LABOUR
BRIEFING
No. 101 April 25th-May 9th 1990

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40p

VOTE LABOUR!

DON'T PAY THE POLL TAX!

A massive vote for Labour on May 3rd will maintain the pressure on the Tory government built up by the anti-Poll Tax movement.

By JOHN WILTON
Labour candidate, Quinton Ward
Birmingham City Council elections
and GUY DALY
Labour candidate, Bournville Ward
Birmingham City Council elections
(personal capacities)

On the doorstep the election campaign is dominated by one issue — the Poll Tax. Labour canvassers are even being stopped in the street by people who want to tell them what they think about the Tory Tax.

Elderly people, young people, even people who have voted Tory all their lives are eager to tell canvassers that they won't be paying the Tax and won't be voting Tory on May 3rd.

Message

We have to tell them that by voting Labour they can send a clear message to Thatcher and her crew: the Poll Tax must go and so must the government.

The May elections must be turned into both a referendum on the Poll Tax and an electoral expression of the anger of millions of people supporting the non-payment campaign and the anti-Poll Tax movement.

The election results should be yet another argument for a general election now — an argument the Labour leadership should now be making loud and clear *every day*.

The millions of people suffering under the Tories — struggling to pay rocketing rents, mortgages, and water rates, and worried sick by Poll Tax bills, barely surviving on low wages or inadequate pensions, waiting for treatment at underfunded hospitals — can't wait another two years to get rid of this bunch of Tory crooks and scroungers.

They need a change *now*.

However, we cannot just say, "Vote Labour on May 3rd and leave the rest to Labour Councillors in the Council Chamber — and to Neil Kinnock."

Our message should be: "Voting Labour is one way to show your opposition to the Poll Tax. Even more important: Don't pay the Tax! Join your local anti-Poll Tax Union!"

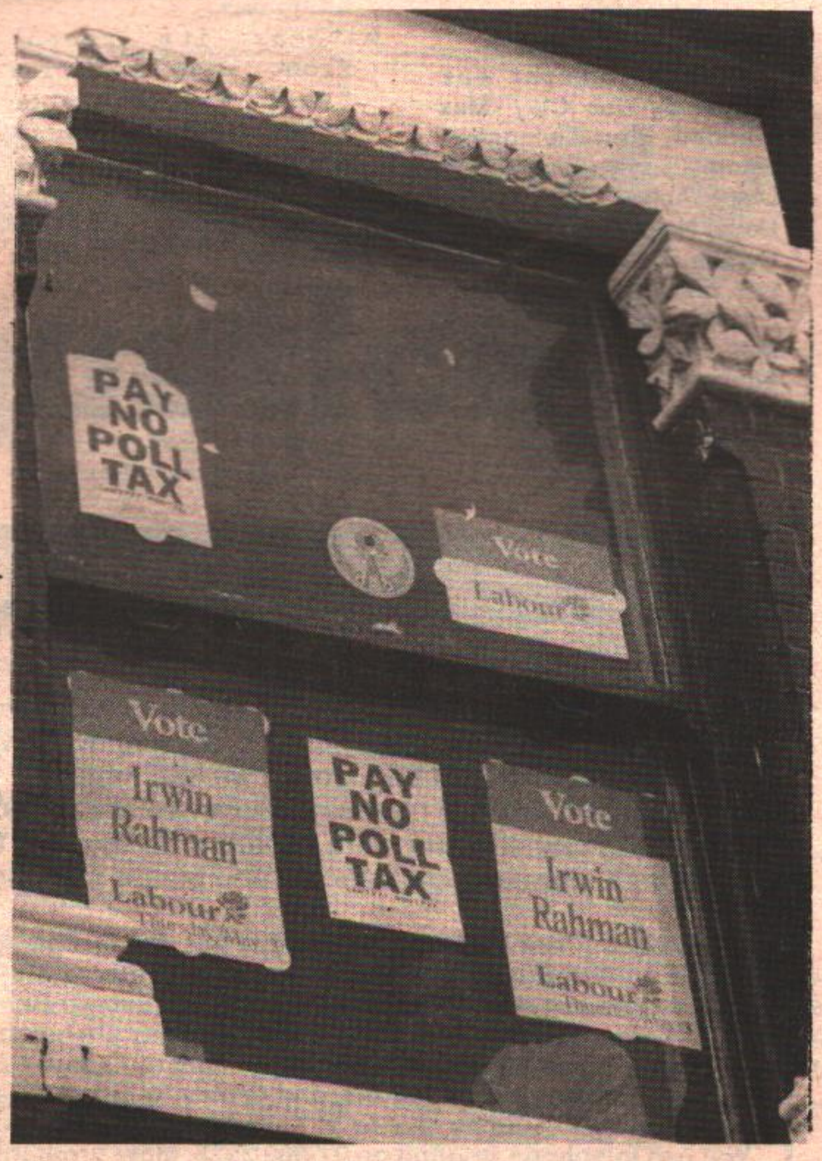


PHOTO: Jonathan Kempster

Building support for the many Labour candidates pledged not to pay the Poll Tax is one of our most important tasks in the run-up to May 3rd. After the elections, we have to do our best to maintain links between these Councillors and local non-payment campaigns so that we keep the pressure on Labour Councils.

Candidates

All Labour candidates should be asked a simple question: what is the quickest way to remove the hardship imposed on working people by the Poll Tax?

Those who have thought about it and are honest enough to say so will answer that only a mass campaign of non-payment can bring a quick end to this hated Tax.

Those who say to people already living under the poverty line that they must pay the Poll Tax now and elect a Labour government in two years time (which will take another two years to abolish the Tax) are the ones who are living in "Cloud Cuckoo land".

People living in poverty have no choice. They can't afford to pay the Poll Tax. Labour candidates should stand in solidarity with these people — by refusing to pay.

Telling them to "be patient" is simply abandoning them to the ravages of Thatcherism.

A massive Labour vote on May 3rd coupled with the continuing growth of the non-payment campaign will pave the way for a General Election *sooner* rather than later.

In cities like Birmingham, we want to see a big turn-out on May 3rd and a massive defeat for the Tories. This will boost the confidence of both the labour movement and the non-payment campaign.

We have to work to bring these two together — not least by recruiting people from the anti-Poll Tax movement into the Labour Party.

Nothing would be a better antidote to the current middle-class stranglehold on the Party — and would be a major step towards making Labour a genuine mass membership party.

LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!

Letters

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, May 3rd if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Support NOLS but build a fighting leadership!

Dear *Briefing*,

With regard to Louise Holloway's article (*Briefing* no. 89), I would just like to say how much I agree with the sentiments expressed about the current leadership's unwillingness to lead any action against student loans, or to lead *any* real action against the Poll Tax...

I therefore also agree with Louise about the need to have a fighting leadership of NUS which is prepared to lead and escalate militant action against the many attacks which students face.

For this reason I was delighted at the election of six hard left candidates to the NEC at the recent NUS Conference, which means that the hard left now occupies three of the seven NEC full-time positions.

I was also delighted, however, at the victory of all but two of the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) candidates.

Their victory is especially significant given the challenge which NOLS and the hard left faced from the slate of "independents" grouped together under the hollow, egotistical leadership of Richard "Cosmo" Hawkes.

Despite the Kinnockite leanings of the NOLS candidates, the defeat of Hawkes *et al* should give a cheer to all students who want to see a fighting NUS aligned to the labour movement.

It is on the attitude towards NOLS that I fundamentally disagree with Louise. She advocated that in the Presidential election we should vote for the SWP, and then for the Greens before transferring to NOLS.

In reality, if such a strategy had actually been employed on a large enough scale it would have taken vital votes away from NOLS, thereby resulting in a *victory* for Hawkes over Twigg, the Labour candidate.

Moreover, while I can sympathise with dissatisfied socialists advocating support for the SWP, I cannot do so for the Greens, who are both opportunist and essentially anti-socialist.

Finally, like it or not, NOLS is the official student section of the Labour Party. For this reason it is the duty of Party members to support properly selected NOLS candidates, above all others in NUS elections.

The case for doing so at the recent Conference was of course given all the more validity because of the all out threat from the right.

This said, it is still vital for socialists to work inside NOLS to transform it into a fighting organisation, giving the student movement something to be really proud of.

Paul Montero,
Convenor,
Humberside Area NUS
(personal capacity)



PHOTO: Martine Stead

Valerie veers off the mark

Dear *Briefing*,

I have not been a regular reader of *Labour Briefing* before but I have become one recently because, contrary to what Valerie Coultas says in *Briefing* no. 99, its coverage of the Embryo Bill and campaigns around it has been streets ahead of th rest of th left (and even feminist) press.

Unlike other "socialist" newspapers and magazines, *Briefing* has not completely ignored lesbians, dismissed us as irrelevant, or denied our existence.

Rather, it has covered all of the issues that the Embryo Bill and the amendments to it raise in a thorough and interesting way. This obviously includes the implications of the Bill for *all* women.

Personally I think that Valerie Coultas's article is more contradictory than the Bill which is a clear attack on a woman's right to choose.

Keep up the good work!
Yours in sisterhood,
A. Palmer
London

Anniversary greetings

Dear *Briefing*,

Congratulations on reaching your 100th issue last fortnight.

Labour Briefing has brought to the Movement two qualities which are of unique value: information that cannot be found elsewhere and socialist commitment that has been notably lacking, at the top, over the last decade.

It has also offered us an alternative to the narrow sectarianism which has characterised some other groups on the left by being constructive, outward-looking, and open.

Long may *Labour Briefing* flourish, as an indispensable instrument in our campaigns for social — and socialist — change through its approach which is democratic, international in its outlook, and bold, at a time when Left pessimism has weakened us so unnecessarily.

Tony Benn

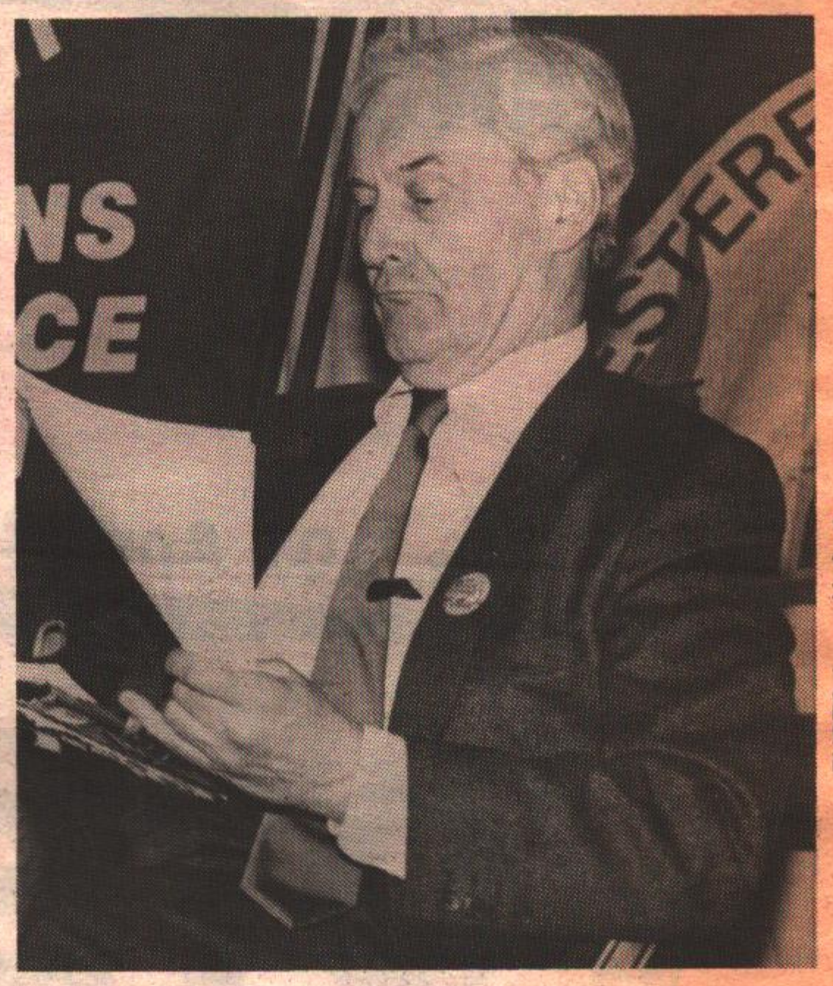


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Tony Benn: regular reader of Labour Briefing.

Campaign Group alone in backing Hong Kong

Dear Briefing,

The members of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs who put forward the following amendment to the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill at its Third Reading are to be congratulated:

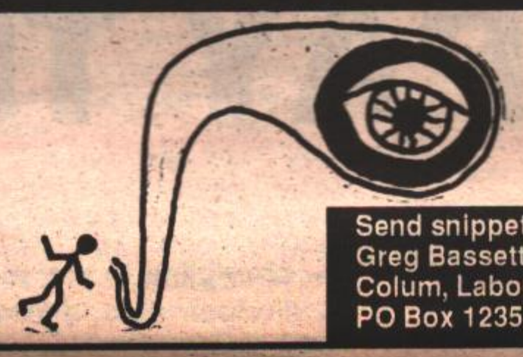
"This House declines to support the Second Reading of a Bill which makes no provision for the development of a fully democratic system of government in Hong Kong before the transfer to China, and makes no provision for the right of access to British Dependent Territories Passport holders in Hong Kong who might wish to come to Britain."

The amendment was signed by Bob Clay, Max Madden, Ken Livingston, Jeremy Corbyn, Tony Benn, Diane Abbott, Terry Fields, Dave Nellist, Alice Mahon, Dennis Skinner, Harry Barnes, and Ronnie Campbell.

With the Labour Party's sorry record on racism and immigration, this initiative deserves wider publicity.u

Yours in socialism,
Christine Fraser,
East London

PERISCOPE



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

Violence to Poll Tax headlines

The Guardian continues its ever more tortuous attempts to make current realities uphold venerable liberal nostrums.

Witness its recent front page headline "Poll Tax Violence Fails to Check Labour Lead".

Under this language-torturing rubric, *The Guardian* printed details of its latest ICM poll, taken shortly after the "London Poll Tax riots", and revealing a Labour lead over the tories stretching to 24%.

The same poll claimed that 7% are determined not to pay their Poll Tax at all and another 27% expect to pay only "after some delay".

Among 18-24 year olds 19% intend not to pay at all and 38% "after some delay".

Given the way the questions were posed — and by whom — these are striking confirmations of the broad base of the anti-Poll Tax movement.

Given the poll's other finding that 70% are now clearly opposed to the Poll Tax, perhaps *The Guardian* would have done its costly survey more justice by headlining it: "Poll Tax Violence *Increases* Labour Lead".

We told you so

In the light or a recent Gallup survey commissioned by CND, Labour's pro-tanks, pro-nukes, pro-NATO defence policy looks more of an electoral flop than ever.

According to the poll, 70% believe the USSR poses no threat to Britain; 75% want arms spending diverted to the NHS and the environment; 54% oppose replacing Polaris with trident (against 26% in favour); and 59% oppose "a defence policy based on the possible use of nuclear weapons" (only 31% are in favour).

Labour's "defence team", we are told, is now reconsidering the Policy Review commitments to enhanced conventional weaponry — and may even decide at last to do what Conference told it to do — back cuts in defence spending.

But no there is sign so far of any willingness to heed public opinion on nuclear disarmament.

Such a climbdown might be just too much for the Kinnockites to swallow — no matter what the implications for Labour's chances in the next General Election.

Contact Briefing

IMPORTANT!

Please will *Briefing* sellers bear with us, as we once more try to surmount production and printing problems.
•We are in the situation, once again, of looking for new printers, as we have been unable to finalise with East End Offset a regular printing slot as we had hoped.
•Meanwhile, British Rail have just jettisoned their special delivery service for newspapers and magazines – forcing us to rely, at great extra expense, on the post to bring you your *Briefings*. Please keep in touch with the office for news of publication – and please keep us in touch with how the new arrangements are working out.

