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BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

inside ...

- Gareth Peirce
- Dawn Primarolo
- Women's pits campaign
- Ronan Bennett
- Tower Hamlets

Still working, still fighting

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

Stop press

Clause 4 effaced

GORDON BROWN and his Shadow Cabinet economic team, bolstered by Shadow Health Minister David Blunkett, have decided to "take the ideology out of the public-private debate" by championing private investment in the public sector, including in education, health, childcare, training, and defence diversification.

These people learn nothing from bitter experience.

They propose to turn the remaining state-owned industries into "public interest companies" which "would operate with the same structure as private-sector companies."

In the past, public sector industries were modelled on undemocratic civil service structures - and still made to operate within private-sector dominated markets.

The result was the discrediting of public ownership and the Thatcher onslaught. Brown *et al* now complain of the "lack of accounting transparency" in state-owned industries. Are they suggesting that private companies offer a model of openness, accountability and fiscal honesty? The experience of contracting-out and privatisation in health and local government has already proved a bane to both workers and consumers.

Labour's latest shift to the right will be welcomed by the leader writers but will only fuel popular cynicism with party politics. Labour's continuing drive to eliminate its "ideological" differences with the government simply confirms widely held suspicions that whoever you vote for, the establishment wins.

Brown, Cook, Prescott and, of course, Smith, know that the private sector is not motivated by concern for the public weal. According to the *Observer* they propose to entice it by "eliminating much of the commercial risk for companies" and "loosening constraints on developers".

Their policy shift, yet another attempt to efface Clause Four, is nothing but a crass bribe to the establishment, another doomed attempt to capture the middle ground - by eliminating "ideology" from the key question of economic policy. It is unlikely the Conservatives will oblige them. They know the importance and resilience of ideology, even if Labour does not.

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Bread as well as roses



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY started out as Working Women's Day. It's worth remembering today, when the proportion of women in the workforce is fast approaching 50 per cent and more women than men are joining trade unions.

The nature of work is changing, not just for women. Part-time, flexi-time, short or even zero hour contracts are all increasing. The reason for these changes is clear - it suits international capitalism. Production is moving to "just in time", using modern technology on the one hand, and women working in small groups or at home on the other.

Women have adapted to these changes not because women accept exploitation without protest, but because they mesh with the realities of women's lives. All over the world, women still take 95 per cent of the responsibility for child care and housework. Increasingly, they also take responsibility for much of the family's finances.

Throughout the developed world, "heavy" (male) industries are disappearing to be replaced by "lighter" manufacture of consumables and service industries. Men are having to adjust to what women have always experienced - being dependent on another wage-earner, or being paid less than your spouse. Some commentators believe that this is an underlying cause of the increase in violence against women. Just one more item in the long list of social problems blamed on the increased independence of women.

The Tories are in a dilemma over how to deal with the new realities, created, in part, by their economic policies. They know that women's work is vital to the economy, but are unwilling to provide the superstructure - nurseries, after school care, etc. - that would make working women's lives easier. Their "pro-family" policies mean that they have to pay at least lip-service to the full-time mother. Their economic policies make it impossible for a family to live comfortably on one income: child allowances are amongst the lowest in Europe.

The Labour Party has little to offer. Decent child-care costs money. As long as the Shadow Cabinet refuses to make spending commitments, people are bound to ask: what will be different under Labour? The Party is all over the place on the Child Support Act, currently the corner-stone of the government's (non) child-care policy.

If women's voices were really being heard in the Labour Party, if they enjoyed real equality of power with Labour men, different policies would prevail. The truth is that the leadership is chipping away at what little real representation of women the Party allows. Women's conference is being replaced by "training weekends". At other Party conferences women are represented, not by elected representatives, but by the 'respectable' - and unaccountable - Labour Women's Network and Emily's List.

The Party and the labour movement in general would be wise not to underestimate the strength of women. Women started the February Revolution in Russia when they insisted on marching on International Women's Day against the orders of their (male) leadership. Women united the opposition to Pinochet in Chile when, again, they marched together on March 8th.

The women's movement has changed since the early seventies, when you could see the whole movement united on the International Women's Day marches. Despite all the talk of post-feminism, the movement has made huge strides, as well as steps backwards. Major social issues that once could not even be named have been recognised because of sustained pressure from the grass-roots of the women's movement.

For years, women have been urging the labour movement to place a women's agenda at the centre of its policies and activities. The response of the leadership has been lip-service. As democracy and accountability in the Party have been constricted, women's drive for real power has been set back. In the old USSR, International Women's Day was marked by men doing the washing up (after all, it was only one day a year) and giving their wives roses. But remember, we want bread as well as roses, and we want it 365 days of the year!

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 February 27th. We are happy to offer a right to reply on the usual basis to all members of the labour movement.**

All articles published in *Labour Briefing* reflect the opinions of the authors alone unless otherwise indicated. *Briefing* welcomes criticisms and contributions. Deadline for the next issue is Friday March 11th.

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Contact *Briefing* at PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU. Telephone: 081 985 6597; fax: 081 985 6785

Sudden death in the chamber



Steve French asks what will happen in the likely event of Labour gaining a large haul of new councils this May.

JOHN SMITH'S strategy was recently compared to flared trousers. Labour is bound to come back in fashion - policies can only be dangerous. After gaining much electoral ground in last year's shire elections, major swings to Labour in council by-elections this year indicate that despite having no spending plans (ie. policies) Labour may come into vogue in many new councils this May. How on earth are Labour to spend this manna from heaven?

Labour candidates are likely to fare well this May purely because they are not called "the Conservative Party candidate". With few local exceptions, Labour's platform for May offers the anodyne concept of "quality assurance" and hollow promises of community participation in misery planning. May's elections will be seen as a referendum against the Tory government with little other political content.

A campaign for a massive council house building programme to tackle homelessness and unemployment isn't on the agenda. It would prove enormously popular if it was. It's hardly a revolutionary demand. The building industry would support it - but it would be a spending proposal that the *Sun* could attack. Labour councillors face growing homelessness with housing investment cut to a fifth of what it was 15 years ago. Don't forget that councils can build homes only by borrowing money (at exorbitant interest rates) from the City ("Mortgaging the Future"?). While the call to release capital receipts from "right to buy" sales is fine, it is a drop in the ocean compared with what is required.

In a recent Caribbean Cup football match, Barbados needed to beat Grenada by two goals to qualify from their group on goal difference. New rules sanctioned that drawn matches would go to sudden death. The side scoring first would be deemed winners by 2-0. When leading 2-1 Barbados concluded that they should risk sudden death and deliberately scored an own goal. Grenada twigged and immediately started attacking their own goal to no avail. What's this got to do with local government? Well, I couldn't help but recognise the similarities with Labour's "tactics" on councils. "The dented shield" was hailed as the strategy to defend communities. Defend services by cutting them. Attack your own goal.

Four years ago one left-wing council leader suggested that while she would vote for cuts in services she would support strikes against those cuts. Confused? Well most Labour councillors have evolved a right-wing logic to their predicament. Trade unions have to live in the real world. "Efficiency" is the mantra. The "dented shield" has now become "re-inventing local government". Labour are trapped from even revealing social injustice because of their role in managing it.

Last year, Jack Straw talked tough against compulsory competitive tendering in Brighton to court trade union votes on the "link" issue. However, Labour's practice on the ground accepts and even welcomes the Tories' agenda. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities boasts that 82.4 per cent of work has been kept in-house - proving that DLOs can be justified on the basis of cost. Direct Labour Organisations in Labour areas have proved themselves to be more than ten times as profitable as DLOs in Tory councils. But in practice, every single service that has been subject to CCT has been privatised. Winning "in-house" tenders have offered only a hollow victory. The Tories' project has not been simply to hand over services to private profiteers. The central objective was to drive down public sector wages and conditions. While initially complaining, eventually Labour councils complied.

Following witch-hunts and Labour's rightward march, any notion of a council chamber battle in defence of services seems out of the question. But, workers and service users have no serious option other than to fight back. Local authority spending represents one quarter of the public purse. What is called for is a local dimension to the current debate on full employment and the welfare state. We should be proposing concrete plans to link unions and the community in opposition to cuts, the wage squeeze, CCT and the other opt-out variants.

"Yes, but how did Barbados get on," I hear you cry. Well they won in "sudden death". Labour's own goal strategy might not stop them going forward into the council chamber, but what's the point of electing leaders who can only attack their own goal? They only risk sudden death.

● Steve French was a Labour councillor in Lambeth until expelled in the witchunt

NEWS & VIEWS

Strange case of the 'loony left'

Elizabeth Drury looks at the storm of controversy raging over Hackney head teacher, Jane Brown.

THE DISPUTE that began over Jane Brown, the headteacher of a Hackney primary school turning down subsidised tickets to a ballet performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, has taken on far wider significance.

The remark about "heterosexual love" that the press seized upon was one sentence in a 15-minute telephone conversation between Brown and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation back in September 1993. It was part of a much wider conversation about how all cultural events have to be considered in the context of the equal opportunities policy of the school.

Pat Corrigan, the chairperson of Hackney's Education Committee, and other "unnamed" councillors, released statements to the press as soon as they were contacted and before they had even spoken to Jane Brown. The "strategy" of the Hackney leadership, no doubt with one eye on the May council elections, was to seek to reassure their most reactionary political enemies that they had become "respectable".

Pat Corrigan let one of the council's cats out of the bag when he let slip at a meeting that, "We don't need this just when we are negotiating a seven-figure sum from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for the refurbishment of the (Hackney) Central Hall". The issue had seemed settled after a few days but then new "allegations" were introduced by the press and quickly taken up by Education Director Gus John. All of these allegations have been clearly refuted by Jane Brown and her union, the National Union of Teachers. Brown has been barred from comment, yet the council even issued a press release attributing quotes to her that she hadn't agreed to.

Brown herself, parents, children, friends and workers at Kingsmead school learnt after the first day how to ignore hounding by the press. Children were asked questions like, "Does she prefer boys or girls?" and, "What do you know about homosexual sex?" Parents and teachers organised to make sure that no one repeated the mistake of making unguarded comments. Not so Hackney. Gus John announced that Jane was going to be suspended. The governors (who actually decide on suspensions) were furious and rejected a number of attempts by John to force this on them. Then he announced that he was coming to the school to speak to the parents.

A petition and a packed hall of 150 carers were waiting for John and Corrigan. The meeting listened and then let them know their views. Having managed to unite the whole audience against himself, John made the most despicable attempt to divide the meeting. Trying to whip up homophobia, he declared that: "There wouldn't be a Kingsmead School if it wasn't for heterosexuality."

The parents, already hardened in their defence of Jane Brown and the school, rejected this crude attempt to create division. The attack on her by the Hackney council leaders can only serve to encourage the Tory "back to basics" lobby and Education Secretary, John Patten, in his attempts to undermine hard won equal opportunities provisions.

The local Kingsmead community has been at the heart of the campaign to defend her. From this has grown a wider campaign of support from trade unions throughout Britain. Hackney and the national NUT have given support, as have the Hackney Council Unions and Joint Shop Stewards Committee and branches and regions of many other unions. Hackney headteachers have voiced their disgust directly to the education authority.

A London meeting of the Association of Black Governors has called for John's resignation. Local MPs and many local Labour Party branches have voiced their support. A lobby of the council attracted a crowd of 600.

The campaign took off because of fear, frustration and the need to counter the Tories "back to basics" ideology. The bizarre aspect is that it is Hackney's "loony left" council that has fallen into the trap of waging a battle on behalf of this reactionary ideology.

● **Send donations and messages of support to Kingsmead Support Campaign, c/o Hackney Teachers Association, 219 Mare Street, London E8.**

Elizabeth Drury is an activist in the National Union of Teachers in Hackney.



Gould riddance

Bob Cryer MP waves farewell to Bryan Gould and finds that there's not much to mourn.



Bernie gets his first customer

THE DEPARTURE of Bryan Gould in September for new academic pastures in New Zealand has been regarded by some of the posh papers as a blow to the collective intellectual power of the Parliamentary Labour Party. His loss is, in reality, hardly likely to be noticed.

Between 1974 and 1979, as the Member of Parliament for Southampton Test, he gained a reputation in the House of Commons for making short, neat, well-researched speeches against the Common Market. Today, such speeches are regarded as irrelevant, with the leadership directing the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party in abject, uncritical acquiescence to all the policies, centralisation and impositions of the Common Market.

There is only a passing critical comment among Labour MPs, these days, about the Common Agricultural Policy while the pro-market fanatic majority in the PLP appear to be blissfully unaware that this is the only area of compulsory expenditure and soaks up around 70 per cent of the grossly excessive annual budget of the European Economic Community.

It is a pity, nonetheless, that Bryan Gould felt unable to maintain his determined opposition and should be departing for the university staff common room because the kitchen is too hot.

In 1987, during the general election, a soft and reassuring voice was necessary to overcome the ranting uncertainties pouring from Neil Kinnock.

This gave Bryan Gould a national eminence which carried him on to the National Executive Committee and a prominent place in Labour Party counsels. Once inside the Labour Party establishment, he found the same tired conventions governing political attitudes which he had criticised when MP for Southampton Test - he switched to the safe seat of Dagenham in east London in 1983.

He had persistently criticised the monetary policies of Labour Chancellor Denis Healey, now busy lining his pockets from advertising fees, and in a *Guardian* article in 1978, Gould wrote: "The failure of pay policy, as much a symptom as a cause of the government's difficulties, has revealed the bankruptcy of current economic policy. The only prospect now is of further tightening of the monetary and fiscal screw, despite the fact that the last thing needed by an economy with chronic problems of low growth and falling competitiveness is a further dose of deflation."

A pungent criticism, which has still not been answered in the succession of staccato soundbites which Gordon Brown has produced to elaborate Labour's economic policy.

Bryan Gould's consistent criticism of the EEC has never been shared by the so-called serious press which laments his departure, which is curious because it has been the only distinct policy which Bryan Gould has been consistently firm about.

Indeed, at one stage he indulged in the absurdity of advocating share ownership of public sector service industries, though this was later disowned as taken out of context.

The "radical" candidate for the posts of leader and deputy leader of the Labour Party, Bryan Gould certainly was a touch more radical than John Smith and the other members of the shadow cabinet, though that is to start from a pitifully low point on any radical agenda.

If he had been elected deputy leader, it is hardly likely that he would shortly after have sought the Chiltern Hundreds or the stewardship of the Manor of Northstead, the archaic means of leaving Parliament early.

That being the case, his departure can only be seen as sour grapes and opting for an easier path than battling to win the Labour Party from the clutches of the right wing and filling the vacuum that has thus been created.

The heart of the Labour Party has a sound socialist beat to it and opting out of the struggle will never help to direct the red blood of socialism back into the life of the only alternative vehicle for government - the Labour Party, warts and all.

● **Bob Cryer is Labour MP for Bradford South.**

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Island-speak in Tower Hamlets

Ravinder Kaur probes the strange manoeuvres in the Isle of Dogs Labour Party and digs up some unsavoury goings-on.

MILLWALL COUNCILLOR Ted Johns has a reputation for going it alone. In 1970, he was one of an aggrieved bunch of Isle of Dogs residents that protested against deprived social conditions by barricading the then only road onto the Island, proclaiming UDI for the area, and dubbing Johns himself "President of the Isle of Dogs". It was, needless to say, a short-lived protest of little lasting consequence.

