LABOUR
40p FORTNIGHTLY
BRIEFING
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40p

AFTER LOCAL ELECTION VICTORIES...

DON'T LET TORIES OFF THE HOOK!

Bradford voters took the first electoral opportunity to put an end to Eric Pickles' right-wing experiment and send a clear message to Thatcher.

The Tories lost five of the 13 seats they were defending and failed to regain any of the seats they lost in 1986.

If the previously safe Tory ward represented by Pickles and the two Lord Mayors whose casting votes gave him power had been at stake in this election, the city wide swing would have given it to Labour.

Labour gains included Odsal, the seat whose loss gave the Tories control in 1988.

Perhaps the most striking gain was Shipley West, a substantially middle class and traditionally Tory seat, which hasn't been represented by a Labour Councillor in 68 years.

Special Report from Bradford
By Paul Hubert
Chair, Shipley West Labour Party

However, the signs for Labour are contradictory. In three wards the turnout was as high as 60%, boosting majorities in safe seats for both parties and giving Labour Shipley West despite an unusually high Tory vote.

This might suggest political polarisation in the area, but few posters were up and there was little sign of campaign fever. Tory posters were especially hard to find.

Traditional Tory voters were clearly unhappy with the government. Number takers at the local station told us "there's no way we'll help out in a General Election."

Even many Poll Tax gainers doubted whether the destruction of local services was worth it. Key local issues included the selling off of old people's homes (along with their residents) and chaos in education.



PHOTO: Don Williams Photography

The threat of redundancy hangs over 100 local teachers because of Local Management of Schools and budget cuts. Up to 50 Further Education lecturers are also threatened.

Normally Conservative school governors and heads have been up in arms at the cuts they are supposed to make. The only official Tory response has been to tell them they are "confused".

Continued inside, p.2

Local Elections

Briefing **supporters report from the ground:**

- ✗ Birmingham
- ✗ Liverpool
- ✗ Calderdale
- ✗ Watford
- ✗ Tower Hamlets
- ✗ Westminster
- ✗ Haringey
- ✗ Ealing
- ✗ Brent

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LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!

Letters

DON'T LET THE TORIES OFF THE HOOK!

Continued from front page

Labour's fears of disaffection amongst Asians proved unfounded at least for the time being.

Mohammed Riaz, who defected to the Tories just ahead of deselection by his local Labour ward, promised to lead the "slaughter of Labour".

In fact, Amin Qureishi secured a Labour majority of over 3,000, only a few votes short of Riaz's total in 1986. In another ward an "Islamic Independent" managed less than 9% of the vote while Labour secured an absolute majority.

But the Labour leadership can claim little credit for the Tory defeat.

Its inertia during the 18 months of Tory control was symbolised by the refusal of the Labour leader, Phil Beeley, to give up a well-paid job in Wakefield Local Authority in sufficient time to qualify as a candidate.

Throughout the last year, he also failed to give a policy lead. The Manifesto was sent out less than a week before the elections.

Most damagingly, the Labour leadership had no real involvement in the local struggles against the cuts and the Poll Tax.

The new Labour regime now has to operate within the constraints of the Tory Poll Tax and budget, as well as the effects of existing cuts, especially in education and social services.

The Bradford labour movement will have to ensure that everyone knows what the Tory legacy is and that the existing Poll Tax framework means only minimal improvements are possible.

If the Labour Group gets locked into power-playing and City Hall bureaucracy, the danger is that their incompetence will let the Tories back in next year when the Poll Tax will rise with the removal of the safety net.

However, if they use City Hall as the basis for campaigning politics they can ensure that Bradford gives a hand in destroying both the Poll Tax and the Tory government.

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 17th if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Boil the Greens!

Dear *Briefing*,

Labour's excellent result in the previously safe Tory seat of Quinton, Birmingham (see page 6) owed much to the local candidate's non-payment stance on the Poll Tax.

Also attracting support were his opposition to the Council's "prestige" projects, and a long record of activity in defence of local jobs and services.

In the midst of our struggle against the Tories along came the so-called "community-based" Greens, whose candidate lives in a large house outside the ward.

The Greens launched a concerted press attack on the Labour candidate running over several weeks.

This was despite the fact (well known to all the local Greens) that the Labour candidate had an excellent record on saving the local park and many other green issues.

This smear campaign helped elect a pro-Poll Tax, earth-despoiling Tory. The Green Party is not socialist and is certainly no friend of the working class.

Yours for socialism,
Pauline Purnell
Birmingham

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SERA: Correction

SERA's Vice-Chair, Mike Malina, has asked *Labour Briefing* to correct a point made in issue no. 100 in an article entitled *SERA affiliates to Labour!*

Mike stated on behalf of Sera that SERA did contribute to the Policy Review and they also argued that the Labour Party should oppose nuclear power.

Briefing stands corrected on this factual point and apologises for any confusion caused.

On the main point of the article that Larry Whitty wants SERA to provide Labour with a purely cosmetic green face we stand by every word.

SERA has been invited to make a contribution to the debate so we look forward to them exercising their right of reply in a future issue.



Haringey Greens: no stand on anti-racism, despite Broadwater Farm community campaign in defence of the Tottenham Three.

Greens on the white side

Dear *Briefing*,

I was reminded of Steve Potter's passing disparagement of "demogogic" attacks on the Green Party in a recent "Briefing during our local election campaign.

Hornsey and Wood Green is a hard-fought battleground, one of the crucial Tory marginals which Labour must win to form a government after the next General Election.

The Green Party appears to have won just under 20% of the vote across the constituency on May 3rd, which, if repeated at a General Election, would certainly give the seat to the Tories.

It would be pleasant to think that this was a left-wing protest vote against Labour or an endorsement of Poll Tax non-payment. But the facts are otherwise.

Although several local Greens have played a positive role in the anti-Poll Tax movement it hardly featured at all in their election campaign, though numerous attacks on the local Labour Council did.

Unfortunately these were not attacks on the right wing Council leadership for cutting jobs and services for implementing the Poll Tax and threatening to prosecute non-payers, for abandoning anti-racist, anti-sexist, and lesbian and gay rights initiatives.

Instead, the Greens disparaged the local Council for its "mismanagement" and for being too "left wing". As a result they were the beneficiaries of a middle class, anti-Tory, anti-Labour, and generally grumpy protest vote.

In one leaflet they encouraged their voters to use their extra votes (only one Green candidate was standing in each of the multi-member wards) to support "any" of the major parties — including the Tories.

Any political party which fails at the very least to call for a vote against the Tories is reactionary and cannot be perceived as any kind of partner in the socialist project.

Finally, I was disturbed during our election campaign to find that several local white supremacists — fiercely anti-Labour and anti-black — had Green posters up in their windows.

Of course, Labour's record on racism is atrocious. But the Greens are a new party and had they taken a clear anti-racist stand (backing, for instance, the Tottenham Three) they would not now be attracting such support.

Yours for socialism,
Mike Marqusee
Hornsey

PERISCOPE



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

Nothing to do with "Bedsit Trots"

To most punters the phrase "reading pad" may conjure up the image of a bed-sit somewhere west of London.

But to Labour activists the reading pad is the lynchpin of electoral organisation.

Without it you simply can't convert your canvass returns into useable information for knocking-up voters on election day.

But as May 3rd approached local Labour organisers in Camden began to worry: where were the reading pads?

A number of urgent phone calls to head office turned up the same amazing story: none of our full-time officials had bothered to arrange for any of the simple but precious items to be printed.

When it dawned on the whizz-kids of Walworth Road that their omission was a serious one, last minute emergency arrangements were made to print the pads — on a Sunday in Merseyside.

Thus Labour's elections strategists managed to cost our Party a pretty penny in avoidable expense.

We can hardly blame Labour's London supremos for this minor error.

After all, they were busy with other urgent items — chucking out socialists, censoring local manifestoes, and waging one of the most insipid, negative, and ineffective Labour campaigns ever seen in the capital.

Trouble at t'Congress House

Rumour has it that the normally somnolent corridors of the TUC HQ at Congress House have been disturbed of late by murmurs of discontent from TUC employees.

Their grievance? The TUC refuses to recognise any of their unions.

Instead, Willis and his "deputy" Monks insist on dealing with their workers through a non-union house staff committee, just like a good old-fashioned family firm.

Fraud (Squad) at Poll (Tax)

Not satisfied with having expelled 11 left Labour Councillors from the Haringey Labour Group one month before the local elections, the right-wing Labour Council leadership has now set the fraud squad on five of the recidivist socialists.

The crime which the plainclothes hounds are investigating is the alleged failure of the said Councillors to declare a personal pecuniary interest in a Council debate.

The debate in question concerned fines for non-registration for the Poll Tax.

The alleged personal pecuniary interest? The five Councillors (all opposed in principle to Poll Tax, Poll Tax registration, and Poll Tax payment) had themselves *not* registered for the Poll Tax.

They therefore stood to gain (so the Labour right and the Tories allege) from any leniency on the Council's part towards non-registerers.

Ealing's no comedy

Workers in Ealing's equalities and members' services units came into work on the Friday after the local elections with heavy hearts, knowing their jobs were on the line.

Would they be sacked? Or redeployed? They didn't have to wait long — new Tory leader Martin Mallam told them to clear their desks by the next Tuesday.

Understandably, they turned to NALGO for help. But repeated phone calls met the same response: there's no one available today, the executive are interviewing a new secretary...

At about 3.30pm, Chris Morey, Branch Secretary, was eventually tracked down. Worried members asked to meet him.

He would be convening a meeting, he said, some time next week. He'd let them all know.

Nice to see NALGO out there fighting for its members.

Green Party campaign for Poll Tax Payment

Haringey Green Party has found a novel way to fight the Poll Tax "without damaging services":

"Groups of people with a wide range of incomes band together to jointly pay their Poll Tax bills in proportion to their incomes".

Each group appoints two administrators and each member tells them what her/his income is... The total bills for all the group are then added together and re-divided between the members.

With opposition like this, the Poll Tax will hardly last out the month! What happened to that vote for mass non-payment at the Green Party Conference?



Margaret Hodge

Hodge Dodge?

Rumour has it that Islington Council boss Margaret Hodge was so keen to produce "her sort" of election propaganda that she *somehow forgot to check with the local Labour agent before issuing her own material* — thereby breaking the law!

Can we expect Margaret to take the next logical step and pledge herself to non-payment of the Poll Tax?

ITV's election night special also featured Margaret Hodge. "It's going well in Islington", she said smugly. "A 13% swing to me."

