MERSEYSIDE LABOUR

BRIEFING

25p

No 2 NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 1982

BENN INTERVIEWED

After speaking at the Liverpool District Labour Party's Pre-conference rally on 21st September, Tony Benn was interviewed by Merseyside Labour BRIEFING.

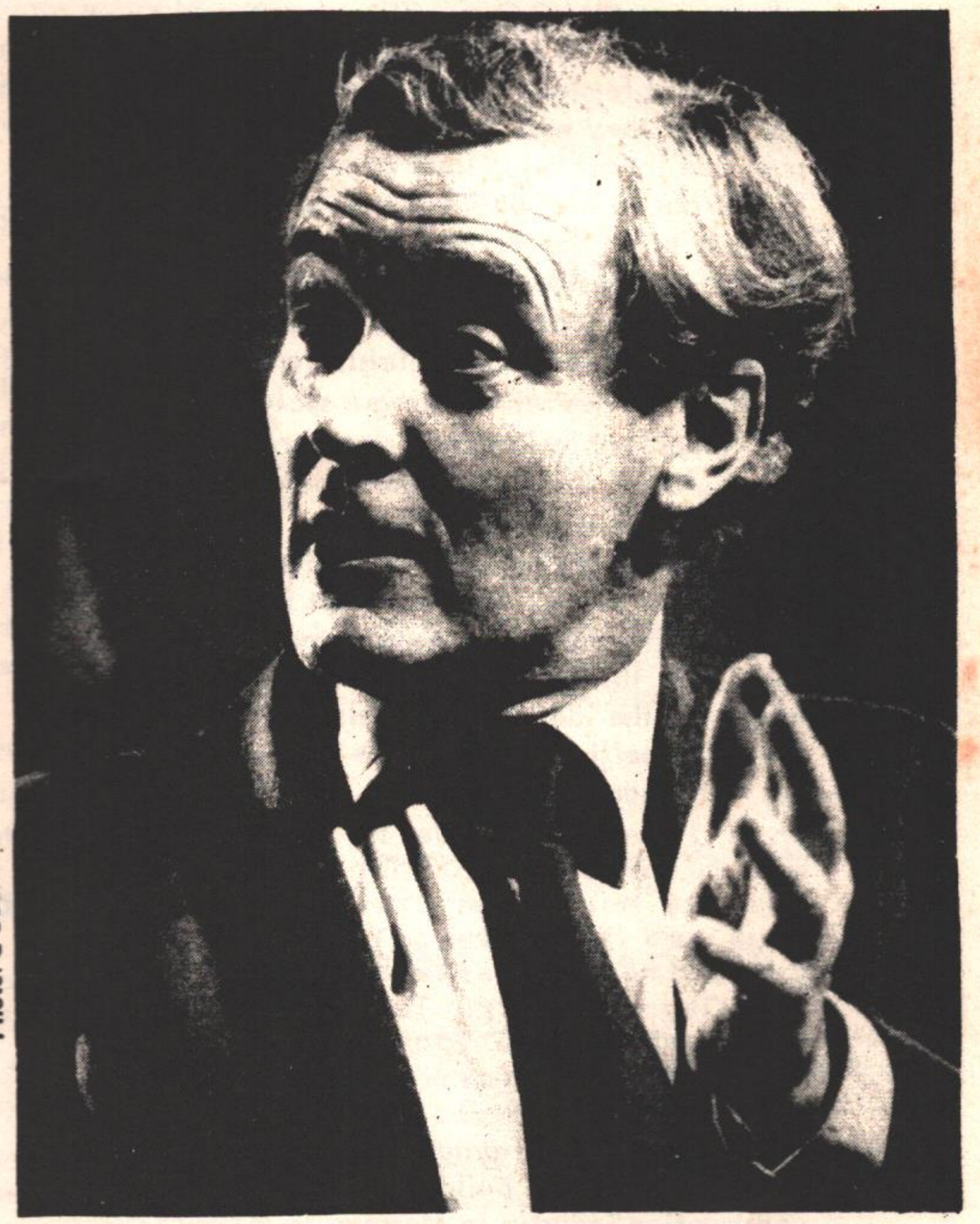
MLB: In view of the Tribune Group's decision to apply for registration, do you feel there is a need need for a different alignment of the parliamentary left?

BENN: Well, shall I put it like this; I think that we need a group of members of parliament who don't see the work only in parliamentary terms, but are open to campaigns to flow through them. We have had a campaign group meeting all year which, for example, got together to help the ASLEF strike. We've also drafted a bill to ban foreign nuclear bases, and drafted another bill to provide an amnesty for trade unionists who were going to be jailed or punished under Tory legislation. Alan Roberts has done a bill, under the auspices of that group, which would give greater rights to council house tenants -- the right to be consulted, and so on. So it isn't a question of dividing and subdividing until you get ideological purity. I think that's a great mistake. What we've got to do is to build around issues, and I think that's the way the minds of many of us are going.

MLB: That sounds very similar to what we are trying to do in BRIEFING.

BENN: Yes. We have people come in. We don't confine it to members of parliament. People come in if they've got a problem. If you like, it's a collective surgery; you can come in, talk to members, get a motion down, or run a campaign. That's the way, I think, the thing is beginning to work.

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'Photo: G Cookson

Support the Health Workers

.. BRIEFING INTERVIEW

MLB: What kind of a role then do you see for BRIEFING or a network of BRIEFINGS?

BENN: Well they're appearing all over the place. There is one in Manchester, I saw last week, one in Bristol and there is London Labour BRIEFING. I think what is happening is that a new approach to socialist journalism is developing around giving people information, so that they can direct their own efforts more effectively and constructively. I think that's very useful.

MLB: You mentioned in your speech, the the need to draw in people who are outside the labour movement at the moment; women and the ethnic minorities in particular. How do you feel we can achieve this?

BENN: Well, my answer is that we should open the affiliation list of the Party. Just as we've tried to get NALGO to affiliate and we'd like the CPSA to affiliate, we should open it to socialist feminist groups and to CND, and soon -- if they wish to affiliate. That doesn't preclude them having their own policy. The EEPTU has it's own policy but its still affiliated- *the NUM has its own policy. I think we* should now deliberately open and advertise that it is open, an affiliation list of the Labour Party, so that socialist feminists can come to the local parties representing a socialist feminist group or black people representing a black group. They could contribute to policy at constituency level, come to conference with a vote appropriate to their membership and so on. I think, apart from the fact that it's the way to extend the ideas of socialism, this approach is also the total answer to the idea that you solve the problem by expelling people. We want a broader, not a narrower, base.

MLB: On a local note, we're sure that you recognise that Merseyside has had more than its share of problems- even in relatively good times the area has been bedevilled with high levels of unemployment. Do you feel that the AES will provide the solution to the area's problems?

BENN: We do have to have a national strategy, such as a big house building programme; the construction industry in Merseyside is very badly hit. The demand for steel, rail electrification and all that. But I think a great deal of the full employment that I visualise is based upon local plans, locally worked out and funded. The TU Resource Centre which is being set up in Liverpool could be a short of centre for socialist "entrepreneurs". I don't like using capitalist language but you know what I mean; places where projects could be fashioned and then funded. And then there's the shorter working week, earlier retirement and raising the school leaving age to 75, so that people can go in and out of education all their lives. I think it is possible to do, but it does require a complete break with market forces, because it's market forces that have denied Merseyside prosperity even in the good years and have brought it desolation and deprivation in bad years.

MLB: Labour's programme pledges that the next Labour Government will repeal the Nationality Act and institute non-racist immigration controls. Do you believe that immigration laws can be non-racist?

BENN: Yes, Every country has to have some control of people who move in and out. Our objection is that present laws are racist. We have the most ludicrous anomalies now; every Common Market citizen can come in freely, yet even Falklanders can't come in if they're more than a generation or two back, and of course the discrimination against blacks is very strong. Whatever we have has got to *be entirely non-racial in character. The de*tails are something which we will be debating at Conference. I think and hope and believe that it will give confidence to the ethnic minorities that they're not going to be victimised.

MLB: Arising from what you said in your speach about the NEC's decision today on the Middle East - that the NEC have decided to support an independant Palestinian state. Is that your own position?

BENN: Oh yes, very greatly.

MLB: Are you still involved in Labour Friends of Israel?

BENN: Of course, I have made that clear today. The amendment I moved which was accepted was the addition of a few preliminaries about the Beirut Massacre and American policy; to say that guarantees for the security of Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian State should be the subject of international negotiations and the PLO should be invited to take part. That was a big leap for Labour policy and I've always taken that view. I had a tremendous argument with Golda Meir in 1963 in Israel about it.

MLB: Thanks very much for giving us the chance to talk to you.

BENN: That's OK, thank you.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

HEALTH WORKERS MUST WIN



We need 12%

The NHS dispute has now been running for 7 months - one of the longest ever pay campaigns in the public sector. It was way back in April that the TUC, fresh from the ASLEF sell-out, decided that the NHS workers were to be pushed into the frontline in the battle with the Thatcher regime.

They took note, I suppose, of the facts that, NHS workers are not only fairly new to trade unionism, but are also one of the most divided groups of workers in the movement. For the record there are 16 TUC affiliates, not forgetting 53 other non-affiliates (Royal Colleges, chartered societies etc.).

Despite this, 1.2 million NHS workers were plunged into a campaign, the tactics of which have caused dissent and concern. One day stopages, two day stopages, days of action etc. All through the campaign calls for a more dynamic approach have been ignored. The fact that, for obvious reasons, we have fought with one arm tied behind our backs, having to provide emergency and essential services, has both kept up a degree of public support, and kept the government from being too worried by the action.

DILEMMA

This is the perrenial political and moral dilemma facing trade unionists in the NHS; faced with a Tory government who could not care less for peoples suffering (after all they can pay for private health care), and who care even less for the enforced poverty of low paid workers.

Nearly 70% of NHS workers are women (88% of whom are part-time). Clearly this factor is a major reason for low pay and poor union organisation.

It seems obvious now that the campaign cannot continue to feed off the public sympathy for the nurses. Calls for an all-out general strike have already been made, but whether or not workers in the private sector are prepared to risk their own jobs striking on behalf of sister and brother trade unionists in the NHS remains to be seen.

ON MERSEYSIDE

On the TUC's one-day token national Day of Action, Merseyside was one of the strongest areas, and yet the area failed to deliver when chosen to be the first region in the programme of 'rolling days of action'. To be fair to Merseyside workers, 7 days notice was certainly not very helpful. But the whole tactic of rolling days of action has been mishandled, failing to maintain the active support of industrial workers. The campaign is continuing and the government is continuing to sit it out. The NHS workers alone will not break them.

MAKE LINKS

The next significant date for action is on November 8th when the transport unions have called an all-out strike in sympathy with the health workers. We should make an effort to get other workers out as well to make as big a demonstration of solidarity as possible. A second national 'day of action' is likely to be called for November 24th and this too must be built for. The best way to do this is by local action committees which can unite NHS unions and non-NHS unions with Labour Parties and other groups. Such committees exist locally, and it is the task of all of us who are concerned about both low pay and the future of the NHS to get involved in them, forge the links and keep up the campaign.

The fight is not just for pay, but perhaps more importantly in the end, to save the NHS. The Tories may have tried to hide the think-tank proposals to destroy the NHS, but we must realise that the defence of the NHS could become the real battlefield in the fight for socialist ideals.

