LABOUR
# BRIEFING
No. 100 April 5th-25th 1990

**INSIDE:**

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☆ TGWU: left wins the Executive!
☆ Why the left needs an SCLV
☆ Women fight for a secular state
☆ Budget analysis

40p

## POLICE RIOT, WITCH-HUNT WILL NOT STOP US...

# UNITE TO SMASH THE POLL TAX!

**In the wake of the huge demonstrations in London and Glasgow, the mass movement against the Poll Tax has taken on new proportions — and faces new challenges.**

Despite police attacks, media smears, and politicians' threats, these protests were a major success, mobilising a broad cross-section of the British working class against Thatcher's flagship.

The 200,000 strong London demo also featured groups as diverse as "Bikers Against the Poll Tax" and disaffected Tories, not to mention delegations from every part of the country.

Most of those present had not been previously involved in demonstrations.

The huge turn-out reflected a new level of popular anger against the Tories and a new determination to challenge them.

This provides the basis for resisting the attacks on the anti-Poll Tax movement — which are likely to reach new heights in coming weeks.

The prospect of further arrests of anti-Poll Tax activists and conspiracy trials is real; a witch-hunt in the labour movement is a certainty. We must resist all attempts from whatever quarter to use the spurious issue of "violence" to divide and weaken us.

Those who fear the growing power of the anti-Poll Tax movement will try to use the "violence" issue to drive a wedge into it, to divide young from old, so-called respectable from so-called unrespectable, "moderate" from "extremist".

The anti-Poll Tax movement must say loud and clear: responsibility for this "riot" lies with the police and the Tory Poll Tax itself — a crude act of violence perpetrated against the majority of the population.

The Poll Tax has become a catalyst for all the grievances accumulated against the government over the last 11 years. This is because it is such a sweeping attack on so many people.

In the end, it was not surprising that its introduction in England and Wales should have been marked by furious conflict between public and police and numerous attacks on property.

The anti-Poll Tax movement should set up its own enquiry into the events of March 31st.

**POLL TAX: MORE INSIDE:**

☆ Eye-witness reports: p 3, 5
☆ 3D statement: p4
☆ Local Reports: p4

**By Jane Connor**
**Co-Chair, London Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions.**

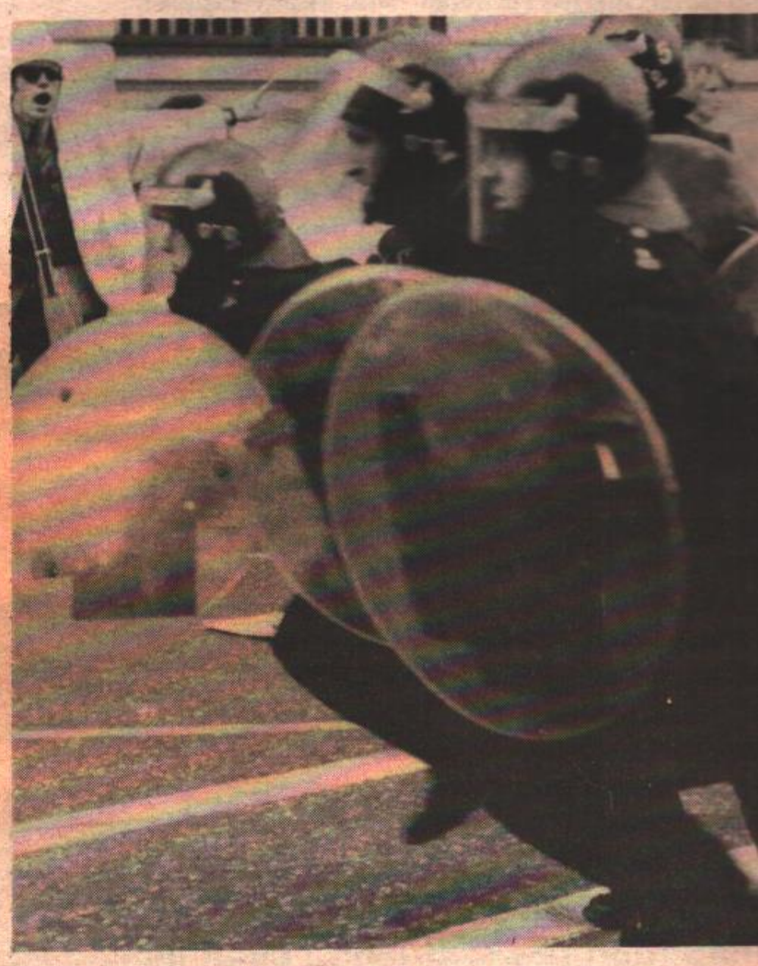
Civil liberties lawyers, prominent trades unionists, veterans of mass democratic movements from Eastern Europe and elsewhere should hear evidence from all and sundry — including the police — and publish a comprehensive report.

This would be a valuable counter-weight to the lies emanating from Scotland Yard and the Home Office.

In this *Briefing* we publish a number of eye-witness reports from the London demonstration.

They make it clear that the police used unnecessary delays and diversions, and ultimately mounted horses, riot vans, truncheons, charges on children and elderly people, indiscriminate arrests, etc., to break up and discredit what was otherwise a gloriously peaceful and positive march.

The reports also make it clear that resistance



to these attacks was not confined to a few "extremists" but was supported by virtually the whole crowd.

In this context the irresponsible calls by Kinnock and Hattersley for "convictions", heavy sentencing and prosecution of "organisations" allegedly involved in "Poll Tax violence" exceeded even their own customary standards of cravenness.

The witch-hunt of the left in the Party will now focus on Poll Tax dissent, starting with those Councillors who voted against the Poll Tax and MPs who have pledged not to pay it.

The All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation is also clearly on the hit list.

Labour's leaders joined the Tories, the police and the media in clamouring for a crack-down

*Continued on back page*

**LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!**

Letters

# 100 issues old!

**The national *Labour Briefing* is 100 issues old. Born as a supplement to bring *London Labour Briefing* and the various other local *Briefing* supplements together, it has grown strong enough to stand on its own. Here's what some of those associated with it over the years have had to say to mark the anniversary.**

## LCC

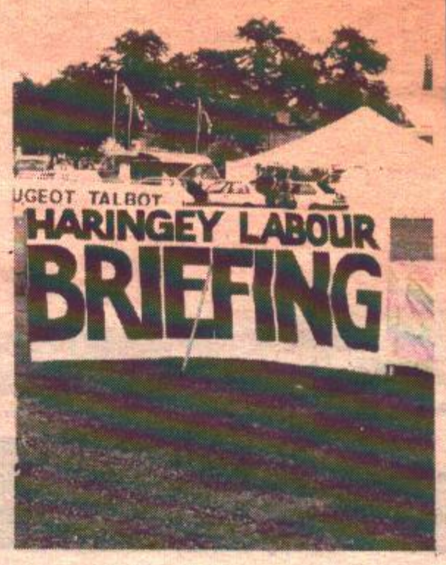
"*Labour Briefing*: possibly the most influential, ultra-left sect, as they have been able to accommodate themselves within much wider campaigns and movements to great effect."
"The name that has been given to this strategy of linking up with organisations and movements outside of the parliamentary left as well as within; it is 'twin-tracking', and originates from *Labour Briefing*."
LCC Mailing, *CLP Activist Network*, Winter 1990.

## Peter Tatchell

"*Labour Briefing* changed my life. No, this isn't the editor's hype or the paranoid testimonial of some born-again leftist. Back in 1981, on the pretext of an article I had written for *Labour Briefing* calling for extra-parliamentary action against the Tory government, I was denounced in the House of Commons by the then Leader of the Labour Party, Michael Foot, and banned as the Labour PPC for Bermondsey by the NEC.
"The next is, as they say, history... an unprecedented campaign of press vilification, death threats, hate mail, and physical assaults, which culminated in the dirtiest by-election in Britain since the War (according to the *Daily Mail* and Labour's loss of a hitherto safe seat. The main beneficiary of the whole episode was *Labour Briefing*, which got heaps of free (and deserved) publicity and its circulation rocketed. Well done Graham!"

## Joan Twelves
## Leader Lambeth Council

"Whilst other papers have come and gone, *Labour Briefing* has remained required reading for *all* Lambeth Councillors — Labour *and* Tory — since issue number one."






## Jeremy Corbyn MP

"I was in at the founding of *London Labour Briefing* in 1980 and ten years later I'm as avid a reader as I was at the start. It's interesting that opinion polls never test the notion of *socialism*. I suspect that this is because it might be found to be overwhelmingly popular.
"*Briefing* however has honourably and consistently campaigned not just against the injustices of capitalist society but also, unusually on the left, for a participatory and caring society that *can* be achieved."

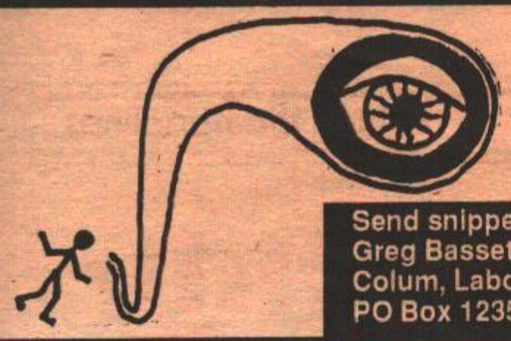
## Nigel Williamson, editor of *The Times* diary

"After Graham Bash the editorial freedom allowed by Rupert Murdoch is most refreshing."

## Jane Stockton

"The early years of *London Labour Briefing* hold fond memories, both personal and political. At that time *Briefing* was unique amongst left publications in placing personal politics (through the StreetLife supplement) alongside traditional class politics on the Labour left's agenda — a major factor in *Briefing's* early success. As good as the current *Briefing* is, I hope to see the day when that aspect of *Briefing's* past is resurrected."

# PERISCOPE



Send snippets and info to:
Greg Bassett, Periscope Colum, Labour Briefing, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.

Hampstead & Highgate's selection:

## Glenda's greatest act

*By Hedda Hopper*
*Our Theatre Columnist*

The selection of Glenda Jackson as PPC for Hampstead and Highgate was as predictable as Neil Kinnock's response.
Neil was delighted. Glenda was humble. Sky TV were allowed access to the count.
The local Labour Party woke up to the fact that New Realism means News Values.
We have a celebrity. We have a candidate who believes that accountability to the CLP means holding regular advice surgeries.
Glenda Jackson did not lie. She was honest, direct, generally affable, and instinctively reactionary.
She described the trade union movement as finished, a Ministry for Women as divisive, nuclear weapons as a necessity, and Japan as a potential mediator in the Middle East.
She failed to turn up to two nomination meetings. She missed the Party's first GC, which was two days after the count, and was selected essentially by people who had never met her.
The postal vote, a quarter of the total, went massively to Glenda Jackson, and the affiliates' section, marshalled by Walworth Road, gave her a head start of over 10%.
Take these away and Hampstead and Highgate would have had a different parliamentary candidate. Kate Allen is a socialist and a feminist, Glenda Jackson is currently appearing in Glasgow.

**And here's what some of those associated with *Briefing* over the years might have said:**

**Mike Marqusee, *Briefing* columnist**
"100 Not Out; well done, *Briefing*, on an excellent maiden century."

**Some *Briefing* Editorial Board Members**
"That's enough of these unintelligible cricketing metaphors."

**Piers Corbyn**
"I forecast a bright future ahead for *Labour Briefing*."

**Neil Kinnock**
"It's the only thing that makes me see red these days."

**Stewart Richardson, Birmingham Labour Briefing**
"The cheque is in the post."

**Other *Briefing* distributors:**
"The cheque will be in the post."

**Brendan Young, Swansea Labour Briefing**
"The cheque isn't in the post."

**HM Queen Elizabeth II**
"The telegramme's in the post."

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**Please note our Easter Break: back in three weeks.**

# WRITEBACK!

**We welcome your letters!**
**Disagree with something? — write in.**
**Agree with something? — write in.**
**Want to raise a new idea? — Write in.**
***Let's hear your views!***
**Write to: Writeback, Labour Briefing, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.**
**Please send letters for the next issue to arrive by Wednesday, April 18th if possible.**
**Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.**

## Come off it, *Briefing*

Dear *Briefing*,
Without exaggeration or rhetoric, *Briefing* supporters in Lambeth were outraged at Peter Chowney's article (*Briefing* no. 99) concerning the Hackney anti-Poll Tax demonstration.
Despite ambiguous formulations, an article fingering the SWP and the anarchists, under the spurious disguise of "objective" reporting has no place at all in a socialist newspaper.
It implicates us in the ruling class offensive against the movement in a completely intolerable way.
If the bourgeois press want confirmation of their witch-hunting reportage of the anti-Poll Tax campaign, all they have to do now is to turn to *Briefing*:
"See, even the 'hard left' admit the violence was 'co-ordinated and well-planned'"!
If Peter Chowney had trouble "pinning down" responsibility for the confrontation then let him pass reporting of events over to someone who knows where the blame lies.
It is with the Tory government, whose Poll Tax it is, and who created a huge layer of youth with no stake at all in society.
It is with the Labour and trade union leadership, who have compounded their utter failure over the years to defend these youth with condemnations of their actions against the Poll Tax.
And it is with the police and every single Labour Council that has hidden behind riot shields and thick blue lines so as to set preposterous Poll Taxes.
We understand that the *Briefing* staff are well-stretched, and that certain mistakes inevitably get made. However, this one goes beyond the bounds of the acceptable.
In our opinion, an apology should be publicly made both to *Briefing* readers who have been shamed by this appalling article, and more importantly, to comrades in the SWP.
It is clear that a major witch-hunt against the hard-left in general is building up, as the chances of defeating Thatcher either by election or by a mass movement multiply daily.
Let us have no more ambiguous formulations, and certainly no more "fingering" articles.
If there is a debate to be had with other groups on the hard left, then we need to have it. But there is no reason why they should listen to us if we write articles like Peter Chowney's.
Yours angrily,
*John Tuite*
(Secretary, Lambeth Against the Poll Tax)
Councillor *Steve French*
*Celia Dignan*
(LAPT and Lambeth *Briefing*)
*Helen Shaw*
(LAPT and Lambeth *Briefing*)
*Sian Moore*
(Vice Chair, Lambeth NALGO)
*All in a personal capacity*



**All Poll Tax photos in this issue from London demonstration, 31st March 1990. PHOTOGRAPHER: Tom Loucas.**

Editorial

BRIEFING
LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

## Make Labour a Poll Tax Battleground!

Labour's mid-Staffs victory and record-breaking opinion poll lead, followed by the Heseltine-Tebbitt joust and accompanied by the continuing upsurge against the Poll Tax, has plunged the Tories into their deepest crisis for many years.

At the same time, the confidence of the whole labour movement — and of the working class — has received a tremendous boost.

But how is our leadership responding to this profound change in the political weather?

Are they gearing up to get rid of the government?

Are they offering a political focus for mass opposition to the Poll Tax?

Are they proclaiming — as are millions in the anti-Poll Tax movement — that the Tories have lost their mandate to govern?

Are they calling for a General Election?

No. Labour's leaders have other priorities. In a week that saw the Tories sink ever deeper into despair, Labour looked set to:

•move against the left on Liverpool Council and others who have opposed implementing the Poll Tax;

•proscribe the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation as a "*Militant* front";

•step up disciplinary measures against *Militant* supporters;

•end trade union participation in parliamentary selections;

•end mandatory reselection by putting the onus on potential challengers to initiate a contest;

•introduce postal ballots for all future reselections.

At a time when most of its supporters want to see Labour pushing for power, our leaders seem determined to launch an internal crackdown.

The fact is that Kinnock and Co. do not want to take over from the Tories *just yet*. They see the popular pressure for serious social change mounting outside the Party.

They know that a Labour victory will only increase that pressure, particularly within the trades unions.

They are worried that unless they can strangle what's left of democracy in the Party — and block the avenues through which popular discontent is expressed in the Party — the next Labour government could face uncontainable demands for radical changes.

As the anti-Tory pressure builds up outside the Party, Kinnock will become ever more ardent in his attacks on democracy and the left.

Our response must be to turn the Labour Party into a Poll Tax battleground. The fight against the witch-hunt and for Party democracy is now inextricably linked with the mass struggle against the Poll Tax. Socialists should step up their campaign for Kinnock to lead the fight against the Tories instead of attacking the people most active in opposing them.

## One Hundred *Labour Briefings!*

As this one hundredth issue of national *Labour Briefing* hits the streets, short-term prospects for the left inside the Labour Party appear pretty dim.

But outside — in Britain and beyond — new vistas are opening daily.

Possibilities dismissed as utopian only a year ago (remember the palava on Thatcher's tenth anniversary as PM?) have now taken on tangible reality — not least the prospect of defeat for the Tories and the election of a Labour government.

Of course the likely nature of that government gives socialists nightmares. All the more urgent then is *Labour Briefing*'s bedrock purpose: to fight for socialist leadership at every level of the labour movement.

*Briefing* was born (originally as *London Labour Briefing*) in 1980 in the midst of a left upsurge in the Labour Party. It rapidly became a focus for the left's struggle for power in the Party.

In the period of retreat ("realignment") which followed, *Briefing* worked hard to keep the banner of socialist principles aloft inside the Party, while at the same time addressing itself to the myriad campaigns and struggles going on outside.

Now the political situation has changed again and *Briefing* has every intention of playing a full part in current developments. We will keep going because there is so much to play for.