Editorial

BRIEFING
LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Tories down — but not out

You wouldn't know it from some of the headlines ("Thatcher's Flagship Sails Home...", "Poll Tax Vindicated...") but Labour was the overwhelming victor in the local elections held on May 3rd.

The 8% swing to Labour across the country would be sufficient to elect a Labour government. In many areas — from Liverpool to Bradford to Lewisham to Great Yarmouth and Brighton — the Tories had their worst drubbing for many a year.

But the fact is this wasn't quite the smashing victory we hoped for — and when share prices rise in the City following an election Labour should always be concerned.

Despite the fact that this was by any standards a rotten result for Thatcher, she is still alive and kicking — and dangerous.

The lesson of May 3rd — which we ignore at our peril — is that we cannot rely on the Tories losing the General Election; we have to win it ourselves.

The swing recorded in the local elections was well below the swing predicted in the opinion polls.

The losses of Brent and Ealing, the Tory successes in Westminster, Wandsworth and Derby, and the Liberal's surprising survival act enabled the headline writers to exhume the Thatcherite corpse.

In the search for scapegoats, some Labour MPs are trying to revive the "London factor".

But if there is a London factor now (and given the strong Labour results in Lewisham and Islington and Lambeth, it is clearly a complicated combination of factors) it must be attributed to the right-wing London Council leaderships who cut jobs and services repeatedly in recent years and then set high Poll Taxes — and to the right-dominated (and grossly incompetent) Greater London Labour Party.

In general, Labour's campaign was insipid and largely negative.

Our Party Political Broadcast was a naked appeal to the middle class and the only thing more striking than its lack of positive alternatives to Tory failures was its ineffectiveness.

There is a solid Tory class base in this country which held up well in the local elections, considering the tremendous economic pressure it's coming under.

And the Tory vote — particularly as a crucial general election approaches — may well prove more resilient than the polls indicate.

That means that Labour will win the next General Election by mobilising the maximum number of working class voters — which of course includes millions of relatively well-paid working class home owners who have increasingly come to hate Thatcher, her mortgage rates, and her Poll Tax.

Seventy per cent of the population is opposed to the Poll Tax, but Labour came nowhere near securing that level of the vote.

The campaign did not become the referendum on the Poll Tax which it should have been for several reasons.

•Labour's mystery alternative to the Tax never emerged.

•The Labour leaderships at both national and local levels did everything possible to distance themselves from the grass-roots anti-Poll Tax movement.

•Labour failed fully to counter the Tories' Poll Tax trap — the electoral arithmetic of which was clear in Wandsworth and Westminster.

Flagship

When the Tories launched their flagship they aimed quite deliberately to use it to undermine Labour's electoral base in the inner-cities and bolster their own.

Why did Labour fail to get this basic fact across to larger sections of the electorate? Why didn't we challenge this particular Tory "con" more effectively?

The answer is stark and simple. Labour does not want to be seen defending local government — and certainly not calling for increased resources to local Councils.

Only a mass campaign of non-payment and non-implementation, backed by the Labour Party and coupled to a Labour commitment to the full funding of local services, can foil the Tory Poll Tax trap.

One of the most striking but least noted features of opinion polls over the last ten years is that the Labour Leader has always run well behind the Labour Party in the popularity ratings.

Kinnock has only recently overtaken Thatcher — and only when she has sunk to unprecedented depths of mass unpopularity.

Thus the apolitical, Kinnock-orientated campaign (particularly marked in London) played to our weakness and to Tory strength.

Some Walworth Road spokespersons — and many on the left — have argued that it is better for Labour to keep Thatcher in office until the General Election.

While it is true that Heseltine would certainly put a few points on the Tories' opinion poll ratings and that he easily beats Kinnock in any head-to-head competition, the overall effect of removing Thatcher would be dramatically beneficial to Labour and the working class.

Labour Party members and supporters — indeed workers of all types all over the country — would see in Thatcher's departure a victory for themselves and a defeat for their enemies.

It would boost our confidence and ultimately make success at the polls — and elsewhere — that much more likely. No wonder the Walworth Road gang are so cautious about removing Thatcher.

With John Smith touting Labour to union-busting, environment-polluting, worker-exploiting industrialists in this country and overseas (and assuring the electorate that Labour "will not prevent job losses") it is clear that the last thing an incoming Labour administration will want is a combative and confident working class.

But what Labour leaders want and what is actually good for the Labour Party and its supporters are not necessarily the same things.

The whole mixed experience of the recent local elections — the swing against Thatcher and Labour's inability to make the most of that swing — confirms once again that socialists have no alterntive but to work inside the Labour Party.

It also confirms that this work must go hand-in-hand with work outside the Party — in the wider social and class struggles against the Tories and the ruling class.

And there the priority for the moment must remain the movement against the Poll Tax, however much the Old Fantasists (aka New Realists) would like to deny it.

Behind the headlines

Labour and the racist resurgence

With the Tories on the defensive, the racists are coming out of the woodwork.

There has been a rise in fascist support in Western Europe (and some disturbing racist and nationalist developments in Eastern Europe).

This, and the Heseltine threat from the "left" of the Tory Party, and the debate about Hong Kong refugees, have all given Norman Tebbit and his extreme right crew the confidence and motivation to declare openly what they had been saying among themselves all along.

But the racist outbursts from the top of the Tory party are only the tip of the iceberg.

In Woolwich in South-East London three Black Labour Council candidates (all supporters of Labour Party Black Sections) suffered racial harassment during the course of the recent local election.

A smoke bomb was thrown into one house; some 50 racist messages were left on another's phone; and a car mistakenly thought to belong to a third was smashed up in front of his house.

By Martha Osamor
Labour Party Black Sections

All three had been involved in the fight against the British National Party, which had set up an office in the area.

Meanwhile in Tower Hamlets in London's East End, the BNP held a public meeting at a local school as part of its election campaign, although anti-fascists in the area mobilised in opposition and got the better of the BNP on the day.

The BNP's results in Tower Hamlets varied (they did get some 200 votes in one ward) but with the notorious Tower Hamlets Liberals continuing to play the racist card, the BNP's room for growth was limited.

The Liberal slogan was "Our Homes for Our People". Their record of racist Council house evictions made them the clear pole of attraction for the large racist vote in the area.

This latest rise in the level of racist activity has several clear messages: the left must remain vigilant and ready to fight. But Labour as a whole must change course.

In recent months, when we should have been standing with our people against the Poll Tax, Labour has been busy trying to smash up the left and distance itself from Black people (and Black candidates) and from the anti-racist struggle in general.

Education Minister MacGregor's announcement that white parents can choose to remove their children from schools with a majority of Black pupils is only a logical development of the racist premises of the 1988 Education Reform Act.

The ERA was intended to bring back so-called traditional English education — with its emphasis on ruling class history and "christianity" — and to reverse the small steps forward taken by progressive educators.

Black

This had an obvious racist purpose. But even more threatening to Black people is the ERA's fraudulent offer of "parental choice".

The MacGregor decision shows just what kind of choice this means — and it is certainly not freedom of choice for the huge number of Black children who often form only a tiny minority in white-dominated schools.

The MacGregor decision also re-enforces the fundamental point that Tebbit was making: Black people don't belong here.

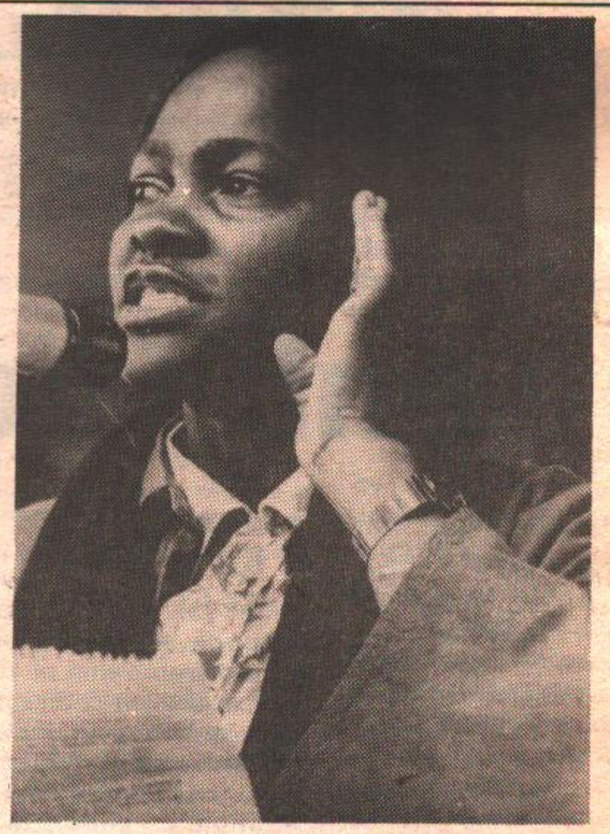


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Martha Osamor

On the streets, at work, in our homes, and our schools this message is hammered home again and again. At the same time, we are told we must prove ourselves. Our loyalty, our allegiance must be tested.

Labour's role in all this is profoundly worrying. Black people consistently vote Labour and Labour just as consistently ignores their needs and leaves then open to attack.

In the Hong Kong debate Labour could have done much better. It could have argued for democratic self-government for Hong Kong *now* as a real preparation for unity with the mainland and a concrete pressure on Deng's bureaucracy.

Instead Labour played the Tory numbers game — and Tebbit was delighted.

Socialist Movement

How do you see the Movement?

In the run-up to its first AGM the Socialist Movement is discussing its internal democracy. Here COLIN LINDSAY, National Secretary of the Socialist Movement, looks at the issues raised.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Tony Benn: founder of the Socialist Conferences.

"The Socialist Movement?" Bemused look.
"Oh, you mean the Socialist Conference!"

Many of us will be familiar with such a reaction.

Despite our activities over the past year, the fact is that many people who are aware of and are sympathetic to the Chesterfield Conferences do not yet relate to us as a Movement.

To involve such people is, of course, a complex process.

An immediate step is the creation of clear democratic structures, which will maximise the participation of supporters in the work and decision-making processes of the Movement.

We should recognise that people have different levels of involvement and different fields of interest. Some may be satisfied with being kept informed of our activities, and perhaps attending a conference each year.

Some want to be more actively involved: in a local group, for example, or in one of our policy or working groups. Others may wish to be active in a national campaign.

It is vital that we develop structures that are more responsive to these differences than in the past.

