June 1994 £1

BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

Anyone but Blair (except Brown)



Inside ...

- Seumas Milne
- South Africa diary
- Dennis Skinner
- Roger Berry
- Local elections report

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

pre stop press

No rush to judgement

THE SOCIALIST Campaign Group has called on Labour's National Executive to hold the vote for the leadership at the Party's annual conference in the autumn.

"The Socialist Campaign Group is appalled at the calls to truncate the Party's procedures for electing its leader", said Alan Simpson MP, secretary of the SCG. "A rushed election would be an insult to members in the constituencies and unions. The most realistic and democratic timescale would be to hold the election at the Party's annual conference."

SCG MPs point out that in 1983 the election was conducted between June 9th and the end of September, and in 1992 from April 9th to July 16th.

"To hold the election in July would be to hand the contest over to the press, which has already offended many Party members by presuming to conduct and even to conclude our election," said Simpson. "The Party deserves not only sufficient time to make up its own mind, but also the widest possible choice of candidates."

The SCG MPs urge the NEC to consider the impact of our Euro-election efforts of any announcement that a leadership contest would be rushed through immediately afterwards. They also point out that an early election might be flawed by irregularities and challenges.

"The Party and the public know what the key issues facing the next Labour government will be: a return to full employment, rebuilding the welfare state, an assault on poverty and homelessness, and an internationalist response to post-cold war realities. We need to be reassured that this election will focus on issues, not images.

"Our democracy is our strength. A summer for reflection and discussion will be a summer well spent."

● The annual conference of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network will proceed as scheduled on June 11th at Manchester Town Hall. The conference will give active Party and trade union members a chance to discuss the issues which all the candidates should address.

In this month's

BRIEFING

Seumas Milne on full employment 4

New man at the Full Employment Forum 6

Crying need for re-think on housing policy ..7

Hidden menace of the coal sell-off.....8

Who lost Lambeth? 10

Millwall's inside story 12

Golden opportunity of the Euro-elections....14

Tories' Scott-free attack on Disabled Bill 15

Trade union news 16

Diary of the South African elections 18

France - on the verge of upheaval? 22

Mass industrial unrest in Indonesia 23

Betty Hamilton - a radical life 24

Periscope 25

Famous last words 26

Letters.....27

Latest on Joy Gardner's murder 28

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Blair can be stopped



DESPITE LABOUR'S POWERFUL performance in the local elections, the results revealed vulnerabilities which made many Party activists uneasy. That unease has been exacerbated by John Smith's death. Where is the Party heading? What does it stand for? How will it cope with the pressures it will face when it forms the next government? Can we even be sure we will form the next government? After all, we've been here before - in 1990 - and we know what happened in 1992.

None of the probable contenders for the succession to John Smith has offered any serious answers to these questions. As we go to press, the names of Blair, Prescott, Cook and Beckett are being bandied about in the press. Of these, only Robin Cook has not appeared as a *Labour Briefing* Class Traitor of the Month - and that is only because we have not got round to him. All of the pretenders to the vacant throne supported the rightward drive which lost us the last election. All supported the Gulf War. All supported the witch-hunt and the centralisation of power in the Party. All supported last year's attacks on the trade union link. None has argued for cuts in Britain's bloated military budget (at least not since 1991).

All of which means that whoever is elected Party leader, Labour will still have an uphill task addressing its long-term underlying crises: lack of activists and lack of socialist policies. These twin crises will not only dog our efforts to win the next general election; they will leave an incoming Labour government prey to the multi-nationals, the City, the press barons and the top civil servants.

Our most pressing task is to build a labour movement that can act as a counter-weight to these pressures. There is, however, one politician whose election would make this task nearly impossible. Tony Blair is the candidate of the British establishment. This establishment knows that Labour is now well placed to form the next government and is eager to ensure that that government serves its interests. Blair is not only the media's man - he is the City's man, the employers' man, the judges' man, the coppers' man. His election would be a guarantee that the next Labour government would pursue none of the radical measures required to address the increasingly desperate conditions facing our people.

Blair would renew the attack not only on the left, but on the trade unions and the very nature of the Labour Party, which in his hands could well make its final transmutation into an American-style Democratic Party. His ultimate aim is to liquidate the Labour Party as the political arm of a larger movement, to cut it free from its base in the unions and constituencies so that it becomes purely a creature of the media-Commons axis, posing no threat to the vested interests which run the country.

Far from being a "modernising" programme, this is a recipe for retreat to the nineteenth century. As our correspondents from South Africa point out in this issue, the need for the workers' movement to amplify its political voice will be one of the central global challenges of the next century. Blair is unable and unwilling to meet this challenge.

Blair's hostility to trade unionism is long-standing. The word solidarity - the raison d'etre of the labour movement - is not in his vocabulary. As Kinnock's employment spokesperson, he engineered Labour's accommodation with Thatcher's legal restrictions on trade union rights. During the 1992 election, he refused to argue the case for a minimum wage.

In the last two years, he has proved the most right wing and authoritarian shadow or actual Home Secretary Labour has ever had. Labour has gained on the "law and order" issue because soaring crime rates have made a nonsense of Tory demagoguery - Blair's attempts to echo this demagoguery in a softer tone have succeeded only in discrediting Labour's commitments to civil liberties. His response to the terrifying rise in racist violence and the march of the far right has been confined to a few anodyne sound-bites. He is incapable of leading the labour movement in the struggle against racism - because he is afraid to offer alternatives to the racist ideas so widespread in our society. Blair is neither as "smart" nor as "electable" as the media would have us believe. In the cauldron of a general election campaign he will be exposed as evasive and vacuous. He will be unable to articulate the crucial differences between Labour and the Tories and Lib Dems.

Party and union members have been deeply offended by the crass media attempt to bounce us into anointing Blair as leader even before John Smith had been buried. But Blair can be beaten. No one can predict the outcome of the ballots either in the unions or constituencies. Activists have a real chance of mobilising the majority of the movement against Blair's "liquidationism". To do that, we must insist that all the leadership candidates address the real challenges facing the Party. In particular, we must know where they stand on those central issues on which the Party has expressed a clear view: defence cuts, universal benefits, extending trade union rights, a specific minimum wage, retaking the utilities into public ownership, and a return to full employment. On these issues, none of the mooted leadership contenders speaks clearly for the majority in the Party. But if Tony Blair is elected, they will not even feature on Labour's agenda.

Why should a candidate who opposes virtually everything the Party stands for win our election? The loudest voices may belong to the media, but we have the votes. Let's use them to stop Tony Blair.

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

Labour Briefing **is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. The next EB will meet on June 5th. 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 June 10th.

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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Beyond the casino economy

The death of John Smith could give Labour's New Right a fresh lease of life. Yet a radical programme to create full employment would actually command the support of a majority of the voters, argues **Seumas Milne**.

NOW THAT the media - owned and controlled, for the most part, by the government and a handful of multi-millionaires - has decided who is to be the new leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, perhaps Labour's membership can now use the contest to discuss the sort of programme that could actually put the Party back into office. More important still would be a commitment to policies that would keep it there, by defending and advancing the interests of people Labour exists to represent.

Even among the self-proclaimed modernisers, Labour's own New Right, it is rare to find any real confidence that the current official Party platform would do much in practice to turn back the tide of mass poverty, inequality and unemployment which is the carefully-cultivated legacy of 15 years of Tory government.



In the wake of last year's confrontation with the trade unions, John Smith undoubtedly moved to distance Labour from the debilitating Euro-monetarism that came to mesmerise the front bench in the dying days of the Kinnock regime. One after another, discarded totems of traditional social democracy were cautiously revived, despite backstage moderniser mutterings. Support for demand management, industrial intervention, the welfare state, trade union and employment rights was suddenly no longer *passe*. There were even daring hints of a renewed commitment to the redistribution of income and wealth.

But the Party leadership's core economic policies remained stuck in the political grooves of the late 1980s. While Labour rode high on the back of popular revulsion at the sleaze and deceit of the Major government, even the most dedicated loyalist found it hard to believe that closing tax loopholes, boosting training and something called "social partnership" could combine to repair the damage inflicted by modern British capitalism on the country's industrial and social infrastructure.

Now even the recent modest advances in Labour policy are in danger from the unexpected revival of the modernisers' fortunes. Meanwhile, what remains of the left continues to be afflicted by a paralysing demoralisation and self doubt which only serves to reinforce its political marginalisation. This is despite the fact that on a range of key economic policy issues, from universal benefits to trade union rights to public ownership to military spending, it is the left that speaks for the Party as a whole.

There is already the basis for a strong alliance between the left, the old "soft left" and most trade unions on the broad thrust of an economic policy which would concentrate single-mindedly on promoting the interests of Labour's natural supporters. While Labour's New Right is still fixated, 1980s-style, on winning over the dwindling bands of the upwardly mobile - the "southern middle class", as the pundits like to say - it is increasingly obvious to others that Labour can only return to office by winning back its one-time commanding lead among working-class voters.

Since 1966, Labour has gained 4 per cent among managerial and professional groups, but lost 5 per cent among clerical workers, 15 per cent among unskilled manual workers (the "DEs") and 18 per cent among skilled workers (the legendary "C2s"). The latter two groups make up three-fifths of the adult population.

The outline of an economic programme which could unite a majority in the Labour movement and begin to deliver the goods for these core target Labour voters is already clear. It would include:

* An unequivocal commitment to full employment, underpinned by support for an expansionary macroeconomic policy in Britain and at the European level. Both the public spending needed to maintain demand and the direct intervention in the labour market necessary for large-scale job creation will have to be overwhelmingly at the national level. Despite all the talk about the death of the nation state, national public spending in the countries making up the European Union is about 50 times as big as the entire European Commission budget.

* A massive boost to public investment, in infrastructure and training, combined with the development of a new democratic public sector, and intervention in the private sector to drive up the rate of investment across the economy.

Investment as a proportion of national income in Britain is currently close to a 40-year low and about half the rate of Japan. Chronic underinvestment is closely linked to the special character of the British economy: its unique domination by multinational companies and the financial sector, its strong tendency to invest overseas and its dependence on the arms industry.

Without a sharp and long-term increase in domestic investment, the prospect for the majority of British people is of continued stagnation in living standards and services. Only the public sector - with a new core of publicly owned companies - can deliver that investment. Contrary to the continual insistence of its opponents, a strong public ownership programme would not eat into other spending priorities, because even full compensation would be paid in government bonds.

Regulation should be complementary, rather than an alternative, to direct ownership. The Labour movement's defensiveness about public ownership is entirely self-defeating and, according to opinion poll evidence, something clearly not shared by the public at large.

* A sharp increase in direct taxation on high incomes, dividends and wealth, with the biting points set high enough to avoid the obvious mistake of hitting potential Labour supporters, as happened in 1992. A 60 per cent tax on incomes over £50,000, for example, as the Transport and General Workers Union proposed last year, would raise up to £5 billion extra a year.

* Tough regulation of the City and foreign exchange speculation, and firm resistance to any return to deflationary, fixed exchange-rate systems, as threatened in the Maastricht Treaty.



Labour's front bench does at least recognise the corrosive impact of the City on the domestic economy, particularly in terms of the short-term profiteering effects of the stock market. But there is little recognition of the battle royal that would be needed to bring it to heel and the strong public sector involvement in the financial sector which would give a genuinely reforming Labour government the necessary leverage to intervene.

* Diversion of arms spending to industrial modernisation and diversification, as well as the rebuilding of our public services.

The demand for a reduction of military spending to the European average has overwhelming support in the Labour movement and is one of the keys to changing the entire direction of the British economy.

This is the kind of economic policy framework - fleshed out with measures such as the restoration of trade union freedoms and a tough minimum wage policy - that already commands a majority among individual Party members and in the trade unions, and could provide a Labour government with the means to begin to transform economic and social conditions in Britain.

It is the job of Party and trade union members to make sure that whoever takes over the Labour leadership cannot ignore it.

● **Seumas Milne is co-author of *Beyond the Casino Economy*. His forthcoming book on the miners, *The Enemy Within - MI5, Maxwell and the Scargill Affair* is published by Verso.**

Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network

DAY CONFERENCE

Socialist Policies For Full Employment

SATURDAY JUNE 11

11am-5pm
(Registration from 10:30am)

MANCHESTER TOWN HALL

Joint conference registration & annual network membership: £10 (waged); £5 (unwaged)

SPEAKERS, WORKSHOPS & OPEN DISCUSSION

With:
Dennis Skinner,
Seumas Milne,
Alice Mahon,
Jeremy Corbyn,
Alan Simpson,
Neil Gerrard,
Jonathan Michie,
TGWU Region 6,
Sao Paolo Forum,
...
and others

➲ WORKSHOPS ON arms conversion, public ownership, international strategies, unemployment & racism, the welfare state, trade union strategies

➲ OPEN DISCUSSION socialist policies & the leadership contest

➲ RESOLUTIONS and election of Network officers



Man for the jobs

Labour Briefing talked to **Roger Berry** (above), Labour MP for Bristol Kingswood, in his capacity as new chair of the Full Employment Forum.

Labour Briefing: There has been much talk of Labour's need for a "big idea" and many people have argued that this must be the drive to full employment. Do you see such a programme as the basis of Labour's future policy?

