JUNE 1995 £1.00

BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left



inside: Brian Douglas killing

- prosecuting the racists - minimum wage - TGWU - repression in Bolivia - Labour, why bother?

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

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Front cover: Protest on 15th May over the death of Brian Douglas at Kennington Police Station.

Design: Gary Drostle. PHOTO: Paul Mattson.

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Labour, the left and the future



IT IS CLEAR that to many people desperate for a Labour victory at the next general election the ideals of Clause IV seemed utopian, irrelevant or dispensable. While the tide of anti-Tory disgust has risen to new heights, confidence in a socialist alternative is at a low ebb. Twenty years of setbacks for the labour movement, coupled with the collapse of Soviet-style Communism and the discrediting of Western European social democracy, have had a cumulative impact.

Despite the poor result, the Clause IV debate confirmed that for the foreseeable future the Labour Party remains an essential battleground for socialists. Here the major question of our times - is there an co-operative alternative to "the rigour of competition"? is capitalism the "end of history" - was argued out not in the safety of academia or the self-enclosed forum of a small "revolutionary" group, but within the labour movement, among working class people, where it counts. Blair's victory will not stop this argument. Indeed, when Labour comes to office, it will seem more pertinent than ever. If socialists have not sustained a vital presence in the Party in the meantime, they can expect to have little influence at that crucial juncture.

We cannot walk away from the fact that a general election face-off between Labour and the Tories is still, at root, a class confrontation, however both Blair and Major strive to disguise it. Millions of working class people will see the new Labour Government as "their" government and will expect it to meet at least some of their needs. Under "Brown's law" - the Shadow Chancellor's recent oath of allegiance to Thatcherite monetarism - that will be impossible. At some point, there will be a clash between a Blair Government's loyalty to "the rigour of competition" and the aspirations of the Party it claims to represent.

The last year has seen an unprecedented influx of new Party members. Blair wishes to claim all of them for his brand of right-wing post-Labourism but the left should take a more realistic view. Most of the new members are new to politics; they have joined because they are outraged by education or NHS cuts and want the Tories out. Blair seems to offer them a way to get rid of the Government, which is their immediate concern. For the most part they have simply not been exposed to socialist arguments.

The Party and union members who voted for "common ownership" may seem small in number compared to those who voted against, but they still represent the biggest and most influentially placed swathe of socialists in the country. Their job now is to engage in dialogue and, above all, joint activity with the new members flooding the Party. The alternative is to circle the wagons in the vain hope that the forces of reaction currently dominating the labour movement will vanish of their own accord.

In the run-up to the general election we need to organise a wide block of forces to mount concerted pressure on the leadership to commit itself to some basic socialist measures: increased spending on education and health, a minimum wage in line with union policies, renationalisation of rail, coal and the utilities, redistributive taxation and increases in benefits, repeal of Tory anti-union laws, cuts in defence expenditure, and a serious programme for the achievement of full employment. Party members and especially trade unionists will want to see a Labour Government taking decisive action on issues such as these. But little will happen if we don't forge an alliance among them now. The 17th June conference on "Socialist Policies for a Labour Government" offers us a chance to make a start.

Blair and his backers believe that the combination of OMOV and leadership diktat will lead to the withering away of GCs and indeed all democratic constituency structures. In response, the left has to help forge a new role for them, beyond passing conference resolutions and electing officers. They have to become forums for desperately needed political education and co-ordinating centres for local campaigning. They have to be used to reach out and involve the new recruits in struggles. They are not bulwarks against a passive membership but bridgeheads to it, leading to activism and a renewal of socialist ideas within the Party. ❑

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

***Labour Briefing* is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. The next EB will meet on June 25th. 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.

***Briefing* is the only magazine on the left which is not funded by any part of the labour hierarchy nor by any organised grouping. To survive and thrive we need the support of our readers. Why not take copies to sell at your local Labour Party, trade union or campaign meeting?**

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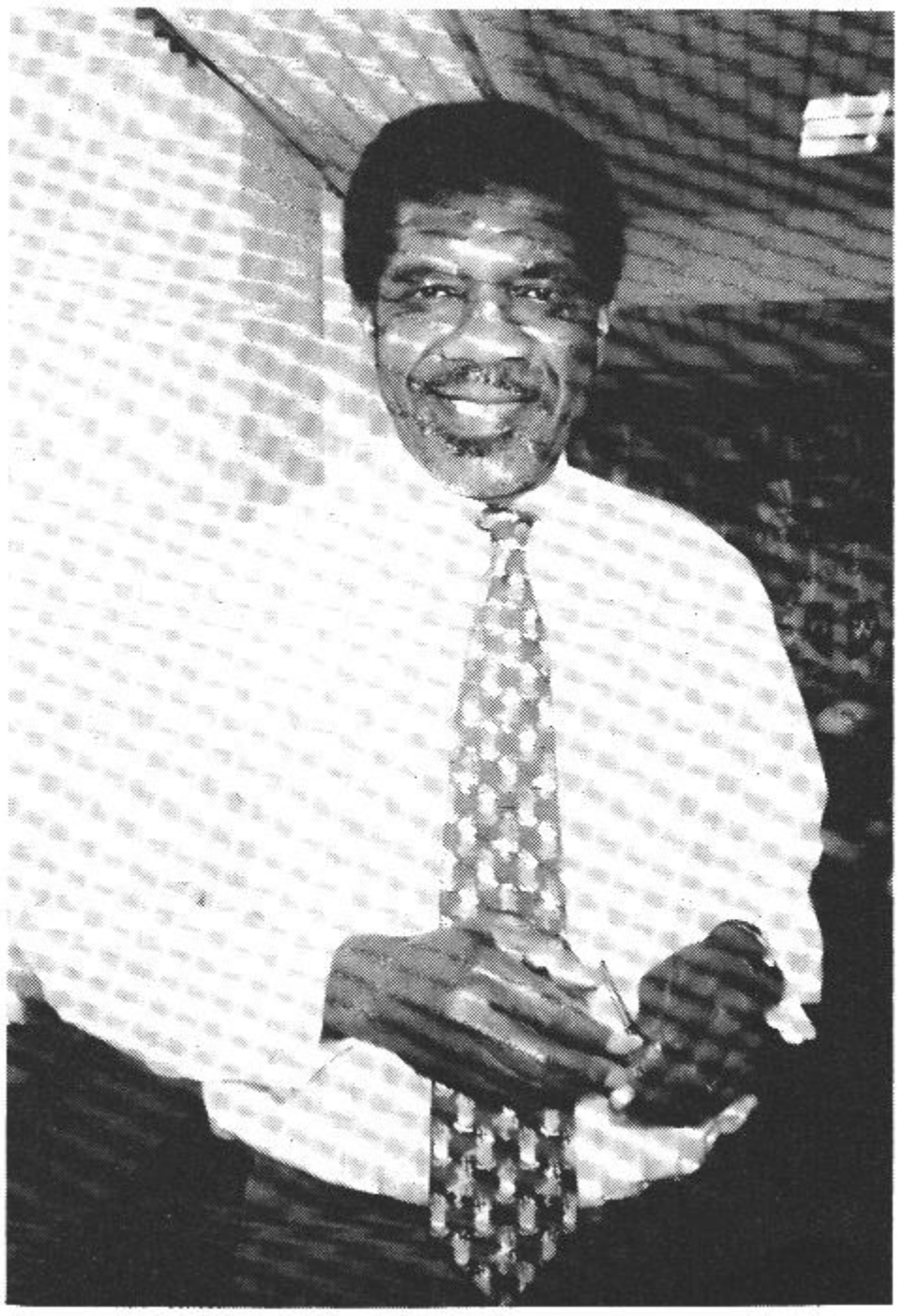


PHOTO: Steve French.

Clear cut choice in TGWU

The election for the General Secretary post in the TGWU represents the most important union election for over a decade. Steve French reports on the contest.

IN MANY ways the Clause IV debate is replicated in this contest. Dromey is Blair's candidate. He represents a passive union movement, hostile to supporting workers' struggles and loyal to the Labour leadership come what may.

Dromey is entering only his second election in the TGWU. In 1991 he declared, then withdrew, then declared again to challenge the Broad Left's candidate, Lew Adams, for the Assistant General Secretary's post vacated when Morris replaced Ron Todd. He was assisted by public relations consultant Mike Craven, one time chair of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee. Once again Craven is working flat out for a Dromey victory. It is also suggested that those involved in the New Clause IV Campaign have been transferred to work for Dromey in an office in Walthamstow. In Liverpool, Dromey's team has occupied an office at the Unemployed Centre, where left-winger Alec McFadden has recently been sacked.

Nominations have now closed. Morris has won support from 843 branches (representing 160,000 members) and Dromey 381 (representing 100,000). In frustration Dromey has launched a bitter personal attack on Morris's refusal to be cowed into supporting Blair's new Clause IV. Peter Mandelson hosted the launch of the Dromey campaign at Westminster and his familiar smear tactics have already been seen in the anonymous Labour leadership attacks on Morris for being "muddled, confused and pusillanimous".

Even arch-right-winger George Wright has refused to back Dromey, not least because Dromey failed to support Wright when he stood against Morris in 1991. Six out of eight regional secretaries have now backed Morris, as have former General Secretaries Ron Todd and Moss Evans and twelve national secretaries of the TGWU's trade groups.

Dromey will have the full weight of the press behind him, making this the most media-dominated trade union election since the likes of Woodrow Wyatt helped the right wing gain control of the AUEW in the seventies. Wyatt's role is now adopted by Martin Kettle of the *Guardian* who has pulled out all the stops for Dromey.

Kettle recently stated that "the real issue is how the unions will handle the inevitable pressure from their members for higher pay and improvements in conditions of work, if and when a Labour Government gets into power." Exactly. Demands from low paid workers are seen as a major problem for a future Blair Government. The Blairites want union leaders who can be relied on to "deal" with them.

Dromey has no independent base in the union. He is the creature of the modernisers and spin doctors. Conversely, Morris has the respect of many thousands of TGWU members as an independent trade unionist who attempts as best he can to represent his members. He has not attempted to build the solidarity action needed to win disputes like the Chelmsford Badgerline bus strike, but he has promoted their cause and pledged financial resources to enable the strikers to sustain the dispute. Dromey would be unlikely to do even that.

Bill Morris has stood by union policy on the minimum wage and is a major obstacle to Blair's strategy of waiting for election victory and then consulting the employers (described by Morris as like "putting Dracula in charge of a blood bank"). Morris has said that low paid workers "cannot wait for jam tomorrow. The working poor that the T&G represent want us to tell them exactly what they can expect."

While Labour's leadership remained silent as May Day was transformed into a Tory jamboree, Morris used the occasion to speak in favour of the peace dividend and defence diversification.

Morris is the first black leader of a British trade union, and was responsive to pressure from below when calling the march against racism in London's East End last spring. A defeat for Morris would represent a set back not just for black workers within the TGWU but for all black people in Britain, who now have a national political figure promoting their agenda.

Dromey is being backed by some left-wingers in Merseyside, who have placed local internecine calculations over the broader interests of the members. But that does not justify the Morris campaign claiming that Dromey is backed by "an alliance of extremes - combining Trotskyists and Labour modernisers". This crass red-baiting amalgam will not help mobilise anyone for Morris. The left should step up campaigning activity in support of Morris, as well as demanding that he stands firm on the policies that Blair wishes to obfuscate. ❑

news & views

Minimum wage v minimalist politics

The argument over the minimum wage looks set to become a key battle over the priorities of the next Labour Government.

TONY BLAIR has made it clear that his government will not set a minimum wage figure until at least a year after the election. Labour's Joint Policy Committee - which represents no one but the leadership - has declared that the minimum wage should be implemented "sensibly and flexibly, taking full account of the economic and employment consequences". Harriet Harman, Shadow Employment spokesperson, has explained that under a Blair government minimum wage levels will be set by a "review commission" of government, employers and unions.

It seems that the Party's democratically-determined support for a minimum wage set at half male median earnings (currently £4.15 an hour) is to be dumped. That's bad news for over 1.5 million British workers paid less than £2.50 an hour and the millions more paid less than £4.15.

Britain has become the low pay capital of western Europe, with the 'working poor' making up a growing proportion of the population. In deflationary, 'Maastricht' Europe, employers chase low wages and workers chase jobs, making strong minimum wage laws a prerequisite for a civilised society.

A minimum wage is also a key measure in the fight against racism and xenophobia. In Britain today, 16% of black workers earn less than £3.20 per hour. Understandably the TUC Black Workers Conference backed £4.15 unanimously.

But for Blair's camp, the minimum wage is an albatross. "If the Tories don't have a figure to attack they cannot say how many jobs might be lost," explained the familiar Walworth Road 'sources'. Evidence from the USA (where the states can top up the federal minimum wage) indicates that a relatively high minimum does not destroy employment and can actually encourage investment in training and plant. In accepting the employers' myths, Blair and Brown also accept the myth that wage costs are the main inhibiting factor in economic growth and that workers must make sacrifices to ensure "profitability" - the *sine qua non* of "the rigour of competition".

That means no relief for the millions of workers who earn more than £4.15 per hour but face brutal pay squeezes and for taxpayers who subsidise low wages through benefits.

