 each year for the next three years to enable the lunatic, right-wing fringe to smear the British left and even the not-so-left.

Two weeks before the deal with Murdoch, Hart gave an indication of what the cash would be used for in an unsuccessful begging letter to Lord White of Hanson Trust. "The enemies of freedom are found both at home and abroad ... The Prime Minister has helpfully described the enemies of freedom at home as the enemy within."

That the author of such obsessive and hysterical rantings should be a Downing Street insider cannot but bode ill for the democratic process.

Hart is a friend of Norman Lamont, Michael Portillo and of course, Malcolm Rifkind. At the 1987 Tory conference, Rifkind was one of a motley group of right-wingers who spoke at the Committee for a Free Britain fringe meeting.

David Hart himself treated the throng to a few words. The CFB would fight "the enemy within," he said, "and we can probably do more than most of you imagine ... the committee has energy, determination, commitment and means. We are freedom fighters ... we intend to intensify the struggle." ❑

Victorian veneer

With Tory ministers falling out of bed and on to the back benches, **Alan Simpson** warns us not to jump on the bandwagon of calling for resignations.

WELCOME TO 1994, a world in which over 20 million people live without a country they can call their own: where, even distanced from the refugee crisis, Britain starts the year with three million children living in poverty, spiralling crime figures and with a decision to start a nuclear waste reprocessing programme (THORP) which could turn out to be our Nightmare on Elm Street for the next 1,000 years.

So, what issue dominates the political agenda, as Parliament reconvenes? SEX.

Far be it for me to stand in the way of a Conservative government on the skids. As one "scandal" follows another and ministers fall like ninepins, national newspapers are having to consider midday editions just to keep pace. But let me offer a word of caution: moral panics do not make for good government.

Don't mistake this as a defence of the ministers involved. I simply want to put the issues into a larger perspective.

We have a government that has been "bonking" Britain for almost 15 years. Why are we surprised when this surfaces at a personal as well as a collective level? The government has had its way with the pits, public transport, council house building, education, pensions, manufacturing industry, jobs and health.



Alan Simpson, MP

No question of a Child Support Act to make them pay for these sort of acts of fecklessness and irresponsibility. It will be left to other generations to rebuild the confidence and self-worth of the damaged child we have all become.

We disconnect this morality in the large from morality in the small only at our peril. That is why I can't get too worked up over the clamour for ministerial resignations and purges. It is the presumption that it would somehow make a difference: that to take a snake out of a nest full of vipers wouldn't still leave you with a lot of snakes.

Perhaps none of this would have assumed the proportions it has done if the government hadn't gone out of its way to assume the moral high ground over family life and to pillory single parent families in particular.

There can have been few cruder examples of "Victorian values" than Tim Yeo's claim that his child was different; it would not be a burden on the state, as he had the money to pay.

On this basis, sex education begins and ends with the bank manager. If your account is healthily in credit then you can do what you like elsewhere. If not ... tough. This version of back to basics still treats children (and everyone else) as affordable commodities and little else. So where does this leave people who bring up children on precious little apart from a Fort Knox full of love?

Perhaps it would be helpful if we began from some humbler starting points. One of these would be the recognition that it is hard for anyone to claim to be the party of the family and support Parliament as it is. Parliament is the most anti-family institution you could wish for. Whose children or partner wants to see them when they return from work at 2 am? What relationships can be built up around evenings in which even London MPs can't take their kids to the pictures because they don't know whether there will be a vote at 7 pm, 8.30 pm or 10 pm?

The job that an MP does worst of all is to give his or her own children the time they are entitled to expect. A more sensible system of government might make for more sensible ways of relating to each other.

A second pointer for a more sensible beginning involves a change of meaning. There is no point in defining the family in narrow and mythological terms.

We ought not to make a virtue out of living in a violent, two-parent household. Nor should we denigrate those who try to be decent parents in single, separate or unconventional households. We ought to be celebrating the extent to which, despite living in the most destructive and demanding of times, people still retain the ability to offer love and mutual support.

What is the point of a purge against a minister when we leave the Child Support Agency intact? What are the virtues in attacking women (and men) who can live together in kindness, whilst pretending that "normal" couples, whose lives are etched through with anger and aggression, are somehow better?

If there is a back-to-basics campaign worth running, then let's begin with the basics of a home, a job, a living wage, a sense of worth, hope and something more than sham opportunities.

I would hate to live in a world stripped of passion and conviction. But, even more, I would hate one driven by a new moralism from the Tory backwoods. The last thing we need now is the same hatreds, greed and contempt for people and the planet, given a veneer of godliness. ❑

NEWS & VIEWS

Half way there?

Paul Foley looks at the government climb-down on the national curriculum heralded by the Dearing Report but argues that we are not there yet.

THE DEARING report is a partial victory against a Tory agenda to kill off comprehensive state education. The reviews of the national curriculum, the reduction of testing to three core subjects - English, Maths and Science - the ending of the national curriculum at 14+, all represent victories for the teachers' boycott campaign.

Yet Dearing still leaves the core of the Tory national curriculum intact.



John Patten, MP. PHOTO: Newsfocus.

Testing will continue in the three core subjects at seven, eleven, and 14; the bureaucratic 10-point scale will remain; and the way is still left open for the publication of damaging school league tables.

The core problem remains a xenophobic, racist, sexist, homophobic, "little Englander" national curriculum, albeit shorn of the worst excesses of the Centre for Policy Studies and the imperialist dreams of John Patten who wants the Union Jack flying above every school in England. Fortunately, Patten cuts a ludicrous figure in the eyes of parents, teachers and the Tories which is why Ron Dearing is effectively the education minister.

But Dearing's agenda is still set by John Major. Major has stressed his "back-to-basics" vision for education: "I don't think children go to school for an experience. They go to learn the basic skills they are going to need in later life". Major has added the fourth R of "respect for authority" to the traditional right wing Tory claptrap of the 3Rs.

We need be in no doubt that what Major wants is to turn young people into a docile labour force, taught to know their place and not to question anything. This is most evident in GCSE assessment in which coursework has been downgraded and success is achieved through narrow application of rote learning in an examination.

Other Tory realities are forcing themselves into the classroom. Little of the revenue raised from Clarke's £10 a week tax hike will find its way into the classroom. The Tories want a 0 per cent wage settlement for teachers; funds are not available to employ sufficient teachers to meet children's needs; primary school classes of over 40 are becoming common as the result of round after round of Tory cuts.

Most disgusting of all is the threat to abolish Section 11 funding for ethnic minorities. If successful, this blatantly racist proposal will take away educational opportunity from the most underprivileged sections of society and deny teachers to those children who need them most.

"Back to basics" in education means a return to the days of labelling the vast majority of working-class children as educational failures. Major's classless society means you haven't got much chance unless you're white, middle-class and male.

Unfortunately, the response of the teacher unions has been weak and vacillating. The ATL and NASUWT are in the process of calling off the test boycott. The NUT is surveying its members on the Dearing Report. Pressure must be kept on the union bureaucracies to continue the boycott; rank-and-file pressure forced the boycott last year and this in turn forced the concessions of the Dearing Report.

Further boycotts will force further concessions from a Tory government which is in tatters. Teachers and parents must not be satisfied with Dearing's concessions; only the scrapping of the national curriculum and its tests will do.

A recent opinion poll put teachers second to doctors and nurses as those trusted by the public. Politicians came bottom. Teachers and parents have watched as the Tories destroy the NHS. They are determined that the same thing will not happen to schools. The way forward is clear - teachers must continue their boycott, parents must continue their support. Together, we can throw out the despised national curriculum and save comprehensive state education. ❑

New Interventions

New Interventions **is a quarterly journal for those interested in the future of socialism. Editorially it is committed to a broad socialist perspective and to developing the Marxist strands of that outlook whilst also encouraging new ideas relevant to today's world. Its aim is to provide a forum for discussion unfettered by any orthodoxy or 'party line'.**

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Paying for the past?

Bernie Grant MP has never been afraid to raise what he sees as key questions, no matter what the consequences. Dave Palmer quizzed him, among other things, about the African Reparations Movement, UK.

***Labour Briefing*: What's likely to happen next on the Joy Gardner killing?**

Bernie Grant: We have to wait and see what the Police Complaints Authority come up with. If it is as thorough as it is trying to let me believe we should be able to maintain a momentum on the case... We have to put pressure on the Jamaican government, because she was a Jamaican citizen, to get them to take some sort of action.

LB: The Home Office targetting of the Jamaicans at Christmas was a further tightening of the screws on immigration controls. In spite of all the publicity, are not such events very difficult to respond to effectively?

BG: I was in Barbados when it happened. The whole Caribbean region was very angry. It was strongly featured in the media all through the Christmas/New Year period. I went on the radio, TV and held a public meeting even though I was on holiday.

This is the thin end of the wedge. The European Union - driven by the French Balladur government - is going to demand all the Caribbean countries will need visas to enter Europe. It is going to extend visa regulations to all non-white countries.

The Caribbean political leaders were a bunch of cowards. They did not take the matter seriously. This happened two weeks after Joy Gardner was buried and they said nothing really. The Caribbean countries should have retaliated with measures against British tourists. That would have soon had the holiday companies knocking on the door of the Home Office to tell them to stop this nonsense.

LB: What do you think of the state of the national anti-racist organisations? People have said plenty of things about ARA's failings but isn't the ANL just as bad at doing work at the grassroots, doesn't it fail to address the primary questions - state racism and popular racism?

BG: I think the state of the national anti-racist movement is very dire because of the splits. I think the main culprits are the ARA. The ANL accept they are not getting the grassroots in the black community ... but that's the same with the ARA.

The difference is the ANL has shown a willingness to compromise and take on board criticism. The ARA doesn't do so.

Why did the ARA not join the Unity march? Why did they have a separate demo in Trafalgar Square which talked to tourists and pigeons? I think their slagging off of the Unity march in the media was a crime against the anti-racist movement.

LB: Is there any room for further progress by the Black Sections and the Black Socialist Society?

BG: I can't see much progress being made. One of the main reasons is that a lot of the leaders of the Black Sections just want to get political office ... which they are perfectly entitled to do but they are prepared to sell out on black issues and the struggle for black representation in order to try to become MPs.

LB: Whatever the context and circumstances didn't your comments on repatriation have a counterproductive effect? Didn't you play into the hands of the right? Didn't you provide the media with a great diversion on race issues?

BG: Absolutely not. As a matter of fact it's woken up a lot of people. You have to set a new, positive, agenda which we have done. The agenda we have set is reparations for slavery and colonisation.

I did not say I supported repatriation. I said that black people in my constituency who are sick of Britain were coming to me and asking for voluntary repatriation. This is something I have never supported. I don't agree with repatriation. It's a fascist idea that black people don't belong here. I was deliberately misinterpreted.

I don't support voluntary repatriation. What I do support is a resettlement programme ... a sort of conditioned return for people of African descent who are fed up with racism ... as part of a reparations programme for enslavement and colonisation, for which we have never been compensated.



Bernie Grant, MP. PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

I'm saying that we want a reparations package which would include: a cancellation of Third World debt; infrastructure development; training and so on from those countries who have exploited people of African origin over the centuries. If some people want to return to their countries of origin, or others want to go there to help to develop them, then the British government should pay for them to resettle.

We are fighting for reparations for the crimes of slavery and colonisation and we are getting tremendous support. I have been up and down the country talking to thousands of people. As a result, we have set up the African Reparations Movement UK.

To me, that is a positive thing because it gives people options. All sorts of people have come forward with ideas ... people who want the return of artifacts ... people who want to set up business links ... we've also set up a reparations movement in Barbados.

All kinds of things are happening, which is why some of these middle class blacks are opposed to it ... where are they leading anyone, I ask?



Crown but not out

Abolition of the monarchy is widely talked of. John Cryer talked to **Tony Benn** about what it would really involve.

OF ALL THE critics of the British institution of monarchy, Tony Benn has above all avoided attacks on the royal family themselves.

"To knock the royal family is cheap," he says. "But to go for the constitutional question is fundamental and serious - there is a credibility in that." Certainly, there is a greater credibility attached to Benn's own comments and views on the British constitution than there has been for many years and that is, at least in part, due to his refusal to make the sort of personal attacks which have suddenly become acceptable.

Tittle-tattle and personalised attacks aside, there is a powerful body of opinion in Britain which, for the first time since before 1939, is keen to see the end of the monarchy. It is made up of radical democrats of the left, like Tony Benn, Euro-federalists, who see the monarch as a bar to the creation of a really strong European union, press barons, who see that there is more money in attacking royalty than in glorifying it, and sections of the public who see a lavish civil list and wonder, quite rightly, why they should be paying for it.

Abolition of the monarchy would have serious repercussions for the entire constitution and the decision-making processes. As Tony Benn points out, "we have a constitution which hangs around the idea of the Crown.

"The constitution is very complicated and slightly mysterious. There are three ingredients in the monarchy - there is the Queen, who is the symbol, there is the Prime Minister, who is the executive and there is the Crown, which is a mysterious idea which gives huge powers to people."

It is, Benn argues, an error to see abolition of the monarchy as simply getting rid of the person. Sacking a king or queen would be a minor part of the process.

The crucial aspect would be the effect on Crown powers, or royal prerogatives, which are usually wielded by the Prime Minister and senior Cabinet ministers in the name of the monarch. Declaring war and signing a treaty, for instance, are both royal prerogatives and can therefore be carried out by a premier without it even being mentioned to Members of Parliament.

"What is really important," says Benn, "is to get rid of the Crown prerogatives."

In the event of abolition, "you would move the powers of the Crown to Parliament, so that everything would be brought under democratic control. So you wouldn't be able to sign a treaty without consulting Parliament, you couldn't pass a law in Brussels - which is done from Britain's point of view with our treaty-making powers - without the agreement of Parliament."

Abolition of the monarchy would also deflate the massively bloated power of patronage wielded by every Prime Minister. "The last 10 Prime Ministers have put 900 people into Parliament by making them peers. For everyone who gets a peerage, there are a further nine or so who want it, so the penumbra of patronage greatly exceeds the patronage itself. That's why Prime Ministers can survive for so long."

Within the Tory Party, even invitations to royal gardens are, it seems, given out to Conservative backbenchers according to how they have behaved in the lobbies.

The MP for Chesterfield argues that the whole edifice of patronage represents "a very corrupt system. I don't mean that money changes hands or anything like that but it puts powers in the hands of the Prime Minister in the name of the Crown.

Undoubtedly, there is a head of steam behind the anti-monarchy movement. But there is still a long way to go. As Tony Benn points out, "the monarchy is still too important to the British establishment for them to want to get rid of it.