Given our sparse resources, our survival through times lean and fat is a feat of which we are proud.

Survival will continue to be a difficult business but we believe that in the present context *Briefing*'s role is more vital than ever. There is simply no one else on the left who does the job that we do.

There is no other vehicle for those who see activity within the labour movement as central but refuse to isolate it from a wider vision of (and participation in) the class struggle.

We are delighted to learn (see page 2) that the LCC considers us the most "dynamic" force on what they quaintly term the "ultra-left" because of our adherence to what has come to be known as the "twin-track" approach — combining work inside and outside the Labour Party.

*Briefing* also provides a forum for socialist discussion, a place where comrades can explore and debate the many questions arising from the class struggle.

We believe there is no other paper on the left committed equally, as we are, to both non-sectarianism and unequivocal socialist politics.

*Briefing* has covered and supported a wide range of broad-based campaigns. Our aim has been to strengthen all the struggles of the oppresseed — not use them merely to advance our own line (or even to improve our sales!).

As the anti-Tory wave accelerates and as Labour's leaders respond in their customary manner (see editorial above), *Briefing* will continue to do its best see that the struggles of the working class finds its expression inside Labour Party structures.

We will continue to bring you exclusive stories of struggle from below and manoeuvre from above. We will continue to keep alight the beacon of socialism inside the labour movement.

However difficult that task may appear at the moment, it is essential if we are to prepare for the radical developments which are sure to follow the next General Election.

Once again we invite supporters, readers and socialists everywhere to make *Briefing* their own paper. Use our pages to inform the movement of your struggles and activites. Write in and join our debates.

And, of course, please contribute to our next hundred issues by buying and selling the paper wherever and whenever possible!

Behind the headlines

# Police riot against Poll Tax demo

**Having looked in vain at the Sunday papers for a single accurate account of what happened on the London demo, I phoned a number of newspapers and the NCCL to describe what I had witnessed.**

**The incident that blew the lid off didn't occur until about 3:50pm.**

I had become separated by the police from my wife and children and was walking around near the top of Trafalgar Square in front of the National Gallery.

I heard some noise or music coming from the area around Northumberland Avenue near where the Strand runs into Trafalgar Square and decided to have a look.

As I approached I could see no trouble or problems at all.

At that moment four riot vans came belting into the crowd from the Strand with klaxons blaring. They were obviously trying to get through into the top of Whitehall.

But the crowd would not let them pass.

People turned on the vans, pushing them back down the Strand with bare hands. For five to ten minutes the riot vans were bouncing back and forth.

By Mick Gosling
Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom
(in a personal capacity)

At one point a youth was carried for 30 to 40 yards on the front of one of these vans as it tried to force its way towards Whitehall.

It was mainly young, dispossessed people in the frontline of the fighting at this point but there is no doubt that they were being ferociously supported by the crowd as a whole.

The riot police in the area panicked and ran from the top of Northumberland Avenue back down Whitehall. Some people then broke into the nearby building site.

Police horses rode down from the top of Trafalgar Square around the South African Embasssy into Whitehall and charged down it.

It was at this point that I saw the incident which was subsequently televised.

A man with a pony tail (wrongly identified by the television reporters as a woman) was flattened by the charging horses in full view of thousands of shocked demonstrators.

The people in the crowd were enraged and a number ran into the road to form a protective circle around the injured man.

Meanwhile, the mounted police had turned around and were charging back up the other way, followed by riot cops on foot, wearing visors and carrying short-arm shields.

A number of people in the crowd asked the police to get an ambulance but the police kept insisting they would handle it. The crowd around the injured man with the pony tail refused to yield to the riot police.

Only at this point did what had been a mild barrage of sticks and cans become an avalanche of missiles of all kinds thrown at the police from the building site.

From my observations it is clear that two incidents enraged the crowd and precipitated the violence:

•the attempt by riot vans to force their way through the crowd at Trafalgar Square;

•the horse charges in Whitehall.

The much reported incident outside Downing Street was actually a very small ruck — so small that a friend of mine watched it while calmly breast-feeding her baby...

But it did seem to have led to the police trying to force their riot vans through the crowd at the mouth of the Strand.

A few weeks ago the press and the government were full of praise for the authorities in Leipzig because they backed off rather than risk a confrontation with demonstrators.

The British press clearly do not wish to apply the same standards at home as abroad.

You'd think from their coverage that they had an army of reporters combing the scene. In fact, they had hardly anybody there and are all relying on the same few individuals for quotes and eye-witness observations.

Their reconstructions of events are wildly inconsistent and should be trusted by no one.



In over 20 years of experience on demonstrations of all kinds I've never seen anything like what happened on the Poll Tax demo.

It's my opinion that there were few arrests before about 5.30 because the police were simply unable to make them against the resistance of such a huge crowd.

Only later when the police regrouped — and most of the demonstrators had left the area — where they able to attack and arrest numbers of youth who had been driven into the West End.

For a period in the late afternoon, the balance of fear switched against the police. They had lost control and they were terrified.

Later, when there were fewer people about, they extracted vengeance.

Campaign: Poll Tax Special

## Local Reports

# Thames Valley Conference

By MARTIN WICKS

**A broad based Thames Valley anti-Poll Tax Conference took place in Reading on March 24th.**

**It brought together local campaigns from Reading, Bracknell, Maidenhead, Slough, and Windsor.**

Also represented were Swindon, Oxford, Reading, Slough, and High Wycombe Trades Councils.

There are four Labour Councils in this area (Swindon, Oxford, Reading, and Slough); the rest of the area are Tory "heartlands".

Her the campaigns have mushroomed spontaneously; in Maidenhead a working class couple decided to organise a meeting and were amazed at the response.

In such areas all the colours of the political rainbow have been involved, including dissident Tories.

This led to some tension at the Reading Conference, given expression by a delegate from Windsor who complained that harsh language and talk of General Strikes (thanks to Workers Power) frighten people away.

Unease was also expressed by a few Labour Party members: "we must concentrate our fire on the Tories not on the Labour Councils."

But there was general agreement on the need to demand that Labour Councils follow the example of Derwentside and refuse to prosecute non-payers.

Lack of work in relation to the trade unions was noted. No action against the Poll Tax has yet developed either amongst local government workers or civil servants.

In Reading the lobby of the Council was treated to the spectacle of the local NALGO Secretary joining Labour Councillors in insisting that there was "no choice".

Ideas were put forward to open a discussion amongst NALGO members: including workplace leaflets demanding the right of Poll Tax campaigns to speak to meetings of union members faced with having to implement the Tax, and setting up workplace anti- Poll Tax groups.

Estate and area organisations are also needed so that we can mobilise in defence of anybody faced with the bailiffs.

The Conference agreed to propose to its sponsoring bodies that a Thames Valley co-ordinating committee be set up. Its first focus will be a demonstration in Reading on May 5th.

# Lancashire Report

**Our first "Can't pay, won't pay" public meeting was held at a Working men's Club in Atherton near Leigh on Thursday March 22nd.**

**The meeting was organised by the Leigh Campaign Group and attended by 200 enthusiastic local people. We sold 30 copies of *Labour Briefing!***

A committee of 30 was formed to organise work in the area. Fifty-five people joined the Labour Party. Further meetings will be organised in other localities.

The following Saturday local Labour MP Laurence Cunliffe held an anti-Poll Tax meeting outside the Town Hall — not much support for his "Vote Labour, pay the Poll Tax" line.

We held our own meeting outside the Town Hall using a soap box to argue a "Can't pay, won't pay" approach and were very successful.

On April 3rd the Leigh Campaign Group held a public meeting to recruit to the Labour Party on a radical anti-Poll Tax platform.

Wigan Metro NALGO branch have adopted a policy on non-compliance with sending out of fines, summonses, etc.

Wigan Trades Council and Atherton and Tyldsley Trades Council also have policies of non-payment.

# Mid-Staffs

**A packed crowd of 350 — with 100 stranded outside in the car park — took part in what was by far the most exciting meeting of the Mid Staffs by-election.**

**The meeting was organised by the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation and was addressed by Gary Freeman from Nottingham.**

**Over enthusiastic local police, frightened by events in the rest of the country, not only patrolled the area in force but even sent Special Branch infiltrators inside the hall.**

**A local campaign was set up and a coach organised for the London demo on March 31st.**

## 3D: Statement



# Cops to blame!

**The following is an edited version of a statement issued by 3D — the open, independent, anti-Poll Tax newsletter issued by activists within the All Britain Federation — following the events on the London demo.**

**March 31st's anti-Poll Tax demonstration and rally, attended by nearly 200,000 people, illustrated the enormous breadth of support the anti-Poll Tax movement commands and the enormous strength of feeling against the Tax.**

If, as the police claim, there were only 30,000 demonstrators and 2,000 police officers (one policeman for every fifteen demonstrators!) the events that followed the arrival of the march in Trafalgar Square would not have happened.

Surely 2,000 police officers could easily have controlled a crowd of that size. Indeed, if the aim of the police was simply crowd control there were clearly too few of them present.

The police clearly had another objective.

A peaceful, good-natured demonstration which had for the most part been policed in a low-key manner was disrupted by a completely unwarranted and provocative police attack, using horses and riot squads, up Whitehall and along Northumberland Avenue.

Many ordinary police officers who had lined the route seemed as shocked and surprised by the waves of horsemen as the demonstrators.

However, the fact that Thatcher's speech condemning the violence was reported before the last section of the demonstration had left Kennington raises speculation.

Many people believe that the police attack was agreed at the highest level in order to provoke a riot and discredit the anti-Poll Tax campaign at a time of unprecedented government unpopularity.

That the police ran riot amongst the crowd was serious enough, but the situation was made worse by inadequate stewarding: too few stewards were present and their lines of communication seemed poor.

The stewards seemed to be concentrated around the platform in Trafalgar Square. After the trouble began there was a marked absence of stewards in the disturbed area and the platform seemed unaware of the police attacks that had occurred.

The stewarding was not the only weakness of the march's organisation.

There had been no obvious provision of legal assistance through the publication and distribution of emergency phone numbers. There were extremely few NCCL and Haldane Society legal observers for a demonstration of this size.

Prior to the demonstration 3D supporters on the All Britain Federation national committee had raised concern over the route of the march; the relatively small size of the assembly point; the fact that the march would go past Downing Street; and the organisers' under-estimation of the possible size of the march.

In the light of what really happened on Saturday — an unprovoked, possibly pre-planned police attack on a peaceful demonstration — we completely reject the initial media comments of Federation officers Tommy Sheridan and Steve Nally which pinned the blame on a minority of demonstrators rather than on the police.

We also reject any idea of an "internal enquiry" within the anti-Poll Tax movement to root out the so-called trouble makers — what is needed is an independent, public enquiry into the policing of the event.

This demand should be supported across the anti-Poll Tax movement and at all levels of the labour movement.

# WE'RE NOT PAYING THE POLL TAX!

**Neil Kinnock is trying to drive the anti-Poll Tax campaign out of the Labour Party. Labour Party Socialists believes the thousands of Labour Party members who are not paying mt come out in the open. Rush bulk orders for the new LPS badge for your ward, trade union branch, Anti-Poll Tax Union, etc. Wear your badge with pride!**

Send your name, address, and order to:
Labour Party Socialists (Poll Tax Badge), 11 Springfield Road, London N15 4AY.
Recommended Retail Price: 35p
Bulk Order rates:
Single badge: 35p
20 Badges: £6
50 Badges: £13
100 Badges: £23
200 Badges: £40
Please make cheques payable to Labour Party Socialists.
No orders dispatched without pre-payment!



# Riot Police!



**I was leaving Trafalgar Square, making for Charing Cross Station to go home.**

**It had been a fantastic march and rally, wholly good-natured and peaceful.**

Ringing in my ears were George Galloway's words from the plinth of Nelsons Column:

"With our self-discipline we've shown the country how to fight — with not a window broken, nor even a policemans helmet on the ground.

"Not violence — but a mass campaign of civil disobedience will smash this hated tax!"

On this issue, he had spoken for all of us. The whole vast rally had roared its assent.

And then the police riot began.

I only became aware of it when the ripples of panic and anger had reverberated up to where I was standing in the Strand.

I can see now that what to an outsider might have seemed like an "anarchist provocation" was nothing of the kind.

The explosion which followed was in fact the inevitable consequence of a police strategy of almost Ceaucescu-like insensitivity and incompetence.

Charing Cross Station was closed. Still wanting to get home, I tried another entrance. Closed. I stood in front of the station, wondering what to do.

I looked towards Trafalgar Square. Although steady streams were by now dispersing, the approach roads were still a sea of people and the square was packed.

To my utter amazement, I saw in the distance a column of yellow-coated mounted police charging at terrific speed right through what seemed to be the packed crowd, from St. Martins down towards Whitehall.

As it dawned on me what was now happening, I noticed groups of people running away past me as if for their lives, and then as I approached closer to the scene, I picked up a welling, rising sense of boiling fury all around me — terror combined with anger, solidarity and courage.

I am probably too old for street-fighting now. Out of instinctive solidarity, I wanted to be close to what was happening — but not too close!

There was a terrific crush at the end of the Strand, but I managed to get to South Africa House, and so as to get a better view climbed up the wall into a grilled window-frame, holding the grill for support.

Although I was in the Lewisham anti-fascist fighting of August 1977, what I saw from this vantage-point was like nothing I have ever seen.

When a whole, vast crowd of five or six thousand people shout rhythmically "Burn! Burn! Burn!" as an immense building goes up in flames...

When they all move forward as one body to obstruct the fire-engines which arrive to douse the blaze...

**By Chris Knight**
**Lewisham East CLP**

Then what is happening harbours the germs of something closer to insurrection than to what *Militant* have tried to stigmatise as the antics of a few unrepresentative anarchists.

We were bottled up, prevented from escaping or going home, driven by one frenzied mob of black-helmetted baton-wielders straight into the ranks of another mob, or else straight under the horses hooves.

But although the tactics of the riot police were utterly mad, not all the police were crazy.

During one panic crush to escape, I was pushed to the ground near a little wall and feared I would be trampled by the stampede behind me.

I fell onto a woman in front of me, who was quickly pulled clear by a policeman who then helped rescue me.

"What the fuck do they think they are doing?", the policeman was screaming, referring to his shield-and-baton wielding colleagues who were so evidently the cause of the rage and panic.

It was interesting to see how the crowd were in general not fighting the ordinary police but arguing with them, pleading with them — and shaming them.

On the issue of the Poll Tax, many police were quick to express sympathy. A few days of that kind of pressure under different, future, circumstances, I thought, and sections might even come over and join us!

## Semi-naked

It was not Timosoara, nor Bucharest. But those huge, burly, semi-naked and tatooed skinheads, punks, anarchists and others who fought so hard were surely aware of the possible parallels.

And they had the same kind of courage.

As they refused to be cowed, standing before the horses, ducking, weaving, surging back, thrusting forward literally to snatch individual brutes of riot police and hurl them to the ground, the hearts of the whole crowd went out to them.

I didn't hear or sense a single word of condemnation — even when 40 or so anarchists scaled the scaffolding of the old Grand Hotel and hailed missiles including a fire-extinguisher down onto the mounted police.

Indeed, the crowd applauded and egged them on, cheering especially when for quite some minutes the police abandoned South Africa House altogether in a panic rush to quit the scene.

In all this immense crowd — at 200,000 the biggest demonstration I have ever been on — mine usually seemed the only grey head in sight.

The generation-gap seemed poignant. These class-fighters belong to a wholly different tradition. No 1960s rhetoric. No tracts by Lenin, or manifestos by Trotsky. No subtle formulations.

They just know "We are the people!" know their enemy — and fight like hell.

"Ultra-leftist", yes: but if revolution is what we are fighting for, we'd better earn the trust of our own most courageous heroes first.

Then we can see if we can guide their anger in ways which don't end with the inhabitants of Cardboard City just solving their cash-flow problems by looting the nearest clothes or hamburger shops.

# Police provoke the aggro!



**We are single parents who went with our young children (under fives) to the Poll Tax demo in London.**

**We went to hear the speeches and to make our protest against the Poll Tax — but we were prevented from doing this by the police.**

Our day began at Duckett's Common in North London where we gathered with other Haringey protesters and took the tube to the Oval.

At Kennington Park we were separated from the rest of the Haringey contingent and ended up filing out of the park at about 2pm.

At this time there was no hint of trouble and everyone was in good spirits — a mood which continued until we crossed Westminster Bridge and passed the Houses of Parliament.

Along Whitehall the march was stopped — we couldn't tell why. While the crowd was confined to the right hand third of the road, the left two thirds were being patrolled by numerous mounted police and police vans.

An elderly man and woman ran back down Whitehall from Trafalgar Square, sobbing and shouting, "Don't take your children up there... they're beating everyone up."

We were told by a steward and a police officer that we were being held up by a sit-down blockading Downing Street.

Throughout this period lines of ten to 20 grinning police snaked their way in and out of the crowd; it seemed a deliberate attempt to provoke the crowd. At this point the police were met with booing and hissing but no one touched them.

Finally we advanced up Whitehall, past Downing Street (where nothing seemed to be happening at the time). We were told by police to get to the right and they seemed to be trying to reroute us away from Trafalgar Square.

**By Annie Baker**
**Hornsey Vale**
**Labour Party and**
**Janis Delani**

Suddenly the mounted police came out from the side streets, ranged themselves across Whitehall and split the crowd. People started running and we moved with our children on to a nearby grass verge.