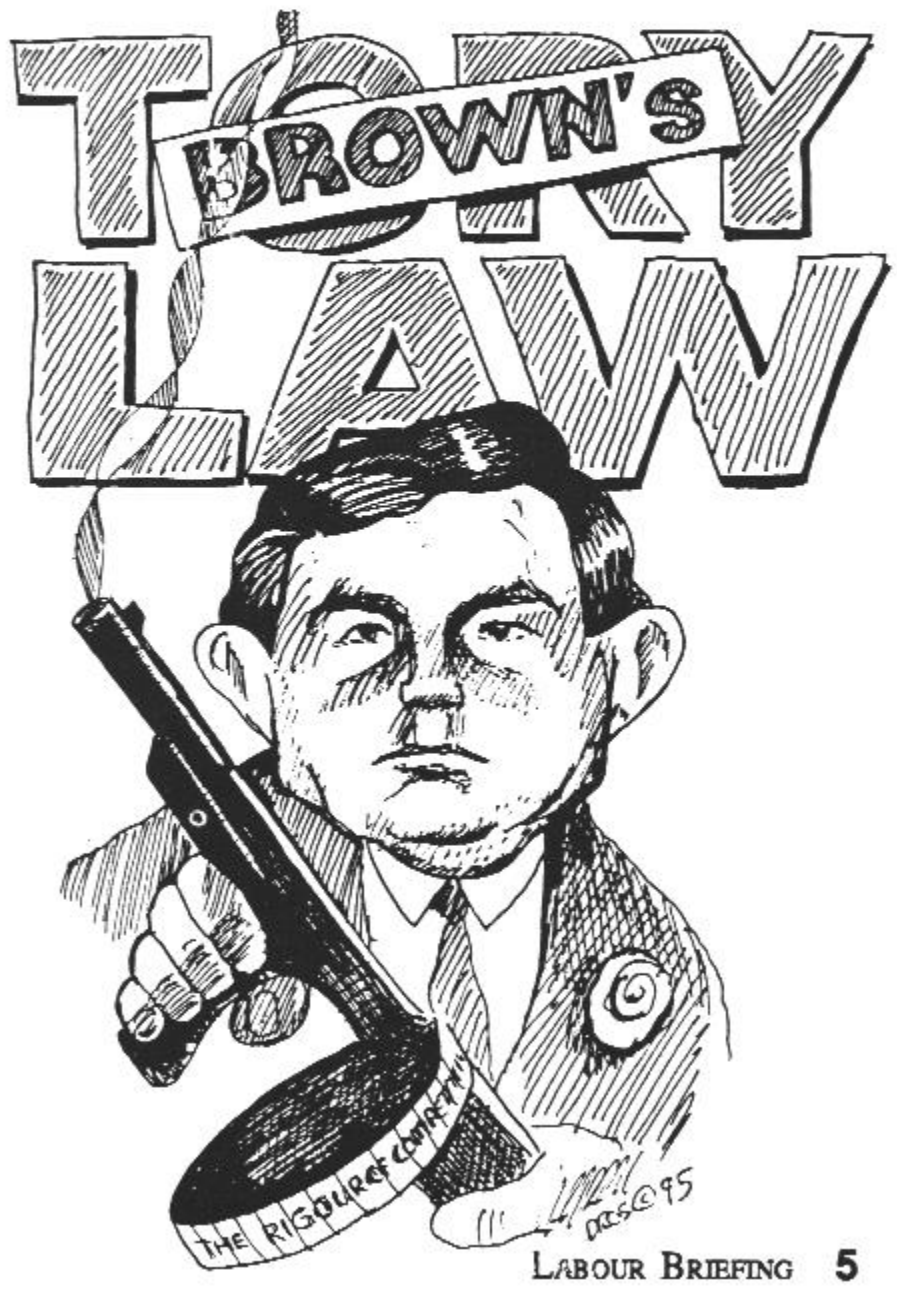
Blair's spin doctors have tried to portray recent meetings on the minimum wage with TUC leaders as indicating union assent. John Monks hopes it will "help influence unions not to make it a major issue". But the TUC and its major affiliates are sticking to the existing commitment to £4.15 an hour.

For all the front bench outrage over skyrocketing utilities' profits and executives' pay, Labour is proposing nothing more than the negotiation of a nominal "normal profit" by a joint body of regulators and bosses. Workers will have no say in these discussions, but bosses are invited in to determine the minimum wage. The CBI has made it clear that employers remain implacably opposed to any minimum wage. Any "compromise" reached at the review commission would be more likely to shore up rather than eradicate poverty pay. Before negotiations even start, Harman has indicated her willingness to accept lower minimums for trainees and young workers.

Like Brown's notion of letting the Bank of England set interest rates, the "review commission" is an attempt to free the next Labour Government from responsibility for difficult economic decisions.

The minimum wage battle highlights the contradiction between the new Clause IV and the labour movement's basic aspirations. Having already emerged so sharply only weeks after Blair's victory on Clause IV, how explosive might this division prove once Labour is in office and the leadership runs out of excuses?

The "review commission" is likely to appear in a paper from the Party's economic policy commission, chaired by Gordon Brown, which will then be put to the Policy Forum and the annual conference for rubber-stamping. If we are to preserve a meaningful minimum wage commitment, we will need to organise a major campaign in the Party and the unions. On July 6th the TUC will hold a "consultative conference", which may indicate whether union leaders intend to stand up to Blair on this issue. ❑



news & views

The untouchables

Helen Shaw of Inquest, a pressure group campaigning against deaths in custody and for reform of the coroner's inquest system, looks at the issues raised by the controversial death of black Londoner Brian Douglas.

BRIAN DOUGLAS died of a fractured skull after reportedly being beaten by police using the new US-style batons. He was arrested on 3rd May when he and another man were stopped by two police officers in Clapham High Street, South London.

He was taken to Kennington police station where he was examined by a police doctor and deemed to be suffering from excess alcohol or drugs. Hours later, his condition worsening, he was taken into intensive care at St Thomas' hospital and died at 3:20am on 8th May.

Stafford Soloman, arrested with him, has made a complaint against the police for allegedly breaking his hand during the incident.

Douglas's death confirms Inquest's fears that increased arming of the police, either with guns or the new batons, will inevitably lead to more deaths. There has already been an alarming increase in the number of police shootings.

Black people are markedly over-represented among those who die following violent incidents involving the police. Since 1985, 33 black people have died in police custody or during and following incidents involving the police. Of those 18 (55%) have been in London.

A total of 70 black people have died in police custody, in prison or during immigration officials' visits to their homes since 1985 - grim witness to the violent role of the state in a criminal justice system riddled with brutality and institutionalised racism.

How does this persistent and murderous racism continue unchecked? How is racist violence institutionalised into policy?

Under the present system of investigating deaths in police custody, the police conduct their own inquiries. Such inquiries are never made public yet they form the basis on which the Crown Prosecution Service and the Police Complaints Authority decide whether charges are to be brought. They also strongly influence the shape of the inquest.

This means that police forces remain unaccountable to the public. The only public forum for examining such deaths is the inquest, with its many procedural problems - notably the lack of legal aid for representation of the bereaved, the lack of prior disclosure of any documentation and its extraordinarily narrow remit.

Inquests are legally required to establish who the deceased was and how, when and where he or she died. Coroners have power to restrict the inquest to this narrow line of questioning, often dismissing more general questions.

The Coroner's Act of 1988 obliges a coroner to summon a jury if, among other things, "The death occurred while the deceased was in police custody or resulted from an injury caused by a police officer in the purported execution of his duty". But the powers of the jury are severely restricted. Relatives and friends of those who die in custody understandably nurse hopes that the inquest will establish the truth and are frequently dismayed by its limitations.

There have been at least two inquests into black deaths in custody which returned "unlawful killing" verdicts and yet no one was charged with an offence or even disciplined. The jury at such an inquest has decided that a criminal act has been committed and yet there is no criminal trial or public inquiry.

Where there is no adequate forum for calling an institution to account in the public domain, abusive practices run rampant. Individual officers, backed by such a mendacious and secretive institution, easily fall into patterns of thinking which assume a certain invincibility.

Structured like the military, the hierarchy closes ranks when under attack. The chain of command becomes a chain of cover-up.

There is another disturbing and consistent pattern of deaths in custody involving those people allegedly under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Two thirds of the people who died in Metropolitan Police custody between April 1992 and April 1993 come into this category.

Those arrested when drunk, like those under the influence of drugs or with mental health problems, are a particularly vulnerable group. Many such deaths are preventable but too often instead of receiving needed medical attention victims are simply incarcerated.

Once a person is brought to a police station, the code of practice under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act requires the police to call a doctor if he or she "does not show signs of sensibility and awareness or fails to respond

Deaths of black people involving the Metropolitan Police, 1985 to 1995:

1985: James Hall (Lavender Hill Police Station), John Mikkelson (Hounslow), Cynthia Jarrett (police raid in Tottenham).

1986: Stephen Bogle (Thames Magistrates Court), Caiphas Anthony Lemard (Kensington Police Station).

1987: Nenneh Halloh (Marylebone Police Station), Mohammed Parkit (Marylebone), Tunay Hassan (Dalston).

1988: Femi Adelaja (Old Bailey cell).

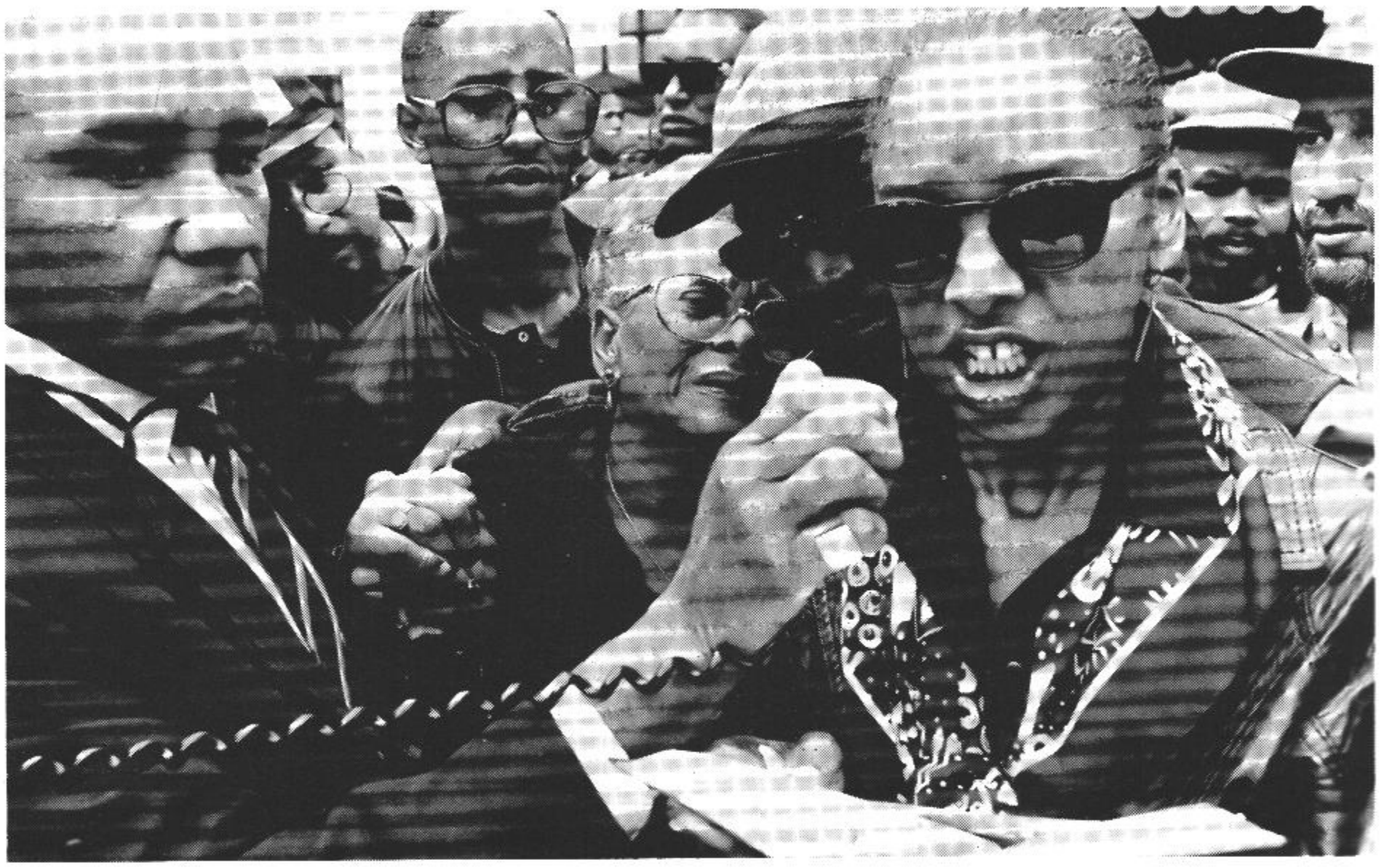
1989: David 'Duke' Daley (Marylebone Magistrates Court), Vincent Graham (City Road), Jamie Stewart (Holloway Road Police Station).

1991: Vandana Patel (Stoke Newington Police Station).

1993: Joy Gardner (immigration raid in Hornsey).

1994: Kwanele Siziba (Hackney), Joseph Nnalue (Stockwell), Oluwashiji Lapite (Stoke Newington).

1995: Brian Douglas (Kennington Police Station).



Brian Douglas' mother Jasmine is comforted by friends and relatives while his sister reads from the bible during the protest at Kennington police station.
PHOTO: Paul Mattsson.

normally to questions or conversation (other than through drunkenness alone)".

The fatal flaw in this provision is that it leaves far too much discretion to the police. As in the case of Brian Douglas, an injury may not be apparent without a thorough medical examination. On what basis then, does a police officer determine that such an injury does not exist?

Police surgeons do not escape criticism. Many offer a poor standard of care to those in police custody. Again, this appears to have happened in the Douglas case.

Clearly, a police surgeon relies on officers to inform him/her of the circumstances of the arrest and behaviour of the prisoner - a process which can affect the thoroughness of any medical examination and help determine whether a referral is made to a hospital. The additional danger is that police officers without medical training may mistake an injury or medical condition for intoxication.

Apart from inhalation of vomit, the commonest causes of death among suspects are already manifest at the time of arrest such as head injury (as in the Douglas case), heart, liver, spleen or lung damage, alcohol poisoning, pneumonia, and hypothermia.

Existing guidelines state that all prisoners must be visited once an hour but if drunk every half-hour and that they should be roused and spoken to. In a report published in June 1994 entitled 'Health Care of Detainees In Police Stations' the British Medical Association and the Association of Police Surgeons described the medical treatment available for detainees as often "appalling" or "non-existent". It warned that badly trained police surgeons were putting lives at risk and recommended that the care of detainees should not be managed in police stations which are "potentially dangerous places".

The issues raised by Brian Douglas's death must not be ignored. The immediate demand must be to call for a fully independent public inquiry. Those in the Labour Party and the trade unions should add their voices to those of the black community in calling for such an inquiry.

Model Resolution

"This branch learned with sadness and anger of the death of young black Londoner Brian Douglas, who died on May 8th of a fractured skull after arrest by police reportedly armed with the new American-style batons.

We are alarmed that the further arming of the police, either with guns or these batons, will lead to more tragic and unnecessary deaths such as this.

We note that black people are over-represented among those who die in police custody.

We have little confidence that the internal police investigation which will form the basis of the Police Complaints Authority and Crown Prosecution Service investigations will establish why he died, whether anyone should face trial or disciplinary measures or ensure such deaths can be prevented in the future. We are concerned that this will also shape any coroner's investigation and subsequent inquest.

We therefore call on the Labour Party to publicly support calls for a fully independent inquiry into Brian Douglas's death."