Johns' current go-it-alone protest is of greater significance. A veteran community activist and former dockworker, Johns has been a Labour councillor for Millwall since 1992. Over the years he has dipped in and out of the Party at his convenience, being a Labour councillor elsewhere in the borough for eight years during the sixties and seventies, before deciding to stand as an independent Labour representative, and then later deciding to come back to Labour to fight the Millwall seat he now holds. But now, just a short time away from the local elections, Johns has changed his mind again. He had decided to join the East London People's Alliance (ELPA), a breakaway party formed by ex-Labour members in the wake of the BNP's byelection victory last September. Considering the BNP won the seat by a margin of only seven votes over the Labour Party, it is worth wondering what the new "party" thinks it is up to with its stated aim of gaining votes from Labour. But then some in Millwall Labour Party were wondering long before now what certain of its members thought they were up to.

The others that jumped ship from Labour to form the ELPA did so, it is widely believed, before they were pushed. So far, they include James Hunt, Labour's candidate for the byelection that Derek Beackon eventually won, and Sandra Ireland, former chair of the Millwall ward Party.

Significally, Ireland came to the fore in the local Party following a purge against Militant members in the eighties. Once the Trots were got out of the way, the path was clear for Ireland and others to take control of the Party and sideline remaining left-wingers. Both Hunt and, to a lesser extent, Ireland were implicated in the leaking of fake canvass returns, prior to polling at last year's byelection, which claimed to show the BNP set to win the seat: both have also been accused by their once-fellow Party members of pandering to racism on the island in a similar manner to that of the ruling Liberal Democrats.

Ireland resigned from the Party last month, claiming that she was being victimised for her "deep commitment to housing the homeless at home". In Island-speak, this means only one thing: supporting housing for the white, as opposed to the Bangladeshi, population. Hunt left the Party just hours before he was due to be interviewed by Labour's national general secretary, Larry Whitty, as part of the Party's inquiry into the leaked canvass-returns farrago. A BNP member, writing not long after the byelection to the local paper the *East London Advertiser*, praised Hunt for having "the courtesy to meet with Councillor Derek Beackon and hear what Derek has to say." Hunt has had ample time to deny having paid a courtesy call on the BNP, but as yet there is no record of him doing so.

The departure of Hunt and others from Labour has, however, been convenient in a different direction. The Party's half-hearted inquiry came to an end, with no conclusion being drawn as to who had leaked the canvass returns, and no investigation at all into the local Party's election literature. Such an investigation may well have had to come to the conclusion that Labour had played a smaller scale version of the Liberal Democrats' populist-cum-racist election tactics.

Two of the local Labour Party's byelection leaflets were couched in unmistakeable Island-speak, the meaning of which will have been plain to all in Millwall who received them. Both dealt with the pre-eminent issue of housing, a thorny subject in one of the country's most deprived boroughs. The first attempted to outplay the Liberal Democrats at their own game. It attacked them for putting out "leaflets saying 'Island homes for Island people'" when the Liberal Democrats themselves had instructed the Isle of Dogs neighbourhood "to give 40 per cent of its lettings to homeless families or else". In other words, the Liberal Democrats were only saying they would tell homeless "outsiders" (translation: Bangladeshis) where to get off, but only Labour could be trusted to actually do it.

A second leaflet was, if anything, a more masterly display of Island-speak. Headed "James Hunt says: 'House the hidden homeless'" it proclaimed: "The homeless in your home are your children who have to sleep on the couch, your brothers and sisters who want a place of their own, your grandchildren without space to grow up in ... James says: 'The Liberals tell us which homeless to house - why can't we decide our own priorities and decide for ourselves?'" It was an unmistakeable, direct appeal to the entrenched white population, made at the expense of an already beleagured Bengali population.

None of this was covered by the national Party's inquiry, which contented itself with the mere issuing of a statement from Whitty declaring, "Responsibility for the BNP victory in the Millwall byelection rests four-square with the Liberal Democrats. There is a world of difference between 'pandering to racism', which is what the Liberal Democrats say some of their members did in Tower Hamlets, and the unauthorised issuing of the canvass figures." So what about the leaflets, Larry?

It is a question that looks like remaining unanswered. Left-wingers remaining in the Millwall Party are unhappy with the outcome. The real issue, as far as they're concerned, remains undisturbed: why were right-wingers allowed to take over the Party and get away with pandering to racism *a la* Liberal Democrats, because this was thought preferable to having left-wingers "causing trouble"? ❑



Dawn Primarolo. PHOTO: John Harris

A long way to go

Dawn Primarolo MP argues that the medical establishment leaves a lot to be desired in its approach to women's health issues.

WITH INTERNATIONAL Women's Week fast approaching, now is a good time to take a long hard look at women's health. Despite the obvious nature of women's specific health needs, there still remain unacceptable gaps in the provision of vital services.

Women shoulder the main burden of caring for the health of the rest of the population - both in the home and in the front line of community care and the National Health Service. For this, we owe them a debt of gratitude, but women, too, have a right to have their specific experiences and health needs recognised, heard, respected and resourced, integrally and comprehensively in the nation's health service, and new research and services sought where there is a shortfall at present.

In short, we need policies which make women's voices heard in the shaping, resourcing and delivery of health services; policies which recognise that the health needs of women are important in their own right. Unfortunately, there are currently many areas of potential ill health specific to women which either do not receive the attention they warrant, or are approached from an arrogant and paternalistic angle. This particular problem will not be resolved until more women are involved in decision-making in the NHS. Four fifths of the NHS workforce are women, yet only 7% are senior decision-makers at regional chair or regional general manager level.

A BMA report 1989 found that nearly half of all medical school graduates were women, but only 20 per cent are GPs; 12 per cent of consultants and 0.6 per cent of general surgeons are women.

Women cannot expect the health service to be responsive to their needs if the service is itself unresponsive to the needs of women working within it and if it under-utilises the skills of its women as health carers and professionals.

Cervical cancer has been in the news over the last few months due to problems with the screening programme. Despite recent reports, the majority of problems occur in the diagnosis of abnormal cells and the long wait for test results. It is, however, vital that women do not lose confidence in the national screening programme. Research must be carried out into new, speedier and more accurate screening methods, such as the probe being developed in Australia, which gives a result in minutes.

In England as a whole, nearly 80 per cent of targeted women are receiving regular screening, but the four Thames regions fare badly compared to the rest of the country, particularly North West and North East Thames, and this regional variation must not be allowed to continue.

The problems surrounding breast cancer are not so much with the screening programme, but are due to the insensitive and unfeeling attitudes of some of the health care professionals women have to deal with. Overall it is estimated that one in 12 women will develop breast cancer at some time in their life. It is a widely documented problem, but there is still a lack of understanding on the part of the medical profession about the trauma it can cause, particularly if a breast has to be removed. Women find that the details of their treatment are not explained sufficiently, and are often left to cope alone with the consequences of radiotherapy treatment or mastectomy. It is therefore hardly surprising that about a quarter of women who have surgery for breast cancer become clinically depressed.

Infertility is another area of health which is presently subject to a huge regional disparity of availability. 65 per cent of purchasing authorities do not have a formal policy for the purchase of infertility treatments, and the majority of those in need of treatment must pay for it themselves: 90 per cent of all IVF children in Britain have resulted from treatment for which their parents had to pay.

However, the emotional and psychological impact of the failure to conceive should not be underestimated. There is a generally poor understanding of the need for and effectiveness of treatment. A large part of the problem is that infertility is not diagnosed or treated early enough, which frequently means that women pass the arbitrary age limits set, and are denied treatment.

This is obviously a very small selection of the areas of women's health that deserve more attention, but what becomes increasingly clear is that many of the problems women face in the NHS - whether they are being forced into giving birth in hospital, or being told that the pain they are suffering due to pelvic inflammatory disease is all in the mind - could be remedied by a more sensitive and respectful approach on the part of the medical profession.

The very least that women should be able to count on is being taken seriously and having their symptoms treated in a swift and effective manner.

● Dawn Primarolo MP is Labour's parliamentary front-bench spokesperson on health.



Possessing the secret of terror

With the controversy over female circumcision whipped up by Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, **Enyonam Afele** looks at the horrific reality of female genital mutilation.

WOMEN'S SEXUALITY and their bodies are the source of desire, envy and even contempt by men the world over. It is held responsible for destroying men, and disgracing the family honour; but women have never totally had control over their own bodies and sexuality. It is men who often determine how it is fashioned, when and how it is used. Today, sexual violence against women by our male-dominated society (through pornography) continues to be protected by laws, cultures and to an extent religion, all structures controlled by men.

The control of women's sexuality by men is not a modern affair - some of the physical and medical methods used today to suppress women's sexuality have existed for many thousands of years.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Circumcision, as it is sometimes erroneously called, is a general term used to describe a number of operations to the female genital organs. In ancient Rome and medieval Europe, for instance, horrific contraptions were used in the form of chastity belts and rings passed through their *labia majoria.*

Today, the mildest form of FGM involves the cutting of the hood of the clitoris only. This is medically comparable to male circumcision.

Clitoridectomy/excision involves the removal of all the clitoris and all or part of the *labia minora.* This, again, is medically likened to the severing of the male's genitals.

Infibulation or pharaonic circumcision is the most brutal form entailing clitoridectomy, plus the removal of the *labia majora* and the sewing or sealing together of the vulva. What is left is a smooth surface and two small holes: the anus and a passage for urine and menstrual blood.

In Britain, there are an estimated 10,000 female children at risk from this abuse which is both physically destructive and psychologically damaging. The parents of these girls are willing to allow acts of mutilation to be performed, because they believe it is in the child's best interest.

These children are predominantly first generation refugees from the war-torn zones in east Africa: Somalia and Sudan. Many fled their country, leaving behind family members and a life which once made sense. Their families brought with them customs and religious beliefs, a way of life that was once the norm. Like all dispersed people, their desire to hold on to their identity is even stronger in an alien culture.

The practice of FGM is, for them, the embodiment of a woman's virtue, it determines her marital status and represents the family's honour within the community; a child who is not genitally mutilated is regarded as unclean, brings shame to the family and will not find a husband.

Reasons for its practice vary but for the majority it ensures the virginity of the young girl until wedlock; thus, like the chastity belts of medieval Europe, it is an effective method of sexual control. Use of the practice on children as young as a month old is common in some communities and clearly the justification is unfounded. Many children have even lost their lives through infection or haemorrhaging. Equally, the morbidity rates are high. Pregnant women who have undergone infibulation have to endure defibulation or cuts to enlarge the small hole to enable delivery. The medical complications are grave and poor health is common.

Although reasons for the practice appear to be embroiled in cultural and religious dogma, it is neither a justifiable custom nor is it a religious obligation. The practice of FGM continues because it has never been challenged or questioned by the majority, it has simply been accepted and passed down from generation to generation.

FGM is on the increase in Britain and throughout the rest of Europe. At the turn of the century, English women had their clitoris surgically removed as a cure for a number of strange ailments including the prevention of masturbation and hysteria. Fortunately, due to increased medical knowledge and growing campaigning by women, this operation is no longer common among English women.

Nevertheless, clitoridectomy is still performed today on unsuspecting women by over-zealous gynaecologists. So traumatic are the physical and psychological consequences that many of these women refuse to talk about the experience.

It is estimated by the World Health Organisation that some 100 million women and girls have undergone one or another of these operations worldwide. The figures and other fragments of evidence have revealed that it is widespread throughout west Africa, the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and along the Persian Gulf, Malaysia, Indonesia, India and Pakistan.

In recent years, due to migration into other parts of the world, growing reports have emerged from Australia, Latin America, Canada and the US. ❑

Class act

Louise Kawakami looks at the varied history of International Women's Day and its roots in the working class.



THE BLUE SUITS' WORST NIGHTMARE: International Women's Day has brought together a strong coalition of women.

MARCH 8TH 1994 will mark the 84th International Women's Day, a date with an important history for women and socialists.

Originally called Working Women's Day, it is believed to have numerous origins and inspirations in the labour and working class movements earlier this century.

In 1907, a march led by women textile workers in New York calling for equal rights and decent working conditions was met with police violence upon reaching a wealthy part of the city.

In 1908, to mark the revolt of the previous year, women workers from the textile trades held a strike on the Lower East Side of the city. Their demands were the right to vote and an end to sweated labour and child labour. This event was also met with police brutality.

Shortly after these brave industrial struggles, at the second Socialist Women's Conference in Copenhagen in 1910, delegates from 17 countries passed a resolution put forth by German Social Democrat Clara Zetkin calling for "an annual women's day - a unified international demonstration".

The first International Women's Day was held in 1911 in Germany, Denmark, Switzerland and Austria. March 19th was chosen to commemorate an uprising of the Prussian Proletariat in 1848. An American International Women's Day had been held a month earlier. Over a million women and men took part demanding the right to vote and an end to discrimination. Two years later, the date was changed to March 8th to commemorate the New York strikes of 1907 and 1908.

Since its beginning, International Women's Day has been a flash-point in many struggles around the world.

In 1914, with the world about to be plunged into the horrors of World War One, International Women's Day became the backdrop of anti-war events. Anti-militarism and peace became the dominant theme of the time.

In 1917, a strike by women textile workers in St. Petersburg on International Women's Day was the spark that started the February revolution which led to the October Revolution itself.

The first International Women's Day in Britain was in 1926, the year of the General Strike with the Co-operative Women's Guild taking the lead. In the years leading up to World War Two, the day was the occasion for opposing fascism here and in Europe.

It was a focus, for instance, of support for the republican forces struggling against the nazi-backed Francoists in Spain and for the struggle in this country against the barbaric blackshirts of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists.

In the fifties, International Women's Day ceased to have the high profile it had previously enjoyed. It was not until the late sixties that the emerging women's movement revived interest in the event. In 1971, 50,000-strong women's marches in London and Liverpool demanded equal pay, free 24-hour childcare, free contraception and abortion on demand.

As well as highlighting struggles specific to countries, International Women's Day serves to point to the International nature of oppression suffered by women and men around the world.

In South America, human rights abuses have been a major theme. In South Africa, August 9th marks the day in 1956 when 20,000 women marched on Pretoria to protest the extension of the pass laws. In south and south-east Asia, women and children have organised to oppose the exploitation by the sex industry, one of the many by-products of western imperialism in the region.

This year, as women continue to battle oppression worldwide, International Women's Day will serve as a reminder of the importance of women's organisation and solidarity in the fight for socialism. ❑

NEWS & VIEWS

Never say die

On the eve of the tenth anniversary of the miners' strike, **Sylvia Pye** recounts the story of the Women Against Pit Closures.

JULY 7TH MARKS the tenth anniversary of the national foundation of Women Against Pit Closures. The organisation was formed in 1984 during the year-long miners' strike in support of the NUM and mining industry. The national group came from the support groups that were set up in all the coalfield areas.

First, an area group would be formed and a delegate from there sent to national meetings in Sheffield, that city being the most central point for everyone to get to.

Many of the groups were set up and organised by miners' wives and miner-related families because it was felt that not only must we support the men but we must also make sure the families did not suffer any hardship. The work done by these groups became a class struggle for women from all walks of life. Most of them had never been involved in politics before. At first the main aim was to maintain the families with food and financial support but the activity soon became much more than setting up and running soup kitchens and social centres collecting food.

The women became public speakers, travelling all over the country and abroad. The movement went from strength to strength, with women getting involved in mass picketing and organising rallies and meetings. They carried their banners proudly in support of the miners and other workers in struggle.