As we go to press – literally, as we type this, the last paragraph of the paper, we hear the news coming through of the first vote on the time limits amendments to the Embryo Bill. While we do not yet know if the limit will sink lower than 24 weeks, we are still certain that the campaigning *Labour Briefing* is more vital than ever. Send us your reactions to the Bill as finally amended – and tell us what suggestions are being made in your area about where the Campaign goes from here.

Articles and correspondence should be sent to *Labour Briefing*, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY; as should payment for invoices (including subscriptions) and money for paper sales in the "London" area. Payment for paper sales outside the "London" area should be sent to 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.

You can telephone Briefing on 01-809 3927, most profitably Tues-Friday.

Next issue: No. 102: Deadline for articles Tuesday May 1st.

Published by Labour Briefing: PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ.
Printed by East End Offset [TU].

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Labour's big lead — an opportunity for socialists

The Tories, bracing themselves for big defeats on May 3rd, are in retreat on a number of fronts.

Their partial climbdown on testing in schools, their endless attempts to wriggle off the Poll Tax hook, and Thatcher's desperate attempt to mend fences with Mandela all point to a desperate drive to buy off sections of the opposition.

But true to form, the Tories are trying to turn retreat into counter-attack.

A crude example was the police violence against the London Poll Tax demo and the media mayhem which followed. As usual, the Tories had plenty of help from the Labour leadership, which called for "convictions" and "heavy sentencing" and offered no word of rebuke to the police.

Reassuringly, the baiting of *Militant* and the anarchists seems to have had little effect on public opinion. In the opinion polls, both Labour's lead over the Tories and popular opposition to the Poll Tax grew in the immediate aftermath of the so-called "Poll Tax Riot".

Poll Tax capping is a potentially more effective Tory counter-punch. It shows that the Tories have retained their central strategic objective: to weaken Labour's grip on the inner cities and force through more cuts in Council jobs and services.

In addition, the Tories hope capping will shift the ground of the argument over the Poll Tax — from one about its intrinsically undemocratic nature to one about its financial level in each Authority.

Assisted

Here again, they have been ably assisted by the Labour leadership, whose "stay within the law at all costs" policy has let the Tories in by the back door when the anti-Poll Tax movement had succeeded in closing the front.

Astronomical Poll Tax levels and threats to prosecute non-payers are hardly the best means of galvanising the huge anti-Poll Tax sentiment now seeping the country.

Indeed, recent opinion polls point to big social majorities building up on our side of a number of key political questions. In separate surveys, over 70% majorities were registered against the Poll Tax, for sanctions against South Africa, against Tory NHS "reform", and for cuts in defence spending and transfer of savings to NHS and the environment.

Support for these positions is larger, firmer and growing faster even than support for Labour.

If a Labour leadership raised the socialist banner on these issues it could consolidate its current lead, rebuild its grass-roots organisation, and secure popular support for the radical measures the next Labour government will need to take if it is to avoid the fate of the last one.

The pressure from below broke through at last week's NUT conference (see p. 12). Similar pressure for action against the Tories *now* is building up in other unions.

Unfortunately, this new combativeness comes smack up against a right-wing bureaucracy whose grip was tightened in almost all unions during the heyday of Thatcherism. A political challenge to the right will be required if the new upsurge is to bear fruit.

This is equally true in the Labour Party itself, where the right keep turning the screws on the left — and in the process waste one golden opportunity after another.

Shadow Cabinet members and union bureaucrats are now reviewing key sections of the Policy Review, already hoplessly out of date.

Spending

A commitment to cuts in arms spending does now seem on the cards, which could be an important bridgehead for the left in building some kind of socialist campaign for a Labour victory at the next election.

On the other hand, Labour's alternative to the Poll Tax looks confused, to say the least. Worse, Kinnock has made it clear that a Labour government would take at least two years to abolish the Poll Tax.

The tragedy is that the Party should be so set on further moves to the right and further curbs on members' rights at a time when anger against the Tories and expectations of rapid and concrete social changes are rising to post-war heights.

Socialists have a wider and more interested audience than for many years.

This is not a passive audience, sitting in front of the TV waiting for Mandelson mumblings, nor even is it out in its garden, tending the roses. It is an active and increasingly dynamic constituency which *will* make its voice heard — even, eventually, in the sound-proofed corridors of Walworth Road.

Hong Kong: who bats for the workers?

Tebbitt's attacks on Hong Kong refugees and black people in Britain are reminiscent of Enoch Powell at his worst.

With the Tories on the rack, it's not surprising that at least one wing of the Party sees political salvation in crude racism.

Equally alarming is Labour's own willingness to play the racist card.

Hattersley in particular disgraced himself and our Party with his remark that Afro-Caribbeans and Asians would resent Hong Kong refugees. We well remember racist Roy's previous "divide and rule" devices in response to Black Sections.

Of course, Labour's record on immigration has always been appalling. Its stand on Hong Kong refugees — opposing the elitist Tory proposals while refusing to commit itself to admitting *more* refugees — was in its worst traditions.

Hattersley's notion that Hong Kong refugees should be dealt with through "normal channels" was only a roundabout way of saying they should be subject to Britain's racist immigration laws and officials like all other black people!

Even Paddy Ashdown put up a better show in defending basic democratic and anti-racist principles than the Labour front bench.

White South Africans are now the biggest single group of immigrants to Britain and the government is intent on making it even easier for them to get in.

This shows that the issue is not — and never has been — immigration (or population control). It was and is about race and racism.

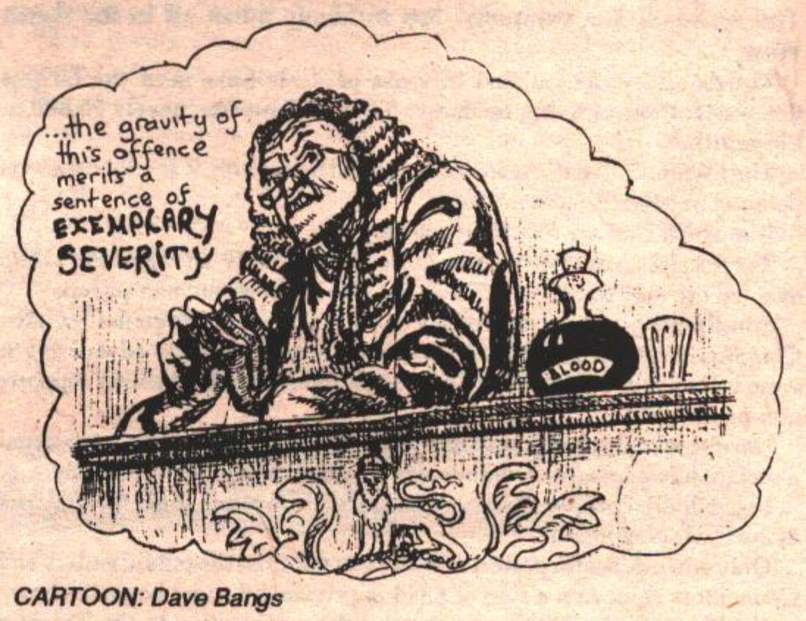
Alas, race and racism are just the kind of test questions Labour's front bench flunks time after time. Socialists in the Party have their work cut out.

We congratulate those Campaign Group MPs who abstained on the government's Hong Kong Bill. Entering the lobbies with Tebbitt's rabid right Tories on this issue was unacceptable — and the government's proposals were grotesquely biased against working class Hong Kong Chinese.

Tebbit's loyalty test for black people is supporting England on the cricket pitch. Our loyalty test for Labour MPs is whether they are prepared to go to bat for black workers — whether they live in Britain or Hong Kong.

Behind the headlines

Another barbarity from British "justice"



CARTOON: Dave Bangs

Nowhere else in Europe do prisoners sleep three to a tiny cell, built by the Victorians to accommodate one.

Nowhere else has the inhumane system of slopping out, where men have to defecate in front of other prisoners and sleep with the results all night.

Nowhere else are they locked up 23 hours a day.

More money is the Home Secretary's answer. More money to build more prisons would mean less overcrowding. More money to pay more warders. But prisons are like motorways; the more you build, the more they fill up.

A more significant change is needed. The government needs to change its penal policy and society needs to change its attitudes.

Since 1979 there has been an emphasis on retribution rather than rehabilitation. Rehabilitation didn't work in the 1970s, the government decided, so they introduced the short, sharp shock. That did not work.

By Liz Davies
Islington North CLP

Custodial sentences shot up, and so did the crime rate. Money was spent on building prisons and courts, and crime expanded to fill them.

Anyone who has spent the shortest period inside knows that's where you pick up "criminal" tricks.

Now the government is seeking to reduce custodial sentences.

The Carlisle Report recommended clear time-limits on remissions and parole, so prisoners would only serve half of their sentences. New guidelines have been produced to discourage courts from sentencing young offenders to custody.

But no change has been made to the remand system. A high proportion of prisoners are on remand and significant numbers of these, if convicted, receive non-custodial sentences.

Magistrates are frightened to take risks. it is safer for them to bang people up than take risks. The government cannot alter sentencing without also altering the remand requirements.

But most important is a general change of attitude. Prisoners riot because they are profoundly frustrated; they have no other way of voicing discontent at their conditions.

It is easy to assume that prisoners forfeit their rights by virtue of the crime they have committed. That makes them justifiable victims.

It means that spending to improve their living conditions is low on the list of priorities. It also means that they suffer brutality from warders and other prisoners without any redress.

Whether and how criminals should be punished is a never-ending debate. But whatever the views on punishment, the loss of liberty is sufficient punishment for any crime.

Loss of liberty involves loss of any control over your life, your day to day activity is solely dependent upon other people. That must involve loss of self-respect.

We have no right to increase that feeling of powerlessness by treating prisoners like barbarians.

The riots around the country are an indictment of the appalling conditions prisoners live in; something unique to British "justice".

Campaign: Poll Tax Special

Right to reply

Anarchist victimised by Labour Council

In 1886, five anarchists and labour movement organisers were judicially murdered as a result of the frame-up following a bombing in one of the centres of the strike wave for the Eight Hour Day across the United States.

In 1889 the Social Democratic International declared May 1st, the day the Eight Hour strike wave had begun, to be International Workers' Day in their memory.

At the time anarchists were recognised to be a legitimate section of the international labour movement, and the martyrdom of five for being union organisers to be an attack on the working class movement as a whole.

The attitude of the contemporary left in Britain towards anarchists and arnarcho-syndicalists is somewhat different, and it needs to change if political myopia is not to contribute to the attack being launched against the anti-Poll Tax movement.

In one case the damage has already been done.

Andy Murphy, a Housing Benefits clerk in Hackney and a NALGO member since 1979, was suspended from duty on April 4th. His "crime" was to have acted as a spokesperson for his political group — Class War — in his own time.

The suspension follows the invitation by a Tory MP to Thatcher in Parliament to agree that Labour Councils should not employ people with Andy's views.

In acting as a spokesperson for Class War Andy had taken advice from his manager and personnel and taken leave to deal with the press, he did not mention his employment by Hackney in any of the interviews.

NALGO has discovered that the Council's most senior management body decided that there were no grounds for taking any action against Andy.

The decision to suspend Andy, justified by the officer concerned as standard practice for allegations of gross misconduct is political.

A further indication that there is no substance to the allegations is the request by the officer concerned to see NALGO's tapes of TV and radio interviews given by Andy which he has not seen — Andy has been suspended on hearsay!

By Neill Roberts
North London
Direct Action
Movement

It is not credible that the officer suspended Andy on his own initiative, against the judgement of his superiors; the decision must emanate from the Council leadership.

It appears, although there is no hard evidence, unfortunately, that the decision was taken at the request of Neil Kinnock's private office.

I used to joke about Labour having its own blacklist — it is a joke no longer. The witch-hunt against socialists in the Labour Party has been extended to anarchists who work for Labour-controlled bodies.

Hackney NALGO regards this as an issue on which we must fight, regardless of whether or not we agree with the views Andy expressed in the media.

We are demanding Andy's immediate re-instatement, and that no disciplinary charges be brought against him. This position is supported by the other council unions, and is being taken up by other NALGO branches, Trades Councils, etc.

How did the Labour leadership, whether locally or nationally, feel confident enough to victimise an anarchist in such a blatantly political manner, so blatant that it could lead to indefinite strike action by NALGO, supported by the other Council unions?

The answer has got to be that statements by the left have given them the impression that anarchists are isolated, and not part of the labour movement.

Most obvious are the remarks by Steve Nark and Tommy Shop'em of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, blaming violence on 31st March on "anarchists".

Like the statements about "naming names", these have never been withdrawn, only fudged.

The one that probably caused most damage was the statement given out at the TUC's lobby of Parliament on April 3rd, which continued to blame violence on an "anarchist" minority of the marchers.

The Federation has no control over the anti-Poll Tax movement — half the local groups aren't affiliated, and there is no structure below the National Committee.

But institution-minded groups like the Labour leadership probably see those remarks as ensuring that anarchists will get no support from the movement.



PHOTO: Tom Loucas

State victimisation: local or national?

Peter Chowney's article "Anarchy in the UK?" (*Briefing* no. 99) probably did some harm — here was a left paper promoting the view that activity by Class War, Direct Action Movement, and Hackney Solidarity Group was related to the violence.

I think Peter Chowney should apologise to Andy Murphy for helping set him up, and *Briefing* should have a hard look at what it says about anarchists in future.

Hackney NALGO's Executive Committee has endorsed a resolution calling for the statements by the Federation to be publicly and unequivocably retracted.

The resolution also made the point that anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists are a legitimate section of the labour movement, and that we can not be offered to the state as scapegoats for events which mess up the plans of social democrats without weakening the movement as a whole.

The left has a problem with anarchists. It is incapable of admitting in public what *Briefing* supporters well know from their involvement in the anti-Poll Tax movement — that anarchists are often competent working class organisers.

The ritual praise for *Militant's* work in the movement which qualifies every — justified — criticism of them is not matched by any recognition of the far greater and more positive contribution made by anarchists to the fight against the Poll Tax. Why not?

Haringey and Lewisham APTUs are what they are today — the strongest campaigns in London — because of the positive contributions of anarchists, but reading *Briefing* you could be forgiven for thinking that it was in spite of us.

In both those groups anarcho-syndicalists have worked closely with *Briefing* supporters, and the situation with *3D* has been similar.

Sham Singh, Trades Union Liaison Officer of the All-Britain Federation, is an anarcho-syndicalist, as are the organisers of the London trade union dayschool on fighting the Poll Tax in the workplace.

Those organisers are now working with the Socialist Movement on a national Conference.

Clearly, our contribution is recognised as important on a practical level, but if that contribution is not reflected in public statements we are left vulnerable to the kind of victimisation Andy Murphy now faces.

If we are allowed to be isolated and picked off, the anti-Poll Tax and labour movements will be seriously weakened, and the attacks will not stop there, but will be used as a lever to undermine the whole movement.

So no more talk about "dispossessed youth" neglected by the labour movement please, an injury to one is an injury to all!

EXETER

Protests Mount

By an Exeter Correspondent

The Anti-Poll Tax campaign has suddenly taken off in the South West.

Towns and cities unused to mass protests have seen the largest demonstrations in living memory: 5,000 in Taunton, nearly 10,000 in Plymouth.

The Plymouth event, organised by a local housewife, was a spontaneous outburst of opposition to the Tax.

But which strategy should be pursued?

The local Labour Party showed its colours early on when the GMC decided not only to collect the Tax but also to prosecute non-payers.

Shortly after, the Labour-led City Council cancelled a Regional Socialist Conference meeting in one of their halls because leaflets advertising it were included in the anti-Poll Tax Federation Newsletter, which supports non-payment!