Roger Berry: Yes. Full employment is the number one priority, partly because of the very obvious personal hardship that unemployment causes, the economic waste and so forth. But, secondly, if we are to defend the welfare state and have the resources to fund health, education, social policies and so on, we require full employment for that also.

So I see the campaign to defend the welfare state and the work of the Full Employment Forum as being linked, which is why we have joint meetings at conferences.

Full employment must be central to what Labour is talking about because it profoundly affects so many millions of people. We really do stand or fall on whether we can convince people that we can deliver full employment.

LB: There has been discussion on using the building industry as a basis for stimulating economic growth and it is official Party policy to release capital receipts so that councils can again invest in building. Is that a realistic basis for dramatically reducing unemployment?

RB: I don't think it's anywhere near enough. There are all sorts of problems with the £5 billion of capital receipts which exist at the moment. The first is that they are not located evenly over the country. A future Labour government would have to re-allocate them.

The second thing is that using capital receipts would increase public sector borrowing and therefore we have to be quite clear about the need to borrow to fund public sector investment.

And, of course, £5 billion is simply not enough. I would emphasise that, yes, I am in favour of using the money that some local authorities have in the bank to invest in building and take construction workers off the dole.

That's a powerful political message, but, frankly, I think we would have to do rather more than talk about the "phased" release of capital receipts, which is the phrase the Party frequently uses. If the Party really means merely the phased release of receipts, we are only looking at releasing £1 or £2 billion.

Now, that kind of money, injected into the British economy, is something and nothing and it will not achieve full employment.

LB: What are the other essentials for getting unemployment down dramatically?

RB: The only way to get down unemployment is to increase spending in the economy. When Jim Callaghan went to the Labour Conference in 1976 and said that you can't spend your way out of recession, not only was that not true, but the opposite is actually the case.

There is no way we can get out of this recession without increasing spending. The jobs won't be there unless people can buy whatever it is potential workers are going to produce. At present I can't see any imminent increase in private sector spending, so I start from the proposition that the only way to reduce unemployment is through a substantial increase in public spending.

I would say that £15 billion of extra spending, which is about 2 or 3 per cent of the national income, is the sort of thing we ought to be talking about. We, therefore, have to explain how we will raise the money for such a public spending programme and there are only two ways of doing it: either increasing taxation or borrowing.

Now, I'm all in favour of plugging tax loopholes, although it will take many months to raise money that way, and I'm all in favour of eliminating waste - and if the Conservatives can spend £14 billion to prop up the poll tax then surely there's some money sloshing around somewhere. But if there was a Labour government tomorrow morning and if that government raised public spending to reduce unemployment, we would have to pay for it. In my view, we should be arguing that those on the highest incomes should pay more tax. Secondly, we ought to argue the case for financing public spending through borrowing.

LB: What role is there for public ownership?

RB: I think all the privatised utilities should be brought back under public control. They are all, effectively, private monopolies with complex systems of regulation. The fact is that it's much more efficient to control directly than to regulate at a distance. I would therefore bring them all back into the public sector.

The Party is committed to bringing water, rail and what's left of coal back into the public sector, but as a matter of medium term policy we should bring back all the utilities.

Opening up

Islington councillor **Liz Davies** examines the woeful housing policies of many Labour councils and argues for a radical, open approach.

THE LOCAL election results in the inner-cities exposed a serious weakness in Labour's political failure to respond to the housing crisis. In Islington, Labour lost eight seats to the Liberals, all of them with high proportions of council tenants utterly fed up with the appalling standard of public housing in which they are forced to live.

The blame for the housing crisis lies with the Tory government. It has deliberately reduced resources to local authorities. Councils can still spend only 25 per cent of any capital monies received on rebuilding - the remaining 75 per cent goes to pay off debt charges.

The government, British National Party and the Liberal Democrats all propagate myths about the housing crisis. The government claims that single mothers jump the housing queue, the BNP and Liberals put the blame on "non-local" people - code for black and ethnic minority families.

Labour councils have traditionally shied away from debating housing. Faced with angry tenants who blame the council for poor housing conditions, Labour councillors tend to retreat into muttering "it's all the fault of the government" without explaining further, or worse, seize on and promote racist phrases such as "local homes for local people" in the absence of any other answers.

The victory against the Liberals in Tower Hamlets proved that, ultimately, racist solutions do not find favour with the working-class. For eight years, the Liberals had pursued a flagrantly racist housing policy. They had seized every opportunity to take Bengali families off their homeless lists. They had instigated a "sons and daughters" housing policy - preferring to rehouse local (white) people to anyone on the homeless list. They were investigated by the Commission for Racial Equality on several occasions.

They were defeated in the courts when they tried to put Bengali families onto an estate with very high levels of racial harassment.

The Liberals quite deliberately claimed that the severe housing crisis in Tower Hamlets was due to the numbers of Bengali families. In October, white tenants, faced with racist propaganda from Labour, Liberals and the BNP, voted for the most overt racists - the BNP. Labour's defeat of both the Liberals and the BNP is a tribute to the efforts of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets to mobilise and the anti-racism of most working-class people when confronted by the real racists.

Despite our victory in Tower Hamlets, Labour cannot sit back on its laurels. In many inner-cities, Labour councils preside as landlords over the most appalling housing conditions. Councils' repairs services are frequently over-stretched and there are huge delays in responding. Families sit in cramped bed and breakfasts for months waiting to be rehoused and are then given one offer of permanent accommodation only. If they turn it down, they are out on the street.

Many council flats suffer from damp, having been inadequately constructed 30 years ago, and children living in damp conditions grow up with asthma or bronchial complaints. Families who are not homeless, or single people not in priority need, face no real prospect of receiving council housing. Young families desperate for a transfer as the size of their family increases have to wait years in overcrowded conditions.

Labour must be seen to be on the side of council tenants, not against them. That means being open and honest about the difficulties that councils face - let's open the books to the tenants, discuss the financial and legal restrictions and talk about creative ways of finding new resources. We should also put our own house in order - where policies on transfer priorities are inadequate or out of date we should examine them and change them, after consultation. Above all, we should be seeking to campaign with tenants and homeless families for an end to the housing crisis.

Labour's starting point must be for more and better public housing, publicly accountable to the tenants who live in it and allocated solely on the basis of need. As council estates in inner-cities crumble away, and beggars congregate on the streets of London, the government must be vulnerable to such a challenge. ❑

Housing in the inner cities is often damp and crumbling.



Last of

Britain's remaining pits are about to be sold off. John Cryer talked to **Dennis Skinner** MP about their likely fate and the pressing need for a future Labour government to take them back into public ownership.



Clipstone colliery in Nottinghamshire, which is already in private hands.

WITH THE Coal Bill about to get Royal Assent, the remaining 15 deep mines still in the hands of British Coal are on the verge of being parcelled up and sold off to private would-be coal barons. Among the pits already closed in the government's massacre of the industry, around six have been re-opened by new coal-owners such as Budge, Ryan and Malcolm Edwardes.

Dennis Skinner, whose local pit of Bolsover has already felt the axe, sees future problems for the rest of the industry in these early sell-offs. "Privateers have already moved into some of the closed mines but what we have to remember is that they are not employing very many people at these pits. Some of the mines being bought used to employ 700, 800, even 1,000 men. The privateers are employing far fewer - at Clipstone only about 200 are being employed. Promises for some of the pits in Yorkshire which are about to be privatised are only 200 to 250.

"So it's pretty clear that what they're doing is mining the best areas in the pit, opening up the best seams which they can exploit easily to make a quick buck. They are almost certainly not planning to do any development work - development work means investing in new faces for the future. So I rather suspect that those pits already in private hands will be mined out very quickly and the same will be true of the other 15 mines and that will be the end of it - no long-term planning."

Skinner also points to the one big difference between a mine and any other workplace - geological difficulties. During, say, a 10-year period virtually any pit will run into problems -under public ownership, strong pits helped the weak. "Let's suppose that a pit with 50 years' reserves goes into a bad geological area so it stops being profitable and, in fact, starts to lose money. Under public ownership, that pit would be carried by a lot of strong pits which, during that period, happened to be mining in good areas.

"But under private enterprise, with each owner having just a handful of mines, the coal-owners won't be able to say to each other, 'My pit has gone into bad strata, can you help me out?' The pit will simply die.

"So I would foresee that, under continuing private ownership, the industry might survive until the end of the century and maybe a little bit beyond, then it would be the end."

Privatisation threatens more than the existence of the British mining industry. Dennis Skinner points out that, "under private enterprise, the pension funds are not safe for hundreds of thousands of retired miners. The government has said that it will safeguard pensions - provided it gets its hands on 50 per cent of the funds. But there is no guarantee that private firms will continue to make contributions in the future so it's conceivable that pensions would no longer increase to meet the cost of living. The pension fund would wither on the vine.

"The same is true of concessionary coal. There must be hundreds of thousands of people who used to work in the industry, plus the widows of miners, who receive concessionary coal. That won't be guaranteed under private ownership. In fact, some miners are already being asked by private owners to sign contracts which exclude concessionary coal."

There are also potential environmental dangers in closing down the industry. When pits are closed, they fill up with water which is invariably filthy. This can rise until it pollutes rivers, lakes and streams, as it is already doing in parts of Lancashire, Derbyshire and the north-east. When all Britain's coal-fields had working mines, the water in a closed pit would tend to get pumped out by another one nearby. This will no longer be the case. The most blatant example of environmental sabotage occurred at Easington colliery in County Durham. When it closed last year, the British Coal management ensured that it would never reopen by turning off the pumps, thus flooding the mine and allowing thousands of tonnes of polluted water to flow into the local river.

Dennis Skinner also points to the coal industry's social welfare organisation, which has traditionally provided sports facilities with the help of funding from the industry. "It provided facilities for football, cricket, bowls, tennis and many other sports, " he says. "These are community assets which anyone can use - what privatisation might bring is the selling-off of the land. And this is at a time when the Tories are moaning about the decline of team sports."

The organisation also provided facilities for disabled ex-miners - pit

the few?



communities have far more than their fair share of paraplegics owing to the highly dangerous nature of the industry. Such dangers are very much a top priority among those who, like Dennis Skinner, are passionately opposed to the sell-off of the collieries. Under recent changes in the Mines and Quarries Acts, "safety measures in the pits will suffer; the job of the pit deputies was to look after safety in the mines. Their powers will be taken away and that will mean more dead and injured miners." Indeed, a recent study has shown that private mines have 20 times the death and injury rates of those in public hands.

Skinner also points to the sheer economic perversity of closing down and flogging off Britain's mines. The Tories, for instance, have a particular affection for open-cast mining because it does not provide any base for the National Union of Mineworkers, regardless of the fact that it never fails to blight the surrounding environment.

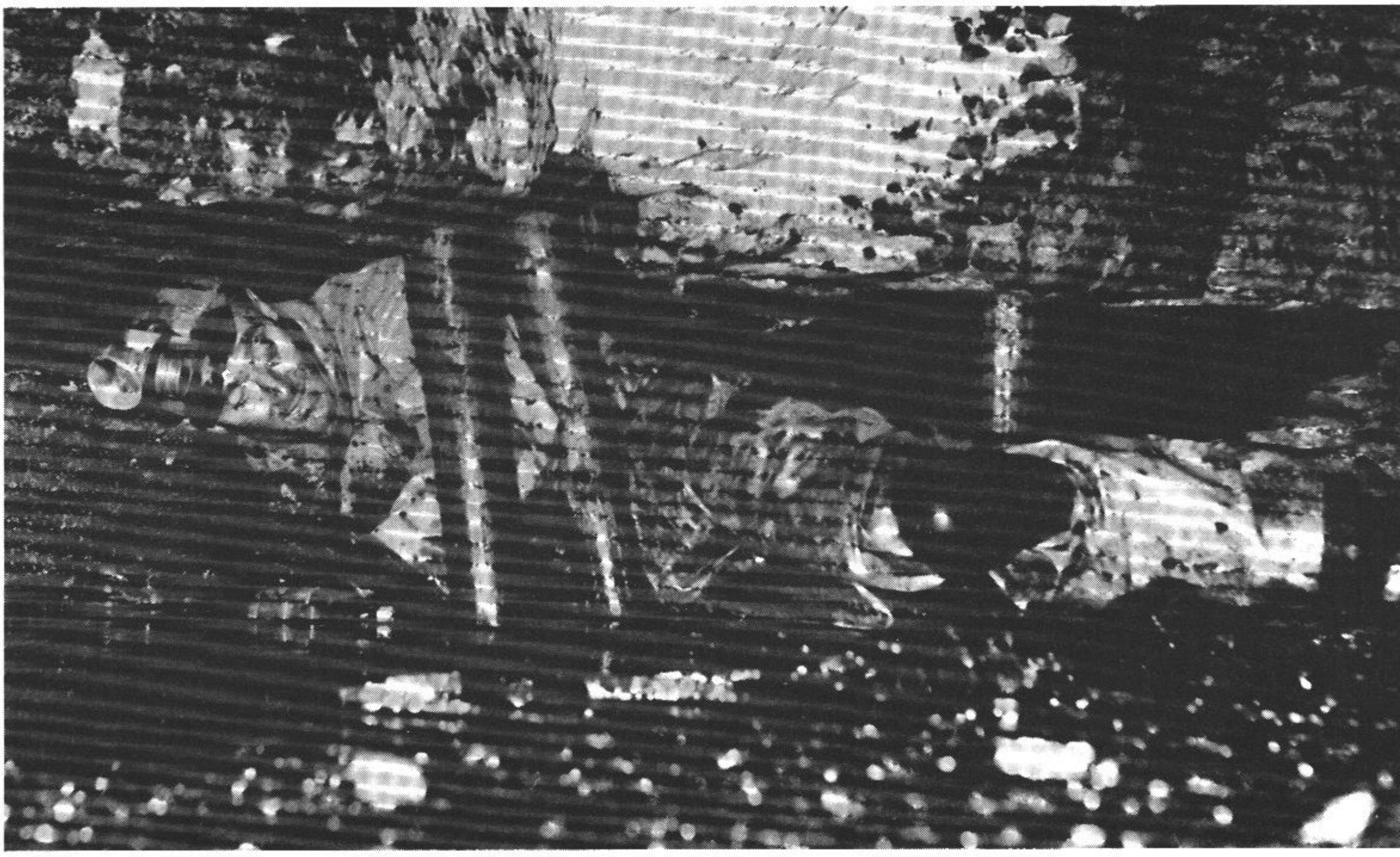
As the MP for Bolsover points out, "open-cast last year produced 18 million tonnes of coal which is the equivalent of 13 or 14 average size pits. It makes getting at the coal easier and therefore more profitable but it only skims off the top one third of the reserves, leaving the remaining two thirds under the ground where it is lost forever because you cannot then drive a drift to get at the rest."