After the strike, the organisation continued because there was still work to do. The mining industry has never ceased to be under attack. There had also been around 750 miners victimised and sacked during the strike and so the national women's organisation became very involved with the national justice campaign. There are still 49 of those victimised miners who have never worked since - they will never be forgotten.

Although our numbers have been depleted over the years, the national network was still a strong organisation when, in October 1992, Michael Heseltine announced 31 pit closures with a further loss of 25,000 jobs from the mining industry.

Women came back into the fight with lots of new members getting involved and a campaign was launched to fight all pit closures. Petitions, marches, rallies and public meetings were organised with Women Against Pit Closures on every platform.

A national women's march was organised with the assistance of the Labour Women's Action Group in London on February 6th last year - with the exception of Arthur Scargill it had an all-women platform at a London rally. It was a huge success and brought us lots of support.

The national organisation had also initiated the setting up of pit camps outside the 10 most threatened pits. Seven camps in all were set up and they became a focal point of the campaign in those areas. The first occupation by women was at Markham Main colliery on December 11th 1992 and was followed by many more successful occupations, including one at Trentham in Staffordshire and four at Parkside in Lancashire.

All the occupations served to highlight the struggle and in many cases stopped the closures for a time. Lancashire women also stopped the final filling in of the shafts and capping of the pit and are still running the pit camp at Parkside.

Being part of a national organisation gives us a strength and unity to carry on campaigning against injustice. There have been many other successful actions by women against pit closures and there will be many more. We will not give up and we will carry on fighting for as long as it takes. We will campaign against opencast mining and imported coal and a government that has no scruples at all in its attacks on the working class.

Never underestimate the power of the women.

● **Sylvia Pye is the national chairwoman of Women Against Pit Closures.**



A Rally in London organised by Women Against Pit Closures.

What they really need

Labour Briefing looks at the reality behind the Tories' attacks of apoplexy behind teenage pregnancy.

THE ONLY THING that has made Tory ministers more excited than single mothers recently is teenage single mothers. It is not the Tories' disastrous housing policies which have led to homeless families being denied somewhere decent to live - it is all those feckless teenagers deliberately getting themselves pregnant in order to jump the housing queue.

The reality is far from this fantasy. Both births and abortions have been falling among teenagers in the last few years. Fewer teenagers are having babies today than 20 years ago and more than half of their babies are registered by both parents.

What has changed as a result of the Abortion Act and a more liberal attitude to single parenthood is that fewer couples are getting married because of pregnancy.

One of the aims set out by the government in its plans for the nation's health is a reduction in teenage pregnancies, particularly for the under 16s. There can be no quarrel with this aim - pregnancy is dangerous for this age group, their babies are more likely to die, and the disruption to their education is obvious. And it has to be said that, for all the governments "back to basics" moralising, the Department of Health seems to have accepted that there is no way to legislate against teenage sex. Instead, the British Medical Association has reissued its guidelines for doctors on confidentiality for under-16s seeking help with contraception and the department has encouraged local authorities to work with Brook Advisory Service, local family planning clinics and youth services to provide more dedicated help for teenagers.

However, the Department of Education has not been so single-minded. From the next school year, sex education will be a compulsory part of the National Curriculum. But parents will be free to withdraw their children - and all the signs are that it is parents with the most problems with their children's developing sexuality who are most likely to withdraw them.

We know from world-wide research that the better the quality of sex education, the later the age of first intercourse and the later the first incidence of pregnancy. Another important aim of sex education must be to prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the incidence of cervical cancer. The use of condoms, as well as a second form of contraception, is therefore of particular importance to this age group if they are having sexual intercourse.

Unfortunately, research in this country shows that risk-taking (that is, sex without contraception) is more common with under-16s than among those who delay intercourse until later. This is because younger people have less confidence about negotiating and discussing their needs, but also because of lack of knowledge and understanding.

It is not just better sex education they need, but education which starts much earlier. It is often said that girls need to gain the confidence to refuse pressure to have sex before they are ready for it. But teenage boys, too, are known to feel that they must prove themselves, or are so inept at relationships that they use sex instead of true communication.

This is why sex education must be part of a wider education in human relationships. Unfortunately, with a government so full of hypocritical moralists, the chances of our children getting the kind of sex education they really need are as remote as ever. ❑

Men of metal

BRITAIN'S MEDIA IS controlled almost exclusively by men. Those in control of the media set the agenda, deciding what can or cannot be deemed "newsworthy". Small wonder, then, that women's issues are sidelined and women themselves constantly misrepresented in all our media.

Jo Treharne
Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom has campaigned for 15 years against stereotyping and misrepresentation of women in the media. But these problems must be tackled at the root if we are to effect any change.

Women are undervalued in the media simply because women do not control the media. In a 1991 report on equal opportunities in European broadcasting, the EC found that just 35 per cent of those employed in the broadcasting industry on a permanent basis are women.

In the same report, the EC found that senior management jobs are overwhelmingly occupied by men.

The resulting disparity that these statistics represent inevitably affects the portrayal of women in the media. Women often appear as "appendages" to their men folk - their role in national news stories is at best undervalued, at worst ignored.

Media sexism is all-pervasive and occurs across all media sectors, from news broadcasts to cartoons, from press articles to adverts. The constant misrepresentation of women in the media is not just a feminist issue, it is a labour and trade union movement issue. Women comprise 51 per cent of the population and have a right to expect fair representation.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom is committed to stamping out media sexism, through education and training.

Flowers and bruises

Liz Davies reports on the debate provoked by the Zero Tolerance campaign against domestic violence.

BRIEFING READERS in London will have seen the posters "Zero Tolerance", pictures of men and slogans such as "He gave her flowers, chocolates and multiple bruising - it's not just a fact of life, it's a crime". This Association of London Authorities campaign, assisted by Women's Aid, is modelled on previous successful campaigns in Edinburgh and Canada.

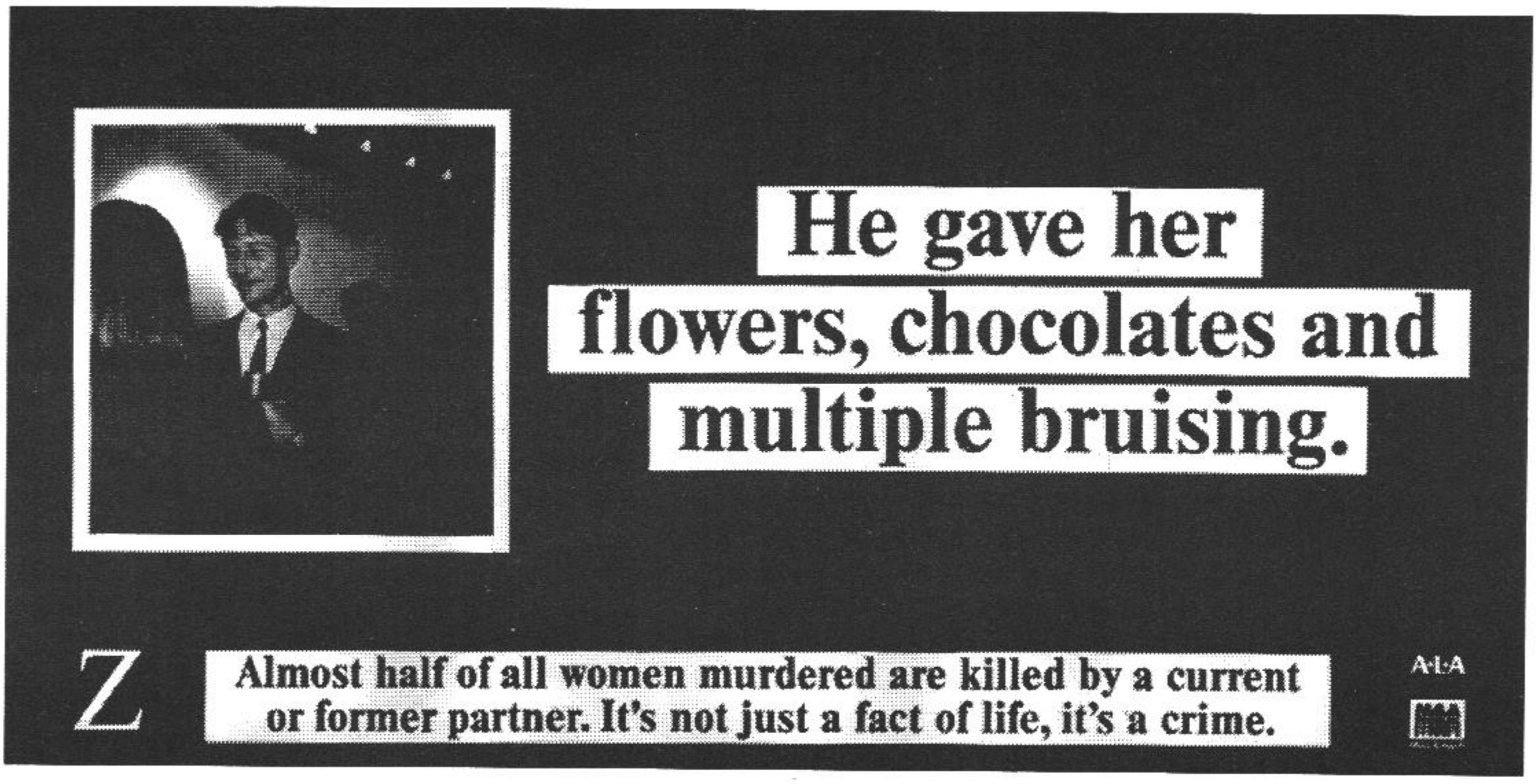
The Canadian campaign was a reaction to the Montreal massacre, when women scientists were murdered by a man objecting to intellectual women. Figures produced by the Middlesex Centre for Criminology show that 30 per cent of all women have experienced some form of domestic or sexual violence, and that 63 per cent of men accept that they might be violent towards their women partners.

The campaign is aimed at men, and this has sparked off some debate, noticeably on the *Late Show* and in the pages of *The Independent*. Some feminists, such as Sarah Dunnant on the *Late Show*, seem to argue that this approach will antagonise men and contribute to the already existing backlash against women shown in the polemics against so-called political correctness or accusations of date rape.

Janet Daly, again on the *Late Show*, professed herself horrified by the campaign's allegation that violence against women may be a "normal" activity. Unfortunately, the figures bear out the assertion that violence against women is both normal and tolerated.

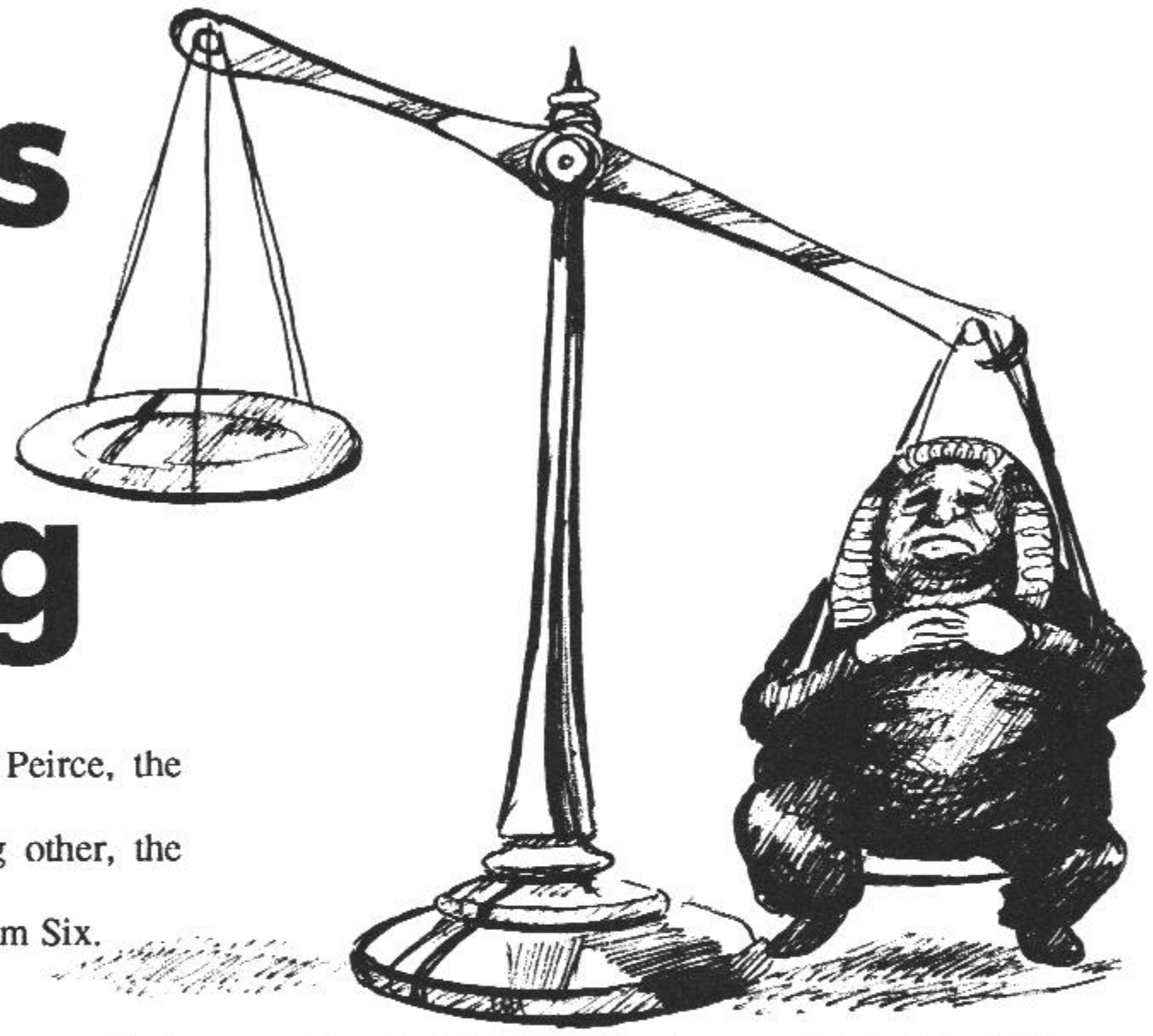
To *Briefing*'s feminist readers, the idea that violence against women can be a normal part of any family is nothing new. The grass-roots of the feminist movement have argued that position for decades. The Zero Tolerance campaign is a local government response to pressure from those grass-roots. It may suffer from being too top heavy and local government feminists must continually remember that they are accountable to grass-roots women's organisations.

Our job, as the feminist movement, is to change attitudes. If men find themselves guilty or uncomfortable when confronted with the figures for domestic violence, as "right-on" Tom Robinson did on the *Late Show*, well, tough! ❑



JUSTICE

Rights and wrong



Leonora Lloyd talks to Gareth Peirce, the solicitor who represented, among other, the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six.

Leonora Lloyd: With a number of women seemingly wrongly gaoled after killing violent partners, how would you like to see the law on provocation changed?

Gareth Peirce: The problem is that the law is compartmentalised artificially. When murder carried the penalty of capital punishment, different ways evolved of mitigating this ultimate penalty. Using defences such as self-defence, provocation or diminished responsibility enabled juries to look at the charge of killing in different ways. In the same way, there needs to be different ways of avoiding the mandatory life sentence.