The last thing we need is a massive and rigid bureaucracy; what we need are flexible structures which present clear lines of communication and accountability.

To illustrate the range and the variety of questions we have to tackle, we need only to look at certain key areas of the Movement.

Local Socialist Movements

Local groups are vital to the development of our movement. We have had some success in establishing and preserving local groups, but with a few exceptions, these remain fairly precarious.

In many parts of Britain there are no operating Socialist Movements. Those that exist are represented on our Organising Committee, but two-monthly meetings do not provide an adequate link between local groups and the rest of the Movement.

Local groups must retain the greatest autonomy. They need capacity to respond swiftly and sensitively to local issues and conditions and to build up positive relations with other local organisations and campaigns.

At the same time, our local groups must have greater and clearer opportunities of being involved in our policy and decision making. Communications between local groups and other parts of the Movement must be drastically improved.

We need to be clear about the kind of organisation we are trying to build at a local level.

Are we trying to create an alliance of socialists that in effect gives an organised focus to the socialist movement that exists in most towns and cities? This would involve individuals and organisations.

Or are we forming groups of individual socialists.

These are not necessarily alternatives: we need to do the latter initially to achieve the former. But it is the former which, I believe, is our aim.

Policy Groups

The role our Policy Groups has been critical in development of our existing policies through the papers for the three Socialist Conferences. Some of them intend to turn in a more campaigning direction.

The need for the clarification of these groups relation to the Movement and the spelling out of clear lines of communication is urgent. All members must be able to participate actively in our policy-making processes.

Should policy work be organised exclusively through national working groups or should people get together on issues of interest locally, with a national convenor to bring people together as appropriate?

What is our basic philosophy about policy development?

Presumably we reject the traditional Labour Party method of leadership appointed committees of the great, the good and the self-important.

But how do we open up the process, not only to our own members but also to campaigning movements and specialist groups not directly affiliated to the Socialist Movement but sympathetic to our aims?

How do you think we can build more effectively on the policy interests and expertise that we already have amongst our members and affiliates?

Related organisations

We have a range of different relationships to an increasing number of bodies, not all of which are clear.

First, there are our founding organisations: the Campaign Group and the Socialist Society, who each have 4 representatives on our Organising Committee.

Could our relations with these founding organisations be improved, making more use of their particular skills and positions? If so how?

Then there are the growing number of organisations which are affiliated to the Socialist Movement. Some have representatives on the Organising Committee, some do not.

What is the purpose of such affiliations for the organisation concerned and for the Movement? How can we make it an active relationship rather than just a formal one?

How can we ensure that the knowledge and experience of these bodies — for example the National Left in Wales — are fully "brought into the movement?"

In another category are organisations that we have created as part of our work in the labour movement: Labour Party Socialists and our Trade Union Committee.

In both these we are working with socialists who are not members of the Socialist Movement.

How do we create clear and flexible lines of communication, responsibility and accountability?

Women for Socialism is an independent organisation. The relationship we establish with it is extremely important.

It is vital to get questions such as that of dual membership right to establish ways in which local WFS groups can relate to our Socialist Movement groups.

What about other women's organisations with which women in the Movement work? These include the European Socialist Feminist Forum. Women Against Fundamentalism, and many local womens' projects. Or are these questions for WFS to resolve?

Annual General Meeting

At our last Annual Conference, in Sheffield, many members felt we should be establishing clearer democratic structures.

The Organising Committee agreed to convene an Annual General Meeting with comprehensive policy-deciding and electoral powers soon after the November Socialist Conference.

This immediately raises a number of questions. How would we handle motions and amendments? How do we weigh the votes of national affiliates, local groups and affiliates, individual members?

What kinds of election to the Organising Committee will ensure a balanced representation on it? These may seem boring administrative issues, but to establish democratic structures, we had better get them right.

Structuring political activity

Questions about the organisation of an AGM have an obvious urgency. But we must not be stampeded into taking hasty and narrowly based decisions which turn out to be harmful or unworkable.

For the discussion on developing clearer and more democratic structures is not, in the end, simply a discussion on "neutral" administrative procedures.

It is fundamentally, a political discussion. The structures and processes we develop will necessarily both reflect the kind of politics we are trying to develop, and condition our capacity to develop such a politics.

If we are to move forward with decisiveness, we must make sure we have the necessary organisational bases. And these must be democratic from top to bottom.

Economic Notebook

Kohl, the DM, and Europe

Chancellor Kohl has ditched previous election promises over DM/OM exchange.

He had pledged to give East Germans a straight one to one currency exchange.

This comes as no surprise and is the only logical road for the West German ruling class.

Independence

In fact it was the Bundesbank, the West German Central Bank, that has more in the way of independence from government than the Bank of England, that finally pushed Kohl to a two to one exchange.

The Bundesbank has always been aware of the potential problems of German unification for the more long term strategic aim of German capital: the creation of a European economic "superstate" under German hegemony.

By MARTIN ALLEN

After the collapse of the post-war Bretton Woods system in which all world currencies were linked to the US dollar, European capital has fallen in behind the German economy and the increasingly powerful Deutschemark.

By the mid 70s the West German economy had overtaken the US in terms of the share of world manufacturing exports and had piled up a national income well above any of its other European competitors.

West Germany also took a large slice of imports from various European economies.

Currencies

The establishment of the European Monetary System ensured that, through linking their currencies to the DM, member states prevented the inflationary effects of depreciating currencies.

The West Germans benefited in that import prices did not undercut their own domestic output. Membership of the EMS also limited the ability of member states to pursue radically different domestic policies.

The process of European integration is set to continue with the tightening of the exchange rate mechanism, the creation of a Central European Bank, and the eventual introduction of a common European currency.

The West German and the European bourgeoisie see this as an effective way of defending their interests against both US and Japanese imperialism.

Economy

If Kohl had gone down the one to one exchange rate road, the German economy could have been thrown into chaos.

As the growth rates of other Western European capitalist economies are closely dependent on German growth, the aim of European integration could have been in danger.

German inflation rates would have risen steeply as a result of large increases in the money supply.

Unemployment would have risen from its present figure of about 100,000 to 2 million, as East German enterprises with productivity rates of about 30% of those in West Germany grappled with a hugely over valued currency and soaring wage costs.

The much talked about investment boom in East Germany would have fallen flat.

Money market interest rates would have gone up to defend the Mark, dragging other European rates, including those in Britain, with them triggering recession.

So it was no accident that on the day after the announcement of a two to one exchange, that Kohl, in an extended interview in the *Financial Times*, reassured the rest of the Western European ruling class.

He promised that the 1992 proposals and monetary union were still very much on.

Thus extreme nationalist elements were headed off, for instance those around people such as Mrs Thatcher, who hoped to exploit uncertainties around German unification to put the break on European integration.

It is the East German working class, who for the moment, will have to pay the price for this.

Fire Brigades Union

Flagship or Titanic?



Last year our Annual Conference overwhelmingly passed a resolution demanding that, in the event that a mass campaign of non-payment in Scotland becomes a reality, our Executive Council urge the Labour Party NEC immediately to convene a special conference to initiate and lead a national campaign of non-payment.

Thatcher 18 months ago described the Poll Tax as her flagship, the crowning achievement of capitalist revolution for Britain in the 90s.

But, after only one year of its implementation in Scotland, the Poll Tax is in utter and complete chaos, and now has all the hallmarks of becoming her Titanic.

Who would have thought in April 1989 that one year hence more than a million people, (from our tiny population of five million, 3.7 million of whom are eligible to pay), have either refused to pay a single penny or are now in serious arrears of their Poll Tax?

Even the Glasgow *Evening Times* was forced to concede that "an estimated 650,000 have not paid at all and another 500,000 have paid only two instalments".

We are entering the 1990's in the midst of the biggest campaign of civil disobedience in Britain's history.

By Jim Blair and Rab Chalmers Strathclyde Brigade Committee

But, with breathtaking hypocrisy, we see Thatcher beside herself with glee over the wave of civil disobedience sweeping Europe, while at home she is up to her neck in her own particular brand of "refuseniks".

It is worth mentioning, in passing, that many of the strikes and supportive action taken by workers in Europe and applauded by Thatcher would be against the law here in Britain.

In Scotland literally hundreds of Anti-Tax Unions have sprung up composed of ordinary men and women, the vast majority of whom are unemployed or on low wages.

They have no links with the trade union movement or the Labour Party, and have amalgamated under the umbrella of the Scottish Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

Glasgow, the bastion of the non-payment campaign, currently has a figure of one in three of the population not paying; whilst Strathclyde Region has one in four refusing to pay.

The vast housing schemes at Easterhouse, Pollok, Drumchapel and Castlemilk have become virtual no-go areas as far as collection is concerned where literally entire streets have still to pay a single penny!

But the Mass Non-Payment Campaign is not confined to the industrial heartland of Scotland.

Anti-Poll Tax Unions have been founded in such diverse places as Gretna-Green on the English border and Lerwick in the Shetland Isles which is nearer Norway than it is to Glasgow.

In January, Strathclyde Regional Council issued 350,000 notices of warrant sales to non-payers.

They, and the Sheriff Officers, are desperately hoping that people will be frightened into paying at this stage. But the authorities are orchestrating a gigantic bluff.

According to Kenneth Simpson, spokesperson for the Society of Messengers at Arms and Sheriff Officers:

"sending our letters to thousands of individuals is not a problem. Having physically to carry out poindings, however, is another matter." (*Scotsman*)

We appeal to our FBU brothers and sisters in England and Wales to join their local Anti-Poll Tax Union or found one in their area where none already exist.

We in Scotland have had to start our movements from scratch. We have learnt the lessons, and yes we have made mistakes.

But by living experience we have created a fighting, working class movement which alone has emerged as the only organisation capable of taking this fight to a successful conclusion.

We now have more than one million non-payers. Many more will become non-payers when they see the increases for 1990/91.

If these figures of mass non-payment were reflected in England and Wales, the Tories would be up against an army of 10 million non-payers south of the border.

Fields

In the words of Terry Fields, MP for Broadgreen Liverpool and ex-FBU Executive Council Member:

"When the judge finds me guilty of not paying the Poll Tax and asks me what I have to say before passing sentence I'll ask to go to the same jail as Lester Piggot.

"He done the Tax-Payer out of millions of pounds and only got a year in prison, in that case I'll only get sentenced to one and a half hours for not paying my Poll Tax."

An *Evening Times* editorial of 2/11/89 commented on the issuing of 236,415 final notices: "The big question is this: How do you take almost a quarter of a million defaulters to court? It simply isn't possible."