Inquest was launched in 1981 by campaign groups set up following the deaths of Blair Peach, Jimmy Kelly, Richard Campbell and Matthew O'Hara and can be contacted at 330 Seven Sisters Road London N4 2PT.

news & views

The price of justice

The Stephen Lawrence family is taking out a private prosecution against the racists they believe killed their son.

IT IS NOW more than two years since nineteen year old Stephen Lawrence was murdered by a gang of white racists while waiting for a bus in Eltham, south-east London.

In the weeks following the killing, police arrested several suspects and eventually charged two youths with Stephen's murder. But in July 1994, the Crown Prosecution Service decided to drop the charges claiming there was insufficient evidence against them. Many were amazed that the CPS would not even take the case to the committal stage, at which a judge decides whether there should be a full trial.

This was not acceptable to Stephen's parents Doreen and Neville. On 22nd April 1995, nearly two years to the day after Stephen's death, his family went to court to issue a summons for murder against four white youths - David Norris, Peter Accort, Jamie Accort and Luke Knight (all aged 18-21). The four were arrested that day and appeared in court soon after. Two of the four have now received bail - on condition they stay away from south-east London.

On 30th May the four will appear in Greenwich Magistrates Court and a date for a committal hearing will be set. At the committal hearing, the family must present sufficient evidence to convince a magistrate to proceed to trial.

This is the first ever private criminal prosecution for a racially motivated attack and could become a landmark case. The Lawrence family and their volunteer legal team (headed by Mike Mansfield) are convinced they have the evidence to convict all four. Since the CPS dropped the case, new statements have been taken from eyewitnesses and other new material has been assembled. It is clear that the police failed to carry out necessary forensic tests or interview vital leads until long after the murder.

"This case could open the floodgates," observes Suresh Grover of the Southall Monitoring Group, which is providing practical back-up to the Lawrences. "Already we've been inundated with inquiries from people dissatisfied with the failure of the police or the CPS to secure justice for them. The Lawrences' stand has underlined the widespread lack of confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to deal with racial attacks."

The Lawrences approached the SMG for help after they had run into difficulties with both the ARA and ANL. Last year, on the first anniversary of the murder, the Lawrence Family and the SMG organised a People's Tribunal on Racial Violence and Justice at Conway Hall. The SMG, using its expertise in supporting victims of racial attacks and in dealing with the legal system, is now working with the family on a daily basis.

Without legal aid and without the resources and powers of the CPS or the police, the Lawrences urgently require donations if they are to gather all the necessary evidence, conduct forensic analyses and take statements. Money is also needed for publicity purposes. If the Lawrences lose the case, substantial costs could be awarded against them.

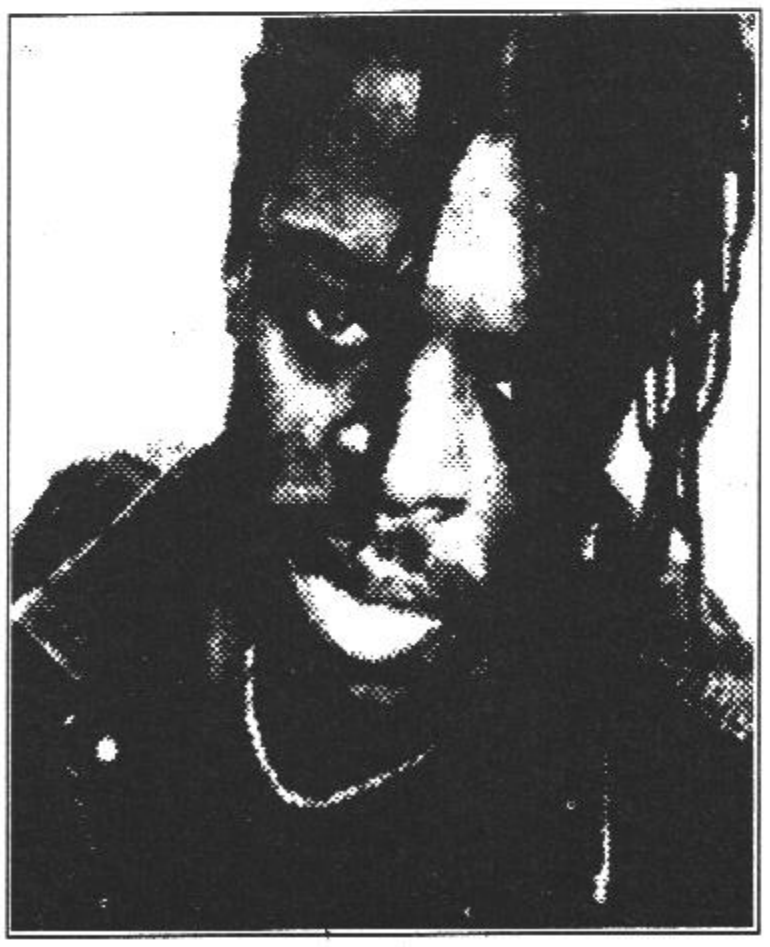
Unlike the CPS, the Lawrence family and their legal team intend to mount an "enlightened prosecution", respecting the rules of evidence and the right to be considered innocent until proven guilty. However, as a result of the prosecution, the family (including Stephen's sister Georgina, now 13, and brother Stuart, 18) are under threat from friends of those charged, many of whom have a history of connections with violence in the locality. The SMG is now negotiating with Greenwich Council to move the family to a safer spot.

The trial is unlikely to commence for several months. In the meantime the Lawrences are asking supporters to give money, organise fund-raising events and public meetings about the case and join the demonstrations to be held outside the court on appropriate dates. The next hearing is at Greenwich Magistrates on 30th May at 10 am - contact the SMG to confirm.

Support has been pouring in from the black communities and especially the black media. *The Voice* has set up an appeal fund and donated £1000. *Eastern Eye*, Asian London, Choice FM, Sunrise Radio and *Caribbean Times* have all helped publicise the case. DJ Mistri is having his locks cut off (at £10 for the 80-plus shorter ones and £100 for the 17 long ones) for the Lawrences' benefit at the Afro Hair and Beauty Exhibition at Alexandra Palace in north London on May 29th. There will also be a 24-hour hairdressing event with all proceeds going to the Lawrence family. On 28th June, a dance and auction with celebrities will be held at the Granaries in Croydon hosted by Brenda Emmaneus of the Clothes Show. Later in the summer there will be a comedy benefit at the Brixton Academy.

Shamefully, there has been little support from the labour movement (including the left). Although a number of union branches have chipped in, as we go to press not one Labour MP or Constituency Labour Party has made a contribution.

"My locks have been part of my image for such a long time and I cannot imagine what I will feel like without them.
But this campaign affects every member of the black community and we should all do what we can to raise funds for justice." -
DJ Mistri.



Contact: Stephen Lawrence Family Campaign, PO Box 3933, London SE18 3SS or SMG 0181 834 2333. Donations to Stephen Lawrence Appeal Fund, Natwest Bank, PO Box 3202, 540 Brixton Road, London SW9 8EB; account number 61797200, sort code 60-03-36.

Racist violence: blaming the victim

When Naseem Uppal was assaulted by racists, the police backed her attackers. But she now looks set to have the last laugh.

IN JULY 1994, Mrs Naseem Uppal told a number of girls playing in the lift in front of her home on the Heston Farm Estate in Hounslow in West London to stop misbehaving. One of their mothers, accompanied by friends, then approached Mrs Uppal and showered her with racial abuse. Mrs Uppal was then assaulted by two women on her own door step - in front of her five year old daughter. Her hair was pulled and she was repeatedly slammed against the wall, as well as punched and kicked by the two women as other residents looked on. Eventually, she was pulled inside by her husband. Together, they called the local police.

As they waited for police to arrive, the white women returned with a baseball bat, shouted more abuse through the door, including death threats, and smashed the Uppals' window.

Despite all the evidence, including hanks of Mrs Uppal's hair coming out as she was being questioned, police refused to accept that she was the victim of a racist attack. "She's not racialist, she's English," said one of the officers about Mrs Uppal's assailant, who was questioned only about the damage to Mrs Uppal's window.

Although the only offensive weapon involved in the incident (the baseball bat) belonged to one of the white women, it was Mrs Uppal who was charged with assault. Her main assailant, Julie Whelan, was charged only with criminal damage. Mrs Uppal was then taken off in a police van and thrown in a cell in Hounslow Police Station while the white woman was driven away in a squad car and given immediate police bail.

"Although the only offensive weapon involved in the incident (the baseball bat) belonged to one of the white women, it was Mrs Uppal who was charged with assault."

This was Mrs Uppal's first experience of a police station and she was terrified. Police laughed at her inquiries and pleas. Her neck began to ache, but police refused to organise medical attention. "Have you been drinking?" they asked her.

When a solicitor sent by the Hounslow Monitoring Project arrived he complained about Mrs Uppal's treatment and was threatened by police with forcible eviction from the station. The solicitor Ahmet Ratip commented later, "The treatment I and my client received by the police was outrageous and unprofessional."

After being kept in the cell for several hours, Mrs Uppal was given bail and then taken to hospital where severe bruising of the neck was detected. She was required to wear a surgical collar for over a month.

The police attitude was summed up by Sergeant McDowell of Feltham's Racial and Domestic Violence Unit. "I know some people who provoke the situation," he said, "and then call the police."

Two months before the attack on Mrs Uppal, in May 1994, the British National Party stood a candidate for the council seat covering Heston Farm. During the election campaign and in the months that followed, incidents of racial abuse became ever more common on the estate which has never been a comfortable environment for Asians. Mrs Uppal's children were verbally abused in and out of school. Stones were thrown at her family. There was an attempt to strangle her daughter and threats to petrol bomb their home. It became impossible for the Uppals' three children, aged 6-13, to play outside. Mrs Uppal, an eleven year resident of the estate, complained to police, who dismissed the harassment as mere mischief from "bored kids".

"Swastikas appeared on their door as did BNP and NF stickers."

In the weeks that followed the assault, the Uppals' life on Heston Farm Estate became a nightmare. Swastikas appeared on their door as did BNP and NF stickers. Death and petrol bomb threats were made on several occasions. Their children were removed from school. While Julie Whelan openly met with BNP-supporting skinheads, white people who spoke to the Uppals were branded "Paki-lovers".

Initially, Hounslow Council failed to offer assistance or advice to the Uppals and seemed more concerned to protect her attackers, providing them with a security camera. However, the Uppals were eventually placed in temporary accommodation.

"I have no confidence left in the police," Mrs Uppal said. "I am scared for my family, especially my young children. The youngest doesn't even want to go out any more. Moving away from the house where we have lived for eleven years has not been easy."

Nonetheless, Mrs Uppal continued to visit the Estate to take part in a Residents Support Group and give help to other victims of racial violence on Heston Farm.

In April, after hearing all the evidence against her, a jury took less than five minutes to acquit Mrs Uppal of assault. She is now taking out a private prosecution against Julie Whelan and is also suing the police.

After the trial, Mrs Uppal received a threatening, abusive letter signed by "Chelsea FC and BNP" - it was sent to what was thought to be her secret new address. Outside her house, she was surrounded by hostile skinheads as she entered her car. She and her family will now have to move yet again. Inquiries are underway as to how the racists got hold of her address. ❑

Is the Party pooped?

With the demise of Clause IV, Kevin Flack and Jon Rogers wonder if the party really is over for socialists.

THERE IS a moment at most parties when you realise - provided you are still sufficiently sober - that it is time to leave. Without doubt, Blair's victory at the special conference must set socialists wondering whether we are welcome in the Labour Party any more and whether there is any point in staying.

From a purely personal point of view, it is harder and harder to remain. To stick with the party metaphor for a moment, it often feels as if most of our friends have left and the party has been taken over by a lot of boring yuppies who won't talk to us or play the music we like. The temptation to slope off to the pub or search out a more congenial gathering is enormous.



Shortly before the last general election, *Briefing* published a pamphlet entitled *Why Socialists Should Stay in the Labour Party*. Its four main arguments were as follows:

• The Labour Party was created by the trade unions and the link with the unions makes the Labour Party an essential forum for socialists. Indeed, socialists who work in the unions but not in the Party are hamstrung when it comes to confronting "New Realism", which spans both the political and industrial wings of the movement;

• Working-class people look to the Labour Party to achieve social progress - the Party is seen as 'their' party. Socialists should not set up a separate party opposed to the working-class party;

• Through involvement in the Labour Party, socialists can try to ensure that socialist policies remain on the agenda at election time and can work to hold Labour leaders to account thereafter;

• For socialists who wish to participate in political activity beyond single-issue protests, there is no viable alternative.

With the exception of the last of these arguments, the socialist case for Labour Party membership has been greatly weakened by developments over the last three years. The assault on the union link has defied all expectations, while the sustained rightward shift of Party policy has often explicitly sought to lower working-class aspirations of a Labour Government. The space for socialist political activity within the Party has shrunk dramatically.

At the same time, however, there seems little possibility that the Labour left might respond to the rightward shift of the Party by a collective split and the establishment of a viable socialist alternative, perhaps because it is less and less clear that a collectively self-conscious Labour left capable of purposive action even exists.

We are in a worse position now than we were three years ago and it is profoundly tempting to write the whole thing off - to leave the yuppies at this increasingly awful party to their twiglets and tedious conversation and go off in search of some fun. But before we put our coats on we need to remember who invited us and why we came in the first place.

Socialists are involved in political activity because we want to change the world - to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their labour, so to speak.

The likely shape of revolutionary transformation of an advanced capitalist society requires that the mass party of the left should be won to a perspective of such a fundamental transformation of the social order.

Notwithstanding the ostensibly socialist wording of the old Clause IV, the Labour Party has never previously been won to this perspective and the conditions do not at present exist either to win Labour for socialism or to construct a mass socialist party as an alternative.

In these circumstances, in which we cannot achieve our ends in the short term, we have no option but to address ourselves to building a movement which has the potential to achieve these ends in the long term.

In 1995, sections of the union movement are responding to Blair's agenda with vigorous opposition. Unison's Affiliated Political Fund refused to tow the leadership line. NUT delegates demonstrated fierce hostility to Blunkett's reactionary agenda for education.

In a contribution to the 1992 pamphlet Graham Bash argued that the struggle in the Labour Party ultimately depends upon the struggle in the unions and that the historic failure of the Labour left has been its failure to root itself within the unions, to challenge the trade union bureaucracy and to democratise the union movement.