"Indeed, in the case of Edward VIII, they were prepared to get rid of a monarch to preserve the monarchy." ❑

NEWS & VIEWS

Judge dread

Danny Nicol argues that a Bill of Rights, now flavour of the month with Labour's chattering elemcnts, would provide thc judiciary with a licence to attack democracy

CHANGE IS not synonymous with progress. Kinnock and Smith made many changes to Labour's rulebook to defeat socialism. They want to do the same to the national constitution. Hence, their recent conversion to a Bill of Rights.

Under a Bill of Rights, our judiciary will have power to invalidate Acts of Parliament - a right they haven't enjoyed for 300 years. The Bill of Rights would be a higher form of law, against which the validity of ordinary legislation would be judged. Further, the Bill would itself be protected from amendment or repeal by special procedures.

Why should Labour hand over supreme law-making power to those who aren't elected, can't be got rid of, and keep sending the wrong people to prison?

Take the United States. Two hundred years ago, the Supreme Court proclaimed that the constitution gave it power to quash Acts of Congress (the constitution doesn't say so). Since then, it has used this power to:

- prevent abolition of slavery as an abuse of property rights;
- stop minimum pay/maximum hours legislation as contrary to liberty of contract;
- obstruct Roosevelt's public works programme during the New Deal.

These decisions had to be reversed by the extremely difficult method of changing the Court's composition through political appointments. During its first 70 years, the Supreme Court declared just three Acts of Congress void. But under Roosevelt's relatively left-wing presidency, 13 were invalidated in three years.

Labour's front bench have drafted a Human Rights Bill. Schedule Three enables legal challenges to the validity of Acts of Parliament. This would be grand if only nasty Tory laws were endangered, not good socialist ones. But looking back over the eighties, it's hard to spot a single Act that would have fallen victim to Labour's Bill.

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act and the Public Order Act would probably have survived intact. The Poll Tax definitely would. Socialist legislation is another matter. Labour's Human Rights Bill would incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law. This provides that:

- "everyone's right to life shall be protected by law," giving judges the right, as in the USA, Ireland and Germany, to determine what abortion laws the country will have.
- "No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest." This would be a huge obstacle to implementing Clause IV. What is "the public interest"? Answer: whatever the judges say it is.
- The European Court on Human Rights has ruled that "freedom of association" implies the "negative right" not to be in a union.

Incorporation of the ECHR would only be the first stage, says Graham Allen, Labour's constitutional spokesperson. Stage two would be a "specifically UK Bill of Rights" decided by "an *all-party* Commission". The Tories and Lib-Dems would want to permanently entrench property rights and citizenship of the European Union.

Some envisage a third stage: a written constitution. Britain already has one: the Treaty of Rome as amended by Maastricht. On joining the Community, EC law took precedence over our law. Our courts must apply EC law in its entirety and ignore any conflicting UK Act of Parliament. The EC Treaty is thus the supreme law of this country. Under it socialist policies are illegal; they distort the single market.

Those intellectually challenged left-wingers who want a domestic written constitution should reflect that we wouldn't get the constitution of the left's choosing. It would be drafted by socialism's enemies, entrenching capitalism either explicitly (like the Rome Treaty) or implicitly through a US-style system of checks and balances to prevent change.



Our uncodified constitution has tremendous advantages for socialists: a strong executive (unfashionable with the chattering classes, but essential for a fundamental shift in wealth and power), party government and not presidential government, a winner-takes-all electoral system, a judiciary which knows its place, and flexibility.

Its disadvantages - lack of accountability of Labour governments to the Labour Party and EC membership - can be dealt with if the political will rematerialises, thanks to the constitution's flexibility.

The leadership want these changes for the same reason they want the European Union, state funding and a powerful second chamber elected by PR. They want to make their counter-revolution permanent.

If the leadership get their "modern constitution" the struggle for socialism will be lost for generations. Let's not lose through naivete. ❑

CLASS TRAITOR OF THE MONTH

Captain Bob's boy

A former miner and left-winger, he went on to help the *Mirror* dish the dirt on Arthur Scargill. All our Class Traitor's are pretty low, but **Kevin Barron** really is the bottom of the barrel.

IF THERE'S one consistent theme in Kevin Barron's dismal political career, it is his dog-like opportunism. Come what may, Kevin likes to be on the side that's winning. Sometimes he gets it right, sometimes not.

A Yorkshire miner for 20 years, Barron quickly realised that the best way to get on in the 1970s and early 80s was to swim with the left. Barron became a stalwart and worked hard for his then Area President, Arthur Scargill. In the 1981 NUM presidential campaign, Barron was Scargill's campaign manager in South Yorkshire - driving, fetching, leafletting and carrying. In 1981, working for Arthur made a lot of sense for a young man in a hurry. After all, Scargill won 140,000 votes in a 70 per cent landslide.

The NUM duly backed Barron in the 1983 selection for the Rother Valley seat, which he won. Still travelling on a left ticket, Barron gravitated to the Campaign Group and backed Meacher for deputy leader. In the miners' strike, Barron acted the union loyalist and was injured by police outside his old pit of Maltby. He even spoke out in support of accepting cash aid from Libya and criticised Neil Kinnock's condemnation when NUM chief executive Roger Windsor was shown on TV kissing Colonel Gaddafi at the height of the strike.

All that changed in 1985. Times were moving on and Barron found greener pastures. In October, he and Derek Fatchett resigned from the Campaign Group in a blaze of media glory, accusing former comrades of "authoritarianism" and of being - of all things - an "anti-leadership group". Barron was particularly upset at the group's support for an amnesty for victimised miners. Precisely 13 days later, Barron was appointed Neil Kinnock's Parliamentary Private Secretary.

This was the beginning for young Kevin, who went on to be appointed Labour's front bench spokesperson on the coal industry. Meanwhile, he sacked his agent on Neil Kinnock's instructions because she was considered too left-wing. Barron also signed up with Labour Friends of Israel, who paid for his freebie to Israel and the occupied territories in January 1990.

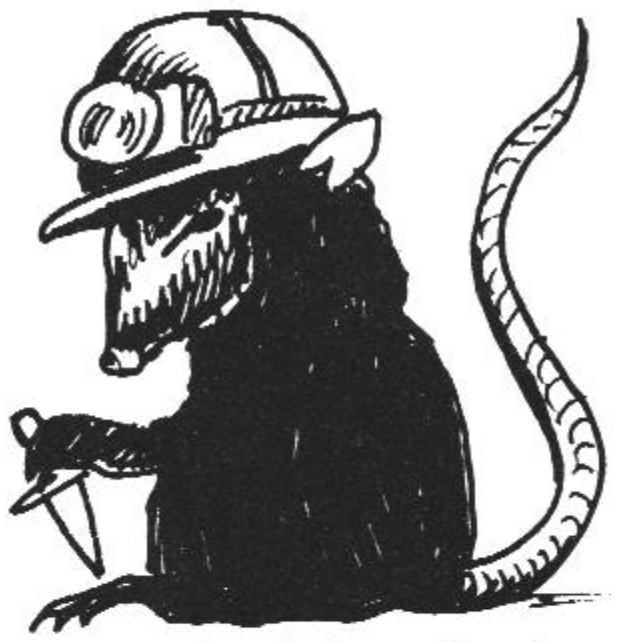
Not much more was heard from the one-time leftwinger - as the government visited its terrible revenge on Britain's miners - until 1990.

It was then that Robert Maxwell's *Daily Mirror* and Central Television's Cook Report launched their smear campaign against Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield. Scargill, it will be recalled, had been accused of lining his pockets with Libyan money and "diverting" a million pounds of Soviet cash during the 1984-5 strike.

Every single one of the main allegations has subsequently been shown to be false. But for Barron, here was a way he could be useful at last. Along with fellow NUM turncoat Kim Howells, Scargill's former South Yorkshire legman threw himself into Maxwell's generously financed campaign. Barron was particularly well placed to do his master's bidding as he was that year's chair of the miners' parliamentary group and therefore an ex-officio member of the NUM executive.

He used the position to the full: appearing on the Cook Report, regularly giving anti-Scargill interviews on the steps of the NUM headquarters after executive meetings, egging on the media, the lawyers and the NUM right to go for the kill and oust their beleaguered president. When Scargill was given a standing ovation at the 1990 NUM conference at the height of the smear campaign, Barron was there to explain it all away for the waiting cameras. "It's like a football manager who always receives a vote of confidence before he gets the sack," Barron said hopefully.

The former Maltby miner was to be disappointed, particularly when a special NUM delegate conference rejected the whole poisonous saga and gave 100 per cent backing to the union leadership. At that conference, Hatfield delegate Dave Douglass remarked that Barron had been on TV again the night before, calling for Scargill to resign and saying, "however deep you bury it, the smell won't go away".



"Let me tell you why that is, Kevin," Douglass went on. "It is because you have plodded around in the crap that long it has stuck all over you."

Delegates voted to condemn the role played by Barron and Howells over the previous six months as an "abuse of their position." They also authorised legal action against Gavin Lightman - the QC who had cleared Scargill and Heathfield of corruption but criticised them over the handling of strike funds - for publishing his report as a Penguin book without the union's permission.

Barron faxed details of the decision to Lightman's office and then denied he had done so. He also took to selling cut-price copies of the discredited report to hapless MPs and members of his own CLP. Censured for his behaviour by the NUM Yorkshire Area, Barron went snivelling to the Commons Privileges Committee that the union was "interfering" with his role as an MP.

In June 1992, Labour's coal spokesperson was unceremoniously expelled from the NUM for lying to the national disciplinary committee and leaking the rules of the union. Even last summer, Barron couldn't let go of the smear campaign. When Roger Windsor was named as a MI5 agent in Parliament, Barron defended Maxwell's chief witness with touching loyalty, even quoting from John Major to prove Windsor's innocence.

Barron's friends confidently expected the new leadership to reward him for narking on his former union. But, to Kevin's astonishment, Smith sacked him. Barron was, nevertheless, to prove that there is still life after political death for a politician prepared to eat humble pie. Last autumn, he threw himself into the successful Gordon Brown - Peter Mandelson campaign to oust Peter Hain from the secretaryship of the Tribune Group, collecting more than £1,000 in new *Tribune* subs from Brown toadies. Barron is now back on the greasy pole, with an AEEU sponsorship in his back pocket and a new job as number four in Prescott's employment team. ❑

Suffolk punch

THE LOCAL Government Review will affect everybody who lives in Suffolk. The terms of debate have been fixed by the government's commissioner, Mary

Andrew Coates
Ipswich CLP

Leigh (a Conservative Lambeth Councillor). The county is to be divided into "unitary authorities". At great speed (detailed proposals have to be submitted by February 25th) a whole swathe of local government is set to be reorganised. Public consultation will take place on the terms dictated by the commissioner.

Final decisions will be taken by next autumn. In these conditions, there will be little opportunity for public discussion. But it is important that the labour movement reacts. A threat to local democracy, to the interests of Suffolk people, and to public services, lies in these changes.

What do these measures mean? The labour movement should start from considering the needs of people in Suffolk as a whole. Suffolk Council provides numerous services which are best organised on a county-wide basis. To cite just a few - libraries, education (including student grants, school meals and school buses), transport, archaeology, records, road safety, social services.

Splitting these services up into separate unitary authorities will seriously weaken them. Many will probably cease to fall under democratic control. School heads have said they will lead a mass opt-out to create a trust to replace the Education Authority. Others will be ripe for contracting-out to private entrepreneurs (school-meals and transport services). Resources will be fragmented. The library stock, at present available to anybody in the county, will be divided up into four or five units. County records will also be dispersed. Some functions will practically disappear, such as archaeology. Discretionary grants will be left in the hands of unitary bodies. The overall effect will be disastrous. As each small borough fights over the share-out of the county's capital, politicians and electors will be at each others' throats.

Victory?

A PARTIAL victory has been achieved in Coventry against the much-diminished witchunt within the Labour Party.

Dave Spencer, Darrell Cozans, Danny Maher, Ivan Moldawczuk and John Porch were accused of helping the campaigns of two of the city's former MPs, Dave Nellist and John Hughes, who both stood as independent Labour candidates at the last general election.

Walworth Road had dispatched a full-time organiser, Roy Kennedy, to Coventry, ostensibly to help win the marginal of Coventry South-West, which we lost. He spent most of the campaign organising against Nellist and Hughes, after which he seemed to do his utmost to remove the left from the city's Labour Party.

Kennedy was assisted by Neil Ryder, who took photographs and videos of the two independent campaigns in an attempt to gather some evidence. Ryder is now a councillor after less than four years in the Party and, prior to that, 15 years in the CPGB.

Spencer, who has been in the Labour Party for 35 years, was suspended from holding office for 18 months, the case against Cozens was dismissed and Maher, Moldawczuk and Porch were expelled.

Nicked

TWELVE LABOUR councillors in Plymouth are facing prosecution for exercising their democratic right to vote in the council chamber.

The 12 have voted while in arrears in their poll tax and council tax payments, which contravenes Section 106 of the Tories' Local Government Finance Act.

It seems that a member of the particularly barmy tendency within the opposition Tory group in Plymouth called in the police and prosecutions are due in March - the 12 constitute more than one quarter of the city's entire ruling group.

Nationwide, there are around 22 councillors facing prosecution under the Act. The Plymouth news comes hard on the heels of the prosecution of three councillors in Lambeth, South London, earlier in January. Two were fined £100 and the third £50.

In Plymouth, the court hearings are expected to last three weeks during which all the councillors are expected to be present, five days a week.

However, there seems to be a certain amount of confusion surrounding the case. It is not clear whether the Act barred them from financial votes or all votes.

Many of the councillors already had arrangements to pay off their arrears and so thought they were in the clear, but the police decided to prosecute anyway.

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Stay away from Saddam!

With George Galloway in trouble after his recent visit to Iraq, **Keith Veness** asks why some Labour MPs still seem to fall for Saddam's propaganda.

FOR THOSE people appalled at the stories emerging through the Scott Inquiry about Tory Ministers' complicity in backing the genocide of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, there is also a rather nasty "tail-back" into the Labour Party from this sort of connection with the barbarous activity of the Bagdad Government to be considered.

Through the eighties, Saddam built a large army and police force through the assistance of British and other "western" governments who saw him as a counterweight to the Islamic fundamentalists of Iran.