The police horses cantered down the street and on to the verge, though the officers must have been aware that there were many children in this section of the crowd.

Luckily, we managed to escape with our children by running behind the back of a big building off Whitehall. A number of demonstrators found shelter here; all were wondering what the hell was going on.

We met a steward who told us to go to the Embankment (away from the police) and approach Trafalgar Square from there.

With others, we tried to do this but when we approached the Square via the Strand we found the entrance barricaded by police. We couldn't see what was going on in the Square but we could hear shouts and screaming.

By now the attitude of the police was intensely hostile and we all thought they might charge us at any moment.

From a nearby McDonalds, we watched 50 or 60 mounted police pour towards Trafalgar Square, followed later on by more horses and police vans, all driving like maniacs. We watched one of the vans back straight into the crowd.

An out-of-uniform ambulance worker entered McDonalds and asked if he could use the phone to call some ambulances to the scene. He said the police refused to call any.

We could not see any ambulances on the scene, though there were certainly many people injured. Under pressure from the crowd in the restaurant the manager eventually let the ambulance worker make the necessary calls.

We began to see smoke coming from a building to the left of South Africa House but couldn't tell exactly what was happening.

One of us went out to try to take pictures. The police clearing the road told her to clear off, grabbed her by the arm and pushed her in the chest.

All the demonstrators we spoke to, including a number of older people, agreed the police were out of hand. (Outside Mcdonalds an old woman kicked a police van and was loudly cheered by the whole crowd.)

We finally left McDonalds at about 6pm and walked away from Trafalgar Square, hoping to find a way back to Haringey. There were still lots of people in the area.

We tried to walk up St. Martin's Lane but the way was blocked by police. We cut through side streets to Covent Garden, where the tube entrances were all closed.

Continuing on to Holborn we realised there had been trouble here too. Many shop windows were smashed but there was no evidence of looting.

On the tube we found ourselves among many other demonstrators wearing anti-Poll Tax stickers, all looking stunned and sitting quietly as they returned home.

Our section of the march was a good mix of old and young, different political groups and backgrounds. It was completely peaceful and good-humoured — yet the police rode horses into it and prevented it from proceeding in an orderly way.

There was no excuse for this police action. We feel the whole thing was deliberately organised by the police in an attempt to destroy a peaceful protest.

The repeated police efforts to split and divert and disperse the crowd seemed to have only one purpose — provoking as much aggro as possible.

P.S. We were none too pleased when we finally got home with our children to find Tommy Sheridan, on behalf of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, condemning demonstrators but making no mention of the police actions.

Labour Party

# Benn speaks on Poll Tax protest

# "A Democratic Upsurge..."

**The Poll Tax is a naked case of the rich robbing the poor.**

Like the revolutions of 1789 and 1917 the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe have had major effects in other countries.

It is not surprising that one year after Tienanmen Square you should find 200,000 in Trafalgar Square.

What I see happening in Eastern Europe is a democratic upsurge; what I see happening in Britain is a democratic upsurge.

I don't think the people on the march felt marginalised. I think they felt in the ascendant.

There should now be a full and comprehensive public inquiry, chaired by a High Court judge, into the events which occurred after the demonstration.

Questions have been asked about the role of the police, as they were after the disturbances at Wapping.

Later the Northamptonshire police, which investigated these allegations, reported that some officers in the Metropolitan police had used unnecessary violence on that occasion.

During the miners' strike a police attempt to bring riot charges arising from clashes at Orgreave were dismissed by the court.

Only last week a man who had been serving a prison sentence for a murder allegedly committed during the Notting Hill carnival was released by the courts after it had been proved that he had been convicted on the basis of perjured evidence.

The Guildford Four have been released and there is now serious doubt as to whether the men convicted of murder after the Broadwater Farm disturbances received a fair trial.

The arguments for release of the Birmingham Six are growing stronger every day.

This time all the witnesses who were present at Saturday's demonstration should be able to come forward and describe, in their own words, what they saw.

This is the only way the public can learn exactly what occurred — and who was responsible.

*Tony Benn made the above remarks at a press conference at the House of Commons*

# Change in Tory strategy

# A golden opportunity for Labour

By JEREMY CORBYN MP

**The Poll Tax represents a change in Tory strategy.**

**Their previous legislation on local government, housing, health, social security and employment was designed to divide opposition.**

Their strategy on the unions was to prevent solidarity action.

Their social legislation aimed to divide the poor and create the image of a "scrounger class". Their housing laws aim to bolster the private rented market and entice Council tenants into the debt society.

In many ways their strategy has worked. United action against the Tories, save for the 1981-83 actions against unemployment and the Miners' Strike has been limited.

Action on unemployment fizzled out largely because the vital links between employed and unemployed were not developed.

The eventual failure of the Miners' Strike was not due to lack of support from grass-roots solidarity committees but lack of real industrial action by TUC affiliates.

The Poll Tax is different. This is a Tory law that affects 40 million people — and makes nearly all of them very angry.

For the labour movement it therefore represents a golden opportunity to mount mass resistance through demonstrations, marches, lobbies, and community mobilisation.

In Scotland the experience of huge civil disobedience has been effective — despite the media silence. The inspiration is seeping South of the border.

The Poll Tax has mobilised more people on the streets than any other issue in the last 20 years — more than jobs or peace.

It is clear from the massive public response that the introduction of the Tax is the beginning and not the end of our campaign.

Those who have participated in the demonstrations and have commited themselves to opposition will not go quietly home.

# Labour activists and the Poll Tax




# Fight the witch-hunt... *and* the Poll Tax!

**The witch-hunt against the left in the Labour Party is increasingly focussing on militant opponents of the Poll Tax.**

**The Tories are pushing hard for Kinnock to expel the 30 MPs who signed a Commons motion supporting non-payment.**

Dave Nellist and Terry Fields are both clearly in Kinnock's sights.

There is also talk of effectively proscribing the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation as a "*Militant* front".

This would mean that anyone associated with any of the local groups affiliated to the Federation could be picked out for the NCC treatment.

The Liverpool Councillors who voted against implementing the Poll Tax are obvious targets.

Tower Hamlets LGC has already modified the wording of its Borough Congress policy on non-prosecution of non-payers following intense pressure from Walworth Road, including a statement of intent to avoid suspension of the LGC and possible imposition of candidates.

The axe has already fallen on 11 Councilors in Haringey in North London.

Regular *Briefing* readers will be familiar with the long sordid saga of the LCC attacks on the left in Haringey, from the use of the police on anti-cuts protesters at the Civic Centre to the failed expulsion moves against Mandy Mudd and the ugly smear campaign against Martha Osamor.

Last month the Haringey Local Government Committee voted by a 3-1 majority to remove 11 left Councillors from the election panel and prevent any of them from standing for Labour in the coming local elections.

## Expulsion

Expulsion from the Group was also recommended.

The vindictiveness of the action is illustrated by the fact that three of the disciplined Councillors had already resigned from the Council and five others were not standing again in any case.

The LCC were quick to submit the cases against the remaining three — who would have stood if permitted — to the NEC (complete with inaccuracies about their voting records).

The NEC voted by 28-2 (Benn and Skinner) to uphold the LGC action.

By Mike Marqusee
Hornsey and Wood Green CLP

The crimes of the 11 were various but all centred on voting at the two Council meetings held in March to set a Poll Tax.

Though not all the 11 had voted against the Poll Tax on the final vote all had either voted for left-wing amendments on non-prosecution or had abstained on the Council leader's Poll Tax and budget proposals.

That was more than enough in the eyes of the philistine Kinnockites who now dominate the local Party.

Among those given the boot were Craig Brewin, Vince Gillespie, Kevin Hargreaves, Steve King, Pauline Crossan, Ron Blanchard, and Martha Osamor.

Martha had already been removed as a candidate at the previous LGC because of the allegations concerning her role in four voluntary groups in Tottenham — allegations largely invented by the discredited Dolly Kiffin and given credence and currency by the Council's Labour leadership.

Speaking at the second LGC Martha stressed the importance of "the voices of dissent" in the Labour Party — the very voices which first attracted her and many like her to the Party.

Speaking at Hornsey and Wood Green GC a week later Council leader Toby Harris disagreed. He stated categorically that "there is no room for dissent in the Labour Party."

Harris and his friends do not seem to realise that the likely Labour victory in the May elections will owe more to the vigorous and independent local anti-Poll Tax campaign than to any of the cuts and political casualties that have characterised their regime.

Indeed, across the country, it is a case of the anti-Poll Tax movement shaking the tree and Labour collecting the apples.

This is, of course, one very strong argument for joining the Labour Party and fighting within it for socialist policies and leadership. However, it is not surprising that many anti-Poll Tax activists do not see it that way.

The best way to deal with this is to forge ahead with the non-payment campaign, clearly identifying ourselves as Labour Party members who will not pay the Poll Tax.

We have to do our best to turn the May elections into referenda on the Poll Tax. Our windows should be filled with *both* Labour and non-payment posters.

Where possible, we should hold local public meetings on the theme of "Labour, the elections and the Poll Tax" and build them within the local anti-Poll Tax movement.

These meetings can address the thorny question of the relationship between the anti-Poll Tax movement and the Labour Party and argue clearly for both non-payment *and* a Labour vote.

Public statements by Labour candidates pledging not to pay and to support all others who cannot or will not pay would be a boost both to the local anti-Poll Tax campaigns and to Labour's electoral fortunes.

Of course, activity of this sort runs the very real risk of inviting the wrath of the witch-hunters — something we in Haringey have learned not to take lightly.

**But the only effective response to this pressure is to resist it.**

In the past the *Militant* have let too many of their own supporters be chucked out without raising a hue and cry — and building the broad support — which could make the price of witch-hunting too high for Walworth Road to proceed.

The anti-Poll Tax demos (and especially the enthusiastic reception given to Tony Benn at the Trafalgar Square rally) show that socialists in the Labour Party now have a vast potential audience.

The threats from the Party's self-appointed inquisitors can only be seen off by concerted defiance linking our struggle inside the Party with the struggle of millions outside it against the Poll Tax.

That is our real strength — one which the quislings in our ranks will never understand but which will yet be their undoing.

# Lambeth

# Council sets huge Tax

**On 29th March, Lambeth Council voted through the £547 Poll Tax level proposed by the Joan Twelves leadership.**

**Nine Councillors supported a motion refusing to set a Poll Tax or to make cuts.**

However, six of them voted in the end to to set the massive tax. Only Cllrs Alison Higgs and Rachel Webb and myself voted consistently against implementation.

Lambeth Against the Poll Tax activists were amazed to see Joan Twelves addressing the national rally in Trafalgar Square less than 48 hours after passing on this massive attack to the people of Lambeth.

Lambeth Council's budget is allegedly a "no-cuts budget", but millions of pounds have been lopped off estimates to meet cash limits on spending.

By Steve French
Lambeth Councillor

The All Britain Federation should form a Councillors Against the Poll Tax wing, led by those Councillors who have unequivocally opposed the introduction of the Poll Tax.

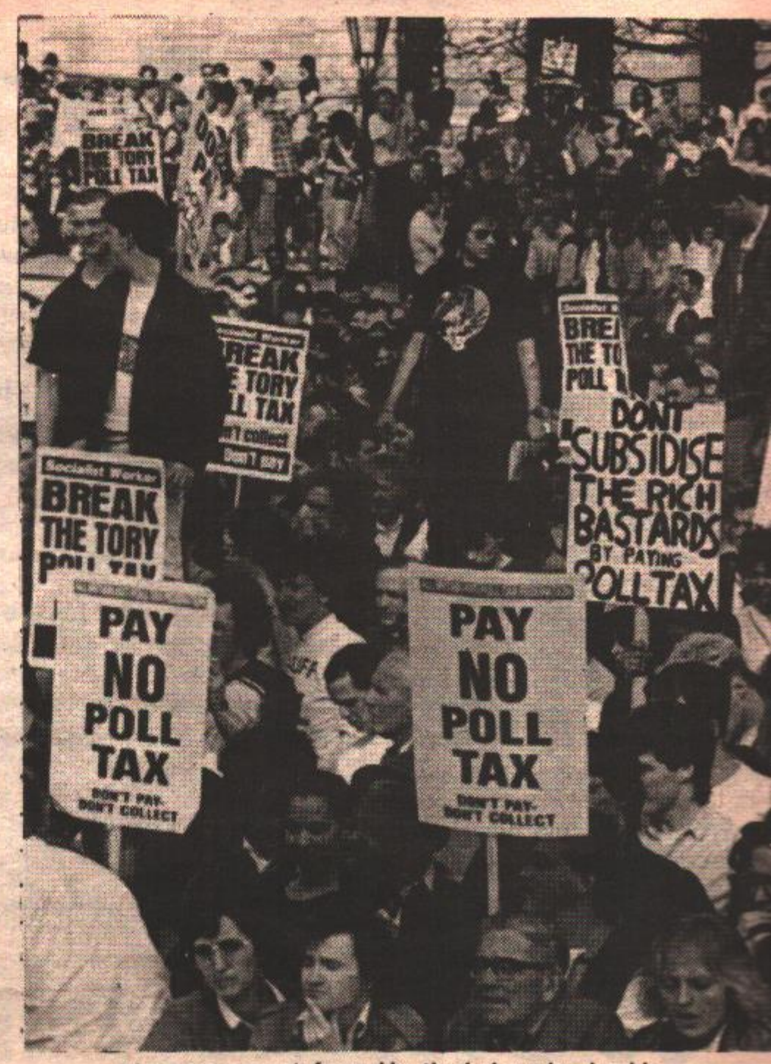
At the lobby outside Lambeth's Poll Tax setting meeting, a speaker from Romania brought greetings and encouraged our fight against the Poll Tax.

Many speakers stressed the need for trade union action.

With Lambeth facing Poll Tax capping, we must continue to demand "No Cuts, No Poll Tax!".

## What will the left do in the General Election?

# Why we need a Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory



*Mass movement: feared by the Labour leadership.*

**Labour's massive lead in the opinion polls and spectacular victory in mid-Staffs have raised a vital difficult question.**

By Pete Firmin
Brent East CLP

**What will the left say (and do) when the General Election comes.**

The Tories are stumbling from crisis to crisis and losing support hand over fist, principally among the better-off sections of the working class whom they nurtured in the past.

Yet Kinnock and the Labour Party, the big gainers from this Tory crisis, have been content to remain merely passive recipients of this new support.

Kinnock and his Shadow Cabinet have become obsessed with refusing to give any commitments as to what the next Labour government will actually do.

The 1987 election campaign was bland, with its Kinnock videos and abuse of policy.

However, the style of the mid-Staffs "campaign", masterminded from Walworth Road, indicates that the leadership intends to way outdo its earlier "effort" in this vein come the next General Election.

What policies Labour has are a pale imitation of the Tories:

- no commitment to renationalisation of privatised industries;
- no wholesale repeal of the anti-union laws;
- two years to replace the Poll Tax by a vague new system;
- refusal to restore cuts in the NHS and local government funding, etc.

Kinnock has also bent over backwards to avoid any identification with even the most popular of anti-Tory struggles, such as around the ambulance workers or the Poll Tax.

Indeed, Kinnock and the front bench called only for arbitration in the ambulance workers' struggle and are now calling on everyone to pay the Poll Tax and "vote it out" at the next election.

Kinnock is concerned that he is seen as an "acceptable" (to the ruling class) alternative to the Tories, a "responsible" (to capitalism) potential Prime Minister.

He wants to do nothing to endanger that. But ironically the more he refuses to support any fight against the Tories the less likely he is to win an election.

It is not impossible that the Tories will recover from their present position. The way to prevent this is to put the boot in *now*.

If the Labour Party (and TUC) were to throw their weight behind the anti-Poll Tax fight it would ensure not only the defeat of the Tax but also, quite probably, the collapse of the government.

But Kinnock believes that if he is to manage capitalism the last thing he needs is any anti-Tory struggle which cuts across this aim and increases working class expectations of a Labour government.

So concerned is Kinnock with being respectable that, at the height of Tory unpopularity, he refuses even to demand that Thatcher call a General Election (something Harold Wilson had no trouble doing).

He restricts himself to saying the Tories should ditch Thatcher. You almost expect him to submit the nomination papers for Heseltine!

But however much Kinnock may wish to remain simply the passive beneficiary of growing anti-Toryism, the Tory crisis actually *encourages* the type of struggle from which he wants to distance the Labour Party.

If millions of people don't pay the Poll Tax Kinnock's "pay up and vote Labour" policy will come under immense pressure, despite the stepping up of the witch-hunt against anti-Poll Tax campaigners.

### Labour

And whatever Kinnock does, if Labour wins the General Election it will do so on a tide of rising working class expectations and demands.

These will include demands to do precisely those things which Kinnock has committed himself not to do, not least immediate repeal of the Poll Tax.

These expectations would come into direct conflict with Kinnock's programme of making the working class pay for capitalism's crisis. How soon and what form such conflict would take can't be predicted.

But it will, inevitably, come to be reflected in an inner-Party battle, just as trade union opposition to the wage controls of the Wilson and Callaghan governments did.

As with the Wilson-Callaghan governments, a failed Kinnock government would probably cause a move *further to the right* amongst ruling class policy-makers.

The ruling class looks to Labour as a second choice party of government which can restrain the working class through periods of Tory unpopularity.

The ultimate inability of Wilson and Callaghan to perform this task led the Tories to adopt a much more confrontational approach (represented by Thatcher) than before.