An answer to the question of whether socialists should remain within the Labour Party, or whether the time is coming to leave, will emerge from the struggle within the trade unions. If socialists within the unions can restore and strengthen the link with the Party and impose worthwhile manifesto commitments on its leadership, the space for socialist activity in the Labour Party will open up again. If, on the other hand, Blair can build upon his triumphs to date, then the movement of opposition in the trade unions will offer the one chance to construct a meaningful alternative to a Party which will no longer be worthy of its name. ❑

The real scandal in Birmingham

Sue Lancaster, vice chair, Sparkbrook CLP, unravels the chain of events that led to the suspension of four Birmingham Constituency Labour Parties - and warns of the consequences.

IN FEBRUARY the *Observer* alleged that Labour Party members in Birmingham had been given preferential treatment when applying for Housing Improvement Grants (HIG). The following day the inner-city Constituency Labour Parties of Sparkbrook, Ladywood, Small Heath and Perry Barr were suspended by Walworth Road. The announcement was made in the local media, without previous communication to local CLP officers. It is still unclear whether any appropriate Party body met to consider the action before it was carried out on the instructions of the General Secretary. The suspensions were, at a much later date, ratified by the NEC, where it is believed they were supported by Clare Short, MP for Ladywood.

The allegations of corruption and queue-jumping through the use of HIGs are totally unfounded. The 1989 Housing and Local Government Act gives people a statutory right to a renovation grant if a house is unfit. The grant is means tested and must be processed within six months. Under the system devised by the City Council, people applying for grants were issued with enquiry forms, and believed that by filling them in they had joined the HIG queue. But when a councillor had a stream of complaints from constituents that their 'applications' had not been dealt with (some had been waiting for as long as four years) it became clear that the queue was a deception by the Council.

There was an obvious need to rectify the situation. An open public meeting was held and constituents were assisted in securing their legal rights. These efforts received local media coverage and a newsletter was delivered to every home in Sparkhill Ward. It is not surprising therefore that some of those who received statutory application forms were members of the Labour Party. By reacting hastily to the distorted, anti-Labour coverage in the media, the Party has damaged its local standing, especially among black voters.

It is widely believed that the allegations of corruption and the subsequent suspensions have a hidden agenda: to prevent the CLPs from carrying out parliamentary reselections. The four constituencies are to be merged into three. Roy Hattersley is to retire, leaving the three remaining sitting MPs (all white) contesting the seats, which have a large Asian and Afro-Caribbean electorate. Party members are convinced that candidates will be imposed. The regional executive has already taken over outstanding selections for council places. Gerald Kaufman, writing in the *Observer*, linked the situation in Birmingham with a call to end mandatory reselection.

Twenty five per cent of Birmingham's population is black and Party membership in the suspended CLPs is overwhelmingly black - but the city has no black MPs. With Roy Hattersley retiring, many see this as the time to rectify this situation. Hattersley himself has called for 'affirmative action' in the newly formed Sparkbrook/Small Heath Constituency and the drawing up of an all-black shortlist. It will be a scandal if a democratic contest is not allowed.

● Renovation grants are payable by the local council to owner occupiers who live in unfit homes. Grants are available to deal with structural problems, water supply, putting in toilets and baths, dealing with damp, repairing drains (i.e. getting the home up to a basic standard of fitness and facilities).

Applications are made on a specific form. Councils have to process all applications and if they find that the work is necessary (and if the applicants are on a sufficiently low income to qualify), grants must be approved within six months.

Faced with a lot of people living in sub-standard housing, often bought years ago in the days when the council largely ignored the housing needs of ethnic minority communities, Birmingham feared it would have to pay out huge sums on the renovation grants. It dealt with that dilemma by refusing to hand out the necessary forms. Applicants were given an enquiry sheet but nothing happened after that.

When he realised what was going on three years ago, Labour Cllr. Raghib Ahsan set up a campaign to help people claim their housing rights. The campaign held demonstrations, complained to the Ombudsman, got local solicitors to take cases on legal aid.

Ahsan commented: "Many local activists were involved, organising meetings and demonstrations about the appalling housing. We did it openly. I went to council committees and said, 'You are cheating the people, like crooks'. Now I have been made to feel like a criminal for trying to get people's housing up to standard, using the law.

"I was told that I was using it to recruit to the Labour Party. Of course I was. I am a member of the Party and a councillor. I campaign to improve our lives and help people to understand and get politically involved. Of course I wanted to get them into the Labour Party."

The media allegations miss the real scandal: that for three years, a Labour council consciously cheated its poorest communities out of their legal right to live in homes with inside toilets and bathrooms, free from damp and disrepair. Out of 124 applicants in Ahsan's area, only six have received payment; the rest are in suspension while the enquiry takes place. If it rains tonight, a lot of people in Birmingham will be cursing their Labour MPs as they go to the loo. ❑

Labour Briefing

The grim reaper

Full employment is the key to reasserting confidence and independence among workers - and common ownership is the vital ingredient which Labour should be supporting, says Ken Coates MEP.

COMMON OWNERSHIP and full employment go hand in hand. Clause IV was not abolished when everybody had a job. Unemployment has greatly weakened our movement.

Conversely, we need a great expansion of public enterprise and public services if we are to create and sustain the jobs that are so desperately needed.

Of course, we cannot deny that the outcome of the Labour Party's special conference was a serious blow to the aspiration of "common ownership". But we need not be too despondent.

There is still a profound suspicion in the labour movement of capitalist forms of organisation, and widespread support for real socialist alternatives. The May Day Appeal for Common Ownership, which I launched with Stan Newens MEP and others, has received a great deal of interest and support.

We all have to get together to maintain and strengthen our committment to common ownership. Discussions about different forms of common ownership are urgently needed. We must show how they are relevant in a world of multinational capital, and how they can survive and thrive. The evil of mass unemployment has to be faced with equal urgency and priority.

All over Europe unemployment still rages at crisis levels. It becomes difficult to recall that, following the Second World War and the European economies re-established themselves, there began an age of almost full employment which endured for nearly three decades. By the 1970s, the unemployment statistics averaged between 2 and 3 per cent in all the countries of the European Community. But this figure had doubled by the beginning of the 1980s, and it almost doubled again by 1985. At that time it stood at 11 per cent of the employed workforce.

For Britain, unemployment has become a veritable crucifixion of millions of people, who are excluded from every aspect of normal living. The incidence of long-term unemployment gives us new indices of misery: deprivation, poverty, family breakdown, loss of hope and self-esteem. Large tracts of Britain become dependent, hanging by their fingernails on the edge of a society which organises itself in car-boot sales, those triumphs of the free market.

What justice can there be for those who are excluded? What are the claims of those who are not wanted in the labour market, not solvent in their own right, excluded from the active economy and from ever widening areas of social life? Where is the "opportunity" on the dole? And "equality" in a society which is polarised to a degree which none of the living can remember?

Mass unemployment is the grave digger of democracy. Among young people, unemployment normally runs at double the proportion afflicting the workforce at large. Who can be surprised at the growth of xenophobia, random violence, petty and not so petty crime? The extreme right flourishes in this poisonous soil. Even more widely, cynicism grows.

And solidarity? This is a good word, but where is it in the official political space of states which have come to live with the "inevitable" fact that millions of their citizens must be excluded in perpetuity, or at least for many years? Let us not forget that today we are three times richer, on average, than we were when all of Europe enjoyed full employment. There is no excuse for locking one single human soul outside the gates.

True, the unemployment regime drives millions into direct poverty, and excludes them from access to many basic amenities. But it also impacts with full force on those who retain their jobs: unless they possess special skills, they find their own position undermined, and with this weakening goes loss of self-esteem. It becomes increasingly difficult for people to defend their rights. In that context, the rights themselves die back, and we reach a regressive state where beliefs which yesterday were taken for granted must now be proved, and where the weakest go to the wall.

Full employment, by contrast, changes the balance of power between employers and their workpeople. Even before employees decide to join a trade union, they gain an advantage from the establishment of a sellers' market for labour. The security which this brings gives the employees the right to say "no".

If an employer makes unreasonable demands, or offers unacceptable low rewards, or is too arbitrary and inconsiderate, then there is another job down the road, around the corner. It is no longer necessary to bite one's tongue.

In such circumstances, trade unions can flourish. A wide range of issues become "management prerogatives" in time of high unemployment. The boss can call the shots, not only on levels of wages, but also on working time, the pattern and rhythm of work and the security of employment itself.

High unemployment figures make dismissal a much feared penalty. Those who fear the sack lose the ability to answer back. Fear imposes docility, which is often misinterpreted as contentment. Full employment dissolves this threat, and brings a situation in which workers enjoy something closer to freedom than is never available to them in times of mass unemployment.

Ken Coates's new book is *The Right to Work: The Loss of our First Freedom* (Spokesman Books, £6.99).

Expand or die?

In the wake of the ditching of Clause IV, Mike Marqusee examines the future of *Labour Briefing*.

"THE ONLY show in town" - that's what the *New Statesman* dubbed the Blair leadership after its one-sided victory on Clause IV. Recalcitrant left-wingers were advised to abandon opposition and join the winning team. It was another example of the British intelligentsia's embarrassing love affair with the Labour leader, in which critical faculties have been abandoned even faster than policy commitments.

Blair may be "the only show in town" to those addicted to the vaudeville of "high politics", but for the rest of us, it isn't worth the price of the ticket.

That is not to say that we should deceive ourselves about the weaknesses of the left. The Clause IV OMOV ballots have confirmed that socialists - i.e. people committed to the struggle to reorganise society on a co-operative basis - now make up no more than some 15% of individual Labour Party members. Blair appears ever nearer to realising Kinnock's dream: the reconstruction of the Party membership itself. This is a new landscape and if the left is to make a mark on it new maps and compasses are needed.

We need to learn how to reach out far beyond our present ranks. That means engaging in dialogue and joint political activity with people to our political right. The Defend Clause IV campaign showed that we are capable of doing that - when we work together and discipline ourselves to address the widest possible constituency.

To make an impact in the labour movement in its current mood, we also need a publication superior to any now on offer (including *Briefing*). This publication must:

1. Belong to the left as a whole, not to any single group or current. This implies a pluralistic approach to political debate, open-mindedness about strategy and tactics and honesty about particular initiatives.

2. Offer comprehensive coverage of the key issues affecting the labour movement from a socialist perspective.

3. Provide readers with the information and analysis they need to take part in the movement's debates. We have to make the arguments, not merely assert revealed socialist truth.

4. Maintain professional standards of journalism and presentation. News coverage must be clear and reliable. Writing must be concise and accessible. Activists need a paper that is useful, stimulating and entertaining; they don't have time to waste on worthy but dull, shoddy or verbose productions.

5. Cultivate a living relationship with its readers. They must be encouraged to contribute ideas and information. They must have a sense that this is their publication.

6. Encourage debate on the key difficulties facing socialists and be unafraid to pose awkward questions. At this juncture, the left should not shy away from sober self-criticism.

7. Be rooted in struggle and activity, reporting and nurturing a wide variety of campaigns, especially the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network.

8. Draw together constituency activists, trade unionists (including trade union officials) and MPs and MEPs. For too long the British left has been trapped in a sterile "rank and file" v "bureaucracy" dichotomy.

9. Treat Party and union activists as multi-faceted human beings - too often the left does its best to live up to its Dave and Deirdre Spart caricature; we can and must speak in more than one tone of voice - humour, satire, self-mockery are essential.

10. Be published regularly and be widely and easily available. This is probably the most difficult goal - but the achievement of all the other aims depends on it.

What about the politics? I don't think we need to worry too much about the parameters, but the core is clear. We need a magazine created by and for socialists active in the Labour Party and the broader labour movement.

Where does all this leave *Briefing*? We have done our best with limited resources in a hostile climate but the magazine is still a far cry from what is needed. Our sales are low. In vast areas of the country *Briefing* is unavailable and unknown. Our coverage has been patchy and inadequate.

For *Briefing* to continue on its present hamstrung basis - staggering from crisis to crisis, skipping issues and failing to cover key events - would be a waste of time. The politics of the moment demand more from us. Our goal should be to establish a magazine of the Labour left that fulfils all the requirements set out above.

That will need a wider array of forces than *Briefing* or anyone else can muster at the present time. So we have to start with *Briefing* itself, while maintaining discussions on future co-operation with all other interested parties.

We need to expand our Editorial Board so that it is representative of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network (which is the kind of non-sectarian, activist initiative which *Briefing* has always championed). We also need to enlist a broader and more diverse group of contributors and to sharpen and systematise our coverage of the labour movement.

Above all, we need more money. Nothing can be done unless we are able to offer our editorial worker a reasonable income and have something left over to invest in promotion. To put it bluntly, unless people come forward prepared to commit cash and/or time, we cannot go on.

If you are one of those who believe that Blair is indeed "the only show in town", then let *Briefing* die. If not, come to the AGM on 3rd June and help us figure out a way not just to survive, but to thrive. ❑

SOCIALIST
Campaign Group
NETWORK

News from the Network

● The Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network is putting its full weight behind building the Socialist Policies for a Labour Government conference called by Defend Clause IV - Defend Socialism (see back page). The conference should provide an opportunity to unite the left around the practical common goal of fighting for specific policies. Originally 17th June was the date for the Network's own AGM. This will now take piace in the autumn. However, in the meantime Party members are urged to organise local Socialist Campaign Groups (there are now over thirty) and to encourage individual subscription to the Network. The Network is also asking supporters to campaign for the passing of the three model resolutions in the trade unions and CLPs.

NEC slate

We hope to be supporting the same slate that the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs promoted last year (Alice Mahon, Diane Abbott, Ken Livingstone, Alan Simpson, Dawn Primarolo, Dennis Skinner and Jeremy Corbyn).

The NEC has now imposed draconian rules on campaigning which make it much more difficult to get our message out. If you want to be part of the campaign to elect a socialist NEC - join the Network now!

Send £5/£2 to SCGN, 3 Blades House, Kennington, London, SE11 5TW.

Model resolutions for Labour Party Conference

Trade unions rights

"Conference believes that there is a vital need to restore to workers the civil and collective rights taken away from them by this reactionary government. Accordingly, we agree to include the following legislative proposals in our manifesto for the next general election:

The right to belong to a trade union, recruit fellow workers into a trade union, and to have the union recognised by the employer for collective bargaining;

The right to be active in the union and to take industrial action without the fear of dismissal;

The right to strike, to picket effectively and to take industrial action in support of other groups of workers without fear of losing employment or having to face legal attacks on the union."

Minimum wage

"Conference believes in a just and fair society which judges its strength by the condition of the weak as much as the strong, which provides security against fear and delivers people from the tyranny of poverty. Therefore we welcome the public commitments of our leadership to include proposals for a minimum wage in the next election manifesto.