It is not so much the way the defence is conducted which causes the problems as the blanket charge of murder - the defence has to respond to that with different strategies. "Murder" is an artificial term which does not cover all situations - it should be replaced with "unlawful killing", which would give more scope for the jury and judge to understand the specific situation.

There is a lot of discussion at the moment about changing life to a fixed-term sentence. That would allow for different sentences for different types of killing.

One problem is that the law always lags behind our growing understanding of how and why humans behave in certain ways. We know more now about domestic violence and how this affects the spouse. None of the defences commonly used - provocation, self-defence or diminished responsibility - can adequately provide an explanation. Often all three should be used together, because that explains the reality of the situation and fits better with our new understanding.

LL: What about the proposal to end or reduce the right to silence?

GP: This would be a regressive step. It is only since the introduction of PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act) that the police have been allowed to take someone in just to question them. Previously, they could only do so if they already had real cause for suspicion and investigations into the crime were continuing.

In the case of women who have killed their violent partners, they should never be questioned immediately afterwards - psychologically, this is disastrous. Everything that led up to the act and the knowledge that they have killed another human being can lead to them saying something that will be used in court to prove that they acted with deliberation, when the opposite is the truth. This is what has happened in some recent cases.

But in many other types of cases, too, the only evidence the police have offered has been the result of their interrogation. Vulnerable witnesses, questioned with no solicitor present, have incriminated themselves. The police have become lazy and stopped collecting other evidence.

LL: What about taking someone in to collect physical evidence such as fingerprints or sperm, or to attend an identity parade?

GP: Yes, although I would be against forcing someone to provide such evidence. In any case, it should only be done when there is other evidence against the person already. There must be some reasonable suspicion.

LL: What do you think about the current outcry on "law and order"?

GP: I think we are in the grip of a collective neurosis. The language used is militaristic - a "war on crime" - which obscures what is really happening. As a result, there is an acceptance of denying people their individual rights, in the name of fighting this war. Everyone must have the right to a fair trial, which includes the right of silence. And punishment should be humane and constructive - putting someone into our prison system simply brutalises them.

LL: Are you against putting people into prison?

GP: No, although far too many people are sent to prison when other forms of punishment would be better for them and for society. It is not inevitable or necessary in the majority of cases. And for those who do go to prison, the regime should be constructive and progressive.

One problem is that many people who commit crimes get away with it and this brings the whole system into disrepute. For example, policemen who commit crimes are rarely brought to trial and punished. Violent spouses get away with it. This can lead to individuals taking the law into their own hands. If the police, for example, are never prosecuted, there can be no sense overall of a just legal system.

LL: What other changes would you like to see?

GP: I'd like to see the re-introduction of jury challenges. You can get all-white juries hearing cases with black defendants, and you cannot challenge this at all now. And I would like to see a properly resourced body to investigate wrongful convictions.

Riding together

Kate Adams (Hackney North CLP) recounts the story of a growing battle to provide disabled people with cheap mobility.

LAST APRIL, along with many others, I received a letter from Hackney Council to say that yet again our Taxi Card would be restricted. This year we would be allowed 86 trips, less than one return journey per week.

The Taxi Card scheme, introduced originally by the GLC, authorises travel at reduced rates for disabled people who find it difficult or impossible to use public transport. Recently, due to spending cuts in London boroughs, a trip limit on Taxi Card was imposed.

My mobility is severely affected by ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis) and I depend on the scheme to get out and about. This time, instead of shrugging my shoulders in defeat, I wrote back urging the council to fund subsidised transport for sick and disabled people as part of a fightback against the uncaring policies of the Tory government. This was the start of a successful campaign to reinstate a full Taxi Card for disabled users in Hackney.

The council's response was typically luke-warm, so with the help of friends who are activists, a motion was passed at the local Labour Party meeting which decided budget priorities for the council. The motion, which demanded that the Taxi Card cut be rescinded, should then have become policy but instead the Labour controlled council stalled saying there was a problem over funding.

Earlier in the year I had joined a group called Hackney Coalition of Disabled People. They helped me to take up the struggle to ensure the motion was implemented. We picketed and leafleted council meetings and sent a deputation to the social services committee, while my non-disabled friends raised the matter at every Labour Party meeting they attended. Due to our combined efforts, the council finally agreed to honour its commitment and promised that a full Taxi Card would be restored to users as from April this year.

However, as the date approaches to implement this commitment, the council appears to be backtracking. The social services committee has agreed to fund the scheme "in principle", whatever that means, but haven't come up with the cash. This is a betrayal of disabled people whose expectations have been raised so much by the council's commitment to equal opportunities.

The people involved in the campaign are not prepared to let councillors get away with this - we intend to keep up the pressure by linking into a London-wide campaign for an unrestricted Taxi Card initiated by DART (Dial A-Ride and Taxi Card Users) to coincide with the borough elections. A manifesto of transport issues has been drawn up and disabled people will be asking candidates to support this if they want their votes in May.

Although the campaign has not yet been won, it is still a massive achievement. Disabled people have put the issue of accessible transport firmly on the political agenda as a basic human right. A crucial aspect was that non-disabled people gave their support in an active and practical way.

The left has tended to see disability as a welfare issue and has failed to organise effectively. The Taxi Card campaign has showed that, working together, we can change things.

Next year, the biggest attack ever on disabled people will take place when the Tories abolish Invalidity Benefit, thus impoverishing millions. This is concurrent with the new legislation against the unemployed and the homeless.

If we can win locally, then we can win nationally. But it will take a much greater effort from the Labour Party and trade unions than we have seen for a long time.

● **Support The Taxi Card Campaign by signing the petition, writing to your MP and local councillors, bringing it up at your trade union branch and contacting the media.**

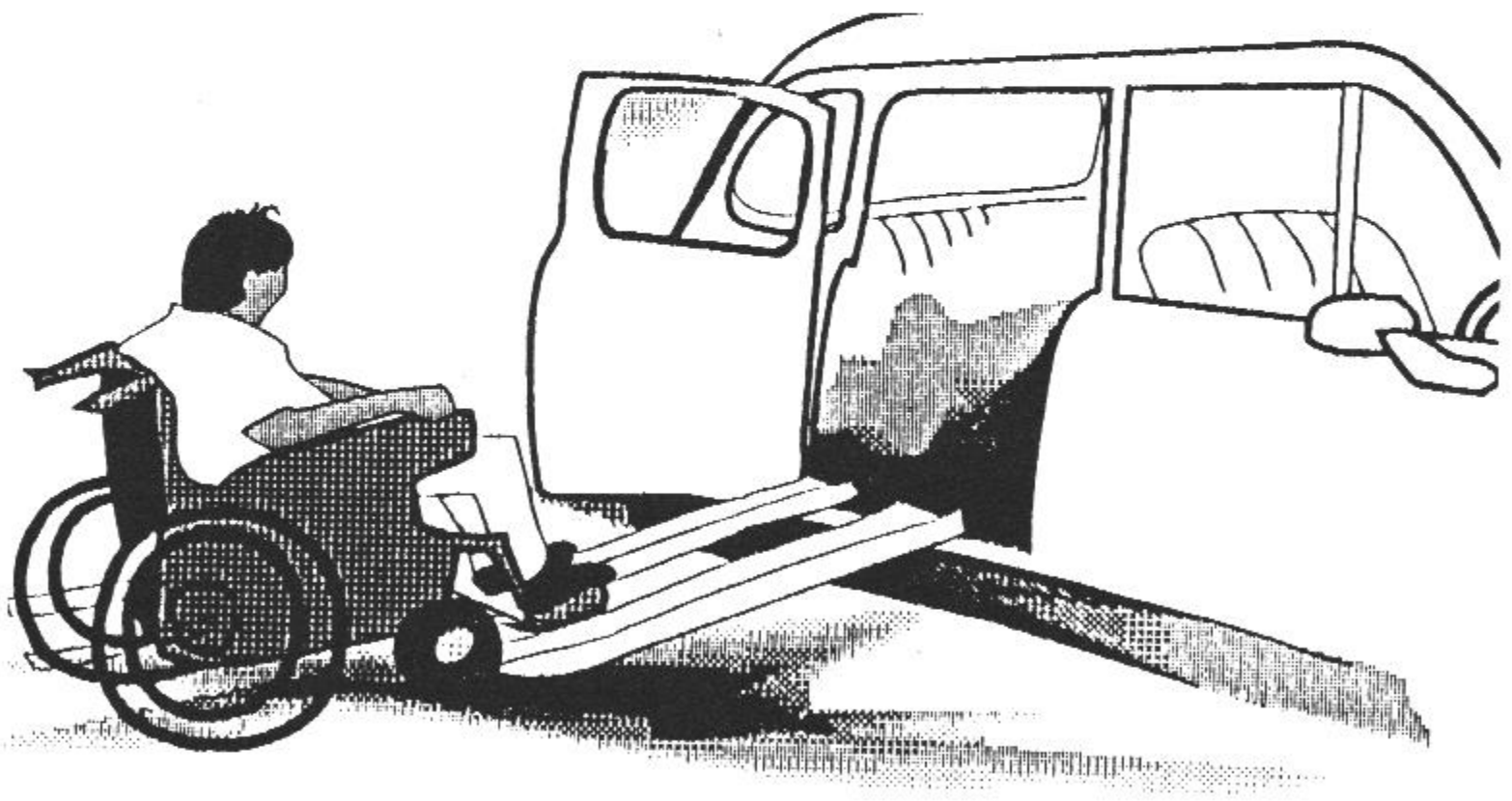




Photo: Paul Mattsson

Unseen strength

Hugh Lowe looks at the recent Tory attacks on pensioners and discovers that British pensioners' organisations have a long way to go.

ACROSS EUROPE, there has been a wave of anti-cuts strikes and massive demonstrations, enthusiastically supported by pensioners. As a result, governments have been constrained in their attacks on the welfare state.

In Britain, last year's European Year of the Elderly saw cuts in the real incomes of already the most impoverished pensioners in the European Community. The pensioners' movement grew in size and strength and the media reported its activities and views rather more often than previously - even the labour movement sometimes recognises its existence!

On average, nearly a third of adult life is now spent in retirement. The neglect of pensioners' issues, especially by the left, is pathetic.

The advances made in workers' lifetime income elsewhere in the EC, especially in Italy, have been concentrated in the social wage and in pensions in particular. Significantly these advances have not been initiated by reformist or socialist governments. The differences in pension levels are dramatic, an indication that the balance of forces in the rest of the EC is more favourable to the working class than in Britain.

Alert pensioners, realising that Britain had the worst pensions in western Europe, set out to discover why.

For some, the learning process was fairly painful because its conclusions contradicted much of the "received wisdom" of the British labour movement. However, it has been a rewarding and revealing experience; even to the extent that pensioners have been heard debating Maastricht in class terms instead of the nationalist ones prevalent in the rest of the labour movement. Pensioners have also grasped the fact that welfare states and pensions systems have inputs and outputs which must balance in the long term.

The British welfare state formula is simple - "very little in, very little out". Pensions cannot be increased unless the rich are made to pay more. An increase in employers' National Insurance contributions of 1 per cent would enable the state pension to be raised by about £5 a week.

The 1993 Lamont/Clarke budgets will further reduce employers NI contributions, already the lowest of any comparable European state, while for employees they will be raised; the government will also continue with "the lowest corporation taxes in the industrialised world" plus "a personal tax regime which favours entrepreneurs and managers."

The entire pensioners' movement is bitterly opposed to means-testing, not only of cash benefits but of service too.

In 1988 Roy Griffiths, on government orders, wrote a paper, most of which is now law, proposing to means-test non-acute, long-term health care. This is in flat violation of NHS principles. Nonetheless the Labour Party, with barely a dissenting voice from the left, accepted, even welcomed, it.

The bulk of the charges have fallen on home-owning pensioners who have had to sell, or pawn, their houses to pay for institutional healthcare in residential and nursing homes, mostly private ones. While the unions and the Labour Party made a big fuss over privatising the institutions, no one seemed to bother about privatising the patients.

The abandonment of long-term care by the NHS accounts for a considerable proportion of the reduction in its beds and staff.

Pensioners' resources have also suffered from the means-testing of other non-acute services, in home care etc, and an unregulated private sector in this field is growing fast.

In December, there was a left labour conference on the welfare state. Its stand in favour of universal benefits and especially Diane Abbott's opposition to means-testing long-term health care is very welcome.

But there were no pensioners' representatives on the platform, which offended a number of pensioner activists. Most welfare state issues involve pensions and pensioners, the most knowledgeable of whom know more about it than almost anyone else. The left should recognise this.

The UK pensioners' movement is still weak compared to most of Europe, although sections of it are quite politically advanced. Italian pensioners' trade unions have 3 million paying members. They often turn out 10 per cent of their members in demonstrations. British pensioners have a long way to go. ❑

Trade Union News



The union representing taxi drivers has put forward a radical plan for the root and branch reform of the industry.

Representatives of the Transport and General Workers Union, giving evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Transport, said that a new National Cab Act was needed to provide a legal framework under which all immediate hirings would be considered taxi work rather than minicab work.

In the big cities, minicab drivers would be reclassified as taxi drivers after a transition period.

The union leaders also called for a second private hire sector which would be closely regulated by local taxi boards composed of representatives of the local taxi trade, the police and the local authority.

The measures would provide greater equality in the industry and a far higher standard of service throughout the country. The TGWU is the only union to represent the interests of taxi drivers nationally.

Sacked women workers at Middlebrook Mushrooms in Hull are planning to buy shares in Booker, which owns the firm, in order to stage a protest at the food giant's annual general meeting in April.

The planned demonstration is the latest move in a long and determined battle by 80 women members of the Transport and General Workers Union who were sacked from their mushroom-picking jobs by the multinational company's Yorkshire subsidiary after a massive 17 per cent wage cut was imposed.

The workers then went through the lengthy legal process now required before they could bring in an overtime ban but they were still sacked.

One of the workers, Carol Westerman, told *Briefing*: "From the very beginning, we complied with the extensive legal requirements of notifying our general secretary, balloting our members and giving notice to management before staging the overtime ban.

"For all our troubles, we were sacked. When we tried to claim unfair dismissal, we were given the cold shoulder and told we didn't have any rights because we were involved in industrial action."

The TGWU has backed the women throughout and is stumping up the cash to buy the shares. There has also been a leaflet produced asking the public to boycott Booker products.

On February 1st, workers travelled from Hull to London and demonstrated outside Booker's headquarters.

A merger between the building union, UCATT, and the Transport and General Workers Union is gathering pace, it seems.

The construction union is now drafting a merger document which will go to its annual conference in June. If passed, the document could mean that a merger will be only months away.

UCATT's executive has already agreed a restructuring package which will mean some voluntary redundancies and cutbacks in the regions but it should put the union on a more sound financial footing in the run-up to the merger.

Britain's biggest union, Unison, is involved in a fierce campaign to save Shenley Hospital, near Radlett in Hertfordshire, the latest victim of the government's hospital closure policy.

A hospital for the mentally ill and elderly, it takes a lot of referrals from north-west London and has 500 patients. The government has condemned it as a "Victorian mental hospital" to justify its closure, but in fact it is a largely modern building with some of the best facilities for the mentally ill in the country.

The government plans to replace Shenley by "care in the community" - putting its facilities out to tender and restructuring its residential care at a number of smaller sites. Many key facilities such as occupational therapy will disappear.