Despite such blatant censorship, the Anti-Poll Tax Federation rejected a sectarian response and continued to organise as widely as possibly.

Five hundred people of all ages picketed the meeting to set the Poll Tax at the Exeter Guildhall.

Only when peaceful protestors were ejected from the public gallery and Councillors agreed on a sum of £344 in private did anger begin to show.

On March 24th, 700 people showed their opposition to the Tax in a demonstration organised by the Federation in conjunction with the Trades Council.

The Chair of the Trades Council attacked non-payment to loud boos. Such was the weight of feeling that one Labour Councillor gave a pledge that those who could not pay would not be prosecuted.

This position was rejected by the Labour Group and he backtracked rapidly.

However the contradictions of a Labour Party which takes out full page advertisements opposing the Poll Tax, but which is preparing to prosecute those who do not pay it was apparent for all to see.

Anti-Poll Tax groups are now springing up all over the city. On April 2nd, over 1,000 people marched to Wat Tyler House — the Poll Tax Office — to demonstrate their determination to defy the Tax.

CAMDEN

Group keeps the lid on

Camden's ruling Labour Group has decided to tow the line again.

The Group will not appeal against a Poll Tax capping figure of £500, a cut of £34.

By not appealing, it allows the government to have even tighter control over Camden's spending and erodes to a greater degree local democracy and accountability.

Cuts of £4.4 million were avoided at the last minute when the Director of Finance devised "accountancy measures" to tide the Council over to next year.

By Adrian States
Chair, Camden
Stop the Poll Tax
Campaign

The leadership of the Labour Group seemed to fail to realise that Whitehall will be back for further restrictions next year and compliance with their wishes now, indicates a total lack of will power to confront the government in the future.

The decision not to appeal, should surprise no one. Since winning the local elections in 1986 with a no cuts manifesto, the Labour Group have squandered their 29 seat majority and complied with Tory wishes.

Cuts of £40 million and 2,000 job losses in 1987/88 have paved the way for collaborating over compulsory competitive tendering and the Poll Tax.

Only two Councillors, Angie Birtill and Adrian States, voted against setting the Tax in the Council Chamber, while outside 600 people lobbied for the Labour Group not to implement it.

It clearly showed how most Labour Councillors are totally out of touch with their electorate.

Estimates that 95% of the Poll Tax will be collected in Camden, must come from another world. The rapidly growing campaign against the Tax will strengthen the call for mass non-payment.

And following the action by CPSA staff at the Bloomsbury DSS not to process forms giving details of claimants to the Council to complete the Poll Tax register, the Housing shop of Camden NALGO has refused to collect Poll Tax with rents.

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 must come out in the open. Rush in bulk orders for the new LPS badge for your ward, trade union branch, Anti-Poll Tax Union, etc. Wear your badge with pride! (And don't pay.)

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: £00.35
20 Badges: £06.00
50 Badges: £13.00
100 Badges: £23.00
200 Badges: £40.00
Please make cheques payable to Labour Party Socialists.
No orders dispatched without pre-payment!

Non-payment

We're not paying the Poll Tax!

"I won't pay the Poll Tax because it's a tax designed to take from the poor and give to the rich. I oppose it on principle. I urge all Labour Candidates in the May elections to make public statments that they will not pay the Poll Tax."
PIERS CORBYN
Labour Councillor, London Borough of Southwark

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

" I am not paying the Poll Tax because it's grossly unfair and, in my opinion, unconstitutional. Neil Kinnock is out of touch with the feelings of ordinary people. He must be living on another planet."
GARTH FRANKLAND
Leeds City Labour Councillor

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

"Even if I could afford to pay the Poll Tax I wouldn't - because millions of others can't."
MICK GOSLING
Victimised Ford Dagenham worker and TGWU member

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

"For me the Poll Tax is a trade union issue. Town Hall workers are faced with paying the Tax — a major attack on our living standards — and with major cuts in jobs and services. As Trade Unionists we must be clear that the only way to defend our jobs is to defeat the Poll Tax through mass non-payment and Trade Union action on implementation with NALGO members refusing to prosecute non-payers. That's why I'm not paying and why we're fighting within NALGO for a national policy of non-collection."
SIAN MOORE
Vice Chair, Lambeth NALGO

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

"I won't pay the Poll Tax because it means me paying 40% more for fewer and fewer services. It's a tax on the poor. I can understand the anger of the people on the march who faced police violence like the miners and the printers before them. We can defeat the Poll Tax if the people remain united determined not to pay it. For myself, I will fight it all the way."
TERRY FRENCH
Victimised striking miner

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

"The Tories make laws in the interests of their class. Lesbians and gay men have long suffered under unjust laws, made worse by this government through Section 28. The Poll Tax has created a genuine mass opposition. This is the first chance since the miners strike of getting them out and establishing the conditions for positive social change. Every socialist must be part of this non-payment campaign."
PETER PURTON
LCLGR (personal capacity)

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

"A Tax which is less for a single millionaire than for a working class family of four is an unjust Tax which must be defied. The case for a mass campagn of civil disobedience has rarely been stronger on any issue in Post-war British history. A government which forces through an oppressive law against the wishes of the majority of the British people is a tyranny which has lost its democratic legitimacy and forfeited its moral right to rule."
PETER TATCHELL

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

" I'm not paying the Poll Tax because it is the first step on the road to the introduction of Pass laws and other measures of undemocratic mass-control which so many people have given their lives to overturn in Azania. The long-term implications of the Poll Tax are horrendous. It must be resisted."
NARENDRA MAKANJI
Haringey Councillor

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

" The Poll Tax represents attacks on the community, cuts in the services we provide, cuts in our jobs - I don't think Trade Unionists should collect the Poll Tax. It acts against the poorest in society. "
ROM WILLIAMS
Haringey shop steward

POLL TAX



PHOTO: Tom Loucas

Opposition to the Poll Tax: the Battle of Trafalgar Square.

If the Cap fits...

Why has the government Poll Tax capped 21 local Councils?
On the face of it this seems pretty stupid.

By ERIC WARBING

Hundreds of thousands of bills will have to be reprinted and re-issued at great expense.

The fact that no Tory Councils were capped, despite the large number of "losers" in these areas, will only increase the widespread feeling that the system is politically rigged.

The Councils were capped shortly before local elections — if the Tax really is designed to increase accountability to the electorate, why not wait a few weeks and let the people decide?

In addition, the system of transitional relief introduced for the duration of the phasing-in period means that for many people capping will make little or no difference in their Poll Tax bills.

In Haringey the Tax level was set below the government's notional figure, which is the level of Poll Tax on which the government pays transitional relief.

Transitional relief is a grant which subsidises individual Poll Tax bills to ensure that at the notional level no-one pays more than £3 per week more than they did under the rating system in the previous year.

As Haringey set its Poll Tax below this level, then for many people the actual level of Poll Tax payable had little to do with the level set by the Council. It was simply last year's rates plus £3 per week.

For over 50,000 Haringey residents the Poll Tax will still be last year's rates plus £3 a week, despite the cap.

So why do it?

There are a number of reasons. The government is trying to make out that high Poll Tax levels are due to Labour Councils wasting money.

Convoluted

To maintain this illusion a highly convoluted formula had to be worked out under which only Labour Councils got capped, despite the fact that several non-capped Tory Councils have Tax levels higher than those of some of the capped Labour Councils.

The other reason the government had to cap was because it always said it would.

It was obvious that many Councils, Labour and Tory, would go for a high level in the first year of Poll Tax knowing that the government would get the blame, particularly as it had massively cut revenue support grants.

The government therefore tried to use the threat of capping as a means of bullying Councils into making cuts. A leak from the DOE that up to 100 Councils could be capped was intended to do the trick.

These are still not sufficient reasons for capping, and given how silly it makes the government look, there must be something else behind it, and there is.

The main reason for capping is the government's fear of the forthcoming elections. By "increased accountability to the electorate" the government actually means "turning elections into referenda on the *level* of Poll Tax."

"The Community Charge puts the community in Charge" is one of the Tories' favourite slogans at present. But with the prospect of massive swings to Labour Councils with high Poll Tax levels, the Tories ran scared.

To avoid Labour saying that "the Community Charge puts Labour in charge" the slogan became "the Community Charge puts the Secretary of State for the Environment in Charge".

How should Labour Councils respond? All are committed to legal strategies and none are prepared to confront the government on the issue.

Some have accepted the cap, and are busy cutting away, others are appealing in court in a vain attempt to show that they are prepared to stand up to the government.

Challenging the cap in the courts is hardly a socialist strategy and is unlikely to succeed. It is easy to suspect that Labour Councils pursuing this course have hidden agendas.

Item one is to minimise opposition to their cuts. By appealing and losing, Councils can delay the setting of a new Poll Tax and increase the scale of cuts required to balance a single year's budget.

Making more cuts this year will reduce the cuts that the Councils feel they will have to make in future years.

The Labour right in London has another reason for appealing. The delay in the re-setting of the Poll Tax means that the cuts will be made *after* the elections by new Labour Groups.

By making the new Groups make the cuts, the right wing can identify those Councillors prepared to stand and fight early on, and fit them into the current round of witch-hunting.

Of course, this is all very cynical.

To suggest that both the Tory Party and sections of the Labour Party are acting purely out of self-interest and with little consideration for the people whose lives they are playing with is something neither would accept.

But what is clear is that Labour Councils do not intend to mount a political campaign against the Tax and therefore all their talk of appeals and legal opposition should be viewed accordingly.

TRAFALGAR SQUARE DEFENCE CAMPAIGN

A Defence Campaign is being set up for people charged as a result of the police attack on the Poll Tax demonstration in Trafalgar Square on March 31st.
An initial meeting to gather together as many defendants as possible has been organised at Conway Hall on May 3rd at 7.30pm.
All defendants, their close relations or personal representatives are welcome.
The Campaign will have as its sole objective the legal defence of those charged. The Campaign will be politically independent and answerable to the defendants only.
To date the meeting has the backing of the following groups:
•Tottenham Against the Poll Tax
•Haringey Against the Poll Tax
•Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign
•Hackney Community Defence Campaign.
For further information contact:
•Antony Benson: 01-808 3611 (h); 01-808 4581 ext 298 (w)
•Terry Conway: 01-263 8289 (h)
•Tottenham Unwaged Centre: 01-802 9804 (messages left).

Labour Party

Haringey witch-hunt



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Haringey: a tradition of resistance

Defiance by whose rules?

Eleven Councillors were disciplined by Haringey's Local Government Committee in March. A number of these had already resigned their seats or did not intend to stand again. The remainder were subsequently barred from standing. One of them, Ron Blanchard, was later reinstated after protesting that he had not in fact broken the whip at any stage!
CHRIS DILLON, Hornsey & Wood Green CLP, reports on the blood letting.

The latest round of the witch hunt in Haringey took place at an LGC.

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC) achieved their aim of expelling from the Labour Group those comrades who had refused to vote to set a Poll Tax, or who would not support the hounding of non-payers.

These expelled comrades represent the growing anger of the grass roots movement against the Tories' Poll Tax.

The Poll Tax has now become Labour's Poll Tax too: to accept and comply without struggle is inexcusable and can only be condemned as supporting liberal New Realism.

Orchestrators

The orchestrators of the expulsion campaign were conspicuous at the LGC by the silence they maintained, which was only broken when the meeting and their stooges within it needed directing.

The result of the meeting was a foregone conclusion. If the Labour Party rulebook had included execution for such rebellious acts, then the gallows would have been built and waiting.

The LGC had interpreted standing orders to allow the tabling of motions of condemnation without consultation with the wider party.

This comes from the clique which claims to champion "one member one vote" — but not when removing elected Councillors!

However, in order to display some semblance of democracy a trial had to be staged, and evidence produced.

The evidence against the "accused" consisted of interpretations of Standing Orders. and denunciations of "immorality" for acting in defiance of the Labour Group, and for breaking the "law".

These laws and morals, taken directly from the Tories, have been designed to make it impossible for the working class to break through the constraints imposed upon it.

The Tories will change laws and introduce new ones in order to uphold and maintain their dominance, as they did with the changes in trade union laws.

When workers rise up and break those laws in an attempt to secure their rights, the New Realists within the Labour Party condemn their actions.

Socialists must state loudly and clearly that all actions which contribute to the defeat of the Poll Tax must be seen as laudable examples of working class morality.

By not standing behind the non-payment movement, the Labour Party is standing for the criminalisation of millions of non-payers — forgetting that the labour movement was founded upon struggles against unjust laws.

These same principles apply to the "rebel" Councillors, who are not isolated individuals, but part of a mass working class movement.

Those same toadying characters from the LCC who see the Poll Tax purely as a stick with which to beat other party members, will have no qualms about continuing to celebrate historic events in the history of the movement.

The peasants' revolt and Tolpuddle Martyrs will no doubt be commemorated by special red rose mugs featuring Neil Kinnock and Watt Tyler!

The left in the Labour Party can take heart from the strength of the anti-Poll Tax movement.

Not only does the Movement have the power to sweep the Tax and the Tories away — it also has within it the seeds of the power to sweep away the rotten New Realist leaders.

Party selection

NEC moves to break union link

The NEC is about to launch yet another attack on the Parliamentary selection process.

By DAN CARTER

Having removed the federal, delegate-based structure with an unworkable mixture of one-member-one-vote and trade union/socialist elctoral college, it will not put before Party Conference plans to remove the trade unions altogether.

For the first time since the formation of the Labour Party 80 years ago, the link with the unions will be broken.

Arguments that this new system will be "more democratic" will abound.

Particularly in the national press from the *Telegraph* to union-busting Maxwell's *Mirror*, press barons will rush to promote their vision of democracy in the Labour Party.

This will, of ocurse, having nothing to do with the fact that they will now be able to control selections with favourable or damaging articles in the way they tried to stitch-up the TGWU elections and successfully succeeded in collusion with Frank Field in Wallasey at the 87 General Election.

Hartlepool, with sympathetic national profiles of their man Mandelson, will be repeated all over the country. And with no right of reply, candidates will be libelled with no form of redress.

You won't have to read the candidates biographies or statements, or attend any meetings, because there in your friendly local rag will be the stories of loony lefties and moderate mainstreamers.

It looks likely that most unions, continuing their desperate bid to get Kinnock elected at all costs, will vote themselves out of a vote at Conference in October.

We must campaign against this, and for a true participatory democracy, where union branches meet and question the candidates before democratically deciding their votes.

Mandating

A return to GC voting, with the addition of mandating of delegates so they truly represent the membership's wishes, is the best way forward.

Labour is not just an individual membership party on Western European social democratic lines, however much Kinnock would like it to be.

We still have organic and effective links with the organised working class through the unions and we will campaign to keep them.

Labour Party Socialists Conference

Make the challenge!

The Labour Party Socialists Conference on 19th/20th May is crucial for both the development of both the Labour left and the Socialist Movement.
BRYN GRIFFITHS, Tottenham CLP, reports on the preparations for the Conference and the important debates that will be taking place in Sheffield.

The current political situation should make it easier to mobilise for the Conference.

The Tories' crisis, the mobilisations against the Poll Tax and Labour's spectacular victory in Mid-Staffs will increase the confidence of the working class in general and the left in particular.

All will recognise, however, that there is a contradiction between these and the politics (or lack of them) on which mid-Staffs was won and of the Policy Review!

The Conference aptly titled "The Future of Socialism in the Labour Party" has three themes:

•***Policies for a new decade.***

With the publication of a new policy statement, dubbed "son of Policy Review" by *The Guardian*, it is vital the left has a positive response.

We must recognise the momentous changes taking place in Eastern Europe and South Africa.

•***Campaigning for Socialism.***

If a Labour government is to be elected, and if that government is to introduce radical changes to our society then we need a campaigning Party and an involved membership.