However, we note with great concern the recent statements that no definite figure on what the minimum will be will be pledged before the next election.

Worse still, it is proposed that the determination of the minimum wage level will be subject to consultation with employers. We do not believe that the employers, who have a natural inclination to keep wages as low as possible, should be able to determine what the final level should be. Instead, Conference believes that a definite figure should be put in our General Election manifesto thus allowing the whole British electorate to democratically decide on what it should be.

Further, we hold that a minimum wage will only make a meaningful difference if it is set at a reasonable level. We believe that it is unacceptable for people to be expected to survive on less than £160 per week. Accordingly, we reaffirm previous commitments to setting the minimum rate of half male median earnings, which currently stands at £4.15 per hour."

Public ownership of the utilities

"Conference notes the overwhelming desire of the population for a return of the public utilities to common ownership. The mockery of 'free competition' by these private monopolies has led to massive jobs losses and wage reductions for their workers in contrast with huge salary hikes in directors' remuneration. In many cases privatisation has also led to the callous reduction in service to the public.

Conference does not believe that an increase in Government regulation will be sufficient to control the long term investment and employment decisions of these multinational companies or ensure that these privatised utilities will serve the public interest.

Nor do we accept that the issue of compensation should be used for not taking back these services into public ownership - there are many alternative ways of dealing with this matter without undermining our plans for spending in other areas.

Conference agrees to implement the spirit of the new Clause IV and return to public ownership the public utilities as 'undertakings essential to the common good'. In doing so we reject the old bureaucratic model of appointees in favour of boards directly representing and accountable to the workforce, consumers and other relevant bodies."

No excuse for Trident

Walter Wolfgang of Labour CND examines the prospects for a nuclear free world.

THE LAST two Labour Party Conferences committed a future Labour Government to scrap Trident. Since then the first Trident has become operational. Yet front bench speakers refuse to advocate this Party policy. It is therefore essential that this policy is reaffirmed at Labour Party Conference with plenty of resolutions on the topic.

Trident represents a twelve fold escalation of capacity and unlike Polaris is independently targettable. Douglas Hurd has made it clear that Britain will keep Trident for the foreseeable future. Rifkind wants it to have a sub-strategy war-fighting role presumably directed against the third world.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty has been indefinitely extended. Mexico, Ireland and South Africa among others have pressed for global nuclear disarmament - Britain hasn't. As a concession to third world countries, notably South Africa, there will be a review of disarmament negotiations every five years.

But the nuclear five (USA, Russia, Britain, France and China) cannot really be compelled to do anything. Gorbachev's vision of a nuclear free world by the year 2000 has been lost. Start II has not yet been ratified.

Much more pressure is needed. If nuclear weapons exist they may one day be used. It is therefore vital that Britain under a Labour Government would scrap Trident.

Labour CND model resolution for Labour Party Conference

"This Conference deplores the statement of the Tory Foreign Secretary to the Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference which has the effect of ruling out any possibility of Britain scraping the Trident missile system. Britain, one of the world's foremost proliferators, therefore contributes to making nuclear proliferation by other countries more likely.

Conference further deplores the fact that the first Trident has become operational ; that it is now planned to have a sub-strategic nuclear war-fighting role which threatens the third world; and that nuclear weapons and nuclear materials continue to be transported regularly on British roads and rail,

Conference reaffirms the contention of the 1993 and 1994 Labour Party Conferences that scrapping the Trident weapons programme is an essential step towards the global elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Conference therefore reaffirms the demand of both these conferences that the next Labour Government should decommission the Trident missiles system and stop all nuclear weapons testing.

Conference calls on the PLP to promote opposition to Trident in Parliament and the NEC to campaign against Trident in the country."



Hear the Hibakusha

Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki tell their story

27th June London
28th June Norwich
29th June Sheffield
30th June Leeds
3rd July Newcastle
4th July Glasgow
6th July Carlisle
7th July Manchester
8th July Coventry
10th July Birmingham
11th July Cardiff
13th July Bristol
14th July Reading
16th July London (Trafalgar Square event to mark the 50th anniversary of the first ever nuclear test)

The tour is being organised by Yorkshire and Humberside CND together with Christian CND. Donations towards costs would be greatly appreciated. For more information please ring Yorkshire and Humberside CND on 01274 730795 or Christian CND on 0114 273 9047.

One Party, one leader, one vote?

In the wake of the Clause IV decision, "one member-one vote" postal ballots are all the rage. Can the left learn to live with, if not love, OMOV? Three *Briefing* Editorial Board members give contrasting views.

Dorothy Macedo writes: I do not agree with those who argue that we must learn to live with OMOV. Of course, we must revise our tactics to ensure we reach all Party members, but it is vital for the left to explain whenever possible why we remain opposed to OMOV ballots.

You cannot have an active local Party able to campaign in elections and on local issues if people never come to meetings because they can sit at home and wait for a voting paper to drop through the door.

More fundamentally, we need to explain why it is that the Party rule-book makes no mention of OMOV ballots of the type we held on Clause IV (there is only provision for OMOV ballots for the election of leader, deputy leader and the seven CLP places on the NEC, all recent innovations). The labour movement would never have existed if it had tried to organise workers only as isolated individuals. There would be no Labour Party had organisations not come together as collective entities.

As individuals we are all weak - liable to lose heart or be bullied or bought off. It is only by combining together and making decisions collectively that we have any chance of shifting the balance of wealth and power. The Tories have done much to undermine our collective organisation; we shouldn't let the Labour Party follow suit.

Bryn Griffiths writes: Socialists in the Labour Party have opposed OMOV postal balloting, arguing that it excludes participation by local trade union delegates, undermines the principles of participatory and collective decision-making and substitutes for them solitary decision making without any need to explore the issues with fellow Party members.

Put bluntly, the ruling ideas of a society are those of its ruling class. To challenge this state of affairs we have to create structures that make people feel more powerful and able to bring about change. This is unlikely to happen in a form of party organisation more akin to the National Trust than a trade union.

However, when the right wing raised the OMOV issue the left made the mistake of staking everything on the defence of the right of CLP General Committees to make all decisions. It is right to defend GCs because it is there that local trade union delegates cast their votes - but a much more important principle is the defence of collective and participatory decision-making.

I would suggest that the left now refocuses on a principled opposition to postal balloting. Those people who cannot attend because of illness, work or carers' responsibilities should be allowed to apply for postal ballots, but this should be the exception and not the rule. Voting could be at ordinary ward meetings or constituency aggregates. Such an approach would breathe life into Party meetings by encouraging new members to attend.

Even at a general or local election, voters are expected to leave their houses to cast their vote. Is it too much to ask that Labour members attend the odd meeting to cast their votes when crucial decisions are to be made?

If the left supports the call for OMOV at Party meetings we can unite the feeling that the franchise should be extended to ordinary Party members with a principled defence of participatory, collective decision-making.

Whatever tactics the left adopts in response to OMOV we must learn to campaign under voting systems where the electorate goes far beyond the confines of the local GC. To refuse to make such a move would be to hand the Party to the right, an extreme example of infantile leftism.

In the long term, the discipline of having to talk to a much greater number of Party members can allow us to lay the basis for a left revival - but the first stage must be to get the new members to participate in local Party life.

Mike Marqusee writes: The left must accept that OMOV is here to stay. To new members, demands to revert to GC-based decision-making will seem nothing more than a threat to their own right to participate and to vote. Our aim should be to democratise OMOV, not to scrap it.

1. OMOV should not be the sole prerogative of the leadership. Members and affiliates should have the right to trigger OMOV ballots as well. We should propose an amendment to the Party constitution to enable members to secure an OMOV ballot on a particular issue by securing a specified number of members' signatures and/or supporting constituencies or trade unions.

2. We need a code of conduct for OMOV ballots. During the Clause IV exercise, constituencies had to make up the rules as they went along. We also need to discuss who bears the expense of ballots.

3. The flow of information and argument from official Party sources must be fair and balanced.

Of course, under OMOV, the *Guardian* will always cast the biggest block vote. But we need to learn how to maximise our influence and votes. That means improving both the quantity and quality of our publicity. It also means a renewed stress on political education and debate at all levels of the movement.

It would be crazy to concede that the left must always and under all circumstances lose OMOV ballots. Events can change the tide of opinion despite the best efforts of parliamentarians and pundits. If the left does not learn how to live with OMOV, it will not be able to take advantage of the opportunities that come its way.

Trade Unions

Fighting back

As we went to press, the Fire Brigades Union held their annual conference. Mick Shaw, FBU London chairperson, previewed events.

FOR THE first time since the Second World War - when we organised members of the war-time National and Auxiliary Fire Services - the FBU has a membership of more than 50,000.

This achievement should not be underestimated. In 1979, when the Tories took power, FBU membership stood at 40,533. After 15 years of Tory attacks on trade unions and public services, membership now stands at 50,701.

This has been done by recruiting an overwhelming majority of Fire Service Officers - the management grades - who would previously have belonged to the scab organisation, the National Association of Fire Officers, and by recruiting part-time firefighters in rural areas.

The increase of 1,565 members in the last year is largely due to the success of the union's campaign to re-sign all its members as required under the Tory "check-off" legislation. Like the political fund ballots, this major piece of anti-union legislation has backfired on the Tories.

For the first time, there are a number of resolutions on the annual conference agenda which question the future of the Fire Service Upper Quartile Pay Formula, the result of the 1977 national strike. This has arisen because the formula has produced below-average pay rises for the last two years.

Other issues on the agenda include the effects of local government re-organisation on Fire Brigades, the Home Office review of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, cuts in central government funding and the recent Audit Commission report into the Fire Service. All of these pose potentially serious threats to our members and conference will reiterate our determination to defend our members' jobs, pay and conditions.

The issue of equal opportunities in the Fire Service will be a key area of discussion, particularly in the light of the recent industrial tribunal ruling in favour of a woman member in Hereford and Worcester, fully supported by the union, who was subjected to appalling sexual harassment. A number of resolutions call for the employment of a full-time equal opportunities official.

Health and safety will be another major topic of debate, with two fire authorities receiving improvement notices from the Health and Safety Executive following the deaths of five FBU members in the last four years.

There are a number of resolutions calling for the trade union and labour movement to actively oppose the Criminal Justice Act and its restrictions on trade union and political activity.

The issue of Northern Ireland will be discussed for the first time in recent years, with a resolution from our Northern Ireland Brigade welcoming the peace process.

The repeal of anti-trade union legislation will be debated with a resolution calling for a framework of positive rights and an amendment which demands simply the repeal of Tory legislation.

Although the fate of Clause IV has already been decided a resolution and several amendments call for the retention of the old wording.

We hope this conference will send a clear message to the "new" Labour Party that the FBU still supports the fight for common ownership and socialism.

● At the conference, FBU President Ronnie Scott attacked Blair's relationship with the unions. He said "they have no right to tell us want we should do whilst distancing themselves from the trade union movement". Scott called the new Clause IV "ludicrous and nonsensical" staing that "the few will use their wealth and power to resist anyone who tries to take it off them".

Briefing will provide a report of the conference in our next edition.

TUC march for full employment

The march sets off Tuesday 13th June from Liverpool and arrives 23rd June in Sheffield.

13 June - eve of march rally, Liverpool
14 June - Liverpool to St Helens
15 June - St Helens to Wigan
16 June - Wigan to Salford
17 June - Salford to Oldham (via Manchester)
18 June - Oldham to Dewsbury (via Huddesrsfield)
19 June - Dewsbury to Leeds
20 June - Leeds to Wakefield
21 June - Wakefield to Barnsley
22 June - Barnsley to Rotherham
23 June - final day: Rotherham to rally at Sheffield Grass Bowl
24 June - South Yorksire festival at Sheffield Wortley Hall

Ring the TUC on 0151-298-1225 (North West) or 0113-242-9696 (Yorkshire & Humberside) for more details.

Trade Unions

MSF elects Fabian

Leonora Lloyd reports on left gains and financial controversies at this year's conference of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union.

THE KEY issue facing this year's MSF conference was whether or not there was a financial crisis, and how it had been handled.

The problem for the leadership was that if it admitted there was a crisis, then its stewardship of the union's finances was in question; but if there was no crisis, then its attempts to make drastic cutbacks into expenditure could not be justified.

The reality, as the left saw it, was that the union does have real financial problems, due to some bad decisions by the leadership and poor management of resources, but that this has been seized upon by Roger Lyons in an attempt to reduce branch and regional democracy.

Most of the Lyons' proposals were defeated, including one which would have cut the Labour Party Conference delegation far beyond the reduction needed by Party rules. But a proposal to elect a committee to investigate and report back to a recall conference was also defeated. The left also lost in its attempt to get the election for the general secretary started next year.

However, the left won on a major question of union democracy. The MSF delegation to Labour's Special Conference (which voted 21 to 14 against Clause IV) was condemned. The rules are quite clear: delegations must vote in accordance with conference decisions and the last time MSF conference debated the issue of Clause IV it agreed it wanted it retained as part of Labour's constitution.

On policy issues, the results were a mixed bag, but on the whole MSF continues to stand with the left, notably on issues such as full employment and trade union laws.

In a debate on a composite motion on economic policy, an amendment worded in terms of the old Clause IV was narrowly carried. Lyons then opposed the motion as a whole, which was narrowly defeated. Most of the substance of the defeated motion was, however, reintroduced in a composite motion carried later in the Conference.

The right - 'MSF for Labour' - is well organised and the lesson for the left is clear. It, too, must act in an organised and united way. Unity Left and Network 90 between them ensured the election of a left vice-president, Gary Fabian, but because Unity Left refused to oppose the election of right-winger Dave Minahan for president and did not support the left candidate (myself), MSF now has an anti-abortion, anti-Clause IV, Lyons-supporter as president for the coming year.

Socialist Movement
Trade Union Committee

Conference

'New' Labour and the Unions

Saturday, 15th July
10:30am-5pm
South Camden Community School
Charrington St
London NW1

Speakers include: Tony Benn MP

Workshops on the link with Labour, our democracy and theirs, organising the union left, preparing for Labour in office, full employment, the minimum wage, 35 hour week, defending the welfare state, the anti-union laws.

Send £5/£3 (Cheques to "SMTUC") to 3 Blades House, London, SE11 5TW.

Sylvia Pye needs support

THE SYLVIA PYE Appeal Fighting Fund (SPAFF) was set up in April 1994, when Sylvia Pye was singled out to pay the costs British Coal ran up evicting the Parkside Pit Camp in Lancashire. Hundreds of supporters have worked towards raising the required £15,877.16 (plus SPAFF's own legal costs).