The failure of a Kinnock government could well lead to an even more oppressive Tory regime than the present one. It would also lead to demoralisation and confusion amongst the working class.

Millions of working class people would see the defeat of Thatcher by Labour as a great victory and a chance to turn around the attacks they have suffered over the last 11 years.

What are socialists to do in this situation?

Clearly we cannot turn our backs on this feeling, fold our arms and say "electing Kinnock is no solution." We have to put our efforts behind getting Labour elected.

But equally to throw our weight behind the Kinnock bandwagon and campaign simply on the basis of his non-policies would be to neglect our responsibility to explain the problems these will create.

It would also neglect our responsibility to begin *now* to organise opposition to them.

We need a "Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory" which, while calling for a Labour vote, will oppose any de-mobilisation of struggles justified by the "don't rock the boat" line.

On the contrary, we should call for a fight to force the Party (and potential next government) to adopt and carry out clear policies in the interests of the working class and the oppressed.

Repeal of the Poll Tax and anti-union laws, proper funding for a free, adequate NHS, British withdrawal from Ireland, no incomes policy, nationalisation under workers' control of leading companies are a few of the most obvious requirements.

Previous attempts have been made to organise such campaigns around the General Elections of 1979, 83 and 87.

Those of 83 and 87 were too little and too late, with no serious attempt to involve the wider forces neccessary for such a campaign to have a real impact.

The best aspects of the SCLV of 1979, however, can serve as a model.

Initiated well in advance of the calling of the General Election, SCLV obtained wide sponsorship from Councillors, MPs, CLPs, etc., and produced a paper, *Socialist Organiser* (only later the paper of one particular tendency).

It produced leaflets around specific issues which it offered to CLPs to use in their election campaigns.

Which precise aspects of can be repeated (and improv we can only discover by star the groundwork for such a c paign *now*. If we leave it until Election is called, nothi worthwhile will get off ground.

The choice for the left is sim Do we keep our heads down even worse, do *nothing* in General Election) or do we attempt to intervene independe around left policies?

In doing so we can link up those fighting the Tories, aro the Poll Tax, a Woman's Righ Choose, Irish self-determinati and those on strike facing the a union laws.

In this way we can lay the b for an organisation which fight the inevitable capitulatio a Kinnock government.

The Labour Party Socialis conference on May 19th/20th fers the opportunity to begin vital work.

## Labour Party Socialists

# The future of socialism

**Socialists in the Labour Party know that the world is changing.**

By Bryn Griffiths
Tottenham CLP

**The momentous events in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and Southern Africa are creating a new international climate in which it will be easier to argue for peace, internationalism and economic co-operation.**

But the Labour Party is out of step. The Policy Review removed key policies on the economy and peace.

Each day the Party looks more elitist, authoritarian and out of touch with grass roots opinion. Party membership and activity is on the decline.

The LPS Conference on *The Future of Socialism in the Labour Party* is organised by Labour Party members for fellow socialists in the Party.

*Briefing* supporters should be organising *now* to achieve the greatest possible attendance and support for the Conference. In Haringey and Coventry prominent local Party members are writing an open letter appealing to people to attend.

It is also important to get sponsorship from local Constituency and Branch Labour Parties.

In Birmingham the local government based Summerfield Group has agreed to sponso: the Conference and the North West Campaign Group has been closely involved in the Conference organising committee.

The Party witch-hunters are turning their attention to Poll Tax refuseniks, and in Haringey and Brighton local Councillors are being threatened with expulsion from local Labour Groups for refusing to vote for the Poll Tax.

Those committed to non-payment should be encouraged to come to the Conference, which will be making the Poll Tax campaign and the witch-hunt a major theme.

The three main themes of the Conference will be:

- Policies for the Next Decade;
- Democracy for the Party;
- Campaigning for Socialism.

For further information or speakers on the Conference, call Bryn Griffiths on 01-801 6041.

**Labour Party Socialists**

**Conference**

**The future of Socialism in the Labour Party**

**May 19th and 20th**

**Sheffield Poly, Pond Street**

**(opposite BR station)**

**Registration from 10am Saturday**

**Conference:**

**11am-5pm Saturday; 10am-2.30pm Sunday**

**Registration:**

**Delegates from Organisations: £10 each**

**Individuals: £6 (waged); £3 (unwaged)**

**For further details, contact:**
***LPS, PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UD.***

Special Feature: Education

## Socialist Movement

# A radical alternative to the Tories!

**At a time when Labour Party policy on education is adapting to the Tory agenda it is essential that socialists provide an alternative.**

The monthly meetings of the Education Working Group of the Socialist Movement have brought together a range of people involved in the politics of education, including *Briefing* supporters and members of the Socialist Teachers' Alliance.

We have been drawing up a comprehensive policy document, a radical alternative to Tory policies around which support can be mobilised in the labour movement.

**By Richard Hatcher Socialist Movement Education Working Group**

Alternative policies are, of course, only half the story. We also want the Socialist Movement to begin to campaign around issues of education cuts, Local Management of Schools, sexism, racism and heterosexism — all issues where public concern can lead to action.

That means getting involved in local struggles and linking up with other organisations already active on education issues, such as Black Sections and left groupings in the unions such as the STA and the Socialist Lecturers' Alliance.

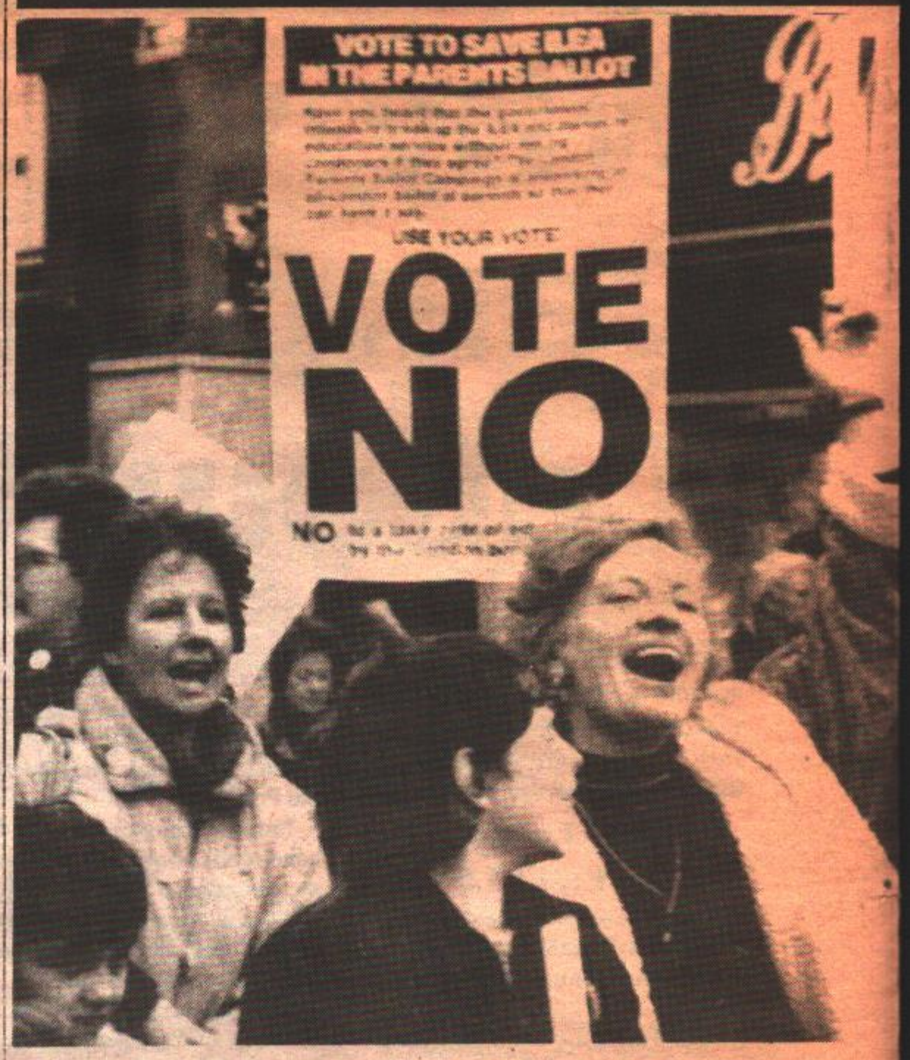
We also have to strengthen links *within* the Socialist Movement — for example, with the work that Women for Socialism are doing on education — and develop the education dimension of issues such as ecology and democratic rights.

On September 22nd the Education Group will be holding a working conference in Nottingham, drawing in people from outside the Group to discuss and finalise a policy document and plans for action to be fed into the Socialist Movement as a whole.

The Socialist Movement Education Working Group can be contacted through:

**Paula Allman, Dept of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD.**

## NUT




*Parents on the march: now the STA must fight for the adoption of a popular alter*

## Women for Socialism

# Women and education

**Is it surprising that the Tory attacks on education appear to have won a large degree of passive acceptance?**

**No, it is not: the ideas behind the post-war education system were never argued for.**

Parents' meetings were needed in all schools to explain and popularise mixed ability teaching — let alone "Why comprehensives?" or "Why Positive Images?"

It is therefore difficult to raise campaigns to defend post-war education from attack.

**By Jan Pollock Women and Education Group**

Parents and students know from experience that it is a system which is biased on grounds of class, race, gender and sexuality. It is hard to defend enthusiastically an institution which lets most people down.

But a campaign to defend education, whilst trying to develop a system which can defend the interests of the working class and the oppressed, is certainly more attractive.

Whilst the Labour Party and TUC have accepted the Tory agenda for education, some groups, such as Women Against Fundamentalism, understand the need to develop an alternative.

The Women and Education policy group grew from a day-school held by Women for Socialism in October 1989.

Caroline Benn and Women Against Fundamentalism introduced the discussion on what it means not only to defend state education against Tory attacks, but also to look beyond to a socialist and feminist perspective.

The day-school brought together trade unionists, women's group activists, students, teachers from all sectors of education.



*Equal opportunities at work?*

parents and school governors.

The Women and Education group has continued the work begun at the day-school, where women saw the need for a socialist-feminist education policy statement and the development of wider strategies.

Meanwhile, Tory attacks are placing even more obstacles in the way of women getting an education, in every sector from pre-school to degree level.

For example, despite propaganda about offering women more access to education, places in polytechnic creches, which enable women with young children to study, are being squeezed.

Some polytechnics are charging huge increases in creche prices to mothers — who will now have to study on the basis of a loan rather than a grant.

*So much for equal opportunities!*

In order to develop policy which can be democratically discussed and taken up by the Socialist Movement by the end of the year, the Women and Education group has planned a series of meetings to develop ideas from the day-school into policy.

Issues range from sexual harrassment to the structure of education, and from religion to resources and the curriculum.

These questions are becoming even more urgent. For example, a Bradford school is being taken to court for not imposing Christian worship on its pupils, as the Education Reform Act says it must.

At the same time, Local Management of Schools is leading to LEA Advisers on anti-racist and anti-sexist education being cut.

The severe cuts which many schools will face under LMS is favouring the employment of inexperienced male teachers, who are less costly than women who may need maternity leave.

Equal opportunities policies of LEAs are carrying less and less weight, and can now only be advisory. Jobs are being lost and protected status ended.

The Tory attacks are deep and wide-ranging, touching every aspect of education. *It is urgent to start campaigning against them and for socialist alternatives now!*

# Left on th move

**The NUT leadership is dominated by a "Broad Left" grouping which makes up some two-thirds of the National Executive.**

**It is an unholy alliance of Stalinists, Euro Communists and Labour right-wingers, which has never challenged NUT General Secretary Doug McAvoy's new direction for the union.**

McAvoy has been leading a drive to destroy the NUT as an effective trade union and turn it towards being a "professional association" providing legal advice and insurance benefits to the members and distancing itself from all talk of industrial action.

The Broad Left are now collaborating in this turn, and offered no serious opposition to the imposition of the 1990 pay award which threatens the national pay scales of teachers, as well as giving many teachers a real pay cut.

The NUT National Executive has spent almost £1 million on an advertising campaign in the national press and has dissociated itself from the ballot by the NAS/UWT, the other TUC affiliated teachers' union, for a one-day strike.

Instead, the NUT preferred to form an alliance with the scab union the Professional Association of Teachers and the Heads' Associations — a strategy which the Broad Left will have to defend at the NUT's Conference in Bournemouth.

It is to be hoped that they will also suffer losses in the current elections for the NEC, where the Socialist Teachers' Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic Fighting Union have stood candidates in most areas.

**By Martin Allen Socialist Teachers' Alliance**

The left has held its ground in the difficult period since the end of the two year campaign of action over pay in 1986. They have still been able to mobilise large votes in elections and at Conference, and organise action around specific issues and in solidarity with other workers.

This has been at a time when morale amongst teachers has been at its lowest, as a result of low pay and increasing workloads, and when the leadership have not hesitated about witch-hunting the left.

In addition to salaries, the left will be going on the attack on issues such as:

- conditions of service and Local Management of Schools, where the left will be leading demands for action rather than just glossy publicity;
- the "Licensed Teachers" scheme (this way of undercutting current salary levels must be opposed);
- demanding the Union supports the Anti-Poll Tax Campaigns and non-payment.

The STA has always argued that any campaign against the Education Reform Act, and particularly the National Curriculum, must involve alternative notions of what should be taught.

They have had some success at winning this argument within the Union, and will again be campaigning on this and the need for non-compliance with parts of the

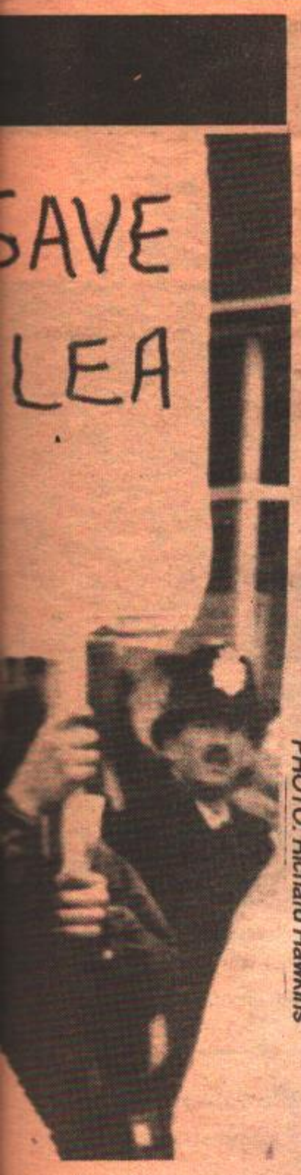



PHOTO: Richard Hawkins

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## Women, race and religious education

# Campaigning for secular education

**Women Against Fundamentalism was born in the wake of the Rushdie Affair.**

**It was an attempt to provide a voice for women silenced by male community leaders claiming to speak for all.**

We are opposed to the demand for state-subsidised muslim schools, on the grounds that they would restrict the life chances and narrow the horizons of Asian girls.

Religious leaders see girls only as future wives and mothers, with the main responsibility for transmitting "traditional" values.

We believe that to educate girls in this way is contrary to equal opportunities — girls should have the same opportunity to choose a career and control their lives, as boys do.

It is not enough simply to oppose muslim schools. Christianity in its various forms is privileged in this country — especially in education.

Muslims have the right to expect the same treatment as other religions. Tory attempts to re-impose christian worship on state schools only strengthens minority communities demands for separate schools.

The Rushdie Affair has provided an opportunity to argue for a secular state in Britain, as the precondition for a pluralist, non-racist society.

That means the abolition of the blasphemy laws, and, most importantly, the creation of a secular state education system.

**By Clara Connolly**
**Women Against Fundamentalism**

The voluntary-aided status of religious schools should be abolished, and state subsidies to such schools phased out. The clauses in the Education Reform Act which enforce religious worship on state-schools should be withdrawn.

This is a bold step that the Tories certainly will not contemplate. But if the teachers unions took a strong position on the issue, a future Labour Government might provide the *only progressive answer* to the demands of muslims and others for separate schools.

Secularism, however, is only a pre-condition of racial harmony, it does not in itself produce it.

Even if there were no religious schools, there would still be a strong temptation for different ethnic minority communities to retreat into a dispairing separatism.

This is because of the perceived inability of mainstream schools and teachers to protect Black children against racism, or to provide them with the dignity and self-respect needed for real learning.

### Identity

Racism is the hidden agenda behind the debate about religous schools.

British Asians — the main focus of virulent racism in playgrounds and housing estates — are finding the adoption of a religious identity more resonant in the present climate than a racial one.

The multicultural consensus, which prizes "cultural diversity" and ignores racial inequality, encourages such forms of organising.

Black women have most to lose — caught between religious fundamentalism on the one side and the indifference of "tolerant" white liberation on the other.

### Minorities

A secular position, if it is strongly linked with an anti-racist one, is capable of winning allies among ethnic minorities, particularly among Black women.

A comprehensive system that is genuinely striving to offer equal opportunities to all its pupils — boys and girls, white and black — is a far more attractive option than a plethora of separate religious schools.

To achieve this, teachers need support and resources, and the will to change.

An active Black parents and students movement, supported by and supporting the schools, is the best guarantee of that.