Open-cast mining has been given a governmental leg-up in the shape of planning guideline MPG 3 which stipulates that a local authority cannot halt the creation of an open-cast mine in its area if the mine is "in the national interest." This effectively leaves local authorities powerless in the face of mining companies who could not care less about the destruction of the environment.

"There are also growing imports of coal," Skinner argues, "which last year were running at about 20 million tonnes, equivalent to £700 million on the balance of payments deficit and roughly 15 or 16 pits. Then there's the French interconnector importing power at the equivalent of around 6 million tonnes of coal a year - that's another four or five pits."

There is also the massive cost of closing pits and laying off miners, which has run up a bill of some £2.5 billion over the past couple of years, while unemployed miners will cost around £800 million a year in state benefits for the foreseeable future.

The Labour front bench has said that public ownership will play a part in the future of the mining industry under a Labour government. Clearly, for campaigners like Dennis Skinner who know the industry inside and out, this is simply not enough. For overwhelming economic and social reasons - the long-term planning of Britain's energy needs, the misery of mining communities facing devastating levels of unemployment, the safety of the pension fund, even the very survival of any kind of mining industry - the only answer is to return coal to public ownership. ❑



Who lost Lambeth?

Local election roundup

Is Labour's defeat in Lambeth a legacy of London's 'loony left'? **Mike Marqusee** says the pundits, as usual, have got it wrong.

IN 1986, following the disqualification of Ted Knight and other Labour councillors, Labour swept to victory in Lambeth, taking eight seats from the opposition on a shamelessly left-wing manifesto. In 1990, under the left-wing leadership of Joan Twelves, Lambeth again achieved one of the best swings to Labour in inner London.

The next year, following a council meeting which voted to oppose the Gulf War, 13 Labour councillors, including Twelves, were suspended from the Party and investigated on the orders of the National Executive Committee.

After two years and 200 hours of hearings at the Party's National Constitutional Committee, six of the 13 were expelled and the others suspended for periods of between 6 months and two years. At the hearings, witnesses repeatedly warned that the disciplinary action would weaken the local Party and strengthen Labour's opponents. Despite poor results in by-elections in 1993, these warnings were ignored.

On May 5th Labour suffered its worst result in Lambeth since 1968. In the Vauxhall constituency, where Labour claimed 55 per cent of the vote in 1990, it was down to 38 per cent - with the Lib Dems up from 14 per cent to 46 per cent. In Streatham, captured by Labour in 1992, Labour found itself in third place in the popular vote. Nearly *one in three of Labour's 1990 voters deserted it this time. Half switched to the Lib Dems (mainly white council* tenants) and the rest stayed home.

The London Lib Dems are masters of opportunist oppositionism. They make themselves the champions of anyone with a grievance against the council - and they play the race card on the doorstep without compunction. Strong Lib Dem showings in other Labour-controlled areas indicate that there is more at work here than just a "Lambeth factor". Unless Labour gets to grips with the housing crisis which afflicts its supporters in inner city areas, it will continue to haemorrhage working class votes to the Lib Dems and to even more obnoxious forces on the far right.

Nevertheless, the result in Lambeth was particularly poor. There is a "Lambeth factor". But what is it - and who is responsible for it?

For the last three years, the Walworth Road bureaucracy has been in full control of Lambeth's Labour Parties and council. Steve Whaley, who replaced Joan Twelves as leader (but lost his seat on May 5th), worked to Jack Straw's directions. That was not enough for Kate Hoey, the Labour MP for Vauxhall imposed by Neil Kinnock against the local Party's wishes in 1989, who scapegoated the council for all the borough's ills. "If the Lib Dems were to win for a year," she said last August, "then it might shake things up."

Mike Tuffrey, leader of Lambeth's Lib Dems, welcomed Hoey's high-profile war on the local council: "When she attacks the council she is telling people not to vote Labour." His advice to Labour was ignored: "To keep power in Lambeth, they have got to get back to confrontational, anti-government politics."

Instead, Labour attacked its own council but offered no positive alternative. It said nothing about the Tories' assault on local democracy. Straw's obsession with council tax levels was no help to Labour in Lambeth, where council taxes, like the rates before them, are high because of the swelling tide of poverty in the borough.

"Labour is the only party with a new team for Lambeth," ran the Walworth Road-inspired campaign slogan. Indeed, the "new team" mantra was repeated five times in an election address of just over 100 words. Voters cannot be treated like idiots; for a "new team", they looked to a new party.

Little was said about policies for equality and nothing at all about racism. Though 45 per cent of the borough's population is black, there are now only two black councillors (one Labour and one Lib Dem).

Walworth Road screened all the candidates (excluding Ted Knight in the process), wrote the manifesto and all other campaign literature and imposed a full-time agent with no local experience. Despite the centralised command, the campaign was poorly co-ordinated. Literature was marred by errors of fact or spelling and often arrived late.

The long fracas over the witch-hunt had already demoralised the Party's activist base. As in many London boroughs, fewer members took part in the campaign than in either 1986 or 1990.

Undoubtedly, the allegations of corruption, which emerged after the suspension of the 13 councillors, hurt Labour badly. Jack Straw was keen to blame the left. He attempted to link the disciplinary actions to the corruption charges and was promptly served with a writ for libel which is still outstanding. In fact, former Lambeth Chief Executive Herman Ouseley, now head of the Commission for Racial Equality, told the NCC that the suspensions had delayed and disrupted the Twelves' administration's work in dealing with mismanagement. Larry Whitty congratulated Steve French for the excellent work he had done as a Committee Chair to root out corrupt practices - and then expelled him from the Party because of his stance on the poll tax.

In 1993, the District Auditor declared that the suspensions had "increased the difficulty of managing the authority". Even the *Sunday Times* admitted last August that the competence of and public support for Lambeth's last left-led administration "may be one of the hidden truths that will haunt the Labour Party".

MUCH OF what the press and the front bench have lazily described as "corruption" is the result of an effort - in line with Labour policy - to keep council services in house. The scale and nature of the problems were distorted by the Tories and the press - whose false version of events was *confirmed by Straw, Hoey, Whaley and the entire Walworth Road election campaign. To put the whole thing in* context, compare the £10 million allegedly "lost" by Lambeth over a decade from improperly awarded contracts (i.e savings the District Auditor presumed could be made if these services were privatised) to the £8 million two-year overspend in Islington's education budget under the "efficiency first" regime of Walworth Road favourite Margaret Hodge.

In response to the "corruption" panic, the Labour Group began privatising indiscriminately. Contracts for housing repairs in the north of the borough were granted to a private firm whose performance was so poor that it had to be sacked by the council last November. Short-term contracts to plug the gap until the tender expired on April 1st were then given to other private firms, who simply could not cope with the backlog created by their predecessor. As a result, repairs ground to a halt in

Birmingham

THE RESULTS WERE as good, if not better, than most Labour supporters could have hoped for. The Tories really were crushed. The final result was even better than four years ago, when these seats were last contested during the anti-poll tax campaign.

Labour was defending 28 seats - all of these, apart from one lost to the Liberal Democrats, were held.

Two wards, Quinton and Edgbaston, were gained from the Tories, who only managed to hold on to three wards in Sutton Coldfield and Harborne ward in the Edgbaston constituency.

Whether these results can be explained in terms simply of mid-term unpopularity of the central government is highly debatable. Birmingham was targeted heavily by Conservative Central Office, perhaps more than any other council in the country, and John Major and other Cabinet ministers visited the city during the campaign.

Without doubt, the Tory leadership were praying that a win in Birmingham would deflect attention from what always promised to be a savaging at the hands of the national opposition.

The old criticisms of the Labour administration, that of profligate spending on big, prestige projects, simply do not hold water. The new leader of the Labour group, Theresa Stewart, presented a manifesto in which the defence of services was the main priority.

Education was without doubt a big issue. Under Labour, the education budget will be larger than the Standard Spending Assessment calculation. The Tories had stood on a pledge of increasing it to more than half the total council budget but this did not seem to fool the electorate - it became apparent that such a pledge would involve cuts of £100 million to other services.

Apart from winning one ward from Labour, the Liberal Democrats did not live up to their pre-election proclamations. Indeed, in some parts of Birmingham they lost ground to Labour and their vote increased slightly at the expense of the Tories.



JUBILATION erupts in the London borough of Croydon among Labour candidates and supporters on local election night. The Party took control of the council for the first time ever. It had been controlled by the Conservatives for over 100 years - as long, in fact, as local government has existed in its present form.

Lambeth (continued)

the months before the election. Some tenants had to deal with three different contractors in a period of eight months.

The suspensions of 1991 were triggered by Walworth Road disquiet about the Gulf War meeting and pledges of poll tax defiance. Neither Lib Dems nor Tories mentioned either of these issues during the election campaign. They focused on inadequate housing services, which they blamed not on privatisation but "corruption". In so doing, they were merely echoing the line pursued by Straw and Whaley.

For the record, the two Militant Labour candidates attracted 310 and 647 in the two wards in which they stood and had no effect on the results.

Following the election debacle, the new, shrunken Lambeth Labour Group elected Anna Tapsell, a left-winger, as its new leader in preference to Cathy Ashley, one of the organisers of the witch-hunt. On the ground, if not in BBC studios, people are aware that Lambeth was lost not by the left but by the Labour right's reckless pursuit of a factional vendetta and the leadership's terror of the media.

BNP - down but not out

THE BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY lost a degree of their legitimacy when they lost their Isle of Dogs seat at the council elections. But they did not lose votes.

In fact, Derek Beackon's vote went up by 500 to over 2,000 and elsewhere in Tower Hamlets they polled between 650 and 900 votes (reaching 23 per cent in one ward). In Newham, with a parliamentary by-election pending, they received a staggering 33 per cent in one ward and 24 per cent in another.

Despite the low number of candidates (50 to 60) across Britain, and the fact that many campaigns comprised just putting out a leaflet, the fascists did remarkably well. The BNP, the National Front and assorted nazis received 6 to 10 per cent of the vote across the West Midlands and 10 to 20 per cent in Hertfordshire. Incredibly, *Searchlight* states that "propects for the BNP are far from rosy."

An NF splinter group, Third Way (associated with Patrick Harrington), stood candidates under various local community banners, but did not receive the same level of support as the better known BNP or NF.

The widely publicised hundreds of candidates from the BNP did not materialise, and it is believed that the NF were only able to field their's after a windfall legacy of over £100,000. If the fascists had been able to stand on the wide scale that they did in the 1970s, they would undoubtedly have done very well indeed; having a councillor elected last year broke through many barriers.

With three East London by-elections approaching, an immediate task now is to ensure the Labour Party learns from the electoral success of its high-profile anti-racist campaigning in Tower Hamlets and does not take its traditional stance of sitting back and trying to ignore the nazis elsewhere. It is essential that people do not presume that, after Labour re-took the Isle of Dogs, the fascists will go away - the left must learn not to repeat the complacency that set in after 1979.

Local election roundup

Millwall victory: the inside story

The sweetest results for Labour on May 5th were its victory over the racist Lib Dems across Tower Hamlets and especially its triumph over the BNP in Millwall. **Mike Marqusee** talked to local Party members to find out how it was done.

LAST SEPTEMBER'S disastrous Millwall by-election, which BNP man Derek Beackon won by seven votes, owed much to an inept Labour campaign which had excluded local left-wingers and pandered to racism. This time, the left was reincorporated - indeed, leading left activists were implored to take on key organisational roles - and there was no compromise with racism and parochialism. The Party took on the British National Party in a political struggle and won by a thumping 1,500 votes.

Labour's campaign mobilised 3,500 local people to vote for Labour and against the BNP in the highest ever turn-out in a British council election. Among Labour's supporters were some 1,000 working class-people - white and black - who had never voted before.