The whole operation smells of dirty tricks. The North-West London Mental Health Trust, the current manager of Shenley, which has the backing of its elderly residents, was not even invited to tender. It put in a bid anyway.

Unison is supporting the local campaign against closure which is gathering momentum. Shenley's elderly residents are demanding that provision be maintained at least until 2005 and have issued a set of detailed principles as a basis for continuing care.

Over 2,500 members of the National Communications Union staged a 24-hour strike at the Girobank processing centre in Bootle, Merseyside, in mid-February in support of a pay claim.

And 1,000 other NCU members across the country walked out in a near-100 per cent action - the first at Giro since the seventies.

Management has so far refused to consider going above its best pay offer of 1.5 per cent but the union has warned that stoppages will continue until there is some movement.

NCU deputy general secretary Jeannie Drake said: "Last year, we made record profits of £64.4 million for the bank - now they want to reward us with a pay cut.

"Small wonder that today's action has been so overwhelmingly supported."

Seventeen Asian workers disciplined for taking a day off to celebrate a religious festival have been awarded £1,000 compensation each for racial discrimination.

The industrial tribunal in Leeds was regarded as a test case for the Asian community in Britain.

The 17 men had received final written warnings when they took a day off for Eid, one of the most important dates in the Moslem calendar, in June 1992.

The managing director of the company involved, Keith Sugars, described their action at the time as "mutiny".

An irreplaceable heroine

Leonora Lloyd recalls the life of Labour MP Jo Richardson, who died recently after a long illness.



Jo Richardson

WITH THE death of Jo Richardson the labour and women's movements have lost a doughty fighter. Although her family were Liberal supporters, Jo became a socialist at the age of 15. After a period in local politics, she became assistant to MP Ian Mikardo, who remained a close colleague and friend and predeceased her by only a few months.

I first met Jo in 1957, when we were both in Hammersmith Labour Party. I was secretary of the Young Socialists and she was the Youth Officer. In that role, she frequently defended us against the very right wing agent. She contested her first seat in 1964 and finally won Barking in the February 1974 election.

Jo was a committed unilateralist and on the left of the Party. She was secretary of the Tribune group of MPs for many years and a member of the NEC from 1979 to 1991, the only woman to win a place in the constituency section for much of that time.

She never meant to become known above all as a champion of women. In 1975, when the Labour MP, James White, introduced an anti-abortion bill, Jo was on the platform of the first meeting called to organise against it and she chaired the founding meeting of the National Abortion Campaign shortly afterwards. From then on, she above all other MPs led the fight to retain abortion rights.

It was largely as a result of this, Jo once told me, that she began to be invited to speak to many different kinds of women's organisations, and from this arose another of her parliamentary battles. As a result of a bill she sponsored, battered women won new rights and she believed that this was the most significant thing she ever did.

Jo was elected to the shadow cabinet in 1987 and used this position to campaign inside and outside the PLP for a Women's Ministry. Unfortunately, during the period she also lost much of her left credentials, voting for the witchunt and supporting the Kinnock leadership, even while privately having many reservations.

However, Jo had little personal ambition - it was her policies she fought for - and she aroused much love among women in the labour movement for the courage with which she campaigned.

Before the 1992 election, she had an operation to repair some of the damage which arthritis had inflicted upon her. However, the operation left her weak and in great pain and was followed by two further operations.

Jo was in London's Bart's hospital for many months and left in a wheelchair. She had lost a lot of weight and was still in pain. Despite this, she attended Parliament for vital votes and came to the 1993 Party Conference, where she held her traditional meeting for women delegates and visitors. The London women's organisation held a number of meetings at the House of Commons which she went to in her wheelchair.

With her death, an era has passed. Jo's period of greatest activity coincided with the period during which the women's movement was at its height and no other woman MP seems able to take her place. She will be sorely missed. ❑

Forged in fire

THE DEATH OF Labour MP Jimmy Boyce last month was a shock both to the labour movement and all who knew him. Until the last few weeks he showed no sign of the illness from which he was suffering or that he knew a heart transplant was the only remedy. He had been waiting for a donor when the fatal moment struck.

He was a buoyant, combative Scottish foundry worker who made his home in South Yorkshire. Elected to Sheffield City Council in 1984, in the heart of the Republic of South Yorkshire as it was then known, Jimmy was a member of the left in a left-wing area.

His radical socialism was not diminished by his transformation from councillor to Member of Parliament at the last general election and he voted with, and had strong sympathies toward, the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs. He was becoming adept at using the House of Commons as a platform for socialist ideas and defending his Rotherham constituents against the depradations of this evil government.

He is a sad loss to the radical wing of the Labour Party and to the Amalgamated Engineering Union. His death also reduces the small number of manual workers in the Parliamentary Labour Party. Our deepest sympathy is extended to his family.

Bob Cryer
MP

INTERVIEW

Challenging the machismo

Liz Davies talks to Jane Barrett, a former national organiser for the South African Transport and General Workers Union and an ANC member.



Jane Barrett

Liz Davies: What structures are there for women within the liberation and trade union movements?

Jane Barrett: The ANC has a Women's League, which was an affiliate of the fifties' organisation, the Federation of South African Women, a cross-party, pro-liberation movement which successfully organised protests against the pass laws. During the years when the ANC was banned, the Women's League mobilised women into general political protest, and was active around social issues, such as housing and education. Since the unbanning in 1990, the League has continued to play that sort of role. Recently, it has been taken up with its own internal conflicts, focussing on the role of Winnie Mandela.

COSATU has had two women's conferences since the mid-eighties and has a National Gender Forum, so called because it is officially gender-blind. In practice, however, only one man attends the Forum and it is a women's organisation. It is under-resourced, with only one full-time member of staff. It has an ex-officio seat on the National Executive.

Half of COSATU's affiliates have their own women's forums, the South African Transport and General Workers Union included. Ironically, the union with the highest proportion of women members, the textile workers' union does not have a women's organisation. They had a debate which took place at all levels of the union, four or five years ago on the validity of a separate organisation, and decided against it. The women now in the leadership argue that they can tackle issues directly within the union and thus address questions of gender in balance.

I should mention here that there is an ongoing debate within the trade union movement in South Africa as to the use of women's forums. Should they be organising and representing women as women, or using the organisation generally to mobilise women politically?

LD: What issues do these women's organisations take up?

JB: COSATU's National Gender Forum developed an imaginative policy for better child care. For the last two years, they have called a National Child Care Day, asking workers to bring their children to work. As three quarters of COSATU members are men, many fathers also took their children to work. As a result, more employers have expressed an interest in funding child care places.

There is a general debate on the merits of work-place, as opposed to community-based, child care and pre-school education. The problem with community-based child care is the government's unwillingness to invest resources.

The greatest need for pre-school education is in the black townships, where there is the lowest provision.

On the subject of maternity leave, pregnant workers very often get dismissed except in the most organised workforces where workers will strike in support of a pregnant woman's rights.

Two years ago, COSATU'S women's conference held a long debate on the subject, eventually deciding to consult the rank and file. A woman's right to choose is in the ANC Reconstruction and Development Programme.

LD: What about women's representation within the trade union movement?

JB: The ANC list was required to include one third women. In my own branch over a third of nominations are women but COSATU representatives on the ANC list were nominated before the quota was passed by the ANC. They only nominated three women out of 20 places.

Women are still badly under-represented at all levels. There is one woman on the 70-person national executive of COSATU. The National Gender Forum is lobbying for quotas. There is already child care provision at meetings. The Forum is trying to focus minds on the absence of women representatives and empower women to take their place among the leadership.

That means building confidence among women and challenging the whole male political ethos.

Ironically, since the unbanning, as political activity has become more complex, women, who were already marginalised, have become even more so. The information about world politics and economics available to male shop stewards and local organisers has produced a phenomenal development, not reflected amongst the women members.

LD: What is the future for South African women?

JB: Despite my criticisms, I am very hopeful about the women in South Africa and the really powerful feminism that runs through them. Many of them wouldn't use the word "feminist", but in its real sense it is deep-rooted in most South African women.

They have been independent women all their lives, and there is a tremendous well of determination to fight, a clarity of purpose and a collective spirit, shown by the very important and powerful contribution to the liberation movement made by so many women both individually and collectively.

I am sure this will carry through post-election. For all the weaknesses of the women's structures in our organisations, the ANC has always combined liberation with non-racialism and non-sexism. Non-sexism is in the Freedom Charter. The practice may not have always borne out the aim, but the South African liberation struggle has not gone hand in hand with the type of machismo often associated with national liberation struggles. ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Shared injustice

Valerie Veness recently travelled to Chicago with one of the Birmingham Six, Gerry Hunter, to be present at the appeal of Manuel Salazar, a prisoner on death row.

SERIOUS MISCARRIAGES of justice do not only occur in Britain. In the USA, thousands of prisoners are wrongfully convicted - and there they face the additional horror of the death penalty in the majority of states.

Manuel Salazar was only 18 when he was arrested on September 12th, 1984. He was charged with the murder of a police officer in his home town of Joliet, near Chicago, in Illinois. Originally stopped as a suspect because he was in a car containing three Hispanics and one black man, he ran away and was chased by police officer Martin Murrin.

When cornered, Salazar was physically attacked and punched. The policeman produced a gun and threatened to kill him, a struggle ensued and the gun went off - killing officer Murrin. The autopsy showed Murrin had been drinking alcohol. Despite this, Salazar was convicted of murder and sentenced to death.

Fleeing to Mexico, he was subsequently kidnapped by representatives of the authorities and returned to Illinois - in clear breach of international law. He has now spent eight years on death row awaiting his last appeal.

Gerry Hunter and I went to Illinois from January 8th to 15th to lend our support at his appeal in Springfield, the state capital. Local campaigners had mobilised an impressive support in the Mexican community and from local trade unionists and people in the legal profession.

We firstly travelled to Springfield for a seminar at a local Catholic church organised to protest at the death penalty and to let the local Catholic community know about Manuel Salazar's case. We found out that 68 per cent of the people on Illinois's death row are black, Hispanic or of other ethnic minorities.

The following morning, back in Chicago, we found ourselves doing radio and newspaper interviews - including those in Spanish for the Hispanic media. There was a lot of interest in the parliamentary early day motion, signed by 115 Members of Parliament and moved by Islington North MP Jeremy Corbyn, deploring the intended execution of Salazar.

The next day it was back to Springfield - in the company of seven coachloads of supporters heading for a rally that evening and the start of the appeal hearing the following day. The rally was packed by over 500 supporters. I spoke and showed a video sent over by Jeremy Corbyn denouncing Salazar's conviction and the appalling institution of the death penalty. By having Gerry Hunter there we were able to show the practical effect of not executing people!

The appeal hearing was totally different from the sort of thing I was used to in Britain. Each side is given 30 minutes to make a case and reply, with the defence then given 10 minutes to rebut the reply. There are a bewildering seven judges but the defendant is not even allowed to appear. It was very unusual by US standards as the hearing was packed, with hundreds outside demonstrating as well. At the end of the hearing, we were told we would not hear the outcome for three to six months!

The following day we travelled to Pontiac "Correctional Centre" to see Manuel Salazar.

We were slightly shocked that after entering the prison we were taken through to an area marked "Condemned Unit". We were appalled to find that the victim of this gross miscarriage was handcuffed for the whole of our visit.

He is a bright, intelligent young man and a talented artist. His pictures are highly rated in the art world. He was amazed by the support which his case has aroused and was overwhelmed that people from Britain had travelled to see him. Despite totally different backgrounds and a wide difference in ages, it soon became apparent that he and Gerry Hunter shared very similar experiences. Our actual time with him was two hours, though we spent nearly all day at the prison.

Our last full day was spent lobbying the Irish politicians in Chicago to support Salazar and we rounded it off by going to see *In the Name of The Father* at its opening-night showing in Illinois, a rather poignant choice of film.

We are determined that the Manuel Salazar case is publicised here. International support is very important in all justice campaigns - if you want to help write to us c/o 129a Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG. It may just make the difference. ❑



Valerie Veness was heavily involved in the campaigns to free the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four and is now the secretary of the East Ham Two Campaign.

Aiding genocide

Maggie Helwig of the East Timorese human rights group, TAPOL, looks at the shameful British record in arming the bloodthirsty Indonesian occupation of that country.

INDONESIA INVADED the small island nation of East Timor in 1975 just days after East Timor had proclaimed its freedom from Portugal. Since that time, it is estimated that at least one third of the indigenous Timorese have died, either killed by bombs, bullets and napalm or by the starvation and disease caused by the invasion and Indonesia's subsequent scorched-earth policies brought in its wake. The "transmigration" programme has been combined with genocidal attacks on the indigenous population, in an overall attempt to repopulate East Timor with settlers from Java and elsewhere in Indonesia.

Initially, Timorese resistance was focused on the guerilla army, FALINTIL, which was orginally closely associated with the political party, Fretilin. Despite massive attacks by the larger and heavily armed Indonesian army - armed to a large extent by Britain - FALINTIL remains a force even now, though its importance is more psychological than strategic.

More recently, the urban resistance, made up mostly of students and young people, has become crucially important. Largely unarmed, this wing of the resistance works by smuggling information to the outside world and by organising, at great risk, public demonstrations.

The Timorese Catholic church has played an important role in the urban resistance. Priests have encouraged and sheltered student activists and the Indonesian crackdown of 1991 began, shortly before the Santa Cruz massacre, with a series of raids on churches throughout the country. Bishop Belo has been one of the most significant voices within East Timor speaking out against human rights violations, using what protection his church position gives him to say that which would bring torture and death to others.

East Timor came to the world's attention in November, 1991, when a demonstration, mostly made up of students, was fired on by the Indonesian army and over 200 protestors were killed. Nothing too unusual in itself, the Santa Cruz massacre became a crucial incident because, for once, western journalists were present, took videos and photographs and managed to get them out of the country and into the world's media.

Later, survivors of the massacre were sentenced to lengthy terms in prison, while a few of the soldiers who had fired on them were given brief terms or simply dismissed. Most were not punished in any way.

Since that time, repression in East Timor has deepened - but so, too, has outside interest and pressure. About a year after Santa Cruz, the Indonesian military finally succeeded in capturing Xanana Gusmao, the leader of FALINTIL, who was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment. The sentence was later shortened to 20 years but in an Indonesian prison it's just about the same thing.

Xanana, however, has taken advantage of his apparently desperate situation and has succeeded in obtaining a transfer to Cipinang prison in Jakarta. From there, he has sent a series of letters to supporters, human rights groups, and heads of state including Indonesian President Suharto himself, demanding the release of other Timorese prisoners - he has not asked to be released himself - and an end to the Indonesian occupation of his homeland. The increased attention paid to East Timor since 1991 has also served to bring to public notice British involvement with Indonesia.

Britain is a major supplier of arms to Indonesia - the second largest, after the United States, between 1987 and 1991. Most recently, Indonesia purchased 24 Hawk fighter-trainers from British Aerospace. Reports indicate that it will soon buy 16 more, and may intend assembling a fleet of 144.

The Hawk deal has now made Britain Indonesia's number one supplier of major weapons systems. Such attack aircraft are, of course, commonly used in the sort of low-intensity warfare that is being waged in East Timor, against FALINTIL and the civilian population. In addition, members of the Indonesian armed forces have received training in Britain, some funded through the British Military Training Assistance Scheme.



A recent demonstration outside the Indonesian embassy against the occupation of East Timor.