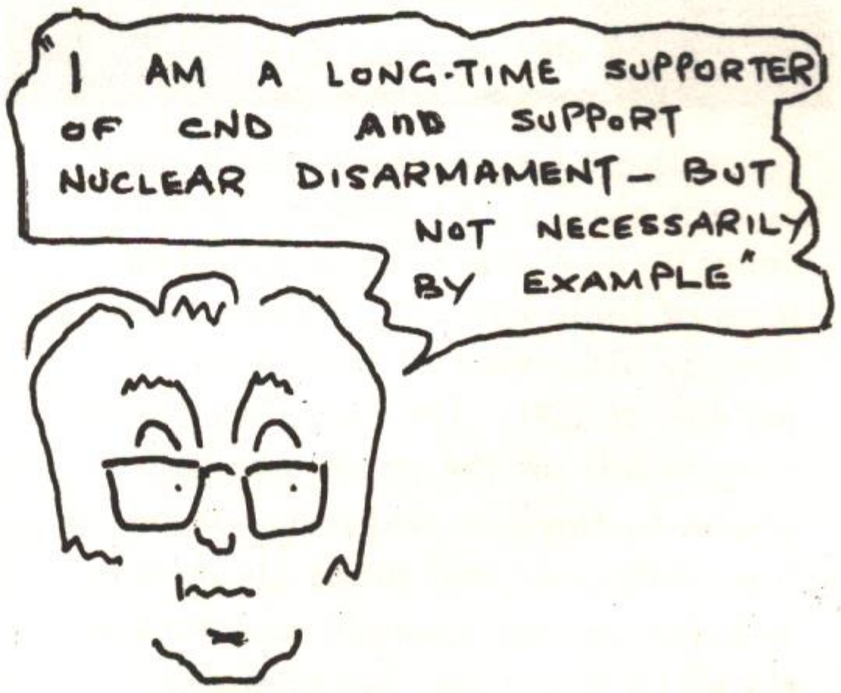
STOP PRESS

Liverpool District Health Authority, who are now being forced to cut some £7.5 million in the next 4/5 years, have now presented a document proposing 5 options for cuts. All contain proposals for hospital closures. Hospitals threatened include Princes Park (geriatric), Newsham General (geriatric), Park Hospital (Psychiatric and geriatric), Sefton General and Rathbone hospitals.

Major job losses are also threatened and we may see redundancies announced in the near future.

Bob Quick
COSHE Regional Officer

Left Foot-Right Foot



GRASS

REGISTER

Discussion on the register has been limited by a tactical difficulty in deciphering what the NEC intend to do. Out of the four constituencies on Merseyside with Militant-supporting PPC's Toxteth, Wavertree and Kirkdale have met since conference and reaffirmed their support for their properly selected candidates. Edgehill did not because its October meeting was inquorate. Toxteth and Kirkdale are petitioning their full membership in support of their candidates. The remaining Liverpool constituencies along with Bootle, Birkenhead, Wirral, Wallasey and Ellsmere Port are all opposed to expulsions. The Crosby CLP had written to the NEC before the conference to indicate their refusal to co-operate with any attempt to remove Marxists and socialists from the Labour Party. Unfortunately Huyton CLP's meeting at the end of October misses our deadline.

SOUTHPORT FLOWER SHOW

Not only did it cause controversy with its links with South Africa but initial figures suggest that the Southport Flower Show has cost the Sefton ratepayers £36,000. We hope that the Council can turn over a new leaf next year.

PRIVATISATION

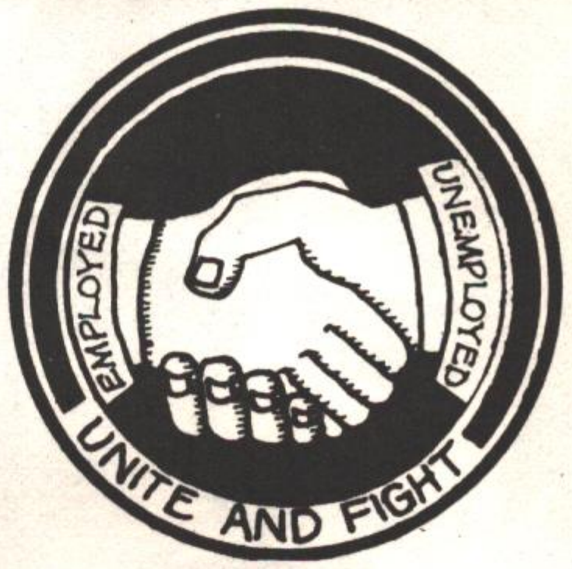
There is growing concern about the current plans being made by certain councils on Merseyside to privatise some of their services. Wirral has already disbanded its DLQ with a job loss of 200. They are also planning to sell off the municipal golf course in Hoylake and privatise refuse collection and street cleaning. In Liverpool the council have recently taken the school bus contract from MPTE. Plans are being drawn up to break up refuse collection so that private companies can make an easy profit on the refuse that is easier to collect. In Sefton the Tory Council claim to support their refuse collection department. However they are seeking private tenders in what they claim is an information exercise! They even accuse Labour's opposition to these tenders as being based on party dogma.

PRIVATISATION GOES THROUGH

Wirral Council's recent decision to privatise depended on the actions of the Borough's Mayor. The Tories had a majority of one over the combined Labour/Liberal opposition, with the Mayor abstaining. Crucially, had 'His Worship' cast his vote with the opposition the vote would have been tied, giving him a second, casting vote. Readers may find nothing strange in the Mayor's behaviour, given that he presides over a Tory-controled council. Unfortunately for our credibility as a party, it is sad to report that the Mayor in question is a Labour member! A defeat for the Tories would have meant at least a six-month postponement of their asset-stripping plans. At the October DLP meeting, attempts to raise this failure to support Party policy were put off on the grounds that 'His Worship' was not present to defend himself.

MISSING COUNCILLORS

Labour Party members in Liverpool are concerned at crucial votes being lost in the city council because of missing Labour councillors. Dingle Ward has sent a resolution to the DLP demanding an hourly attendance sheet.

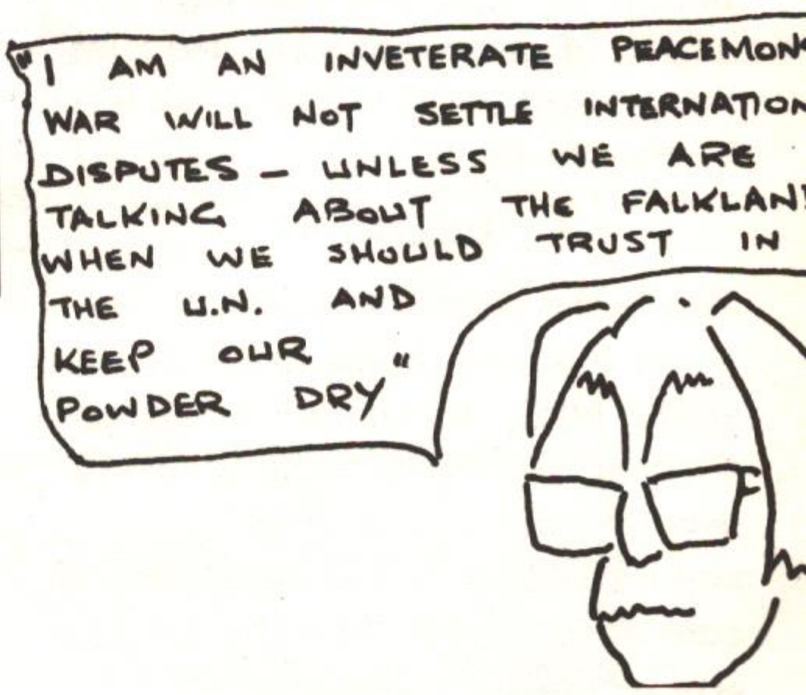


MTUC & UR CENTRE

The old police station in Hardman St. opposite the Philharmonic will house the Merseyside Trade Union, Community and Unemployed Resource Centre when it opens in December. The centre will provide a wide range of facilities for working class organisations. Individuals can affiliate (£5 waged, £1 unwaged); further details from M. Cantor. Membership Secretary MTUC&UR Centre c/o 70 Victoria Street, Liverpool L1.

EXPULSION IN NORTH WALES

Paul Bellis, a member of East Flintshire CLP, has just been expelled after writing to his GMC complaining that his ward wasn't meeting regularly. The GMC decided that the protest was "bringing the Party into disrepute"! Although the decision was reached without following proper procedures, the Welsh Regional Office has yet to intervene and enforce Party rules. An appeal has been lodged with the NEC, and we will report future developments.



ROOTING

PALESTINE

The Liverpool District Labour Party has decided to invite a speaker from the Merseyside Palestine Support Group to their next meeting. The Wirral DLP have taken a similar decision as have the Liverpool Trades Council and Birkenhead CLP. If any ward, constituency or borough party would like a speaker from the group, please contact Ms. F. Gelder, c/o 32 Rock Park, Rock Ferry.

NEC ELECTION

Ms. E. Gallagher got 2,358,000 votes in this years vote for the Women's Section of the National Executive Committee. She came eighth, beating Margaret Beckett and Francess Morrell amongst others. Although she is a member of the Toxteth Constituency Party, the Toxteth GMC had no idea of her candidacy. In fact she has kept an amazingly low profile in the Constituency Party. One delegate to the GMC thinks she has been to one meeting over the past two years. Her ward chairman has never heard of her. Even so she was nearly elected onto the NEC.

BACKHOUSE RESIGNS

John Backhouse has resigned as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Crosby because of personal reasons.

LABOUR WOMEN'S MEETING

The North-West Regional Annual Conference of Labour Women was held in October, and consisted of some 250 delegates from party organisations and trade unions. The proceedings were dominated, however, not by the debates, but by the restrictions imposed on the proceedings.

No resolutions were allowed and apart from the election of the regional committee, there were no votes. Delegates were simply asked to listen to the speakers and join in a discussion by deciding on a resolution, which could have been used as a basis for campaigning.

The level of the discussion was high. Both Robert Kilroy-Silk on "Law and Order" and Gwyneth Dunwoody on "The Future of the NHS" provoked constructive debate. Speakers emphasised the need to support the health workers in their present dispute. Almost every speaker stated her comments by stating her wish for a resolution conference. If women send in enough protests, it should be even better next year.

HAVE YOUR SAY.....

Items for Grass Rooting should be sent to BRIEFING, c/o 8 Ashford Road, Meols, Wirral.

Merseyside Labour Co-ordinating Committee SUPPORTS BRIEFING

For details of meetings & other activities contact:

Julian Clarke
34 Grant Ave., L15
733-1459

REJOICE

Unity Theatre is just around the corner from the MTUC&UR Centre at 1 Hope Place. On Firday 19 and Saturday 20, November, it stages 'Rejoice', a play by John McGrath. This play concerns the hilarious attempts of a Conservative business man to convert a Toxteth youth into a Young Conservative.