How do we campaign? On what issues? And who are we speaking to?

•***Creating a democratic party.***

Many Labour Party members are anxious that the party is becoming elitist and authoritarian. Policy is now changed without consultation, and pushed through by a few top people.

The leadership now wants to further undermine the shambolic selection procedure by making it virtually impossible to even challenge a sitting MP.

To cap it all, the Party spends hundreds of thousands of pounds a year in disciplinary action and rigged "inquiries".

Policy papers are being produced around each of these themes and will be sent out to those who register in advance. There will be workshops on each issue.

The discussions are likely to be controversial, with comrades coming forward with proposals that break with some of the traditional consensus on the left.

In the workshop on democracy two papers will be presented, neither of which defend the status quo.

The big debate is likely to be between those who wish to democratise the block vote and those who would like to see it abandoned in favour of a new kind of relationship with the trade unions.

Proposals will be put to many workshops for practical campaigning activity.

Labour Briefing supporters on the organising committee have focused firstly on the Poll Tax and secondly on the need for a "Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory."

Initiatives have already been taken on the Poll Tax with the petition of Party members committed to not paying and the LPS "Don't Pay the Poll Tax" badge.

In the aftermath of the local elections, LPS will be holding a press conference of MPs and Councillors committed to a non-payment campaign.

With the NEC refusing, by a one vote margin, to organise even a rally or demonstration there is a huge political space for the Labour left to fill.

Left activists must link up with anti-Poll Tax groups on the ground to force a change in Party policy both locally and possibly nationally.

LPS can play a pivotal role in this if it situates itself as the anti-Poll Tax wing of the Party.

A workshop on the General Election will pose the possibility of a "Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory" before, and during the General Election.

This would publicly call for a Labour vote based not on Kinnock's policies but clear demands on the Labour Party and a possible government, linking up with, for instance, anti-Poll Tax groups, Irish solidarity organisations and strikers.

This proposal will need detailed and wide debate and the LPS Conference will be an ideal place to start.

This Conference, distinguishing it from so many others, intends to set up an organisation of supporters.

The proposal is for a Steering Committee consisting of up to four representatives from each Labour Party region, three black supporters of LPS, three women supporters of LPS, plus nine members eleted by the National Conference.

The sectional groups will hold separate meetings to elect their representatives. Regional representatives will also have the task of organising supporters in their areas.

It is essential that *Labour Briefing* supporters do their utmost to build the Conference.

We should seek sponsorship from every possible body — left caucuses, LP branches and CLPs, Women's and Black Sections and trade union organisations (a trade union input into the Conference is essential).

This serves two purposes, primarily sponsorship should be a commitment to build for the Conference, **but the money is also essential.**

The "Summerfield Group" in Birmingham, which unites left Councillors and the left of the Labour Party is sponsoring the Conference. Leicester Councillors who voted not to set a Poll Tax are mobilising.

In Coventry and Islington left caucuses are putting a big effort into building for the Conference. Black Sections have given the Conference a boost by agreeing to sponsor it at a national level.

LPS is an excellent opportunity to begin the task of rebuilding the Labour left. A Kinnock government would open up new opportunities for a Socialist left putting an alternative to his policies of austerity and retreat.

LPS will not be a talking shop. It is serious about establishing a regionally based national organisation, so see you in Sheffield.

LOCAL ELECTIONS

Voting against the Poll Tax

The 1990 local elections *will* be a referendum on the Poll Tax.

The Tories, facing Labour opinion poll ratings of over 50% and a burgeoning leadership crisis, are in a panic.

By Bryn Griffiths
Tottenham CLP

Even Jack Cunningham has been moved to describe the Tory Poll Tax smears against the Labour Party as "Goebbels type tactics."

Recent local government by-elections show that Labour is performing well and will be starting from a very high level.

•The average Conservative to Labour swing in the 11 recent contests wirth a 1987 General Election baseline was 15.3%.

•One of the Tories' worst results was in a Bromsgrove ward, where there was a 31% switch to Labour.

•Labour has only lost one by-election since the New Year — in Lochmaben where it failed to defend its seat!

In 1986 Labour had an exceptionally good year, gaining 484 seats (see box). To make big gains Labour's performance will have to be nothing short of brilliant.

The Liberal Democrats must be facing the elections with as much trepidation as Kenneth Baker. Huge losses could lead them towards political oblivion.

Opinion polls place them barely above their former partners the SDP and the Green Party; although they will gain some comfort from their relatively good performance where they have stood in local by-elections.

Their problem is the massive fall in the number of candidates they are actually standing. In 1985 they contested 90% of all by-elections; but so far this year the Democrats have contested a mere 60%.

Liberal campaigner Tony Greaves denounced the failure to stand candidates as "an appalling disgrace." (*Liberal Democrat News*).

In some areas the Liberal Democrats will be blighted by one of the 400 SDP candidates; in others they will be facing Michael Meadowcroft's continuing Liberal Party as well.

Other minor parties include the Greens, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party, and the newly formed Islamic Party of Britain.

1986 ELECTION RESULTS

Conservative	–705
Labour	+484
Alliance	+272
Independents	– 57
Scottish National Party	– 15
Plaid Cymru	+ 1
Others	– 5

Source: Press Association

The Greens go into combat with the highest number of candidates ever in the local elections. They will defend up to 20 seats and field candidates right across the country, although not a full slate in every Authority.

It will be interesting to see if the Green bubble has burst.

A mixed performance in local by-elections suggests there will be few shocks, but their vote has reached as much as 36.2% (Sedgemoor District Council) where they were the sole repository of the anti-Tory vote.

Perhaps more worrying for Labour is the Islamic Party of Britain.

Formed in the aftermath of the Rushdie affair, the Islamic Party is standing candidates in Blackburn, Bolton, Bradford, Leicester, Newham, Preston, Tower Hamlets and Walsall.

PULSE

In Scotland, Labour is the establishment party. The Tories have given more prominence to Michael Forsyth, the privatisation and PULSE supremo, but pundits are not expecting much of a Tory fightback.

More of a threat is posed by the SNP. The SNP recently won a ward by-election in the key marginal constituency of Galloway and Upper Nirthsdale. They are hoping to win the balance of power in Lothian.

The elections will be fiercely fought in London with the Tories defending the privatisation jewels in their crown: Westminster, Wandsworth and Merton, which are all under threat.

Tory

The demise of Lady Shirley Porter and her Westminster privateers would be a fantastic blow to Tory morale!

Labour could be vulnerable in Ealing, Waltham Forest, and Brent, and the Tories are also hoping to make gains in Haringey.

The fact that unnamed Labour tacticians were quoted in the *Municipal Journal* as seeing these Boroughs as "vulnerable" is an appalling indictment of Labour's record.

With Labour rocketing ahead in the opinion polls how can London Boroughs held by Labour be under even the slightest threat?

If Labour does do badly in any of these, the relatively recent Kinnockite converts will have some serious explaining to do!

Tower Hamlets is a Labour target.

The end of the East End's racist Liberals would be very welcome indeed and hopefully the local Labour Parties row with Walworth Road signals the possibility of at least some resistance to the Poll Tax from the new Council.

Outside London all eyes will be on Eric Pickles Tory Bradford. Pickles has claimed that a "low" Poll Tax will secure the Tory vote. Bradford should never have been Tory. Let's hope we win it back.

Wallasey should go Labour unless the Field affair has put a spanner in the works. If even half of Field's accusations of left wing Councillors being so influential are true, it will be great to see them in office.

I'm looking forward to the local elections. I want to see Kenneth Baker squirm as he attempts to explain the Tories' rout in the Poll Tax referendum.

Recent opinion polls that pinned the blame for the Poll Tax riots on the Tory Party signal that they are in big trouble.

It would also be great to see the wretched Liberal Democrat election machine blown into oblivion further upsetting Tony Greaves.

Labour

Election night should be a night to enjoy as long as the Labour spokespersons can manage not to be too craven under the establishment spotlight. Is that a lot to ask for one night?

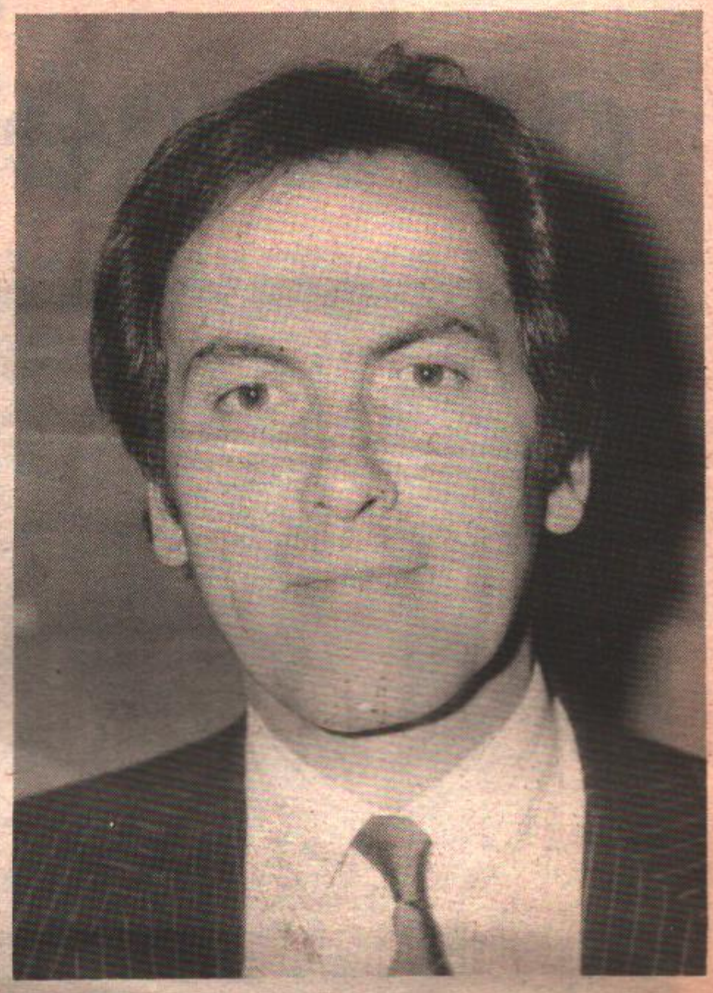


PHOTO: Labour Party Photo Library

Will Jack Cunningham, Labour's Campaign Organiser, be craven under the establishment spotlight?



When will Thatcher-ism become Thatcher-wasm?

Waltham Forest

Tory Poll Tax — We won't pay!

The Labour Party seems set to retain or regain office in many Councils on May 3rd.

It may win majorities in others never before run by Labour, like Redbridge.

By John Wray
Labour Council candidate in Leyton Ward

At the same time, the left seems to be going in the opposite direction.

Its desertion of local government may be predictable and more honest than what we have seen recently in Lambeth, but it is still an admission of defeat against the thrown-away-shield of the office-without-principles faction.

In Waltham Forest over just the last year we have had a Council that has tried to introduce a HAT for four Council estates; and which has still not grasped the truism that more urban motorways do not mean traffic relief.

Not only has it arbitrarily fined Poll Tax non-registerers, but it has also threatened to withdraw housing benefit from these people as well.

It is quite easy to give up, faced with this and more. But running away from such temporary defeats doesn't give the left much credibility in the long-run.

In one ward in Waltham Forest — Leyton, currently held by the SLD — three Labour candidates, myself and Jenny and Denis Gray — are openly standing on a "We won't pay the Poll Tax" platform.

Left

The Poll Tax is an issue which demands left Councillors who will fight for non-prosecution. It is also an opportunity for the left to stand on radical platforms and win.

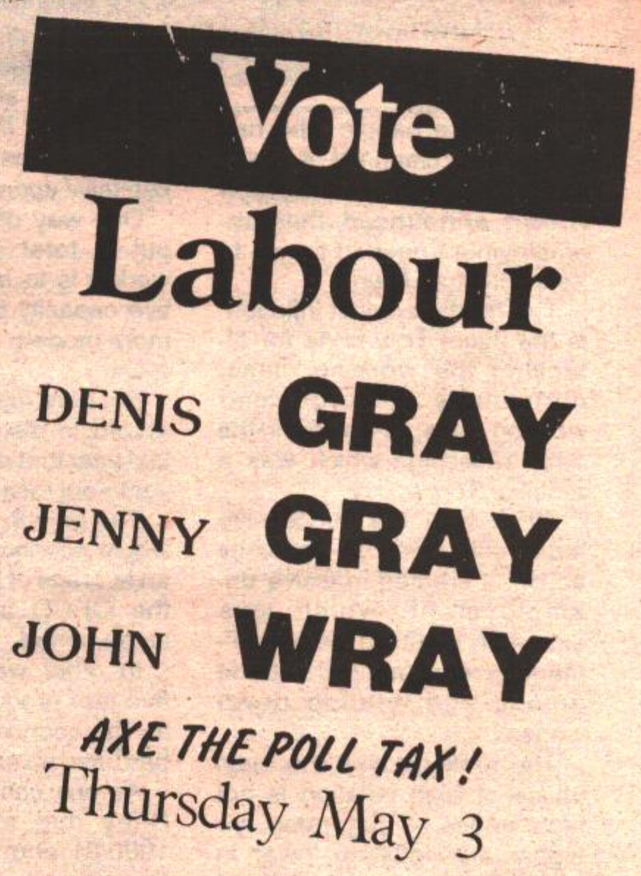
Our canvass returns in the first two weeks have shown large swings from the last two years which are not simply attributable to the national mood.

We have a firm SLD base to overcome and we have been promised more support than in other wards where the opposition is non-existent.

Members of the local Anti-Poll Tax organisation have lent support to us because of our stand on a totally non-sectarian basis.

If elected our first task will be to fight for a policy of non-prosecution of those who refuse to register; and to link up to develop anti-Poll Tax policy with similarly committed activists both here and in the other areas.

To do this the one message that every left member of the Labour Party must acknowledge is "Stay and Fight".



The Economy

Hoist by their own petard!



"Well, Maggie, this is the driving seat; and once you're in it, you're responsible for what happens..."

It was almost funny.

Just when the government was claiming credit for the 40th successive monthly fall in the unemployment figures, along came a gaggle of economists saying unemployment was too low.

By Padraic Finn
Westminster North CLP

The same people who had just given a clean bill of health to John Smith and Gordon Brown announced that unemployment needed to rise to keep inflation down.

The "battle against inflation" is the usual Tory code for attacking the working class, particularly the organised working class, as we saw in the 1981 recession which was a result of Tory policy.

Allied with the successive legal restrictions on solidarity action, it created massive unemployment, which was extremely useful to the government in weakening the trade unions and holding down wages.

The reality is that the main cause of high inflation is not high wages — pay rates are higher and inflation lower in most of the advanced capitalist economies — but the structure of the British economy itself.

Despite their claims, the Tories failed have to arrest Britain's long decline: its industrial base suffers from low investment, is out of date and is inefficient compared to the rest of the advanced capitalist world.

It is simply unable to meet the demands placed upon it, especially in a period of rapid credit expansion, as was the case after 1987.

The rise in productivity claimed by the Tories as part of the so-called "economic miracle" can be explained by higher unemployment.

If fewer workers produce the same amount of output, then productivity deals to finance wage increases are a way of keeping inflation down.

The problem is that despite the Tories' shock treatment, productivity in Britain is still lower than the other advanced capitalist economies.

One way of increasing output in total and output per worker is to increase productive capacity by investment in more modern plant and equipment.

But here again the Thatcher record is dismal. It was only last year that manufacturing investment rose to its 1979 level.

The growth in output for the whole economy since 1979 at an average of 2%, is well below the OECD average for the same period.

In other words, taking the average productivity of labour for the economy in total, there has been no economic miracle.