In the wake of recent revelations linking aid and arms sales, it is important to note that Indonesia is currently the third largest Asian recipient of British aid, and that the amount of aid given has tripled over past years, increasing significantly after the Santa Cruz massacre when several other countries cut back or suspended aid.

● **For more information:**

British Coalition for East Timor, PO Box 2349, London E1 3HX;

Campaign Against Arms Trade, 11 Goodwin St., London N4 3HQ;

TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, 111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8HW.



Sex, violence

Yori Matsui, a Japanese feminist, probes the causes of the brutal exploitation of women in Asian countries.

IN 1989, for the first time in Japanese history, women in Japan played a key role in defeating the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in the Upper House election, due partly to nationwide resentment over former Prime Minister Uno's involvement in a sex scandal.

The geisha whose favours he purchased protested publicly that she felt humiliated by his treatment of her.

The response from Japanese women to the geisha's complaints was quite encouraging. During the election campaign, Uno was prevented from making public appearances because everywhere he appeared he was met by angry women carrying placards.

Japan has become an economic superpower with a huge trade surplus, extensive foreign investment, important overseas assets, and a dispenser of economic aid to the Third World.

Such rapid economic growth has been accompanied, however, by a comparable growth in the sex industry, an inseparable part of the whole. The huge demand for female workers in this profitable industry cannot be met by available Japanese women alone.

Thus, the shortage of young women has been filled during the past decade by migrant women from neighbouring Asian countries. Some people estimate that nearly 100,000 women come to Japan every year. While 70 per cent of them are Filipino, Thai women are increasing, followed by Taiwanese, Koreans and Malaysians.

A blatant example of international trafficking, these women are brought here and, in most cases, forced into prostitution. This flesh trade and other facets of the sex industry are almost entirely controlled by the yakuza (the Japanese mafia).

During a three-year period beginning in 1986, 1,200 Asian migrant women sought refuge and assistance at HELP, a women's shelter in Japan, because of human rights violations such as physical violence, psychological abuse, drug use, non-payment of wages, and so on.

Many of these cases of violent abuse of migrant women workers end in tragedy. Recently, a Filipino employed as a hostess was abandoned in a nearly unconscious state near the gates of the Philippine embassy in Tokyo. Taken to a hospital, she died five days later of tuberculosis. To her employer, she was merely a commodity useful for making money. When she became seriously ill and unable to work, she was a burden; she was expendable, and so she was discarded.

Another Filipino, only 17 years old, came to Japan on the promise of a department store salesperson job, but when she arrived, she was whisked away to a brothel in Chiba, north of Tokyo. When she resisted prostituting herself, she was cruelly tortured. Finally, escaping to Tokyo some two years later, she carried scars of cigarette burns all over her body.

Several months ago I attended a conference, "Child Prostitution and Tourism", in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. I was shocked to learn of the number of young prostitutes under 16 years of age in Thailand: perhaps as many as 800,000 according to the Children's Right Protection Centre.

Thai economic development is so dynamic and fast that it almost reaches the level of the newly industrialized economies. In spite of this, rural poverty is persistent and consumerism penetrates even into very poor villages in remote areas.

Expanding tourism, promoted by the Thai government, creates more demand for prostitutes and, under such circumstances, in many poor villages in northern Thailand more and more farmers are selling their daughters into the sex industry in Bangkok and other tourist resorts.

In Japan recently, I saw a child pornographic magazine, a special issue on Thai prostitutes that included a series of photos of a 15-year-old virgin hill tribe girl from Burma being raped and abused.

European paedophiles, preferring even younger girls around 10 to 14 years old, come to Southeast Asia in large numbers. They are not allowed to abuse children in their own countries, and they find it relatively easy to buy a very young girl in a Third World country.

An African sister said that violence against women is rooted in three things - poverty, war and culture. Today, the three major causes of this violence are: development, militarism and patriarchy.

The type of development that has been pursued for the past three decades has widened the gap between rich and poor, both globally and within nations. This kind of development has destroyed nature and reinforced men's domination over women because it has been promoted by and favours the interests of the industrialized world, particularly the transnational corporations.

IN THE RICH world, competitive money-oriented economic systems, new technology, consumerism and other inhuman social structures that result from a lifestyle of overdevelopment, all contribute to and converge in increasing violence against women at home, at the workplace, and in far away places.

On the other hand, in the Third World where three out of four human beings on earth live, people suffer from debilitating poverty because of underdevelopment. Here in this part of the world, women are victimized by men who are so poor, and frustrated because of it, that they tend to express their feelings in cruel ways.

Both overdevelopment and underdevelopment can be called "male development" and it most definitely is

and militarism

"male". There are many women's groups now at work, searching for alternative development models in order to create a new society: one that is free from violence, oppression and discrimination.

It should go without saying that poverty is the key issue in most Third World countries, and it is equally true that it is the weakest sector of society, the poor and women, that is most affected by violence.

ON MALAYSIAN plantations where the legacy of British colonial rule still has its influence, and where the so-called "culture of poverty" is deeply rooted, Indian male workers live oppressed lives and compensate for this by oppressing their women. Women become victims of severe beatings, harassment and even rape.

And now a new colonialism is manifested in the restructuring policy being imposed on the impoverished Third World by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Another problem of development is consumerism, which begins in the First World and spreads to the Third World. Giant transnational advertising companies provoke the materialistic greed of the masses in both the First and Third World countries. Commoditization of women is usually accompanied by violence, as in forced prostitution.

Technology is also a development issue that affects women. Transnational corporations with advanced technology are operating in third world countries far away from oversight committees and home offices. It happens, however, that these corporations often use their new technologies without the same safety precautions that would be required in their home countries.

The Bhopal disaster in India in 1984 is an example. There was an explosion at the Union Carbide's chemical plant there, releasing a vast amount of poisonous gases that killed at least 8,000 people outright; and some estimate that as many as 300,000 were injured without hope of recovery.

A second cause of increasing violence against women is militarism. History tells us that military aggression has always been accompanied by rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

When the Japanese Imperial Army invaded China and south-east Asia between 1938 and 1945, Japanese soldiers not only raped the women in their path of conquest, but carried away thousands of young Korean women as Chongshindae, or "battlefield prostitutes."

The US Army in Vietnam in the sixties and seventies was no better behaved than the Japanese Army in World War Two. Many books have been written by former US servicemen about their experiences there. Their testimonies to the rape of village women during their "search and destroy" missions, and accounts of purchasing prostitutes in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) are painful reading.

Even though the US military presence in Asia was reduced following the Vietnam War. US bases still remain in many countries, and prostitution around these bases - for example, in Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, is dreadful.

BECAUSE OF the stronger yen, the price of sex with a Japanese woman is very expensive for the GIs. In darkened clubs, Filipinos dance on stage as watching servicemen drink beer, and video projections of sex and violence run continuously in the background.

In unlit corners, some of the men are being sexually serviced. In this kind of environment, fuelled by alcohol and exposure to violence, the phenomena of soldiers belonging to an oppressed class in their own culture expressing their frustrations in brutal sexual assaults on prostitutes can be observed.

The third factor inherent in the problem of violence against women is how patriarchal culture, religion, and tradition have institutionalized violence against women, and how fundamentalism and communal tension perpetuate or aggravate it today.

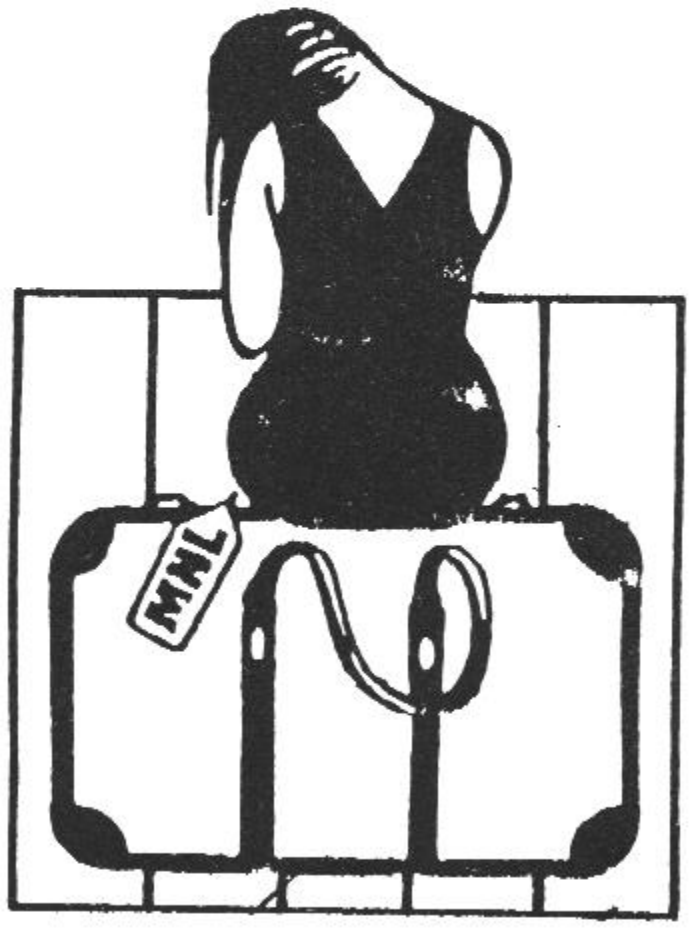
Historically, most world cultures have had cruel forms of violence against their women. In Europe, for example, witch hunting caused the horrible deaths of about nine million women between the 15th and 17th centuries.

TRADITIONS OF institutionalized violence against women abound in India. Sati, or widow-burning still occurs. Sati means that the wife is burned alive on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. Banned by the British in 1829, nevertheless, only three years ago an 18-year-old woman was killed in a Sati rite and glorified by fundamentalists.

As we have seen, violence against women occurs in many places and takes many forms. It moves from the domestic scene to the state, the military and the transnational agencies; from mutilation and maiming to murder.

On the other hand, in most countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, women are beginning to fight back effectively in a variety of ways: the establishment of crisis centres and shelters, counselling services, networking, changing laws, demonstrations and consciousness-raising activities that empower and challenge male-oriented education systems.

● Yori Matsui is the author of *Women's Asia*, published by Zed Press, £8.95. This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in *Asian Student News*, published by the Asian Students Association in Hong Kong.



REVIEWS

Dirty linen at the seaside

Narinder Bains reviews
Bhaji on the Beach.
Directed by Gurinder Chada.

ASK ANY young British Indians what they think of members of their community making films like *Bhaji on the Beach* and the response will almost certainly be very positive.

We - that is, young Indians - arrived on the music scene a few years ago with Bangra and now we are entering the film industry with something of a sensation.

Bhaji on the Beach is simply the story of a day out in Blackpool for a group of Asian women, a story which recalls my own childhood as older Indians tend to have a tradition of going on days out rather than taking holidays. Within this group there is, if you like, a fragmented rainbow coalition of outlooks, needs and prejudices.

There is a young, middle-class woman who has spent her life doing her parents' bidding and has just secured a place to study medicine, only to discover that she is pregnant by her Afro-Caribbean boyfriend - not usually a guaranteed path to the average Indian family's heart. Incidentally, her boyfriend echoed my own partner's feelings about being "the invisible man" as far as her family was concerned.

There are two young sisters who are joining the trip to take the opportunity of eyeing up the local talent while away from their mother, and a woman who, along with her small son, is living in a women's hostel after leaving her husband and the stifling atmosphere of his family.

The young mother is pursued to Blackpool by her spouse along with his two brothers, the eldest of whom is determinedly aggressive. Here, we have well-drawn characters. Indian men are, it is true, often as torn between two cultures as Indian women, but so often they fall back on a traditional, machismo role. After all, they have a vested interest in maintaining a traditional culture because most of that culture's advantages are bestowed upon them.

Arguably the least ambivalent character in the film is the young woman who organises the trip and drives the minibus. She is a straightforward feminist and holds the trip together when the many problems arise. But her own life and its complications are never examined.

A group of three older women consists of two strong traditionalists and a more complex character whose life is becoming confused by her questioning of whether she did the right thing in getting married and bringing up a family from a young age. Set against, and in striking contrast to, these three, is a mini-skirted woman from Bombay who ends a day of chatting to various men by buying a present for the group - a cake in the shape of a pair of breasts. Yet she is the only one who actually lives in India and asks the older women pointedly: "What do you know about India now?"

So there is every kind of character and problem displayed in this film - it is almost a British-Indian Canterbury Tales for the nineties. That is where the movie's problem lies: it packs too much in and tries to cover too much ground. But, then, the Indian community has been in Britain for longer than there have been cinemas, yet there have been hardly any films about, or by, Indians. So trying to make up for lost time and thus covering a little too much ground is eminently forgiveable.

Older Indians could well be offended by *Bhaji on the Beach*. Many will undoubtedly see it as washing dirty linen in public. But the film does reflect the experiences of many minority groups in Britain and, indeed, throughout the world.

There is a scene in which the young, single, pregnant woman is sat in a cafe. On one side, the two older traditionalists are abusing her morals and reputation for sleeping with a black man. On the other, two white women are swapping racist bigotry. Eventually, the young woman leaves after effectively telling the four, "A curse on both your houses".

This scene beautifully illustrates how young Asians, especially women, are caught between two worlds. For us, the future is difficult, painful and full of hard decisions. But be assured - we will win through and find our own path in the end. ❑



TROUBLE IN MIND: Hashida is comforted by Oliver after finding she is pregnant in Bhaji on the Beach.

Ronan Bennett reviews
In the Name of the Father.
Directed by Jim Sheridan.



Daniel Day-Lewis plays Gerry Conlon. PHOTO: Universal Pictures

The face of evil

WHEN YOU GO to see *In the Name of the Father*, forget about the row over the factual changes. The film's reactionary critics have never cared tuppence for the facts of the Guildford case. That they are so vocal now is testimony not to a belated interest in getting to the bottom of a sordid miscarriage of justice but the mark of their continuing hypocrisy and dishonesty.

In the Name of the Father, co-written and directed by Jim Sheridan (whose credits include *My Left Foot* and *Into the West* is a loose adaptation of Gerry Conlon's book, *Proved Innocent*. Conlon was arrested in Belfast in 1971 and brought to England for questioning about the Guildford pub bombings. Five people died in the explosions, over 60 were injured. Conlon's, father, Guiseppe travelled to London to arrange legal aid for his son and went to stay with his sister-in-law, Annie Maguire, only to be arrested with other members of the Maguire family during a police raid.

After being brutalized, humiliated and threatened with guns during interrogation, Conlon - together with Paul Hill, Paddy Armstrong and Carole Richardson - signed a confession. Riddled with inconsistencies and gross errors of fact, the confessions were nevertheless sufficient to convict all four. Each was sentenced to life. At a separate trial, the seven people arrested at the Maguire home were convicted of handling explosives (though no explosives were ever produced). Guiseppe Conlon, already a seriously ill man, got 10 years. He died in prison in 1980. The Maguires and the Guildford Four were exonerated in 1989 after evidence of extensive police wrongdoing came to light.

Although the miscarriage of justice is at the heart of the film, its emotional centre is the difficult relationship between the wayward Gerry and the upright and morally incorruptible Guiseppe. The film's use of the father-son relationship, a classic vehicle for Hollywood story-telling (the movie was financed by Universal), seems overly schematic, but it is powerful all the same.