Iraqi businessmen and politicians hob-nobbed with arms manufacturers like Matrix Churchill and with cabinet ministers and other leading Tories. While this was going on, the Bagdad regime was engaged in a mass slaughter under the rubric of the "Al-Anphal" campaigns that led to the killing of 182,000 Kurds and Assyrians in Northern Iraq and the disappearance of countless other opponents - communists, Shia clerics, trades unionists and others - in the rest of the country.



George Galloway, MP.

A great many politicians in Britain were quite prepared to turn the proverbial "blind eye" to this reign of terror. Various Tories forged profitable links with Saddam ("Matrix Churchill" was a joint-stock company for British-Iraqi trading) and lucrative contracts were forged on the basis of "oil for weapons" deals.

More strangely, a great many people on the British left were duped by the "anti-imperialist" and "Arab liberation" rhetoric that flows out of Bagdad. There is now little doubt that a number of "left-wing" groups in London were funded by Ba'athist cash in the eighties.

A number of prominent labour movement politicians visited Iraq and were escorted around by "Uncle Saddam" to see cheering crowds - many of whom had family members taken hostage by the Mukhabarat (Iraq's murderous secret police) to ensure they kept cheering loudly enough - and view the ghastly neo-Stalinist architecture that loomed over Iraqi cities.

With the threat of war over Kuwait, Saddam tried to use various British politicians to show what a kind and generous person he was. People as diverse as Edward Heath and Tony Benn visited Bagdad in 1990 and 1991.

While there can be little doubt that it was correct to go there to collect "human shield" hostages for humanitarian reasons, a number of politicians and clerics were manoeuvred into mouthing pleasantries about the regime and implying that Iraq under the Ba'athists was not as bad as people made out.

This must have been particularly galling for the small band of MPs like Ann Clwyd and Jeremy Corbyn who had been trying since the massacre by poison gas of 5,000 Kurds at Halabja in 1988 to alert the labour movement into realising the true nature of this murderous outfit.

The aftermath of the Kuwait war at least raised to public scrutiny some of the horror. As mass graves were unearthed in Free Kurdistan and the massacre of the Shia and "Marsh Arabs" in the south came to light, public opinion at last started to see the true face of Ba'athism and its leader, Saddam Hussein Takriti.

However, some people never seem to learn. A recent deputation of three Labour MPs went to Iraq as guests of the regime, though paying their own air fares! George Galloway, Harry Barnes and Tam Dalyell met Tariq Aziz (Saddam's deputy and the token christian in the government) and were again shown the "state tour" of those parts of Iraq still controlled by Saddam and the Mukhabarat.

On their return, Dalyell even had the cheek to appear at a "fringe" meeting at Labour Party Conference to explain what he had done.

Among the gems he managed to come out with was: "there is no repression of the Marsh Arabs - it is an invention of the western media." He went on to attack George Alegia, the TV reporter, for his reports from the marshes while under air assault from Saddam's helicopter gunships.

He also explained that "Iraq does not treat its Kurds as badly as Turkey or Iran"! Apart from being untrue, it shows what a miserable yardstick Dalyell chooses to measure human rights and social justice by.

Even worse, appearing on the same platform was someone introduced as an "Iraqi engineer living in London". This particular individual told us he had visited Basra three times in the last year - something not possible if you are not working directly with the Bagdad Government.

This person is known to the Iraqi National Congress (the "umbrella" opposition group of Iraqi democrats) and to the various Kurdish groups based in England as an operator for the Mukhabarat. Yet Dalyell saw fit to bring him to a Labour Party Conference!

Such behaviour is either naive in the extreme or quite sinister. Dalyell, Galloway et al, should either explain urgently why they are flirting with a government that belongs in the same category as Hitler, Pol Pot and "Papa Doc" Duvalier or they should cease this contact immediately and apologise to the hundreds of thousands of victims slaughtered by Saddam and the Ba'athists. ❑



Gerry Adams and John Hume — paving the way for the future?

Major sabotage

Geoff Bell reflects on the Tories' cowardly dodge of undermining the great opportunity which now presents itself for peace in Ireland.

JOHN MAJOR seems determined to abandon the Irish peace process with the same characteristic dithering and back-tracking which is the hallmark of everything else he touches.

Repeated requests from Sinn Fein for clarification on the implications of the Downing Street Declaration on Ireland have been turned down by Major. So have similar requests from Labour spokesperson on Northern Ireland, Kevin McNamara and numerous nationalist politicians including the leader of the Social and Democratic Labour Party, John Hume.

Even Irish premier Albert Reynolds has offered to help with such clarification. Major's refusals to do likewise is making it clear that it is he rather than Sinn Fein who is sabotaging the peace process. It should be remembered that the latest stage of this process got under way with the talks between Hume and Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams, and it was only when these emerged that Major decided to launch an alternative initiative.

In an attempt to excuse his present inaction, Major has once again reverted to proclaiming he won't talk to Sinn Fein until republican violence ends. However, the hypocrisy of this was once again exposed on January 15th when, at a press conference chaired by Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn, Sinn Fein released documents outlining the history of negotiations between the republicans and the British. Most sensationally, the documents show that the Tory government was within days of agreeing to start secret talks with Sinn Fein in April last year. The government asked for a promise of a two-week ceasefire from the IRA but, when such an assurance came, the British once more back-tracked.

With such revelations, and a closer study of the Downing Street Declaration itself being made, many in Ireland are becoming increasingly cynical about Major's attitude to the peace process. For example, Eddie McGrady, the most right-wing and anti-republican of the SDLP MPs, recently described the Downing Street Declaration as a "Unionist document", criticising its emphasis on reassuring the Unionists.

The attitude of Sinn Fein toward the declaration has also become clearer with the release of a long statement from Gerry Adams. This went into some detail about the proposals which emerged from the Adams/Hume talks. Adams said that the proposals outlined a number of basic principles:

- The Irish people as a whole have the right to self-determination;
- an internal settlement is not a solution;
- the Unionists cannot have a veto over British policy but the consent and allegiance of Unionists expressed through an accommodation with the rest of the Irish people are essential ingredients if a lasting peace is to be established;
- the British government must join the persuaders;
- the two governments (British and Irish) have the major responsibility to secure political progress.

Without clarification, the Downing Street Declaration falls well short of these proposals. In particular, the British continue to insist on the Unionist veto and John Major has ruled out the possibility of attempting to persuade the Unionists that their future lies in a united Ireland.

This latter point is of particular relevance to the Labour Party whose official policy is indeed to attempt to persuade the Unionists to support Irish unity. Unfortunately, just when Sinn Fein, the SDLP and the Irish government are calling on Major to do this very thing, the Labour leadership has declined to promote the policy. Instead, shortly after the Downing Street Declaration, when John Smith followed John Major in making a television broadcast, it was the old bipartisan story of Tory tweedledum and Labour tweedledee reading from the same script.

At the very least the Labour leadership must promote its own policy of the British government joining "the persuaders." Moreover, Labour should now show its readiness to do in the public gaze what the Tory government has been doing privately for at least three years - talk with Sinn Fein.

As for Labour activists, it is a question of "back to basics" - the key issues of Irish self-determination, an end to the Unionist veto and British withdrawal. While Irish republicans have shown a willingness to be flexible on the implementation of these principles, they still remain the core issues. Building a pro-peace campaign based on them would be a valuable contribution from activists in this country. The opening of a discussion on organising such a campaign would do no harm at all. ❑

Trade union

THE GOVERNMENT'S attempt to end the check-off system - under which employers deduct union dues at source - could backfire on the Tories in the same way that the attack on political funds did a few years ago.

Tory ministers thought it would be an easy way of battering the unions if legislation forced them to seek members' permission to continue with the check-off system.

Undoubtedly, this has created something of an administrative nightmare for union officials. On the other hand, as one union official told *Labour Briefing*: "It means we've got to get off our arses and go out, campaign, talk to people and agitate in the way trade unions used to when they were being built up from the grass roots."

General union GMB is probably as advanced as anyone in getting the membership signed up. In Scotland, the union has been recruiting new members through the check-off campaign. In some cases where it had, say, a 90 per cent membership at a plant or factory, the interest sparked by the campaign has pushed it up to 100 per cent. In other cases, some non-union places are now unionised for the first time.

One official said that "if we keep going at the present rate we will end up with 8,000 extra members in Scotland alone".

However, there is still a long way to go in England and the campaign is very much in its early stages.

Britain's second-biggest union, the TGWU, is also in the early stages of its campaign, but there has already been a conference in London for 400 officers to get the thing off the ground.

One officer claimed that "the Tories' attempt to smash the political funds in the eighties actually made members realise the importance of the political funds and some were set up in unions where they previously hadn't existed.

"The same, I think, could happen with the check-off campaign".

Building union UCATT has already had some success recruiting more members among local authorities and the big construction firms. But problems lie ahead with smaller firms where many workers are moving from site to site and even from job to job.

George Brumwell, UCATT's general secretary, said recently that so far the union "has had a very positive response from the membership. We see this as a potential platform to actually recruit more members."

UCATT is probably the union most at risk from the attack on check-off; more than 90 per cent of the members are covered by the system.

Shopworkers' union USDAW is also reporting a positive response. In the areas where the campaign is underway, there have been no problems retaining the check-off system.

The union which has suffered most under the legislation is the rail workers. RMT reportedly lost 21,000 members when British Rail wound up the check-off system in revenge for industrial action taken last year.

This has meant transferring the existing membership to direct debit payment, which is apparently going pretty smoothly so far. More crucially, the union has managed to claw back a few thousand of the 21,000 members lost with BR's pre-emptive attack. ❑

The TUC is making major cutbacks and will probably end up more like a pressure group, general secretary John Monks has revealed.

The eight main policy committees and seven industry committees have been suspended indefinitely while the principal decision-making body will be a new Executive Committee, which will meet monthly and will replace the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The supreme body within the organisation will remain the General Council but its meetings will be cut from 12 to five a year.

When asked if the changes amounted to a cost-cutting exercise, Monks said that there would be no staff cuts in the foreseeable future.

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news

Ambitious coal tycoons who are queueing up to buy into Britain's remaining pits are planning to derecognise the National Union of Mineworkers and to ask miners to contribute their own cash to the sell-off.

The scab Union of Democratic Mineworkers is trying to put together a consortium with US mining firm, JWR, and bankers, Kleinwort Benson, in an attempt to buy into the coal sell-off. UDM leader Neil Greatrex, has said that the putative owners "would only recognise the UDM."

He added that this would also apply if the consortium bought into pits where the NUM is the dominant union.

Greatrex also said that he would be asking miners to put in "no more than £2,000" each.

According to the minutes book of the UDM, a copy of which has been obtained by *Briefing*, the union "proposed that British Coal make the remaining workforce redundant, prior to privatisation."

There has been speculation that the rebel outfit is keen on this course of action because it would give miners redundancy money which could then be sunk into buy-out schemes like its own.

Henry Richardson, leader of Nottinghamshire NUM, has condemned the UDM scheme as "pie-in-the-sky. Like all their other schemes, it will come to nothing but heartache and pain for many miners."

The much-vaunted management buy-out, which is being co-ordinated by the British Association of Colliery Managers, is thought to be planning an input from miners of between £2,000 and £3,000 each.

The BACM leadership were unavailable for comment on any aspect of the buy-out.

Former British Coal manager Malcolm Edwardes has been very critical of the management's planned bid; he has quite reasonably pointed out that one cannot be both a seller and a buyer. However, Edwardes himself has his own company, Edwardes Energy, and is interested in buying a number of recently closed mines.

The ex-manager has said that he does not want to deal with the national NUM but will talk to the men at each pit. It would not be unreasonable to argue that this means effective derecognition.

Budge Mining, which is involved in trying to buy some pits, would not comment on any aspect of the sell-off.

Indeed, the only major potential buyer which has said it will recognise the NUM and not ask miners to stump up cash is Caledonian Mining, which in interested in buying the north-east coalfield.

The last pit in Lancashire, Parkside, is still being defended by the Women Against Pit Closures one year after British Coal closed it. The women have mounted a round-the-clock camp at the pit, every day of the week, for the last 12 months.

Management has tried to bring in limestone by lorry to seal the pit, which failed. The latest rumour is that it may try again, this time by rail, as the mine still has its own railway.

The action by the women means that Parkside could easily be reopened at any time and begin producing coal again.

A confidential report by accountants HW Fisher on the Rail, Maritime and Transport union has recommended that the union must make major cutbacks or face a merger.

There has been speculation that a possible merger partner would be the TGWU, which could mean a virtual takeover by the larger union.

The RMT is currently running at a deficit of £2.5 million a year - this is forecast to top £4 million unless drastic action is taken quickly.

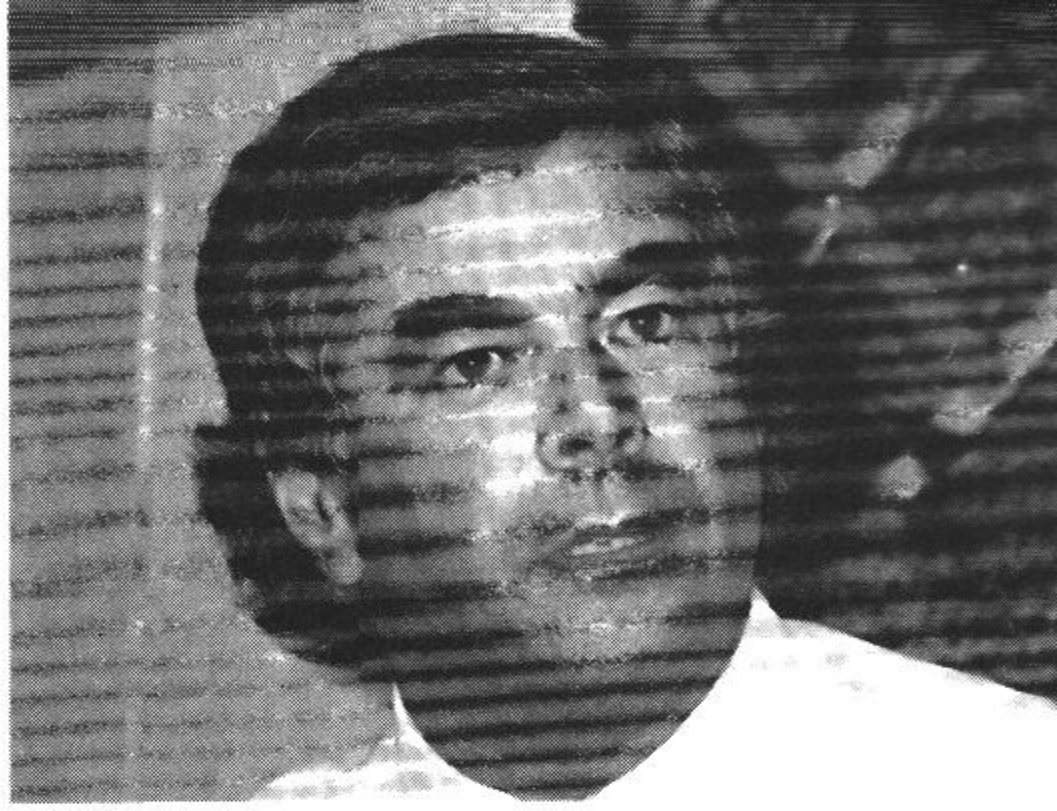
Many of the financial woes are not of the union's own making: cuts by British Rail, the disastrous merger with the seamen's union and BR's ending of the check-off facility have all played a part.