As one commentator put it: "they dug a deep hole in 1980/81 and they have been filling it ever since".

This dearth of investment in a period of a longterm high in profits is due partly to the removal of exchange controls by the Tories in 1979 and partly to the attraction of high interest rates.

Massive amounts of capital have been invested abroad.

Why take chances by long term investment in British industry when the same or even a greater level of return is provided by interest on bank deposits or speculation on the financial markets?

Services have a slightly better record on productivity and investment than manufacturing through the 80s.

They are constantly trumpeted by the government as the solution to every problem from high unemployment to closing the technology gap with other countries.

But the balance of trade surplus on invisibles — tourism, banking and so on, has been falling disastrously over the last couple of years and is less and less capable of making up for the deficit on industrial exports.

If inflation is seen as an imbalance between supply (the ability of the economy to produce goods and services) and demand (the purchasing power of consumers) the Thatcher decade has seen both sides of the problem reassert themselves.

Output has not kept pace with demand resulting in a combination of inflation, as more money chases relatively fewer goods, and a balance of trade deficit, as imports have flowed in to meet the shortage.

On the demand side the inflationary expansion of credit over the past three years is directly due to the government.

The so-called "electoral cycle" requires a pre-election boom to improve voters attitude.

Lawson's efforts in 1987, combined with the loosening of credit controls following the stockmarket crash in the same year, led to pumping up of demand which the economy has been unable to cope with.

Latterly, the government has tried to damp down this demand using high interest rates.

But they can cause inflation by keeping the value of sterling high — making imports more expensive, and possibly discouraging investment because of the high cost of borrowing.

Another reason for the credit boom of the past few years has been the house price boom.

As the value of houses has inflated way past the original price, a significant number of people have used this capital gain to borrow for consumption and therefore fuel further the credit boom.

The immediate problem for the Tories is to get interest rates down. Governments are rarely re-elected when interest rates are high. However, this is a dangerous strategy. Inflation is expected to hit 10% this year.

Wage rises need to be kept down but when they have confronted different groups of workers over the past couple of years the results have been mixed.

The call for higher unemployment is in reality a demand for a recession to cool the overheated economy and hold down wage increases so that interest rates can be reduced, laying the basis for a pre-election boom in 1991/2.

The ruling class is increasingly concerned both about Thatcher's policies and her chances of re-election.

That is why those fine socialists John Smith, Margaret Beckett and Gordon Brown may be finding that their invitations to working breakfasts in the City are on the increase.

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But can Labour le
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Below we look at
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April has been the month of riots.

A recent cartoon in the London *Evening Standard* showed a judge sentencing a Poll Tax rioter to go and join the prison riot at Strangeways.

By GILL LEE

Millions of people, including thousands of ex-Tory voters, have pledged themselves to breaking the law over non-payment as part of a massive campaign of civil disobedience.

The Tories' image as the "party of law and order" is rapidly sinking in a sea of lawlessness and disorder.

In an attempt to crack the law and order whip, a special Trafalgar Square Riot Unit has been set up by the Crown Prosecution Service to deal with charges arising from the anti-Poll Tax demonstration.

The unit expects up to 500 people to be prosecuted, with many suspects being identified from film handed over, as a result of a court order, by 15 TV and newspaper companies.

One Poll Tax demonstrator has already been charged with attempted murder.

Among those in the frontline of prosecutions will undoubtedly be large numbers of dispossessed youth, now set up by the media to become Thatcher's new "enemy within".

Labour's Roy Hattersley has set the stage for penal victimisations through his call for "exemplary sentences".

Faced with horse charges and police swinging batons people have two choices: turn and run; or stand and fight.

On March 31st, a significant number of people, mostly young people, were prepared to stand their ground and fight, using bottles, scaffolding poles, or anything else with which they could arm themselves.

Responsibility

How can this be explained? Clearly the responsibility for violence rests with the Tories' regressive tax and the police provocation of a peaceful demonstration.

But what accounted for the willingness of a substantial section of the crowd to stand and fight the police and the horse charges?

Thatcher's economic policies have created a new underclass of young people who see the state purely as an oppressive institution and feel they have nothing to lose from open confrontation with the police.

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POLL TAX

Nightmare in Downing Street!

It was all so simple!

Replace the massively unpopular rates with a system in which everyone paid, and that would call into line "profligate" Labour Councils pretty sharply!

It was a dream of an idea, and Thatcher made it her "flagship".

By John Tuite
Norwood CLP



PHOTO: Tom Loucas

"It's been a lousy week for Mrs Thatcher's struggling government..."

But it has all gone horribly wrong and the Tories have no easy way out. The Poll Tax has become the focus of all the dissatisfaction, anger, and opposition that for ten years the Tories had managed to contain or divide.

The reaction, domestic and international, to the fighting that occurred after police attacked the March 31st demonstration illustrates how deep the crisis is for the Tories.

The *Economist* complained about "muted" public reaction to the violence, and called it "a dangerous public apathy".

After Tory attempts to smear the campaign and divert attention away from the Tax itself, Poll Tax campaigners found not the slightest backlash on estates or in the streets.

The international press labelled the violence an expression of all the ills and tensions that Thatcher herself built up over ten years.

Newsweek, in a special feature, referred to the state of the NHS, the transport system, etc.

At home, attempts to blame Labour for the violence have failed to halt its continued rise in the opinion polls.

Over the past months divisions and desertions have multiplied throughout the Tory Party. The resignation of the Oxfordshire Tory councillors was one media highpoint, but there are many more.

Even the "shining example" of Wandsworth has been attacked, not by nasty lefties, but by Tory councillors outraged at the grossly unfair advantages Wandsworth obtained over other Tory Councils — witness the leaked letter from Berkshire Tories.

For the first time, Thatcher's leadership is seriously questioned.

Tory MPs are "punch-drunk" from the Poll Tax levels being set in their constituencies, according to Sir Marcus Fox, vice-chair of the back-bench 1922 Committee.

Michael Heseltine has raised his head as a possible contender, stating in a usefully ambiguous way that "people will pay a tax they thought was fair".

And of course, the disaster in mid-Staffordshire is soon likely to be struck home by the possible loss of hundreds of Tory Councillors in the forthcoming May elections.

It all makes for delightful reading!

Opposition to the Poll Tax was always going to be considerable, and probably successful. But the Tories made a major mistake, multiplying our forces and electrifying the campaign beyond our first expectations.

They tried both to introduce the Tax and squeeze Council spending at the same time, breaking the cardinal rule of introducing a new Tax: "Do it generously!"

They set spending targets at only 4% above their fanciful spending figures for last year, while inflation is running at 8%.

The result is that Councils, regardless of political hue, were forced to set Poll Taxes on average £85 higher than the government target of £278.

Poll Tax capping has not relieved the pressure, despite the appalling weakness of the Labour opposition.

In fact it has added to the confusion, undermining the very ideological reason for the Poll Tax, that local electorates should be able to discipline "profligate" Councils through the ballot box.

Only a few weeks away from the local elections, 20 Labour Councils are capped. The criteria is widely perceived as politically biased, but the anomalies are stunning.

How is a Tory in a Tory Borough with a Poll Tax above £400 supposed to react when Labour controlled Calderdale, with its £296 tax, has been capped? Who is being "profligate" amid this mess?

The Tories are obviously at a loss as to how to do anything positive about the Poll Tax.

It is estimated that just to hold the Poll Tax levels down to this year's preposterous levels an extra £3 billion would be needed from the Treasury.

This kind of sum makes tax cuts seem a little difficult in the run-up to the next General Election!

On top of this, to prevent any of that £3 billion going onto services, rather than reduced Poll Taxes, a further and expanded round of capping would be vital.

It must all seem a bit much to Tory MPs who were sold on the simplicity of the Poll Tax — simplicity being a necessary virtue in selling any idea to most Tory MPs.

What are they to make of the fact that the Treasury will probably find itself paying £1 billion more in rebates today than last year under the rates system?

But at the bottom of all this is another fear. Right wing Tory MP, Anthony Marlow, has said that the Government "risked being confronted by a massive and unchallengeable campaign of civil disobedience".

Ten years after Thatcher walked into 10 Downing Street, after the miners, the printers, and all the rest, it must be very confusing for the Tories to have to face such truths.

The class struggle goes on! And this time it looks like they are not going to walk all over us.

The initial sentence of *The Economist's* editorial in the week of Poll Tax capping and the battle in Trafalgar Square, is something to savour:

"It has been a lousy week for British self-esteem and for Mrs Thatcher's struggling government."

More of that is coming our way.

Hundreds of thousand of young people have come to London from all over Britain looking for jobs and a better life and have instead found homelessness, unemployment and poverty.

Changes in social security regulations mean many 16-18 year olds receive no state benefits at all. Others have existed for years in the informal economy.

People who have previously existed outside the regulations of the state and have received nothing from it are now being asked to pay the Poll Tax!

And it is not just young people who are prepared to break the law over the Poll Tax.

Estimates vary but if non-payment in England and Wales reaches the levels suggested in opinion polls between eight and nine million people will be breaking the law.

From the Peasants' Revolt onwards, the lesson of history is clear: unjust laws deserve to be broken and laws which are widely seen as unjust will be broken by masses of people.

The Labour leadership's response has not been to defend those who are taking a stance against the Poll Tax and to use the resistance against the Tax to build a wider fightback against the Tories' (or, perish the thought, capitalism).

On the contrary, Labour's calls have been to keep opposition within a legal framework and to begin a witch-hunt against those in the Party who support non-payment.

Kinnock & Co.'s response to Poll Tax violence has been more backward than their response to the prison riots.

At least over the prison riots they were prepared to put at least some of the blame on the overcrowding and poor conditions which predominate in the prison service.

The Tories policy on prisons has been similar to their policy on the health service, transport and education: don't invest in the infrastructure no matter how much "demand" might be increasing.

But given the increase in prison "demand" is a direct result of Tory judicial policy of longer sentencing and more frequent resort to custodial sentencing, the resulting riots are particularly easy to lay at the Tories' door.

While they escaped with little political damage from Kings Cross and Clapham, both caused by a similar lack of investment in infrastructure, the riots at Strangeways, Dartmoor and Bristol may be the beginning of deeper upheavals the Tories will find hard to evade.

Campaign!

Abortion rights

Tories move to reduce time limits

As we go to press, the most serious attack on abortion rights since the '67 Act was passed is being launched in parliament.

Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Tories' business manager, has tabled a new clause to the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Bill which may allow time limits for abortion to be reduced to as little as 18 weeks.

Anti-abortionists have been campaigning since 1967 for a reduction in time limits but have been frustrated by lack of parliamentary time for Private Members' Bills and the refusal of governments to sponsor legislation.

The Tories' decision to table a clause on time limits changes all that: a vote will be taken. The government will guillotine debate if necessary, with MPs of both parties having a free vote on abortion time limits.

By GILL LEE

It is clear from the debate on previous Private Members' Bills that — with the honourable exception of a few left labour MPs — the majority of MPs are unlikely to stick with the 28 week time limit laid down in the '67 Act.

Any reduction in time limits is a defeat for the pro-choice movement.

Reasons for late abortion include:

•bureaucratic delays caused by inadequacies in health service provision of abortions;

•foetal abnormalities discovered late in pregnancy;

•and late discovery of pregnancy itself because the woman is very young or is going through the menopause.

The new legislation will deny a choice on abortion to these women.

If time limits are restricted the anti-abortionist will only come back for more.

Concession

Any concession on time limits is a concession to the idea that individual women do not know best and that there are limits to the control a woman should be allowed to exercise over her own body.

In allowing a free vote the Labour Party says it is allowing individual MPs to make a decision of conscience.

But it is individual women who get pregnant and individual women who must be allowed to choose whether or not to continue with a pregnancy.

The Labour Party leadership must be held to account for putting the so-called rights of conscience of MPs above the rights of millions of women to decide for themselves on abortion.

Abortion is fundamental to women's ability to control their own lives and it is therefore an issue in which the whole working class has an interest.

Illegal

Rich women have always been able to afford to get safe, illegal abortions.

In contrast, before the passing of the '67 Act millions of working class women were forced onto the back streets for illegal, frequently dangerous, and sometimes fatal abortions.

The speeding up of the parliamentary timetable for the Embryo Bill has given the pro-choice movement little time to mobilise against the restrictions on time limits.

The impact of New Realism on the women's movement and on the Labour Party has made it harder to win outright opposition to restrictions on choice.

In addition there has been much confusion and debate around the nature of the Embryo Bill itself. Since this is the first piece of government legislation on the new reproductive technologies debate was inevitable.

While women have been clear on the need to campaign against any amendments restricting abortion time limits or access to donor insemination, there has been a lack of clarity on the Bill as a whole.

Opponent

Opponents of the Bill have argued that the statutory licensing authorities it establishes would exclude lesbians, and possibly even to single heterosexual women from access to donor insemination and the new reproductive technologies.

They have also argued that by conferring a special status on embryos older than fourteen days, the legislation could be used in the future by the anti-abortionists.

Others have argued that the clause in the bill (also being debated as we go to press) allowing research on embryos up to fourteen days is positive legislation and that the bill is therefore a progressive bill.

They have argued that the dangers are in the amendments and not in the Bill itself.



Mobilisations during the campaign against the Alton Bill.

Legislation which seeks to oppress and restrict the rights of any one group of women oppresses all women and must be opposed.

If restrictions on time limits are passed, the campaign clearly becomes one against the bill as a whole.

The Stop the Amendment Campaign is organising a demonstration on June 2nd in London.

Build the demonstration!
Defend the '67 Act!
Fight for a woman's right to choose!

NUS Conference

Labour Students deal to their left

Would Cosmo Hawkes, the right wing independent win the Presidency or not?

This question dominated the gossip in the run-up to NUS Easter Conference in Blackpool.

As usual, the large blocks on Conference floor revelled in procedural manoeuvre after procedural manoeuvre.

Remarkably — although with reduced time — we managed five debates in four days.

Conference was unable to fit in a discussion on the Poll Tax demo. It contented itself by finishing a *three year* discussion on NUS reform by voting for...the status quo.

Reactionary solutions were offered to the Housing crisis as the big Higher Education colleges wielded their card votes to support the social market and co-operation with landlords.

Similarly the left lost the Further Education Union Development debate.

The Union adopted an empty "New Times" philosophy for education in the 90s, just as the Poll Tax movement was placing struggle and demonstrations at the centre of British politics!

The Abortion and Embryo Research debate was low key.

Importantly, Conference rejected attempts to split the campaign into "Abortion" and "Donor Insemination". NUS supports a vigorous campaign for a woman's right to choose.

The elections dominated Conference. For the second time in eight years the National Organisation of Labour Students domination of NUS was under serious threat.

By Alistair Chisholm Delegation Leader, SOAS SU

Ironically it was the alliance of Euro-Communists and "independents" who have for years formed part of NOLS' "hegemonic alliance", and who were nurtured by NOLS — who provided the threat.

Fed up with playing second fiddle to Walworth Road, and under the leadership of "Cosmo" Hawkes, the "independents" made their bid for power.

By the time we reached Conference this election contest had encouraged a rampant outbreak of Poll-Tax non-payment?

NOLS reacted by doing a very abrupt about face. They did a deal with the very people their right wing block had been designed to exclude: *Socialist Organiser's* "Left Unity".

Disgracefully, the pound of flesh offered by *SO* was supporting the *de facto* privatisation of NUS' service wings — NUS Services Limited and the National Students Services Organisation.

Left unity only had enough votes to win *one* place in the 12 member part-time Executive constituency.

But in the single member full-time constituency they won National Secretary and Vice President, Further Education Union Development — joining the National Womens' Officer elected in similar circumstances at Womens' Conference the week before.

In the block of 12, the SLD re-emerged with 2 places, *Militant* kept their two and the Green Party Students, with a radical manifesto, won their first place.