Daniel Day-Lewis is, as you would expect, stunning as the streetwise Gerry, an authentic Belfast wideboy, a hustler always on the look-out for the main chance, but the real surprise of the film is Peter Postlethwaite as Guiseppe. There are moments of almost unbearable poignancy in the scenes of Gerry and Guiseppe together.

The film has an authenticity about the North lacking in so many big-budget films (*Patriot Games, The Crying Game*, to name but two).

The Belfast riot sequence is the best mounted, best directed, most exciting I have seen, capturing perfectly the rioters' sense of confusion and danger. The supporting actors - Maire Jones, John Lynch and Don Baker in particular stand out - do not put a foot wrong. Although *In the Name of the Father* deals with terrible human suffering - it is hard to imagine the despair, helplessness and rage Conlon experienced at watching his father die in prison - the film is leavened with a sparky humour and is never maudlin.

In the Name of the Father is not without its faults. At two hours, thirteen minutes it is too long; there are scenes that cry out for cutting. And while the psychological hinterland of Gerry and Guiseppe is explored with subtlety, the policemen and judges are little more than cut-outs: Corin Redgrave's talents are woefully under-exploited as the evil policeman, Dixon.

The staging of the courtroom scenes are so awry that they begin to look like LA Law meets the Guildford Four set in a seventeenth-century court of assize. However, none of *In the Name of the Father*'s failings are enough to undermine what is an important, committed, angry and well crafted film. ❑

REVIEWS

Thinning democracy

Mike Phipps reviews
Low Intensity Democracy, edited by
Barry Gills, Joel Rocamora and Richard Wilson,
published by Pluto, £9.95 pbk.

IS THERE more to democracy than periodic elections? The answers of the authors of *Low Intensity Democracy* is an emphatic yes: starting with respect for human rights, civil liberties and freedom from economic oppression which is intensifying throughout the world.

This book unmasks the new standards trumpeted by US policy makers, for whom the pursuit of "democracy" is a more efficient means of achieving traditional goals. Noam Chomsky's essay gets right to the point, contrasting America's ruinous policy in Nicaragua with its failure in Vietnam. Whereas Vietnam, from a purely American standpoint, cost 58,000 US soldiers and 150 billion dollars, in Nicaragua "the Reaganites ran a cost-effective operation, expending only trivial sums to cause Nicaragua some 15 billion dollars in damages and 30,000 killed outright, along with unknown others who died from disease and hunger."

In Latin America and Asia, a common theme of US policy emerges: support for periodic elections, as long as elite authoritarian power structures remain intact. The notion of democratic reform as something linked to a wider programme of social change or even respect for human rights is nowhere on the west's agenda, as a survey of recent American - and British - vetoes in the UN confirms. As for Africa, its increasing exclusion from the world market is paraded to justify the shabby line that it is not "ready" for democracy.

In eastern Europe, the collapse of Stalinism has permitted what Burbach here calls the "Latin Americanisation" of the region. As the old regimes fell, western leaders acted quickly to abort processes which could lead to comprehensive social reforms and a heightening of class antagonisms which might have led to a real clearing out of the old elite.

Instead they promoted ideological allies of the free market, many of them recent "converts" from the collapsing order with few democratic credentials. Along with this went "thin democracy": imported multi-party elections based on media image and corporate money.

The case studies which make up the second part of the book confirm this analysis. In Guatemala, the military regime abdicated in 1986, partly on the grounds that a civilian government could more easily obtain international aid. In the first five years of "democracy", there were 2,429 extra-judicial killings and 559 disappearances. In 1989, "death squads declared an open season on trade unionists and student leaders". Only two police officers were ever jailed in this period.

The case of the Philippines is also instructive. Elected to power in 1986, Cory Aquino could have used her tremendous political authority to implement the reform agenda on which she had campaigned. Instead, military and economic power was left in the hands of Marcos holdovers.

The weak land reform law was so complicated it was virtually impossible to implement. In 1987 the government abolished the Human Rights Commission and abuses by the military increased accordingly.

Little has changed since Clinton came to power in the US. Western leaders have no hesitation in choosing which side to take whenever there is a conflict between capitalism and democracy, as recent events in Russia and Haiti confirm. ❑

Bottom of the pile

Labour Briefing reviews
Homeworkers Worldwide by Sheila Rowbotham, The Merlin Press;
Dignity and Daily Bread, edited by Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter;
In Praise of the Anecdotal Woman: Motherhood and a Hidden Curriculum
by Jacqueline Andrews, Trentham Books.

THE NATURE OF production under capitalism is changing. Modern technology has not given us more leisure - unless you count enforced unemployment - but has enabled managers to plan their production more precisely. Traditionally, Marxism held that overproduction was a cause of depressions and unemployment. Now, large organisations work on the basis of "just in time" production rather than "just in case". When you buy your soap powder or new shirt, the shop's computer registers immediately at the warehouse, enabling accurate re-ordering.

Large conglomerates have shed much of their skilled labour and contracted out work. At the bottom of this process, which is often international in scale, are to be found homeworkers, who are overwhelmingly women.

Women have always worked from home, but now they are at the bottom of an enormous international pyramid of labour. Other women, unable to find any paid work, create jobs for themselves outside any formal structure. The first two books examine this growing phenmenon, both in this country and world-wide. The process has led to women creating new forms of organisation, learning how to negotiate with contractors, and gaining strength by working together across national frontiers. The books draw attention to the need for trade unions to understand the importance of the work done by women in the informal sector and to learn from them new ways of organising, rather than seeking to impose existing methods which are not appropriate.

The traditional way for women to break out of the low-paid trap is through education. Jacqueline Andrews herself started higher education when she was already the mother of two young children. At university, she discovered just how male-orientated the academic world is. There is no provision for women wanting to take a couple of months off to have a baby, problems with child-care are not accepted as a good excuse for a late essay, and if a child gets ill on the day of the final exam, bang goes three years work. Either women with children accept the structure - designed for men - or go under.

Jacqueline Andrews's book explains just how the education experience fails women and starts to provide some of the ways in which it could be changed - if only the men who control the system were prepared to change with it.

Broken dream

Liz Davies reviews
Heaven and Earth.
Directed by Oliver Stone.

HEAVEN AND EARTH is the last episode of Oliver Stone's Vietnam trilogy. Unlike *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, it examines the Vietnam war from the point of view of a woman, and of the Vietnamese. It is based on the true story of Le Li Hayslip, a woman from a rural Vietnamese background caught up in the war. She is finally "rescued" and brought to the US by an American soldier, a composite character of four men in her life, played by Tommy Lee Jones.

The film charts the impact of the war on them both, and on their relationship. She represents Vietnam and through her experiences the turmoil of the Vietnamese is explored. The film ends with reconciliation and is going on release just as President Clinton has announced an end to the American trade embargo on Vietnam.

The film is moving, beautifully shot, compassionate and honest. It is a realistic picture of the horror of the war, which Oliver Stone witnessed at first-hand. And it clearly lays the blame at the door of America. As in the previous films, Stone shows the suffering inflicted on the Vietnamese by the Americans, and also the brutalisation that the American soldiers suffered. He is less at home portraying the war through Vietnamese eyes, but this is a valiant attempt. That said, he gets somewhat carried away by beautiful shots of the Vietnamese countryside and Buddhist ceremonies, and these reduce the impact of the film.

Le Li Hayslip escaped. Therefore, she is atypical of the Vietnamese who were butchered or survived the war to face building fresh lives and a new economy.

The film does not really address this problem. The American soldier, and the US suburbs are seen as the ultimate dream and once she has escaped, being a resourceful woman, she prospers materially.

This is where the allegory breaks down - Vietnam was not rescued by the Americans, but liberated itself and is still paying the economic price today. Le Li escaped to the American dream, Vietnam rejected it.

The film's strength lies not in any moral lesson about relations between America and Vietnam, but in its dramatic portrayal of the horrors of the Vietnamese war and its clear starting-point that America was to blame.

As a piece of cinema, and a well-intentioned comment on the Vietnam war, it is well worth going to see. Its confusion between the true story and the allegory, however, leaves the viewer confused.

Personal authority

George Georgiou reviews
Tony Benn's videoed collection of parliamentary speeches.

WHY HAS Tony Benn released this video? Is this a sign that the grand old man of the left has adopted slick, modern advertising methods *a la* the blue suits who now run the Labour Party?

Benn anticipates this question and the answer is clearly "no". In his introduction, he points out that, since Parliament has been televised, it has also been sanitised and this has led to diluted and eviscerated politics. There is, he concludes, a responsibility to ensure that dissenting views such as his own get across to the public. The videoing of every speech in Parliament ensures that this is possible.

And with that he switches to his first speech, concerning the "callous, brutal" attack on the mines from "a party that professes a belief in the citizen's charter and a classless society.

From pit closures, he moves onto fox-hunting, nuclear weapons and, with great wit and humour, the ordination of women.

As ever, he speaks with constitutional authority, historical awareness and constant references to the experiences of working-class people.

In the Gulf war debate, he was the first to mention the word "oil" and spelt out a particularly succinct aphorism: "Morality is not the product of a parliamentary majority."

Similarly, in the arms to Iraq controversy, Benn pointed out that MPs represented soldiers maimed and killed by weapons supplied by British firms.

The video is perhaps too personal to be a really powerful tool for education and agitation. It is, nonetheless, well worth viewing.

Tony Benn Speaking Up In Parliament

Tony Benn is among the most powerful speakers inside and outside Parliament. Extracts of his speeches in the House of Commons, on some of the most significant political controversies of recent years, are available on cassette for the first time. They include the closure of the pits, fox-hunting, nuclear defence, the Gulf War, the ordination of women and many other debates since parliamentary broadcasting began in 1989.

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.....

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That's rich

Coventry North-West's Labour MP, **Geoffrey Robinson**, has two homes neither of which is in his constituency. He has an eight-bedroom house in Surrey, which he bought in 1983 and which apparently is no longer big enough for him.

He recently purchased a 20-bedroom mansion in Hampshire for £800,000 which has its own ballroom, swimming pool, billiards room and chapel.

Coventry's evening paper asked some of **Robinson**'s constituents whether they thought their MP should live in the constituency he represents in the corridors of power. One member of the public said that it would be better if the MP lived in the city but added: "I don't think he would be able to find a 20-bedroom home in Coventry."

that Members of Parliament have such a hard time of it and need more time away from the burdens of office so that they can relax - like all the loafers who work in shops, offices and factories and who enjoy such easy and privileged lifestyles compared to the wonderful, self-sacrificing men and women in Westminster.

To be fair, **Allen** also recommends shortening the holidays but, nevertheless, what changes like these will mean in practice is more guillotines being imposed and, therefore, more odious Tory legislation going through the House of Commons.

The richest irony here is that, while certain Labour MPs argue for reducing Parliament's hours, others in their ranks have been busy sitting on a committee which recommends allowing coal owners to force miners into working seven days a week.

Irresponsible journalism

Our article by **Ravinder Kaur** (see page 7) on the latest developments in the **Tower Hamlets Labour Party** confirms the report, published by *Briefing* back in October, exposing the racists who had taken over the Party in Millwall and helped the Lib-Dems hand the council seat to the BNP.

The point here is not just that you read it first in *Briefing*. Other publications had access to this story but refused to touch it. London's *Evening Standard* was set to run with it but was scared off by empty threats of libel action. Both *Tribune* and the *New Statesman* chose not to cover the Labour angle of the story - though they covered the Lib-Dems embarrassments in detail. Frankly, comrades, your refusal to print the truth about Labour in Millwall amounts to nothing less than a cover-up of racism within Labour's ranks. You let down your readers, the Labour Party, and, not least, the black people of Tower Hamlets.

Undoubtedly, our friends at *Tribune* and *New Statesman* will not agree. We would welcome their response.

Splitters!

We can reveal that the splits in the **Socialist Party of Great Britain**, which everyone has been talking about (you mean you haven't?), are based on different perceptions of women's liberation.

The **Socialist Party of Great Britain** first denounced this "reformist" concept way back in 1904; not ones to move with the times, in 1974 they "formally ruled that membership of women's liberation organisations was incompatible with membership of the SPGB." The Clapham-based Socialist Party, a split from the SPGB, has adopted the demands of women's liberation while the original party has declared that "its actions demonstrate its total betrayal of socialist principles." So there.

Ken who?

Ken Livingstone's swollen ego seems to get bigger every day. In a survey carried out by *The Big Issue*, in reply to a question about whether he would own up if he damaged someone's property, Ken replied: "I'd leave a note because because some bugger would be bound to see me and I'd get done anyway, with a face like mine everyone knows."

Briefing decided to put this assertion to the test and we showed his photograph to 100 people selected at random. Unfortunately for our Ken, his fame does not seem to be quite as extensive as he seems to think.

While 37 people recognised him, 43 had no idea who he was. Another 14 thought he was a politician but could not name him. Five people though he was Saddam Hussein and one said that he was George Galloway.

Benefit for the Tower Hamlets Nine

JC001, London Posse, Hustlers HC and others.

Special appearance by Apache Indian.

March 4th
The Rocket, Holloway Rd., London N4.

Further details: 081-548-0099

Go East!

Periscope is surprised to learn of the departure of nauseating former leftie **Rachel Pitkeathly** to eastern Europe as a "consultant".

In a previous incarnation, **Pitkeathly** was an activist in *Socialist Organiser*. Supporters of that set-up will have particularly bitter memories of the chancer as she later gave information to the *Guardian* and Walworth Road which led to the banning of 50 *Organiser* supporters.

Naturally, she obliged her new-found friends by painting a particularly lurid picture of life under the heel of a wild-eyed bunch of demented fanatics.

Young Rachel then trod the usual path of mediocre careerists in the Labour Party: research assistant to Labour MP, followed by a nine-month stint as Shelter's parliamentary officer before landing the top public affairs post with that organisation just one year ago.

She has now left the homeless charity rather suddenly and in somewhat mysterious circumstances. We wonder what eastern Europeans will be "consulting" her about.

The poor dears

In his recent Thomas Paine Memorial Lecture, Labour MP **Graham Allen** gave a passionate plea for reducing the long, tedious hours worked by all our Stakhanovite representatives who sacrifice so much to tread the corridors of power.

The front-bench spokesperson on home affairs said: "Labour's view, endorsed by the Parliamentary Labour Party, is that the parliamentary day should be shifted forward by three hours and normally begin at 11.30am and end at 7pm."