Sylvia was picked out from the hundreds of protesters in an attempt to divide or frighten supporters. As chair of National Women Against Pit Closures, she has actively fought the Government's anti-NUM policy since going on strike from her job in the pit canteen in 1984. Since then, as part of WAPC, Sylvia has been active in the fight for jobs, peace, education and health.

The Parkside camp was maintained for twenty months, extending the life of the pit for all that period. Visits by riot police, the eviction, threats and state surveillance all failed to intimidate the protesters. The state has now destroyed the colliery. Sylvia is being told to pay up simply for standing firm - if not she faces prison.

The campaign has free posters, stickers and protest cards to send to British Coal. T-shirts, badges and booklets are for sale. Supporters receive regular newsletters. Cash is needed.

Send donations and requests for information to: The SPAFF, c/o Common Road Nurseries, Newton-le Willows WA12 9JJ.

Trade Unions

Call for day of action

Jennifer Davies, Deputy Branch Secretary, Newcastle Unison, reports on a renewed determination to fight Tory attacks among public sector trade unionists.

RANK AND FILE activists from public sector trade unions have called for a co-ordinated day of action in the run-up to the announcement of the Government's next budget in November. Delegates to the 'Organising to Defend the Public Sector Conference' held in Leeds on 13th May agreed to argue for this in their unions and in the TUC.

The conference, called by Newcastle and Strathclyde Unison branches and Tyne and Wear FBU, heard speakers from health, rail, teaching, local government, the fire service and civil service outline what is happening in their sectors. The common message was stark. Right across the public sector we are seeing the culmination of 16 years of Tory attacks, both ideological and economic. The language and the weapons may differ (privatisation, CCT, market testing, trusts, charge capping, opting out) but the effects are the same. For public sector workers there is job loss, casualisation, insecurity and worsening pay and conditions. For service users there are queues, increased charges, reductions in quality, range and accessability.

Underlying all this is the real Tory aim: the dismantling of the welfare state and with it the power of public sector trade unions.

Against this background, the need for unity is clear. Public sector trade unions must move away from the piecemeal, reactive approach we have seen so far, responding only to individual attacks in individual sectors but never drawing the threads together. So far this year we have seen eruptions of anger and a real desire for action, bringing together workers and service users in a range of areas - education, local government, health and rail are only a few examples. The conference agreed that maximum solidarity must be given to all these campaigns. It also called for support for the RMT demonstration against poverty pay to be held in London on 10th June. A massive turn out right across the public sector would be an important building block towards action in November.

The need and potential for action has never been greater. The Labour Party must promote distinct policies which will reverse the Tory attacks of the last 15 years and build a strong and expanding public sector.

- Delegates agreed that the conference should be reconvened in September.

Further details from Newcastle Unison: 0191-232-8520 (X-6980).

Fighting tools

Graham Benjamin reports on the annual Trades Councils Conference, held in Bristol, 12th-14th May.

ONCE AGAIN THE Trades Councils Conference offered a useful forum for trade unionists opposed to the modernisers and keen for a serious fight against the Tories.

Motions were passed calling for a minimum wage of two-thirds median male earnings within the first term of a Labour Government.

Dawn Primarolo from the Treasury Shadow team told the conference that full employment was the most important goal of the next Labour Government and that the Party "looks for a package of policies that buttress that central goal of full employment". Unfortunately, Blair isn't looking hard enough for these policies. Two months ago he stated that Labour would not "say to people that we can guarantee you a job". Primarolo said, "I don't want the Labour Party to tell the trade unions what to think and I don't think the trade unions are going to be able to tell, at the moment, the Labour Party what to think."

Steve Argent from the Chelmsford, Badgerline strikers addressed the conference. A motion calling for solidarity was passed and conference adjourned to join a march in support of the Badgerline workers.

Amazingly, a number of motions were critical of the TUC's stewardship of the trades council movement. John Monks was censured for the way he has handled East Anglia's integration into the South East Region. Motions were also passed call for adequate funding for trades councils.

Bill Morris told delegates that his comments bore no relation to his contest against Jack Dromey. Everybody laughed. He seems to be a very nice man. Much nicer than Jack Dromey.

The conference showed that the trades councils movement is far from dead and that they should be taken more seriously by the Labour left. Linking militants in a wide range of trade unions with community campaigns, they can become effective fighting tools.

NUM vote for strike action

The ballot for strike action in the NUM has resulted in an overwhelming 83% in favour of selective 24 hour action in the 20 pits owned by RJB Mining. The union is fighting a three year wage freeze at a time when RJB Chief Executive Richard Budge has awarded himself a 23% pay rise. The NUM are also demanding full union recognition. Arthur Scargill described the result as the "highest per centage vote for action in the union's history"

Budge won his bid to privatise the mines, whilst his fitness to be a paid company director was being officially investigated. Dennis Skinner was evicted from the House of Commons for daring to suggest that a "crooked" deal had been struck.

FACE the future

Sue Lister from the education pressure group, FACE, spells out the uncomfortable realities of Conservative attacks on state education and what Labour must do to repair the damage

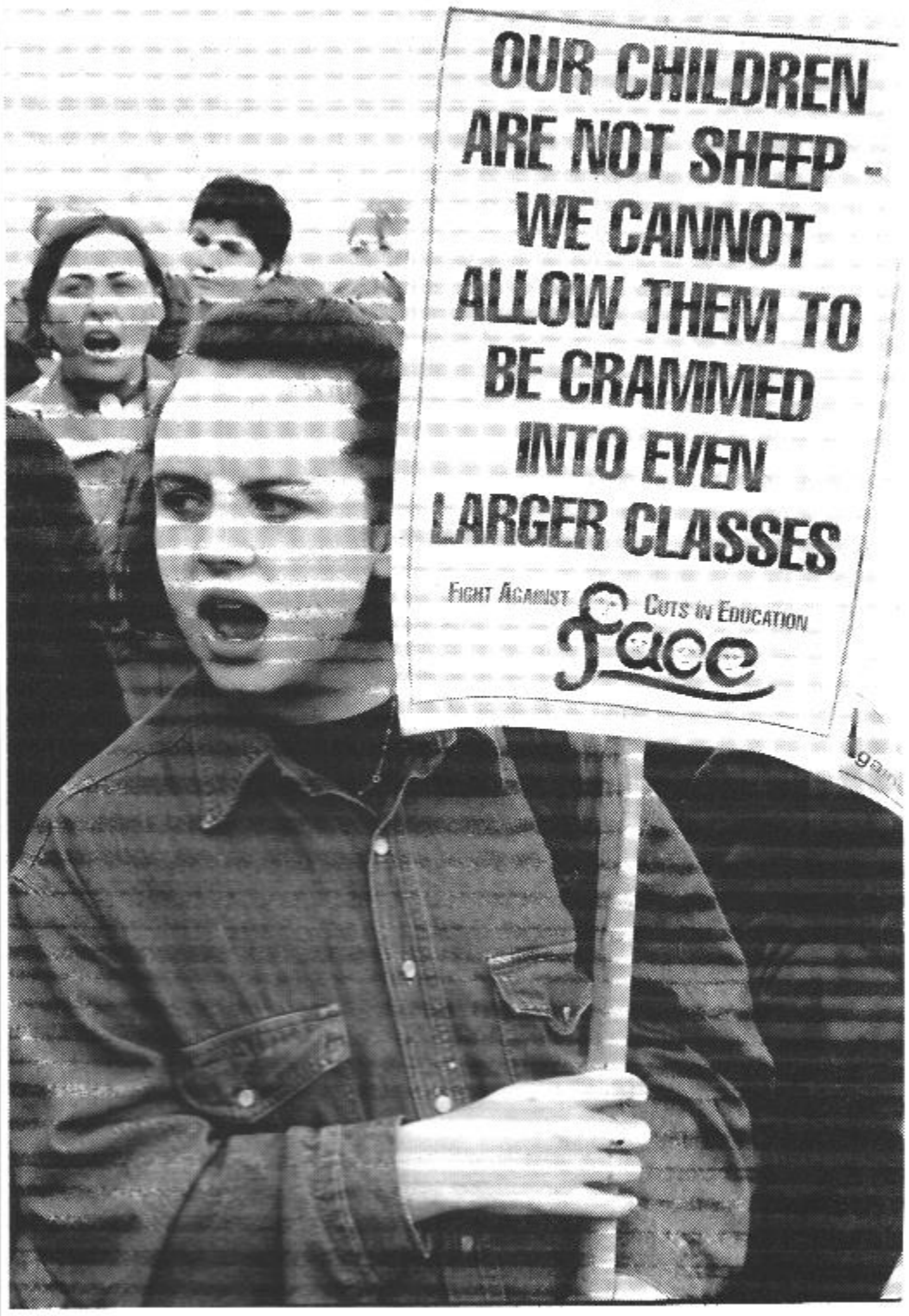


PHOTO: Paul Mattsson

WITH 15,000 on the march organised from scratch in just six weeks the March 25th Fight Against Cuts in Education (FACE) demonstration was more successful than most expected. It was not the end but the start of a nationwide campaign.

Schools all over the country have now set deficit budgets and demonstrations and rallies are being held in virtually every locality.

As the conference season for the teaching unions began it was no surprise that Education Secretary Gillian Shephard tried to persuade them and us that in next year's public spending round "education will be the top of our priorities."

Is this the same Gillian Shephard who warned her Cabinet colleagues that cuts would cost up to 10,000 teachers' jobs - and was ignored?

Even if she meant what she said about next year, what about this year? Do we say to children that they can have this year's education when we can afford it?

Can we offer them an extra couple of years at school later on to make up for what they are missing now? It's too late at 16 to go back and catch up on what you should have done at eleven. Do we sack thousands of teachers now and re-employ them in a couple of years' time?

We need enough money to educate children now - not at some point in the future.

That's why FACE has to fight on and ensure we get:

- changes in the ridiculous way education funding is decided;
- a guaranteed increase in the amount spent on education;
- the money cut from this year's budget returned now, so we can stop the cuts before the damage is too great.

Gillian Shephard's vague promise was followed by the words "as the economy delivers further growth". The only noticeable growth on offer from this Government has been in scandals.

Far from offering new money, ministers' time and time again challenge us to explain "where should the money come from?" They lead us to believe that to stop cuts in schools we have to cut something else instead.

FACE is a single issue campaign in defence of education but we don't want to see cuts in any other section of the public sector. We will not allow the Government to play one section off against another.

Instead of "where will the money come from?" we have to ask ministers "where has all the money gone?" They tell us the economy is expanding - suggesting more cash rather than less.

They keep increasing taxation - 20 increases since 1992. Yet still it appears there is not enough money to educate our children. So what have the Government done with the money they have taken from us?

Of course, it is now clear that John Major wants to hold down public spending to finance new tax cuts in the hope of winning the next election.

But a poll conducted for the *Guardian* newspaper has again shown that most people, including Conservative voters, would prefer to pay more tax than see a cut in either education or health services.

Instead, we are paying more taxes while the Government is cutting all aspects of the welfare state.

So far, this article has only mentioned the present Government. But the Labour Party has not made any commitment to increased funding for education.

Our campaign has to continue to ensure the Labour Party knows we will not accept anything less than increased funding, a restoration of minimum standards and a reverse in the present downward spiral of spending.

As a political, but non-party political, campaign, we will not accept an inferior education service from anyone.

Labour must be told that unless they fight for education, they could be the next long-term target of angry parents.

This feature was reproduced from *Action for Health and Welfare* (the bulletin of the Welfare State Network).

Plug in to the Welfare State Network!

The Welfare State Network was launched in 1994 to build a national movement to defend vital services, benefits and public sector jobs.

Affiliation of £25 for unions and Labour Parties, £10 for pensioners' and unemployed groups, individual subscriptions £5/£3. Affiliates receive 10 copies of each issue of ACTION. Bundles of 25 are available at £6 (unions) or £4 (pensioners/unemployed groups).

Send to: WSN, c/o Southwark TUSU, 42 Braganza Street, London SE17.

Building the fightback for education

FACE conference

Coventry

June 10th 11am to 4pm.

Contact FACE: c/o St Giles County Middle School, Hayes Lane, Exhall, Coventry CV7 9NS. Tel: 0589 789104.

The French exception

Andrew Coates examines the long-term cost of Mitterrand's capitulation to capital.

"THE CAPITALIST system is the origin of evil." Thus, Francois Mitterrand, 1980. He was even more explicit in 1972: "We have no need of the masters of money ... the new feudal lords, masters of armament, masters of electricity, telecommunications ... We will make these people pay for the centuries-old evils they have left us."

The Parti Socialiste (PS) claimed not to be social democratic, but genuinely socialist. It would carry out the "rupture" with capitalism. Workers' control, nationalisation and social legislation was the programme of the PS when it won the 1981 elections.

Fourteen years later, we can see what the break with capitalism amounted to. Mitterrand bequeathed his country an unemployment rate of 12%, where 20% of French people hold 68% of the national revenue.

The "excluded" sleep on the pavements of Paris. Working-class Parisians see their houses demolished and themselves transported to distant suburbs. Long-term unemployment is a cancer eating at the heart of democracy. Homelessness has reached a point where the French acronym for it, SDF (Sans Domicile Fixe), has become a standard usage.

French fascism in the shape of Le Pen has won more than 15% of the popular vote, drawing near to the largest force on the European extreme right, the Austrian Liberal Party which gained 22.6% of the vote in October 1994.

The fascists celebrated May Day by killing a North African near the annual Jean D'Arc demonstration and this racist murder dominated debate during the two rounds of the presidential elections.

That Le Pen's party, the Front National, proved the largest force among the working class shows the depths of the political crisis. The poor in some of the bleakest housing estates in Europe are thus reduced to fighting among themselves. Many of the working class districts of Paris such as the 18th arrondisment, are electric with racial hatreds of all kinds and complexities but above all, French against Arab. That is the equality, liberty and solidarity Mitterrand brought.

Much has been made of the British Labour Party's modernisation. Mitterrand's party was there first. The PS had its own "Clause IV" debate in 1983 at its Congress at Bourg-en-Bresse, two years after Mitterrand came to power.

"Many of the working class districts of Paris such as the 18th arrondisment, are electric with racial hatreds of all kinds and complexities but above all, French against Arab."

Initial nationalisations - 36 banks, five major industrial groups and large numbers of companies where the state became the majority shareholder - were complemented by raising the minimum wage, increased social protection and a tax on the 2,000,000 richest French people.