The rapidly declining membership is now down to around 77,000, thus denying the union its automatic seat on the TUC's General Council.

General secretary, Jimmy Knapp, and his deputy, Vernon Hince, could face challenges from both right and left of the union. In the event of an election, the dire financial situation is bound to play a major role in the ensuing debate.

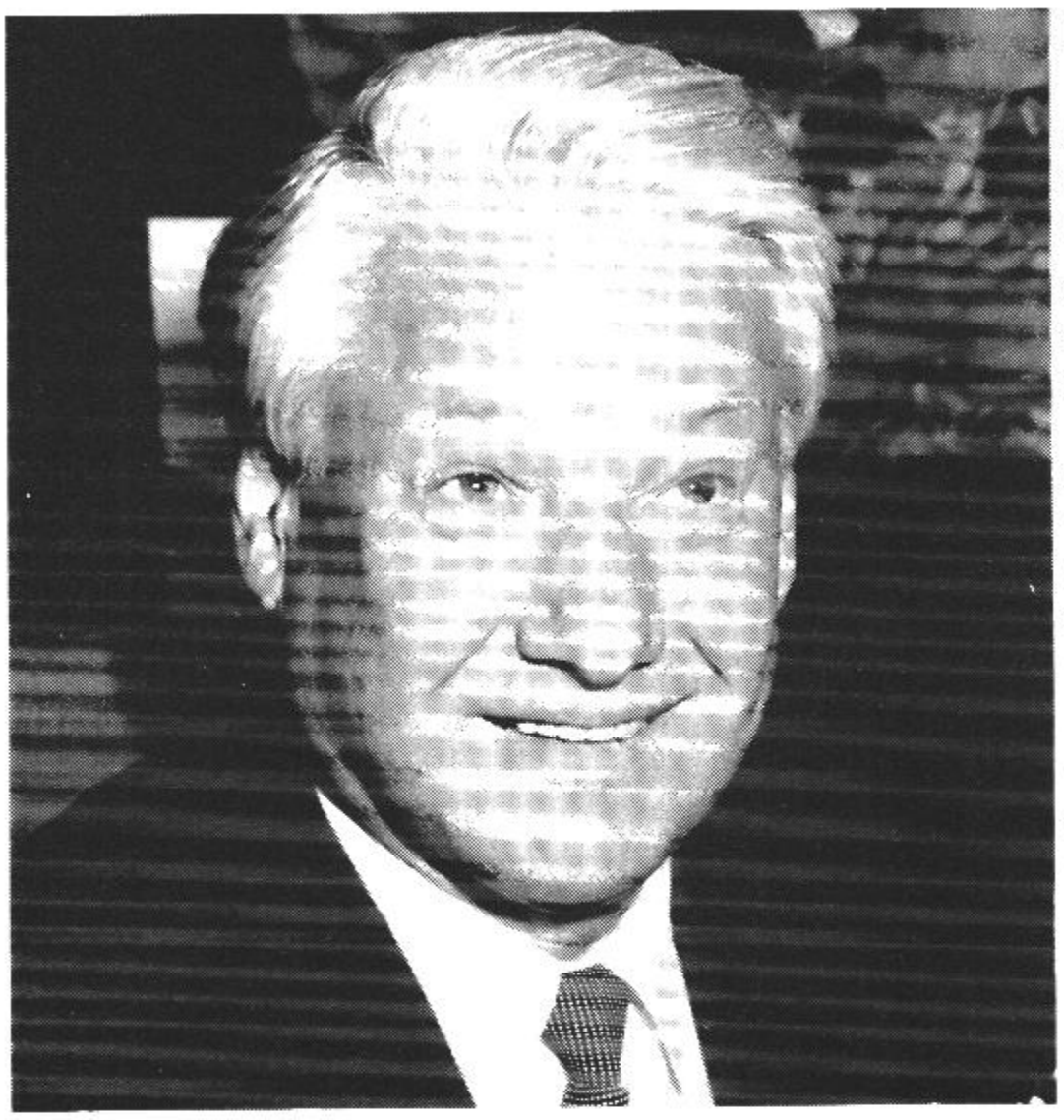
Trade unionists will gather in Cheltenham on January 29th for a national demonstration to mark the tenth anniversary of the trade union ban at GCHQ, the government's espionage centre.

The march will assemble at Pittville Park at midday. Speakers at a rally afterwards in Montpelier Gardens include Mike Grindley, chair of the GCHQ unions, and Labour leader John Smith.



Tony Dubbins (above), general secretary of the Graphical, Paper and Media Union, has pledged continued full backing for the sacked Harvest Seven. Dubbins addressed a rally in Macclesfield, where Harvest Printers is based. The seven were sacked last July for taking limited industrial action in pursuit of a national pay award.

Photo: Newsfocus



Boris Yeltsin. PHOTO: Newsfocus

Antony Arblaster looks at the repercussions of Russia's recent elections while (opposite) **Alice Mahon** recounts her own experience as an election monitor in that country.

The

WRITING IN the November *Briefing*, the Russian writer Yevgeni Pashentsev eloquently voiced his fears about the situation in his country in the wake of Yeltsin's bloody repression of the parliamentary rebellion: "My own great fear is that we could start to see the rise of a Russian Hitler, because we have many of the conditions which existed in the 1930s in Germany — unemployment, poverty, political confusion, the undermining of democracy."

Sooner than Pashentsev expected, perhaps, a figure has emerged who could fill that terrible role - Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the absurdly named Liberal Democratic Party, but in reality an extreme nationalist and overt racist and anti-semite. Since the unexpected and unpredicted success of his party in the December parliamentary elections, everyone has been asking the same question: is this the Russian Hitler?

Many commentators seem to regard him as almost a figure of fun -a clown whose opinions are ridiculous and grotesque, who delights in shocking people. Only the number of votes he received entitles him to be taken seriously.

But all this could have easily been said of Hitler in the late 1920s - and was. His opinions, too, were considered to be too preposterous, too illiterate, to be taken seriously. He too was a clown, a ranting outsider whom a wily elite could easily outwit. It was on these terms that the respectable right let him into power. "We can contain him and the Nazis," they thought.

Even when the Holocaust was well under way, there were plenty of people in Britain and the United States who refused to believe that it was happening. They could not accept that Hitler actually believed in his own racist ravings and had acted upon those beliefs.

Whether Zhirinovsky actually believes what he says - who knows?

The phenomenon of the powerless firebrand who is miraculously converted to moderation when he or she comes within sight of power is a familiar one (Neil Kinnock offers a recent minor example). But you can't count on it happening. It didn't with Hitler, or Reagan or Thatcher. Zhirinovsky's racist and chauvinist outbursts are evidently popular with large numbers of Russians, and that is reason enough why he should stick to that line. He stood for the presidency against Yeltsin and Ryzhkov in 1991, and he has his eye on the next contest in 1996.

Whether the next two years are years of rise or decline for Zhirinovsky and Russian fascism will depend above all on what happens to the Russian economy and Russian living standards. Boris Yeltsin was probably right to interpret the Liberal Democrat vote as a protest against the appalling effects of the economic "shock therapy" that he and his governments have imposed on the Russian people.

Having proscribed several parties from taking part in the elections, obstructed others and used his control of the media to influence voters, there were not all that many avenues left open for protest. But one of them was represented by Zhirinovsky, and a quarter of the voters took it.

Even heavily manipulated elections do not always go according to plan. And so it has turned out in Russia. Yeltsin managed to win approval for his new and more authoritarian constitution. But the parliamentary elections produced a body even less sympathetic to his programme than the one he forcibly dissolved in October. Yeltsin's brutality and high-handedness have generated a backlash of a particularly ugly and dangerous kind.

But not all the consequences of this will be regrettable. The signs are that the frantic pace of the transition to capitalism will now be slowed down. More consideration will be given to the human costs of economic restructuring, and even to preserving some of the social provisions inherited from the Communist era. Some of the hardline capitalist raiders are now leaving the government. Yegor Gaidar has thrown in the towel and Boris Fyodorov is also likely to do so. They are disgusted at the current tendency to make concessions to what one reporter called, without a trace of irony, "conservative demands for more social spending".

If that is conservatism, then it is clear that Russia needs more of it - and so do we! The support now being given to post Communist parties of the left, in Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere, indicates that substantial minorities are not willing to see all the social and economic gains won under Communism sacrificed on the newly established altar of the so-called free market.

It may also be the case that the threat represented by Zhirinovsky and a revival of Great Russian chauvinism will awaken the capitalist powers, above all the United States, to the need to provide Russia with aid on a massive scale. This is indispensable if sustained economic hardship is to be avoided, and the extremely uneven and fragile transition to democracy is to be sustained. Economic misery, which leaves the market dogmatists unmoved, is the soil in which the weeds of fascism are most likely to flourish and grow strong. ❑

greatest fear

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

I WAS AN international observer of the Russian elections in December on behalf of the civilian committee of the North Atlantic Assembly. I was the only MP from the UK on the delegation.

My overall impression was that, while the actual voting on the day was conducted fairly, there were some outrageous violations of democracy in the conduct of the election campaign. The amount of time allowed to collect the signatures necessary to qualify was far too short. Some parties clearly had access to foreign money even though this was illegal. Television coverage was grossly unbalanced. Each party was allocated party political broadcasts but then the governing Russia's Choice party got all the news coverage.

At one point during the campaign Yeltsin threatened to ban any parties which criticised his new constitution. This was overturned by the electoral court. But the compromise they came up with did ban any attacks on the constitution during the last 24 hours of the campaign!

Everyone wanted to know where Zhirinovsky had got his money from because he bought a lot of TV time towards the end of the campaign. Opposition parties also pointed out that the government used state employees to collect signatures for Russia's Choice and it was the only party allowed to canvass the army for votes.

On top of all of this, the main left newspaper, *Pravda*, was prevented from appearing for two days just before the vote.

Nonetheless the parties associated with President Yeltsin and the government suffered a crushing defeat, winning less than 30 per cent of the vote.

I understand a little of the feeling of national humiliation which Zhirinovsky was able to exploit. Just one small example was the virtual contempt with which some of the US Congressmen with us treated even high Russian government officials.

The most hopeful thing about the situation was the strong support for the left. The left combined took roughly 30 per cent of the vote in spite of all the obstacles that were placed in their way.

Now it will be a contest between the left and Zhirinovsky as to who will lead the opposition to Yeltsin. Zhirinovsky will probably lie low in Parliament with his eyes on winning the election for the presidency.

When he met us he arrived flanked by press, television crews and eight minders. He radiated confidence and reminded me of a young Mussolini.

His politics were a populist combination of some of the social policies of the left, combined with extreme nationalism, racism, protectionism and support for the free market. He argued that the reformers were suffocating the private sector and that Russian industry and agriculture should be protected from foreign competition. He was overtly racist, confirming that he wanted fewer foreigners and more "blue-eyed, blond-haired" Russian presenters on television.

The elections confirmed that the largest party on the left in Russia is the Communist Party. We met the CP's leader, Zuganov, who described the CP as the party of the working class. He made clear that its policy was the protection of the working class from the cradle to the grave.

He struck me as a straightforward sort of character. He didn't duck questions and gave lengthy, carefully prepared answers.

He definitely did not propose a return to the old regime. He said that mistakes had been made but that the Communist Party wanted an open and free society.

We met the Electoral Arbitration Court, consisting of nine members. The court was set up to oversee and to investigate any problems. It was argued that it could not be impartial or independent because it was formed by the president. However, the court did investigate some cases of serious violations. When Russia's Choice candidates were interviewed on television, one of them had called for the hanging of communists starting with their leader, so of course they were ruled out of order by the court. It was not made clear what sort of penalties would be handed out but members of the court said that penalties could go as far as banning.

I want to make a distinction between what happened in the run-up to the election and what happened on the election day. On the day what I saw was fair.

Because voters had five polling sheets, it was a very complicated process and the fact that the candidates' parties did not appear by their names seemed to cause a lot of confusion.

At the first polling station we visited, in a middle-class area, there were observers from Russia's Choice, the Civic Union and the fascists. They said that when Yeltsin held his referendum the voters were pouring in. Many fewer Russians voted this time.

In the second polling station, two old women came up and asked us if we knew about the privatisation of municipal flats and if we knew whether residents had been murdered to get them out.

We went out to a working-class district in Moscow at night for the count, and I must say people there were delighted to see us. They gave us vodka and cheese.

At the count, it was claimed that only 46 per cent had voted. At another station, in a working-class area with a big steel works, 86 per cent voted in the referendum in April and only 46 per cent this time. ❑



Alice Mahon MP. PHOTO: Phil Maxwell

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Brave, heroic — and rich

After several years working in Namibia, **Mark Johnson** asks: whatever happened to the great freedom fighters of SWAPO?

A BLACK LIBERATION movement, committed to freedom and justice for the people of Africa's last colony, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the ANC, heroically resisting the South African war machine's attempts to destroy their struggling refugee camps ... SWAPO touched the nerves of the left and won hearts everywhere.

More active than the ANC in fighting repression and without the terrorist taint of the PLO, "the sole legitimate representative of the Namibian people" had an unshakable moral case for support. Whatever happened to SWAPO?

SWAPO is alive and well and running the government of the independent Republic of Namibia. It won the elections in 1989 with a comfortable majority and is expected to do even better next time - last year's regional elections showed massive support for the socialist heroes of the liberation struggle.

So what has been achieved? Has land been snatched from heavily-subsidised white farms and been re-distributed to give ordinary Namibians a chance for security and moderate prosperity? Has the tax system been overhauled so that the richest members of society provide help to those on whose labour they prospered for so long?

Have the police, feared for their brutality, been reigned in? Have companies investing in the country been forced to change their employment and environmental policies, so as to work for the good of society rather than its exploitation? Does Namibia stand up in international affairs as a proud and independent champion of the oppressed everywhere?