In Millwall, there was a sense of purpose in voting not apparent elsewhere in Britain on May 5th. At many of the polling stations, the BNP were 20 strong, blocking access for voters. Police cleared them away only intermittently. BNP supporters on motorbikes and cars followed voters from the polling stations and harassed them.

Nonetheless, members of the Bengali community mobilised themselves to vote on an unprecedented scale. The well-publicised efforts of the churches were largely irrelevant as black community groups organised their own transport and ensured that people walked to the polls in large groups, running the gauntlet of press, police and massed BNP supporters. They made voting a collective and political act, as it was in South Africa.

The revived local Labour Party realised that racism had to be tackled as part of a larger programme. It stuck to its policy of allocating housing according to need and hit back hard at the BNP, which until recently had enjoyed a clear run in Millwall. With help from Party, trade union and anti-fascist activists from across the country, Labour was able to amass 3,000 promises. On election day, 80 per cent of these voted.

However, Nick Raynsford MP, Walworth Road's man in Millwall, was worse than useless. He seemed obsessed with persuading ex-Labour councillor Ted Johns, the media's favourite Islander, not to stand as a candidate for the "East London People's Alliance". John's price for not splitting the Labour vote was a slap-up reception organised by Raynsford and Frank Dobson at the Commons. In the middle of the first week of the campaign, Raynsford summoned local party officers and candidates to the Commons to tell them: "The National Executive Committee has decided that Millwall is a priority. We're going to help by writing you a local manifesto." He then pulled said manifesto out of his pocket, whereupon the local activists - aggrieved already at missing a crucial evening's canvassing - spotted numerous embarrassing errors. Eleven of the 12 sites named for potential housing development in Raynsford's "local manifesto" were not actually in Millwall ward. The park he promised to revamp was in a different part of the borough.

Dobson and Raynsford promised to bring a load of MPs down for an evening's canvassing, but cancelled the event at the last minute. The GLLP pulled an eve of poll leaflet written by local Party members allegedly because it libelled the BNP.

Labour's candidate in September, James Hunt (exposed last year by *Briefing* as a racist) stood this time as an "Independent Islander". Observers at the count spotted many split votes for Hunt and Beackon. It has been revealed that two years ago Hunt was offered a consultancy by the London Docklands Development Corporation if he could get himself elected to the council. The security firm which he runs has, mysteriously, not been affected by the recent large-scale lay-offs at Canary Wharf. Walworth Road owes an apology to the whole movement - and the black community of Tower Hamlets - for having allowed this impostor to stand as a Labour candidate.

"The strength of our campaign was that it drew on traditional Labour movement solidarity," explained



Barnet

THE TORIES ARE reeling from the shock of losing power in Barnet. The new council has 29 Tories, 25 Labour and six Liberal Democrat councillors, but this obscures the fact that Labour won 40 per cent of the votes to the Tories' 37 per cent (the Liberal Democrats got 19 per cent).

Barnet Council has been solidly Tory since its creation in 1964, and the borough currently returns four Tory MPs, including Maggie Thatcher's successor Hartley (seedless jam) Booth.

On last month's results, they would lose Finchley and Hendon North, and struggle to hold Chipping Barnet, leaving them with only Hendon South as a safe Tory seat. And when the new boundaries come in next year, Hendon South will disappear, leaving the borough with a Labour seat (Hendon), a Labour marginal (Finchley) and a Tory marginal (Chipping Barnet).

On the council, Labour is forming a minority administration, NOT a coalition. The Liberal Democrats are restrained by the fact that five of their six councillors are novices. Mind you, so are 13 of the Labour group.

The price for their co-operation was the chair of the Town Planning Committee. Their leader, Jack Cohen, reported that the Tories "made only a half-hearted attempt to negotiate - and that is putting it generously." He also pointed out that during his eight years on the council his party had received no co-operation from the Tories who were frequently "rude, patronising and condescending."

Labour is promising to end the secrecy that has been the hallmark of Tory Barnet. In the past, totally secret meetings took place between chief officers and committee chairs, and power was delegated to groups of three councillors to decide much council business in private. Labour leader Alan Williams and deputy leader Joan Ryan have also pledged to work closely with the Barnet Labour Parties as well as council unions and community groups.

Thanks to Barnet LGC's policy of replacing retiring councillors with women, the new Labour group consists of 10 men and 15 women. They include Kitty Lyons (wife of MSF leader Roger). Long-time *Briefing* supporter Ellis Hillman is to be the mayor. He told *Briefing*: "I look forward to shaking the foundations of the Thatcherite heartland."

No one underestimates the task ahead for the Labour administration. Even with Liberal Democrat support they have a majority of just two; on most committees they will have to rely on the chair's casting vote. The budget for the year has already been set by the outgoing Tory administration, and government controls leave precious little room for manoeuvre. Nevertheless there is a real opportunity to demonstrate how a Labour council will try to operate openly and involve the community in decision-making.

Millwall (continued)

Millwall Ward organiser Jenny Fisher. "The limits of the Anti-Nazi League's approach were exposed by their irrelevance to the crucial battle at the ballot box. Their stunts made no impact on the struggle to mobilise the vote. By going it alone rather than working with and for Labour, they became a sectarian irrelevance."

Despite Labour's triumph, Beackon's vote went up to just over 2,000. Local Labour activists point out that the BNP has put three years of intensive work into the Isle of Dogs. "The BNP support is far more than just a protest vote," Fisher explained. "It is the result of a long-term effort by the fascists to implant themselves in the local community. Labour still has a huge task on its hands. The new Labour council must respond and deliver or the BNP will continue to attract support."

The local white working-class appears to have split its votes equally between Labour and the BNP. Many local people were outraged at the media coverage which suggested that all white working-class people on the Isle of Dogs were racists. As in its coverage of South Africa, the British media could not bring itself to admit that this was a political struggle, not an "ethnic" one. As such, it was a struggle which could only be waged - and won - by the Labour movement. ❑

Islington

LABOUR EASILY RETAINED control of Islington council but lost eight seats to the Lib Dems and failed to retake the lone Tory seat lost in a by-election last year. Disgruntled council tenants proved vulnerable to the Lib-Dem/Tory "local homes for local people" appeal. Labour's own campaign was tainted by Cllr Dave Barnes, who was quoted in the local newspaper on the morning of election day to the effect that Labour would soon abandon its policy of allocating housing according to need in favour of a "sons and daughters" policy.

Following the election, Alan Clinton, one time member of the Socialist Labour League turned right-wing New Realist, was elected council leader over the ineffectual soft left, Derek Sawyer. Islington is now saddled with its most right-wing council since the defeat of the SDP in 1982. Ex-NUS President and apparatchik supreme Stephen Twigg is now Group Whip and is getting ready to succeed Clinton in a year or two.

Former left-winger Talal Karim disgraced himself by joining the right wing camp, which has made him Deputy Leader. As chair of the Finance Committee, Paul Convery, former Labour Co-ordinating Committee Secretary and currently head of the Unemployment Unit, will now spend his days issuing press releases decrying joblessness and his nights creating it.

EALING: THERE WAS A huge defeat for the Tories, with the Labour share going up to 48 seats and the Tories down to a mere 20. The Liberal Democrats trailed in with only one councillor.

The Conservatives previously had a majority of eight over Labour so this represents one of the country's most eye-catching reversals in these elections.

One of the new ruling group's first priorities will be an attempt to reverse the planned sell-off of the former Southall Town Hall. The Tories had already gone some way through the process of flogging it for a song and so potentially depriving Ealing's residents of an important amenity.

BRIGHTON: **Labour gained one seat - Preston ward, Tory since records began, was won by 29 votes. Elsewhere the Tory vote collapsed.**

Victory celebrations were marred by a couple of Labour right-wingers choosing to retrieve Militant Labour (198 votes) from obscurity with lengthy attacks.

Labour supporters are looking for a socialist strategy and not the settling of old scores.

Meanwhile, Party members are gearing-up for the Euro elections where, following boundary changes, Labour has a real chance of winning.

HILLINGDON: Wally Kennedy, expelled by Labour (see last month's *Briefing*) retained his seat with a handsome majority. Labour, which won Hillingdon following a recent by-election, now has a majority of 19.



Alf Lomas

A Euro death-blow

London North East MEP **Alf Lomas** sets out a socialist battle-plan for the coming Euro-elections, a strategy which would deliver a crushing defeat to the government.

THE EUROPEAN Elections on June 9th will be a wonderful opportunity for people to vote for an increase in the number of Labour Euro MPs in the European Parliament. At the same time it will be a referendum on the Tory government, giving people a chance to show what they think of cuts in social services, attacks on trades unions, racist policies and recent tax and national insurance increases.

We should, of course, show how the European Community has put forward legislation in the field of workers' rights, working conditions, environment, etc, which are far better than anything we could get from this Tory government.

Many of these social achievements have been won as a result of pressure from Socialist Euro MPs and from the trades union movement and I am pleased now that the movement is realising that, just like the farmers and multinationalists and all the other lobbies, they too must have a voice in Brussels. The TUC recently opened an office there, the GMB has an office there and the Transport and General Workers Union has a full-time European Officer, who liaises with the 18-strong group of TGWU Labour Euro MPs which I convene and chair. It is important that unions know as quickly as possible about legislation coming from Europe that will affect their members.

These social matters, such as improving health and safety at work and improving women's rights, have been welcomed but we have also to expose the inherent capitalist nature of the European Community, with its free market policies, its mass unemployment and resulting poverty. There are now 20 million unemployed people in the EC and over 50 million people living in poverty. Yet we have had the recent Maastricht Treaty which, by imposing spending restrictions on governments, further exacerbates these problems. Instead of meekly accepting this, the Labour Party ought to be on the attack now and demanding changes when the Treaties are up for review in 1996.

We should be vigorously exposing the obscenities of the Common Agricultural Policy, which still takes 60 per cent of the European Community's Budget - £30 billion - and is costing the average family in Britain over £20 a week. A policy which leads to mountains of food being stored and hundreds of thousands of tons of food destroyed in a world where people are starving.

We should also expose the well-kept secret of the European Community Directive, which all 12 member governments have signed, for the harmonization of Value Added Tax. This will mean having two rates of VAT, a standard rate of not less than 15 per cent and a lower rate on so-called "sensitive items" which will be between 5 and 9 per cent. There is no provision for zero-rating, although any goods and services that are currently zero-rated can remain so until the end of 1996. After that, items like food, children's clothing, public transport, newspapers, books, etc. will all be subject to VAT.

Why isn't the Labour Party launching an offensive against this?

Much is made of the grants received in this country from the European Community and, while any funding is welcome, particularly funds for training the unemployed and for regenerating parts of Britain, we must always remember that we get back far less from the EC than we put in. Currently, the net payments are about £5 million per day. I am sure if we asked people whether they would like to continue paying £5 million a day into Europe or would prefer to spend that money on hospitals, homes, schools, etc, I know what sort of answer we would get.

So, during this election campaign, socialists should be campaigning for a switch of funds from the Common Agricultural Policy to job creation, improving the infrastructure and training unemployed people. It should be a campaign of outright opposition to the VAT regime, a better deal for pensioners, an end to the free market and a transition to socialist economic policies for planned growth and fairer distribution of wealth.

In other words, we want a Europe for the people, not for the rich farmers, multi-nationals and financiers, as it now is. Such a programme would win overwhelming support from workers and retired people and would strike a death blow at the Tory government and the Liberal Democrats. ❑

Nicked - or Scott-free?

Alan Simpson MP probes Tory double-dealing over the Disabled Bill and finds a collective guilt at the heart of government.

PARLIAMENT, last month, was engrossed in giving new meaning to the words "Scot-free". The row that brewed up revolved around the question of whether Nicholas Scott, the Minister of State for Social Security lied to the House of Commons about government involvement in scuppering the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. And if he did, should he be allowed to get away with a mere apology in the House for having given "an inaccurate answer"?

There are two levels on which this might be dealt with. The first is fairly superficial. "A minister who lies to the House should resign his office," says one side of the argument. The other counters with: "Nicholas Scott is a nice man who is well respected and his apology should be enough".

Now, I don't know whether Mr Scott ia a nice man, a very nice man or a very, very nice man. What I do know is that millions of disabled people in Britain were denied a legal entitlement to equal rights and equal treatment by some very dubious government tactics. The way that this was done was very simple. The Bill had all-party support and clearly had a strong chance of becoming law ... if a vote was reached.

When a government does not like Private Members' Bills, it has two choices. The honest one is to put a three-line whip on its own MPs which normally obliges them to vote against the Bill. The less honest way is to get some of your backbenchers to do the dirty work for you. This is what happened to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

A couple of Tory MPs tabled four miles of amendments. It didn't matter what they were about, the only purpose was to fill up the time before the debate had to end. In this way, the government can get off the hook without being seen to be the villain of the piece. It also cloaks members of its own side who want to support an idea in theory but not in practice. They can say, hands on hearts, that they would have voted for the Bill, if only a cluster of perfidious rebels hadn't sabotaged it. Reputations of "honourable members" remain intact; the law remains inert; nothing changes.