Cosmo and all but one of his cohorts were beaten by NOLS/LU.

The election of delegates was held before the current explosion around the Poll Tax had really taken off.

It was more subdued than Christmas Conference, with the bureaucratic barons from the big rich HE colleges more well organised than ever.

NOLS and their left hand, *Socialist Organiser/Left Unity* are little more than efficient Conference intervention machines.

Socialist Organiser's control over NUS' Womens Campaign and Further Education work will be an important test which will place a big strain on their apparatus: can they break-out into the real world?

Bureaucratic manouevres, petty factionalism, unprincipled deals and frontism may bring short-term electoral gains but it won't defeat Thatcher.

Disability Alliance

New news now

The Disability Alliance has produced a new edition of the Disability Rights Handbook.

The benefits system is constantly changing — and notoriously complicated. 4.3 million disabled people depend on benefits in this country.

This unique and comprehensive manual has been completely updated to include all the latest changes in benefits.

It is packed with details of how to cope with benefit appeals, housing problems, Poll Tax, debt, and much more — including a directory of over 600 useful organisations.

The Disability Rights Handbook makes a confusing and difficult field easily accessible to all.

Written and designed for individual people with disabilities and their families, the Handbook is also a major source for advisers and counsellors, advice workers, social workers, trades unionists, health workers, and teachers.

It costs £4 and is available post free from Disability Alliance ERA, 25 Denmark St, London WC2H 8NJ.

CONCERT REVIEW

The struggle is our lives!

Entering Wembley Stadium on Easter Monday afternoon was exciting.

The atmosphere was rather like Carnival and the crowd ranged in age from nought to 60.

I had worried a bit about being thirty-something amid a sea of youth but was relieved to find that I was not the only one with wrinkles!

Mandela has been turned into an icon. Stalls sold Mandela T-shirts in an amazing variety of motifs, colours, etc.

Lenny Henry was a great compere, making the event political by referring to the need to step up sanctions and appealing to the crowd of 72,000 to get off their backsides and get involved in the fight against apartheid.

By Ronnie Held
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

The stars were certainly diverse: ageing hippies like Neil Young and Lou Reed seemed to get the over-30s going (a bit!), whilst Tracy Chapman, Anita Baker and Terence Trent D'arby went down a treat with the more youthful elements.

Fantastic

The music from a mixed South African band was fantastic, but perhaps the real moment of the show came in the unlikely form of a bishop.

Yes, Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, in flowing purple robes and large cross, got a tremendous response from the crowd.

Obviously timed to bring the mood down to a sober level in preparation for Mandela's entrance, Trevor calmly reminded us why we were here.

And then, as though he'd spoken quietly to god, the lights went out!

A hushed silence fell over the stadium and a South African trumpeter blasted out the ANC South African anthem.

Spontaneously, thousands and thousands of people lit matches or cigarette lighters to accompany the wailing sound of the trumpet.

All was quiet. Then Mandela, accompanied by Winnie and Akelaido Tambo, walked onto the stage — an incredibly joyful moment.

Cheering

The crowd erupted with pleasure and sang, "You'll Never Walk Alone". The clapping and cheering went on for 15 minutes.

Mandela's expression was fantastic. I must admit to a lump in my throat as I looked at his face.

As has been widely reported in the press, he made no direct reference to Thatcher's government, but instead used Thatcher's own phraseology to attack her:

"There are some in the world who wish to support the South African government by giving it rewards and carrots.

Overwhelming

"But we, representing the overwhelming majority of the people of our country, turn to you for support which we need more than ever before.

"It's only those who support apartheid who can argue that the Pretoria government should be rewarded for the small steps it has taken."

Mandela thanked the British people for "electing not to forget, because our fate could have been a passing concern", and paid tribute to the Artists Against Apartheid, whom he said had been a great source of inspiration to black South Africans.



Nelson Mandela

Looking at the stage bedecked in ANC colours of green, black, and gold, with the Mandela slogan "The struggle is my life" flying across it, it was hard not to feel euphoric.

The task for us is to tap the obvious potential for a massive campaign to step up sanctions and to make Thatcher's name mud.

FILM REVIEW

Why Spielberg sucks

***Always*, directed by Steven Spielberg, with Richard Dreyfuss, Holly Hunter, John Goodman.**

This is a tedious and meretricious film which no one should go out of their way to see.

It is also a Steven Spielberg film so undoubtedly plenty of suckers will make the trip regardless of a feeble injunction in the pages of *Labour Briefing*.

By Mike Marqusee
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

Always is a clumsy remake of *A Guy Named Joe*, a Spencer Tracy vehicle of the 40s. The World War II bomber pilots of the original are here recast as contemporary airborne firefighters.

Spielberg has made a mawkish, stumbling, embarrassingly overblown hash of this, his first stab at the "adult" subject matter of love and death.

Indeed, the only moments of the film which could be called gripping are the flying and forest fire scenes, and even they are expensively proficient rather than imaginative.

I've always thought Spielberg's reputation as a story teller and cinema craftsperson was unearned.

He is incapable of sustaining tension for more than five minutes at a time, incapable of building plot from scene to scene — and as for developing character, he rarely even attempts it.

Even the big set pieces,the spectacular physical action scenes for which he is famous, are often incoherent. He gets away with much confusion by virtue of scale alone.

Spielberg's films are sometimes defended as good old fashioned post-modernist pastiche; they are self-conscious recreations of this or that genre.

But Spielberg seems attracted only to the crudest elements in the old genres — sentimentality (by the bucketful), artificial complications, gratuitous climaxes.

He has no critical angle on anything, least of all any subversive subtexts in the genres he imitates.

The one time he entirely abandoned genre and pastiche he revealed just how ill informed he is about real life. His version of *The Colour Purple* had to be the worst film it was possible to make of that marvel-filled novel.

Always is meant to be a romantic comedy of character. The problem is Spielberg hasn't bothered to create any characters and therefore both the romance and the comedy fall flat.

None of the three principles are nearly as interesting to the audience as they are to themselves and each other. It is a waste of three excellent character actors.

Somehow the unmitigated schmaltz of the story is harder to take on a wide-screen in full colour at no expenses spared than in the modest, black and white, studio-bound production of the original.

The most intriguing aspect of the whimsical plot is its concern with the way the dead haunt and guide the living. It seems as if Spielberg simply didn't even notice this theme.

Instead, the notion of personal survival after death is nothing but mechanical premise to keep the plot rolling from set-piece to set-piece.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying Spielberg should stick to adventure flics like the Indiana Jones epics.

I hated those too — not because they were mindless entertainment but because they were not very entertaining mindless entertainment.

Certainly his films lack the many minor virtues which made the best Hollywood product, in the old days, not only entertaining, but frequently less mindless than the critics of the time suspected.

BOOK REVIEW

Italy's hot autumn

The "hot autumn" in Italy saw the expression of a deep felt resentment against oppression burst out from the working class.

In terms of lost hours, it was the third largest strike movement this century.

Robert Lumley's new book traces the background to the momentous events of 1969 — in social, economic, and political terms.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP



Your mother and I are terribly worried . . . Andrea . . . give us your word that you don't take drugs

As in France, the movement began in the colleges. By January 1968, 36 universities were occupied.

Violent clashes ensued. Police brutality was rampant, but the students fought back.

The social polarisation split the Church with trainee priests occupying seminaries. Even school students were arrested and charged with "crime of opinion" — an old offence under the pre-war fascist Penal Code.

Legitimate violence was emphasised as a way of breaking from the past, creating solidarity and forging the Guevarist "new socialist man". Clearly this approach tended to reinforce the oppression of women, a factor which was to fuel the development of a mass feminist movement.

The student revolt had an immediate impact on the workers' movement.

The late 60s had seen a growth in workplace collective bargaining and wildcat strikes — a reaction against national deals.

Now workers adopted new methods like the "planned go-slow" — a co-ordinated reduction in output, controlled by workers — originally pioneered by rank and file committees at Pirelli Rubber Company.

Then the earthquake — 50,000 Fiat workers walked out in Turin, followed by mass strikes in Milan. Among their demands were: equal pay, a 40-hour week within *three years*, and union rights at work.

The movement, and the violent state response to it, caused profound social divisions.

In 1969 alone there were 96 fascist attacks on left wing premises and 50 bomb attacks attributed to anarchists, culminating in the December 1969 Bank of Agriculture blast which killed 12, and the death of anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli in police custody.

One hundred thousand members of *Il Manifesto* were expelled from the PCI, which sought to dissociate itself from the New Left.

The longer term results of the Hot Autumn were more contradictory. Workers got improved conditions, a Labour Charter, and an amnesty for offences committed, but the rank and file committees were dismembered or institutionalised.

The new methods of protest, however, spread to other movements, of women, southern peasants, and squatters.

The elitist Red Brigade and the much later "Can't Pay, Won't Pay" movements also trace their origins to this turbulent period of Italian politics.

Congratulations Robert Lumley for writing an intelligent and highly readable account of these events.

***States of Emergency*, by Robert Lumley, *Verso*, £10.95.**

Trade Union Briefing

NUT CONFERENCE

Teachers vote to strike:

New Realism on the rocks!

The Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) and all classroom teachers scored a series of major victories at NUT Conference over Easter.

In a head on clash with New Realism, delegates voted to take national action, if necessary, to defend jobs and fight Local Management of Schools (LMS).

By Valerie Coultas Islington Teachers Association

General Secretary Doug McAvoy, unable to win the debate on Conference floor, was forced to use witch-hunting methods in the press to try and discredit and override Conference decisions.

He ended up on the last day of Conference being heckled by angry delegates when he defended his no-strike strategy and attacked Conference decisions.

The whole Conference involved a battle between rank-and-file delegates and the platform.

At times it seemed as if the floor was going to erupt with rage as the platform did everything it could to suppress the debate on salaries.

Tempers flared as the platform tried to make delegates change their minds over launching a national fightback over LMS (the attempt to turn school governing bodies into boards of directors who will be forced to run schools on business lines).

As *The Guardian* (17th April) admitted, "leaders of the NUT appeared... to have badly underestimated the mood of delegates."

The Executive speakers, it went on, "seemed unable to match the passion of angry delegates from the floor and were repeatedly heckled."

In absolutely every debate there were two clear choices before Conference: accept the Executive strategy of try to live with Tory education policy or reject it and mount a fight to defend pay, jobs and state education.

The Executive's use of union strike funds for an advertising campaign on salaries was rubbished. The move to a centralized subs sytem came under fire because of the errors and inefficiency.

Primary school teachers were given backing to take action if the conditions worsened, and the Executive was told it had to fight much harder for proper nursery education.

The debate on the national curriculum and testing was also lost by the Executive and a resolution from the Camden Association calling on the Executive to "explore ways of boycotting testing" was passed.

The Executive's view on teacher appraisal (observation of teachers in the class) was criticised for doing management's job for them.

On salaries the Executive did manage to get its priority resolution, calling for a wider consultation exercise and a special conference in October.

But this was a pyrrhic victory for an embattled Executive who forced this resolution through in order to avoid debating the numerous, far more radical ones, from the local Associations.

The central debate of the Conference therefore became the debate on national strike action over redundancies due to LMS and Poll Tax capping.

The Bradford Association, already threatened with teacher sacking due to the Tory Council's low Poll Tax, moved for a suspension of standing orders to discuss this threat.

The Conference voted by a 30,000 majority on Monday against the Executive's weakening amendments to the Bradford resolution.

It was then that Doug McAvoy decided to go to the press to report the "militancy" was *Militant* inspired.

The move backfired in the Conference. Delegates were unimpressed by the crude intervention of McAvoy and the press. Most were aware that *Militant* has very little influence in the NUT.

The STA fought back explaining how McAvoy was insulting not *Militant* but Conference delegates, Conference democracy and the NUT in his outrageous manoeuvres.

The LMS resolution was reaffirmed with an increased majority of 32,000.

This was after a debate in which the Executive used every argument it could muster to justify not taking national action to defend jobs — including that the resolution implied law breaking and would wreck the union.

STA delegates countered by explaining how damaging it was to define the dispute with the government over LMS as illegal.

Later the Executive used its Aims and Objectives clause to rule out large parts of the resolutions on the Poll Tax and Ireland.

They were also able to rally sections of the Conference against attempts to allow wider policy debate in the union.

At the height of the Conference the political polarization was sharp.

The majority of delegates were clearly unconvinced that the Executive strategy of "propaganda and persuasion" was anything like tough enough to defend teachers and state education from the Tory government's assault.

The NAS/UWT action on April 4th had reminded NUT members that other teachers were willing to take action over pay.

Thatcher's crisis was seen by many delegates as an opportunity to move the NUT forwards as a fighting union. They clearly did not want to go along the Doug McAvoy road of build an AMMA-type union which is permanently on the retreat.

MacGregor's tiny concessions on testing and appraisal and Thatcher's hesitations on the national curriculum were seen as chinks in the Tory armour that the NUT should exploit by putting on *more* not *less* pressure.

The STA, a united current of different left groups, was a clear alternative leadership throughout the Conference.

Its huge meetings were packed; its bulletins were widely read; its Executive members effectively countered the press interventions by McAvoy.

"If you allied me with Benn and Scargill that would not upset me," STA Executive member Bernard Regan told the press at the Conference.

STA delegates joined with the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union to call a salaries and redundancies conference on 20th June in Nottingham, to prepare joint resolutions for the special conference in October.

NUT associations at the Conference plan to produce a special Conference Report to circulate to all schools.

Doug McAvoy's attempts to appeal over the heads of the Conference to members in the schools and by witch-hunting the left and to build a no-strike postal ballot union must be countered at every step.

Teachers and state education deserve a much better deal than the Tories or Doug McAvoy are offering.

The message from the Conference is that teachers want a fighting union, one that is willing to counter the Tories at every step. This is clearly the only way that state education will be saved.

TRADE UNION DAY SCHOOL AGAINST THE POLL TAX

Trade union activists who have been at the forefront of the non-payment campaign in London and the Greater London Association of Trades Councils (GLATC) are organising a Dayschool Against the Poll Tax for trades unions with the full support of the All-London Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

Delegates are invited from trade union branches, shop stewards' committees, and workplace anti-Poll Tax groups.

The objects of the dayschool are:

•to share the experiences of groups of workers who have faced, and fought, the Poll Tax in the workplace;

•to inform delegates of the problems which the Tax will pose for trade unions in the workplace, and strategies for fighting them;

•to discuss means by which branches, shop stewards' committees and activists can get involved in the campaign initiated by the community groups organising for mass non-payment.

The dayschool will be held at the Institute of Education, Bedford Way (off Russell Square) WC1, on Saturday 28th April, and will start at 10 am. A creche will be provided.

Registration is £5 per delegate, £2 for individuals. Cheques should be made payable to HAPTU (TU), and sent to Sham Singh, c/o 72 West Green Rd, Tottenham, N15. This is also the contact for the creche.

Socialist Movement

The next steps forward

The Socialist Movement is now moving into a new stage of development.

It was created in a period of considerable political difficulty.

By PAUL WALKER

But now the shift against Thatcherism combined with the stranglehold developed by Kinnock over the Labour Party has provided new opportunities for the Movement to grow.

Labour Party Socialists (LPS) and the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee (SMTUC) will organise supporters by sector and be building blocks which will enable the Movement to grow into the key left force.

In themselves, these organisations are important, but for the Socialist Movement to make the most of the current opportunities three initiatives must be developed.

•More emphasis is being put on local groups. These will be the basis for any national campaigns which the Socialist Movement will launch or work with others around.

Local groups will not be needed where effective left co-ordinations exist, but this should not prevent supporters of the Socialist Movement organising in different ways in different areas as and where it is possible.

•The Socialist Movement Organising Committee agree on the need for better publicity and information to give the Movement the profile needed for its political initiatives; a newspaper or magazine of some sort is necessary.