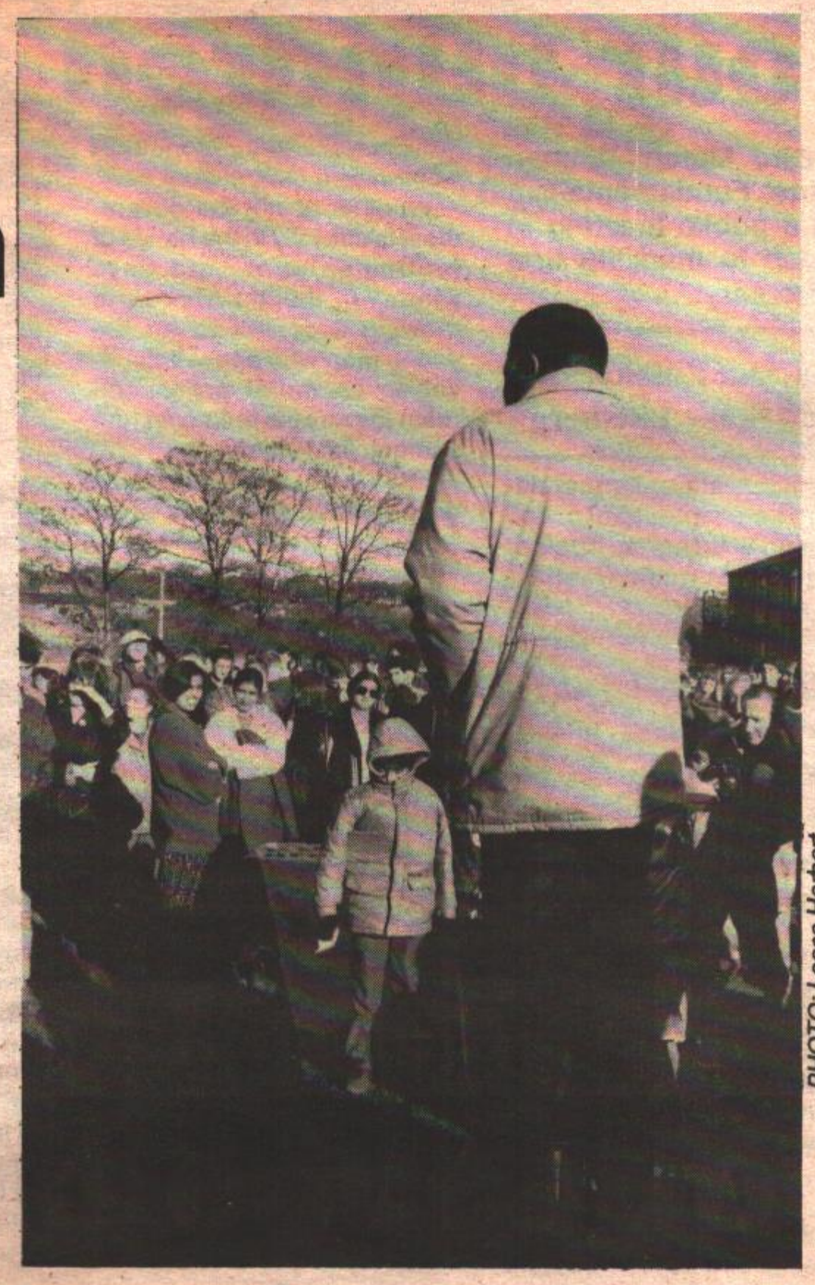


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

*Dewsbury, October 1988: British Asians rally against racism in education.*

***To contact Women Against Fundamentalism, call Southall Black Sisters on 01 571 9595.***

## Higher Education

# Crisis? You ain't seen nothing yet!

**Thatcher and Baker's dreams of a reformed, industry-friendly and business-like Higher Education system are rapidly turning into a nightmare.**

**"Top Up Loans" — ludicrously proclaimed as increasing access to education — are running into trouble.**

The outrageous Bill takes away students' right to sign on in the summer, claim any Housing Benefit, giving them a loan instead. It also gives massive discretionary powers to the Minister for Education.

However the House of Lords — responding to student pressure and the government's general unpopularity — has thrown out the Housing Benefit cut and rejected the massive powers it gives to the Education Minister.

This follows hard on the heels of the banks pulling out of the system.

It is now a very real possibility that the Bill will run out of time or be defeated altogether.

The new systems for funding universities and polytechnics are running into deep trouble. The new committees which administer their funding — the Universities Funding Council and Polytechnic Central Funding Council — have adopted a *laissez-faire* approach.

**By Alistair Chisholm**
**General Secretary,**
**NUS London**

One Poly director is reported to have been recently told by a very senior PCFC member:

"Planning? Planning is out. If you can make a profit out of it, do it."

The poly directors have issued a joint statement bitterly complaining about their funding crisis and stating that they can not guarantee the quality of their courses.

The same pressures are at work in universities. For example, London University is up to its neck in debt, and is even considering imposing "Top-Up Fees" on its students to bail itself out.

Britain is undoubtedly in a mess when it comes to training its labour force — producing only one third of the graduates that its major competititors do.

Thatcher's "get rich quick" approach to the problem, by cutting-back and hoping private industry will fill the gap, is not working.

The second prong of Thatcher and Baker's plan is in direct contradiction to the first. Colleges are supposed to respond to the demands of industry, and also to the demands of students!

The idea is that colleges get less money centrally, with further grants dependent on student numbers (tripling home fees this year). Thus institutions have to "compete in the market place."

First, students do not want to do the courses which industrialists want them to do. For example, English Literature MAs are oversubscribed by a factor of three, while Engineering courses are often unable to fill places despite financial incentives from the government.



*Thatcher: from dream to nightmare*

Second, this new approach means that institutions have to pack more and more students into the same buildings.

Course quality is going out of the window, student homelessness is going through the roof, and the quality of student services is dropping through the floor. Last year hundreds of students were forced to sleep on floors, in portakabins etc.

The fact is that Student Loans, no matter how they are dressed up, will not increase access into education. Capital from private industry can not substitute for a proper funding. And you cannot marry the demands of industry with the needs of students.

This mass of contradictions, which are already opening-up, promise to throw Higher Education and the Tories into a deeper and deeper mess.

The task for socialists is to understand this, to be prepared with our alternative and to arm ourselves to defend education.

The Women's Page

## Women Against Fundamentalism

# Four hundred at anniversary meeting

**On 23rd March, Women Against Fundamentalism held a public meeting in London to mark its first anniversary.**

By Ann Rossiter and Spike Pittsberg

**An international panel addressed the topic of "Women's Struggle Against Religious Fundamentalism Across the World."**

**"During the bombardment of one of the Iranian towns by the Iraqi airforce a public bath was destroyed and the Islamic officials decided not to save women from the rubble because the ideology forbids men from seeing women's bodies."**

***(Opening speech by Iranian speaker)***

Over 400 women from ethnic groups in England crowded into the hall to hear reports about women in countries where fundamentalist power is on the rise.

Many identical points were raised by the panel: fundamentalism is foremost a political movement with the control of women as a central goal.

Whether or not the government is officially in the hands of fundamentalist parties, wherever the movement is growing it seems to be the young men who appoint themselves as moral police and roam the streets enforcing fundamentalist values.

From Iran to India to Azerbijan, women are harassed for wearing pants or make-up, or for leaving the home unaccompanied by a male relative.

In many countries women have no right to divorce, and are often forced into marriage as children. Their testimony is invalid in courts of law and they are forbidden secular education.

Atrocities against women were reported: female circumcision in Africa; the stoning to death of supposed adulterers, lesbians and prostitutes in Iran; and rape leading to forced marriage to the rapist in Pakistan.

A victim of the latter, Rabia Janjua, addressed the meeting, giving a moving account of her life (see box).

### Member

Effua Graham, a member of "Forward", made the connection between christian fundamentalism and colonialism.

The USA Mormon Church, infamous for its racist doctrines, is now preaching heavily amongst unemployed African immigrants in Britain, and in Africa itself.

Dr Nira Yuval-Davis raised the issue of women's large-scale participation in fundamentalist movements, and proposed an explanation based on her knowledge of religious Jewish women in Israel, who gain a sense of security, identity, and empowerment.

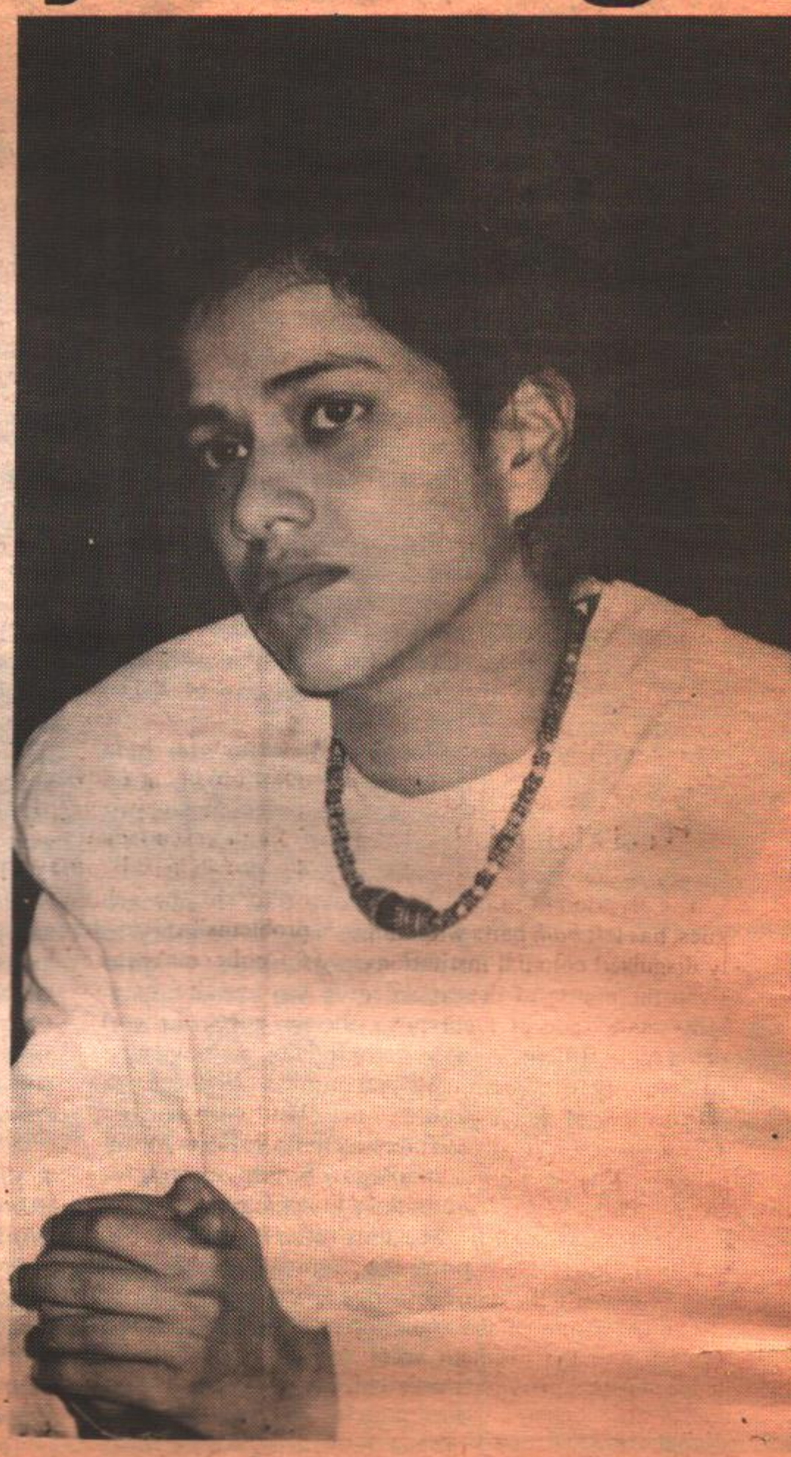
National Abortion Campaigner Leonara Lloyd pointed to the international links amongst anti-abortion movements, a point reinforced by the Bangladeshi and Iranian speakers.

Leonara warned that the 1985 Amendment on abortion to the Irish Constitution is now being taken as a model by the anti-choice USA movement. This amendment added foetal civil rights to a law which already absolutely prohibited abortion.

In a report on the growing Hindu fundamentalism in India, Gita Sahgal pointed out the financial interconnections between immigrant Hindu communities around the world.

Women from the audience raised the lack of gender analysis regarding fundamentalism among progressive male colleagues from their communities. At the end of the meeting it was clear that a strong sense of solidarity had been formed.

**To join Women for Socialism, or for further information, write to: Ruth Clarke, 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY.**



*Gita Sahgal addresses a Haringey meeting on the Rushdie case last yea*

***Women Against Fundamentalism can be contacted at BM Box 2706, London WC1N 3XX.***

## Pornography and censorship

# Off the shelf!

**Pornography is in the news at the moment.**

By Dorothy Macedo

**The Campaign against Pornography (CAP) is running its "Off the Shelf" campaign with the aim of getting WH Smiths to stop displaying and selling "top shelf" magazines.**

This was launched last November with support from the National Union of Students and Clare Short MP.

Dawn Primarolo MP has introduced the Bill of Location of Pornographic Materials in Parliament which would limit the sale of pornography (in print or on video) to outlets licensed by Local Authorities.

True to form, the left has got itself in a tangle about this.

The "Off the Shelf" campaign claims that there are direct links between porn and violence against women. Critics say there is no proof of this.

Another argument is that other images of women, such as those in advertising, are degrading, and campaigns which ignore this imply these images are not also offensive.

The SWP criticises CAP for involving Tory women. It is pointed out that repressive regimes ban porn, that we will find ourselves on the same side as Mary Whitehouse, and the main attack is the call for censorship.

### Censorship

It is argued that we should oppose all censorship on principle; in particular we can have no confidence in the law being used to protect women — laws against porn will only be used against lesbian and gay literature.

So why do I think socialists should support these campaigns? I do not know if it is possible to "prove" a link between porn and violence against women. But is that the point?

### Porn

The reason these campaigns have struck a chord with so many women is the outrage felt at being confronted with porn even in "family" shops like W H Smiths.

Of course many other images of women are offensive — but we have to start somewhere! It is much easier to fight for a specific aim that women see as achievable than to make a generalised demand that does not provide a focus for action.

What about the way these campaigns have emphasised their cross-party support? This would be a problem if feminists were expected to keep a low profile in the interests of "unity", but I haven't heard any instances of this.

We should always reserve the right to criticise any aspect of a campaign we take part in. Personally I welcome the chance to debate with a wider range of women than those who get involved with the usual campaigns.

It is important to emphasise how our objections to porn differ from those of the anti-sex brigade.

### Ireland

Sexually explicit material is banned in Ireland, for example — but not for fear of offending women! It is banned because religious bigots want to suppress any openness about sexuality.

The arguments about censorship are complex. I hope people will note that neither "Off the Shelf" nor Dawn Primarolo's Bill seeks to prevent the production or sale of porn. They aim to control its sale.

Can we expect the law to be progressive? I do not suppose that many of us expect Health and Safety legislation to create perfect working conditions, or to interfere seriously with employers' desire to maximise profits. But that does not stop us demanding the introduction and enforcement of such laws.

Dawn Primarolo's Bill would give the job of administering the law to Local Authorities, specifically because of the appalling way the police have administered obscenity laws in the past.

### Smiths

Even more effective, of course, is a mass campaign. If thousands of women complained to W H Smiths about porn, ways would soon be found to remove it! Legislation would be irrelevant.

The reaction of many men to the current campaigns has been depressing if predictable. One wrote to the *Guardian* Women's Page comparing anti-porn activists to Nazi book-burners! A man with disabilities complained that he needed porn, how dare women interfere?

Men seem to have no problems saying what they want, or ignoring women's demands. But too many women still seem to feel the need to apologise for asking for anything.

I believe we should support any initiative which encourages women to realise that they have the power to change their lives. Isn't that what socialism is all about?

## Defend Rabia Janjua!

**Rabia Janjua is facing removal from Britain, where she has lived with her violent husband for five years, since he brought her into the UK under the false pretence of a visitor's visa.**

**Upon leaving the hospital after his latest attack, she sought a restraint order against him. He reported her to the Home Office.**

**Despite a vigorous campaign backed by the Southall Black Sisters, Home Secretary David Waddington has refused to reconsider her case. If Rabia is sent back to Pakistan, she will face either death by stoning or up to 10 years of imprisonment and 30 lashes.**

**The campaign seeks to establish for Ms Janjua the right to political asylum.**

**For further information, contact Southall Black Sisters on 01-571 9595.**

## Labour Women's Conference

**It seems that one of the consequences of changing the structure of Labour Party Womens Conference has been that Conference Arrangements Committee is determined to make sure that the agenda itself is policed.**

To my knowledge two resolutions have been ruled out of order on the spurious grounds that they are on more than one subject — from York Women's Council on quotas and proportional representation and from Hornsey and Wood Green Women's Section on secular education.

Presumably, on this criterion, any resolution that argues that there is a connection between two issues, or that subjects cannot be dealt with in isolation will be similarly excluded. Perhaps any mention of socialism and feminism in the same resolution will offend against the rules of Neil's puppets.

Nor does it seem accidental that the two resolutions that we know have been dealt with in this high-handed manner raise matters than the leadership wants to duck.

The whole issue of PR itself is a hot-potato for Walworth Rd — never mind the debates that have gone on within the Scottish Consitutional Convention about multi-member constituencies and positive action.

As for the sophisticated understanding of the relationship between fundamentalism, relgion racism and sexism put forward in the *Women Against Fundamentalism* model resolution submitted by Hornsey — this sort of nonsense certainly can't be heard in Kinnock's Labour Party of sweetness and light.