By October or November this year the Poll Tax system in Britain will be teetering on the verge of virtual collapse.

FBU members have been proud and honoured to play an active role in this movement right from its very inception. We now ask for your support in defeating this evil and unjust tax. Remember the resolution passed at Conference last year!

Non-Payment is now a reality.

(This article is reprinted from *Firefighter*, journal of the Fire Brigades Union, which noted beside the article that it doesn't represent FBU policy).

NUPE

Lead the campaign of direct action!

NUPE members across the country are joining local anti-Poll Tax groups in their communities and workplaces.

The many resolutions on the Conference agenda calling for mass non-payment and demanding that Local Authorities, especially Labour controlled Councils, do not prosecute non-payers reflect major action on the ground.

By Sally Morawetz Chair, Nottingham City NUPE (personal capacity)

Examples from just the health service membership show very clearly:

•100 student nurses at the Florence Nightingale Nurses Home of Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary are fighting back against the summary warrants out against them.

The Flo' Home Against the Poll Tax Campaign has co-ordinated the closing of their bank accounts — no handbag snatchers here, thanks Maggie!

Campaign

The campaign is threatening to mount a picket and refuse to let anyone into the home who tries to sell off their possessions to recover the £398 Lothian Council is demanding from them!

•A cross-London committee has been set up to organise student nurses throughout the capital (details from the Charing Cross NUPE office on 081-846-1234).

Student nurses on traditional courses "earn" £85 and "must" pay 100% Poll Tax, whilst those on Project 2000 get £88 and "must" pay (only) 20%.

Some student nurses at Kings College Hospital living in the grotty home in Lambeth are expected to shell out an extra £150 more than colleagues living in the new, nicer Southwark home!

•Even the nursing establishment knows they can't afford to ignore the strength of feeling.

The *Nursing Times* (hotbed of radical lefties!) has quoted a letter to COHSE from the UKCC's Assistant Registrar (for professional conduct).

This states the excellent news that non-payers who are subsequently fined are "extremely unlikely to be the subject of a hearing before the Professional Conduct Committee".

Tom Sawyer and his New Realist supporters will try to argue that we need to concentrate on getting a Labour government elected and not get involved in the mass campaign.

Anyone with any sense, however, knows that the Tories are crumbling precisely because of the mass opposition to this latest attack on working people.

The Tories are not worried about General Election campaigns against a more popular Labour Party in a couple of years.

NUPE ought to be leading the campaign on non-payment non-implementation and non-collection.

We should be using our ties to demand a Labour Party committed to struggle for the interests of the working class now — and not compromises on the never, never!

Delegates should support the calls for action on the Conference floor on non-collection, no-implementation and come to the Sunday night Broad Left fringe meeting on the Poll Tax.

We must ensure that we use Conference to strengthen our mass action against this hated Tax together with other unions and community groups.

Poll Tax Capping

Capping causes cuts

Poll Tax capping has thrown a large spanner into the wheels of local government finance, with complex and often contradictory results.

The decision of the Secretary of State for the Environment to cap 21 Authorities is the start of a potentially long process.

By Doug Thorpe Islington NALGO

Designated Authorities have 28 days to appeal. The Secretary of State must then consider the appeal and fix a maximum, which is laid as an Order before Parliament. The Authority must comply within 21 days.

This procedure means that new bills will not be dispatched until July at the earliest.

The arbitrary nature of the criteria used to set the capping (12.5% + £26 above the Standard Spending Assessment) has done the government immediate political damage.

It has been seen as biased against Labour Authorities and their arguments about accountability to the electorate have been destroyed.

However, the government believes it will eventually buy support from those opposed to the *level* of the Poll Tax and capping is the only mechanism for ensuring that extra money given to local government is used to lower the Poll Tax not to provide services.

A number of capped Authorities, led by Hammersmith and Fulham, have sought a judicial review of the general criteria used to cap. Others may appeal against their individual limits.

The wide powers given in the legislation to the Secretary of State mean neither of these judicial options are likely to be successful.

Capitulation

It is the capitulation of Councils to the Poll Tax and their decision to make the cuts the government demands that is the biggest comfort to the Tories in these trying times.

The cuts will take place in at least 3 phases:

•cuts made by Councils to keep this year's Poll Tax down and try to avoid capping;

•cuts caused by the capping itself;

•cuts made in a desperate attempt to avoid being capped next year.

Avon Council, for instance, is considering going beyond this year's £20m cut to up to £50m cuts in order to avoid capping in future. Other Councils will follow.

Nevertheless, under instruction from Kinnock and Gould, Labour Councillors are playing down the effects of the cap. Those Councillors who have shown themselves willing to fight the Poll Tax must raise their voices.

In the trade unions capping has fuelled campaigns against cuts and redundancies. The magnificent decision of NUT Conference in favour of national strike action against redundancies shows the way forward.

In NALGO a meeting of capped and cut Authorities decided to step up the union's campaign against cuts, and the fight is now on to win a national campaign for boycotts of the Poll Tax work and defence of services at this year's Conference.

It is important not to separate the capped Authorities from those where cuts were made to avoid capping or from the campaign against the Poll Tax as a whole.

We must not fall into the trap of appearing to call for higher Poll Tax levels. The demands of no cuts *and* no Poll Tax need to be won both in the Poll Tax groups and in the unions.

Community

Unions and community campaigns must be linked in joint anti-Poll Tax/anti-cuts committees.

It is also urgent that unionists in different local government and education unions work together.

Basildon NALGO's call for a meeting of all branches of any union affected by capping should be supported, as should the call for a national Trade Union Conference against the Poll Tax made by the Socialist Movement.

Movement

The powerful movement against the Poll Tax has made the government desperate to bring down Poll Tax levels. Non-payment and trade union action together can prevent this being translated into cuts and bring down the Poll Tax completely.

Watford

Voters dump "Trad Labs"

In Watford, the Labour Party has regained overall control with 20 of the 36 seats.

This brings to an end two years of minority Labour administration.

That began when nine members of the then 23-strong majority group resigned the Labour whip and formed their own "Traditional Labour Group".

By a Watford *Briefing* supporter

The immediate excuse for the split was a dispute about a new shopping complex in which one of the developers had South African links.

Other divisions within the Labour Group included the emphasis to be placed on the Council's Nuclear Free Zone policy; whether to grant Mandela the freedom of the Borough; and the relationship between the Group and the local Party.

Some of the breakaway Councillors had previously been strongly criticised by the GC for making sexist and homphobic statements to the local press.

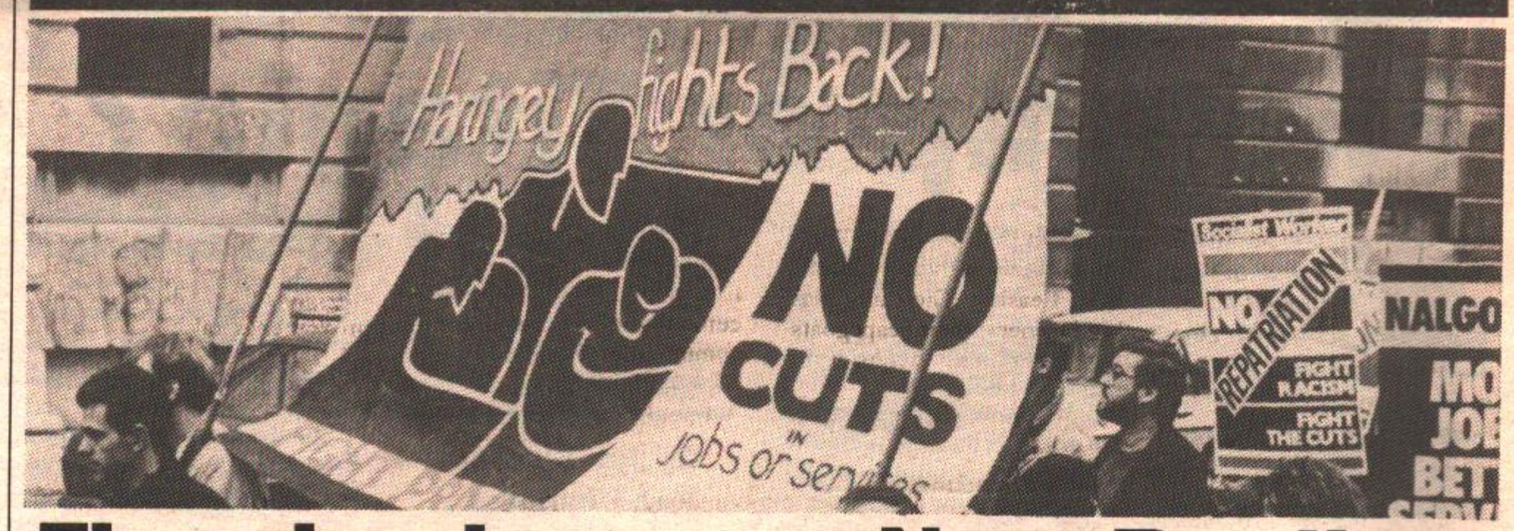


Anti-apartheid: not a priority for Trad Labs.

By the time of the split all nine were effectively ignoring the Party and they were eventually expelled from the Party for forming the "Traditional Group" and opposing official Labour candidates in Council Elections.

Now only two of the so-called "Traditional Labour" Councillors remain.

HARINGEY



Thumbs down .or New Realism

Labour emerged from a confusing set of local election results with a 42-17 majority on Haringey Council.

This is identical to its overall result four years ago, but disguises a number of interesting developments, both positive and negative.

In 1986 Labour defied a concerted national and local hate campaign to increase its majority under the banner of a radical and widely publicised manifesto.

Since then, three seats were lost to the Tories in by-elections, the manifesto was junked, and nine left Labour Councillors were expelled from the Labour Group.

Toby Harris' LCC-dominated administration had waged a ruthless war on the left within the Party, cut services again and again, and set the highest Poll Tax in the country.

Four years ago it rained on election day — but we still had a high turn-out, thanks to hard work by Party members and the high profile given to the local contest by a "Bernie-baiting" media.

On May 3rd 1990, the sun shone all day — but the turnout was down, especially in Tottenham.

By Mike Marqusee Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

Nonetheless, the result in Tottenham (the eastern and more working-class part of the Borough) was a strong one for Labour.

The Tories lost all but one of the five seats they held; the Liberals lost their only seat; and most Labour majorities were up.