No chance. SWAPO is popular but only because the alternatives are worse. Black Namibians are now free to settle anywhere, no longer confined to their "ethnic homelands" (many of which consist mainly of semi-desert terrain). But the white farmers aren't selling and the poor have no money to buy. Why should the whites sell? After all, the subsidies still roll in and landless labour is plentiful and cheap.

There have been big changes in taxation - the top rate has been reduced from 42 to 38 per cent. The excuse? "Our relatively high rates of taxation," explained the finance minister. Relative to whom? All our neighbours, including South Africa, have higher rates. An official at the ministry of finance suggested that the minister might have had the USA in mind. The (white-dominated) police still see no reason to conform to the letter of the law when dealing with the illiterate and powerless and Rossing Uranium, one of the biggest employers, is accused by environmentalists of poisoning its workers and the land itself.

Workers now have the right to strike, but employers have the right to fire and then to bus in migrant workers from the desperately poor and over-populated north. There is no segregation in housing but the only black faces to be seen in the prosperous white suburbs of Windhoek (apart from occasional government ministers in their Mercedes) are the legions of domestic servants (maids, paid about £6 per day) bussed in from the squalid neighbouring township.

At the United Nations recently, the foreign minister declared his wholehearted support of "UN" attempts to capture General Aideed in Somalia, "the main perpetrator of the violence in that country". President Sam Nujoma was the first African leader to be invited to visit Bill Clinton. "I'll be asking him to buy more of our uranium," said this former anti-imperialist guerrilla.

This might be called a "sell-out". Here it is "national reconciliation". The 5 per cent of the population who had a monopoly of political power before independence have allowed a few black people to become MPs and top civil servants. The population meanwhile wonders why so little change has occured. The civil service, much of which was carried over from the colonial regime, has been blamed. The lack of qualified and experienced Namibians is also cited. Foreigners are blamed. Drought is another convenient excuse.

But as the months tick by and the new black elite enjoy the BMWs and Mercedes as well as the mansions with swimming pools, many are beginning to wonder if the SWAPO leaders are really in touch wth the population after so many years in exile, often living a jet-setter lifestyle courtesy of the UN.

Unfortunately, there is no opposition to speak of. SWAPO has taken the South African-backed DTA's political turf to the extent that a number of their MPs have defected to SWAPO. One can only wonder where the politicians will come from to represent of the majority of the population who still have incomes, education and health on a par with war-ravaged Mozambique. "Namibia, land of the brave," runs the national anthem, "Freedom fight we have won. Glory to their bravery, whose blood waters our freedom."

Glory indeed. And for the best and bravest of the heroes: government cars, jobs and houses. It's the least they deserve. And who could ask for anything more? ❑

SWAPO's election manifesto in 1990 included the following:

- **"Under a SWAPO government, Namibia will not allow the status quo to continue whereby the structure of the economy is tailored to the needs and demands of foreign and local private capital."**
- **"SWAPO will transfer some of the land from the few with too much of it to the landless majority."**
- **" ... it will be necessary to transfer a considerable part of state revenues from the mining sector to the development of agriculture."**
- **" ... a mass literacy campaign will be carried out."**
- **"Primary health care services will be established throughout the country."**
- **"A SWAPO-led government ... will ... effect a fundamental social, industrial and economic change."**

Interestingly, the manifesto of the main opposition party, the DTA has proved a more accurate prophecy of the actual policies of SWAPO in government.

Blaming the victims

Four months after the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords, **Ghada Karmi** looks at what has become of all the bright tomorrows they promised.

REMEMBER September 13th last year on the White House lawn? Do you recall all the ecstasy and the bright promises of a new tomorrow for the Palestinians and the Israelis? Well, if you do, compare the scene then with the situation in the Middle East now - and, if you find grounds for cheer, I shall be very surprised!

The fact is that the past four months have been a period of ever greater gloom. The negotiations which were supposed to have started the process of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the Jericho pocket by December 13th last year soon bogged down. Not even a face-to-face meeting between Israeli premier Rabin and chairman Arafat was able to unblock them.

Then, when they began again, they soon stopped, this time because Israel tried to insert terms more favourable to its own negotiating position into an agreed agenda.

Finally, after a flurry of telefax diplomacy, Israel relented and negotiations began again at Taba. But they have not got far, apparently because, this time, chairman Arafat is determined to obtain the maximum concessions from Israel - and Israel is not prepared to make any concessions at all! So, in late January, Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres met Arafat in Oslo to try to hammer out the remaining disagreements.

There are two fundamental points blocking progress. The first is the way in which the borders of the new Palestinian-controlled entity are to be policed and the second how large the Jericho enclave is to be.

Israel was initially obdurate over both: Tel Aviv had to control the borders alone because Israeli security was involved and the Jericho enclave could only be the town of Jericho because of Israeli settlements close by. The PLO insisted that the enclave should cover the whole of the old province of Jericho in Mandate times and that it would control the borders.

To Israeli negotiators, the Palestinian demands over border control smacked of an attempt to achieve genuine sovereign independence. That is something that Mr Rabin had promised would never happen. Eventually, however, both sides agreed on joint border supervision and all that remains is to work out how that can best be done.

The size of the Jericho enclave is more difficult and no agreement seems in sight yet.

The problem with all of these delays is that the longer they persist, the more discredited the whole peace process becomes. Already it is clear that Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist movement, is gaining ground, particularly in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, PLO loyalists, such as the Fatah Hawks, are beginning to chafe uneasily at the leash through which the PLO restrains them.

If that restraint were to break down, then Israel will merely claim that Palestinian duplicity was to blame and would strengthen its already intense military control - because, despite the original agreement, Israeli military power is more oppressive than ever! Even if the restraint holds, the acid of disappointment is gnawing away at the internal cohesion of the PLO and its supporters inside the Occupied Territories. The most alarming signs of this are the sudden spate of complaints against the leadership of chairman Arafat. His undemocratic methods of leadership are well-known and have long been a source of complaint within the movement. Their sudden resurgence now, however, is a serious threat to the ability of the PLO to deliver on the original agreement and really only serve the Israeli cause.

And, in Israel, opposition to the agreement is also mounting. After initially being caught off-guard, the right wing is now mounting a formidable campaign to get rid of the agreement and any possibility of an independent Palestinian entity along Israel's borders. Likud has aligned itself with the settlers who have demonstrated their displeasure with unprovoked violence and hatred.

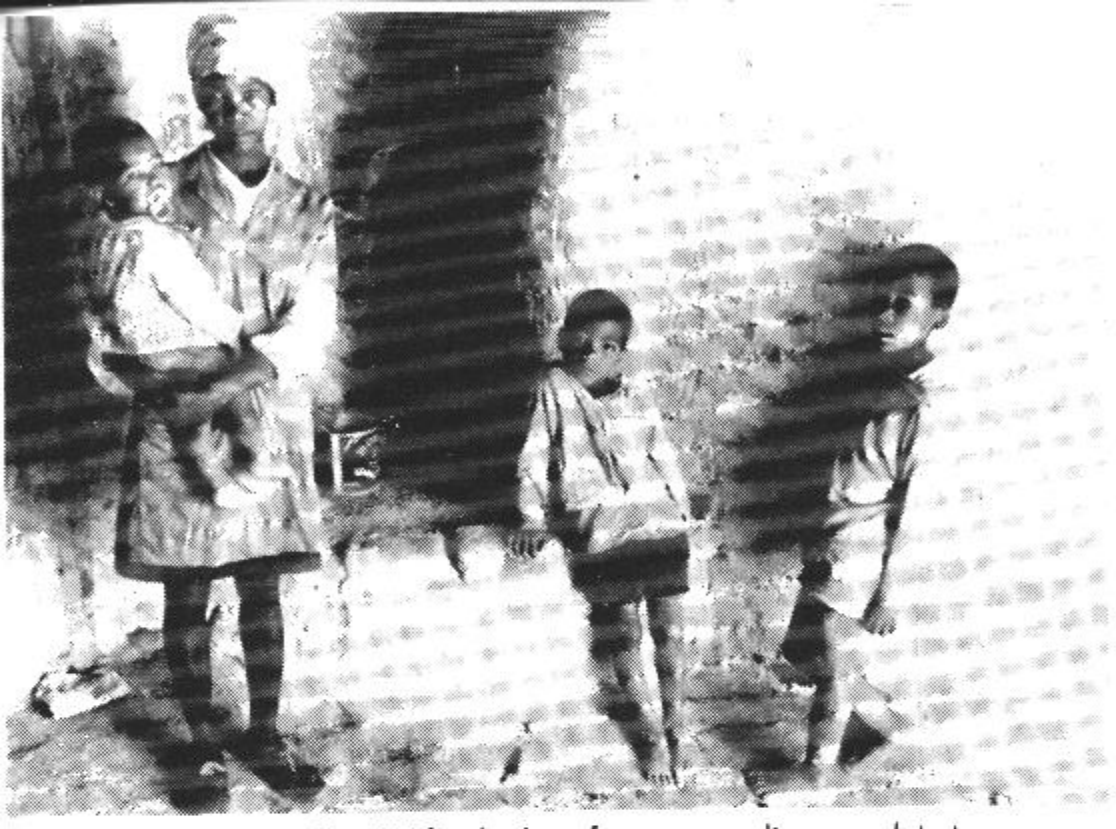
They have been so effective that Mr Rabin has now promised a referendum over the relinquishing of Israeli control in the occupied Golan Heights. Syrian President Assad has made the return of the Heights the price for peace and now the 13,000 settlers there fear that they will be sacrificed.

All this will make Israel want to delay the proposed peace agreement between itself and the PLO. After all, once an agreement is made, Israeli withdrawal will have to take place. And it will be difficult to reverse such a decision once it has been implemented! Yet the Palestinians have every encouragement to hurry the process along. Popular support is slipping fast; international support is following it.

Unless Israel shows some flexibility now, no agreement will be possible, simply because the PLO knows it will not be able to implement what is perceived by Palestinians to be an unjust settlement against popular resistance. And, if there is no agreement, it will be the Palestinians who will be blamed for refusing further humiliation in the name of peace. ❑



MISPLACED HOPES: Palestinian children in the Occupied Territories.



BATTLES AHEAD: The ANC is looking for a resounding mandate to tackle poverty with a radical economic programme

Great expectations

The ANC has radical economic policies and looks set to tap a massive pool of energy and hope. **Sean Coyne** reports on what could be the new South Africa.

DESPITE ALL manner of rumours to the contrary, it now seems that the electoral process in South Africa, culminating in the April 27th general election, is irreversible.

That, of course, does not mean to say that there are not powerful forces who are prepared to disrupt and discredit the election process right up to polling day and beyond. Both the extreme right wing represented by the AWB, and the disgruntled war lords of Inkatha know full well that their own political projects will be immeasurably weakened by the election of an ANC government with a large popular mandate.

Not only will the election expose the real extent of their support, but it will seriously undermine any potential support that they may well be able to garner from outside the country. Even a Mrs Thatcher would be hard pressed to defend those who have abstained and disrupted a process which has been universally acknowledged as conciliatory and democratic, and where unprecedented attempts have been made to engage all political forces in civil society.

However, the subtleties of the unfolding political process do not count for much among those who are convinced that their future interests are to be ignored, and where arms are so readily available.

Yet there are still great expectations. For those who have been denied basic democratic rights, and for the hundreds of thousands who have been intimately involved in the struggle to secure them, the election marks an important historical step forward.

In ANC branches and regional structures throughout the country, the process of selecting candidates has in itself been a novel experience for the vast majority of ANC members, often with surprising results.

Branches, for example, were asked to nominate candidates on to the three lists representing the different tiers of government, and these were then passed onto the regional conferences, and then the recently held national conference. Some non-ANC members, however, were startled to see their names appear in the press on approved regional ANC lists before they had even been consulted about wanting to be candidates.

But these hiccups lent a celebratory tone to the nominating arrangements, and more seriously, perhaps, illustrated the transparency of the process when compared to the arcane and behind-the-scenes double-dealing of the other parties.

It is hard to appreciate from the essentially sterile terrain of British politics just how the right to vote is seen in South Africa. Many on the left in Europe, themselves infected with the self-evident crisis of representation, underestimate this factor in their assessments of the struggle. They do so at their peril.

Within the ANC camp, preparations are at an advanced stage compared to other forces. Election lists have been compiled. Candidates have been selected and comprehensive voter education campaigns organised. Even the armchair cynics have had to admit that, despite their precious bleatings, the ANC and its partners have finally got the show on the road and are preparing for government.

Within the trade union movement, COSATU, substantial material and human resources have been diverted into workplace and community based voter education programmes. Workers and their families are being encouraged to turn out and vote on April 27th and provide the ANC with a large enough mandate to legitimise a radical programme to tackle the appalling poverty and deprivation that exists among the urban and rural poor. For COSATU, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, (the final draft of which will be launched later this month) represents a bottom line for the working class and its allies.

The former general secretary of COSATU, Jay Naidoo, has had the responsibility of steering the RDP through the structures of the ANC, and ensuring that its central thrust has not been lost and watered down into meaningless platitudes. This has been done by using the RDP as a mobilising tool for the organised working class. Shop stewards and activists from all COSATU unions have been encouraged to discuss the RDP, to put forward ideas on how it can be strengthened and popularised, and perhaps most importantly, how its implementation can be guaranteed by an ANC-led government.

This last point has not been lost on comrade Mandela himself. Doing the round of union conferences and civic organisations, he has insisted that a future ANC government which attempts to betray or sell out on the policies for which it was elected must face the anger and opposition of the working class and its allies. Furthermore, he has said that the RDP would protect the ANC from simply becoming a tool in the hands of the multinational corporations and international financial institutions like so many liberation movements, and safeguard its popular support.

There are clearly more than a few lessons to be shared with comrades in other parts of the world, not least being the need for the left as a whole to regain its common identity with the struggle for democratic rights and practices. ❑

Stolen riches

Recent events in Nigeria have been astonishing by any country's standards, yet have gone unreported in the western press. **Sean Coyne** reports.

THE MILITARY regime of General Babangida, which has ruled Nigeria for most of the last decade, reacted to mass pressure from within the country two years ago, and from former financial "friends" outside Nigeria, for the restoration of democracy.

As the economy of this oil-rich nation began to falter, Babangida began to lose the confidence of the international financial community. His inability to correct even the most blatant episodes of corruption (and from which he himself benefited enormously) did nothing to endear him to bankers who watched in disbelief as millions of their dollars went astray and were lost in an unaccountable web of corruption and deceit.

Meanwhile, the debt mountain grew. Workers were told there was no alternative to economic austerity but the regime did legalise political parties.