Presumably only Women's Conference itself can overturn these outrageous decisions (and any others that have escaped our notice).

Womens' Sections, Womens' Councils, GCs, and especially affiliated trade unions should send letters of protest to Conference Arrangments Committee and to the NEC (Please send copies to *Briefing* aswell).

But sisters should also be prepared to refer back the agenda at the begining of conference and demand that the debates be heard.

***Terry Conway*** **Islington North CLP**

## PAMPHLET REVIEW

# Ireland's colonial heritage

***Ireland between the first and third worlds*, By Carol Coulter, *Attic Press*, Dublin, £2.50**

**Politicians often refer to Anglo-Irish relations as a loveless marriage that has sadly broken down.**

**But, argues Carol Coulter in this interesting pamphlet, a more appropriate image is that of kidnap and multiple rape.**

Coulter, a longstanding Irish socialist, suggests that any discussion of Irish politics must start from the experience of colonialism and imperialism. She traces the roots of the socialist, nationalist and feminist struggle against this oppression.

**By Mike Phipps Woolwich CLP**

The partition of Ireland, she argues, has left *both* parts with thinly disguised colonial institutions. Even the courts of the so-called "free state" accept legal precedents set in Britain.

Certainly the patronage and corruption of Irish politics is reminiscent more of clientelist relationships in Latin America than anything in the "first world".

The early instability of the southern state, claims Coulter, was only partially overcome by the huge efforts of the Catholic Church and the ultimate acceptance of partition by Fianna Fail in the 1930s.

Coulter's thesis is that attempts to find a West European identity for Ireland have no historical basis.

Ireland has more in common with Eastern Europe and Latin America in the way it embodies inherited colonial structures.

Disillusionment with institutional politics remains widespread to this day. But this has a positive side too — a contempt for the state, its laws and elections, and a recognition that real changes are the result of pressure exerted on the government — including that of the masses.

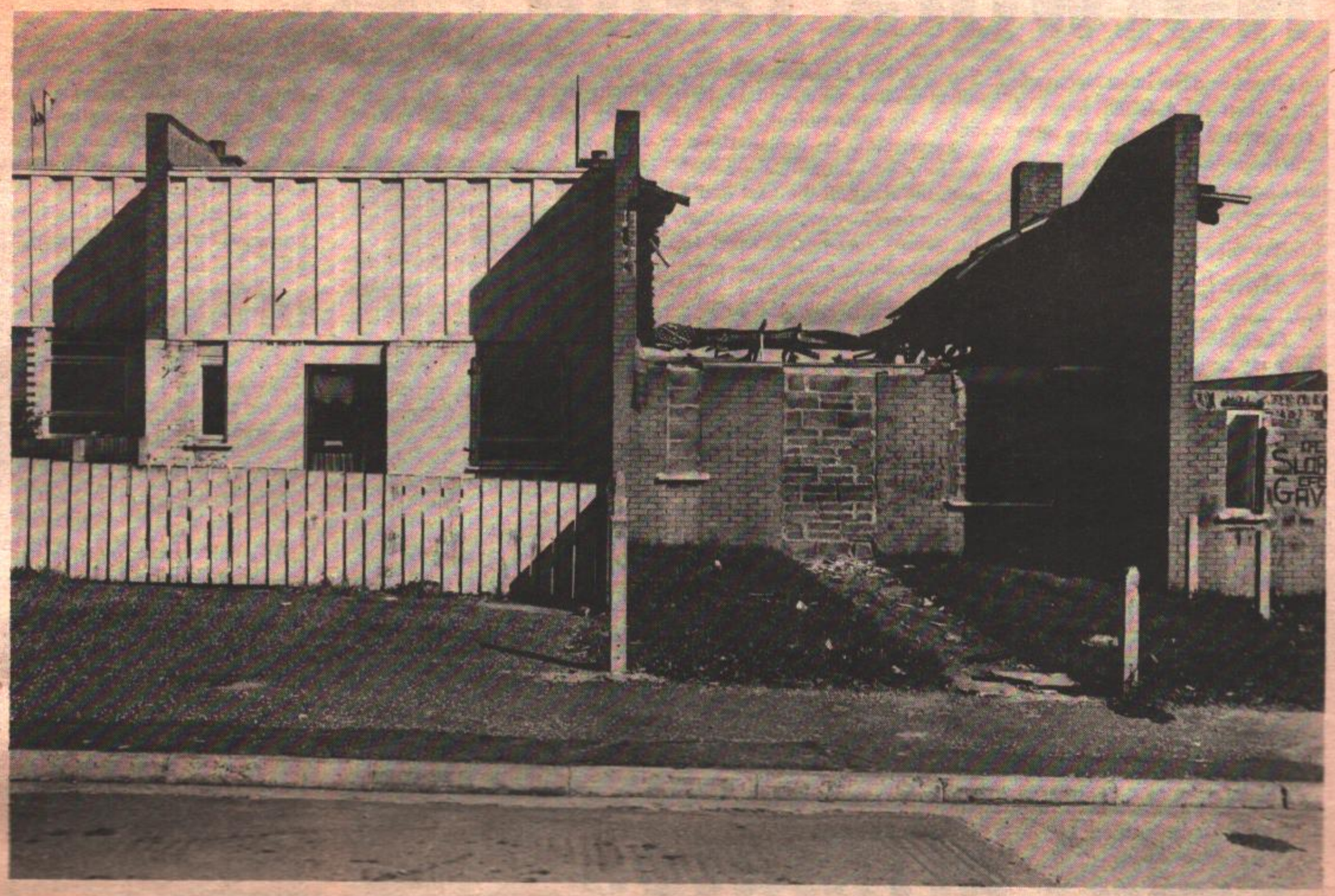
The crisis and breakdown of Ireland's political system is not a cause for dismay, argues Coulter. It underlines the need to replace it with a new framework.

"Thus, far from the 'national question' being a device to divert the attention of people in the south from their immediate and day-to-day problems, it is intimately connected to the solution of these problems".

Coulter makes a key distinction between the real anti-imperialist sentiment of the irish people and the rewritten, simplified nationalism of the ideologists of partition.

The latter present Ireland's history as a centuries-long struggle for formal independence and the flowering of a Catholic identity.

The same distorted view has fostered the idea of two irreconcilable traditions in Ireland, which serves to justify partition. Coulter draws a parallel here with the way the South African regime deliberately fosters tribalism to divide and oppose the unitary struggle of the Black masses.



*Ireland: a thousand years of colonialist oppression...*

Coulter's study draws on a wide range of international references and different disciplines.

In conclusion she proposes a new synthesis of the social and national struggle, drawing on the experiences of new movements in Eastern Europe and Latin America such as Solidarnosc and the Brazilian Workers Party.

*Ireland between the first and third worlds* is an excellent introduction to the problem of Ireland's colonial heritage. It is one of a series of pamphlets by Irish women issued by the feminist publishers Attic Press.

## BOOK REVIEW

# Speaking the unspoken

***New Europe*, Granta No. 30, Various Writers, *Penguin Books*, £5.99**

**"Once marked as a protester, you must learn to be careful — not to walk alone in town, for instance, or to let your children play outside.**

**"You must take care to disinfect your door handle thoroughly — it may be poisoned."**

Thus writes Mircea Dinescu, a Romanian writer who spent most of 1989 under house arrest, watched over by eighteen police officials.

**By JOE JARVIS**

One of the first literary results of a revolutionary process is the ability to say what could not be said before.

No discredit to the political analysts who offer their thoughts on the reshaping of Europe in the latest *Granta*, but it is the power of Soviet and East European writers, so long repressed and unpublished, that comes through here.

One of the most remarkable fictional pieces is *The Siege of Leningrad*, by Mikhail Steblin-Kamensky. Written during the war, it was only published in 1989.

750,000 people died in the two year siege. The story describes the appalling conditions of winter famine, as people ate breadcrumbs and burn furniture to keep warm, and lorries transported bodies left in the city park, like some medieval plague-town.

The experiences recalled here range from the tragicomic, as in Soviet writer Abraham Brumberg's memory of how zealous classmates forced him to re-read a poem eulogizing Stalin with more feeling, to the almost unbelievable.

### Rations

Czech writer Jiri Wolf, jailed for much of the 1980s, was at one point given ten days solitary confinement and a halving of rations for having a loose button.

Since prisoners are required to pay for their maintenance in prison, Wolf left jail after six brutal years owing the state 4,200 crowns.

The experiences of this courageous Charter 77 supporter were traced in Graham Swift's *In Search of Jiri Wolf*.

Wolf was still being harassed by the secret police as late as *November 1989*. They visited him while he was working as a stoker in a boiler room and threatened to throw him in the furnace.

Amid the often very personal experiences recounted here, the crisper analytical pieces, including that of Tony Benn, seem oddly out of place.

One of the more optimistic short stories is *Centre of Gravity* by Moscow writer Victoria Tokareva.

It tells how a woman, whose attempted suicide is twice interrupted, goes on to help another recover her will to live.

*New Europe* is an excellent showcase for a variety of writing about East Europe and the Soviet Union — some new, some coming into print after years of being banned.

## FILM REVIEW

# The ordeal of Ron Kovic

***Born on the Fourth of July*, directed by Oliver Stone, written by Stone and Ron Kovic, on general release.**

**This is Oliver Stone's best and most politically incisive film since *Salvador*.**

**It is a powerful and authentic adaptation of Ron Kovic's autobiography of the same name (published 15 years ago).**

It tells the story of a working class boy from Long Island who joined the marines straight out of high school, brimming with good old American anti-communist machismo.

**By Mike Marqusee Hornsey & Wood Green CLP**

Shipped off to Vietnam, he was fully exposed to the inhumanity and chaos of the war.

Severely wounded, he lost the use of his legs and — as the film makes uncompromisingly clear — his penis.

He underwent the hell of medical treatment at an over-crowded, under-funded veterans hospital in the Bronx, only to be ejected into a civilian society increasingly torn apart by the criminal folly of the war.

After a painful personal and political reassessment, he became a militant opponent of the war and an activist in Vietnam Veterans Against the War, an organisation which played a major role in crystalising anti-war feeling amongst America's white working class.

Tom Cruise gives an astonishing performance, portraying in distressing detail Kovic's transition from fresh-faced naive patriot to tormented war-butchered veteran.

Stone's heavy-metal cinematic style — intense close-ups, violent editing, plunging, sweeping, trembling camera movement, agonising slow motion — effectively communicates the bewildering intensity of Kovic's experience.

Fortunately, this is no remake of the befuddled, apolitical *Platoon*.

It is a full-blooded attack on US militarism — and a long-overdue, compassionate recognition of the anguish which the war brought to young working class Americans and their families.

Stone's recreations of the innocence of pre-Vietnam suburbia and the contrasting fury of the late 60s and early 70s are by far the best that Hollywood has so far managed in this vein.

For once the anti-war movement is shown as the broad and complex phenomenon that it was. Police and government attacks on it are shown as brutal and reactionary responses to genuine mass protest.

The late Abbie Hoffman (to whose memory the film is dedicated) appears as himself, addressing a student demo.

He is charmingly anachronistic with pot belly and grey beard, but still full of the righteous indignation which seized so many American youth in that era.

From the evidence of *Born on the Fourth of July* it is clear that Oliver Stone (who recently signed a public letter of protest against the US invasion of Panama) has retained a healthy measure of that indignation.

In honestly honouring Ron Kovic's experience, he has created a useful antidote to the chillingly popular fetishisation of the war illustrated by such horrors as "Nam" magazine, currently touted on television and available, alas, at your local newsagents.

Socialist Movement

## Red-Green Conference

# Green and Socialist Network launched

**A Green and Socialist Network has been established from a conference attended by 300 participants on March 24-25th in London.**

By Steve Potter
Dulwich CLP

**The conference opened with a plenary session addressed by Robin Cook MP, Freda Chapman of the Greens, and Joost Lagendejk of the Dutch Green Left Party.**

Cook made a speech that was very critical of Labour's past record on the environment.

Eschewing demogogic calls for Green Party members to join the Labour Party, he stressed the long way that the Labour Party had to travel towards an adequate strategy on the environment.

Surprisingly he declared that, while he was more than pleased with the result of the Mid Staffs by-election, he was perturbed that the Green vote had dropped so dramatically since the Euro-elections.

Freda Chapman from the Green Party outlined her vision of a new political movement that could draw from the best parts of Green and Socialist politics.

She stressed that she saw such a movement being capable of mass action, not just electoral activity, strongly committed to liberation politics and supporting the fight of the oppressed as part of the struggle to defend the environment.

Joost Lagendejk, the International Secretary of the Dutch Green Left Party, pointed out the irony that discussion on Green-Left and Green politics in general was far more advanced in Britain than in Holland, Belgium and even West Germany.

The problem was the debate was of purely theoretical significance, removed from any political practice.

The discussion was followed up by policy workshops ranging from an ecosocialist economic strategy, new forms of political power and pan-European environmental strategies.

Campaigning workshops discussed possible red-green alliances and the possibilities of networks on a European level, at national, and local levels.

One significant weakness of the conference was the absence of a workshop on ecosocialism and feminism — a gap which some participants promised to fill at the next conference.

The final plenary focussed on proposals for a green and socialist network.

While there were predictable differences on exact organisational forms, all seemed convinced that an ecosocialist current was already starting to form and that it needed a more coherent organisational expression to spread its influence further.

### SERA

To some extent this role had been played by SERA — members of which had offered to provide space for the network in the journals of the movement.

However the result of the ballot on whether SERA should affiliate to the Labour Party — carried by 53% to 47% — will effectively prevent the current involvement of Green Party members, underlining the importance of a network in which members of both parties and independent green socialists can meet on equal terms.

The need that many Green Party members feel for such an organisation was marked not only by the presence of supporters of the Green Socialist Forum, a focus for ecosocialists in the party, but also by the presence of Green Party members not linked to the GSF.

Apart from SERA, Socialist Society, Socialist Movement and *Briefing* supporters, there was only a relatively small number of activists from the Labour Party and the left. The rise of Labour's electoral fortunes is having the effect of dragooning the left behind Labour's existing policies and structures.

The main function of the network now must be to push forward an eco-socialist perspective within existing organisations, not only the Labour Party and the Green Party, but also the student and trade union movement where the scope for united action is, as yet, unexplored.

The Network will be inviting affiliations from both individuals and organisations in the near future. An open steering committee will provide a starting point for a more structured form of organisation in the medium term.

**For more information write to the Green and Socialist Conference, c/o 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG.**




*Cook eshews calls for Green members to join the Labour Party: will the Green Party in Britain move on to emulate the electoral success of the German Party — at the expense of Labour seats in Europe?*

## Socialist Environment and Resources Association

# SERA affiliates to Labour!

**In the last issue Steve Potter reported that the Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA) was balloting its members on whether to affiliate to the Labour Party. BRYN GRIFFITHS of Tottenham CLP looks at the background to the debate and examines the result.**

**SERA bills itself as the "green wing of the labour movement and the socialist wing of the green movement".**

**The vast majority of its 1,200 members are in the Labour Party, but a significant minority of around 15% are members of the Green Party.**

After the Greens' rise to prominence, the Labour leadership began to develop a commitment to green issues, and announced, after the Euro-elections, that Labour would be a red-green Party by 1992.

This looks to be an increasingly hollow promise with the Labour leadership looking neither particularly red or green!

Larry Whitty wrote to SERA inviting them to consider affiliation to the Labour Party as a Socialist Society like the Fabians, Socialist Education Association, and — the most recent affiliation — the Socialist Christian Movement.

The Whitty letter triggered a debate in SERA which has culminated in a very narrow vote to affiliate with 47% voting against — a number far beyond the confines of Green Party members.

Many on the left of SERA, around the Socialist Movement's red and green wing, opposed affiliation, believing it would compromise SERA's relationship with those outside the Party, most notably the Greens.

The right of SERA, Britain's own "realos", welcomed the vote after seeing it as a step towards becoming an effective parliamentary pressure group focusing on MPs and MEPs.

The relationship between SERA and the Labour leadership is a strong one, with Robin Cook a front bench spokesperson regularly speaking on their platforms.

### Realos

The "realos" uncritical enthusiasm for affiliation says something of their political timidity. During the Policy Review the Labour leadership invited SERA to participate in the environmental working party, provided it did not mention nuclear power! SERA declined to participate.

The fact that so many SERA members voted against affiliation is a damning criticism of Labour's leadership and suggests a deep suspicion of Kinnock's commitment to environmental policies.

However, to see the SERA vote in a negative light would be a mistake. As well as all the risks, there is the opportunity to take the fight for green-socialist politics into the heart of the Party. Assuming affiliation goes ahead, local SERA branches will have representation on local Labour Party GCs.

In the long term the answer to the Green Party is to build a strong red-green wing of the Labour party fighting for the green-socialist policies against the Labour leadership. Without such an approach exhortations to join the Labour Party are likely to fall on stony ground.

In our dialogue with Greens it is important that we argue for a labour movement orientation. A strong and radical SERA would be an important component of such an approach.

If SERA was to become a timid pressure group whispering in Neil Kinnock's ear it would be useless in the debate with the Green Party.

A big issue for SERA will be whether to continue the dialogue with the Greens and the joint activity flowing from the Red Green Conference.

*Briefing* should side with the Socialist Movement wing of SERA in their fight for a red-green dialogue. We must resist any attempt to sanitize SERA from non-parliamentary influences.