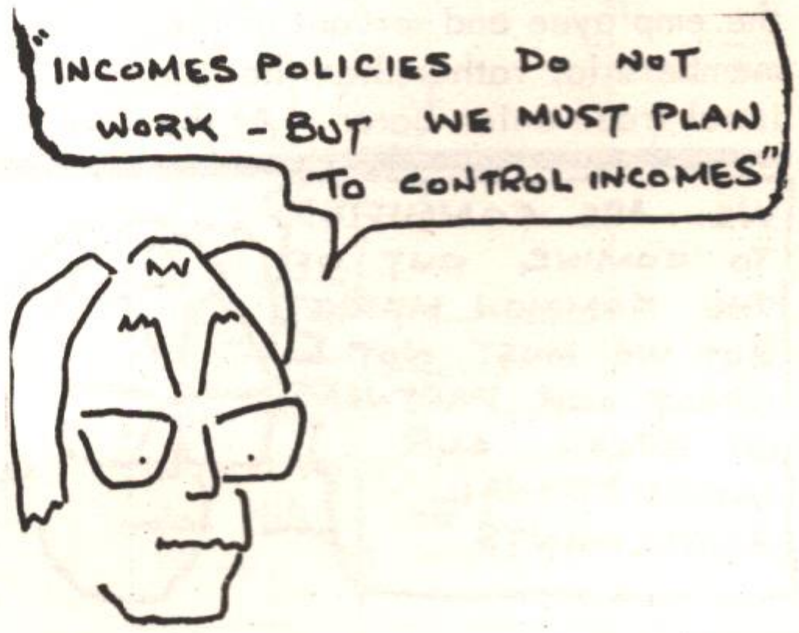
NOT A LOVE STORY

The film, Not A Love Story, directed by Bonnie Klein, will be given a women only showing on Saturday, 27th November at the Rialto Community Centre, 70-74 Upper Parliament Street, Liverpool 8. Entrance is 50p. Tea and discussion after film. Creche available. Film starts 2:15 pm

....DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST

The Liverpool Playhouse is putting on the very funny socialist play, Accidental Death of an Anarchist from November 25 - December 18. The play describes the consequences of the death of an anarchist held by the Italian police. Everything is held up to ridicule, including the reformism of the Italian Communist Party.

* *



Weighell's Last Turn

Ian Williams

Member of NUR NEC

After the burst of jubilation at seeing the witch-hunter burnt at his own stake, the euphoria over Sid Weighell's political demise is now turning to concern for the future of the union he misled for so long. The cause of socialism can only be enhanced by the removal of a man whose every reactionary phrase fell like manna into the columns of the gutter press. But the real target, rather than an individual, must be the legacy of intermingled corporatism and centralism which has put one man into such a powerful and, until recently, unaccountable positon in the Labour movement.

PAW IN THE BOX

It was not the Left that brought Weighell down. He caused his own downfall by being caught with his paw in the ballot box at Blackpool. None-the-less, five or so years ago he might have survived. Since then the NUR has changed; so that when he fell this time it was not into a safety net of adulation, but into the lion's den of an increasingly active rank and file. His attitude on the 'winter of discontent', on the witch-hunt, on pay policies and 'productivity' deals, and the opposition engendered by his authoritarian advocay of these helped to ensure his demise.

SUPPORT JIMMY KNAPP

What socialists in the NUR must do now is ensure that, whoever the new General Secretary is, he or she is the employee and servant of the membership, rather than the traditional trade union baron. At the very least he or she should be prepared to stand for re-election and to turn the NUR away from being the advocate of managerial policies. The only declared contender who seems anywhere near fulfilling these promises is Jimmy Knapp, current chairman of the Southeast TUC. His standing has been enhanced considerably over the last week by Weighell's malicious and unprecedented attacks on him.

BARONIAL PATRONAGE

Moving away from the NUR, the burning wreckage of Weighell's career has thrown light on some of the murkier corners of trade union baronial patronage. What should be examined now should not be Weighell's individual actions, but the whole obscene concept of one man throwing 170,000 block votes onto the board on behalf of a union with only 155,000 members! It is now time to consider how to develop links between the unions and the Party, and translate these into real Party membership and activisim on the part of trade unionists individually and collectively. Various ideas involving, for example factory branches, have been floated. I consider that Sid Weighell's going will prove even more of a blessing if it gives rise to serious and constructive thought on these lines.



GETTING ON THE PANEL

Paul Thompson
Dingle Ward.

Choosing a candidate to fight the local elections is a very important task for any ward. It is made more difficult by the Liverpool District Labour Party's Local Government Panel for 1982/1983. When our ward - Dingle - drew up its shortlist there were only 27 on the total panel, and only about fifteen of them were actually available. There were no women. The information on which we are asked to choose is ludicrous - age, occupation, trade union and time of LP membership. Surely the key is a candidate's views, both of activity and policy. We have been told that a candidate provides greater information to the DLP, before he/she is selected. To withold that from wards is an inversion of democratic procedures. Without such information, selection of a shortlist can only be blind, or on the basis of the "old comrades network".

With this in mind, the ward unanimously passed a resolution which calls on the DLP to:

i. Give greater publicity and information to Branches concerning the procedures and functioning of the Panel, and of the job of Councillor, so as to encourage a greater number and wider range of nominees.

ii. Give positive encouragement to women members to apply (given the wholly male composition of the 1982/1983 list). The DLP should liaise with the Womens' Council and active Womens' Sections in the constituencies to ascertain the most effective methods to achieve this aim.

iii. Make the task of short-listing by Wards easier and more democratic by requiring each nominee to submit additional details (minimum 100 words, maximum 300) of their experience and views, to be circulated with the panel list.

Persuading people to stand is never going to be easy given the arduous nature of the job of Councillor. But spreading information and creating more democratic procedures will help to improve the quantity and quality of the Panel.

LIVERPOOL

Women's Rally

The fifty people (mostly women) who braved the elements and resisted the attraction of Ian Mikado and the Troops Out Social to attend the Toxteth Women's Section pre-conference rally must have felt that this was time well spent. Frances Morrell stressed the need for constitutional reform within the Party and Hillary Wainwright ex plained how socialism cannot succeed without feminism.

WOMEN'S COMMITTEES

Val Wise gave an account of the women's committee of the GLC and its success in attracting over 300 women to its open meetings. The speakers may have felt that they were preaching to the converted but there was less consensus in the room than one might initially imagine. Issues such as positive discrimination and the establishment of women's committees at local level (which provoked such opposition by the Tories in London) are likely to be the cause of much internecine wrangling in the Labour Group in Liverpool. While nobody openly objected to the concept of women's committees, there were calls for women to get involved in the mainstream of politics and the implication being not behind the scenes in committee rooms.

CHILD BENEFIT

There was probably greater consensus on the issue of doubling child benefit Allowances. Ruth Lister of the Child Poverty Action Group put forward a strong case for the abolition of the married man's tax allowance in return for an increase in child benefit. But one felt that she had perhaps too much faith in the PLP and the trade unions. The proposal is contained in Labour's programme and was endorsed by annual conference this year, but history has shown that this is no guarantee that the proposal will be implemented. Under Callaghan the scheme to replace the income tax allowance for children and family allowance with child benefit was very nearly shelved under pressure from the trade unions. Admittedly the trade unions are no longer staunchly opposed to such a policy but one can forsee problems if women are asked to accept a drop in take home pay and some sort of voluntary wage restraint.



WIDER INVOLVEMENT

Looking around the room it was difficult to spot anybody who is not involved in the Labour Party or the womens movement. This was understandable because this was not just a women's meeting but also a Labour Party meeting. In future the Toxteth Women's Section must build on the support and interest shown at the meeting amongst party activists; but it must also involve women who are not necessarily active in the Labour or women's movement. As one black woman from Toxteth remarked, we are not going to attract a wide cross section of women to meetings when our method of publicty is a leaflet in "News From Nowhere".

Ruth McDonald
Kirkdale CLP

Turning the Party Outward

At a recent meeting of the Wirral District Labour Party, a resolution was passed calling on Labour councillors not only to hold regular surgeries in their own wards but also to provide surgery facilities in wards not having Labour councillors. It was felt that in order to build in wards where support was low, often because of low membership, the existence of regular surgeries combined with increased ward activity to attract new members could make inroads into a number of Tory and the few Liberal wards in Wirral.

The issue is not just a question of winning more council seats. The need to turn the party outwards, taking on board local issues, being involved in work with tenants associations, local pressure groups etc. is essential.

Years of right wing control, particularly in previous Labour strongholds has left a vacuum, filled in many cases by the Liberals, appearing as the "campaigning party of the people". This situation must not be allowed to continue. Labour councillors must be committed to playing a major role in reversing this process and in this regard the left in the party must not be coy in seeking selection as in local elections as well as candidates fighting for a radical programme on which to campaign.

Colin Penfold
Wirral Borough
Councillor



Merseyside Labour BRIEFING asked Alex Bennett of the Black Workers Consortium to give his views on the value of positive discrimination and on the Government's response to last year's riots in Liverpool.

What's happening in L8?

MLB

A year on from the riots, has the government's response to the area's problems produced any results?

BENNETT

Before referring to the work of last year it is important to point out that no government has been able to respond effectively to Liverpool's situation for the last 30 years. In that context this government has been no different - the window dressing has been more flamboyant in the shape of Michael Heseltine and the so-called 'captains of industry' but in the grocer's shop the shelves are still bare apart from the shabby little corner occupied by the Manpower Services Commission. It is from this pandora's box of never-ending little tricks that Michael Heseltine has tried to 'regenerate' the Merseyside economy. Over the last 12 months the Government has taken more money out of Liverpool than Heseltine could dream of putting in, in terms of cuts in local authority spending, increased taxation etc. And the effects of the policies have been felt all over the city, especially in Liverpool 8, with rising unemployment and cuts in services like education and the social services, and loss of benefits to DHSS claimants recently highlighted by the trade unions. Also one of the more diversionary arguments recently used has been that of the 'outer areas' syndrome. This is the argument used to camoflage the failure of the Merseyside 'initiatives'. If the people of the inner areas aren't happy with what they've received the politicians say that they are greedy, and what about the people in the 'outer areas'. Divide and rule. If the government were serious they would allocate the necessary resources, not make more people compete with each other for the ever decreasing amounts of money. That is the failure of the last twelve months - not to fail to identify the illness, but to with-hold the medicine and in fact exacerbate the patient's disease.

MLB

There has been a lot of controversy lately concerning employment policy for the ethnic minorities. In particular, the idea of positive discrimination has been opposed locally by sections of the Labour Party. Do you think that such policies have any value?

BENNETT

Affirmative action policies are valuable in so much as they are effective in redressing the balance, and offering opportunities to groups who have formerly been disadvantaged. This, of course, includes the black community as well as women workers and a number of other groups who experience prejudice in our society.

Not to recognise the need for affirmative action is to deny that prejudice exists within this society - a facile argument when you compare the unemployment figures for the black community in Britain against that of the white. Therefore, if politicians of whatever political colour or faction are serious about combating racism and latent prejudice they can only support measures that will achieve that, goal, i.e., affirmative action programmes.

There is, of course, also the argument that these policies will create a 'white backlash'. The black community has been subject to this backlash for the greater part of its history and one suspects that this may be political concern for lost votes rather than concern for the welfare of the black community.

The role of affirmative action programmes should be to identify areas of concern and develop strategies to combat racist practices and policies. It has been the experience of agencies that have adopted this type of action that, even if they had previously considered themselves 'equal opportunities employers', there were a whole range of areas in which they seemed to discover discriminatory practices.

Yet despite the need, you also need to say that if these action programmes are to work properly and achieve their objectives there must be cooperation from as many sides as possible. Thus it is important for the politicians to understand the issues and for the trade unions to underwrite any policies, and to monitor their effectiveness. They are, after all representatives for the workforce and should be seeking equal opportunities for all members of society.