The trade union movement, in the form of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) decided to form a Labour Party on a programme committed to ending unmanageable debt servicing, overcoming corruption and promoting respect for basic trade union and human rights.

When it became clear to the regime that the NLC-sponsored Labour Party was gathering mass support, Babangida simply banned all political parties and activity in order to "preserve the unity of the country".

Babangida's next political response to the crisis was novel.

His regime dreamed up the idea of a "transition to democracy" which would be based on the formation of two state-sponsored and controlled political parties, one being a little to the left (the Social Democratic Party) and one being a little to the right (the National Republican Convention).

All the party officials were screened by the regime, and the two manifestos on which the eventual elections would be fought were written by the regime.

Millions of naira were illegally spent in ensuring that favoured candidates were selected and approved.

Eventually, despite the severe limitations imposed by the regime, two presidential candidates emerged and a date for the election was agreed and campaigning began in earnest.

The candidate of the SDP was Mashood Abiola, a self-made multi-millionaire who claimed an affinity with the urban and rural poor by endlessly declaring his humble origins.

On June 12th 1993, the Nigerian people went to the polls to elect a new civilian president.

But all was not well in the barracks. Despite millions of naira being used to buy votes and influence the outcome, for Babangida and his friends, Abiola could not be allowed to win. Before the election result could be announced, the whole election process was scrapped, and Babangida fully restored as the military leader. Once again, the reason given was the possible break-down of the federal structure of the country, and a descent into ethnic, tribal and geographical mayhem.

The results of the election have still to be presented to the Nigerian people.

The effect of cancelling the limited democracy granted by the regime was nothing short of traumatic. An umbrella group calling itself the Campaign for Democracy (CD) called for mass action and successfully brought the country to a standstill. The NLC, in alliance with CD, provided the organisational muscle to ensure that fuel supplies and transport were stopped, and demonstrations of workers and students were staged in all major cities and towns.

Babangida, under intense pressure to stand down, announced the formation of an Interim National Government (ING), made up of senior civil servants, military officers and a sprinkling of largely discredited former politicians, but this was not enough to cool the temper of the masses.

Late last year, in a last-ditch attempt to pacify the international bankers, the ING unilaterally announced the removal of a subsidy on petroleum products, thus pushing up household costs and travel well beyond the reach of millions of people.

Once again, the labour movement took the lead. A general strike was organised to force the puppet regime to negotiate over price increases and to press for an end to corruptive practices.

The strike itself lasted for five days, and was gathering momentum by the hour. In every part of the country, regardless of the ethnic make up of the population, workers and their allies took action against the imposition of austerity measures by an illegitimate regime.



The breadth of support for the strike, and its ability to expand and draw in other layers, was remarkable. More importantly perhaps, it exposed the lie, used persistently by the military regime, that the country was in danger of breaking up into a civil war in a repeat of the bloody Biafran war of the sixties. The truth of the matter is that there was a civil war situation developing, but not between different ethnic or geographical communities, but rather between the "haves" and the "have-nots".

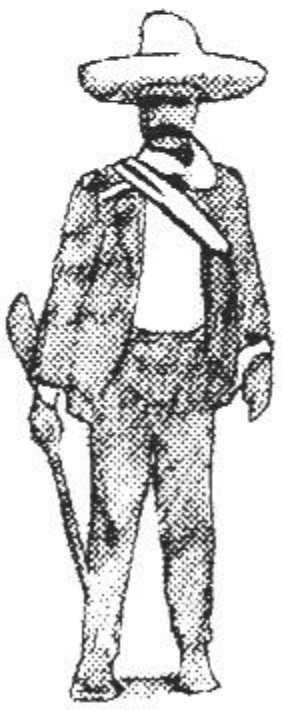
The strike forced the regime to compromise on the question of the oil subsidy, and to respond to popular demands for democracy.

During the general strike, the Interim National Government was itself dissolved, and a new military leader, General Abacha, took over where Babangida left off. He has surrounded himself with a motley crew of discredited politicians and has promised to restore democracy in the near future. No one is holding their breath! ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Land and politics in Chiapas

Neil Harvey examines the roots of the remarkable Zapatista rebellion in Mexico, which managed to capture the attention of the world early in the new year.



THE NEW year uprising of some 2,000 peasant guerillas in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas stunned observers and tore apart the image of national harmony so carefully fomented by the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. By timing their occupation of San Cristobal de las Casas and three other towns for Janaury 1st, the guerillas, known as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), scored a major propaganda hit.

This was the day that Salinas's prized North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect. But instead of being propelled into the First World, Mexico was shaken by a violent reminder of the Third.

Declaring war on the Mexican government and vowing to reach Mexico City, the EZLN (named after Emiliano Zapata, one of the main peasant leaders in the 1910-17 revolution) called on the other parliamentary powers to depose "the dictator Salinas" and organize free and fair elections. It called on the Mexican people to join the struggle for "jobs, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace".

In the first days of fighting over 100 were believed to have been killed. Then the government launched a military offensive involving 12,000 troops and bombing raids on suspected rebel hide-outs. Human rights organisations denounced the army for carrying out extra-judicial killings and disappearances, and blocking the entry of humanitarian aid to the civilian population in the war zone.

Faced with a worsening situation and several bombings in central Mexico, including the capital city, Salinas enlisted the foreign minister Manuel Camacho to lead the negotiation effort and declared a ceasefire by government troops. The situation remains tense and the authorities' control of information in Chiapas suggests to many that the number of casualties in the first week of combat may be far higher than the official figure of 95.

The causes of the Chiapas uprising are to be found in the state's extreme levels of poverty and social inequalities. Other factors include the expansion of cattle ranching, the growth of a migrant peasant population and the shrinking opportunities for younger Indians.

Over 50 per cent of the population suffers from malnutrition, one of the highest rates in the country. The state's illiteracy rate (30 per cent) is three times higher than the national average, while the proportion of children who do not complete primary school is 62 per cent, compared to 21 per cent nationally. Thousands of families go without electricity, drinking water or drainage in their homes. Among the poorest are the municipalites where the EZLN launched its rebellion: Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas.

Yet paradoxically this is a wealthy state and a strategic one for the Mexican economy. Since the sixties several hydroelectricity plants have been constructed which together provide the centre of Mexico with 55 per cent of its electrical energy. For the past decade, Chiapas has been third and fourth producer of natural gas and oil respectively. Nationally, it occupies first place in coffee production, second in livestock and third in maize.

The benefits, have not been felt by the one million Indians who make up a third of the state's population. On the contrary, each of these activities has reduced the amount of land available for peasant agriculture. In the seventies, dam construction flooded cropland and oil and gas exploration led to contamination of rivers and farmland crop yields.

Since then, the large coffee plantations have seasonally employed Guatemalan migrants, cutting off an important source of cash income for impoverished highland villages. Almost 60 per cent of the Chiapas workforce earns less than the regional minimum wage of $3.33 a day.

With the decline of agriculture, Chiapas has become a ranchers' paradise.

Economic and political power have gone hand in hand as the ranching families dominated state politics. Between 1960 and 1976 the area used for livestock grew from 22 per cent to 49 per cent of total land area in Chiapas. Private armed guards and police have frequently been deployed to evict colonists, often burning down their homes and razing their crops. The main municipalities affected by this violent competition for land have been Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas, precisely where the EZLN has its principal base of support.

It is noticeable that the composition of the EZLN is of young Indians who have grown desperate in their search for a piece of land on which to subsist.

These young militants have grown up on a daily diet of rural bossism, government corruption or indifference and police brutality. Their transgression of the law is a direct consequence of the routine transgressions of the authorities themselves. Chiapas is notorious for the high level of human rights abuses.

These include the assassination or unlawful detention and torture of leaders and members of peasant organizations seeking to defend land rights through the legal channels.

The future of the EZLN is uncertain at this stage. Little, if anything, is known about the leaders who have come from outside Chiapas, nor their exact affiliation. At the same time, the rebels showed a high level of organisation and the capacity to take four towns and then recede again almost as quickly is remarkable. Its bases of support are probably larger than the 2,000 who are estimated to be under arms at the moment. Their strategy appears to have been one of organising small groups in many communities, rather than whole communities which, in Chiapas, are usually divided in many political or religious factions. This means that the rebels will continue to exist for a long time.

The full impact of the rebellion for Mexico will be largely determined by the presidential elections in August 1994. The government may try to localize the issues to Chiapas and put its energy and resources into the areas controlled by the EZLN. However, if it leaves aside the issue of respect for democratic rights it may find itself with many more rebellions in the aftermath of the August elections.

● This article is an edited version of an analysis appearing in *Central American Report*, available from Central America Human Rights Committee, 83 Margaret Street, London W1N 7HB.

Health warning in US



PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON'S European tour went down well with the media at home, boosting the beleaguered President in what will be his major domestic battle in the coming year: pushing his health care plan through Congress.

Mike Marqusee
Islington North CLP

Having ruled out the popular and simple "single payer" option adopted by Canada, Clinton has opted for a system of "managed care" in which all employers will be compelled to pay for a minimum health insurance package to be delivered by private consortia of health care professionals. It would undoubtedly represent an improvement for the 40 million Americans - most of them in work - currently without health coverage of any kind.

But how much of it will survive Clinton's battle with Congress? Powerful lobbies - insurers, doctors, employers, drug companies - will be at work to strip the minimum package to the bone, delete all attempts to cap physicians' fees or drug costs, and ensure maximum profitability for the insurance companies.

Senator Daniel Moynihan, powerful Democratic chair of the Finance Commitee, has already announced that he doesn't think there is a health care crisis. In return for any kind of national health package he wants Clinton to make radical "welfare reforms", i.e. reductions of welfare costs through restriction of entitlements.

This is where the Whitewater allegations come in. What has emerged so far shows merely that the Clintons were typical players in the sleazy eighties interface of government and business; it is nothing compared to the illegality and immorality of Reagan and Bush in the Iran-Contra affair.

However, Clinton's attempts to restrict public access to papers relating to Whitewater have enabled the Republicans and some conservative Democrats to make hay. They know a Clinton administration weakened by public distrust will be eager to make whatever concessions they ask for in the health care battle.

Had Clinton presented Congress with a single-payer style plan, a mass campaign could have been built in its support - providing at least a partial counter-weight to the private sector lobbies. As it is, Clinton may well find himself facing his Congressional enemies alone.

Burma action takes off

The Burma Action Group is stepping up its campaign against the military regime in that country by calling for a boycott of some of its key backers - Amoco, Texaco and Total Oil companies.

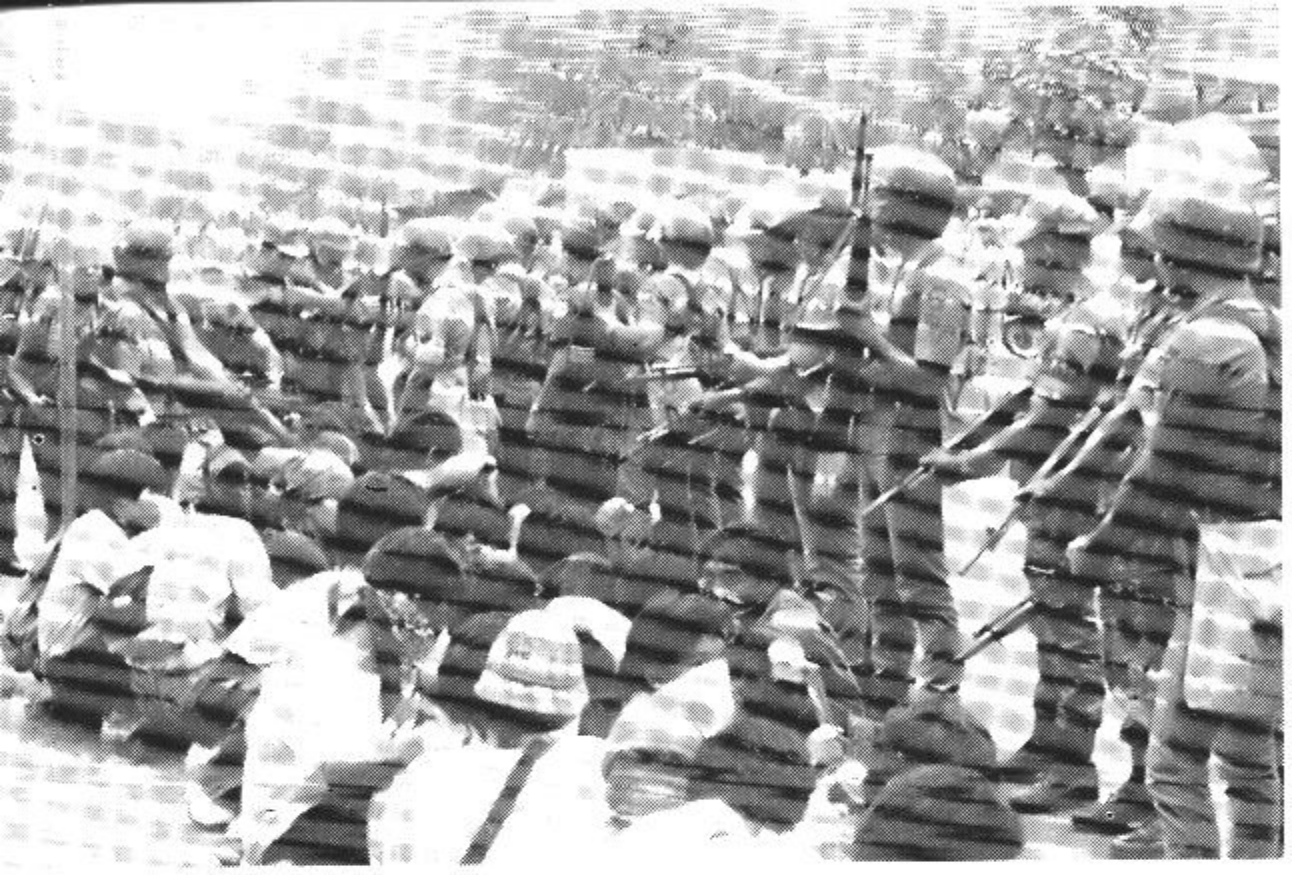
They are calling on people to write to the companies saying that they will refuse to buy their petrol until they withdraw support for the dictatorship.

Since the upsurge against the military in 1988, up to 10,000 civilians are thought to have been killed by the regime. Thousands more have been jailed and tortured and 400,000 refugees have fled the country.

The Burma Action Group, which works for human rights and a peaceful solution to the civil war, sees a boycott of key investors as a central way of pressuring the government.