Thank God. Someone has finally realised



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Yet another *Briefing* quiz

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

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

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

Greetings to Labour women everywhere

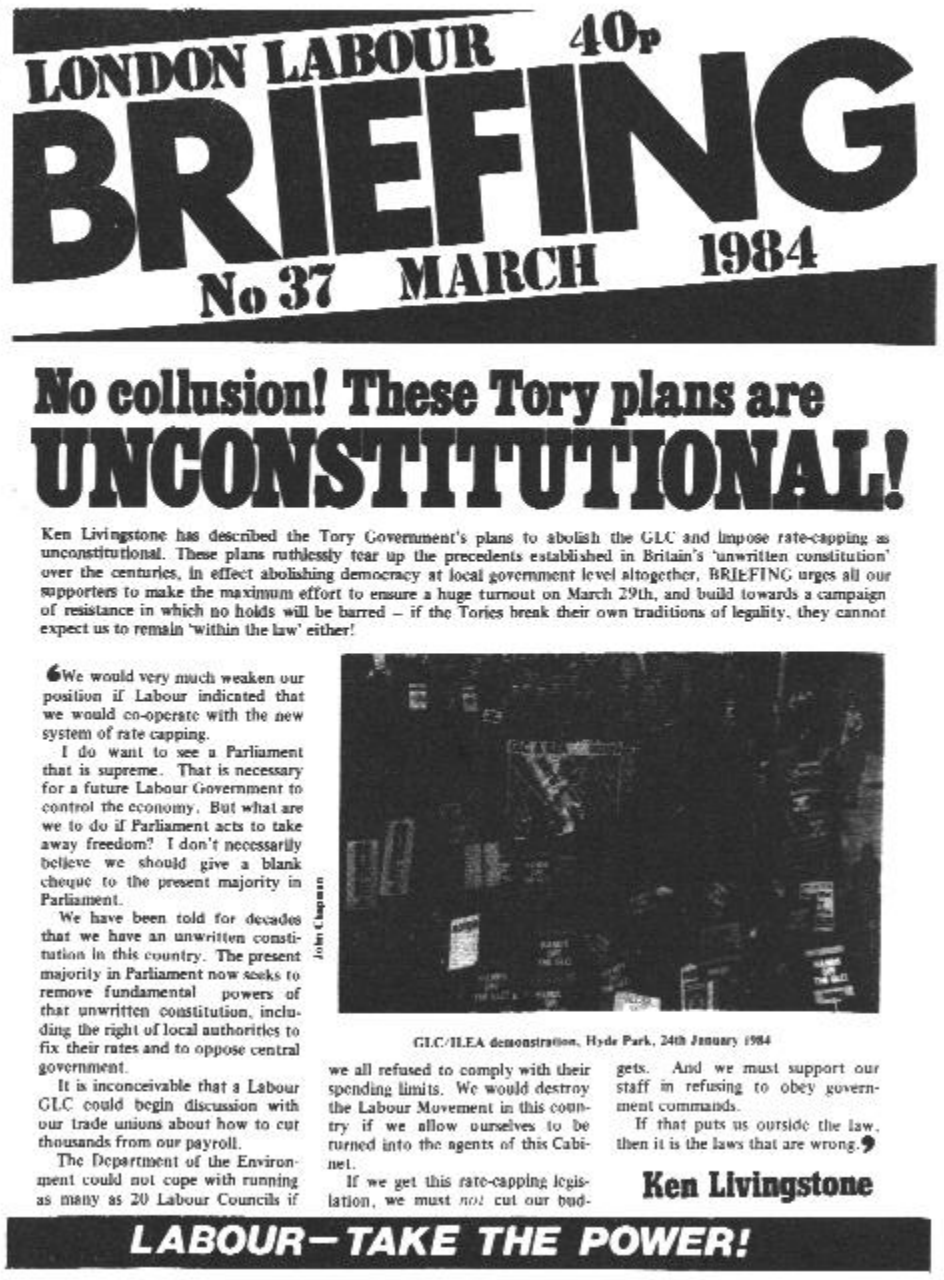
Diane Abbott MP

Famous last words

"Liverpool is a living tribute to private enterprise and Tory policy in the destruction of the economy and the industry. The Liverpool Party and Labour Group are forced to make changes in unthinkable areas. How we can help Liverpool now, when most of the left-wing councils in Britain are saying we must work together, that if we are going to go then we ought to go together, bearing in mind the disaster of Clay Cross, is a difficult one. It's an ongoing debate between some of us and the Liverpool councillors.

Obviously, we all give moral support. But there's no question that between now and this April, other councils will be able to go on the same line as Liverpool."

David Blunkett- *Briefing* March 1984



LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING 40p
No 37 MARCH 1984

No collusion! These Tory plans are UNCONSTITUTIONAL!

Ken Livingstone has described the Tory Government's plans to abolish the GLC and impose rate-capping as unconstitutional. These plans ruthlessly tear up the precedents established in Britain's 'unwritten constitution' over the centuries, in effect abolishing democracy at local government level altogether. BRIEFING urges all our supporters to make the maximum effort to ensure a huge turnout on March 29th, and build towards a campaign of resistance in which no holds will be barred – if the Tories break their own traditions of legality, they cannot expect us to remain 'within the law' either!

"We would very much weaken our position if Labour indicated that we would co-operate with the new system of rate capping.

I do want to see a Parliament that is supreme. That is necessary for a future Labour Government to control the economy. But what are we to do if Parliament acts to take away freedom? I don't necessarily believe we should give a blank cheque to the present majority in Parliament.

We have been told for decades that we have an unwritten constitution in this country. The present majority in Parliament now seeks to remove fundamental powers of that unwritten constitution, including the right of local authorities to fix their rates and to oppose central government.

It is inconceivable that a Labour GLC could begin discussion with our trade unions about how to cut thousands from our payroll.

The Department of the Environment could not cope with running as many as 20 Labour Councils if we all refused to comply with their spending limits. We would destroy the Labour Movement in this country if we allow ourselves to be turned into the agents of this Cabinet.

If we get this rate-capping legislation, we must *not* cut our budgets. And we must support our staff in refusing to obey government commands.

If that puts us ourside the law, then it is the laws that are wrong."

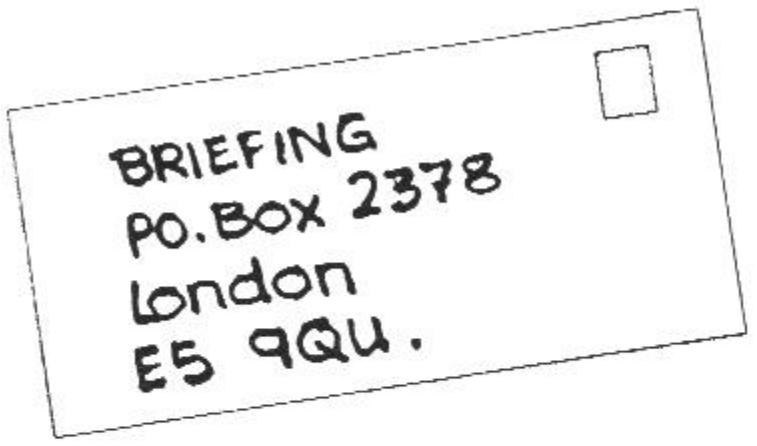
Ken Livingstone

John Chapman

GLC/ILEA demonstration, Hyde Park, 24th January 1984

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

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



Danny Nicol's piece, "Judge Dread" is an embarrassment for the socialist left. Nicol defends the largely undemocratic British constitution established by the Whig oligarchy in 1688/9. "Our uncodified constitution has tremendous advantages for socialists: a strong executive... a winner takes all electoral system, a judiciary which knows its place, and flexibility."

What Nicol is saying is that socialists must defend, at least in part, John Major's executive-dominated government system because one day we hope to use it for ourselves. He thus lends assistance to the Tory government and drives away some of our potential allies.

There is nothing anti-socialist in having a constitution which delimits space for Parliament, the executive, local units of government, etc and which also attempts to guarantee basic freedoms and "due process." The socialist struggle is about how the judges are selected and what is written in the constitution. It is a mistake to think that even after the election of a left-Labour government our strong executive wouldn't ever act in a heavy-handed way against socialist as well as non-socialist critics.

Yours in struggle,
Peter Bowing,
Hungary

I was very interested to read Danny Nichol's article in last month's *Briefing* regarding Labour's proposed Bill of Rights and his fears which I share. However, I cannot agree that we should continue with our present constitution. What is needed is a new constitution for Britain, the one which was spelt out in a book entitled *Common Sense* written by Tony Benn and Andrew Hood. I can only give a brief outline of the book, which I urge all democratic socialists to read.

The authors propose abolishing the monarchy and replacing it with a elected president, replacing the House of Lords with an elected House of the People and the Privy Council with an accountable Council of State. All magistrates would be elected, High Court judges would have to be confirmed after nomination and police forces would be responsible to their police authorities.

There would be a framework for a Freedom of Information Act and parliamentary supervision of the security services. The Church of England would be separated from the state to give it freedom to choose its own leaders and its structure and faith.

An associated Commonwealth of Europe Bill would bring the foreign relations of Britain - including our relations with the European Community, the United Nations and other treaty allies, including those in NATO - under parliamentary control.

These changes would be fiercely resisted by the establishment, including the Labour front bench. People like Tony Benn and Andrew Hood can only point the way forward. It is up to the whole labour movement, in the constituencies and trade unions to demand these democratic changes.

Finally, may I recommend a Tony Benn video called *Speaking Up In Parliament* which I feel establishes him as the authentic voice of the people and makes him worthy of the support of all genuine socialists.

Yours fraternally,
JE Hobday,
Nottingham

A chairde
I was amazed to read in your Dec' 93 issue the interview with Peter Hain MP in which he refers to "the lesson of the late seventies - when the ANL really did destroy the NF." Surely nobody is so naive as to believe this. It was the adoption of racist and anti-immigration policies into the manifesto by the Tories which attracted away the majority of the NF's support in the late seventies. The Tories were willing to accept into their ranks many people with openly racist views and a history of activism within the NF. The ANL, while being successful in attracting young people away from the NF with its 'Rock Against Racism" gigs cannot claim to have "destroyed the National Front". In fact, the ANL disbanded soon after due to the political affiliation of its leadership while the NF remained active, albeit on a much smaller scale.

Anti-Fascist Action has been active since the early eighties in countering racism and fascism. We realised that the problem never went away. Minority communities have continued to suffer since the late seventies. We state that the problem can only be solved by opposing fascism and racism both politically and physically. We will continue to do so while many others will have moved onto the next topical campaign.

Yours,
Aodhan De Pacr,
on behalf of Dublin AFA

Surveying the crisis of British capitalism last month's *Briefing* editorial, appears to see primarily grey when it comes to opposition to the impact of the crisis. You even go so far as to echo the cynical commentators of the *Grauniad* et al in suggesting that 'the effective opposition in this country is now left to the press barons and the Tory right'. Come on! If you take off your dark glasses and stop checking to see whether John Smith is ever going to wake up, matters can look very different.

The many thousands who went on the Unity march against the BNP last October and the endless variety of local protests, in workplaces and communities against the Tories make up a potent force not only for opposition to the Tories but to replace them altogether. It is the job of the left to organise and give leadership to these fights. Not to ignore their existence!

Yours sincerely,
Keith Flett,
London N17

In the article by Dermot McKibbin (Feb 1994) page 27, I was given as the contact person for Red Rope. This is incorrect, I am the membership secretary. The national contact is:

National contact/Info Secretary:
Shirley Johnson
Flat 2, 14 Beresford Road
Birkenhead
Merseyside
L43 1XG

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Marriott,
Red Rope

It is my belief, which I'm sure I share with many *Briefing* readers, that the labour movement has been diverted into peripherals. Blue suits and nice roses do not win elections.

To conquer the Tories at the next general election, our Party must be led by true class warriors, the kind of people who can really mobilise and inspire working-class people.

This is precisely what happened before World War Two when great leaders of the working-class movement like Wal Hannington, Jack Dash and Harry Pollitt emerged. It is not true, as many of the more ludicrous ultra-leftist groups seem to think, that the pre-war Labour movement achieved a shift in wealth and power toward the working class purely because it was in the interests of the ruling class to allow them to do so.

The very fact that Britain entered the war against Hitler was in the very teeth of opposition from the ruling class. The British public were alerted to the true nature of fascism in the early thirties by reports of blackshirt meetings carried in newspapers such as the *Daily Worker*, the *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian*.

This raising of public awareness continued with the Spanish Civil War when thousands of communists, trade unionists, socialists and formerly a-political individuals came together to defend the republican government. Some 2,000 men and women actually made the trip to Spain and many gave their lives for freedom.

By 1939, the British working class was solidly against fascism. But the ruling class, led by the absurd figure of Lord Halifax and the obnoxious Lady Astor, were either sympathetic toward Hitler or actually enthusiastic supporters of the nazis.

Among Tory leaders, Churchill stood out not because he was intellectually gifted but because he was one of the very few who saw Germany as a greater menace than the Soviet Union.

After Dunkirk, Halifax and his parasites were still strong enough within the cabinet to try to organise a coup against Churchill in an attempt to come to terms with the German dictatorship.

They failed because of a powerful and politicised working class - the same working class which grasped real power in 1945.

So let us not be diverted into bothering with anything other than class politics plain and simple. The right is brain-dead and only concerned about sartorial flair while the left has Trotskyism, feminism and goodness knows what else to divert it from the true class struggle.

Yours fraternally,
JT Steel,
Manchester

There have been a couple of letters in *Briefing* recently which have castigated the production team for their somewhat trendy tendencies when it comes to page design.

I must say that I am bound to agree with such sentiment. I can only hope that *Briefing* does not acquire state-of-the-art technology - I have no doubt that such an event would herald shadow headlines, shadow box standfirsts, headlines running up the side of the page and no end of fancy lay-out to divert the reader from the content of your organ.

There are lots of colleges running courses in production journalism - please enrol on one without delay.

Yours in solidarity,
Mike Smythe,
Weymouth

Why is it that so many publications on the left seem to shy away from sports coverage?

I enjoy reading *Briefing*, plus a number of other left-wing journals, but I am also an enthusiastic football supporter. Football is, incidentally, a true working-class sport.

I am sure there are other lefties out there who crave some intelligent sports coverage and comment.

Sportingly yours,
Dave Simpson,
Crewe

Mildred Gordon, MP

sends greetings to women on *International Women's Day*

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unite TUC against RACISM

join the TUC in a national demonstration on saturday march 19 '94

racism is an evil which should have **no** place in society

The march and rally will take place in East London.

There will be a range of speakers, plus entertainments.

Newham Monitoring Project, the anti-racist alliance based in the East End of London, gave the following statement to *Labour Briefing* in welcoming the march against racism, organised by the TUC in conjunction with the ANL and ARA:

"Newham Monitoring Project welcomes the decision of the TUC to rise above the petty squabbling of other national organisations and organise the march against racism in Tower Hamlets on March 19th in conjunction with local community groups.

This march is in support of Quddus Ali, who was brutally beaten by racists in September 1993; in support of the Tower Hamlets Nine, who face serious charges because of the police's attempts to break up a vigil for Quddus outside Whitechapel Hospital; and in support of Muktar Ahmed, currently lying in Whitechapel Hospital after being viciously attacked by racists in Bethnal Green.

Local community groups, including NMP and the Tower Hamlets Nine Defence Campaign, will be leading the march with trade union leaders.

Muktar is the latest victim of communities under siege, facing rising levels of racist attacks and the prospect of the BNP winning more seats in Tower Hamlets. This threat is faced by black communities across east London, with the BNP also standing candidates for the local government elections in May in Custom House and Silvertown, an area of south Newham with many similarities to the Isle of Dogs.

NMP is already organising against the BNP in Newham, countering every attempt by the fascists to spread their racist propaganda in the borough and use popular racism to recruit.

The demonstration on March 19th is simply the first step. What happens after the marchers have gone home is even more important, particularly in the run-up to the elections.

We call upon all progressive forces to support the NMP's major campaign against racist violence and fascism in east London, and to give their full support to the Tower Hamlets Nine Defence Campaign, whose imprisonment would not only represent a defeat for the nine but for the whole community. "

Demonstrate against racism

Saturday March 19th, 11am.

Assemble at Spitalfields Market East London.

Millwall Labour Party

Beat the BNP campaign days:

Sunday March 6th

Sunday April 10th

10am to 2pm

Ring *Labour Briefing* on 081-985-6597 for details

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