### *Briefing*

*Briefing* supporters should join SERA and participate in the debates that will undoubtedly flow from affiliation to the Party. We should support those that will be fighting to ensure that it is SERA that influences the Labour Party and not the Labour Party that influences SERA.

Labour is in crying need of a green-socialist wing.

**SERA VOTE ON AFFILIATION TO THE LABOUR PARTY**

| | |
|---|---|
| **For affiliation:** | **329** |
| **Against affiliation:** | **295** |
| **Turnout:** | **52%** |

Campaign!

## Student victimisation

# Defend the PNL 20!

**In response to a call by NUS on 12th March, some 30 colleges across the country went into 24 hour occupation against the government's loans scheme.**

By Sam Silverlock
Victimised student

**This was one of a series of actions taken by students in their fight against loans and followed February's massive 40,000-strong demonstration in London.**

The campaign has already notched up some successes: the banks' withdrawal of co-operation from the scheme and the recent government defeat in the Lords over the proposed abolition of student entitlement to Housing Benefit.

At the Polytechnic of North London students successfully took control of the Kentish Town site on March 12th, and shut down the college for 24 hours.

The management have now decided to take action against certain students.

Twenty students have been picked out and charged with a "breach of the polytechnic disciplinary code", with charges range from "stacking tables and chairs" to "assault on members of the PNL management."

The seriousness of these charges cannot be underestimated. The way the left in particular have been picked out for treatment points to an attempt by management to get rid of the activists in the college and undermine any actions that students take in the future.

### Students

They hope to intimidate students into accepting any policy *contrary* to students interests without a fight.

A campaign to defend the PNL 20 has been launched from the college.

Students are being called on to support and mobilise for any actions that the campaign initiates, including petitioning, sending letters of condemnation to PNL management, and attending lobbies of the hearings when they take place.

Clearly, if the students are allowed to be victimised in this way it will have repercussions far beyond PNL: the national campaign to defeat loans would be weakened.

It is important that we get support not just from other student bodies but that the defence campaign is raised in other labour movement bodies.

Get support from your trade unions and Labour Parties, get MPs to send condemnation letters to PNL, and attend the lobbies.

*Fight Victimisations! Drop the Charges! Defend the PNL 20!*

**For further information contact PNL Students Union, Holloway Road., London N7.**

# Mid-Staffs: Big swing; little policies



By SALLY EVIAH

**When Thatcher goes, she will have "Mid Staffs" written on her heart.**

**It was a tremendous victory for the local Party members and the thousands that flocked in to help.**

But it was the Poll Tax that won the Mid Staffs by-election for Labour — bigger, not unlike the way in which doctors campaigning vigorously on the NHS won us Mid-Glamorgan.

The Tory rank and file have had enough of high mortgage rates, years of run-down industry, hours of waiting in NHS queues, and now, on top of that, paying double the old rates for the privilege.

It wasn't really a vote *for* Labour. Reading every dot and comma of Labour's leaflets left you none the wiser as to what we would do in office!

The Tories and Liberal Democrats based their campaign on this lack of upfront policies and the Labour candidate's lack of public meetings.

Sylvia Heal's speech to the ticket-only Labour rally said very little. Someone had written it for her.

She was given media training, and along the way an obviously caring human being based within the labour movement — although certainly not that of the Midlands working class — had lost any way of expressing her genuine views and feelings.

So how had she been selected? It was by the NEC refusing to shortlist the candidate with the most nominations, an ex-striking miner still involved in the Justice campaign.

At the selection meeting, it was obvious that Sylvia Heal was the Party leadership's choice. Cris St Hill, who fought a good campaign in '87, was regarded as the wrong choice to fight a media-run by-election.

After Vauxhall and Mid Staffs, it appears black candidates have no chance of standing for Labour. Or will Bootle prove the exception?

Mid Staffs is full of arch Tories — or was. Many switched to Labour because they were anti-Thatcher and the Liberals provided no alternative in a seat they would have taken three or four years ago.

National media influence is shown by the fact that despite a local base and holding a Council by-election in the middle of the campaign, the Liberal Democrat bandwagon never took off.

An amateur campaign, even by their standards, left the Greens a very poor fifth.

It was significant that the best attended Tory public meeting was with Michael Heseltine. If he was to take over from Thatcher and ditch the Poll Tax, the middle classes would return to the Tories in droves.

Much of the credit for Labour's victory will go to the Wally Road whizz-kids computer campaign.

But many local activists are fed up with being ordered around and know that it will be left to them to hold the seat when the bandwagon leaves town and a General Election is on us.

Despite "Poll Tax, Poll Tax" being parroted on every doorstep, Party members were instructed not to attend a local Poll Tax meeting called by the All Britain Federation.

Over 400 turned up to it, with no official Labour input.

Labour put across few policies, and the vote was anti-Thatcher rather than pro-Kinnock.

However, even while we lament the passing of singing the *Red Flag* (replaced now by the singing of the "Lady in Red"!) the victory should be savoured by the labour movement in Mid Staffs as the one which witnessed the beginning of the end of Thatcher.

# Major's boring budget blues

**John Major had little room for manoeuvre in his first budget.**

**The only question was whether he would use tax increases to curb resilient consumer spending.**

But the "Lawson boom" with its tax cutting "give away" budgets has now sputtered out in a sea of consumer and corporate debt, an uncontrolled trade deficit, burgeoning inflation, and faltering output.

By Dave Palmer
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP



Can the Tories turn the economy round in time for the next election? In order to do this Major must achieve two things:

- that demand and output growth slow down enough to stop rising inflation;
- that domestic demand is kept flat to curb imports while encouraging rapid export growth to close the trade gap.

Even though interest rates are at their highest real level since the 30s, the massive current account deficit is inconsistent with a stable pound.

The world financial markets are worried by the performance of the UK economy and the political prospects in Britain.

UK interest rates are just not high enough to keep the pound from falling and inflation rising as import costs rise, notably of food and raw materials. Each 10% fall in the pound adds around 3% to prices.

The external pressures on the pound are intensifying as interest rate rises are used in the face of accelerating inflation in the stronger economies.

Political instability adds to the downward pressure on sterling. As government unpopularity increases and Labour support rises, so sterling falls. Inflation and interest rates rise once again causing further unpopularity for the Tories, and so on.

The public account surplus originally projected at £12.5 billion in 89/90 has fallen to £7 billion due to the fall in projected tax revenues as the economy has slowed down, falls in privatisation receipts, and higher than expected Local Authority spending.

In the past few years £25 billion has been repaid on the national debt which is now at its lowest level since before the First World War. GDP in 1990 is set to grow by 1%, investment to decline by 0.75% and the current account deficit decline to £15 billion.

Imports have fallen and exports grew by 11.5% last year, the highest level since 1973, and are forecast to rise by 9% in 1991.

Unit labour costs have been rising faster in the UK than in any major economy, but due to the fall in the pound relative costs have fallen such that export prices are now at the 1985 level.

The decline in sterling has led to the improvement in export performance which is maintaining output and reduced the trade gap.

Turning round the trade gap remains dependent on continued buoyancy in world trade. As output slows, so productivity declines and unit labour costs rise.

Recent Central Statistical Office figures revealed that in the last quarter of 1989 wage costs per unit of output exceeded 10% and productivity fell by 0.5%.

Unlike previously, no Treasury figures were provided for the coming year, suggesting things are now much worse.

This is the heart of the government's economic dilemma. The fall in sterling fuels inflation but lowering export prices improves the trade gap and maintains output.

High interest rates constrain investment and output causing unit labour costs to rise, fuelling inflationary pressures.

The unstated policy of letting the pound slide has staved off a recession in the UK at the cost of instability on the foreign exchanges and higher inflation. The government commitment to a "firm exchange rate" is largely bluff.

A vicious circle ensues as the increased prospect of the return of a Labour government rebounds to the Tories disadvantage.

Disagreements within government about exchange rate policy and the ERM exacerbate the problem.

The belief is that clarifying financial markets' expectations on the exchange rate (by pursuing policy dictated by defending parity) would allow lower interest rates, if complemented by raising taxes.

The City was pressing Major to supplement the use of interest rates by tightening up on the fiscal front.

They wanted £5-10 billion removed from the economy — by, as a minimum, not indexing personal allowances in line with inflation.

Predictably, Major did not reverse income tax cuts because of fears that they may tip the slowing down economy into full blown recession — hence the neutral budget.

Income tax rates were unchanged and personal allowances raised in line with inflation.

Ideological gloss was added with a series of small savings incentives (for example, TESSA) designed to "promote a culture of thrift" which in the longer term are supposed to increase the availability of investment funds.

The Madrid conditions on joining the ERM were maintained and high interest rates restated as the single policy measure to defeat inflation.

The Treasury Medium Term Financial Strategy projections were the most revealing.

Inflation is likely to breach 9% in April due to the Poll Tax and annual adjustments in the mortgage rate. The Treasury projects it falling to 7.25% by the end of the year and 5% by the second quarter of 1991.

The Budget failed to dampen inflation fears. The City gave it the thumbs down; and sterling lost two cents against the dollar and two pfennigs against the Mark. Only after heavy Bank of England intervention did it stabilise by the end of Budget week.

Labour's response was predictably vacuous and muted.

Kinnock had little to say and greeted Major's minor savings incentives with encouragement. The backbenches concentrated on getting the change in Poll Tax rebate criteria backdated for Scotland.

Labour now styles itself the "Party of production" which aims to "generate an industrial renaissance", by renewing grow in manufacturing investment and increasing public spending on training, research and the infrastructure.

The Shadow Front Bench now propounds entry to the ERM: completing a set of policies very close to those put forward by Michael Heseltine.

John Smith's alternatives amount to very little: increased allowances tax on investment; uprating of allowances (which Major carried out); increased child benefit; a few green measures; immediately joining the ERM.

Labour economic strategy is identical to its overall approach: gain power on the basis of Tory unpopularity without spelling out any clear alternative.

"Supply side socialism" is little more then the combination of Labour's traditional pro-manufacturing industry positions with post-Thatcherite rhetoric and commitment to balanced budgets and monetary rectitude.

In the past year the economy has been able to absorb pay rises which have largely maintained pay in line with inflation because Thatcher refused to join the ERM and let the pound fall.

Joining the ERM now with output stagnant would put the pressure onto keeping unit costs down. The only way out would be reduced living standards or further falls in output and high interest rates.

Labour's Euro-turn is not the panacea it appears.

Labour to office with an incomes policy anyone?

International Briefing

## TGWU Elections

# Victory for the left!

**The left has increased its majority on the General Executive Council of the TGWU from 21-18 to 22-17.**

**This will come as a major blow to the right-wing in the trade unions and the Labour Party.**

Neil Kinnock, along with the New Realists in the unions, were convinced that the new postal balloting procedures imposed by Tory anti-union legislation would produce a landslide for the right.

They were relying on the postal ballot to bring the TGWU reliably into the New Realist camp.

They were hoping to shift the TGWU to the right of the AEU, even towards the EETPU, in its political positions.

By ALAN THORNETT

So confident were the right in winning the election that they had their candidates ready to replace the existing President of the union at the first meeting of the new Executive.

Such a shift to the right by the country's biggest union would have been a huge coup for Kinnock and would have brought major changes in both the TUC and at Labour Party Conference.

The gains for the left in this crucial result came in three regional constituencies.

In Humberside, the winner was the previous TGWU Chair Walter Greendale — who was defeated by the right-wing two years ago in a dubious campaign.

The left-backed candidate in the North West, Peter Dunnico, won; as did Carole Rowe in the Southern Region.

In the huge Region One, London, the three broad left candidates — Steve Riley, Peter Hagger and Peter Landles — were elected, leaving Brian Nicholson, the right wing former national Chair of the TGWU in third place.

### Product

The results were the product of a re-run ballot following the discovery of balloting irregularities identified by the Electoral Reform Society.

It was claimed by the right that corruptly cast ballot papers had benefited several left wing candidates and the right wing ran a campaign in the second ballot on the basis that a vote for the right was a vote for fair elections.

Their allegations fell to pieces, however, with the result of the second ballot — which, according to Ron Todd, was not substantially different to the first.

The balloting irregularities have been the subject of an investigation by Todd, who quite rightly withheld his findings until the second ballot had been completed.

He has now put the matter in the hands of Scotland Yard, and it is being investigated by the Serious Crimes Squad.

The left victory in this ballot shows that even postal ballots are not always reliable for the right-wing, particularly in the absence of a major media intervention.

One casualty was the size of the poll. This was given as 20% — although scrutinising the results region by region makes the figures look even lower. The figures published show the turnout as nearer 15%.

### London

In the huge London Region, for example, it was only 12.5%. Two years ago under the workplace balloting system the poll was 40%.

Despite the importance of this victory it has to be said that the left majority on the TGWU Executive does not have a good record.

Unlike the left minority on the NUR Executive, for example, they have insisted on keeping within the law and stuck to this with the dock strike.

They have supported Kinnock on everything except the important issue of unilerateral nuclear disarmament.

The choice in the T&G has therefore been a choice between a weak broad left and a hard right who want to take the union down the road of Bill Jordan and Gavin Laird - or even, in some cases, Eric Hammond.

This is the importance of the result. The right has been denied this in these elections.

They must be denied them in the future as well, and that can best be ensured if the new Executive builds for itself a better record of struggle than the last one.




PHOTO: Jim Thain & Martine Stead

*What future for TGWU rank and file?*

## TGWU Ballot

# A vote of confidence

**STEVE RILEY, re-elected onto the TGWU General Council for Region One, said:**

**The TGWU Executive election results are a vote of confidence:**

- for policies which the trade union has developed in recent years, such as peace, unilateralism, repeal of *all* Tory anti-trade union laws and the reinstatement of positive rights for workers;
- supporting an independent trade union rather than one going down the road of the EETPU with no-strike deals and pendulum arbitration which erodes workers rights;
- support for a strong campaigning union that goes into the world fighting for its members interests not afraid of the Tories or its legislation;
- support for the return of a Labour Government committed to the interests of the working class.

## TGWU Textiles Branch 1/1312

# Bacton lock out

**For many years clothing workers in East London, most of whom are refugees, have been largely unrepresented by a trade union and so have been made victims of the free market anarchy of the clothing industry.**

**However in recent times the TGWU Textiles Branch 1/1312 has mounted a campaign of recruitment and organisation amongst sweatshop workers. This demonstration is in support of the drive to unionise all textile workers.**

The example of workers at Bacton Fashions demonstrates the forces opposed to the unionisation of textile workers.

At Bacton Fashions the 1/1312 branch had recruited a number of workers and had forced the employer to negotiate with branch officials over arrangements for "waiting time" payments and distribution of work during slack periods.

Rather than allow trade union representation in the factory the boss, Mustafa Dil, closed the factory and locked out the workers. This demonstration has the support of the locked out union members at Bacton.

Bacton workers are determined to end the ruthless exploitation of workers by the textile bosses.

Like thousands of other workers in the textile industry they were being denied the right to belong to a trade union and the right to negotiate with their employer over issues such as pay, hours of work, health and safety conditions, lay-off arrangements when there is insufficient work, redundancy pay, overtime payments, holidays etc.

The demo is also in support of the four people who were arrested when Bow Territorial Support Group, the Police Paramilitaries, attacked a peaceful picket and arrested four refugees.

### Supporting

The 1/1312 branch is committed to supporting the progressive policies of the TGWU. Indeed three of the slogans of the demonstration; a right to work, a right to join a trade union and a right to fight racism are all longstanding policies of the union.

The Right to Stay slogan is not, as yet, official policy of the TGWU. It is, however, the policy of the textiles branch.

We say that workers have a right to work wherever they want, and that they have a right to join a union, no matter what their immigration status is. We hope to influence others in the TGWU to support this policy.

The textile trade is profitable and many employers are rich from the work of the textile workers.

The TGWU Textiles Branch 1/1312 calls on all textile workers to join with us in the struggle for decent wages and conditions of employment. All workers are welcome to join, regardless of status.

We call upon all other trade unionists, unemployed and students to join with textile workers on April 7th.

Help provide a moral boost for textile workers, those fighting racism and all those who support the principle of workers organised in trade unions.