What kind of periodical is still open to debate but the results of our feasibility study show that many socialists only read certain papers because there is nothing else on offer.

Non-sectarian

Many believe that there is an urgent need for a non-sectarian journal of the left of a type that only the Socialist Movement could provide.

•The whole Movement agrees that a further development of democratic structures is required.

The growth of local groups and a journal will simplify this task.

The obvious step forward, that of an AGM where the Organising Committee and the Officers are directly accountable to and elected by the individual and organisational affiliates of the Movement, is now in hand.

These three developments are intertwined and if achieved will make the Movement the principal non-sectarian organisation on the British left in the 1990s.

It will become an organisation which can respond to social struggles and give real leadership to the many who have been ignored by labour movement leaders or have avoided traditional left groups because of their sectarianism.

Whether the Socialist Movement can assume this role will be influenced by the following factors.

There is the impact of social and class struggles on the existing left.

The agreement by the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation to co-sponsor a trade union conference against the Poll Tax with the SMTUC gives some indication of the possible openings for a recomposition of the left in the decade ahead.

The Movement's role should be to build the broadest possible unity in action with other groupings, such as *Militant* supporters, in order to encourage dialogue and a convergence of strategies as the crisis of British capitalism develops.

In addition, the failure of a Labour government, if elected, will lead it into a confrontation with the workers and the oppressed, who have the right to expect fundamental changes after three terms of Thatcherism.

Then, if the Socialist Movement has been able to develop sufficiently, it will be able to build united actions and even lead these campaigns.

Recent international events may open the way to developing internationalism in the labour movement. Recognising these possibilities the Movement has been keen to develop international links and campaigns.

The coming SOTSPROF tour, the development of an analysis of events in Europe and a desire to build worldwide links have provided the basis for the Fourth Socialist Conference.

On November 17/18th the Conference will have a theme of "Socialism after Stalinism". The international implications of the collapse of Stalinism will provide the backdrop for the debates and will lead to a wide number of initiatives.

The weekend will have an international character rather than a purely European one, since it is recognised that it is impossible to understand the new era from a purely European perspective.

Anti-capitalist and anti-Stalinist speakers from the Workers Party in Brazil, the FSLN, Southern Africa, Eastern Europe and the USSR, amongst others, are being invited to the Conference.

Although there are many problems facing the Socialist Movement it is now not simply responding to but also initiating political developments.

Briefing supporters should be fully involved in all of these developments; from local Poll Tax groups to international co-ordinations.

The Socialist Movement is opening up political opportunities which should be seized with both hands.

LABOUR PARTY SOCIALISTS CONFERENCE

The future of Socialism in the Labour Party

Sheffield Poly

The Student Union, Pond Street

(opposite BR station)

May 19th & 20th, 1990

Registration from 10am, Saturday

Conference 11-5 Saturday, 10-2.30 Sunday

Details: LPS, PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire. S44 5UD

NALGO

Pay claim: build on last year's success!

For the first time NALGO has launched a campaign for a flat rate pay rise.

The claim is for £1,500, 35 hours maximum week and 25 days minimum holidays for its local government members.

By Fred Leplat
Islington NALGO

This comes after years ot pressure by the left of the union who have always argued for a flat rate rise as the only way effectively to end low pay.

In contrast to the propaganda by Tory and Labour Councils, local government staff are not all well paid, inefficient, and always off sick.

In fact 250,000 Council staff are paid below the Council of Europe's Decency Threshold of £8,476 and are potential claimants of Family Credit.

With the national pay claim, NALGO has submitted a claim for £3,000 London Weighting and £1,500 South East Weighting.

The Inner London Weighting is currently £1,722 (the rate paid to staff in the Outer London Boroughs is half that) while other major employers, including Gas and Electricity, pay supplements from £2,200 to £3,000. The major banks are currently offering the unions £3,200.

With the prohibitive cost of mortgages and transport in the South East, all NALGO members see this claim as a reasonable one.

On April 11th, the Local Authorities employers turned down the South East allowance while accepting that under 18s would receive the same London Weighting as everybody else.

The employers refused to give any other response to NALGO's claim except to say that an offer on the cost of living supplements will be made at the next joint meeting on May 16th, the same day as employers will make an offer on the national pay claim.

The employers are playing for time. The pay increase is due on July 1st, and if they can hang on until then it will be difficult for NALGO to organise industrial action in the summer.

Last year's national strike by NALGO was successful because the employers indicated early on that they would attach outrageous strings to the pay rise. This gave time to organise for action, and the members were prepared to strike.

Last year's dispute was a victory, with the employers dropping all strings and paying a pay rise above inflation.

This year, the NALGO campaign has so far been low key. Some publicity has gone out to members, but not in the quantity necessary to prepare for industrial action.

The national leadership is clearly not keen to repeat last year's strike (it cost money!). Nor is it keen to campaign for a flat rate claim — having always preferred percentage claims which keep differentials.

Furthermore, it has separated the issue of London and South East Weightings from the national pay claim. This will only dissipate energy for the pay campaign as the calendar for negotiations is the same.

The great concern felt for the Weightings could be used to build up the campaign for the national pay claim.

The local government employers will probably offer a rise, without strings, in line with the government's unofficial pay norm (around 8%) on both the national claim and the London Weighting.

This would not be acceptable in view of the claims submitted and the predicted rise of inflation to 10% or more.

London branches should support the call from Waltham Forest NALGO for a lobby on London Weighting of the employers on the May 16th, the date of the next meeting with NALGO.

Branches outside London should call on the national leadership to organise an official national lobby on May 16th.

Should there be no offer near NALGO's claim, then the NALGO Local Government Branches Conference on June 11th should issue the call for immediate industrial action in pursuit of the claims.



Islington NALGO members — veterans of the picket line.

New wage round

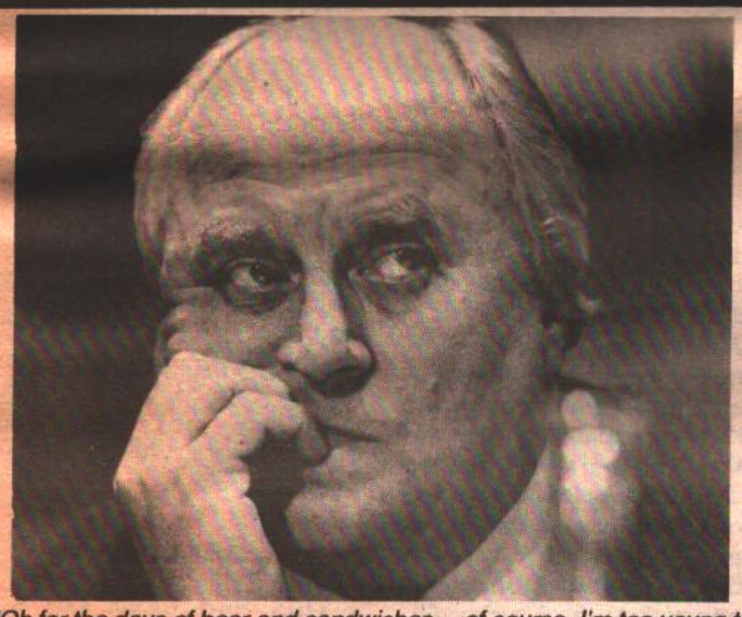


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

"Oh for the days of beer and sandwiches... of course, I'm too young to remember them myself..."

The pressure is on

By ALAN THORNETT

The Tories' economic problems are emerging as far worse than they have been prepared to admit.

Official inflation figures are set to rise sharply as factors such as the Poll Tax add to existing upward pressures.

The effects of this on the new wage round are becoming obvious.

74,000 workers in the power industry have rejected an 8.5% wage offer; 62% have voted for strike action and over 90% for the alternative of industrial action short of strike action.

The 64% turnout was the highest ever recorded in the industry.

Implementing this is in a meaningful way will be difficult given the dominant position of the EEPTU leadership in the industry, but the employers are now on the hook and are likely to produce an improved offer.

At the same time leaders of 130,000 white collar workers in the NHS are to ballot for action and the NALGO Health Committee has rejected an offer of 7.7%.

A "rolling programme of strike action" is to be proposed at the NALGO Conference in May.

The rail unions have presented a claim for a "substantial offer" and a 35 hour working week. They have rejected 8.8% and talks are continuing with the unions hopeful of an improved offer from BR, at least on pay.

It is clear that both management and union leaderships are keen to avoid the kind of battles which were fought over last year's review.

Car industry

Honda and Rover plan first British non-union car plant

Rover is a car manufacturer with a fully unionised workforce.

It has obtained a stake in a new plant to be built by Honda at Swindon, which, Honda have announced, will be non-union from the outset.

Unions which organise in the car industry have been informed that they will not be recognised at the Swindon plant which will eventually employ up to 2,000 people.

The Swindon Rover/Honda link is a part of a wider deal in which Honda has paid BAe £104m for a 20% stake in Rover, which BAe bought from the government in 1988 for a mere £150m. On these figures Rover is worth at least £520m.

By ALAN THORNETT



Cowley car plant: an unattractive investment for Honda, given its tradition of trade union organisation.

It is actually worth very much more because the Honda deal did not include any part of Rover's massive property assets, currently being exploited by BAe at Cowley and Bathgate.

Nor did it include any part of its other companies such as Unipart and the heavy vehicle manufacturer DAF.

The Honda Swindon project would be the first non-union car factory in Europe as well as the UK. The fact that it is linked to an existing unionised manufacturer makes it even more ominous.

It would bring a completely new factor into a British car industry which is already undergoing massive changes to the detriment of the workforce and the unions.

Even at Nissan in Sunderland there is some union recognition through a single union deal with the AEU; although membership has been kept very low and they have remained tied down with restrictive agreements.

Honda's decision means that Japanese manufacturers establishing plants in the UK are now ready to move away from the stage of single-union, no-strike deals (which they could have obtained for Swindon if they had wanted) to no unions and no deals at all.

This is a door which has been opened to them by the New Realists who have given way to every one of their demands in the past and have thereby encouraged them to go further.

It is not the first time Honda has gone down this road.

Strategy

They are basing their move on the strategy they have already employed in the USA where both their car and motorbike plants in the South were established as non-union plants and largely remain so.

The move also makes it very clear, if it was not clear already, why Honda prefers to build a new plant in Swindon with a completely new workforce, rather than purchase the Cowley South works 30 miles down the road.

Cowley has a trained workforce in place; they could buy the plant for a fraction of the cost of the Swindon development; and it is linked to body building facilities.

Although the plant is now controlled by the right-wing, removing the unions from a plant with decades of struggle and tradition would be a near impossible task.

South Africa: COSATU

An 'M-plan' for liberation

The leadership of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has circulated shop stewards in all its affiliates with an analysis of the current political situation and the options facing the trade union movement. In this document — excerpted below — they call for a new "M-Plan" (Mass Plan) whose object is "to build mass-based, nationwide organs of people's power in every township, village, factory, mine, and farm."

We need to make a decisive intervention in a rapidly developing situation, otherwise we risk being swept aside by events.

•A semi-insurrectionary situation is developing in the country, similar to 1985-86. A mass offensive is taking place, particularly in the rural areas.

•The unbanning of the ANC/SACP, release of Mandela, etc., has not only created a revolutionary mood and excitement; it has also created unprecedented space to mobilise and more importantly organise our people. This space must be fully exploited.

•The danger exists that the regime and other reactionary elements will use the developing situation to create conflict amongst the people, and provoke an uncontrollable situation as an excuse for a crackdown.

Creating organs of people's power is the only way of ensuring proper direction, and taking the offensive forward in a disciplined way. The alternative is ungovernability and directionless conflict.

•We have a rich organisational experience from 85-86. Conditions exist for us to harness this experience to make a qualitative leap forward into a totally new situation, of a type extremely difficult for the regime to reverse through the use of repression, sham negotiations, or other tactics.

•The time factor is critical: events are moving so rapidly that if we don't act decisively, history will pass us by.

Addition

In addition the task of building mass ANC branches is on the horizon — this gives added urgency to the need to move rapidly to building organs of people's power, to provide the context for a mass ANC.

Recent events show that the enemy will take advantage of the current volatile situation:

—to create conflicts and divide our people;

—to create disillusionment;

—as an excuse to crack down on organisations and terrorise the people.

Experience shows that ungovernability, unlike people's power, allows enemy elements, agents provocateurs, and criminals to take advantage, particularly where the militancy of the youth is uncontrolled and undirected.

For example, the recent spate of "conflicts between hostel-dwellers and residents" in Katlehong, Witbank, Vosloorus, and other places were clearly orchestrated in a situation where residents were insufficiently organised to identify and act against those provoking violence.

Our "M-Plan" will be:

•A nationally co-ordinated call to the people to organise organs of mass democracy in every part of the country, urban and rural.

•An organisational guide as to how these organs should be set up, and how they should function.

This should include guides for setting up street, village, and shop stewards committees, people's courts, and defence committees.



Mandela's welcome release has unleashed a new wave of militancy in black South Africa. What will be the response of the ANC of Oliver Tambo (above)?

Special attention should be given to guiding people on how to avoid abuse of these organs.

•A code of conduct, setting out the basic dos and don'ts of democratic organisation.

•A programme of action which integrates the organs of mass democracy into a national political programme.

This programme should relate both to local "bread and butter" issues (housing, education, crime, land, etc.) as well as national political issues.

In particular, the campaign for a constituent assembly should be popularised, with the election of local organs of people's power consciously paving the way for this democratic process.

Timetable

•A timetable, for setting up structures. This could provide, for example, that in three months, the rudimentary elements of mass organisation should be set up in every part of the country; that in, say, six months' time a national civic organisation is launched with delegates from these organs, etc.

In the current revolutionary climate we are able to set targets which may previously have been unthinkable.

The "M-Plan" should be issued by the Mass Democratic Movement and the ANC.

The popularity and authority of our movement is such that such a plan would not go unheeded in any part of the country. In fact people are demanding that leadership is given to the situation which is developing.

Joint MDM/ANC structures need to be involved at all levels, from national to local, in strategising and implementing such a plan.

Structures would retain their identity and responsibility for organising in their own area but would have to account to the entire Democratic Movement for their progress/lack of progress.

Committees

MDM committees should be set up to look at the question of rebuilding structures, monitoring progress, and reporting to the MDM. People should be identified to work in various areas.

Comrades need to study the lessons from recent years. Why have street committees and other mass organs tended to fizzle out when there is not an immediate crisis to deal with?

Can a programme of action, propaganda and political education help to resolve this problem?

What abut the problem of uneven development, with advanced organisation in parts of the country, and virtually nothing in other areas? Lack of co-ordination between areas fighting similar battles?

Highly militant areas burning themselves out and other areas taking over, only to repeat the process?

Structures

Who should set up civic structures where none exist? What is the role of COSATU in this regard? Where are the structures of local, regional, and national co-ordination?

These are some of the questions which an "M-Plan" could help answer.

The masses hold the key to change. The challenge facing us is to unleash the creativity and power of the masses through new organisational forms corresponding to the new situation.

This will lead to a situation of dual power which will put enormous pressure on the regime to see negotiations through to genuine elections. The alternative for the regime will be to face a scenario of insurrection.

For us, the path to either option is essentially the same.

Guildford 4



PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

"British justice" being practised on the picket lines at Dover. Quite restores your faith in bourgeois democracy, doesn't it?

Smear campaign gathers pace

It is six months since the convictions of the Guildford Four were quashed.

Already damage limitation by the establishment has gathered pace with the publishing of transcripts of taped "confessions" by Gerry Conlon, one of the four.

The successful appeal shook the criminal justice system and opened to question legal repression underpinning British policy on Ireland.