Setting up Workplace Branches



The 1981 Annual Conference approved ammendments to the Party Constitution and the Rules for Constituency Labour Parties to provide for the establishment of workplace branches. These are to be formed through Regional Officers in accordance with rules and regulations sanctioned by the NEC.

The objectives of workplace branches are: to recruit more activists and supporters to the Party, especially from the trade unions; to provide political education for members and propaganda for the Party; to help co-ordinate joint trade union/ Labour Party campaigns and activities; and, to work with Constituency Parties.

A minimum of ten individual members of the Party, at a workplace, may establish a Branch by requesting a Regional Officer to convene an inaugural meeting, at which the Regional Officer must be present.

But it appears that a single employer spread over a wide area does not qualify as a workplace. (Clearly, there is going to be some difficulty in deciding about a large coal mine or a large car plant that stretches over several miles.) **Also**, the workers in a single department might not qualify for a workplace branch. The Party's North-West Regional Office say they have been instructed to apply the rules, strictly, as meaning a single site. This would eliminate most council departments and disenfranchise a large number of workers on small sites-such as teachers in primary schools. A large school or college should qualify, according to a recent circular to members of the Socialist Educational Association. The SEA say that all teaching and non-teaching staff, and students over 15 years of age, are eligible to join. Anyone with a specific enquiry about setting-up a branch is advised to write to the National Agent, David Hughes, at Labour Party Headquarters.

RULES INTERPRETATION

It appears that it will be comparatively easy to build a workplace branch in any large office or factory, but, if the present rules are interpreted too strictly, this progressive development will not reach a large number of hitherto isolated workers. There are people working in small branches of chain stores and banks and the like, with low levels of unionisation. And there are large numbers of people, working on small, fragmented sites, in the Teachers' and Local Government unions, where the battle for Party affiliation has yet to be won. To leave these people isolated from Labour Party influence because of a rigid use of the rulebook will be to lose a historic opportunity to build the Party and a misinterpretation of the spirit of the 1981 Conference Decision.

MODEL RULES

The Model Rules, finally approved by the NEC in July 1982, are similar in many respects to those for ward branches. But there are important differences: the workplace branch is entitled to only a nominal delegation of one to any constituency parties in the area; '...Industrial matters... properly the responsibility of the appropriate trade union...' are not supposed to be discussed; and, members subscriptions are paid to the wards in which they live - so funds have to be raised by donations, collections, and other activities.

There is also a great deal of uncertainty as to what actually constitutes a branch. The Model Rules refer to any '...factory, office, depot, or other place of work to be covered as agreed locally', and 'In any dispute over the precise definition of area to be covered, the NEC will have the final decision'. What precisely that final decision is likely to be could be a cause of uncertainty and a deterrent to members eager to build the Party at their workplace. This may account for the rather slow way in which these branches are being built around the country.

MERSEYSIDE BRANCHES

On Merseyside, a Branch was set up in the Liverpool City Council Housing Department in February 1982; two more are planned, in Copperas Hill Postal Offices in Liverpool and at Cammell Lairds shipyard in Birkenhead. There is a lot of enthusiasm for a Workplace Branch in Wirral District Council which would be a base for a political fightback against 200 sackings by the Tories last summer.

John Nolan

Birkenhead CLP

£ £

Appeal for Money

MERSEYSIDE LABOUR BRIEFING IS AN INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST MAGAZINE.

Your support is necessary if we are to continue. We rely upon contributions from individuals, trade unions, and Labour Groups.

Please send any contribution to;

Merseyside Labour BRIEFING
c/o 69 Lambton Road
Liverpool 17

£ £

GAY RIGHTS :

"Don't ever expect that campaigns are won by talking to people at the top. Nobody every got their rights given to them by anybody else. You've always got to fight for them. And campaigns only really get going when people are proud of what they are," Tony Benn told the fringe meeting organised by the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights (LCGR) at this years Conference.

Earlier in the year, we in LCGR had high hopes that at last the Party would adopt the programme of fairly basic rights for lesbians and gay men set out in the NEC's own discussion document, The Rights of Gay Men and Women. Our optimism was based on the fact that over 100 CLPs had written to Walworth Road endorsing the document's proposals, and none had rejected them. But the NEC perpetuated discrimination in its draft for Labour's Programme 1982 by continuing to make illegal homosexual acts in the armed forces and merchant navy, and by amending the age of consent for male gays to 18, as against the current age of 16 for hets. So we went to the Conference in force for the first time - gay, proud and angry, fighting for our rights and the rights of our sisters and brothers.

NOT ALONE

We were not fighting alone. Over the the past year, Socialist Organiser has given us space to express not only our political demands but to write about gay sexuality. In the pre-conference issue of London Labour Briefing there were eight pages of articles, mostly by LCGR members, which tackled the personal/political issues of being gay, and which publicised our fringe meeting. The News of the World seized on the articles on the Sunday before Conference. "Gay Row Rocks Labour", it said on page 2. Apparently we were "plaguing the Labour Party with fresh turmoil," in a "massive attempt to make homosexual rights a dominant issue," at the Conference. The article supplemented a story which the Sun had run on the Saturday, containing the shock-horror story that Peter Tatchell had gone to the Gay Olympics - a story which is completely denied by Tatchell. The Daily Mail ran two pages of stores on the Monday: "What makes Tatchell tick?" and "Foot upset by gay campaigners" which said that "MPs and trade union delegates have been shocked at the tirade of abuse from Gay Rights Campaigners." The Mail was particularly intruiged by the London Labour Briefing articles by Mary Evans, who recommended being a lesbian, and by a transvestite, Les Tate.

SURGE OF SUPPORT

The result of all this was an added surge of support for us. By Tuesday evening, when our fringe meeting was held, we were no longer raising what many might formerly have seen as a fringe issue. By the BBC's count

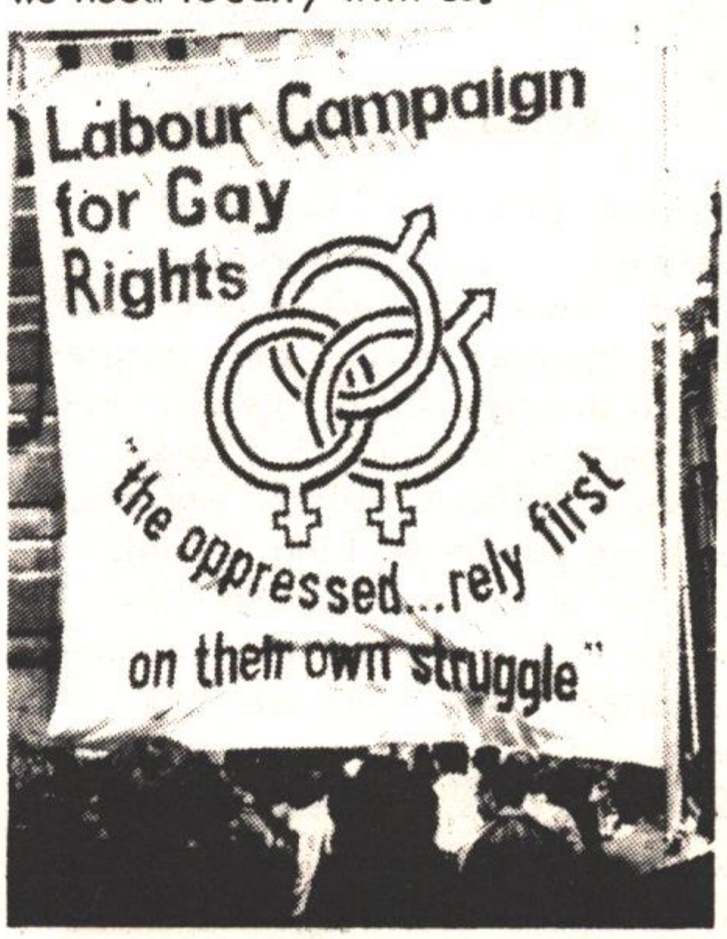


we had 250 present in a room booked for an audience of 100 - and that was after we had ejected reporters from the Sun, News of the World and Mail. Our platform included Joan Lestor, Jo Richardson, Ken Livingstone and Peter Tatchell: Tony Benn cancelled an engagement to attend in solidarity with us when he read of the press' attemot "to hound and harass in a disgusting way."

ELECTORAL LIABILITY?

Joan Lestor said that there were two categories of people who opposed gay right within the Party: those who have the prejudice themselves, and those who defer to what they believe to be other people's prejudices because of electoral problems. She said "one thing that has surprised and delighted me is the number of CLPs who are interested. Now they've got a job to do." Peter Tatchell echoed this when he said "those who say that we must opt for 18 on the age of consent because we don't want to turn the voters off have really got an underlying view that we've got to get power." But I say that if we seek power at any price, if we compromise on fundamental principles ... of opposing the different forms of oppression, whether it be sexual or racial, the oppression of class or of sexual orientation ... then we're a very weak and a very poor Party." Tony Benn emphasised that rights were never gained by stealth. This contrasted strongly with Neil Kinnock, who told us when we lobbied him after an NEC meeting at Brighton that whilst he felt the age of consent of 16 to be an electoral liability, there would be nothing to prevent the next Labour government from legislating for 16 once it was in power.

Ken Livingstone spoke of the problems within the GLC Labour Group on the question of grants to gay groups and particularly the Gay Teenage Group. But Tory George Tremlett, who believed "there are votes to be made out of queer-bashing on public platforms "had put on such a gross display of prejudice that Labour members had been totally united when they saw the true nature of the opposition. Since then "virtually every grant proposal for every lesbian and gay male organisation sails through unchallenged in the Group meeting. "It shows the progress which can be made if we sit down and talk to all the people we need to carry with us."



It is a political issue!

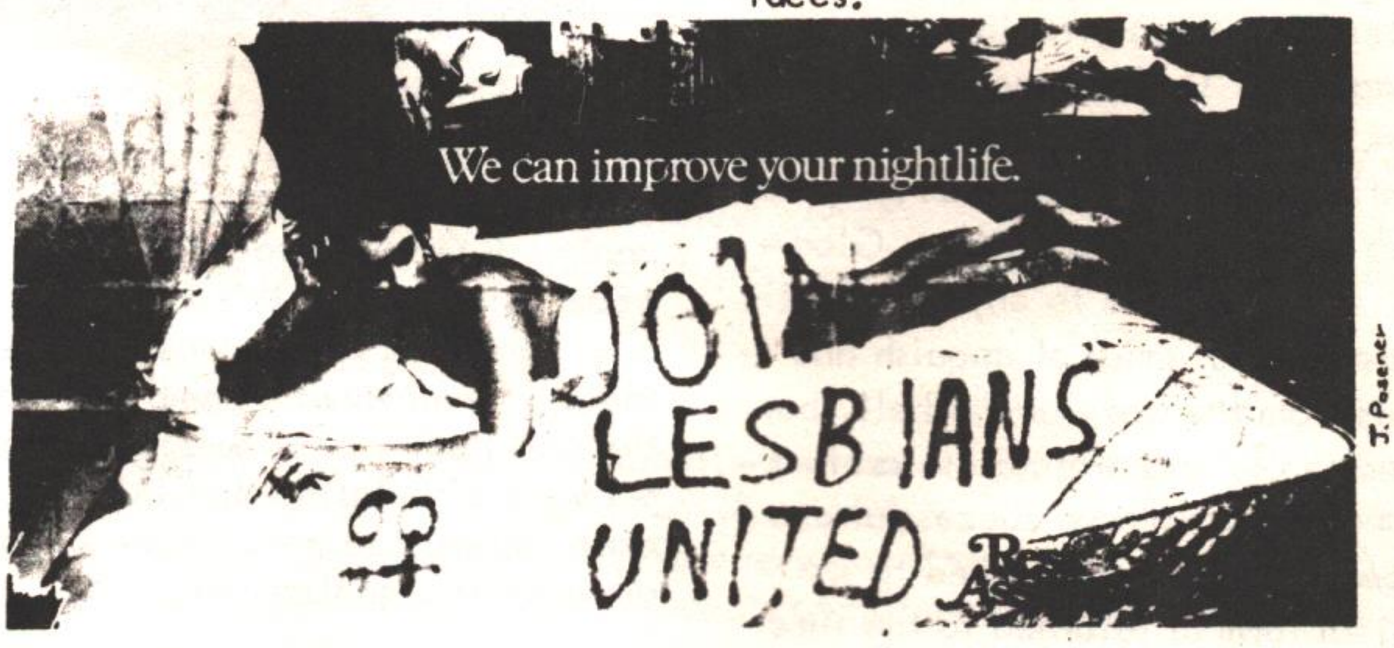
Chris Beer
LCGR

NO IFS AND BUTS

Two men from the Gay Youth Movement and a former member of the armed forces spoke from the platform of the discrimination which they and their sisters and brothers experience. The answer to the prejudice is to fight in the open. As Peter Tatchell put it, "As long as we pander to what we think are people's prejudices they will be reinforced, they will never change." Within the movement, Joan Lestor said, "Democratic Socialists are being forced to recognise that if you are committed to equality you can't stop when someone is black neither can you stop when someone is gay. It's a total committment. There aren't any ifs and there aren't any buts about it."