But in this instance, the plan fell apart. It amazed many Labour members that chunks of the amendments were moved by Lady Olga Maitland. She doesn't have a reputation for much beyond joined up writing, so when one member went to check the original copy, it came as no great surprise to find that she had simply put her name to amendments that had been prepared elsewhere.

The only surprise was to find that the preparations had been done for the government by civil servants working directly for the minister. This removed the mask of innocence that the government had feigned - and the minister only made matters worse by denying any knowledge of any involvement. So should he stay or should he go?

My own reaction is to say it makes no difference. Sacrificial offerings may help to deflect public anger, but they don't confront the key issues. Disabled people are still denied basic civil rights, and the government, rather than an individual, has to be held responsible.

This brings me to the more serious level of debate. The reasons behind the government's opposition were to be found in documents they had quietly placed in the House of Commons library the night before the debate. Their estimate of the Bill's implementation cost was £17 billion. "Too much, too much" was the rebels' cry. Since no one had had a chance to look at the figures, it was hard to conduct a serious debate about them.

If the government had wanted to do so, it would have submitted the figures while the Bill was under detailed scrutiny during its committee stage. That is where you can talk about specific changes, phasing of commitments, variations in grants and penalties which might be needed.

None of this was done. All the empty words about commitments to basic civil rights for disabled people were just that ... empty words. The coachloads of people who came to Parliament to lobby their MPs, the tens of thousands of others who wrote to us, rang us, visited our advice surgeries, were lied to.

At the end of the day, it was not within the opposition's power to deliver this Bill. It was never within the government's intention to do so. I would have had more respect for a government which at least had the courage to be open about the stand it was taking.

At the end of the day, however, it is a question of commitment as much as of cash. If we want water fit for everyone to drink, there is a cost for purifying it; if we want air fit to breathe, then effective pollution control will also cost money. Both could be seen as "burdens" on business. Both eat into profits. So, too, do health and safety regulations, but all of these are costs which link to judgements we make about "quality of life" factors of the society we live in.

There is a thin and arbitrary line which divides those of us who are (temporarily?) able bodied from those who are not. But there is a chasm that divides us in the respective rights and entitlements we each enjoy. It will not be bridged by empty words and parliamentary evasions. While the minister may keep his job and walk away from criticism "Scott-free", there will be millions of disabled people who simply know that they are not free to do the same. ❑

Trade union

Over 2,500 Post Office workers went on strike on Merseyside in April in defence of a colleague who had been victimised by a supervisor.

The worker had been bullied and victimised by his boss, who then put him on suspension for attempted assault, an entirely bogus claim. Union of Communications Workers members immediately walked out and the action rapidly spread to the next shift. The bosses refused to talk to union representatives, saying that the stoppage was illegal and that the workers should return to work immediately.

The following day, Royal Mail went to the High Court and obtained an injunction declaring the strike illegal. However, that evening saw an angry mass meeting which decided to carry on with the fight.

By this time, the UCW leadership was put in the same unenviable position as so many union leaders over the years since the government began the process of eliminating workers' right to take strike action. General Secretary Alan Johnson addressed the members and told them to go back to work - the union was facing action in the courts and the potential loss of some £3 million. But the members were indignant, angry and in no mood to return.

Over 2,500 post office workers were on strike by this time, bringing the Merseyside area to a standstill. During the following weekend, prolonged negotiations led the members of the strike committee - who saw that the future of the union was on the line - to recommend a return to work.

The day before the return, the suspension of the Post Office worker in question was lifted. However, a disciplinary proceeding against him is being pursued.

It's taken 14 months of siege and harassment and attacks by police in riot gear - but British Coal has finally managed to expel the women who were occupying Parkside, the last deep mine in Lancashire.

The management is now expected to fill in the pit shafts, putting the mine beyond salvage, and pull down the surface buildings.

The St Helens colliery once employed 1,000 men in a recession-hit area but it was closed at the beginning of 1993, at which point the Women Against Pit Closures organised the occupation.

On May 18th, 30 bailiffs and 200 police officers broke into the camp, arresting two people and virtually ensuring the death of mining in Lancashire.

Shirley Marsland, one of the women at the pit, said that the police operation was carried out with military precision.

"A passing motorist told us that the road had been closed at 8 am this morning."

Billy Pye, an executive member of the National Union of Mineworkers and Parkside's last branch secretary, said that the numbers of police used at Parkside were the same as those used to protect scabs working at the pit during the 1984/85 strike.

Earlier this year, one of the biggest management organisations in the printing industry was forced back to the negotiating table by the Graphical, Paper and Media Union and then had to make concessions on pay and conditions. However, there are still three firms in dispute as a result of the battle between the British Printing Industries Federation and the GPMU.

The whole saga began well over a year ago when the union put in a claim for more pay and better conditions. The BPIF abandoned talks in a huff but was forced to climb down when scores of its member firms came to individual deals with the union.

This left Arrowsmith's at Bristol, Revel and George in Manchester and Harvest Printers in Macclesfield still in dispute with medieval bosses engaging in attempts to crush the union membership. However, GPMU general secretary Tony Dubbins has repeatedly made clear his determination to ensure that all three disputes conclude in a manner satisfactory to his members.

In the cases of Arrowsmith's and Revel and George, Tory anti-union laws have proved particularly helpful to the managements. At the Manchester firm, the courts demanded that a union official be present on the picket-line at all times. Of course, if this were applied across the whole of the Labour movement it would ensure the virtual end of picket-lines.

At Arrowsmith's, an injunction was granted to the firm's owner - one Victoria Arrowsmith-Brown - which effectively meant that any pickets who even raised their voice against the imported scab labour ran the risk of arrest and prosecution.

As the government pushes ahead with its plans to privatise the Post Office, a recent opinion poll has shown the measure to be overwhelmingly unpopular with the public.

More than 68 per cent of people surveyed by MORI opposed the sell-off and large majorities believed that postal charges would go up and service down. Eighty-one per cent of people believed the Post Office was better off in the public sector, 79 per cent of people saying they "felt strongly" or "cared" about the issue. The National Commincations Union and the Union of Communications Workers welcomed the poll's findings, which show an increase in support for a publicly-owned Post Office on last year.

Merseyside firefighters are continuing their dispute over contracts, with the local FBU brigade committee rejecting the fire authority's latest offer.

Ten thousand firefighters took to the streets in April to protest against the threatened dismissal of colleagues who are standing firm against new job contracts which flout previous negotiated agreements.

While the authority has withdrawn the contracts for existing staff, it is insisting on keeping them for new recruits. The brigade committee has decided to push for strike action against this. National officials called off an earlier strike ballot when management withdrew the contracts for existing staff.

The Durham Miners Gala will go ahead on July 9th this year - we hope that all *Briefing* readers will make their best effort to attend.

Arguably the greatest working-class event in the calendar, the gala was under threat after the pits massacre - the last two pits in the whole of the north-east, Wearmouth and Ellington, had closed recently.

But the leaders of the Durham area of the National Union of Mineworkers sent out appeals to all the area's TUC-affiliated unions for support. The response was magnificent and so the 110th gala will go ahead.

● The TUC has agreed that the 1995 Congress will take place in the Brighton Centre from September 11th to 15th.

news

Roger Lyons was defeated on three key issues at the conference of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union in May. A resolution was passed condemning last year's Labour Party conference delegation for abstaining in the vote on OMOV and calling for MSF to campaign to restore trade union voting for parliamentary candidates.

A motion from the union's National Executive Committee, welcoming a document called *MSF into the 21st Century*, was defeated. This document included a reasonable analysis of current trends and of the reasons why people joined unions. However, it postulated changes in the union which, if implemented, would have created a union of passive members organised by professional full-timers, taking the emphasis away from collective bargaining. A resolution calling for a national enquiry into irregularities in recent NEC elections was also passed against the wishes of the executive, complete with threats of legal action.

On policy issues, there were some defeats for the left. The position opposing anti-union legislation was weakened, as was the union's commitment to public ownership. While the left candidate for the presidency was elected, the vice-presidency was won by the right. On the votes for these positions and for many key resolutions, the conference was almost equally divided between left and right.

The most successful fringe meeting of the conference was organised by Network 90 and Unity Left, with speakers Dennis Skinner and Dawn Primarolo. Over the next year, with the right clearly organising more strongly than ever, the two left groups must continue to work together.

Britain's biggest union, Unison, is to have no say in Labour Party policy or in the fight for the leadership.

Unison leaders can urge or comment, but following the union's first, 2,000-delegate national conference last week, they have no control over the 687,000 Unison members who pay into the Affiliated Political Fund (APF).

Furious and divisive rows rumbled on all week about whether conference could instruct the APF to follow certain policy courses.

In particular, delegates from the NUPE branches were keen to maintain clear political avenues for Unison in the Labour Party.

In the end conference backed the Standing Orders Committees who said that under Unison rules, no motion which seeks to instruct the Labour Party can be debated.

The move means that Unison will have no say in the fight for the leadership. General secretary Alan Jinkinson strenuously avoided any comment, claiming it "unsuitable".

The root of the problem is the different political cultures of the three unions which merged in July 1993 to form the 1.4-million strong Unison - NUPE, COHSE and NALGO.

NUPE and COHSE were both affiliated to the Labour Party and therefore had a say in policy. NALGO has always closely guarded its political independence. Under the instrument of amalgamation, the new hybrid cannot affiliate except by a rule change.

With the union's APF now completely independent of the union's conference, cynical delegates were muttering of nightmare scenarios with the APF putting forward motions to Labour Party conference which went directly against Unison policy. Unison will probably conduct a postal ballot for the Labour leadership of APF payers at an estimated cost of £450,000.

The NUCPS annual conference at Blackpool last month took a welcome step towards uniting civil service trade unions by endorsing a proposed merger with the Inland Revenue Staff Federation. (The IRSF conference has also welcomed the proposal, subject to discussion at a special conference).

Apart from this, the NUCPS conference was generally a dull affair. Much of the first two days were spent discussing rule amendments, disciplinary procedures and future conference arrangements, including the vexed question of charging delegates for tea and coffee.

Little of this will have any effect on members. On pay and privatisation, motions calling for specific campaigns were rejected in favour of alternatives instructing the National Executive Council to do something in general but nothing in particular.

On a more positive note, the factional feuding which bedevils conference was suspended on two occasions. At a fringe meeting, leading lights from the three main factions plus an independent NEC member took part in a wide-ranging discussion on ways of opposing privatisation.

In the conference hall a motion on racism prompted an excellent debate. Delegates highlighted the problems faced by people in areas such as Tower Hamlets and there was a welcome tone of unity. Conference also responded with acclaim to an address by Vusi Nulapo of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union of South Africa.

The need for a vigorous campaign to defend jobs was amply demonstrated by the news that the Department of Transport is to make 20 per cent "efficiency savings" (i.e cuts) over the next two years.

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A date with destiny

Steve Faulkner recently returned from South Africa where he spent three weeks as a volunteer working with COSATU in the ANC election campaign. He travelled with Jane Barrett, former national organiser of the South African TGWU, who was returning to vote and to campaign for an ANC victory. Here is an edited version of the diary of his experiences.

Friday April 15th

We arrive in Joburg around 5.30 pm and are met by Jane's sister who is fired up about the elections in a way that we have not seen in her before. The ex-liberal Democratic Party has a billboard proudly proclaiming, "No Killers, Kidnappers, Torturers, Or Corrupt Politicians". Also notice a classic National Party poster en route, "Say NO to the ANC, Say NO to Communism".

Supper with Maggie who is putting us up for the duration. She works for COSATU and so we catch up on all the inside news of comrades and friends.

Saturday 16th

Attend an ANC concert at Zoo Lake in Parktown. Hundreds of supporters gather in the sunshine on the lawns. Tokyo Sexwale has addressed the crowd, and seems to be growing in popularity all the time. He has that Bennist ability to explain difficult issues in simple but not simplistic terms, and isn't above a little self-mockery and the use of a joke to underline a point.

Peace Monitors mark every corner of the grounds set aside for the event, and small groups of first time voters collect around the three voter education tables.

Sunday 17th

A late breakfast at Maggie's, with a load of Janc's old mates. Plough through the newspapers and start cutting out the political adverts and the stories that I am certain will not be reported at home.

Supper at Jay and Lucie's. Not seen either of them looking so energised for a long time. As the ex-general secretary of COSATU Jay Naidoo has been a high profile campaigner, and is high as a kite, having spent the weekend campaigning in the Indian communities of Durban. In Chatsworth, where there is the largest Indian community outside of India, the meetings have been very large, and peppered with lots of questions about the intentions of an ANC government.

Monday 18th

We head straight for COSATU head office in the morning. The election campaign department is operating full swing. Jessie Maluleka, who has been seconded from the National Union of Mineworkers to head the department, welcomes us warmly and tells us of the options for helping out.

Jane is persuaded to help out at the ANC headquarters organising transport for voters. I opt for working with the COSATU comrades in the Pretoria campaign office. We agree to set to work the following day.

Jane found Susan Shabangu, previously an official of the TGWU and now on the national parliamentary list as a COSATU released candidate, at the COSATU office.

Susan, a young widow and parent of three, wonders what she will do about her kids once elected. The candidates are presently debating whether they should accept being housed in the parliamentary village in Cape Town, and risk their children becoming an isolated elite. It's all a bit complicated because Parliament only sits for six months of the year, so permanent relocation is not on. Besides, the ANC is busy trying to develop a formula for accountability to the electorate (in the absence of constituencies) which may mean MPs being allocated responsiblity for particular areas.