The two best personal results in the Borough went to left-wingers Roger Harris and Ron Blanchard. The LCC had done its best to kick the latter off the panel — going as far as to send lies about his Council voting record to the NEC.

In Hornsey & Wood Green (the western half of the Borough and one of the most marginal Tory seats in the country) the news was not so encouraging.

Council Leader Toby Harris scraped in by 80 votes; Labour lost three seats to the Tories; and there was an overall swing from Labour to Tory of just over 1%.

In the strongly Labour South Hornsey ward, Deputy Council leader Philip Jones received a sharp slap on the wrist from his Labour-voting electorate (mostly Council tenants).

Jones was over 200 votes behind his running-mate Williamson, thus reversing the usual alphabetical hierarchy.

In the Wood Green area, extreme right-wing Tories won marginal seats that would have gone to Labour if the left-wing activists in their wards had been given a decent choice of candidates and any real encouragement to participate in the campaign.

The campaign slogan, "Haringey's a good place to live", summed up its forked-tongue insipidity.

On this showing, Labour will fail to win the crucial Hornsey & Wood Green marginal. LCC Parliamentary hopeful Barbara Roache will need the full co-operation of an alienated left if she wants to take the seat from the Tories.

Westminster

Lady Porter rises from the grave

Labour was shocked by the scale of the defeat in Westminster.

Twelve seats were lost to the Tories, including the seats contested by the Labour Group Leader and Deputy Leader.

A 7% swing to the Tories on a high turnout gave them a majority of 30 seats and brought Labour back to the position before 1986, when we came within 300 votes of taking the Council.

The Tories fought the election on their £195 Poll Tax, the second lowest charge in London.

By Padraic Finn

To back this up, the government focussed its publicity (and funding) on Westminster in an attempt to show that it was the *size* of the Poll Tax — rather than its principle — that people objected to.

Tory voters turned out in droves, joined by SLD voters. In at least one ward the SLD vote went over wholesale to the Tories.

Labour had had real grounds for optimism.

Aside from the 20% lead in the national opinion polls, Lady Porter's Council had been shaken by a series of splits, resignations, and scandals.

The best known of these was the selling of three cemeteries to property developers for 15p.

Tories hoped to counter these disadvantages through their policy of building "stable communities" — i.e., driving out working class tenants and replacing them with wealthy owner-occupiers.

This was largely achieved through a combination of Council house sales, deporting the homeless into B&B accommodation in other Boroughs, and the escalating price of housing in central London.

The decisive factor, however, was the Poll Tax. The massive fiddle of Westminster's grant from central government ensured a low Poll Tax.

Labour's weakness was its lack of an alternative. There was no serious campaign against the Poll Tax in the Borough and therefore a vote for Labour was seen as a vote for a higher Poll Tax.

Bland appeals to Labour's "values" and reliance on "pale blue" politics let the Tories escape the drubbing which was coming to them.

EALING

Council tenants turn to Tories

Labour's loss of Ealing Council was a shock to everyone, including the Tories.

At the start of the count, Tory Leader Martin Mallam privately conceded defeat, and admitted they were "worried" about some of their safe seats.

Labour was fighting on a good manifesto, although it contained no concessions at all to those unable to pay the £443 Poll Tax.

By Peter Chowney Hackney South CLP

Close examination of the results reveals that the middle class areas, first won in 1986, remained Labour. But the traditional Labour-voting Council estates of Northolt and Greenford went Tory.

Reasons for this are difficult to pin down. Identical Council estates in neighbouring Hounslow remained Labour. There had been no serious local scandals, and the local press had been broadly supportive of the Council.

It could be due to resentment amongst Council tenants of Ealing's generous homelessness policy or to racism and anti-gay hysteria stirred up by local Tory MP Harry Greenway.

The result puts in power a Tory group made up mostly of "paper" candidates.

Having declared himself as a "Heathite", Martin Mallam wasted no time in showing his true colours. He has told over a hundred Town Hall staff (mostly women and black workers) to clear their desks. Big disputes are inevitable.

In spite of its cuts and unashamed implementation of the Poll Tax, the loss of Ealing is a tragedy for all sections of the Party. More analysis is needed.

Brent

A self-inflicted wound

The Council election results in Brent were part of Kinnock's nightmare — but a predictable one.

Labour went into the elections on 46 (up on the 1986 result through by-election gains), with the Tories on 22, and Liberal Democrats on four.

We now have a hung Council with the Tories holding 31, Labour 29, and SLD six.

The Tories are saying it is due to a Labour Poll Tax of £498.

Both Walworth Road and the local Labour leadership claim that the policies of the Labour Group were fine, but they hadn't yet managed to put the record of the previous Labour administration behind them.

By Pete Firmin Brent East CLP

Neither explanation holds water. Other London Labour Councils (Lambeth, Haringey) set much higher Poll Taxes, and had more radical policies, yet suffered no losses (even making gains in Haringey).

The "previous administration" theorists claim that Labour was "loony left" until saved in the last few years.

But Brent Labour Group was never even particularly radical! It didn't even set up a single lesbian and gay centre!

When the Leader of Brent Council said he would not allow Section 28 to alter Brent's policies, he was quite right — there were none to be altered.

The nearest Brent came to radicalism was in a certain expansion of services and its bureaucratic equal opportunities policies — which never met the needs of people in the eighth most deprived Borough and which it never organised to defend (remember McGoldrick?).

The biggest single factor in Labour's defeat was its devastating cuts (far bigger than Bradford's) and rent increases over the last three years.

This left the unions demoralised and many working class voters disillusioned in areas where services had become virtually non-existent.

This demoralisation shows up again in the anti-Poll Tax campaign, which has meetings significantly smaller than elsewhere in London.

The irony is that the New Realists' strategy has undermined what is supposed to be the benefit of New Realism: electoral support!

The right will probably try to blame the left's lack of effort in the election campaign for the defeat. But the campaign was run almost exclusively on the right's policies, their manifesto, with their candidates.

The immediate task is to try and stop the new Labour Group forming a pact with the Liberals (tacit or otherwise).

Tower Hamlets

"Liberal Democrats" play the racist card

It was most annoying that the SLD victory in Tower Hamlets appeared on the television as a "gain".

The Liberal Focus team had won 25 seats in 1986, and with the support of one SDP member outvoted Labour's 24 members to take over the Council.

Labour did win a by-election off the Liberal Focus Team, who by then were all Democrats and later became Liberal Democrats.

(No wonder some of the leaflets putting forward Labour's policies this time round ended "vote for the party with an identity, not an identity crisis.")

But the Mayor's casting vote has kept the Liberal Focus Team in power in the "hung" Council throughout the last four years; and the "new" Council (LFT 30, Labour 20) will mean no change for the people of Tower Hamlets.

It was disaster enough when LFT won in 1986, wresting control of a Borough incorporating the old London Borough of Poplar where George Lansbury had led the stand for equalisation of the rates in the 20s.

But Lansbury's tradition had long since disappeared. The 1982-6 Labour administration under Paul Beasley had been one of the rottenest, most complacent, right wing types.

In fact, the 1986-90 LFT administration strived to outdo even Beasley. Their ally was big business; their scapegoats for all that went wrong were black people.

Tower Hamlets was divided into seven "Neighbourhoods". The Councillors in each Neighbourhood comprised the Neighbourhood Committee and were to run their own area.

Skeleton statutory Council Committees were maintained, as was a Policy and Resources Committee so tiny meetings were often two Liberals in a Town Hall broomcupboard at 8am — very difficult to lobby!

By Jenny Fisher Bow & Poplar CLP

Labour Neighbourhoods were subject to budgets set by the Liberals; and it was difficult to explain who was responsible for what.

Liberal Neighbourhoods received more generous budget allocations.

Wherever Labour attempted a popular socialist initiative or attempted to organise community defence against developers, the matter was declared a "Borough-wide issue", taken out of the Labour Neighbourhood's hands, and decided by the Liberals' policy triumvirate!

Nonetheless, Labour's position in the Neighbourhoods certainly helped protect some communities from the worst Liberal devastation.

Finally, the extra bureaucracy caused by the replication inherent in decentralisation has cost masses. £20 million has gone on building seven new Town Halls for the seven new Neighbourhoods alone!

Why couldn't Labour take Tower Hamlets back?

The Party was enormously demoralised by the sudden blow of losing in 1986. Activism plummeted, and membership slumped below 400 at the low point.

Some Labour Councillors disappeared to run little fiefdoms in the Neighbourhoods; others drifted into lethargy, as all they could do was suffer perpetual opposition within Liberal Neighbourhoods.

The Group couldn't discuss common initiatives: all the Neighbourhoods were doing their own thing at their own pace. Where some Councillors wanted to discuss in Group the running of their Neighbourhoods, they were faced with many Group members who had no experience of the position they were in.

Liberals controlling the purse strings meant that many voters in Labour Neighbourhoods grew discontent as their housing situation worsened: whereas all could see the improvements taking place in Liberal Neighbourhoods.

Some of these occurred at the expense of selling off estates to developers, some improvements grew out of deals with the Urban Development Corporation

But the Liberals blamed all the problems on the Bangladeshis. Labour never nailed that lie. The number of racist attacks grew.

The Liberals cast the Labour Group as "loony lefties"; and although three out of four Labour Neighbourhoods were busy holding up the dented shield, the mud stuck.

The Greater London Labour Party assisted in this caricature: insisting that the Borough Party's policy of non-prosecution of Poll Tax non-payers and trying (only trying!) not to increase rents under new legislation be removed from the manifesto.

Nor did it help when a GLLP official commented to the local paper that the Labour Group Leader was a "silly berk",

providing a wonderful headline two weeks from polling day.

The Liberals did not stand in every ward this year. They ignored Labour safe seats; stood in their own safe seats; and targeted sufficient marginals in each ward to win control of six of the seven Neighbourhoods.

Their piece de resistance was to issue an eve of poll leaflet headlined "Labour News" (bilingually, for authenticity!) with a tiny Liberal "p&p" in marginal wards, one of which was lost by nine votes.

In the bogus leaflet, "Labour" pledged to issue an amnesty for squatters, double the rents, and use empty flats to house Bangladeshi homeless families.

It is now the subject of legal action by the local Party.

Only in one ward did the Liberal plot fail. In Millwall ward on the Isle of Dogs, targeted by the Liberals, an excellent socialist campaign was fought which deprived the Liberals of their Chair of Education designate and Chief Mediator with the LDDC.