GREAT SUCCESS

The meeting was undoutedly a great success, and we will be using the impetus generated by it to build a much stronger campaign for next year's conference. But one major problem will clearly be to put across the fact that, in LCGR, our struggle is about politics not civil rights. One way forward will be to promote, within our CLPs and trade union branches, policies which are explicity concerned with fighting patriarchy, and which are contributory to rather than seen as alternatives to the fight for women's rights. We hope shortly to have discussions on these lines with the Women's Action Committee of CLPD. Ken Livingstone spoke for LCGR as well as for himself when he said: "We will carry on fighting and challenging prejudice in every CLP and trade union branch until we commit this Party to a position not just on gay sexuality but on all forms of sexuality. The Tories and the press know that our campaign unlocks the repression in their sexuality. As we do so we take ourselves much closer forward to transforming the whole of society than perhaps we can on any other single issue that this movement faces."



JOIN THE STRUGGLE! FOR DETAILS OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP AND AFFILIATION OF YOUR CLP? PARTY BRANCH AND TRADE UNION BRANCH? WRITE TO LCGR, 61a BLOOM STREET, MANCHESTER M1 3LY. SPEAKERS ARE AVAILABLE: ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE MADE VIA THE SAME ADDRESS.

HOUSING STORM IN SEACOMBE

Council maisonettes in Borough Road East, Wallasey have caused a storm in the local press and local Labour Party recently.

The maisonettes are badly in need of repair; some of the rooms have cracks that you can put your hand into, window frames are rotten and badly fitted, and doors are badly hung. The communal bins are only emptied once a week, despite being full again within a few days. Large lumps of concrete have fallen away from the sides of the buildings and from the stairs. Recently a child narrowly escaped being seriously injured or killed when a large piece of concrete just missed falling on him.

Understandably the residents are angry. When Housing Director, Mr. Darnley, turned up at the maisonettes lumps of masonry were thrown at him. But Mr. Darnley is not the only one to come under attack. The residents on the estate have collected a 700 signature petition calling for the resignation of the three Labour Councillors for Seacombe. When the Executive Committee of Wallasey Labour Party heard of this situation they immediately called a public meeting to bring together the residents and their councillors. At the meeting residents complained that they never saw their councillors. It was also alleged that one particular councillor had resorted to referring to people on the estate as "animals", and had made racist remarks about one family.

Fortunately some of the Labour Party members present at the meeting were able to point out that the real problem was the Tory Council on Wirral, and that even when councillors did take up complaints the Council would not willingly put money into council housing.

It was also pointed out that the residents could influence who represented them on the council by joining the Labour Party and selecting candidates who would fight their corner and several new members were recruited.

Members of Seacombe Branch and Wallasey CLP now have to rebuild credibility in Borough Road East by leading a fight for better housing in the area. The left in Seacombe Branch are still trying to bring the three councillors to account, after failing by a few votes to win a no confidence motion in a packed ward meeting.

BITTERNESS AND TENSION

The degree of bitterness and tension created in the Branch over this issue is demonstrated by the fact that a meeting between the Branch chairman and one of the councillors degenerated into a brawl and is now in the hands of the police.

Mick Cashman
Wallasey CLP

ANNUAL CONFERENCE



CROSBY DELEGATE'S DIARY

MONDAY

Monday morning begins with the usual scrabble that delegates have to undergo to justify the claim that the Labour Party Conference is not stage managed. This is the 'reference back' procedure to try and ensure that missing words, phrases, resolutions and composites are promptly re-instated on the agenda. Conference Arrangements Committee (a body more in need of infiltration than any other!) epitomised by its chairman, Derek Gladwin, seems immune to any democratic control, pleas, cries of anguish and shouts from the body of the hall, but occasionally and often quite arbitrarily a delegate can be successful and a composite can be returned to its original form or returned to the timetable for debate.

This all intensifies the atmosphere which is both expectant and electric. Then the debates start and in theory, the shaping of part of the Labour Manifesto. This year, because of Left Wing Briefings, delegates were aware of the necessity of the card vote for recording a $\frac{2}{3}$rds majority and as anyone who watched conference could see, this at times became cumbersome, but it was always needed, especially in view of the disastrous NEC results.

Conference was in no doubt about committing the Labour Party to abolishing private medicine. This composite allowed the whole Labour movement to be united, fighting for a common cause and feelings were euphoric as the results of the vote were announced. After dinner though, this feeling was reversed with a vengence. A gloomy financial report was followed by the registration debate. The constituency section was overwhelmingly against the register yet the union block vote ensured that the register will be instigated and the same block vote wielded for a right-wing NEC ensured that the register will be acted upon.

TUESDAY

Tuesday saw the Labour Party at one again, determined to repeal anti-trade union laws. This must have been too much for someone because the next event was a bomb scare and the hall had to be evacuated. Rumors were circulating that this was one more attempt to prevent the debate on womens' organisations.

A call to make a short list of one unconstitutional was unfortunately lost, but three good composites were carried on transport, renationalisation and public ownership.

WEDNESDAY

On Wednesday conference voted by a huge majority to "bppose...all nuclear weapons in or by Britain." The sheer jubilation as the result of the vote was announced was tremendous. Delegates jumped up and down, shouted, cheered and clapped.

John Boyd's strange expression could now be directed at himself, 'he was in the conference but not of it.' The same could be said later in the day of Brother Sid.

When Clive Jenkins and Arthur Scargill raised the question of the missing votes the hall buzzed with speculation. Then the news filtered through that it was the NUR vote that was questionable. Members of the NUR delegation told me that when they asked Sid Weighell to confirm or deny the rumours he denied them. Finally, Mr. Weighell announced on Newsnight that he had indeed broken his Union's mandate. The NUR delegation were angry. Even Weighell supporters among them were less than pleased. They were upset that he had lied to them about the vote. The delegation had heated meetings on Thursday. Some wanted to recommend his sacking to the NUR executive, others were not prepared to go that far. They decided to submit a factual report and not give any recommendation.





~DELEGATES' REPORTS

THURSDAY/FRIDAY

Some other strong composites were debated and carried on Thursday and Friday:

-more investment for council houses and a tightening of both council and private tenants rights.
-a 35 hour week with no loss of pay, a national minimum wage.
-a radical education policy, both in schools and opening up higher education to everyone.
-abolishing inhumane immigration laws.
-banning the use of plastic bullets.
-a legal right of reply in the media.

So conference over the week had put firmly in the manifesto some radical socialist policies giving us all good reason to fight hard for a Labour victory. However there lingered a feeling that a constituency conference would have demanded a more socialist manifesto, designed to change the balance of power and wealth in the country. They certainly would not have begun by introducing a register or by voting in a right-wing NEC. Still, Trade Union block votes included, conference had been alive and exciting, real debate had taken place.

For the future however, this years conference has shown that there is a greater need for ordinary members of the Party to control the Party. If the newly elected NEC and the PLP do not wish, for example, to have unilateral nuclear disarmament, they may still water it down at their first Clause 5 meeting. It is this elitist attitude of the Right that must be abolished.

Jane Tonner
Crosby CLP

WALLASEY DELEGATE'S VIEW

This year's Labour Party Conference has seen the result of not enough attention being paid to democracy in the trade unions. Time and time again the block vote was used to push through the policies of the Right. The NEC is now well and truly in the hands of those opposed to democratic reforms within the Labour Party and the register is there for those who think any different.

The call for unilateral nuclear disarmament got it's two thirds majority to go into the manifesto, but the call for withdrawl from NATO was defeated. Healey, commenting on the decision, said that it didn't really make much difference - as long as we belong to NATO we are committed to nuclear arms. He's right; and a major push to win withdrawl from Nato as part of Labour's programme should take place before next years conference.

SUPPORT FOR THE PLO

The decision to recognise the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People is a dramatic turn about considering the Labour Party's pro-Zionist policies of the past. The resolution was however only narrowly carried.

WOMEN'S MOVES SNUBBED

In the debate on women's organisation all the resolutions; attempting to get the women's section on the NEC elected by the women's conference; to have a woman on the parliamentary shortlist in every constituency where a woman applies, and to have resolutions from women's conference brought to the national conference, were shamefully defeated.

IMPRESSIONS

My first Labour Party National Conference has reinforced my ideas about the leadership and structure of the Labour Party. Most of those now on the NEC are not working for Socialism or for the involvement of the majority of the people in the way this country is run. They work for the "mixed economy" and in their own self interest. They work for wage restraint and the management of the capitalist economy, using organisational maneouvres rather than democratic debate to get rid of their opponents ideas.

At this years conference the left in the Party seemed to run scared, holding back from the fight for democracy. Unless there is a fightback against the register and for socialist policies, the Labour Party in government will be the managers of capitalism and the working class will suffer again.

Lol Duffy
Wallasey CLP

A Song from Red Review

Oh dear, what can the matter be,
Militant's been thrown out by the NEC,
Soon to be joined by all of the IMG,
The Party's united at last.

Oh dear, what can the matter be,
Hattersley wants to throw out CLPD,
Soon to be followed by Tribune and LCC,
The Party's united at last.

Oh dear, what can the matter be,
Golding is wanting to throw out Roy Hattersley,
Foot's not quite sure, but supports it for unity,
The Party's united at last.



Oh dear, what can the matter be,
Callaghan wants to throw out Solidarity,
Healey's defected and opted for anarchy,
The Party's united at last.

Oh dear, what can the matter be,
Grantham is wanting to throw out the CLP's,
Duffy is wanting to throw out the T&G,
The Party's united at last.

Oh dear, what can the matter be,
NEC's voted to throw out the PLP,
PLP's voted to throw out the NEC,
The Party's united at last.