Tuesday 19th

Arrive in Pretoria (some 50 minutes drive from Joburg) to be met by the COSATU campaign team made up of two released volunteers from each affiliate, and coordinated by three comrades who have been seconded to the election campaign. They have an office in the same building as the ANC, so co-ordination is good and relations excellent.

We talk about what I might do to help, and decide on helping to draft a programme of activities for the next few days. I also agree readily to go out on the campaign trail.

In the afternoon I attend my first voter education forum. A marvellous event organised in a local community hall. Hundreds of people turn up, and watch intently as the COSATU team go through their paces, and with 10 volunteers from the audience explain the practicalities of the voting procedure. There is even a mock secret ballot, and everyone waits anxiously for the vote to be announced by the presiding officer (myself!) who announces that the ANC has received eight votes, the National Party one and there is one spoilt paper. Cheers and laughter all round.

When we get back to the office, there are six more requests for voter education forums in workplaces, most of which are located in neighbouring Bophutatswana (Bop for short), the homeland that collapsed under popular pressure from below and turned the puppet Mangope out of office just six weeks before the election.

Wednesday 20th

After our team meeting, we all go off to do different activities. Some are running voter education sessions, some are on a "knock and drop" mission (distributing posters and leaflets through township letter-boxes) and I go off with a couple of comrades to visit four factories in Bop to advertise a workers' forum taking place on

Friday.

Throughout the election campaign, there have been hundreds of workers' and people's forums. They are geared towards providing an opportunity for local people to ask how an ANC government will deliver its promises.

It's so refreshing to hear candidates answering questions directly and honestly. If they don't know an answer they say so, and people accept that. If they disagree with the questioner, or with ANC policy, they say so, but in an entirely friendly and constructive manner. Driving back to Joburg much later that night I decide this is the nearest I have ever been to real workers' democracy.

Inkatha have agreed to enter into the elections. It is a real victory for the democratic process, and we all wonder if it is going to be possible for the ANC to campaign openly in Kwa Zulu. Buthelezi is interviewed on TV and says that he is a peaceful man, and that he is happy to subject himself to an election on his record, but it's clear that his base is breaking up.

Thursday 21st

While out with the campaign team collecting a PA system, we call into a brickworks where there is to be a voter education rally later in the afternoon. The factory is a miserable place, built over 60 years ago, and containing two hostels for women and men workers drawn from distant rural seats. The conditions are appalling. There is nowhere to cook. There is no electricity or hot water in the bath-house, and workers are crammed into sleeping quarters based on the shelf-bed system.

The workers are excited to see us, and explain that they have been campaigning for voter education for over two months, and the boss conceded the day before when the workers' representative said that he had made contact with the COSATU office.

The brickworks is in a white right-wing location, and the workers are concerned that they might be threatened by AWB thugs. We decide to investigate the possibility of a mobile voting station calling in at the brickworks, and make arrangements for the meeting that evening.

I manage to speak to one of the women workers at the brickworks. She tells me she has four children at home, some 300 kilometres away, and that she sees them for one and a half days per quarter. I show her a picture of my daughter, and we share a sad joke about how quickly children grow up when you are away from them.

Friday 22nd

Myself and the COSATU comrades gather for the last of the workers' forums before the election campaign period ends. At the end of the meeting, there is a mad scramble for badges and posters. It's hard to believe that all political activity and trade unionism were effectively probibited in Bop just six weeks ago.

Jane has spent the day phoning every TGWU office and a range of bus depots and taxi organisations. It had been hoped that government finance would be released to pay for non-partisan transport - particularly for the rural areas where voting stations are sometimes eight miles from where people live.

There is no spare cash for bus or taxi fares. However, the negotiations of the week have come to nought. So the phone around is to determine what has already been negotiated free of charge for voters by workers on the ground.

The results confirm the hunch Jane has all along - that in most areas transport shop stewards and ANC activists have already secured agreements. Many bus and taxi owners have an ordered arrangement for the provision of transport rather than risk the vehicles and drivers being hijacked on the way to the voting stations!

Saturday 23rd

Have Saturday morning off to catch up on all the newspapers. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) comes in for particularly hard criticism. It's hardly surprising. It has employed nearly a third of a million people, has been solely responsible for organising both fixed and mobile voting stations, and for training all the officers for the monitoring and counting of the vote.

In the afternoon we attend the last of Mandela's rallies, in Soweto. It's a

Continued on page 20



INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

A date with destiny (continued)

glorious day and the FNB Stadium is packed. The format of the rally is one worth copying elsewhere. Short speeches from just a couple of ANC leaders, music, and then Mandela walks into and around the stadium waving to the crowds. He makes a short punchy speech during which he severely chastises those people who brought guns to the rally and fired them off in a sort of informal salute when he entered the stadium.

Sunday 24th

Jane goes off to the ANC headquarters for a final meeting on the transport crisis, and is there for 10 minutes when the Joburg bomb planted by the right wing goes off just a block away. She is among only a handful of people in the building, and can see the chaos down in the street, including her own bomb-damaged car. Maggie and I have heard the blast four kilometres away and are relieved when Jane telephones to say she is safe. Nine people dead and a hundred more injured. It is miraculous that more were not killed, as downtown Joburg is heavily populated. One of the dead is Susan Keane, an ANC candidate for the PWV parliament.

If Jane had been 10 minutes later, she would have been caught in the blast outside. I shudder at the thought.

In the afternoon we travel to the last of the Pretoria-organised people's forums in a rural Bop township called Motlalong. Motlalong is the product of forced removals of blacks from the town of Brits in old South Africa some eight years ago. The comrades have erected a marquee and there is a stage with banners and posters and an enthusiastic audience of around six hundred.

There are short speeches, a voter education session, solidarity messages and then a question and answer session of the two candidates who have attended, including Susan Shabangu. George Nkadimeng, the vice-president of COSATU, makes a rousing speech about the expectations of the working class, and about the need for a strong and militant labour movement.

Tuesday 26th

After a full day's campaigning, Jane and I are persuaded to go to the flag-raising ceremony at midnight, where the old flag is to be lowered and the new flag raised. We are glad we did. Far from being the stodgy affair I imagined, there was a carnival atmosphere, and a jazz band! Everyone joined in the dancing. Even Jon Snow of Channel Four fame.

Wednesday 27th

Neither of us has official duties, so we spend the day voting station hopping. We start off at the Kensington recreation hall where we get our first taste of "the queue", which is to become symbolic of a nation's catharsis. It is five deep, and stretches round three long streets in a huge loop.

Anne, Jane's sister, spends six and a half hours in this particular queue before casting her vote. On the drive to Yeoville we pass a bomb disposal crew blowing up a parked car in a controlled operation, but even this does not disturb the massive queue which has formed at a nearby voting station.

We make our way to Alexander township north of Johannesburg. Alex is small but very overcrowded. There are 13 voting stations. We head for the one at Freedom Square - a large dusty patch of open ground. The voters stretch from up the road and curl around the outskirts of the square.

Some have been waiting for eight hours already and are at least two hours off getting to vote. We strike up a long conversation with a domestic worker who tells us how it would have been impossible for her madam to stop her voting today. I can't resist asking her who she is going to vote for, and she smiles and says the "the old man in the white hat" (as opposed to the old man without a hat ... the bald De Klerk.)

People are taking the secrecy of the ballot very seriously and, unusually, we did not see a single person wearing a political tee-shirt or emblem of any description.

On our way home, we call at the local ANC branch information table. Jane bumps into a lawyer friend, Crystal. She is of Greek extraction and her parents run a general store in Wolmarandstad in the western Transvaal. It's the town where the right-wing council has ordered the erection of two look-out towers and a boom at the entrance of the township, to be operated during the vote. Two weeks ago water and other services to the township were cut off as punishment for the people's support of the elections. In protest the entire township population has turned out to vote at the "white" town's voting station. Crystal's parents are solidly ANC. They have suffered considerable ostracism from the white community - they've been reporting local farmers who have refused to allow voter education to take place amongst their labourers.

Friday 29th

The voting has been extended in some areas, and in others it is emerging that the IEC has made some terrible logistical errors, not all of their own making. The legacy of apartheid has a lot to answer for. It has emerged that the distribution of voting papers and the siting of voting stations were all based on a discredited census that was carried out several years ago.

There is a feverish discussion on the radio and in the press about events in Kwa Zulu/Natal. Accusations and counter accusations of ballot-rigging and intimidation are rife. Western observers realise for the first time just how difficult it is to monitor elections in areas where apartheid has deliberately under-developed the infrastructure and basic communications facilities.

Saturday 30th

Watched election TV for a couple of hours. The SABC team looked wrecked and openly admit to being thoroughly pissed off with the IEC for their slow counting and reporting procedures. What is very clear is that the ANC has done remarkably well in most parts, but that it has suffered a set-back in the Western Cape, due in large part to a sizeable proportion of the Coloured vote going to the National Party.

In other parts, where there are sizeable Coloured communities, the ANC does well, indicating the long-term impact of the Coloured Labour Preference policy that divided African and Coloured workers in the Western Cape for many years. This represents a big challenge for COSATU.



Sunday 1st May

In the morning we join Maggie and around 50 other people at a commemoration in West Park Cemetery for her partner, David Webster, who was murdered by the regime five years ago. It is a sharp reminder that the price of freedom was a very high one indeed for many comrades.

Later that same day we drive to Jane's home town Pietermaritzburg in Natal, where we spend the next three days.

Monday 2nd

The news this morning continues to centre on the chaos of the vote counting in Durban where a huge dispute had arisen between Inkatha and the ANC. All sorts of accusations were being made. Ballot boxes have been found which when opened had all the voting papers neatly stacked inside. Similarly, some boxes arrived without the proper seals and there are widespread reports of pirate voting stations staffed by Inkatha where local well known Inkatha warlords stood outside "greeting" all those who came to vote.

There is also an incredible report of an investigation into the possible sabotage of the distribution of election equipment for the voting stations by officers seconded to the IEC from the Home Affairs Ministry.

I hear Neil Kinnock on the radio. He is speaking in his capacity as an observer from the European Union, I think. He is derisive about elements of the election process and says little which is positive. I can't help but wonder if he had thought about the incredible role that COSATU, and James Mahlatsi, the President of the National Union of Mineworkers, have played.

Mandela himself had made no apologies for the alliance with COSATU. In late 1993 he addressed the special COSATU congress and had stated emphatically that, should a future ANC government betray the working class, he hoped that COSATU would do to an ANC government what it had helped to do to the National Party government and campaign for its dismissal.

Mandela's speech is characteristically modest. He stresses that the victory was a collective effort.

Mandela finishes his speech by talking about the need for reconciliation, and the difficulties that lie ahead. The celebration breaks into song and dance, and the Mandela boogie is born!

Tuesday 3rd

Took a drive to Durban, and met with a group of TGWU activists. We talk about the difficulties of campaigning for the ANC in large parts of Natal. About how the police refused to provide any real protection, and how Buthelezi had benefitted by coming into the elections at the last moment.

Meanwhile, Buthelezi had been on television saying that, though he was a tolerant man, he could understand the frustration experienced by many of his supporters, and how this might result in heightened tension.

This was clearly a signal to his own supporters that, if necessary, they might have to resort to an escalation of violence to ensure that Kwa Zulu stayed firmly in the hands of Inkatha.

Thursday 5th

Back in Joburg. Today is reserved for farewells. A good time to reflect on some of the lessons for other countries and other movements.

A number of issues have really struck home. First, is the need for a political trade union movement. To break down the artificial barriers that exist between work, community and political activity. And as a result to make politics accessible.

Second, the process initiated by COSATU on how principled alliances can be built and policies agreed which empower workers. A lesson which workers throughout the world would be wise to study.

The RDP first surfaced in COSATU. It may not be a perfect document, but it does serve to emphasis the MINIMUM that the working class is prepared to accept. It has also been a useful tool for moving a whole range of debates on the economy, democratic accountability, anti-corruption measures, workers' rights, etc, on to the offensive.

Third, how the successful mobilisation of local people can be achieved even in a situation of extreme intimidation and insecurity in order to maximise the possibilities for a peaceful democratic transition.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING



Riot police prevent workers from entering Medan's industrial area as violent strikes shut down the city.

Force majeur

Workers in Medan, Binjai, and Pematang Siantar, the industrial belt of north Sumatra in the western part of Indonesia held a week of strike actions in April. **Liem Soei Liong** reports.

THE INDONESIAN political system is commonly known as authoritarian and oppressive. President Suharto, a former general, has been in power since 1965 and is now one of the longest surviving dictators on the globe. He has used heavy-handed methods to keep political stability in the country.

In the last two decades, Indonesia has experienced an economic transformation. From a supplier of natural resources (oil, gas and tropical wood) Indonesia emerged as a newly industrial nation, manufacturing consumer goods like sports shoes, textiles and electronic appliances.