The right wing ward officers who two months previously had issued a paper appealing for the "Trots" to be thrown out of the Party washed their hands of the election, leaving it to the left to ensure that an effective campaign was mounted.

Party members rallied round and ensured that the viciously racist Liberal campaign, on the slogan "Island homes for Island people" (i.e. kick the Bengalis out and house white people) was beaten.

The Liberals now have control of five of the seven Neighbourhoods, but the left made sure they didn't get their hands on prize of the Isle of Dogs.

The promise of years more Liberal Focus rule is catastrophe for the working class of Tower Hamlets, but already the hard left in the Borough is making plans to lead Labour's campaigning fightback " even if the Greater London Labour Party get in the way.

Kinnockite policies did get a toehold in one ward, where the candidates issued a rose-bestrewn election address reassuring the electorate that the candidates were heterosexual, fecund, and kind to animals (in that order).

Militant supporting Party members have been ordered not to attend Anti-Poll Tax Union meetings in that ward by the GC's chief Kinnockite, who has threatened to see to it personally that they are expelled if they show their faces in his manor.

That campaign saw 75 votes knocked off Labour's combined total in 1986.

Millwall ward members, who have earned themselves the label of the "Millwall supporters" for their tenacious pursuit of socialist policies on the GC and LGC, look forward to the local Party's discussions on the way to win elections.

Liverpool

Now organise the movement!

The massive 11 seat gain for Labour has given them a 67-32 majority on the Council.

By Philip Atherton

"Pavement politics" Liberals have received yet another blow from the electorate.

The Labour Group is now firmly split between the Poll Tax non-payers and the Coombes soft/left/right wing alliance — which will have to rely on the Liberals for support.

Coombes and the pro-Poll Taxers will have but one choice: to revoke the whip from the 30, combined with moves to expel them from the Party, if attempts by Kinnock's NEC and the regional bureaucracy fail to secure a climbdown from the weaker elements.

Ultimately, the non-payers, part of the Liverpool Broad Left, can only defeat Kinnock and Coombes by organising the Council workers and the thousands of non-payers in the community.

But *Militant* supporters, fearful both of expulsions and their inability to contain the militancy of local campaigns, have put the anti-Poll Tax movement on hold.

This must change! The non-paying Councillors and the whole of the campaigning left must organise the movement now!

Calderdale

In Calderdale (which includes Halifax and Hebden Bridge) Labour won two seats from the Liberal Democrats and now have overall control of the Council.

Labour increased its majorities all around and came within 18 votes of capturing a notorious Tory stronghold.

Calderdale was a Poll Tax-capped Council. Last month Halifax witnessed its largest ever demonstration (against the Poll Tax).

If the May 3rd vote is repeated in a general election Labour will take the Calder Valley parliamentary constituency from the Tories.

Calderdale Briefing supporters

Birmingham

Knowles' nightmare comes true

May 3rd saw the election of *Labour Briefing's* first Birmingham City councillor.

Guy Daly in Bourneville, committed to Poll Tax non-payment, turned a Tory seat into a 789-vote Labour majority.

Birmingham Briefing almost scored a second success when John Wilton in Quinton slashed a Tory majority of 1,204 to a mere 47.

By *Birmingham Labour Briefing*

Wilton, standing on a Poll Tax non-payment platform, was probably denied victory by the disinformation campaign against him by the local Greens and by the equivocation of Council Leader Dick Knowles on several important manifesto commitments.

It was well known that Knowles did not support such popular commitments as "No more Olympic bids" and "No more funding for the Super Prix".

Wavering voters were often won over on the doorstep when it was pointed out to them that the best way to upset Knowles was electing John Wilton to the Council.

Besides Knowles, undoubted electoral liabilities included Kinnock, foreign junkets by Birmingham City Councillors, and so-called prestige projects such as the International Convention Centre (interest charges for which added £17 per head to the Poll Tax).



Dick Knowles: before the nightmare

The biggest vote loser for Labour, though, was the failure of the Labour leadership to support the Poll Tax non-payment campaign and to produce a credible alternative to the Poll Tax.

Guy Daly's clear support for Poll Tax non-payment enabled him to overcome a predictable but vicious Tory smear campaign.

One Tory leaflet accused him of the outrageous crime of supporting "public ownership and workers' control" and taking part in "demonstrations, burning, and mass civil disobedience"!

There is no truth in the rumour that we are looking for a few Tories to barbecue in hot weather!

Labour Party Socialists Special Feature

Local elections 1990

Mixed verdict on Poll Tax buy-off

The Labour Party leadership were keen to make the local elections a political test for Thatcher.

This worked up to a point, but there seem to have been other factors at play.

With many high turnouts recorded, the electorate finally seems to be taking local government seriously.

Overall, the results were encouraging for Labour — 300 net gains, securing 2,800 of the 5,000 seats on offer.

There were three categories of Local Authority involved, each of them affected by different local factors, and each of them producing different results.

SLD

The Tories suffered worst, with the SLD (which stood 1,000 fewer candidates than in 1986) maintaining idiosyncratic islands and providing a comfortable home for disillusioned Tories.

In Scotland, the regional council elections produced only a small swing to Labour of around 1% — but Labour support here is already overwhelming.

There seems to have been a small shift from Labour to SNP, with the Tories desperately clinging to a small core of supporters in the smart city suburbs of Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Sterling.

English

The SLD performed particularly badly here too.

In the English Districts, Labour gained 10 councils out of 152 — in spite of only a third of the seats in each of these councils being on offer.

The swing to Labour was best in the South at 15%, but even in the North, where support is already very high, 11% was achieved.

Labour gained seats in virtually every Council, with areas like Hastings and Portsmouth in the deep Tory south showing well.

Best of all, Thatcher's favourite Bradford fell to Labour. And in Liverpool, Labour gave the Liberals yet another drubbing.

Liberal Democrats elsewhere were jubilant at their smaller than expected losses, and the Greens received a respectable

By PETER CHOWNEY

share of the vote where they stood, though they won only three seats.

But most enigmatic were the London results.

An overall swing to Labour of only 1% was recorded, with Tories making big gains in Westminster, Wandsworth, Brent, Hammersmith, Ealing, Hillingdon, and Harrow.

But some facts are hidden here. Press desperation to keep Wandsworth and Westminster Tory was aided by a government-fiddled Poll Tax in both Boroughs.

The Tories bought voters with an effective cash handout of £117 a head.

Overall in London, both Labour and Tories made gains. Labour won one Borough from the Tories (Merton), but lost Ealing.

Brent (previously Labour) ended up hung, with the Tories losing overall control in Kingston and Havering, but gaining Hillingdon (from no overall control).

Kingston

The Liberal Democrats did rather well, increasing majorities in their three London Boroughs, including Labour targets like Tower Hamlets, and winning Kingston.

The London *Evening Standard* somehow interpreted this as "Kinnock Wakes to new Blue Dawn".

Press attention on Wandsworth and Westminster as Tory "flagships" somehow misses out Merton, another borough which pioneered privatisation, service cuts, and Thatcherite philosophy, but did not get an artificially deflated Poll Tax.

Merton

The only reason Merton has never been considered a flagship Borough is because no one knows where it is.

Worst of all, Londoners now have to put up with dreadful pictures of Westminster Leader Lady Porter on the front page of the *Standard* every day for the next four years.

But the most puzzling result in the whole country is that of Ealing.

A reasonably efficient Labour Council which had suffered no scandals, set an average London Poll Tax, and had good PR, surprised everyone by turning overwhelmingly Tory.

Nonetheless, the picture is favourable to Labour, whatever the papers might say.

Labour was building on a high 1986 base, especially in London, where the demise of the GLC caused a big pro-Labour reaction.

The biggest danger for the left now is that Kinnock may demand further purges, claiming that the poor London result was caused by vestiges of "loony left" Council policies.

Radical

What must be remembered is that the 1986 landslide was achieved on radical manifestos right across London — manifestos which were later abandoned.

Nor can high Poll Tax bills be used as an excuse. The two highest Poll Tax boroughs, Lambeth and Haringey, both showed overall swings to Labour; whereas Bradford, with a low Poll Tax, also swung to Labour.

But since no Labour Councils anywhere adopted anything resembling a radical platform this time round, it's difficult to make comparisons.

There is some evidence to suggest that right wing administrations lost support, but the picture is complex.

Perhaps the most disturbing message is that the Tories are capable of buying support through low Poll Taxes.

If they were to extend their policy in Westminster and Wandsworth to other key Councils, especially in London, Labour could find itself in deep trouble.

For Labour to make a further breakthrough in local government and give local Party activists the strength to re-introduce good radical manifestos the Poll Tax has got to go.

Waiting for the next Labour government to dream up an alternative which doesn't upset the city is just not good enough.

The campaign against the Poll Tax, the need to make it fail through mass non-payment and huge popular protest, is now greater than ever.