The Health and Wealth of Associated Octel

Socialist Environmental Scientists Group

Flat 1 106 Princess Road, Liverpool 8

In a time of mass unemployment and vicious attacks on the welfare state and trade unions it would be ludicrous for socialists to give priority to environmental issues. However, we believe these cannot be ignored because such issues represent major areas of direct and indirect conflict between capitalism and the needs and interests of workers. It is obvious that when jobs are at stake, workers can be blackmailed into accepting hazards in the workplace and the general environment. In addition to the obvious health risks from such things as nuclear power, pesticides (e.g. 2,4, 5-T), acid rain, and metal pollution, these also cause damage, often irreversible, to our environment. We believe it is imperative to realise the demands for clean air and water and a relatively unspoilt environment as part of the struggle for a fairer society. However, this must not be achieved at the expense of jobs. Emphasis should, instead, be placed on the production of cleaner, safer alternatives formulated with the full involvement of workers' initiatives.

As an issue which illustrates some of the points we feel are important, we would like to consider lead in petrol. We have chosen this for the following reasons, firstly the alkyl lead compounds added to petrol are manufactured by Associated Octel at Ellesmere Port, and, secondly this company has recently stepped up its propaganda offensive in the national press. An example of this was a full page newspaper advert in which they claimed the absolute necessity of lead in petrol for economic reasons and asserted that fears about health hazards are unfounded. They also claimed that their record of concern for the environment is impeccable.

FALLACIOUS CLAIMS

It is simple to show that Octel's claims are, at best, fallacious and frequently little more than propaganda with which to obscure their real objective, which is the maximisation and maintenance of profits.

One paragraph in this advert trumpets, "Octel can state with absolute conviction that the assertions of the anti-lead campaign regarding a connection between airborne lead and health - childrens health in particular, are unsubstantiated medically or scientifically". This statement is deceptive; in fact it is comparable to those trotted out by the experts of the tobacco industry about links between smoking and lung cancer. Similar verbal discharges have been made by scientific apologists for the asbestos industry, who have, for much of this century, defended the mythical safety of their wonder products. (Octel's deception is emphasised by the judicious positioning of a photograph of a blissful mother and child above the statement.)

MERSEY BIRD DEATHS

As for Octel's concern for the environment, the reality is not all that pretty. In 1979 thousands of birds were killed on the Mersey estuary with about 3000 carcasses being recovered. Autopsies of these, and those of scavenging rats, revealed massive levels of lead, and alkyl lead in particular. Additionally many surviving birds showed symptoms consistent with alky lead poisoning.

SHIP CANAL

Octel alone discharge waste alkyl lead into the Mersey, via the Manchester Ship Canal. Discharging takes place at very high tides, which "coincidently" the pattern of bird deaths followed closely. The combination of these amazing coincidences and the absence of alternative explanations leads to an inescapable conclusion. Indeed, the North West Water Authority has ceased looking for alternative explanations to the "totally scientifically unsubstantiated" conclusion that alkyl lead killed the birds.

Interestingly Octel themselves carry out and support "bbjective", (i.e. unhostile) research on alkyl lead in the environment. Is this a guilty conscience?

POLITICAL CONFLICTS

Although it is absolutely necessary to challenge the assertions of companies like Octel with informed scientific and technical argument, we must not lose sight of the predominantly political nature of such conflicts. "Impartial" experts or organisations cannot be relied on; in fact claims to be impartial are usually either fraudulent or hopelessly naive as complicity inevitably results.

Present legislation cannot be relied on either, as it is weak or non-existent and is proving to be pitifully inadequate, representing, as it does, the vested interests of the profit makers. It is therefore essential that committed scientists and specialists fight alongside workers not only in mass campaigns against industrial and environmental hazards, but also in attempts to prevent their occurrence in the first place. Ultimately this can only be achieved when workers, who are the major victims of existing and potential hazards and environmental deprivation, possess control of the means of production geared for need and not for profit.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

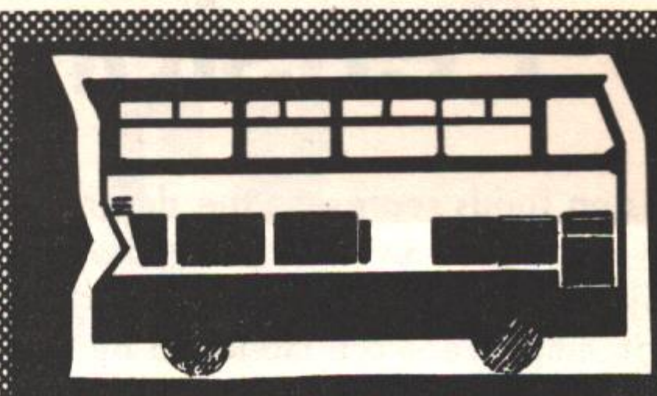
ACROSS

1. Taxidermist, 9. The apple, 11. Inca, 13. Grit, 14. Sea, 16. Nought, 17. Anthem, 19. Lie, 20. Them, 21. Calm, 23. The Alamo, 26. Coordinator.

DOWN

2. Ant, 3. Idea, 4. The Empire, 5. Militant, 6. So, 7. Nationalist, 8. Disarmament, 10. Asthma, 12. Causes, 15. Thatcher, 18. Nepali, 22. Data, 24. Oxo, 25. Go.

Will the Tories Stop the Buses ?

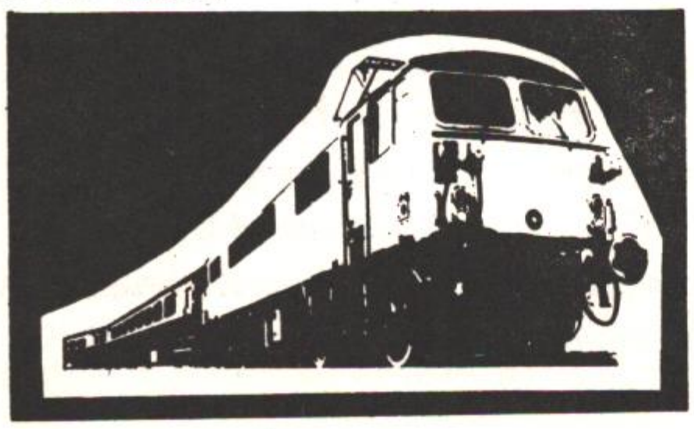


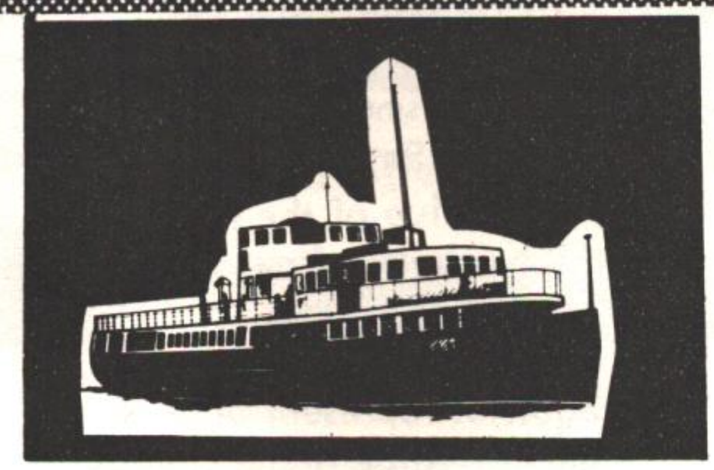
For a number of years, public transport has borne the brunt of attacks on public expenditure from successive governments. Former Labour Minister of Transport "Wild Bill" Rodgers, now riding shotgun for the "Sudden Death Party", spear-headed the threat to the bus. Several Metropolitan Counties like Merseyside and South Yorkshire felt his heavy hand on the brake. He warned them that if they didn't increase fares, revenue support from taxes would be severely chopped.

With the foundations for the undermining of public passenger transport having been laid by Rodgers, the Tories started to finish the job. They introduced legislation enabling private operators, often employing non-union, part-time labour, to cream off the proceeds from the more profitable routes operated by National Bus Company. This forced NBC into slashing fares and twisting the arm of the trade unions into "accepting "new agreements. This put in jeopardy many of the more "unprofitable" rural routes.

PARALLEL ATTACK

Running parallel with this attack on the nationalised sector of public transport was the Tories assault on the finance of transport operated by local government. Merseyside's share has been a cut in real terms of its transport supplementary grant in the past three years of around 20 percent, with a further chop expected in 1983 of seven percent. Local authorities were forced to cut services, increase fares, increase rates or a combination of all three.





RESPONSE

Although some authorities have fought honourably against this blackmail, Tory-controlled Merseyside planned cuts in services — in some areas up to 60 percent - linked with swingeing fares increases. The result of this policy would have been to isolate large areas of Merseyside, hitting young and old and the large percentage of working people who have no access to a car.

That many people found this policy unacceptable was shown overwhelmingly by the County Council Elections in 1981. All the Metropolitan counties and the GLC returned Labour administrations pledged to reducing fares. Faced with this situation the Tories turned to the law, coming down particularlly hard on the GLC who, faced with overwhelming odds, were forced to retreat.

No one on Merseyside needs reminding of the attempt by Great Universal Stores to have the council reverse its cheap fares policy.

FURTHER RESTRAINT

Undeterred, the government now intends even more vicious attacks, including the re-structuring of London Transport and legislation to drag recalcitrant councils into line.

What a pity that past Labour governments weren't so enthusiastic in dealing with reactionary local authorities like Wirral over its education and housing policies. (One more opportunity lost by a Labour minister later to transfer to the SDP)

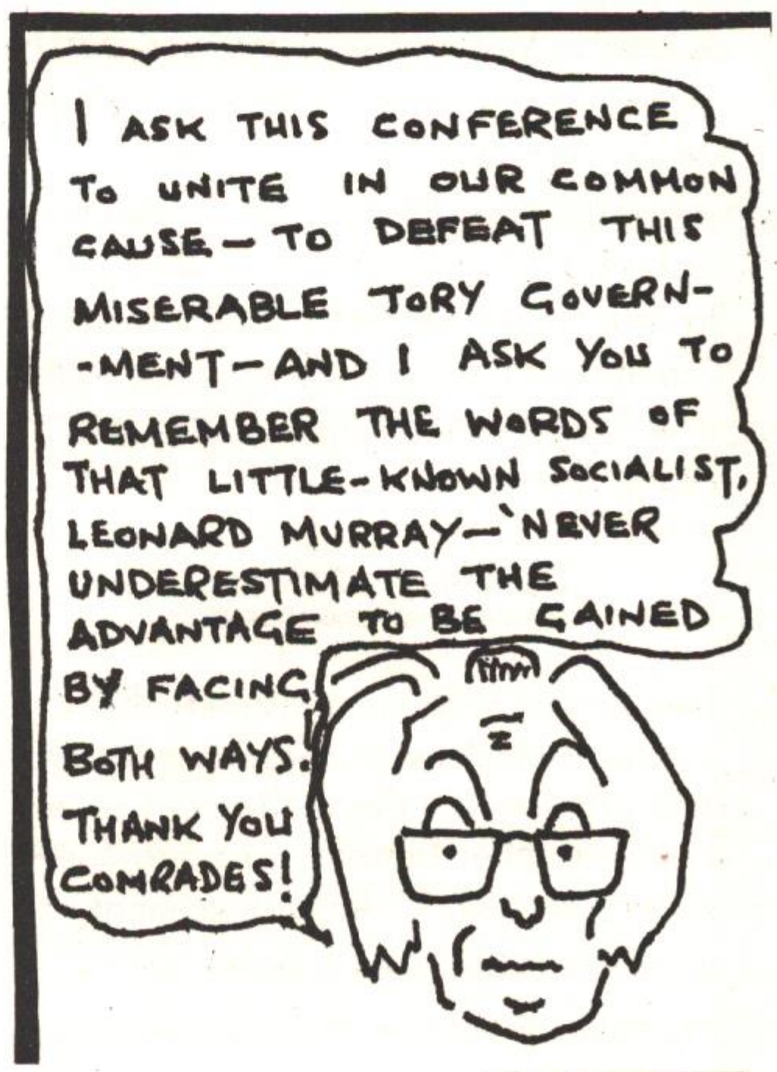
CHEAP FARES WORK

One thing the Tories have failed to explain is that during their administration, passengers dropped by around 35 percent. Conversely, under Labour, that decline has now been reversed, with a growth in passengers double that expected even by MPTE. With a further reduction in fares planned next year, the future looks bright for Public Transport on Merseyside, but only if we fight. The gloves are off. We cannot allow the government to succeed in its attempts to decimate public transport. We must link up with other Local Authorities and trade unions to fend off this attack, and help it protect jobs and services.