Its two assets, cheap labour and political stability, are proudly presented by the Indonesian authorities and are eagerly embraced by foreign investors. Not surprisingly, most of the investments originate from the Asia-Pacific countries like Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The industrial action in Medan on April 14th and 15th has really shaken the foundation of the two assets mentioned above. Starting as a demand for better wages, exploded out of control and two days of rioting ended in destruction and looting of shops and burning of vehicles. More than 100 people were arrested, among them leaders of the demonstration. It is expected that some of the arrested will be put on trial.

Tensions in Medan, the largest city in Sumatra with an industrial area of around 8,000 factories, had been building for months. During an earlier strike in March, a worker named Rusli was found dead in the river. His suspicious death was never properly explained by the authorities. Other burning issues for Medan workers are of national import: the total absence of freedom of association and the refusal of many companies to pay the meagre minimum wages.

Freedom of association has indeed become a hugh issue. Two years ago the SBSI (the Indonesian Workers' Welfare Union) was set up and it is this union together with some local non-government organisations that organised the initial demonstration on April 14th. The Indonesian government sponsors the SPSI, largely seen by the workers as an extension of the company management. In reality the SBSI has flourished and enjoys support from many workers. In many cities SBSI branches and chapters have been set up. The other burning issue is poverty wages. In January, the government increased the daily minimum wage by 27 per cent to around 3100 rupiahs (about £1), by far the lowest in south-east Asia.

On April 14th, a minimum wage demand of 7,000 rupiahs was presented which resulted in practically a general strike for the Medan region. An estimated 40,000 workers poured into the streets of Medan and went to the governor's office. The demonstrators were received by some minor officials and this created anger and frustration in the crowd. In the following days, shops and factories were attacked.

An Indonesian Chinese factory owner, Kwok Yoe Lip, was beaten to death by the crowd who dragged him out of the car. The SBSI issued a statement that they were responsible for the demonstration but not for the rioting and looting. As is often the case third parties, youth gangs organised by the military intelligence, were at the forefront of provoking violence which incriminated the leaders of the demonstration.

Military intervention in labour disputes in Indonesia follows a general pattern. Strike leaders are dragged to the military command, man-handled and ultimately have to sign their own job resignation. In fact, containing labour unrest has become a source of income for the military. Company bosses have to give large monthly sums of money to keep labour unrest at a distance.

But increasingly, as the Medan experience has shown, this scheme is collapsing. If the entire manufacturing workforce of 50,000 leaves the gates to demonstrate, even the military cannot control the situation anymore. One month after the Medan riots, the military authorities in Jakarta announced that the powerful security body, Bakorstanas, would increase its involvement in social conflicts from their outset to prevent them from spinning out of control.

Despite this tough language, the image of political stability in Indonesia is just not the same any more. ❑

Learning to recreate the left

Andrew Coates examines the rapid and bewildering changes taking place on the French left and finds that there is cause for alarm.

IS FRANCE ON the brink of revolutionary change? From Garges-les-Gonesse to Toulon, the suburbs are the scene of nearly daily rioting. Successive waves of protest have forced the right-wing Balladur government to withdraw legislation aiding private education, weakening the minimum wage, and social protection. There is a searing atmosphere of dissatisfaction in the streets. On May 1st, a rally of around 25,000 people assembled at the call of the communist trade union federation, the CGT.

Prominent among the participants were supporters of AC (Agir Ensemble Contre le Chomage - Act Together Against Unemployment). Right-to-work marches have already started across the country.

And yet ... the left is definitely not in a position to present a credible alternative. On all sides, French politics show advanced signs of disintegration. Prime Minister Edouard Balladur and his ally Jacques Chirac have openly fallen out over economic strategy.

The former is keeping to his free-market liberalism, the latter is demanding (undefined) "action" against unemployment.

This division has not helped the left. The Communists' appeal for a "pact" of unity has had few takers. Jean Pierre Chevenement's Mouvement des Cityones has isolated itself by putting Pierre-Marie Gallois, one of the leading military strategists of nuclear warfare, on its list for the European elections.

Right in the mainstream of politics, businessman and owner of Marseille's football club, Bernard Tapie, is making a bid for the position of a French Berlusconi. His "radical-populism" already receives the backing of around 10 per cent in opinion polls. The left-of-centre journalist, Laurent Joffrin, writing in *Nouvel Observateur*, described this "left" as follows: "A 'left' for which effectiveness counts more than justice, victory more than conviction, and force is better than rightness". Against this, the socialist leader, Michel Rocard, interviewed in the Parti Socialiste weekly, *Vendredi*, lamely advocated a "Europe which is the guarantor of social protection".

The right is very definitely not on the retreat. Indeed, the lack of unity among the mainstream RPR and UDF, specifically a glaring division over Europe and Maastricht, has aided the "national" forces.

On May Day 7,000 fascists assembled in Palais Royal to hear the extreme-right demagogue, Le Pen, denounce "the soft dictatorship of the republic, the republic of filth and rottenness". Uninterrupted by counter-demonstrators, nazis paraded in medieval armour around the statue of Joan of Arc.

Some people have tended to dismiss Le Pen since his party saw its vote reduced to under 10 per cent in the local election. But the anti-fascist journal, *Ras Le Front*, argues that the FN is actually about as strong as the Italian post-fascists and can confidently expect to win a number of deputies in the European poll.

As in Britain, French politics have been marked by the decline of mass parties. The French left used to have a street-by-street structure in many towns, with people responsible for leafleting, keeping contact, etc, exactly like the Labour Party. Now only the Communists retain anything of this capacity. Direct-mailing of supporters, a reliance on the media rather than face-to-face encounters and a much smaller formal membership are the norm. The ecologists have a mere 4,000 membership - for a group that has numerous local councillors this means a high ratio of elected people to activists, with all the problems this implies.

The Socialist Party is also in this position. Without the union involvement of the Labour Party this makes them a semi-professional, and very middle-class, body of political specialists.

The central preoccupation of the French left is unemployment. The 35-hour week has assumed almost mythic significance for everybody from the Socialists to the League Communiste Revolutionnaire.

The 35-hour week will doubtless be taken up by sections of the British left, particularly in view of the coming Socialist Campaign Group conference on full employment.

But as the leadership of the Mouvement des Cityones has observed, it is all very well sharing out work, but the real basis of full employment has to be increased production. Secondly, although the 35-hour week is important it hardly deals with the central mechanisms which are "liberalising" the economy - from the EU to the right-wing governments in power in most of Europe.

The French right is quite prepared to accept the demand (the Senate actually nearly passed a law on this, and nobody is against it "in principle") though the real issue for them is that it should not be imposed, and workers have to agree to a loss of salary.

Whatever the flaws in the campaign for 35 hours it has to be said that it seems to have really helped establish a grass roots movement amongst the unemployed. There are about 200 local "collectives" working for a forthcoming march against unemployment. They state that over 2,500 people are organised in the campaign in the departments of La Bretagne alone. Each locality has its own "popular front" of activists (from the left of the socialists to the ecologists and various Trotskyist groups). They have been able to unite around the issue.

While we must conclude that France is not on the brink of a revolution, it is still possible that the left will be able to regroup, and build mass activity. ❑

The real battle lies ahead

Maria Black
El Salvador Solidarity Campaign

WITH THE second round of the Salvadorean elections, an important stage of the peace process has come to an end. The results of both rounds show that the FMLN-CD Coalition has become the second political force in the country. But ARENA, the right-wing party in government, has managed to hold on to political power at the national and local level thanks to massive and systematic technical fraud.

On March 20th, the Salvadorean people voted to elect the president, 84 deputies to the National Assembly, 262 mayors, and 20 deputies to the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN). Although ARENA failed to gain an absolute majority in the first round of the presidential elections, it gained the presidency in the second round with 68 per cent of the vote, while the FMLN-CD coalition gained 24 per cent and subsequently 31 per cent, increasing its share of the poll by 32,952 votes in the second round.

In the National Assembly, ARENA gained 39 deputies against 22 for the FMLN-CD coalition. In alliance with the Party of National Conciliation (PCN), and after some massaging of the final results, ARENA has ended up controlling a majority of the assembly, though it faces a far more formidable opposition than ever before. From now on, ARENA will not be able to govern without taking into account the FMLN and the people it represents. The elections have shown that there is substantial support for democratic change.

However, the elections have also demonstrated ARENA's ability to organise ever more sophisticated forms of electoral fraud, as well as its creativity in presenting different images of itself to different sectors of the electorate.

Although estimates vary, it is generally agreed that a considerable proportion of those who did not vote were in fact prevented from exercising their democratic rights. Many did not receive their electoral ID cards because of "lack of time" or because their documents had "disappeared" in the registration process; others, who had all the necessary documents, did not appear in the electoral register, which had hardly been revised since 1989.

These "technical" problems were particularly acute in the ex-conflictive zones where the FMLN had its strongest base of support. Thus, many of the people who had suffered and fought most to bring about democracy in El Salvador ended up being excluded from the democratic process. Technical fraud had particularly dire consequences at the municipal level where, contrary to all predictions, the opposition managed to win only 14 municipalities, often losing by a handful of votes.

None of these problems and "irregularities" were put right for the second round. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), closely controlled by ARENA, was unwilling to take any action. The opposition challenged many aspects of the fraud and some of the results, but was taken by surprise and was hampered by fears that too strong a denounciation might deter its supporters from participating in the second round.

The United Nations Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) received many complaints and reports of serious irregularities from its own and other international observers, but declared the elections "acceptable", probably motivated by a desire to bring to a successful conclusion at least one peace process in a year of diplomatic disasters.

The Salvadorean opposition has made a good start in challenging ARENA's monopoly of power but the political battle for genuine democracy is only just beginning.

Betty Hamilton: an obituary

Carol Coulter and Harry Vince

BETTY HAMILTON, who died in London at the age of 90 on May 2nd, was a revolutionary in every sense of the word. Her associates ranged from innovators in the arts like Elizabeth Duncan and composer Michael Tippett, through anti-colonial leaders like Kwame Nkrumah to Natalya Trotsky.

She was born Berthe Dutoit in 1904 into a socialist family in French speaking Switzerland. She became involved in Communist politics where she formed a relationship with a comrade, the father of her son Jacques. She had her son in Paris in 1927, alone, a courageous act even for the most emancipated woman in those days.

Disillusioned with the French Communist Party, she married Willie Hamilton and came to England. Here, she joined the Labour Party in Britain while also seeking out Trotskyists. She joined the group led by C L R James, but she soon left it over its attitude to Labour and joined the Militant Group.

During this time she and Willie sheltered dozens of refugees, socialist activists and Jews fleeing fascism in Europe. When war broke out Willie joined the RAF and she moved north with her two young children and worked in a munitions factory in Grantham. Although opposed by the trade union leadership, she unionised several hundred women and won them equal pay with the men. She was also secretary of the Constituency Labour Party there.

She carried on her political work as a Trotskyist and member of the Workers' International League, travelling all over the north on trains or hitch-hiking, often returning in the early hours of the morning to snatch a few hours sleep before getting up to put in another day's work in the factory.

In 1943, the various Trotskyist groups in Britain merged into the Revolutionary Communist Party, of which she was one of the leaders, along with Ted Grant and the late Gerry Healy.

Later, she became joint secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International, one half of the Fourth International and she was a founding member of the Socialist Labour League in 1958. She broke with Gerry Healy when he led the SLL away from the Labour Party in 1964, though she remained in the SLL/WRP until 1971.

She had a special interest in the anti-imperialist movement. With Fenner Brockway she was joint secretary of the Congress of Peoples against Imperialism, and she was also a member of the Anti-Partition League, which opposed the partition of Ireland.

In recent years she was housebound, which did nothing to reduce her close attention to international and domestic politics, but intensified her love of reading. It is a sign of her adventurous, lively mind and courageous spirit that most of her friends at the time of her death were of the same generation as her grandchildren. We will all miss her.

Very fair

Periscope was amazed to hear of the rather anti-democratic antics of **Labour's NEC panel**, which interviews potential by-election candidates.

Of 11 nominees for the Bradford South vacancy, caused by the untimely death of **Bob Cryer**, the panel knocked off all those with any kind of local connection apart from the man they wanted to win, the leader of Bradford council, **Gerry Sutcliffe**.

Sutcliffe was put on the shortlist with three candidates without any sort of local basis of support, which under OMOV meant that, regardless of their competence, none had any chance of winning.

Unsurprisingly, Sutcliffe won with 120 votes while his three rivals polled less than 10 votes each. Those dumped by the NEC included Bob Cryer's son, who had secured two of the six ward nominations (Sutcliffe had the support of only one ward).

Wintour lies!

Patrick Wintour's *Guardian* reports on the Labour leadership battle have been little more than despatches from the Blair camp (of which Wintour is a long-standing member) but his May 16th article claiming that "some Campaign Group members have gone so far as to argue that they would like to see victory for **Blair** [because it] would bring the unions and left back together again in a strong alliance" was pure mischief-making.

For the record, a well-attended Socialist Campaign Group meeting held on May 18th discussed in detail the options for the left in the coming leadership conference but postponed any final decision pending further consultation. All were appalled at the attempt by the media and the right wing to bounce us into a quick contest.

Not one of the 20 MPs who attended the meeting expressed anything other than horror at the prospect of a Blair victory.

Wintour followed his usual practice of printing any old gossip emanating from **Peter Mandelson** and the Labour right as gospel. He did not even bother to check the story with any of the officers of the Socialist Campaign Group.