A run on the franc, warning signs from every international capitalist, and Mitterrand trembled. One of the PS leaders, Jean-Pierre Chevenement, proposed a real break with the market economy through planning, protectionism and state collectivism. Contrary to subsequent mythology, this option was never tried.

The moderate left, represented by the Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, wished to confront the economic crisis with some degree of socialist principle and dignity, but without this clear socialist strategy. Mauroy soon lost out. The more right wing Laurent Fabius replaced Mauroy as the Communists left the government. By the end of the decade, the PS's love affair with the market allowed it to support privatisation.

Jacques Delors played a key role. Writing in *Our Europe* in 1992, Delors talked of a new "synergy" between state and society and a Europe-wide campaign for economic renewal and social solidarity. In fact, the budgetary rigour, competition standards and anti-inflation policies of the Maastricht Treaty have actively encouraged France's present economic miseries.

There is a strange anecdote about Mitterrand's electoral victory in 1981: that he persuaded Jacques Chirac to give only a lukewarm endorsement to the UDF leader and defending president, Giscard, on the basis that in a decade "all this will be yours".

True or not, putting up Jospin as the Socialist candidate was little short of a joke. Those who remember Jospin from his days in Paris as Mitterrand's number two in the PS know that the man was too implicated in the leader's twisted personal manoeuvres to be a credible alternative to the right. His impressive vote (48%) represents simply the mass loathing of Chirac that stems from bitter experiences of the neo-Gaullist's long tenure as Mayor of Paris.

The most important statistics of the first round of the presidential elections were that 58% of the unemployed and 55% of workers voted for the "protest" parties. One in four backed these bodies, which range from the Front National, the anti-Maastricht, right-wing de Villiers, the Parti Communiste Francais, the primitive Trotskyists of Lutte Ouvriere (LO), to the left-wing ecologists of Dominique Voynet's Verts. The latter, supported by the League Communiste Revolutionnaire, and the hard-line socialist Alliance Rouge et Verte, scored 3.32%. Arlette Laguiller from LO got 5.5%.

More significantly, the Communists began a slow return to the centre stage of French politics. Their candidate, Robert Hue, organised a vigorous campaign, and won 8.73%. What *Le Monde* calls the "French exception", the astonishing resistance of French people to normal bourgeois politics, remains. ❑

Bolivian state of siege continues

THE BOLIVIAN people are waging a desperate fight against a president whose programme of privatisation and self-enrichment makes Thatcherism look tame. Adam Brown reports.

70,000 teachers went on strike in April and May against the privatisation and cutting of education provision and for better wages. Teachers earn under £100 a month. The strike won backing from parents and community organisations and spread from the countryside to the cities. The teachers organised a march on the capital. This was smashed up by the military and prevented from entering La Paz.

On 23rd March the government declared that the electrical power and telecom industries would be privatised. Workers in these industries went on strike against the proposal. All the important cities declared general strikes in solidarity.

In Tarija, a province on Bolivia's southern border with Argentina, unrest led to a declaration of independence from President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada's government.

A general strike was called by the COB. A strike wave hit Bolivia. On 19th April a state of siege was declared. Over 1,000 trade unionists and political leaders were interned. One third of these were deported to military bases. A curfew was imposed and meetings were banned. Travel between cities now needs special permission.

A section of the COB then called off the general strike and most prisoners were released leaving the teachers isolated. By May the teachers were forced back to work. Vilma de la Plata, Gonzalo Sorucco, Estanislao Aliaga and Jose Luis Alvarez, leaders of the La Paz Urban Teachers Union, remain in jail. They are threatened with sentences of between four and 15 years for organising strikes.

De Lozada used a state of siege in 1985 to push through 'shock therapy' with a wage freeze which provoked a general strike. De Lozada is one of the richest men in Bolivia and owns one of the biggest mining companies.

A support committee has been formed in Britain. Tony Benn told a well-attended meeting on 18th May: "Everywhere there are two flames burning: that of anger at injustice and that of hope of a better society" and called for solidarity with the Bolivian teachers.

Model resolution:

We note the state of siege declared in Bolivia to break legitimate strikes against education cuts, privatisation and poverty wages. We note that the teachers' trade union leaders are still interned and call for their immediate release. We agree to send £10 to affiliate to the Bolivia Union Solidarity Committee (c/0 BCM 7750, London, WC1N 3XX; Fax: 0171-978-9144) and to circulate their material. We agreed to send letters of protest to the Bolivian Embassy, 106 Eaton Square, SW1.

We call on the National Executive to support this campaign and inform the membership of its activities.

UN failure

AS EVENTS IN Rwanda again hit the headlines, African Rights have produced a timely report cataloguing the failure of the UN operation there. *A Waste of Hope* documents how the UN Human Rights Field Operation became, in the words of one disillusioned staff member, "a systematic boycott of everything that could have made a positive contribution."

The report argues that the UN, rather than investigate the 1994 genocide, has interpreted its primary role as one of preventing revenge attacks. This often means simply protecting the original perpetrators. Some monitors have gone so far as to say that their function is to discredit the Rwanda Patriotic Army, whose coming to power and establishment of a broad based coalition government helped end the massacres.

Recent events seem to show that the botched UN role and the delay in bringing Rwanda's mass murderers to justice may have created conditions which make revenge attacks more likely.

A Waste of Hope is available at £5.95p from African Rights, 11 Marshalsea Road, London, SE1 1EP.

News from Nicaragua

Mike Phipps reports: Fifteen thousand Nicaraguan teachers - about half the country's education workers - have ended their seven-week strike against privatisation and low pay. They settled for a 12% increase of $5 a month and the reinstatement of 400 sacked members. The mass sackings had provoked solidarity action by the health workers' union Fetsalud in the latest of a series of heated disputes over tumbling living standards.

Meanwhile divisions among the Sandinistas continue. The 'orthodox' Democratic Left led by Daniel Ortega has confounded its critics by approving an economic programme that argues that the principal agent of economic reactivation should be the productive sector and not the state.

The proposal calls for a new alliance between owners and workers around increased productivity and participation, based on the 'democratisation' achieved by land reform in the 1980s and privatisation of some state-owned industries into the hands of workers in the 1990s.

This rightward move by the majority Sandinista current underlines again that differences with the Ramirez current (which broke away to the right last year) seem to be based less on principles than on personalities and tactics.



The killers

Adam Hartman examines Britain's record as arms supplier to the genocidal Indonesian regime and argues that a Labour Government would have only one real option: stop the exports.

INDONESIA is one of the world's worst human rights violators. According to Amnesty International, its military regime has committed abuses on a staggering scale since 1965.

Indonesia is also one of the fastest growing economies and markets in Asia with an abundance of natural resources and cheap labour. It is a honey-pot for British investors. British governments have turned a blind eye to the Suharto regime's human rights record and the illegal occupation of East Timor and is now vying to be Indonesia's principal arms supplier.

British arms sales to Indonesia are not just very lucrative, they also help to create a favourable "climate" for British investment.

They strengthen the military, helping it to keep the lid on dissent and maintain political stability. They help to curb challenges to multinational corporations from workers organising in trade unions or communities defending their natural resources, and their use against East Timor helps maintain access for British firms to off-shore oil and gas reserves. These might be lost if East Timor gained independence.

In 1978, British equipment was photographed in action against demonstrators in Jakarta. There is eye witness evidence that Hawk jets supplied by British Aerospace (BAe) have been used against the East Timorese despite claims that they are only used for training.

In June 1993, BAe agreed to supply 24 Hawks to Indonesia, for delivery from January 1996. Up to 144 Hawks are rumoured to be in the pipe-line. Coventry-based Alvis is supplying Scorpion light tanks.

A coalition of campaigning and labour movement organisations has been set up under the banner "Stop the Hawks - No Arms To Indonesia". Strong local campaigns are running in Preston (near Warton - the site where the Hawks are assembled), Manchester, Coventry (focussing on the Alvis deal) and Bristol (where Rolls-Royce is making engines for the Hawks), Hull, Oxford and other cities. Trades councils are playing an important role; linking up with unions in the factories, and campaigning for arms conversion.

We urgently need to build support for the campaign inside the Labour Party and to commit the party to a policy of cancellation of existing deals with Indonesia and opposition to future deals with the regime. There is also a need for a wider campaign in the Party against arms sales to all repressive regimes (whether formally democratic, like Turkey, or openly dictatorial) and for investment in arms conversion.

Unfortunately, the signs are that a Blair government, committed to "the enterprise of the market" and a "thriving private sector", will bend to the will of British Aerospace and the other large arms companies. Blair is likely to say that such arms sales are necessary to safeguard jobs and to finance the upgrading of Britain's defence capacity.

It is significant that when Blair visited Manchester in February, his first port of call was BAe's factory in Chadderton, where he was anxious to reassure workers that the defence industry will be safe in Labour's hands.

Blair has two alternatives. He can safeguard defence jobs by stoking up conflict around the world and arming vicious regimes, thereby trampling on Labour's commitment to peace and internationalism. Or he can safeguard them through arms conversion. This is why the struggle for arms conversion must be a priority for the Labour left under a Labour government.

We are urging support for resolutions for this year's Party conference demanding that Labour imposes an arms embargo on Indonesia. Please move this resolution (printed below) in your ward, constituency, affiliated trade union, socialist society etc.

Please also get them your ward, CLP, union etc. to affiliate to Stop The Hawks - No Arms To Indonesia, c/o NPC, 88 Islington High Street, London N1 8EG.
Tel: 0171 561 1236.

Model resolution

Conference notes:

1. The Indonesian government's record of major human rights abuse;

2. The illegal occupation of East Timor by Indonesia since 1975;

3. The UK's role as the major supplier of arms to Indonesia.

And calls on the next Labour Government to:

1. Implement an immediate arms embargo on Indonesia;

2. End the training of members of the Indonesian armed forces by the UK;

3. Withdraw all military export licences to Indonesia and to cancel all current military contracts.

Day of Action on arms sales to Nigeria

Saturday 10th June

June12th is the second anniversary of the annulment of the elections. Since then, Britain has completed delivery of an order for Vickers main battle tanks.
Local activities across the country.
Contact: Campaign Against the Arms Trade, 0171 281 0297

Radio venceremos

Mike Phipps reviews
Rebel Radio *by*
Jose Ignacio Lopez Vigil,
published by
Latin American Books,
£8.99 paperback.

THIS IS THE extraordinary story of the clandestine radio station of the El Salvadorean guerrilla movement, the FMLN, which operated illegally in the mountains of Morazan during the civil war of the 1980s. At the end of the 70s the FMLN needed the station to reach the people since all left-wing papers were closed and possession of a revolutionary leaflet could cost you your life.

Different participants piece together the story: buying components abroad, blagging them through customs as 'sound systems', learning to broadcast by trial and error, transmitting under mortar fire from caves and home-made air raid shelters, repeatedly practising the dismantling of the generator (to reduce the operation from one hour to 14 minutes), broadcasting live coverage of firefights.

In the early 80s the army adopted a policy of civilian massacres in areas where the FMLN was active. One hundred people were killed in one village alone. Children were roasted alive in baking ovens. The book covers the indispensable role played by Radio Venceremos in exposing this atrocity and preparing the ambush which led to the execution of the army commanders responsible.

One of the most poignant stories is of a peasant woman who is suspicious of three apparent guerrillas who come to her door asking after another. Unsure whether to trust them, she offers them a single tortilla. When the corporal eats it without sharing it with the other two, she realises correctly that they are government soldiers in disguise.

This is a book of astonishing and inspiring courage. Buy it - you will never read anything like it.

Signal failure

SIGNAL FAILURE by Sam Stacey (published by RMT South-West District Council) is a new pamphlet on the recent history of the railways. It explains how their decline under successive Tory and Labour governments has paved the way for privatisation and how this has led to a plundering of the network by speculators.

It makes the case for an expansion of the network from an economic, social, environmental and safety standpoint. It calls for a clear commitment from the Labour leadership to renationalise the entire network. Well-researched and accessible, it will be of particular use to rail union activists and campaigners who want to muster their arguments against opponents of public ownership.

New from NMP

"FIFTEEN YEARS of Community Resistance", the Newham Monitoring Project's annual report, documents the work of NMP over the last year and the struggles of the black community against racist violence, fascism and police harassment in Newham.

The report gives detailed case work statistics including a breakdown by nature of harassment, area, gender and age, as well as highlighting trends identified in the last year. A total of 196 cases of police harassment and 253 cases of racial harassment are reported, a substantial increase on 1993 but merely the tip of the iceberg.

Among the trends reported this year are increased fascist activity in south Newham, the repeated abuse of powers by the police and the continuing failure of local government agencies in their dealings with the victims of racial harassment.

The report also details the brutal death of Shiji Lapite while in the custody of Stoke Newington police and the NMP's successful campaign to oppose the BNP electoral activities in south Newham as well as providing a catalogue of cases illustrating the failure of the local authority.

A new pamphlet from NMP, *The Enemy In Our Midst: Exposing racism and Fascism in Newham*, outlines the activities of local fascists and exposes key individuals behind violent racist organisations. The pamphlet is aimed as a guide to activists and takes up key questions on how to defeat the far right.

The pamphlets cost £1 plus p+p, and multiple orders may be accepted from organisations on a sale or return basis from NMP, 382 Katherine Road, London E7 8NW.

Send a message to the road builders!

South Coast Ramble Against Megaroad Madness!

A walk protesting against the Folkestone to Honiton
Super-highway and its spur roads.
Starts: Folkestone, Monday June 12th. Finishes: Honiton, Sunday June 25th.
Join for an hour or two, a day, several days, or the whole fortnight, to see the magnificent countryside that is threatened, from Romney Marsh to Golden Cap.

Details: 01293 884273



Blair's arrogance

In a recent poll, more than four out of five expressed their unhappiness with the **European Union** as it now stands. **Blair**'s response to this was: "It is true that opinion polls probably would push us towards a sceptic approach but I am adamant that such an approach would be folly and we will not pander to it."

So why is it that we have been told by **Blair** that we have to ditch socialism because it is unpopular?

Gone bananas

As the row over **Government sleaze** rumbles on, a new report has highlighted the extravagance of select committee trips overseas.

The annual budget for select committee travel this year is £670,000.

Two years ago the Agricultural Select Committee spent ten days in the Windward Islands studying banana growing. The relevance of this to a non-banana-producing nation must be dubious.

It is this same committee, chaired by the now infamous **Jerry Wiggins**, which recently went to South Africa at a cost of £38,000 to research the fruit growing industry. Britain's fruit growers declared the trip "a waste of time and money."