One thing is clear; to deny mobility is to deny freedom. The Tories must not be allowed to cripple one more public service by wielding the sharp edge of Thatcher's axe. We must halt the Tories now before they stop the bus for good.

John McCabe

County Councillor



Pension Funds and Merseyside

Pension funds represent the deferred wages of you and me. In total their assets now amount to £40 billion. They own over 20% of the shares of all UK companies quoted on the stock exchange. The pension funds for most local government employees are managed by the relevant County Council. If all local authority funds were put together they would constitute the largest fund of all - over £7 billion - nearly 20% of all pension fund assets. The political importance of this makes allegations of "hobbit socialism" look silly. In addition the importance of pension funds allied to the establisment of local enterprise boards has been recognised by the TUC and Labour Party.

MERSEYSIDE DEVELOPMENT FUND

In July 1982 the County Council agreed, in principle, to establish a Merseyside Development Fund. This is intended to provide venture capital for new or expanding enterprises, particularly those having difficulty in obtaining finance and thereafter to consider the option of the County Council itself taking a stake in such an enterprise. It is hoped the Development Fund will attract investment from the County Council's Pension Fund and other public and private pension funds. The problem with involving pension funds is the argument that this could conflict with the interests of their contributors and beneficiaries and the duties of the trustees - County Councillors on the Superannuation Committee. So is the strategy of investing in Merseyside companies a "high risk" venture which would jeopardise the pensions of local government employees? These arguments have to be answered if the pension fund source is to be unlocked and the process of local economic development and employment creation assisted. Without pension fund participation the money available to any Merseyside Development Fund will be very limited. At the most it might represent £5 million (the product of a 2p rate under section 137 of the Local Government Act, 1972 which is available for any spending in " the interests of the area").

CENTRAL PROBLEM

The central problem surrounds the pension funds' main objective which is to provide for the retirement pensions and other benefits of contributing employees. Any investment policy is said to be subservient to this main objective - the preservation of the real value of the fund's assets. Thus the emphasis of pension fund investment is on:

(i) equity type investments - UK equities represent 50% of the market value of the County Council's Pension Fund and are mainly in the larger companies - the so-called "blue chip" shares.

(ii) fixed interest government stocks or gilt edged securities which represent 20% of the market value.

The Merseyside County Treasurer has stated that it would be beyond the powers of the trustees to invest locally to support employment oportunities regardless of the rate of return. So where do we go from here?

The basis of the County Council's proposal is that investment of part of the pension fund should be in local companies. Under the present regulations, for example, up to 10% of the pension funds of local authorities can be invested in unquoted securities (e.g. firms not quoted on any recognised stock exchange). This would represent around £30 million in the case of the County Council's administered pension fund. While not all local investment would be in unquoted securities a significant proportion would probably be in companies (small/medium size) that come into this category. The investment would be for long-term growth without expectation of short-term profits. Such investment in local growth helps to guarantee the Council's ability to pay pensions in the future. Local authority pensions are guaranteed by ratepayers. If the industrial and commercial base of Merseyside is undermined, so too is the rate base, since industrial and commercial ratepayers that exist, the greater the payers contribute up to 50% of that rate base. The fewer industrial and commercial ratepayers that do exist, the greater the burden falling on other firms, so threatening their ability to survive and pay rates.

RETURNS

There has also been a continuing debate about the ability of the standard investments, such as stocks and shares of "blue chip" companies, to provide sufficient income for future pensions. One survey by a stock broking firm showed that the total return earned by the average pension fund was a negative rate of 3%. Another report found that fewer than 2 out of every 100 pension funds matched the rise in average earnings. Since pensions are linked to the final salaries of employees, a fund which cannot match the rate of increase of earnings is creating a financial burden on employers and employees, and in the case of local authorities funds, on the ratepayers.

Investment in firms with long-term growth prospects for capital gains, rather than dividends and short-term increase, may also help reduce the existing liability on ratepayers. You could ask the question - "If the Merseyside Pension Fund will not invest in Merseyside, why should anyone else"?

It is important that the role of pension funds in the national and local economy is better understood. The issue needs to be taken up in Labour Party branches, CLP's and in work-places. It is not a peripheral issue but an integral part of the developing local alternative economic strategies being pursued by a number of Labour controled county councils. With central government controls over local government expenditure increasing, the pension fund resource is becoming even more important because it is exempt from public expenditure controls.

Alan Chape
Birkenhead CLP

HELP! HELP!

All copy in this and the last issue of BRIEFING has been typed by one poor sod. Anyone who can help with the typing, please call 727-7486.

S.A.D. FIGHTBACK

SAD (Sisters Against Disablement) is a group of feminist women who got together to form a collective because we had had enough of being treated as second class cititzens.

As feminists we wished to use the understanding that feminism has given women to explore their oppression. We see many parallels with our oppression that can be explored in this way. Just as the term racism has been coined to describe the way black people are oppressed, and sexism is the way women are oppressed, so we see our oppression in terms of handicapism.

HANDICAPISM

What is handicapism? We think it is obvious; it is the means by which we are oppressed and so we use the term in the same ways as racism or sexism. Disabled women are doubly disadvantaged in society; both by sexism and handicapism and we have to organise together to fight back. Handicapism is about social and economic oppression, segregation both in terms of access (buildings, places of entertainment, communication systems), condescending attitudes (even when masked as 'help') and being relegated to Christmas and the charity collection boxes.

It's about being used (and abused) by the medical profession/social work profession/the charity business and many more.

In Sisters Against Disablement we are concerned with taking the position of disablement out of the understanding of disability as individual tragedy and show it for what it really is, political, a social minority group like gays, ethnic minorities etc.

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY

We are dis-abled by society the same as these other groups are and we link our oppression with theirs. We will no longer be seen as pathetic, helpless, second class and we demand our rights and an equal place in society. The Labour Party can assist us in our struggle. This of course will mean adopting a radical position regarding disablement and by passing policies that will strike a blow at handicapism, which is rife in this country.

CHARTER OF RIGHTS

As the women's movement has seven demands, similarly SAD has six demands for a charter of rights.

1. Compulsory legislation concerning access. All new buildings to be built accessibly. Old ones to be given grants for conversion.
2. Legislation for positive discrimination in the workplace.
3. Closing down of segregated schooling (special schools), segregated work places (sheltered workshops), and segregated residence institutions. Compulsory integration of schooling.
4. End of means test for Women's pension, comparable payments to be made with men.
5. Planning for and implementation of a fully accessible public transport system. Whilst this is in process all segregated transport (ie Dial-a-ride) to be run by and for disabled people.
6. State Benefits concerning disabled women paid directly to the disabled woman concerned to be used at her own discretion.

The adoption of these demands would go some way to crushing the handicapism that is rife in Britain today. We demand the support of the Labour Party, as a people's party, in making sure our rights are given full priority.

If any woman is interested in joining our struggle, contact SAD at 54 Whitby Court, Parkhurst Road, London N7 0SU, or phone 01-607-3671. Subscription for membership and newsletter ($\frac{1}{4}$ly) £2.50, payable to Sisters Against Disablement. We have regular meetings so come and join us. AB (able bodied) women welcome.

WRITE FOR BRIEFING

Merseyside Labour BRIEFING welcomes any contribution from Labour activists that is not racist or sexist. We see our prime roles to be:

- -To encourage the exchange of views between Labour activists.
- -To provide activists with information on issues that can help make the Labour Party a more effective and campaigning body.
- -To provide a forum where political issues of local relevance can be given an emphasis not available elsewhere.

Contributions should generally be limited to a maximum length of 800 to 1000 words. If possible articles should be written double-spaced with wide margins. The deadline for copy for the February/March issue is Tuesday, January 11th. All material should be sent to MLB, c/o 8 Ashford Road, Meols, Wirral.

CROXTETH COMP.
More Help Needed !

Note: BRIEFING have withheld the name of the contributor of this article (a volunteer helper at the school) because of the possibility of black-listing.

The occupation of Croxteth Comprehensive School, which began in the week before the summer holidays, is breaking new ground in terms of resistance to the Tory/Liberal massacre of education in Liverpool.

SUMMER SCHOOL

A highly successful summer school was mounted during the holidays, in which parents and children participated on a voluntary basis; this included subjects such as history, sociology and art, provided by volunteer teachers and FE lecturers. Many of the teachers gave up their summer holidays to do the school.

AUTUMN TERM

At the end of the holidays many of the teachers returned to their full-time jobs and the occupation was faced with a shortage of staff to begin the autumn term timetable. The publicity which the school gained on the first day, however, led to offers from unemployed, retired or part-time teachers. More are still needed.



Joseph: Wants Croxteth Closed

PARENTS TENACITY

Parents have been the mainstay of the occupation: guarding the buildings by night; cleaning and maintaining them; supporting the teachers in the classrooms; teaching 'non-academic' subjects (games, cookery, needlework, typing etc); doing the secretarial work and cooking meals - the best school meals in the country!

The parents have truly displayed a capacity for self-organisation and tenacity at which we can only marvel.

OVER 300 CAME BACK

The first day of term was a real vindication of the stand taken by the Action Committee. The campaign, faced with a brick wall at the end of a two year battle with the political and legal authorities, could have very easily shrugged its shoulders and collapsed. It is an indication of the determination of the parents, however, that they did not allow this to happen. And on the day when term began over 300 pupils, out of 450 last year, came back.

HELP STILL NEEDED

Offers of help, whether teaching (teaching qualifications or a degree), administrative, secretarial etc. are still needed in order to relieve the burden on existing volunteers. Help has come from people all over the Northwest, including Theatre in Education (from Leeds) and Open Eye (who put on a film-making and photography course). Please phone Phil Knibb (548-8927) or Cyril D'Arcy (220-3269). Messages of support and donations should be sent to Croxteth Community Action Committee, % 45 Finch Road, Liverpool L14.

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In the past week the campaign has received further support. The Liverpool Division of the NUT passed a resolution pledging support for retention of the site for the comprehensive school for the area. This was despite attemots to whip up opposition from teachers at Ellergreen, where the Croxteth pupils were to have been transferred.

Parents' and Teachers' Common Cause

While private schools prosper, with large grants from this Tory Government, state education is facing the biggest threat yet. Cuts in both resources and teachers have been going on throughout the country and now the Liverpool City Council led by the Liberals and Tories have just got around to its own series of cuts in line with government requests. Schools have already been closed and a lot more are listed to go. Teachers are being taken from schools and not replaced, while the schools themselves face large scale re-organisation. The educational needs of the children in the city take second place to the financial savings that the council are determined to make.