Anticipating this, the state delayed the appeal for five months and then stage managed it carefully. A whispering campaign began suggesting that the quashing was merely technical and the Four were still guilty.

By PIERS MOSTYN

The May judical inquiry was established, headed by a judge not renowned for his liberalism, with terms of reference that would ensure it had no teeth.

There is to be no cross examination of judges and no compulsion of witnesses to attend. The timetable is so drawn out that a report is unlikely within two years of the Four's release.

Previous judicial inquiries into miscarriages of justice have been notorious for achieving the opposite of their supposed objective.

Notable

Most notable were the Brabin inquiry on Evans, the Fisher inquiry on Confait, and the Calcutt inquiry on the Cyprus ex-servicemen.

All of these appeared to concentrate their energies on exonerating the establishment and proving that the defendants were really guilty after all.

This proved to be highly embarrassing in the Fisher Inquiry as the true culprit of the murder was discovered soon after the inquiry's report!

On British repression in Ireland, judicial inquiries have an almost unrivalled record of obedient cover-ups.

In response to criticisms, May announced that he would not accept evidence the *sole* purpose of which was to suggest the guilt of the Four.

The Metropolitan Police can have had no other objective in submitting the tapes of Imbert's prison interviews with Conlon.

The Guardian helpfully intervened to explain that the tapes could provide additional evidence, explaining why the police and the DPP were so tardy in looking for flaws in the convictions or accepting the appeal.

But no submission could point *solely* to the Four's guilt, because it would inevitably have an additional "purpose" in exonerating the police and the DPP's office.

As supporters of the Guildford Four have forcefully explained, the tapes prove absolutely nothing.

Publicising them can only serve the interests of a police force and legal system that is scandalised by repeated stories of corruption, frame-ups, brutality and conspiracies.

Conlon was a highly vulnerable 20-year-old. His father was about to go on trial as a result of his original confessions.

He was never cautioned, not legally advised or accompanied by a solicitor and was probably unaware he was being recorded.

Having just been convicted, he faced decades in gaol and had nothing to lose. He repeated his "confession".

But in substantiating earlier ones he did nothing to overcome the incredible paucity of detail, contradictions with the other Four's statements and internal inconsistencies.

It is not unusual for Imbert to visit a prisoner in such circumstances — far from it.

It is a common source of police intelligence to approach newly banged up convicts when they are at their most miserable to persuade them to grass on their mates.

Conlon just told Imbert what he had previously been ordered to say and garnished it with Irish Republican pub gossip. He then withdrew the statements entirely.

In publicising the Met's slander campaign after the police had tried in vain for two weeks to get other papers to do so, *The Guardian* merely followed the dishonourable tradition set by *The Independent*'s vilification of Colin Wallace.

Security

This had been fed by security sources, no doubt, but the rug was then pulled with the government's admission of Wallace's involvement in dirty tricks campaigns.

Coming after the Granada documentary claiming to "name" the real Birmingham bombers, this latest twist to the Guildford saga indicates an attempt to "take over" the prisoners campaigns and turn them round.

The focus is turned towards blaming the "real perpetrators, smearing the defendants, explaining away technical failures, and limiting damage.

This is instead of exposing the corruption of the system, naming those in positions of responsibility, and calling for it to be radically transformed.

Now there are relevations that the original court transcripts of the Guildford trial have been "lost".

It has been further revealed that the Surrey police are paying the Avon & Somerset police (who are conducting the inquiry into the frame-ups) £10,000s to "defend" them.

True justice seems little closer for framed-up Irish prisoners than it was 15 years ago.

East Germany

Interview: PETRA WIESCHADLO

Defending women's rights in the GDR

PETRA WIESCHADLO and THOMAS KUPFER are in Britain on a speaking tour organised by the CAMPAIGN FOR SOLIDARITY WITH WORKERS IN THE EASTERN BLOCK (CSWEB). REBECCA FLEMMING spoke to Petra for *Labour Briefing*. CSWEB can be contacted at 56 Kevan House, Wyndhorn Road, London SE5.



East German workers savour the powerful moment of toppling the regime... How does the revolution look in the cold light of dawn?

***LB:* What is the current situation of the women's movemnt in the GDR?**

Petra: First I must say that I am a menber of the United Left and of the Independent Women's Federation.

The IWF was founded in December 1989 to take part in the process of change that was taking place and to put women's questions on the agenda.

We organised different groups in districts all over the country and now we are encouraging more women to become politically active, to meet together and speak out about their problems.

We try and organise or support specific projects, for instance lesbian groups.

We have to send women to the round table to try and represent women's interests and then there are the elections on May 6th which we have to prepare for. So you can see there are very many things to do!

***LB:* What are the central demands you are putting forward at the moment?**

Petra: There are many demands. In general we say that it is not enough to have laws stating the equality of women, we must change structures so that women reach leading positions, we must have quotas, we must have women's officers.

This is so that women can stand for their own interests in all areas of society. That is one part of our demands.

Another one is that we have to fight for better social benefits.

We have to fight for "parenthood" so that not only the mother is responsible for childcare, the father is as well, and we have to improve the thinking on these questions.

Therefore some laws must be changed in the GDR because some of the social benefits are only given to the mother — e.g., fathers do not have access to the "baby year" (a paid year off work following the birth of a child).

And, of course, we started to fight for improving the childcare system, but now we have to fight not only to improve it but to defend it, because the situation has changed totally since Autumn last year.

Childcare

Some of the childcare institutions, creches, and kindergartens have already been closed. I think we have to defend the system and fight for it to be improved.

There is also the general question of the unemployment of women.

The restructuring of areas of work and industry will particularly affect women as the fields where most women work are being reconstructed first and women are being sent back to their households and children.

There is a kind of politics from our governing party — the CDU — now that it is good for the children and good for the woman to stay at home, and good for the family.



Climbing the wall in the first days of the revolution

We have to fight against that position because it is not the solution to the problem to send the woman back home and make them economically dependant.

We must fight for shorter working hours for parents and so on, so that they have more time with their children and oppose sending only the woman back to the home and children.

***LB:* There is a similar drive to send women back into the home by Gorbachev in the Soviet Union.**
There, because of the double burden of both full time work and all the domestic responsibilities — housework, childcare, etc. — that women carry, the idea of going back into the home is gaining support from many women.
It appears to them as something that will make their life easier. Is this true in the GDR also or do women still hold onto their right to work?

Petra: There are both tendencies in the GDR.

You can find the tendency you mention. If women want to stay at home we do not want to force them to work, that is not our aim. But we want to fight for those women who want to work to be able to do both full-time work and childcare.

There are also many women who have finished their studies, got their education and want to work, women are used to work and there are lots of women who want to have a good job.

I think the danger is that women who want to work will be pushed into part-time jobs — underpaid, not fully insured, no social rights. That is the real danger in the GDR at the moment.

We don't want to fight against women who want to be at home, we think women must have the right to choose what they want to do with their lives but we think that the possibilities must be there.

***LB:* I know that there has been free abortion on demand up to 12 weeks in the GDR since 1972, but problems with access to contraception and so on. Are their any battles over this aspect of a woman's right to choose presently?**

Petra: Not yet. There are some things we have to improve — more education and information around birth control and contraception and those things, more forms of contraception that are easier to get, etc.

Abortion will become a topic in the next few months. If we reunify under Article 23 we will have to adopt all the laws of the FRG and that poses a real danger to women, especially concerning abortion.

There is a very restrictive law on abortion in the FRG that would be a real step back for a woman's right to choose want they want to do and we will have to fight against this.

I think we must build close contacts with women in the FRG who are campaigning for abortion rights.

***LB:* Do you already have links with women in the FRG?**

Petra: Our group in Halle has been approached by women in our partner town (there are special links between towns in East Germany and West Germany) to go and visit, develop contacts, etc.

***LB:* In the elections the IWF was in a coalition with the Greens. How did this work out?**

Petra: Yes, we had a coalition with the Greens and it was a problem for us. The result is that the Greens have eight places in the Peoples' Chamber and we don't have any.

I think we were not experienced enough to mange it correctly.

First, both the Women and the Green Party thought they had more votes.

Electoral

Second, with the electoral system in the GDR we have districts and we have lists. The number of votes a list receives defines how many places the organisation gets in the Peoples' Chamber.

If you only get one candidate elected for the district it is the person at the top of the list and it was the mistake of the IWF that we had no first position candidates.

Legally speaking the result was correct but there had been an agreement that the IWF would have a third of the coalition's places. When that did not happen, we could not agree how to resolve it and the coalition broke down.

Nevertheless, in some districts the Greens and the IWF still work together.

***LB:* Is the IWF open to all women, including those in different organisations — the United Left, the Greens, even the CDU?**

Petra: I think the CDU has now started a women's union — the Christian Women's Union — which is a separate organisation and I think women with CDU ideas will not join us but they are able to.

All women who want to fight for women's interests as staed in our programme can join the IWF. They are in many different groups and no groups.

Poland

International solidarity against the Poll Tax

A picket of the British Embassy in Warsaw was held on March 31st, to coincide with the anti-Poll Tax demonstrations in London and Glasgow.
Organised under the slogan "Smash the Poll Tax — Solidarity with British Workers", it was attended by anarchists and members of the Revolutionary Left Current (a Trotskyist group in Warsaw).
The RLC distributed a leaflet to passers-by entitled "No to Thatcherism — in Britain and Poland."

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POLL TAX NOTES

Tory tax: imperialists ride again

As non-payment begins to take off in England and Wales, NARENDRA MAKANJI, Chair of Labour Party Black Sections looks at how the Poll Tax has been used all over the world as a device to control the people.

Scottish people began to face up to Poll Tax bills at about the same time as people in England and Wales received registration forms.

Tory politicians are now looking for ways to highlight the gains from the Poll Tax and to press home the political advantage.

The Tory government will argue that the Poll Tax is absolutely necessary to end the "tyranny of the hard left" in Local Authorities, that it will be fair to everyone, and no-one will pay too much.

If anyone does end up paying too much, they say, then the taxing authorities will be brought to account at the ballot box.

The opponents of the Poll Tax are in disarray in arguing about "staying within the law" and "civil disobedience and non-co-operation".

In this debate, those arguing for a strategy of staying within the law were dealt a heavy blow by Labour's defeat in the Govan by-election.

The Poll Tax is not new in this country. It was introduced by Richard II in the 14th century and sparked off the Peasant's Revolt.

Elsewhere, the Poll Tax has been used as a device to disenfranchise and to control the people.

For example, in India, the Moghul ruler Aurengzbeb imposed a Poll Tax (called Jizya) on all non-moslems in 1679, sparking off a massive revolt by the Rajputs and forcing his successor Emperor Akbar to abolish it in 1681.

In the United States, after the defeat of the Populist Party — the party of the poor farmers — the Democrats, towards the end of the 19th century, amended the constitutions of some Southern and Western states.

Their purpose, via the introduction of forms of Poll Tax, was to disenfranchise the black people who had been brought into politics by the populists, and possibly also to weaken politically the poor whites who made up the backbone of the Populist Party.

The Poll Tax in varying forms survived in the Southern states into the 20th century.

It was finally abolished when the Supreme Court ruled in 1966 that under the "equal protection" clause of the 14th amendment, the state could not levy a Poll Tax as a prerequisite for voting in state and local elections.

In South Africa, a form of Poll Tax survives to this day and is the basis of the pass laws.

The tax was first introduced on the Indian indentured labour in the latter part of the 19th century in Natal, which was a Crown Colony, with the British Colonial Office fully responsible for its government.

The government proposed an annual Poll Tax of £25 on every Indian who had been freed from indenture. No Indian could afford to pay such an exorbitant tax and live in Natal as a free person.

Lord Elgin, the Governor-General of India, considered that the amount was excessive, and ultimately accepted an annual Poll Tax of £3. This was equivalent to nearly six months' earnings on the indenture scale.

Mahatma Gandhi in his book *Satyagraha* in South Africa comments that:

"There was hardly any labourer who did not have a wife and a couple of children. Thus as a general rule, every labourer was required to pay an annual tax of £12."

It is impossible to describe the hardships that this Tax entailed. The Indians carried on powerful agitation against this Tax.

But what could the poor labourers do in this matter? The agitation was, therefore, carried out on their behalf by the Indian traders, activated by motives of patriotism or of philanthropy."

In Southern Rhodesia, another type of Poll Tax was introduced to give the different races differential access to resources and other means of production.

A hut tax was introduced, which facilitated the seizure of land by forcing the African peasants out of subsistence farming and into the cash economy as labourers in mining, building and domestic work.

Fertile land and cheap labour were both made available by this single fiscal action.

In 1904, the hut tax gave way to a £1 per head Poll Tax on each male African person.

Europeans with incomes of less than £400 for a single person were exempt from the tax. In the fiscal year 1904-5 African taxes provided 42% of the total government revenue, while the contribution of the whites was only 27%.

Those fiscal measures were supplemented by legislation for cheap labour such as the 1901 Masters and Servants Act.

In 1926, the Native Juvenile Employment Act provided for the compulsory indenturing of Africans found "loafing" in urban areas.

Every African person over the age of 14 years was required to carry a registration certification (RC or "situpa") which served as a Tax receipt.

In 1936 the Native Registration Act obliged every African to have proof of work in the towns, a pass to seek work or a visiting pass. In less than 40 years, the Poll Tax procedures had been converted into vicious pass laws.

Lambeth

This cap doesn't fit; we won't wear it!

As expected, Lambeth has been added to the list of 20 Labour Authorities "poll tax capped" by the government.

The cap reduces the Poll Tax from £547 to £496 which indicates cuts of nearly £9 million.

Many near the Council leadership believe that decisions on cuts can be delayed through legal challenges until the autumn!

Lambeth Against the Poll Tax have agreed to call a lobby against any Council meeting intending to make cuts, with the slogan " No cuts, No Poll Tax, Make the Tories pay!".

Sadly though, the local NALGO leadership are ill-prepared to face the challenge.

By Cllr. Steve French

The national initiative of calling together representatives from the 21 Authorities is also to be welcomed.

But the crucial question is how will the Twelves administration respond to the budget crisis once their legal challenges have failed?

Whilst prepared to set the Poll Tax, attack workers conditions, and oversee, privatisation, Joan Twelves has always claimed that cuts were her bottom line.

Her choice is stark; turn left to confrontation or right to the pro-cuts lobby.

In these times of Poll Tax capping, this is the moment to form "CAPT" — Councillors Against the Poll Tax. Those who have unambiguously opposed the Poll Tax should contact me on 01-733-3403.

But more importantly action must be prepared by the Trade Unions.

The London Federation's dayschool on April 28th should be turned into a conference for action.

The National Federation Trade Union Conference must be raised in every Trade Union. At every level our objective should be industrial action to fight the cuts and political strikes to smash the Poll Tax!

TRADE UNION DAY SCHOOL AGAINST THE POLL TAX

Trade union activists who have been at the forefront of the non-payment campaign in London and the Greater London Association of Trades Councils (GLATC) are organising a Dayschool Against the Poll Tax for trades unions with the full support of the All-London Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

Delegates are invited from trade union branches, shop stewards' committees, and workplace anti-Poll Tax groups.

The objects of the dayschool are:

•to share the experiences of groups of workers who have faced, and fought, the Poll Tax in the workplace;

•to inform delegates of the problems which the Tax will pose for trade unions in the workplace, and strategies for fighting them;

•to discuss means by which branches, shop stewards' committees and activists can get involved in the campaign initiated by the community groups organising for mass non-payment.

The dayschool will be held at the Institute of Education, Bedford Way (off Russell Square) WC1, on Saturday 28th April, and will start at 10 am. A creche will be provided.

Registration is £5 per delegate, £2 for individuals. Cheques should be made payable to HAPTU (TU), and sent to Sham Singh, c/o 72 West Green Rd, Tottenham, N15. This is also the contact for the creche.