**For further information contact the Bacton Strikers at 489 Kingsland Road, London E8 4AU. Tel: 01 249 6930.**

**From a strike leaflet*

## Demonstration in Support of Bacton textile workers

### Saturday April 7th

**Assemble 2pm; Clissold Park, N16**

**We demand:**

**A right to work! A right to join unions!**
**A right to fight racism! A right to stay**

**Speakers:**

**A Bacton striker; Mike Farrell (Branch Secretary); Jeremy Corbyn MP; Tony Cordell (Hackney Joint Shop Stewards Committee)**

## Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee

# Poll Tax Conference

**An appeal from Tony Benn MP**

**The campaign against the Poll Tax is by far the biggest public demonstration that we have seen in this country for 50 years and it involves everybody over the whole political spectrum.**

**Trade unionists are involved, both because those who work in local government depend for their living on raising revenue to pay for the services they provide, and because they and many others are being required to implement a grossly unfair system of taxation which will hit the poorest hardest.**

**The importance of solidarity, which has always been the key to trade union strength, has now acquired a new meaning in the community and trade union leadership in this campaign is essential.**

- **Trade unionists across the country may well find that the Poll Tax is deducted from their pay.**
- **Trade unionists in local government face compulsory redundancies as councils make cuts in local services.**

**This is a matter for all trade unionists and the TUC.**

**The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee request that your union branch or committee endorses the call for a National Trade Union Conference Against the Poll Tax to be held at the earliest practicable date.**

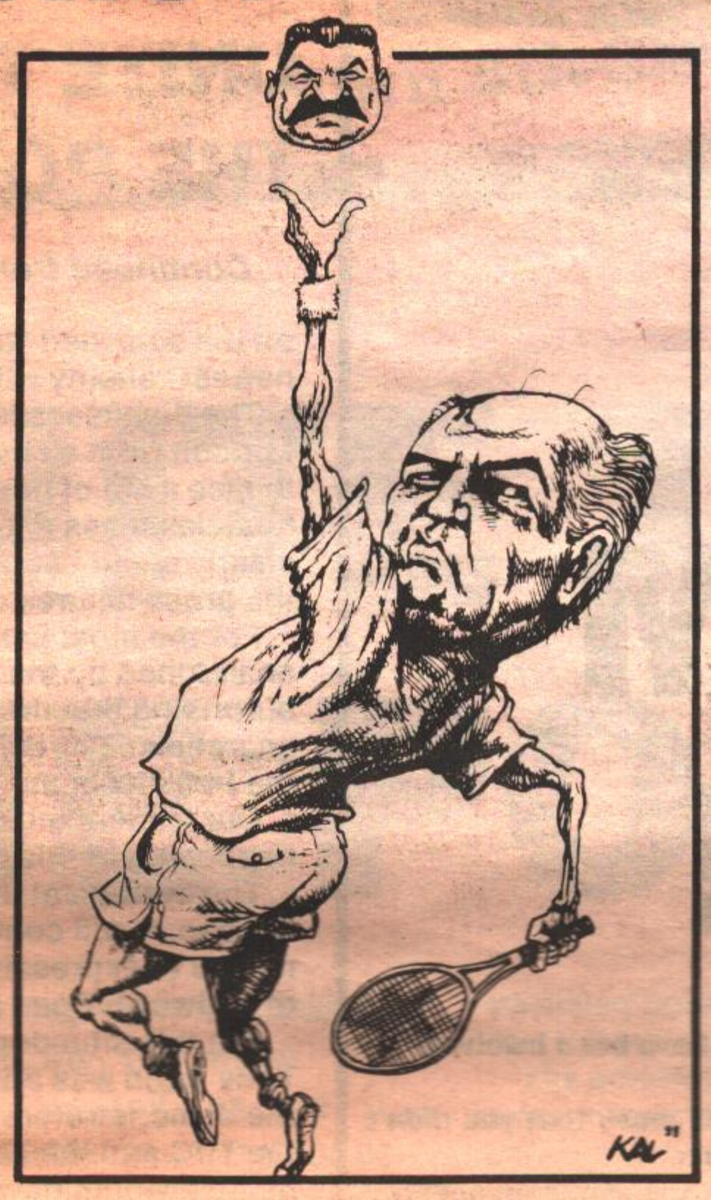
**Further details from The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, c/o 53a Geere Road, London E15.**

## Lithuania

# Big choice for Gorbachev

**In the shadow of Soviet tanks the Lithuanian people attempt to secure their independence from Moscow.**

By Tom Loucas
Islington North CLP




**Whether or not the current tense situation breaks out into the sort of bloodbath witnessed in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan is in Gorbachev's hands.**

Since the Lithuanian parliament declared independence on March 11th, Gorbachev has responded with ultimatums and shows of military strength.

On March 27th he sent in troops to take over Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) buildings and round-up Lithuanian conscripts who had deserted.

Gorbachev has attempted to use both the carrot and the stick to bring the Lithuanians to heel.

Assurances that force will not be used and discussions held are followed by threats that the rule of law must be defended (hence the rounding up of deserters) and lives protected.

This last and most recent threat is the most worrying. The threat to life was the pretext for using troops in Azerbaijan; and now even the bougeois press is admitting that there is clear evidence of the authorities provoking ethnic conflict.

The new Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis, has said t force will be used "because ould create the threat themselves."

The Moscow inspired mobilisations of anti-independence groups are evidence of this possibility.

If Gorbachev cannot face down the Lithuanians he will be pushed towards a full-scale military intervention. Many commentators have noted the similarities between the current situation and the Prague Spring.

*Newsweek* quotes one diplomat as saying, "The notes back and forth between Moscow and Vilnius look like the first half of 1968 in Czechoslovakia.

"Gorbachev is using very tough brinksmanship — tough decrees and short deadlines. The Lithuanians are refusing to budge.

"It's not quite August yet, but we are getting very close to the time when an irresistible force meets an immovable object."

Lithuania presents Gorbachev with a serious political crisis.

Gorbachev, ever the pragmatist, understands that concesssions to nationalism are inevitable given the forces unleashed by perestroika. But he does need to control these centrifugal forces if they are not to derail his attempt to remodel bureaucratic rule.

The law on secession now in the Soviet parliament was drafted precisely to deal with growing nationalism without threatening bureaucratic rule, by allowing republics to secede only if certain conditions imposed by Moscow are met.

A referendum must be held in which two-thirds of permanent residents vote in favour of secession, followed by a transition period of up to five years.

Finally the Soviet parliament must agree that the "interests and claims" of the USSR and the republic had been "harmonised".

But by declaring independence the Lithuanian parliament, dominated by the Sajudis (the nationalist movement which won 72 of the 90 seats in February's local elections) is denying Moscow's control.

They claim the USSR's laws do not apply to them as they do not recognise the legality of Stalin's annexation of the republic in 1940. They have called for volunteers to form a civilian defence force to police the borders.

One thousand five hundred Lithuanian conscripts serving in the Soviet army have responded to their call to return — which proved too much for Gorbachev, who had to clamp down on this "flouting of Soviet law and threat to army discipline."

### Split

To add insult to injury, at its congress in December last year the LCP split from the CPSU — a necessary move if the party was to retain any support in the masses.

The republic has placed itself beyond the political control of the bureaucracy by denying Moscow any jurisdiction in its affairs — a lack of control is exacerbated by the split of the LCP.

Threatened splits from Moscow by the Estonian and Latvian CPs, following the model of the Lithuanian CP, not only strenghten the conservatives' hand but it also militates against the stabilisation of bureaucratic rule.

Gorbachev knows that if he cannot bring the Lithuanians back into the fold by negotiation and/or threats, he faces the choice of tanks or unconditional independence for the republic.

### Green

If he gives in to the Lithuanians, Gorbachev will give a green light to the other republics wanting increased independence. But he cannot let the Lithuanians have their way.

Faced with the choice of independence or tanks he will choose tanks. The Lithuanians are well aware of this — Gorbachev has made sure of it — and perhaps rather than face the tanks they will climb down.

Whatever happens, socialists have a duty to support the right of the Lithuanian people to independence on their own terms not Moscow's.

The 80% Sajudis vote in the February elections and the fact that Lithuanians did not willingly enter the Soviet Union in 1940 is ample evidence of their right to independence.

We reject the two-faced response of the western powers who profess support for the right of self-determination while at the same time refusing to recognise the independent Republic of Lithuania.

By equivocating they are making it easier for Gorbachev to use force.

We should demand the immediate removal of all foreign troops from Lithuanian soil and that independent Lithuania is recognised as a sovereign state.

## East Germany

# Election: eyewitness report

***Anschluss* is Sigie's word for what is about to hit his country.**

By GEOFFREY SHERIDAN

**A supporter of Neues Forum, he was with the contingent who invaded the Stasi headquarters in Leipzig in November.**

Young, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable, he was devastated at the outcome of the election.

At the SPD's election rally, Willy Brandt said the fact there was an election was the first step forward. The local elections in May would be another opportunity.

He sounded like a Labour politician after a bad election. Only this was a defeat for a social system; a country, in fact.

The German Democratic Republic is still on the map, but really in name only.

Most likely the country the East German workers toiled to create and the Stalinists imprisoned will be a pushover for West German capital. Just maybe the West German trade unions will resist cheap labour.

It will cost billions to reduce the pollution to the levels permitted by the EEC. The Community's "rules of competition" may yet be defeated by the habits of four decades of "socialism", whatever the distortions of rule by bureaucrats.

The Federal Republic is now looking for half a million East Germans to be self-employed. How do you invent a capitalist class?

Sigie was undecided whether he should go to Poland, where he has a cousin, or to the Federal Republic.

Some kinsfolk, the West Germans: there they were with their makeshift Pepsi and Coke stands; to see the joy on a boy's face at his first can! They nosed around in their limos expecting the right of way as they inspected the assets. Peasants is how they think of the East Germans.

This is a country which no longer appears to have a police force or an army.

In Dresden we dined in the army officers' club. They had walked out two days before, declaring their mess open to the public. We were welcome, in spite of the signs surrounding the barracks warning that the district was off limits to those from non-Warsaw Pact countries.

As one might expect, especially when it is Germany, a country without police or army strolls the streets as orderly as ever. No-one was stealing in the stores, whose stock was reminiscent of London a decade or two ago.

The GDR has a living standard ahead of the rest of the Soviet bloc; higher than Portugal's. But the East Germans look to the Federal Republic. They like what they see; hence Sunday's vote. A lot, of them will never get the goods, obviously.

Contradictions abound. Officially an Ost Mark exchanged for a DM when the regime came down. It is still forbidden to take Ost marks in or out of the GDR, but the banks in West Berlin hand over about five of the ostensibly non-convertible marks for a DM.

It meant we could have coffee and cakes in a stately East Berlin hotel for around 50p a head. The waiter must have known. He treated us to such icy service his real job might have been running the state; a vacant position, in fact.

On the night of the election, after eating with our group in East Berlin, the East German coach driver stopped me from getting on board holding two glasses of wine (one was for me).

Sigie, reeling from the votes, screamed at him, then turned to us and spat out in English: "Stupid fucking racist".

This driver, evidently regarded us as Bavarian peasants. After Sigie's shout he graciously ushered me in.

The last time I was in Berlin was when the Wall went up. I had hitched there after taking my O-levels, to arrive at 4am on a deserted street on what was to the last day of unimpeded movement between West and East.

The next morning, 13th August 1961, I watched clumps of dazed West Berliners gathered by the Soviet sector.

The GDR Volspolizei, kids my age, sat with their sub-machine guns on the tanks, which were decked with flowers and pictures of Yuri Gagarin, the first person in space.

That night just outside West Berlin's huge youth hostel I ran across the first East German to make it through the "Wall", then a line of barbed wire and troops.

A 21 year old journalist from Leipzig, he had heard the tanks from his hotel room and decided he would chance it, not knowing that on that first day the military had no ammunition in their weapons.

He had spent most of the day being debriefed by the West Berlin police. The *Daily Express* kindly reimbursed me for the cost of my holiday.

*A joke.* At the SPD rally I heard that many of the former Stasi were now taxi drivers. Useful, since they already know where you want to go before you tell them.

If I listened to my Jewish relatives I would have returned with bricks to put the Wall back up.

## Colombia

# TRADE UNION LAWYER ARRESTED

**On March 27th Daniel Libreros Caicedo, a trade union lawyer, was arrested as he boarded a plane at Cali Airport. He was returning to Bogotá following a raid on his home by the military.**

**He has been detained by the local 3rd Military Brigade, a military unit renowned for its use of torture.**

Daniel is a member of the Executive Committee of *A Luchar* (To Struggle), a broad based workers' organisation. He was in Cali to defend nine A Luchar members who had been arrested on March 5th, along with 71 others, now released, for trade union activities.

*A Luchar* is the second largest organisation on the Colombian left. The larger the organisation has grown, the wider and deeper its influence amongst the working class and peasants, the more consistent the military has become in its campaign of hostility, persecution, and murder.

In a statement issued on March 28th, the National Executive Committee of *A Luchar* said that Daniel's arrest was further "evidence of the lack of political guarantees in our country; guarantees that allow opposition forces to organise freely; guarantees for citizens' constitutional rights..."

A statement issued by the Permanent Council of Opposition Forces, of which *A Luchar* is a part, demanded that the Colombian government must guarantee the "freedom of political activity to all the parties and political organisations involved in the present electoral struggle."

A defence campaign for both Daniel and *A Luchar* has been launched. Labour movement organisations and individuals should write, demanding Daniel's and his comrades' immediate release, to the Colombian embassy in Britain and to the Colombian President:

**Virgilio Bargo, Palacio de Narino, Bogotá, Colombia.**

LABOUR BRIEFING

## STOP STATE TERRORISM AGAINST IRISH PEOPLE

# FREE THE BIRMINGHAM SIX — NOW!

**By Liam Mac Uaid**
East London Irish Action Committee
(personal capacity)

**"The Home Secretary should stop pussy-footing around. The men are innocent. They should be released immediately."**

In these words, Tory MP Sir John Farr summed up what virtually everyone now feels about the most blatant political frame-up ever seen in British judicial history.

The roar of voices demanding the release of the six men has become deafening. Every Irish person in Britain, now joined by Bernard Levin, Ludovic Kennedy, the *Times*, and Sir Anthony Beaumont-Dark, want the Six to be released. Only the most weasle-like, brutalised, cynical servants of the British state now dare seriously suggest that the Six should stay in jail.

Thatcher's comments in the Commons on the *Who Bombed Birmingham?* television programme were as unconvincing as her assertion that the Poll Tax will soon be popular.

She knows the Six are innocent and she also knows her civil servants and law officers are even now looking for a way to release them — one which won't end up with a number of cops in jail and some of the most senior members of the British judiciary implicated in a frame up.

"The men are innocent. They should be released immediately." Exactly. They must *not* be held as hostages until the men named in the Granada documentary are extradited to British courts. What earthly chance do those named have of getting a fair trial? To be accused of being an Irish Republican is enough to get you ten years in this country. To be accused of being both Irish and a bomber is enough to get you life imprisonment, regardless of the evidence.

Let's get this straight. It was absolutely wrong for Granada to make such grave allegations and support them mainly by asserting that the men in question were Irish, were associated with Republican politics, and may have been involved with other bombings.

After all this time, could *you* prove that you *didn't* bomb Birmingham? Could anyone?

Police Federation spokespeople now talk openly on TV about the loss of public confidence and the demoralisation rampant in every major police force in Britain. The releases of the Guildford Four, Hassan Khan, and Alban Turner, all of whom were framed, have exposed the British police as lawless.

As case follows case, one thing becomes clear. For every cop who speaks out publicly against the crimes committed by his or her colleagues, thousands more happily collude. Will working people in Britain ever again take a police officer's word on trust?

Geoffrey Dear's frantic shuffling from one TV studio to another, accompanied by an avalanche of press releases from the West Midlands police, demonstrated the terror that seizes the police when they think of the day — which will come soon — when the Six leave their cells for the last time.

On that day, their criminal behaviour will be undeniable. But our work as socialists will not be over then. Justice demands that everyone who has had a part in wilfully keeping these innocent men imprisoned spends part of his or her lives in jail.

The Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four were sent to jail *precisely because they were innocent*. The television programme made it clear that the police have known for 15 years that they had locked up the wrong men. What it did not explain was why they persisted with this "Error of Judgement".

Every Irish person in Britain knows, however, that the British state wanted to terrorise the Irish community, to drive it out of political life and out of the debate on Ireland.

For almost 15 years this policy has been pursued — with some success. Now the heroism of the prisoners and the strength of the campaign have transformed the men into six Irish Nelson Mandelas, symbols of the people's desire for freedom. The clamour for their release will not die away.

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# UNITE TO SMASH THE POLL TAX!

*Continued from front page*

on the so-called "anarchist menace", Britain's newest "enemy within".

The dispossessed youth who arrive in London from all over the country (and abroad) to face a life of poverty, unemployment, homelessness and police harassment are clearly set to become the latest scapegoats for the gross failures of capitalism in Britain.

For the most part, these youth have been abandoned by the labour movement; it is not surprising that many are attracted to anarchism. For them, as for so many others, the Poll Tax is the last straw.

Our leaders must open their eyes to what's happening in this country.

The outrage at the Poll Tax is not a flash in the pan; it will continue to grow and find new means of expression with or without the help of Walworth Road and Congress House.

But this situation is far from satisfactory. Tony Benn was absolutely right when he told the demonstrators in Trafalgar Square that if the TUC and the Labour Party had backed the demo it would have been over a million strong.

The anti-Poll Tax movement needs the weight and strength of the official labour movement.

Activists in the anti-Poll Tax groups need to focus more attention on securing that support despite the witch-hunt now being brewed up in the corridors of Walworth Road.

"Poll Tax violence" is now being used as yet another excuse for the bureaucrats to denounce the non-payment campaign.

We must not allow them to get away with this. For all *Militant*'s admirable hard work in building the anti-Poll Tax movement, its approach to this particular question poses more problems than it solves.

What's needed within the Poll Tax movement is open and considered political debate on the ideas and tactics raised by some of the anarchist groups — not threats of exclusion.

That way lies division and disintegration for the mass movement and an invitation to the witch-hunters in the Labour Party to do their worst.

*Briefing* believes that the Poll Tax will be defeated not by random conflicts with the police but by the collective strength of an ever-growing mass movement, taking to the streets again and again, organising the millions who have said they will not pay, building and nurturing non-implementation by trades unionists, and vigorously defending itself from police and judicial attacks.

The tremendous turn-outs in London and Glasgow and the continuing rash of anti-Poll Tax activities across the country should give heart to all socialists.

As for the attacks of the police, the media, the Tories and the Labour leaders they should only re-enforce our determination to see this struggle through to the victory that is surely within our grasp.