● For more information, contact BAG, 84 Long Lane, London SE1 4AU, Tel: 071 359 7679.

Mike Phipps
Brent South CLP



Students face the brutal Indonesian army during a recent protest.

Britain's butcher friend

Paul Field looks at the astonishing political activity which has recently taken place in Indonesia, and the savage repression which habitually follows in that tragic country.

CIVIL UNREST erupted in Indonesia last year on issues ranging from unpopular traffic laws and the national lottery to territorial disputes and campus freedom.

By focusing on these issues, which effect the lives of tens of millions of Indonesian people, students succeeded in staging protest actions which drew massive support.

As expected, the Suharto regime responded by unleasing its troops and security forces to quell the protests. Flashpoints in a year of resistance and bloody repression have included:

• January 1993. Several students were arrested in Blangguan. Blangguan is a peasant area which the Indonesian military wants to sequester for its military exercise. They have regularly intimidated and attacked the villages.

• May 1993. A 25 year-old worker named Marsirah from Sidoarjo, East Jaira, who had joined 14 co-workers in a meeting with management to try to reach a wage settlement at a local waterworks, disappeared while her co-worker had been pressured by the local military to resign. Marsirah vanished without a trace. Four days later her battered corpse was found in a shack bordering a ricefield. The autopsy report showed her vagina was ravaged with a 15-centimetre blunt object.

Outraged by this act of brutality, East Jara newspapers and local non-government organisations galvanised public opinion. After bringing the case to the attention of international observers, Marsirah's death appeared on the agenda at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, an International Labour Organisation Conference in Geneva and a women's rights conference in Paris. Such exposure has embarrassed Jakarta into forcing local authorities to conduct a serious enquiry. However, to date no arrests have been made.

• June 1993. "Bloody Morning at ISTN". Students in Jakarta's Institute of Science and Technology staged a protest action against campus policies and the commercialisation of education. Three hundred troops from the Indonesian military stormed the campus.

• In the same month, four anti-dam protestors were killed on the island of Modura off the eastern coast of Jaki. Security forces opened fire on villagers for demonstrating against government plans to build a dam that will flood 170 hectares, including villages and prime farmland;

• July 1993. Police banned what would have been the first national congress convened by Seikal Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia (SBSI, or Indonesian Prosperous Labour Union), an independent labour federation established 18 months ago. Indonesian law only permits the existence of the government-controlled All Indonesia Workers Union (SPSI), whose leaders are appointed by the state mostly from the ranks of the ruling party, Golkar.

In an interview with the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the SBSI's Chair, Muchtar Payanan, estimated the union's membership at 100,000, with women accounting for roughly 40 per cent of the factory-level leadership;

• December 10th 1993. Students co-ordinated rallies calling for human rights at campuses in Surabaya, Senarang, Solo and Yogyarta.

• Three days later, hundreds of students demonstrated outside the Interior Ministry calling for quick action over the killing of the four anti-dam protestors in June. The students also raised the issue of the massacre of over 200 unarmed East Timorese at the Santa Cruz Cemetery in Dili in November 1991 and the killing of Muslim protestors in North Jakarta in 1984.

The wave of repression in Indonesia has coincided with attempts to break the back of the East Timorese resistance or FRETELIN, following the arrest of their leader Xanana Gusmao.

Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony in 1975. Since then, it has pursued a genocidal policy which has resulted in the deaths of over 200,000 Timorese people. This compares to the number exterminated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Recent policies adopted by the occupation forces have included a forced sterilisation programme for 95,000 Timorese women which has been extended to the murder of newly born infants and small children of mothers who escaped the initial programme.

After years of quietly aiding the slaughter, the US Congress blocked the sale of aircraft from Jordan to Indonesia last July. It would seem that years of campaigning and grassroots pressure has finally brought results.

However, at the moment when a breakthrough seemed to have been achieved in the campaign to isolate Indonesia, Britain stepped into the breach. The British Aerospace contract completed last June will provide 24 Hawk combat aircraft to Indonesia for £500 million. Britain is now Jakarta's principal arms supplier.

● For details of solidarity activities contact:

TAPOL - The Indonesian Human Rights Campaign - 081 771 2904

Coalition on East Timor - 071 639 4700

Campaign Against the Arms Trade - 071 281 0297.

Rural and red

Dermot McKibbin reviews
What price Britain's forests? by the Labour Party and
The Forestry Commission Under Threat by The Forestry Unions Action Group.

THESE TWO pamphlets provide excellent ammunition for socialists who wish to start the public debate over the future of Britain's forests. Despite clear promises from the Prime Minister that the Commission would not be privatised, the government has set up an interdepartmental review group to consider the management and ownership of Commission land.

The Commission is required by law to promote effective forestry management by achieving several objectives: the promotion of recreation and access: conservation of wildlife and the environment: and to sustain wood production. In addition, the British government told the Rio Summit that by the end of 1993 it will prepare a forest plan as part of its contribution to conserving the world's forests. This plan has yet to be produced.

The Forestry Commission spends over £7 million on over 60 specialist recreational activities ranging from birdwatching to husky dog racing. Even the Countryside Commission recognises that privatisation will result in the loss of recreational provision.

The Commission manages 340 sites of special scientific interest, 46 Forest Nature sites and over 1000 archaeological sites. The Commission has recognised the tension between commercial activities which lead to large monotonous conifer monocultures and environmental/aesthetic concerns. Some existing conifer forests are being restricted to meet this concern.

Private forest owners can receive subsidies for not planting conifers such as the £600,000 received by John Cameron, Chairman of Scotrail (and apparently the largest sheep farmer in Europe) for his decision not to plant conifers on Glen Lochay, Perthshire's last forest-free glen.

The Labour Party has calculated that City institutions would probably only be prepared to pay around £150 million for the Commission even though its market value is £1.9 billion. Grants to new owners to continue environmental policies would wipe out this profit in under eight years. Thereafter, the public purse would be worse off to the tune of £200 million every decade.

Clearly jobs and the local economies of rural communities would be adversely affected by privatisation. Both publications come out with predictable alternative strategies to keep the Forestry Commission within the public sector and how it can be improved.

Red Rope, a socialist walking and climbing club will be seeking to mobilise the outdoor movement to stop these proposals. On September 26th 1993 the Ramblers Association organised 10,000 walkers to take part in Woodland Walks to support the continued free access to Forestry Commission Woods.

● Further information about Red Rope is available from: Richard Marriot, 23 Tallis Street, Longsight, Manchester M12 5RQ.

Mountain slaughter

Keith Veness reviews
The Persian Expedition by Xenophon
published by Book Club Associates. £12.95.

IT MUST BE some sort of record to review a book 2,400 years after it was written - but there are excuses in this case!

This book is the story of an army of Greek mercenaries enlisted to fight for a usurper to the Persian throne in 390 BC, which became stranded and had to fight its way across Mesopotamia, the Zagros Mountains and Anatolia to reach the Black Sea at what is now Trabzon. This was then a Greek colony and thus marked comparative safety for the army.

A great many British schoolkids have been taught this story but due to poor translation and total ignorance of the Middle East by the translators, it remained for many years nothing more than a mythological tale of heroism that was usually read in "classics" classes and not treated as history.

Now, a brilliant new translation is available that explains properly what the various terms in Greek mean and it can now take its place as a proper part of the histories of many peoples of the area.

This book establishes the Kurds as one of the most ancient people in the area, with a continuous culture and history nearly three millennia old. By the time of Xenophon, the Kurds and Persians were distinctive peoples with different languages and the former were already a "mountain people", unlike the plains-dwelling Persians. In addition, the Kurds had clear clan leaders and a well-developed series of towns and hamlets that were totally independent of, but had treaties with, the Persian Empire.

After holding off a superior force of Persians for seven days, the heavily-armoured Greeks entered Kurdistan after crossing the Little Zab River. The Persians abandoned the chase, fearing the mountain Kurds, more than their ostensible enemies. One of the Greek's guides told how a Persian Army of 120,000 soldiers had entered the mountains and not a single warrior had returned alive!

The Kurds put up a terrible resistance to the invading Greeks, staging ambushes and small skirmishes in a classic guerilla-style campaign that was later the hallmark of every Kurdish struggle against outside conquerors.

Xenophon comments "We suffered more at the hands of the Kurds in six days than we did in all the battles against the Persian Empire!"

Buy this book and read a genuine tale of heroism, and also help resurrect a key part of history that shows the Kurds as the original settlers of the area long before the Arabs or Turks had been heard of!



Man of the people

Spotted in the corridors of Islington Town Hall: **Jimmy Greaves**, erstwhile striker extraordinaire, currently a self-styled people's pundit on television.

Greaves was filming a piece using one of the rooms in the Town Hall as a backdrop when he was asked by a council worker to please move his car - it was in a space reserved for members.

"I'm not moving my car for any fucking socialist," said the irate Greavesie, apparently unaware of the small proportion of socialists in the Islington Labour Group.

Doubly disgusting

We have no wish to defend **George Galloway**'s grovelling at the court of **Saddam Hussein** (see page 16 for other Labour MPs' links with Iraq), but we can't help being a little disgusted by the sanctimonious double standards on display in the establishment's attack on him.

Labour's shadow Foreign Secretary, **Jack Cunningham**, admitted while castigating Galloway that he himself had only just returned from a visit to **Beijing**. Throughout the eighties, Tory MPs paid regular tribute to **PW Botha** in South Africa, without incurring the ire of the media, the government or, for that matter, the Labour front bench.

Then there are the myriad parliamentary friends of the likes of **Jonas Savimbi** or the El Salvador death squads.

Finally, while **Galloway** may have given ideological succour to **Saddam**, unlike the Tory government he did not sell him arms.

Spot the democrat

Beaconsfield Tory MP **Tim Smith**, who was promoted to the Northern Ireland Office in the reshuffle following the departure of **Tim Yeo**, is on record as saying that Irish people living in Britain should not have a vote here.

Smith's 1991 outburst embarrassed **John Major** into issuing a statement that he had "no plans" to disenfranchise the Irish.

This fell short of the full-scale repudiation demanded by Labour. In the light of all the recent exposures about Tory gerrymandering, it is worth noting that at one Conservative conference of the early eighties, there were resolutions calling for an end to the Irish vote.

Bassam ... again!

Not content with trying to kick out 26 members of Brighton Labour Party, **Steve Bassam** has found a new target - the local 'soft left'. Following his "balance the books at all cost" policy, Bassam's idea was to sell-off land to **Sainsbury**'s in return for cash to re-develop the town centre white-elephant, Churchill Square.

A number of Brighton Labour councillors shared the local Labour Party's view that Brighton did not want yet another super-store, and certainly not on a green-field site. The rebels' penalty for abstaining in the council vote (causing Bassam's scheme to be voted down) was their resignation from various Committee posts.

Of course there's no truth in the rumour that he's trying to throw mud at those interested in the **Brighton Pavilion** PPC selection, due to take place later this year.

Watch this space!

No vote

Another great Labour organisational coup has come to light in the Midlands.

Party members in the **Coventry and North Warwickshire** Euro seat are now receiving ballot papers for the selection of their candidate for this year.

Members who do not qualify under the 12-month rule are receiving the forms and, in the same post, letters telling them that they are not eligible to vote!

The truth ...

Asked by the *Guardian* newspaper, "On what occasions do you lie?" Labour's front-bench health spokesman **David Blunkett** replied: "I have never knowingly lied. If pushed, to avoid a direct attack on a political colleague in public."

Mmmm.

Maggie's man

So someone has described **Norman Willis** as "thoroughly honourable". They must be a very misguided trade unionist. Oh, it was **Margaret Thatcher**, writing about his role in the miners' strike. That explains it.

Danger kids

Next time you get into a clash with fascists you may strike lucky - it could be a member of the **RCP** defending their right to freedom of speech, "question everything, ban nothing" as the slogan of *Living Marxism* goes. Oh yes, the RCP also thinks date rape confuses "drunken fumbling" with the "vicious and brutal assault" of rape. They could be dangerous if anyone ever listened to them.

Yeo hero

Sue Slipman, the Communist student leader who took the natural step of a jump over Labour to help found the SDP has finally got her just rewards. An **OBE** in the New Year's Honours goes to the Director of the National Council for One-Parent Families who welcomed the **Child Support Agency** and who believes Tim Yeo has "behaved rather well".

Old Parrish

Continuing the stream of departures from Wally Road is **Jim Parrish**, a Mandelson fan who ran the Labour Party's events and exhibitions.

His finest hour? The '92 **Sheffield Rally**, described by even *PR Week* as "infamous" rather than a success. Having taken early retirement - was he pushed or did he jump? - he has gone on to set up Jim Parrish Communications.

Apparently, it's not based in Nuremburg.

Kicking

Unsure of who to vote for in the TGWU General Executive Council elections? In Region 1, former national chair of the T&G, **Brian Nicholson**, is attempting to regain his seat on a ticket of "kick out Communists and Trotskyists". So now you know who to vote for (or not)!

Over to you, Kev

On the subject of our Class Traitor of the Month, **Kevin Barron**, it is interesting to note the Rother Valley MP's actions as secretary of the Yorkshire Group of Labour MPs.

Our Kev told a recent meeting of the group that he had arranged sponsorship for this year's first annual dinner of that august body. The dispenser of such largesse was, he revealed, **Yorkshire Television**.

It was pointed out by other Members of Parliament and by a representative of the Transport and General Workers Union that Yorkshire TV had laid off considerable numbers of its staff and therefore the sponsorship might generate unfavourable publicity.

The union representative added that, as far as he was concerned, any sponsorship should come from the trade union movement. Undaunted, Barron replied that he might be able to secure alternative support from **Yorkshire Electricity**.

Bear in mind that this firm is playing its part, albeit indirectly, in closing pits. What's more, young Kevin was himself a miner for 20 years!

London's Shangri-La

As more and more Labour councils adopt policies of evicting racist tenants, **Camden Council** in North London has more than 30 black families suffering racial harassment while not a single racist has been evicted. Seven of these families have waited for action for between two to three years. Meanwhile, tenants are still being evicted for rent arrears.

Bonny Blackburn

Blackburn Council have taken the unusual step of putting up a commemorative plaque to rioting strikers. Of course, these class warriors are safely dead and buried - having been killed in the Blackburn plug riots of 1842. They were killed by the **72nd Highlanders** who fired on them during a protest at a 10 per cent wage cut for mill and iron workers. Congratulations to the GMPU's **Tony Humphreys**, a councillor and vice-chair of the Trades Council, for his research which led to the memorial.

Sell out with *Labour Briefing*!