Fortunately the NUT leadership in Liverpool have anticipated a lot of the moves being made by the Education Authority and to a certain extent teachers have been prepared for the fight for their jobs and their schools. It has however still taken a lot of people by surprise. For too long teachers have thought that it wouldn't happen to them - but it has and for the first time they are realising why it is important to be in a union.

Continued on Page 19

BRIEFING
EDITORIAL MEETING

The next open editorial meeting will be on Wednesday, January 5th at the Pig and Whistle, Covent Garden.

LABOURS LOST VOTES

IN REPLY TO A LETTER FROM THE CROSBY CLP SECRETARY, PRINTED IN THE ECHO AND ASKING MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO ENSURE THAT ALL MEMBERS OF THEIR HOUSEHOLD REGISTER AS ELECTORS, THE FOLLOWING COMMUNICATION WAS RECEIVED:-

Dear Mr. Kenny,

As a lifetime working man and a Labour-man and trade-unionist, I felt I must answer your very sensible letter in a recent issue of the "Echo".

There are many reasons why people like me cannot vote and which of course costs the Party valuable votes and enthusiasts. Here goes -

Many, many men, like me, living in a house (THERE ARE 9 OF US HERE) in our furnished rooms - completely self-contained .... except for sharing toilet and bath, wish not to be on the Register of Electors.

Firstly we avoid being recipients of vast amounts of literature which is useless - ranging from Readers Digest (worst offenders), household and clothing manuals, Conservative and SDP leaflets, other advertising media etc., etc., and most horrific ..... from maintenance men, police, TV prowling squads, and reps from Skelmersdale Development Authority, seeking 'moonlight flitters' from Skem who hurriedly departing from that hopeless outpost 'forget' to settle their rent and bills before departing back to civilisation!

These organisations, authorities, firms, and even individuals, all know their quarry by name and address obtained from the Register of Electors which any citizen has the statutory right to see.

Ergo - stay off it like me. This is an old chap - over 40 years at sea - and like any old sailor, I dodge nobody; I only want peace! Sadly, however, the Labour Party loses all our votes.

Disliking writing letters without my address, I must apologise, but with respect - once more I want peace. In closing, I sign my ex POW no. 242.

With respect and good wishes,

sincerely X

Continued from Page 18

"PARENTS/TEACHERS A COMMON CAUSE"

Whenever a school under threat has sought support from the parents the response has been magnificent. This support has taken the form of petitions, lobbying councillors and, as at Croxteth Comprehensive, sitting in. Parents at my own school were probably a major factor in forcing the reversal of a decision to redeploy four members of staff. But if parents are going to help then the problems facing the school must be explained to them by the teachers.

FALLING ROLLS

With the fall in the birth-rate has come the first real opportunity to reduce class-sizes, though even with this the state schools would never achieve the pupil/teacher ratio enjoyed by the private schools. Instead the Tories have seized the opportunity of getting rid of teachers, cutting teacher training and, in a lot of cases, actually increasing class sizes.

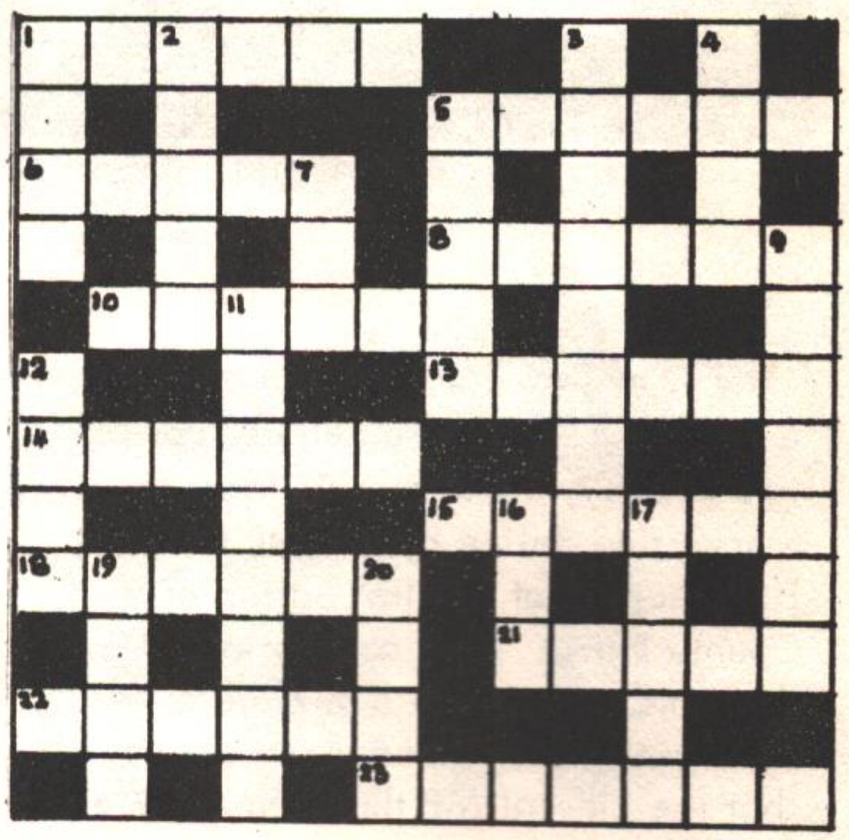
Children in Liverpool in Liverpool in the coming year are going to be faced with teachers and schools in disarray. Teachers worried about their own jobs and schools concerned about how many members of staff they are going to lose. We can expect to see larger classes and children may even be moved to a different school. Teachers will be stretched to their limits and this is bound to lead eventually to educational standards being eroded. Fewer teachers, especially in secondary schools, has already started to limit the number of subjects available to the pupils.

PARENTS AND TEACHERS MUST UNITE

Until a Labour government is returned to power the only way to defend our children's education is for parents and teachers to join together in their common cause and show this Tory government and the councils who support them that they are not going to stand by and see education in the state schools collapse.

David Hornby
Hoylake & Royden
Branch LP

BRIEFING CROSSWORD



ACROSS

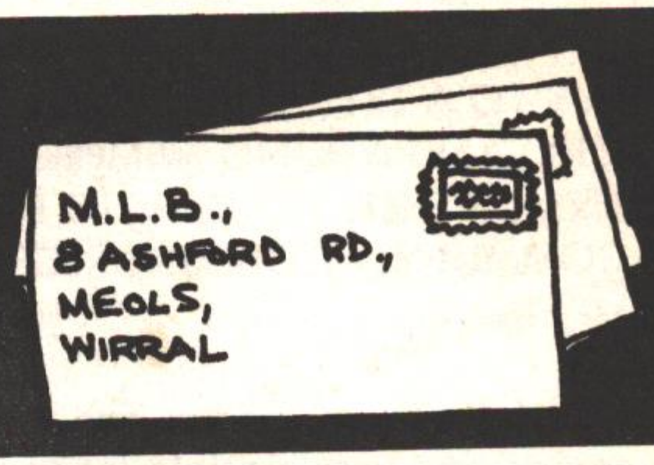
1. Populate (6)
5. Instruments of warning (6)
6. Red Indian trophy (5)
8. Dangerous sport (6)
10. Working-class party (6)
13. Chooses by vote (6)
14. This weapon sounds like a holiday at sea (6)
15. Desert (6)
18. Irish river (6)
21. Time-piece (5)
22. Symbol of principle (6)
23. Scene of recent riots (7)

DOWN

1. Destructive animal (4)
2. Largest livestock and meat-packing centre in the USA (5)
3. Area of Liverpool. Famous for recent direct action on education cuts
4. By an author unknown (abv) (4)
5. Curved sword (5)
7. Internationally recognised representative of middle-eastern people (3)
9. Respirator (3,4)
11. A presentation of facts and information (8)
12. An organisation to defend citizen's rights (abv) (4)
16. A nuclear authority (abv) (3)
17. The positive electrode of a cell (5)
19. Middle-east country. Scene of atrocities against the Mojahedin (4)
20. Mongolian tent (4)

Solutions in the next issue.

LETTERS



NO CORRUPTION

Dear Briefing,

The same day Comrade Tonner's article appeared on supposed corruption in the Party, I was reported to the Merseyside Police by the MP for Edge Hill because of the last editon of County Extra. Both accusations share the same approach - a mixture of half-truths and innuendoes - except that the Liberal MP throws in malice as well.

I do not have, contrary to what was suggested, a chain of office. It has never been proposed I should have and I would not want one. I do not regularly attend lavish functions nor go junketing as a way of life.

It is true there is a Chairman of the Council who has been given a chain of office (at no cost to the ratepayers and funded in part by trade unionists) and wears it at civic functions. It is true there are receptions from time to time. The scale and extent of these are now under the control of the Labour Group and to suggest they are corrupt is absurd.

Comrade Tonner might, in fairness, have reminded you that Merseyside Council is the only Labour Council not to pay responsibility allowances; that in May 1981 the system of some councillors having free MPTE zone tickets was ended; that many Labour members make enormous personal sacrifices in terms of time and personal life to work for the Movement; that every Labour Group meeting is attended by representatives from the County Party; and that, against an enormously difficult background, the Labour Group works very hard and honestly. None of these things are other than they should be and they only need to be repeated because of the distorted picture given. I know the article was obviously written in good faith but it did comfort the enemy and was unworthy of its author. If Comrade Tonner is still in any doubt about its unfairness, she can come to a future meeting of the Labour Group if she contacts me.

Yours,
Keva Coombes

FIGHT THE RIGHT

Dear Sir,

I purchased the first editon of Merseyside Labour BRIEFING with an intention to take a copy regularly. However, after reading the founding statement I am having second thoughts. A statement such as "Socialism in Britian faces a major crisis which threatens its existence as a credible political force" is both vague and lacking in historical perspective. Temporary problems or unpopularity does not alter the fact that socialism is the only real alternative to capitalism in decline.

It is becoming more and more obvious that the Conservatives can do no more than manage the collapse of British industry. The continuing increase in unemployment, falls in industrial production, contraction of world trade and critical instability in the world banking system, point to a deepening recession, intensified competition and desperate attempts to maintain profit levels. This is leading to an unprecedented attack on the living standards of working people, and this will have the effect, seen throughout the history of capitalism, of the development of political consciousness. And, after a period of initial uncertainty and subservience, an expansion of industrial militancy. The Left have failed to lead and direct this growing disatisfaction because they are not yet in a position to do so. The working class look to the Labour movement and its leadership for direction, and the Right's combination of moderate policies and attacks on socialists will not inspire enthusiasm. The self-activity of the working people of Britain is and will be thwarted by the likes of Chapple, Healey and other non-socialists who in the past managed to gain control of the Labour movement.

They are now, however, politically bankrupt. Keynesian reflation will not work because the present slump is much deeper and more permanent than a conventional trade-cycle. The "crisis" of socialism in Britain has nothing to do with "over-simplified ideas" and the "jargon" of party activists. Rather it is to do with the right-wing leadership which accepts capitalism and whose major preoccupation is with discrediting socialism and workers' power. The ousting of that leadership must be the number one priority of all genuine socialists. Strangely the founding statement does not even mention it.

Paul Rimmer West Derby LPYS

Published by
Merseyside Labour Briefing, 8 Ashford Rd., Meols, Wirral.
Printed by
Whitechapel Press (TU), 100 Whitechapel, Liverpool.

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