Brian Sedgemore MP has revealed that MPs get a £365-a-day allowance when taking part in these junkets. On a recent Treasury Select Committee trip to Brussels MPs tucked into oysters and vintage wines - even sending back one £55 bottle because "the bouquet was not quite right."

Red con

Now that **Blair** has succeeded in eradicating the socialist wording of the old Clause IV from **Party membership cards** he is likely to turn his attention to another word printed on some members' cards.

Those comrades who pay their subscriptions at the reduced rate have the abbreviation RED printed on their cards. **Blair** is likely to be worried that the general public will misconstrue this word and think that it has a socialist connotation.

Don't be surprised if **Blair** has the reduced rate renamed the concessionary rate - which can then be abbreviated as CON.

Gilmour endorses Blair

Lord Gilmour has endorse **Tony Blair**'s "New Labour Party" as the best hope for "One Nation Tory" values.

He says that the one-nation tendency "seems to be largely dormant" in the present Conservative Party. "But I hope it's going to be resurrected in New Labour. Because we do need a One Nation Tory Party, and if the Conservative Party isn't going to be it, let's have the Labour Party as the One Nation Tory Party".

He says he is "very impressed" by **Mr Blair**, the Labour leader, and can find nothing in the new Clause IV with which he disagrees.

"I would have thought virtually anybody could vote for **Tony Blair**."

Take the Torygraph

Labour front bench spokespersons are queuing up to give interviews to ***The Daily Telegraph*** in their attempt to garner Tory votes.

Clare Short told readers in an interview entitled "The accidental feminist", that the new Clause IV represented "the conceptualist components of my socialist outlook."

When asked if there was anything on which she fundamentally disagreed with **Blair** she replied, "I don't think so. It is all in the nuance." Posh words for a Brummie MP.

In another article the *Telegraph* proclaimed that **David Blunkett** was "leading the fight for middle-class votes." When asked to comment on the criticism that he was trying to outflank the Tories by moving to their right, he said that he is prepared to "stand and let the waters roll over me while I get the message across." What happened to Labour listens!

According to **Blunkett** the Party is about "giving a hand-up to people who have talent and want to use it." Sounds OK but it depends on how you define "talent".

Ironically, on the day before **Blunkett** got a roasting at the NUT conference he stated, "We have extremely good relationships with the unions. They understand what we're doing."

Super-market policies

Billionaire former backer of the Social Democrats, **David Sainsbury**, is one of the fifteen members of a new Commission on Public Policy and British Business which is endorsed by **Blair** and is an outgrowth of the Institute for Public Policy Research.

Sainsbury commented that he felt able to participate because the Labour Party had now moved toward the political centre once held by the Social Democrats.

The main remit of the new Commission is how to create wealth. **Blair** commented, "We are now the Party equipped to deal with industry and business, and devising the policies to build a strong economic base."

Sainsbury has plenty of experience of how to create wealth (for himself) by making exorbitant profits at the expense of the working class who shop at his stores. Instead of worrying himself about how to create wealth, **Sainsbury** would do well to consider how to redistribute it, given his experience in the distributive trade.

Overbooked

With industrialists and business executives convinced that Labour will form the next government, **Walworth Road** has turned down companies who wanted to exhibit at the **Party Conference** this autumn, because of excess demand.



Your letters are welcome, but please keep them short

Write to:

BRIEFING
PO BOX 2378
LONDON E5 9QU

As a "purist, arid-thinking" Marxist I'm interested to see that even animal-rightists are schooled in the harsh language of orthodox polemic (Hilda Kean, April *Briefing*).

The issue remains my assertion that morality is a human creation and that we are 'speciest'. If I were a 'super-marxist' I would have hardly quoted two sources of this argument - F.T. Leahy and Luc Ferry - since neither is a Marxists.

Amongst a torrent of abuse Hilda Kean says this "is not the point." Instead she states that there is a "communality" by which the "rights advocated by Tom Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft" can be extended to animals. Are these, for example, the rights of political representation (Paine), or education (Wollstonecraft)? Surely this shows that there are unbridgeable differences between human beings' rights and animals capacities.

She then adds another argument. That because animals are different to human beings we have a "duty to respect them in an amoral way". This stand, known as the 'moral patient' argument, is equally unintelligible. Stones and rocks are different: what moral relation do we have to them?

Far from being socialist these views resemble the medieval belief in 'the great chain of being'. Given these confusions it is no surprise that the various groups of human beings that set themselves up as the voice of nature do not agree.

Amongst the people Hilda Kean claims are "fighting class-based" society for animal-liberation are socialists, anarchists, liberals, ecologists, Tories, and religious believers. Most claim this issue is cross-class, and above left-right politics. Some sections of earth first! still stand for that notable progressive principle of "bioregional tribalism" and a "warrior society". Kean fails to mention the fringe that promotes acts of violence to enforce their principles.

If these are the kind of allies that make up "progressive mass action" Hilda Kean is welcome to them. Marxists have many faults. But few would make the supremely vanguardist claim to be the Party of Nature.

Yours for socialism,
Eric Bright,
Somewhere.

[Note - this correspondence ends here.]

I hope that members of the National Executive Committee read *Labour Briefing*'s article "Lies and loathing in Leicester". Our only chance of getting justice here is probably if the National Executive Committee forgets which side it is on.

Your reporter, Muriel Pritchett, was clearly very well, but very selectively, briefed. The battlelines in Leicester are confusingly drawn.

On the one side, with former leader Peter Soulsby, lies Labour's old right, the old Tribunite left, and part of the hard left, along with some very angry Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims who all feel discriminated against. On the other side lies Keith Vaz and temporary allies, protected by Blair's leadership, and particularly at NEC meetings by Harriet Harman.

I was a councillor from 1987 to 1991, disciplined repeatedly for not toeing the Soulsby's line, and suspended for refusing to assist the implementation of the Poll Tax and cuts budget.

I was removed as a councillor in Leicester East after the Poll Tax rebellion, but most especially because I strongly challenged Keith Vaz's call for the banning of Satanic Verses and his leadership of a march on which many Muslims were calling for the fatwah against Salman Rushdie to be implemented.

My removal depended on falsification of electoral register entries, to enable people from elsewhere in the city to become ward members. When I objected to the Labour Party I was told it was not a breach of Party rules. When I objected to the electoral registration officer I was told off by the regional Party for using the law to deal with internal disputes. When my actions were backed by the branch I represented, it was suspended for allegedly being racist because the people who had made false entries were Asian.

This was only the first instance of blatant manipulation of Party membership in Leicester East. People who cannot read or write English have been excluded from Party meetings for supposedly having resigned in letters to Walworth Road. Others found their membership applications delayed repeatedly until it was too late to participate in council selection meetings. One shortlisting meeting, expected not to nominate a Vaz ally, was abandoned after the room was occupied by non-members, many from elsewhere in the county, followed by a bomb scare, leaving the selection to be conducted by the NEC.

The membership malpractice has been substantiated in detailed documentation, submitted to the NEC. It set up an inquiry, which was prevented from reporting. Complainants have received no response. Valid members of the Party are still being excluded from meetings, not notified of meetings, or, like myself, sent invitations to the wrong venue. The NEC is refusing to act on the worst examples of internal corruption I have ever come across.

I find it odd to be on the same side with those, such as Peter Soulsby, whom I have long opposed. But at least he usually operated honestly. I have nothing positive to say about Keith Vaz. As for the new committee chairs being supporters of *Labour Briefing*, they will at some stage be forced to recall that the first purge in Leicester was of the left. Many of their current allies would be more at home in more right-wing parties - and some of them were.

When Keith Vaz arrived he was welcomed, most especially by the left. Since then, he has been unable to see a dispute without walking in to take sides, nor see harmony without pushing in to create conflict. There is only one solution, which is for the NEC to expel Vaz from the Party, as they would if any lay member behaved as he has done.

Yours,
Paul Gosling,
Leicester.

With the advent of the Blair leadership and its new Clause IV, the British Labour Party has reached an historic crossroads. It is not for nothing that Blair desires to change the Party Constitution and create a new Labour (ie new Tory) Party.

With the collapse of the USSR the epoch of classical imperialism has ended. The Marxist theory of historical materialism indicates that humanity has progressed through savagery, barbarism and capitalism to imperialism.

Leon Trotsky stated that the epoch of imperialism is a transitional period that will either convert into socialism and finally communism or will turn into an age of neo-barbarism which he forecast would be far worse than anything that had gone before.

The world is descending into anarchy and chaos at an alarming rate. The 1992 Los Angeles riots and the 1995 Tokyo poison gas attack are but two events that bear witness to this vision. The Labour Party as a product of the period of classical imperialism has now run its race.

So too has *Labour Briefing* as a paper. The Labour Party was never socialist but social democratic. Socialists must now prepare to found a new socialist labour party in Britain as part of a wider international socialist movement.

Labour Briefing rightly stuck in the Party whilst sectarian groups like the SWP, WRP attacked from without and whilst the Militant Tendency walked out in 1992 saying that it had "had enough".

But to hang on to the Labour Party now is an untenable position. To stay in means to act as a left cover for capitalism. It also means a further political paralysis for socialists still within the Labour Party. How will they garner votes on the doorstep for a tory party?

The whole situation will degenerate very quickly. We can expect the leaders to go for a name change at the October conference and worse will follow as the trade unions are completely jettisoned amid a growing clamour from the media hounds.

It is essential to take a principled stand now rather than later. This does not mean staging a fake left fight in the manner of Arthur Scargill and others on the left. It means initially launching a campaign to get our organisations to disaffiliate from the national leadership at Walworth Road.

We cannot predict the final outcome to this fight. It may be successful but it might as well lead to expulsion. What is clear is that a socialist labour party is needed which will adopt a revolutionary Marxist programme.

We also need a new name for *Briefing*.

Yours,
John Hayball,
Chessington.

It is with great regret I write to tell you I've cancelled my standing order and to ask you not to send me any more copies of the magazine to sell. After 22 years membership, I've resigned from the Labour Party. The Special Conference was the last straw - not that abandoning unilateralism, support for Poll Tax jailings, etc. weren't bad enough. As long as the 1918 Clause IV remained there was hope that at some point sufficient pressure from the working class could be generated to force its implementation. Now that hope is gone and Labour is just another bourgeois party - the left wing of capital.

I now consider that we face the situation faced by Communists in 1925 when they were excluded from the Labour Party. Blair wants to exclude socialism and socialists just as Kinnock excluded Militant and Socialist Organiser whom, despite my disagreements with them, I would recognise as good socialists. As I now see it our task is to build a mass communist workers' party which will be Red, Green and Feminist and, guided by a critical and non-dogmatic Marxism, will lead the fight for communism - humankind's only hope.

Whatever you do, I wish you all well and am sure you'll fight on as I will.

Yours,
Terry Liddle,
London.

Let's leave the SDP Mark 2 to campaign for New Labour, and relaunch the left as True Labour - continuing to campaign for common ownership and only supporting socialists within the Party.

Yours fraternally,
Richard Hanford,
Henfield.

On 29th April, I witnessed and photographed a march of Ulster Unionists which involved UVF paramilitary banners and was attended by up to 200 members of the neo-Nazi outfit, Combat 18.

The march went from Lincoln's Inn Fields to Hyde Park, via the Strand, Trafalgar Square, Whitehall and Victoria Street. It was virtually unpoliced. At the beginning, I saw just one van-load of police officers and six motorcycle outriders.

Throughout the march, a large number of C18 members ran by the side of the march on the pavement, pushing Londoners and tourists out of their way. At one point in the Strand, a tourist coach from the Republic of Ireland came under verbal attack and there was nearly a very nasty incident.

In Whitehall, after I had photographed C18 leader Eddie Whicker - who recently emerged from prison after being convicted, I believe, of fire-arms offensives - some of his henchmen tried to intimidate me and take my camera.

On arrival at Westminster, a large group of C18 members crossed the road and tried to force their way into the Labour Party Clause IV Conference. There were only three police officers guarding that conference. If the thugs had broken into the conference, they could have caused a panic, stampede and possibly many injuries. I have photos of all this. I have sent the negatives to *Searchlight*, the anti-fascist magazine.

Labour MPs should ask the Home Secretary:

- Why are neo-nazi terrorists allowed to march freely through the middle of Londonl, especially so near to VE day?
- Why are members of outlawed paramilitaries and thugs with many convictions for violence among them allowed to proceed through the middle of London with so little policing (this must have been a high-level police decision)?
- Why was the Labour Party Conference left so unprotected when it must have been obvious that this would be a flashpoint? One can imagine the numbers of police who would have been deployed if Irish Republicans had marched near a Tory Party conference.

I have seen no reporting of this fascist outrage in any national papers. I am therefore sending copies of this letter to Labour MPs, MEPs, to some of the trade union leaders who attended the conference and to other anti-fascist organisations and individuals who may be able to add their voice to my protest.

Yours,
Daphne Liddle,
London.

Defend Clause IV - Defend Socialism

Invite you to discuss

Socialist policies for a Labour Government

A one day conference
Saturday 17th June
Carrs Lane Church Hall, Birmingham

Those who defended Clause IV need to organise now to commit the Party to serious policies on the major issues facing a Labour Government. In this we are prepared to unite with all those who wish to resist the policy retreats.

We will focus on policies which have majority support in the Party and trade unions, while supporting all workers' struggles and championing common ownership: place full employment at the centre of Labour's economic strategy; increase public spending to rebuild our services and create jobs; increase tax on incomes over £50,000, dividends and wealth; take coal, rail and our utilities back into public ownership, maintain and improve universal benefits; repeal VAT on domestic fuel; extend trade union rights, including the right to take solidarity action; impose a minimum wage equivalent to half average male earnings; cut military spending to no more than the EU average % of GDP; positive action to challenge racism, sexism and all discrimination.

Speakers include:

Diane Abbott MP, Alison Brown (NUS), Pat Buttle (USDAW Broad Left), Ken Coates MEP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Geoff Martin (chair of London Unison APF), Carole Regan (NUT President), Mark Seddon (editor *Tribune*), Alan Simpson MP

Discussion forums:

- **The contemporary case for common ownership**
- **Defending the welfare state and free education**
- **Keep the party labour - how to resist the modernisers' attacks on collective, participatory democracy**

I/we wish to register for the Socialist Policies conference and enclose a cheque (payable to "Defend Clause IV") for £..... (£5/£2)

Name .....

Organisation .....

Address .....

Return to Defend Clause IV, c/o the NUM, 2 Huddersfield Road Barnsley, S70 2LS.

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