Do you want to reach the most politically active and well-informed members of the Labour Party and the trade union movement with news about your publications, conferences, meetings or services? Then advertise with *Labour Briefing*.

The rates for display ads are:-

£10 per column inch
£30 per 1/8 page
£50 per 1/4 page

Yet another *Briefing* quiz

Saturday March 26th, 8pm prompt

Kings of Clerkenwell public house,

7 Clerkenwell Close,

London EC1

Quiz inquisitor: Mike Marqusee

Entrance (including light snacks)

£4.50 / £2.50

Small ads...

All replies should contain the Box No. on the top left of the envelope, which will be passed unopened to the advertiser. Reply to Labour Briefing, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU

Male socialist writer, Brighton, seeks female partner probably in 40's. Box No. 1.

For sale: Two badminton rackets, one old, one brand new.Tel. 071 923 4976 (work). Box No. 2.

Lodger wanted: woman, non-smoker, possibly vegetarian. Large warm room in North Islington house, share with friendly female family: substantial rent reduction in return for some child-care help outside working hours. Box No. 3.

Small ads welcome!

Wouldn't you rather share your home, holiday or heart with a socialist? Make sure your unwanted books or gifts go to a good home? Take out a small high-value ad in *Labour Briefing*. Only 15p per word (20p for commercial ads). Box no: £2 extra. 5% discount if you run your ad for more than one issue.

Contact: *Labour Briefing*, Fax 081 985 6785; PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

Briefing Women's Meeting

Friday 11th February 8pm

Marchmont Community Centre

Marchmont Street, London WC1

(Russell Square tube)

All *Briefing* women readers welcome

The Complete Class Traitors of the Month

Less than flattering profiles of Labour's high and mighty reproduced from the pages of *Labour Briefing*, 1991-1993.
36 pages of vitriol and abuse for only £2 inc. postage.
Send cheques to *Labour Briefing*, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

Famous last words ...

"Neil Kinnock's ... New Year reaffirmation of the party's defence policy has allayed many doubts and fears. But that is not the the point. The cause for concern lies in the *potential* abuse of the new machinery that has been created. In the wrong hands, what has been sold as the 'streamlining' of the Party's organisation could represent a far more profound constitutional change than anything brought about by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy over the past five years, enabling a determined leadership to ride roughshod over the Party's rank and file.

I do not suggest that this is what will inevitably happen. But the very fact that it could happen should be cause enough for concern."

Nigel Williamson

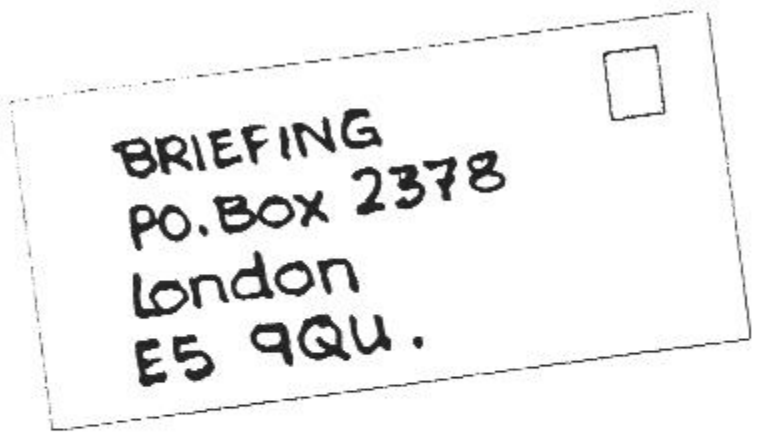

LABOUR
BRIEFING
NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT
No. 4 February 1984

OUT OF NATO!

by JO RICHARDSON

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

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



Mike Phipps vitriolic review of Manny Shinwell's life (*Briefing*, December 1993) cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. Phipps' lack of thought and insight makes me wonder why on earth he was asked to review Shinwell's biography at all. He castigates Shinwell first of all for supporting World War I. Almost everyone from the working class was persuaded by the powerful government propaganda machine to support the war at the time - no truth about what was really going on emerged until much later.

Serving in a Labour Government doesn't automatically justify the epithet "right-wing". This is over-simplification at its most thoughtless.

Yours,
Peter Carr,
Sawbridgeworth

Peter Hain's interview in the December *Briefing* only serves to underline the backward position of the Anti-Nazi League. Unfortunately, by associating so closely with the forces opposing the Anti-Racist Alliance, *Briefing* also comes out of the process up to its eyebrows in such third-rate politics.

It is facile of Hain to pretend that the ANL wants unity and the ARA does not. The SWP initially sponsored the ARA but then decided to split the anti-racist movement by going off in a corner and relaunching the ANL. Any unity based on the continued existence of the ANL would effectively accept that the SWP was correct in its splitting, and that the party has the right to dictate terms to those who have remained in the ARA and presided over its expansion.

Worse, it would also accept the reactionary politics of the SWP itself, which completely opposes the concept of black self-organisation and leadership in opposing racism. This is entirely contrary to the support *Briefing* has traditionally given to the Labour Party Black Sections, black workers' groups and local authority anti-racist committees.

Peter Hain cannot be allowed to get away with the suggestion that ARA does not have the level of Jewish support enjoyed by the ANL. Unsurprisingly, he provides no evidence for this factually inaccurate view.

Neither can Hain be expected to be taken seriously when he says that the ANL destroyed the NF last time around. Whilst no one can deny the impact of the ANL in the 1970s, it is soft on Thatcher's racism to ignore the role of the hard right Tory leadership in the haemorrhage of NF support.

The interview indicates the basic ANL position, which is that fighting racism can be separated from fighting fascism, and that an anti-fascist campaign must take urgent precedence over the anti-racist movement. Thus, the left continues to fail to address the wishes and needs of the black community, taking them for granted in its campaigns and at elections but not accepting structures in which they can organise democratically.

Whatever legitimate debates we may have about this march or that public statement, the blame for disunity in the fight against racism must lie primarily with those who have resolved to put such backward practices before the long-term interests of the movement.

Yours,
Simon Fletcher,
Camden

May I, through your pages, draw the attention of your anti-racist readers to an unpleasant - and almost unbelievable - development affecting workers at the London Borough of Hackney?

Although Hackney is a Labour Council, and makes noises about equal opportunities policies against racism, sexism and so on. Hackney managers have now taken disciplinary action (two written warnings) against two African workers - for speaking to each other in their own language!

We would be interested to know of any other cases like this, and especially of any successful fights against such policies. Meanwhile, we shall treat it as a totally unacceptable act of discrimination, and one which we hope will be widely condemned.

Yours,
Tony Whelan,
Hackney Unison

The theme of World Aids Week this year, which began on 24th November, is *Time to Act*. HIV voluntary organisations in the North West are calling for the Government to act now and adopt a positive agenda.

Despite the reality of over 20,000 HIV positive people already in the U.K., recent changes in the Government's HIV strategy indicate a worrying downgrading of HIV and a remarkable complacency.

The inclusion of HIV and AIDS in the Government's 1992 Health of the Nation document is given as demonstrative proof of Ministers "present and future commitment". The part of the Government strategy on HIV and AIDS outlined in Health of the Nation stated the need for "fostering a climate of understanding and compassion, discouraging discrimination, and safeguarding confidentiality". This has disappeared completely from the new government strategy document.

At the same time institutional discrimination against gay men, through Section 28 and the criminalisation of gay sex under between the age of 16 and 21, continues, together with recent restrictions on HIV/AIDS education in schools with the government amendments to the Education Bill.

The decision to cut funding to two large voluntary organisations in London with a track record of targetted work with gay men, contradicts the government's acceptance of the need to 'target' services. These cuts have been justified assuming an ability by some voluntary organisations 'to secure funding from other sources'.

Yours,
John Nicholson,
Menchester Gorton CLP

I fail to see how a socialist can reconcile his membership of the British police force. Philip Chambers's interview in *Briefing* has not only failed to answer that query, but has begged many more.

A police officer is not just a worker in uniform, as Chambers implies, but part of the blunt instrument that the establishment uses to beat workers with. Keeping workers in check is, despite propaganda to the contrary, the main function of the police force, and if Chambers has been a pig for 30 years he must surely know that. If he was not physically abusing miners during the 84/85 strike then I'll bet he made a lot of money on overtime while his colleagues did. The only reason he was deployed at Wapping was to play a physical part in the crushing of the print workers.

Blaming Thatcher is an easy way out for Chambers. The fact is the Labour Party use the police for the same reasons as the Tories. This is hardly surprising. It is what the police were established for. The level of violence they use is directly related to the task in hand and the balance of class forces at the time.

Chambers stated that few on the left understand the nature of the armed state. I do, Chambers, and I know that for 30 years you have collected a very nice income for being a boot boy of the class enemy. When the working class gets up it will not require an allegiance with the police. Old scores must be settled come a revolution, and one of the first is with the boys in blue; those who vigorously defended the BNP at Welling, those who attacked the anti-poll tax demonstration, those who murdered Joy Gardner - and all the hangers on who are 'only doing their job'.

Yours fraternally,
Dave Hammond,
Lewisham

Recently, we witnessed another twist in the sex war. Needless to say, the tables have been turned once and for all... against women.

The Austen Donnellan case is the worst scenario that women could have in that it further handicaps the right of a woman to control a situation where she may be abused. In fact the situation has become so dire that women may now find that whenever a complaint is lodged against a man on the grounds of sexual harassment - be that rape, derogatory verbal remarks or unwelcome physical contact - as a matter of course, her character, motive for "victimising" her attacker and even her integrity will all come into question. The fact that her dignity and honour have been violated will be a secondary factor in the case, the implication being that she, the victim, must have somehow brought upon herself the situation by such superficial reasoning as the manner of her dress or her behaviour, and that she undeniably provoked her attacker into inflicting bodily harm.

The significance of the Austen Donnellan case is important in that it highlights the complex and difficult path ahead for the battle for sexual equality. The media attention accorded to the case supports and upholds the view that women cannot be trusted: the image of woman as the infernal temptress and sinner. We are being led to believe that every cry for justice is insincere, manipulative and twisted - a case of cry wolf until it rings true.

The implication is obvious: that a woman's testimony and judgement cannot be trusted. In all the hype of Donnellan's acquittal, could it not be seen that the case remained unresolved? The most important factor appears to have been disregarded: whether or not the victim's consent was violated, and that acquittal rested more upon the victim's (student) lifestyle than her attacker's diminished responsibility.

If the thin line between the consensus of what can and cannot be transgressed is not redrawn, we are likely to see more of these such cases, regardless of the woman's feelings or consent. Can a woman withdraw once her partner has passed beyond what to her becomes unacceptable? Is that a valid reason for rape? And who decides enough is enough - is that not the prerogative and right of the woman?

This case is ironic in the way it raises the fact that the victim was unwilling to drag the whole affair into court and attract the undue attention of the media. In the war of his word against hers, the media chose to condemn the victim's motives, and assumed that she simply wanted to punish an ex-partner. It is rather symptomatic of the treatment accorded by society to women who dare to speak out of place. In innumerable cases of sexual harassment, a woman may be unwilling to raise her voice for several reasons. First, the system is against her for being a woman who dares to speak against the tyranny of male violence. The pressure of such a system which believes that a woman should remain passive within the walls and uncomplaining of the roles assigned to her. If she chooses to reject them, she must suffer. Too often, we have seen the voices of such women as Kiran Ahluwalia and Sara Thornton subdued because they decided to end the tyranny of male instigated violence; we have seen the unsympathetic role of their communities in failing to help them in their plight to end the reign of terror which threatened their existence.

Secondly, we only have to look at the sentences that women receive, and the ridiculous and farcical alibis that male attackers use to justify their reasons to kill; for instance, that a partner had 'driven' him to strike her because "she nagged too much", or the table was never set properly (these reasons are genuine, and have been used to "let the man off the hook" in such cases).

A major reason why the police do not receive more reports of rape and other forms of male instigated violence is because of this pressure, a feeling of intimidation and fear, of being treated unjustly. The Donnellan case has blighted any real progress of further protecting women within the law; a case of two steps out and one step back into the abyss.

There is no doubt that the number of cases that are reported is unrepresentative of the actual number with which to measure the situation. Unless and until women who are victims of such violence feel strong enough, not only to come forward, but to stand up against such violence in the first instance, very little chance abounds for justice.

There is no way of escaping the threat of violence in our homes, within our work/study places or in the street, unless we challenge it by speaking out against it.

It is the very act of breaking the silence that will empower women, of making ourselves heard, that will halt the rapidly rising rate of violence against women that is becoming so prevalent in our lives.

Yours,
Fozia Khanam



SENSELESS SACRIFICE: The massacre of Britain's coal industry continues. PHOTO:W. Edginton.

Queueing for rich pickings

BRITISH COAL is on the verge of announcing a further round of pit closures - this time, six mines will face the axe.

This comes hard on the heels of the news that miners have started the new year with yet another productivity record.

For the first full production week of 1994, Britain's miners broke 10 tonnes per shift per worker for the first time in the industry's entire history.

The national productivity record - broken nine times in the last 10 months - now stands at 10.26 tonnes per shift, the previous best being 9.72 tonnes recorded in the first week of December.

Last April - the start of the financial year - the record stood at 8.23 tonnes.

Productivity in the publicly owned mining industry is now 35 per cent higher than one year ago and is averaging 8.46 tonnes per miner at the 22 deep mines still operating.

Given such massive increases in productivity, it is hardly surprising that private buyers are queueing up to get a share of the industry in the event of the planned Tory sell-off.

At Wearmouth colliery in the north-east, for instance, British Coal management has removed some of the expensive, specialised machinery which is required to operate a mine. Any buyer will, therefore, be forced to invest large sums of money in new equipment.

Yet Caledonian Mining is still very eager to buy the pit and make such investments. Wearmouth has 50 years' supply of coal and seams 10 feet thick.

One pit - Clipstone in the Midlands - has been sold to private operators while Bettws in South Wales is in the process of being bought by the management.

Leader of the Durham miners, Davey Guy, gave the lie to the idea that imported coal is cheaper than the domestic product when he told *Briefing* that foreign coal was bought on the Rotterdam market.

"The imported coal is bought on the spot market there," he said, "which, of course, makes it cheaper. But if the producers had to guarantee delivery over, say, five or 10 years, contracts would have to be signed and the price would rise sharply."

• Whitemoor pit, which is part of the Selby complex in Yorkshire, has cut a new national colliery productivity record of 42.82 tonnes a shift.

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Printed by Wernham Printers Ltd (TU), 4 Forster Road, London N17