Labour Party

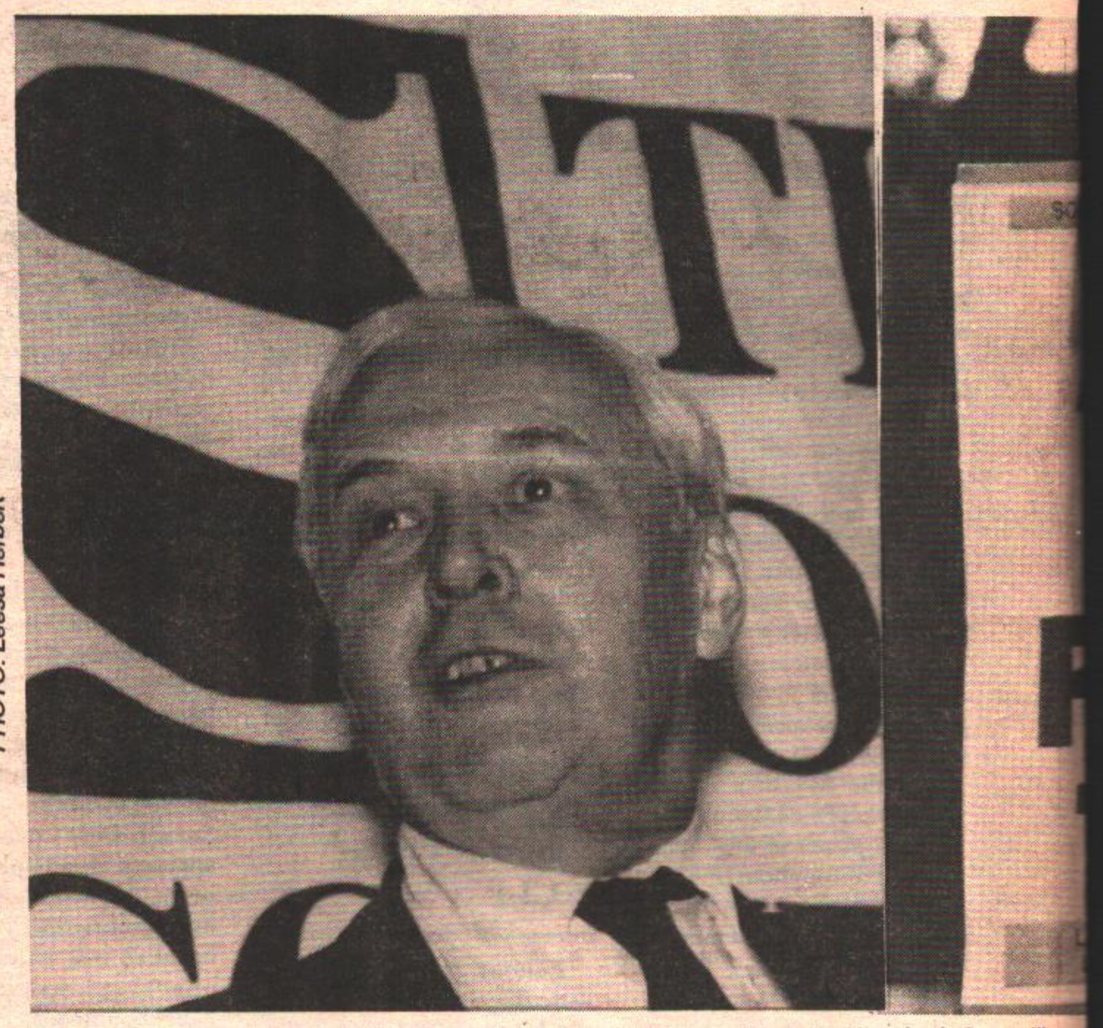


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Tony Benn, building the Socialist Movement [left]; John Tuite, recently elected Lambeth Councillor, p

Stay and fig Labour Party

Labour Briefing is enthusiastically supporting the first conference of Labour Party Socialists to be held in Sheffield on May 19th-20th. BRYN GRIFFITHS of Tottenham CLP takes a wider look at why the building of a left organisation in the Labour Party is crucial.

The Labour left is in a terrible state.

The realignments since the Miners' Strike have left us with the Kinnockite new model party of witch-hunts, policy reviews and the threat of a weakened trade union link.

At a national level we have only two votes on the NEC and at a local level not one local Council could be delivered in opposition to the Poll Tax.

The situation outside the Party is much livelier, with trade union disputes gaining massive public support and hundreds of thousands supporting the non-payment campaign against the Poll Tax.

The Tory Party itself is in crisis with Thatcher's leadership facing challenges from both left and right. This time it is in serious trouble as the economic basis for past Tory success begins to crumble.

To those outside the Labour Party in the Anti-Poll Tax Unions the Party is little more than a bureaucratic monolith.

At best Labour fails to lead any fight against the Tories, at worst it acts as the Tories' second eleven, calling for "exemplary sentences" for those arrested in Trafalgar Square.

Faced with such difficult circumstances left activists are haemorraging from the Party.

Even Vladimir Derer was forced to note in a letter to his Executive members that *Campaign for Labour Democracy* members are abandoning the Party.

For those satisfied with a snapshot picture of history and a cursory look at the surface of Labour politics the answer is easy.

The Socialist Workers Party and Anarchists, enjoying a short term boost, will be only too pleased to offer the glib answer of "leave Kinnock's Party and join the action outside."

Unfortunately the world is not as simple as some of these comrades suggest. The history of British left politics is littered with failed attempts to build a mass working class alternative to Labour.

As early as 1901 the Marxist Social Democratic Federation left Labour's forerunner, the Labour Representation Committee, only to find itself totally outflanked.

Communist

The early Communist Party was sectarian in its attitude towards Labour. It rectified this error and fought to affiliate to Labour on the same basis as the Independent Labour Party and the Fabians.

The Communists built a National Left Wing Movement in the Labour Party which was linked to the radical trade union Minority Movement.

The Communists' success flowed from their fight to join the Labour Party — not a decision to leave it.

All this good work was effectively destroyed by the zig-zagging of the Moscow imposed line.

The biggest breakaway the Labour Party suffered was the ILP in 1932. Having lost the fight for ILP MPs to implement conference policy, 7,000 left — but the membership rapidly declined further, leaving a mere 4,000 by 1935.

In the post-war years a whole plethora of left groups attempted to establish themselves as independent parties. Small pockets of support were built in the trade unions but no serious challenge to Labour was ever made.

The most notable far-left successes were the establishment of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign by the IMG and the Anti-Nazi League by the SWP but both groups were totally eclipsed by the Bennite left.

Labour

The key to the development of the left is its involvement in the Labour Party. Throughout the history of the Party the left has always found its expression within the Party's ranks.

As early as 1909 the ILP published *Let us Transform the Labour Party*, a pamphlet arguing for Labour's transformation into a socialist party.

After the departure of the ILP in 1932, Stafford Cripp's Socialist League took up the left mantle fighting for Communist affiliation.

After the Second World War the Bevanites grouped around Keep Left, Keeping Left, and the Brains Trusts to challenge the Labour leadership.

In the 70s and 80s the democracy movement was formed to fight for the implementation of *Labour's Programme 1973*. The fight culminated in Benn's leader

Socialists

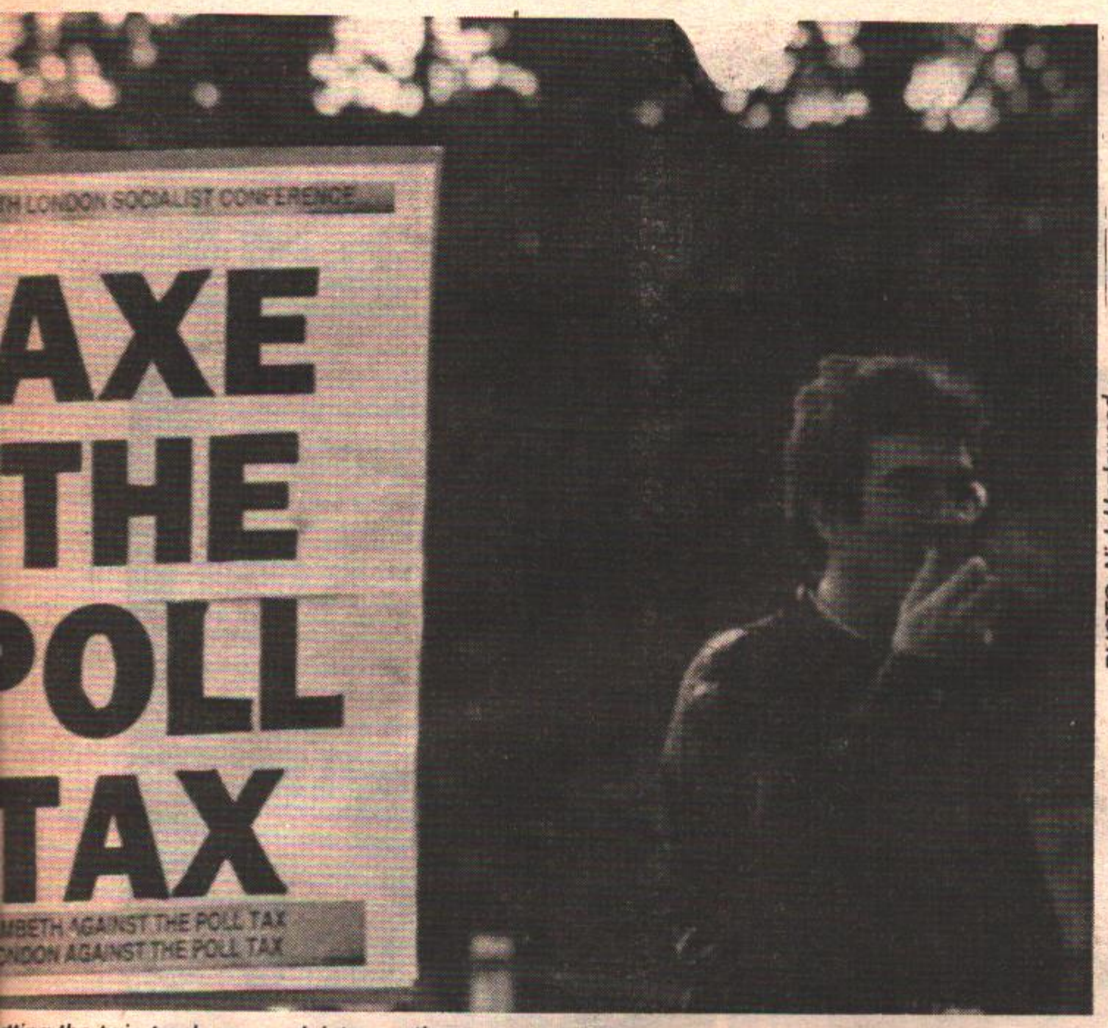


PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

tting the twin-track approach into practice.

ht — join Socialists!

ship challenge of 1981.

A major task for LPS is to stem the flow of left activists out of the Party.

To abandon Labour would leave Kinnock unchallenged, postpone the development of a socialist current in the aftermath of the General Election and condemn ourselves to self-imposed political marginalisation.

Many on the Labour left instinctively understand that we must stay and fight but fail to offer any new strategy.

The CLPD simply state that we must "defend the gains of the early 80s." Unfortunately most of these gains have been extinguished and there is no resolutionary road to success in the forseeable future.

LPS is about a new approach to rebuilding the Labour left.

Previous issues of *Labour Briefing* have outlined how Poll Tax Unions have been used to recruit to the Labour Party. In the last issue John Wray explained how he was raising non-payment as a Council candidate in the local elections.

It is through this approach dubbed the "twin-track" approach by the Socialist Movement that we can begin to recruit and rebuild.

LPS will be discussing in detail how to take campaigning initiatives on:

- •Labour Party Democracy
- •Poll Tax
- •General Election
- •Reproductive Rights
- •Black Organisation
- •Lesbian and Gay Rights
- •Trade Union Solidarity
- •Health
- •International Issues.

It is essential that during the General Election we continue to campaign around socialist politics. The LPS conference will discuss how we can launch a socialist campaign for a Labour victory.