It's long past time that the SCG MPs exerted some pressure on the *Guardian* to report their activities and views accurately. In this case, it is obvious that the Blair camp hoped to muddy the waters, blur the dividing lines between left and right, and create the impression that the "hard left" was as opportunistic and dishonest as the rest of the Party.

Hanna sacked

The new Labour administration in **Tower Hamlets** has made a promising start. It sacked **Vincent Hanna** from the £100,000 plus PR consultancy awarded him by the defeated Lib Dems.

Among Hanna's brilliant ideas for improving Tower Hamlets's image was to rechristen the borough "the East End". But should we be surprised at anything from the man who recently informed **Channel Four** viewers that "western capital is responsible for the fall of apartheid"?

Believe it or not

On BBC TV's **Question Time** someone looking exactly like **Gerald Kaufman** made the following remark: "I know why British and American capitalists want to trade with China. It's because there are no trade unions and no human rights there and the workers can be sweated to the bone for profits."

Cole for the dole

John Cole in the *New Statesman* came up with some rather bizarre and unpleasant arguments for **Tony Blair**, who enjoys, Cole says, "the ethnic advantage ... of sounding like an Englishman."

Cole is also concerned that "the election of a leader would not be distorted by the continuing search for policies on the economy, taxation and the welfare state" - though he then goes on to admit that these are the questions which "will decide whether Labour wins the next election."

Bonkers

Those strange bods down at NASUWT have a very novel view of women's issues. They apparently refused to send a delegation to the **TUC women's conference** on the grounds that all delegates had to be women.

Forearmed

Armed detectives recently raided the home of Limerick Sinn Fein member, **John Earles**, and confiscated a copy of the *Downing Street Declaration*. Noting the irony, Sinn Fein activist **Richard Shapland** suggested: "Maybe they are also looking for clarification."

Kilroy was there (unfortunately)

Upset by remarks made by EC President **Jacques Delors**, ex-Labour MP **Robert-Kilroy-Silk** stresses his anti-racist credentials, "Like a lot of other anti-federalists - Michael Foot, Bill Cash, Peter Shore, Norman Tebbit - I have fought against racism all my life." Being as "anti-racist as Norman Tebbit" could start a new trend - "as charismatic as John Major", "as caring as Virginia Bottomley", "as broad-minded as Mary Whitehouse" or "as socialist as Tony Blair".

In the wrong party?

The outstanding victory in a by-election in Quinton, Birmingham, reported in last month's *Briefing*, was repeated in the local elections. However this time the seat was won in spite of the Labour candidate's apathy rather than as a result of vigorous campaigning.

At the start of the election campaign the Labour candidate, **John Chapman**, and his agent went away on a three week holiday. When they came back they did very little work and seemed to expect the members to run the campaign on their own.

Chapman has very little in common with



the hard-working **Richard Bashford**, and it is a great shame that this carpet-bagger can keep his seat for four years, whereas Bashford must seek re-election next year, as his seat was won at a by-election, and is up for re-election in twelve months time. A Party member in Quinton recalls that at branch meetings Chapman squirms whenever re-nationalisation is discussed and proclaims that it will be impossible for a Labour government to take the utility companies back into public ownership. Chapman has a top job with **Mercury**. Our source concluded, "This chap is in the wrong party."

Undaunted by this, the branch members will be rallying around Bashford to give him the support which will be lacking from his colleague on the council.

Lord Dick?

It has now become clearer why class traitor and Major's friend, **Sir Dick Knowles** (call me Richard) resigned as Labour leader of **Birmingham City Council** last year. He has recently been elected Lord Mayor. During several years of betraying the working class, plain Dick became Sir Dick and now Lord Mayor Dick. How long before he's Lord Dick of Brum?

Coventry landslide

In Coventry, Labour recorded a landslide victory, winning 16 of the 18 seats. The Tories won the other two. Despite this, it seems to be the Tories who are setting the agenda. The Labour group has agreed to the Tories holding the office of Lord Mayor in alternate years to Labour even though they only have a small minority of councillors.

Labour is to be commended for cutting the **hospitality budget**, but, sadly, receptions for community groups will go, whereas a booze-up to "thank" the Police Federation will continue.

The budget for the council's international relations department will also be cut - a clear example of Labour caving in to criticism in Tory election broadcasts. The purpose of the department will no longer be to foster peace and reconciliation. Labour Lord Mayor **Nick Nolan** said: "It is time to cast a cold eye over our international relations. There will only be business trips which will broaden or enhance Coventry's training and manufacturing." In other words, cultural and friendship exchanges will be cut but subsidies from council tax payers to help businesses increase their profits from overseas sales will continue.

Labour Briefing AGM

Saturday, July 2nd 1994
Camden Irish Centre
10am to 5pm

Camden Square, London NW1 (Entrance from Murray Street)
Camden Town Tube or Camden Road North London Line
£5 waged / £2 unwaged (free for outside London)

10am-1pm World Briefing: Learning the lessons of the front line.
Chair: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Jane Barrett (South Africa),
Ghada Karmi (Palestine).

2-3.30pm Campaign Briefing: Back to our own basics
Chair: Leonora Lloyd (*Briefing*). John McDonnell (Justice Campaigns),
Alan Simpson MP (The fight in the labour movement),
Jenny Fisher (Lessons from Tower Hamlets), anti-racist speaker.

3.30-5pm *Labour Briefing*
Chair: Dorothy Macedo (*Briefing*),
Mike Marqusee/John Cryer (report on the magazine).
Report from the women's caucus,
Elections: editorial board, fundraising committee.

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Famous last words ...

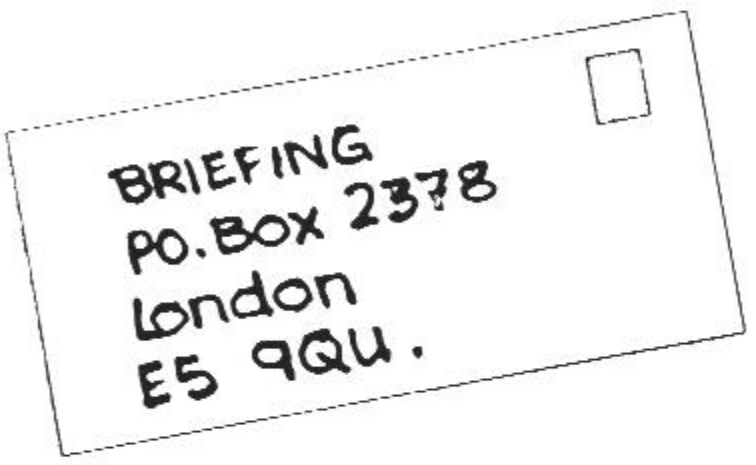
"What is the difference about the miners' strike? What is different is that now we know it's for real - now we're fighting for our lives, on the same cause all over the country. We know the miners are fighting for all of us....

"We're defending but we're trying to build something new. The strength of our movement is that it has a vision of something better. Nothing is ever won without a struggle. What we are learning is if we ever stop struggling they take it all away.

"Now we have a recognition that it is our struggle - a belief that the time has come when we take control of society and administer it for the use of all."

Tony Benn MP

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



Briefing readers should be aware that the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action entered the South African elections to promote the idea of a mass workers party.

They formed a Workers' List committed to the fight for a workers' government, a constituent assembly, nationalisation, the right to work and strong trade union and civic organisations.

Key WOSA activists in Cape Town, however, opposed this campaign as sectarian. In an open letter to WOSA, they attacked the Workers' List strategy as "propagandistic and abstract". They wrote: "WOSA has misunderstood the current political situation in a very sectarian way, has totally misread the mass mood, and has failed to understand the trajectory of leftward moving militants in Congress, PAC, AZAPO, etc."

Instead, the letter argued for critical support for the ANC as the best way of engaging in dialogue with the many thousands of activists who are already unhappy with the leadership's compromises. They asserted: "The masses will not break from Congress because of a propaganda campaign run by a non-existent party."

The job of socialists, they declared, is to "support the Congress left in demanding that the ANC break the power-sharing pact and act on its election promises. We expect the shop floor to move into wages struggle despite the co-operation of COSATU's leadership."

The Cape Town comrades asserted that "a critical vote for the ANC allows us to catch the ear of the left-moving forces without disguising our politics in any way. We can expect the more class-conscious militants in PAC and AZAPO will respond." AZAPO, the main Black Consciousness Organisation, boycotted the election.

They concluded: "WOSA comrades: you cannot hope to build a pluralistic mass party without learning how to work with different political tendencies."

Yours,
Mike Phipps,
Brent

I enclose a cheque for my annual subscription. *Labour Briefing* appears to be becoming a very boring magazine, you have now dropped the Class Traitor of the Month clearly on the grounds that there are no Labour Party members left who are class traitors. The gossip also appears to be going down in both content and quality.

I began buying what was then *London Labour Briefing* because it was irreverent and different, it now is becoming rather boring, you had better spice things up otherwise I doubt I shall be renewing next year.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Balfe,
London SE18.

Richard,
Be assured that such vitriol will never make you Class Traitor of the Month. You are not important enough.

[Ed.]

Keith Veness's brief report "Turkish Election Disaster," May 1994, underestimated the success of the boycott called for by the PKK. It also failed to explain the reasons for the boycott.

Fifty-four DEP candidates were assassinated in the months before the municipal elections, government backed contras were blamed. In addition many more DEP candidates and activists were detained by the state. DEP withdrew because it was unable to campaign.

The boycott was a success in many Kurdish areas. In Tuneceli only 21 per cent of the electorate voted, despite threats by the military to burn entire villages if a single person observed the boycott or one ballot paper was spoiled.

I was in Diyarbakir and Bingol, as part of a Human Rights Delegation, in the election period. We spoke to Feyzulla Karaaslan, the Bangol DEP representative, just released from detention, and to villagers who had been threatened. We heard of a family who were forced to vote for the village guard and MHP (fascist) candidate who had burned them out of their house. We saw a village burning and Kurds who had been forced from the land that had been theirs for generations.

In the last four years thousands of villagers have been forced from their homes to live in shanty areas, towns have been bombed, villages mined. Journalists, lawyers, newspaper sellers and human rights workers have been detained, tortured and shot, or have disappeared. Seven DEP deputies are facing charges which are punishable by death.

The Turkish government is in deep financial crisis, Prime Minister Cillar is unable to resist the generals. Socialists must build the tourist boycott and campaign to halt aid and the sale of military equipment to Ankara.

Yours etc.,
H Clarke,
London E3

Women Against Pit Closures

National Appeal

SYLVIA PYE, national chair of WAPC, is being sued by British Coal for all costs incurred in obtaining their eviction order against the Parkside Pit Camp. Organisations and individuals are asked to make donations and add their names to a list of supporters to highlight the unjust and political victimisation of Sylvia Pye.

● Please make cheques payable to: **"The Sylvia Pye National Appeal Fund"**, and send them to Berni Cavanagh, Common Road Nurseries, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside, WA12.



The demonstration against Joy Gardner's killing in London last year. Photo: Bryn Griffiths.

Lifting the veil?

JAMAICAN CITIZEN Joy Gardner was killed when police and immigration officers forced their way into her flat in Crouch End, North London on 28th July 1993 to serve a deportation order. In front of Joy's five-year-old son, Graeme, a body belt, handcuffs and adhesive tape were used to bind and gag Joy, causing her to suffocate. After a delay of over nine months, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) finally announced on April 27th that three of the police officers involved will be charged with her killing.

The officers involved, Detective Sergeant Linda Evans and Police Constables John Burrell and Colin Whitby, have all been charged with manslaughter. They are all members of SO1(3), Scotland Yard's specialist deportation squad which has since been disbanded - private security firms are now being used.

Evans and Burrell are scheduled to appear at Bow Street Magistrates Court on June 21st.

The evidence of Joy's killing was always unambiguous. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Condon naturally didn't arrest or bring charges against those involved immediately. However, faced with considerable public disquiet over Joy's killing, Condon suspended the three SO1(3) officers on full pay and announced a Police Complaints Authority (PCA) inquiry into the circumstances of her death. Assistant Chief Constable Peter Conlan of Essex Police was appointed under PCA supervision to investigate the case and report as to whether any charges should be brought against the officers.

The Joy Gardner Campaign worked consistently to expose the authorities' footdragging and demand charges be brought. Finally, on February 16th 1994, the PCA handed its 239-page report and 1,500 pages of evidence to the CPS. Though the PCA is able to make use of its powers under Section 97(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act to produce a report for the Home Secretary which can be laid before Parliament, and made public, it failed to do so.

When the report was handed to the CPS stories emerged in the media - obviously based on police leaks - claiming that the main reason for the series of delays in the completion of the report was a difference of opinion between some of the numerous medical experts (representing the many parties involved) who have been consulted in the course of the inquiry.

It was put about that a disagreement between scientific experts as to whether Joy had died as a result of suffocation or head injuries would make it "very difficult" to gain convictions. The idea that for a prosecution to be mounted requires a complete consensus of opinion between scientific experts - some of whom were acting for those liable to be charged - is ridiculous.

Three of the police officers involved in Joy's killing have finally been charged. But, of course, the authorities will ensure further considerable delays before these oficers are brought to trial, and convictions are highly unlikely. Institutional inertia is the authorities' main weapon.

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