During the election period the left must be visible and fighting for a Labour victory. We will have to explain why people should not just vote Labour but join and fight for a new set of policies and a different kind of leadership.

The election of a Labour government would transform the political situation.

Government

The record of the 1974-79 Labour government is a sorry one:

- •it had tested its first atom bomb before the end of its first month of office;
- •by the end of March the compulsory planning agreements became voluntary;
- •Benn, a vigorous supporter of Labour's industrial policy, was demoted (from Industry to Energy);
- •the Labour government was kept in office by deals with Ulster Unionists;
- •the government was condemned in the European court of Human Rights for its record in Ireland;
- •and finally it enforced a 5% pay limit which brought it into conflict with the trade unions.

The last Labour government started with the most radical manifesto since 1945. Kinnock will start with a manifesto sanitised by the Policy Review.

Instead of facing a massive shop-stewards movement boosted by a victorious miners strike, with "left" leaders such as Jones and Scanlon, such a government will face a weakened trade union movement.

The likelihood is that a Kinnock government will be considerably worse than those of Wilson and Callaghan.

LPS has a key role to play. If the beginnings of an organisation can be built now, the left will be in a much better position to fight back.

LPS must make links with the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee to ensure that trade union struggle is reflected in the Labour Party.

Our role as LPS will be to translate working class action into a struggle for leadership at every level of the Labour Party.

This will be difficult as disputes such as that on the London Underground by-pass formal trade union structures. The struggle for leadership must be linked to all our solidarity work.

Kinnock is aware that trade union opposition to a Labour government will be his weakest link.

The Edmunds proposals are designed to wall-off this avenue of dissent by weakening the trade union link and its expression through the block vote.

LPS must respond by fighting to defend and democratise the block vote so the opposition to Kinnock's government can express itself.

The tasks before the LPS conference are daunting, but the response has been very positive and we can hope to provide the kernel of the organisaiton the left requires.

With over 100 registrations at the time of writing, and a growing number of sponsors, we are well placed to begin, in a modest way, the task of building LPS.

The political situation in Britain is changing rapidly so we must prepare to ensure that we are capable of meeting the challenges that lie ahead.

Small steps forward today will reap huge dividends in the event of a Labour government.

Next the General Election

Labour's betrayals: past and future?

In 1945 the Attlee Labour government was elected by a landslide.

It was pledged to a radical programme of nationalisation and social welfare.

In 1951 it collapsed, following three years of "wage restraint". It had even begun to backtrack on its commitment to a free health service. Aneurin Bevan resigned as Health Minister when prescription charges were introduced.

Thirteen years of Tory government followed.

From 1964 Wilson's Labour government gave its supporters six years of crisis management, wage controls and threatened "union reform". Many workers turned away from Labour in disgust. Worse followed under Heath.

Wilson returned in 1974 amid a social crisis.

He was rapidly obliged to concede key pay increases, the repeal of the anti-union Industrial Relations Act and the 1972 Housing Finance Act (responsible for surcharging and disqualifying Clay Cross Councillors).

Five years later Labour fell from office, having totally alienated its base of support by wage controls and IMF-inspired cuts in public spending.



PHOTO: Andrew Wiard (Report)

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

These experiences show that whilst Labour's policies are important, what Labour actually does in office largely depends on the conditions in which it is elected and which develop while it is in office.

It now appears a distinct possibility that Labour will win the next election — despite the reams of defeatist chatter to the contrary, peddled by *Marxism Today*.

It is therefore not premature to ask the obvious question: what is to stop it all happening again?

What is to prevent a repeat scenario:

- •Labour getting elected when the Tories have run the economy into crisis;
- •a Kinnock government imposing austerity, cuts and wage controls;
- •whilst the Tories, out of office, repair themselves politically and prepare to resume government?

After all, there is a long tradition of the ruling class turning to labour movement leaders to do its dirty work.

An early example was Churchill making TGWU leader Ernest Bevin Minister of Labour and Conscription in his wartime government. Is Kinnock doomed to play a similar role?

We socialists want a Labour government as soon as possible. Its success or failure may depend very much on what we do now.

Current talk about the return of a Labour government is due chiefly to the development of a growing mass movement — against the Poll Tax, against the assaults on health and education and against environmental problems.

Thatcher's record unpopularity reflects not only the failure of her policies — it shows that there is a growing body of people *actively* opposed to her government.

The March 31st Poll Tax demo was an expression of this active opposition. And it is one reason why we should call for a General Election now.

We must make the call now not only because we cannot afford another day of the Thatcher government, but because a Labour government elected under conditions of mass mobilisation would have to begin to satisfy the needs of a confident and combative movement of workers and the poor.

This would include a massive injection of funds into the public sector, the repeal of the Poll Tax, a major programme of job creation and defence cuts, and the takeover of financial institutions to pay for this.

The last thing Neil Kinnock wants is an immediate election!

Much remains to be done in re-drafting policies which the Party has never accepted and remodelling Labour's organisation to minimise the voice of the rank and file, and ultimately to abolish Conference.

Kinnock hopes to come to power under normal electoral conditions — quite a rare thing for a Labour government! Perhaps he believes that he stands a better chance of sticking to his preferred policies on that basis.

However, if the working class is not calling the shots, then the ruling class will be.

Unless the labour movement is mobilised from the outset, making demands on Labour, forcing it to act in its interests, then the pressure from the bourgeoisie, its banks and institutions for Labour to carry out Tory policies will be immense, as the Wilson and Callaghan governments showed.

The campaign to ensure the next Labour government delivers in the interests of the working class begins now.

The Labour Party Socialists Conference is an important start. It should lead with a broad socialist campaign for Labour to win the next election.

The building of a socialist campaign for a Labour victory — as opposed to the anodyne media event we can expect from the leadership — is not about the left finding some "acceptable" basis on which to call for a Labour vote.

Voting

In immediate electoral terms there *is* no alternative to voting Labour.

Rather it would express the aspirations of all those in the Party and the wider movement who fear that many policies established over the years are now being jettisoned by the leadership without even a Conference vote.

It would also highlight the fact that without the heroic struggles of the ambulance workers, dockers, seafarers and many others, and without the mass anti-Poll Tax movement, a future Labour government would still be a distant possibility.

Many sections of workers have been defeated by the Tories. A future Labour government owes them a great debt. A socialist campaign for a Labour victory will fight to ensure it is paid.

Labour MPs' Voting Record

Labour MPs voting "yes" to an 18, 20, or 22 week time limit:

MP	Constituency	Lowest no. of weeks they voted for
John Battle	Leeds W	18
Stuart Bell	Middlesborough	18
G Bermingham	St Helens S	20
Dennis Canavan	Falkirk W	18
Tom Clarke	Monklands W	18
John Cummings	Easington	18
Lawrence Cunliffe	Leigh	18
Dick Douglas	Dunfermline W	18
Andrew Faulds	Warley W	18
Frank Field	Birkenhead	20
Peter Hardy	Wentworth	22
J Home Robertson	E Lothian	20
David Lambie	Cunninghame S	18
T McAvoy	Rutherglen	18
C Macdonald	W Isles	18
John McFall	Dumbarton	18
Kevin McNamara	Hull N	18
D Marshall	Glas. Shettleton	22
M Martin	Glas. Springburn	18
Paul Murphy	Torfaen	18
Gordon Oakes	Halton	18
Robert Parry	L'pool R'side	18
John Reid	Motherwell N	18
T Rowlands	M Tydfil/Rhymney	20
John Smith	Monklands E	22
Gavin Strang	Edinburgh E	18
Keith Vaz	Leics E	18
T Worthington	Clydeb'k Mil	22
James Wray	Provan	22

Labour MPs who voted against 28 weeks (in addition to the list above)

George Buckley	Hemsworth
Ronnie Campbell	Blyth valley
Stan Crowther	Rotherham
Tam Dalyell	Linlithgow
Denzil Davies	Llanelli
D Dewar	Glasg. Garscadden
Don Dixon	Jarrow
Patrick Duffy	Attercliffe
Norman Godman	Greenock
Llin Golding	Newcastle-u-Lyme
Thomas Graham	Renfrew W
Wyn Griffiths	Bridgend
David Hinchcliffe	Wakefield
Norman Hogg	Cumbernauld
Jimmy Hood	Clydesdale
Greville Janner	Leicester W
Ted Leadbitter	Hartlepool
John Marek	Wrexham
Alun Michael	Cardiff S
John Morris	Aberavon
Peter Pike	Burnley
George Robertson	Hamilton
G Robinson	Coventry NW
Jack Straw	Blackburn
Ann Taylor	Dewsbury

Labour MPs who did not vote:

Allen Adams	Paisley N
Donald Anderson	Swansea E
Joe Ashton	Bassetlaw
Harry Barnes	Derbyshire NE
Jeremy Bray	Motherwell S
D. Campbell Saviours	Workington
Mark Fisher	Stoke-on-Trent C
Ted Garrett	Wallsend
Bruce George	Walsall S
John Gilbert	Dudley E
Eric Heffer	Liverpool Walton
George Howarth	Knowsley N
Denis Howell	Birmingham Small Heath
Sean Hughes	Knowsley S
James Lamond	Oldham Central and Royton
Eddie Loyden	Liverpool Garston
Tom Pendry	Staybridge and Hyde
Stuart Randall	Kingston upon Hull
Jack Thompson	Wansbeck
Pat Wall*	Bradford N
R Wareing	Liverpool, W Derby

**Pat Wall was too ill to attend and vote.*

A CALL TO ALL WOMEN
PICKET THE IRISH EMBASSY!
17 Grosvenor Place, London SW1 (Victoria Tube)
15th May, 5-7pm
In the Republic of Ireland not only is abortion illegal, it is an offence to give women the names and addresses of abortion clinics abroad.
On May 15th 1990 the European Court will hear Openline and the Well Woman's case — that Irish women's right to information on the procuring of an abortion is *not* in breach of the Treaty of Rome.
If successful, the case will proceed to the European Court of Human Rights.
Organised by WOMEN AGAINST FUNDAMENTALISM, BM Box 2706.
Tel. no. for picket 081-568 9803 (eves).

Embryology Bill

Anti-abortionists taste defeat!

To the surprise and delight of many in the pro-choice movement, the anti-abortionists were defeated in the House of Commons on April 26th.

The new abortion clause, tabled as an addition to the Embryology Bill by Sir Geoffrey Howe, was passed reducing the upper time limit on abortions to 24 weeks.

By VALERIE COULTAS

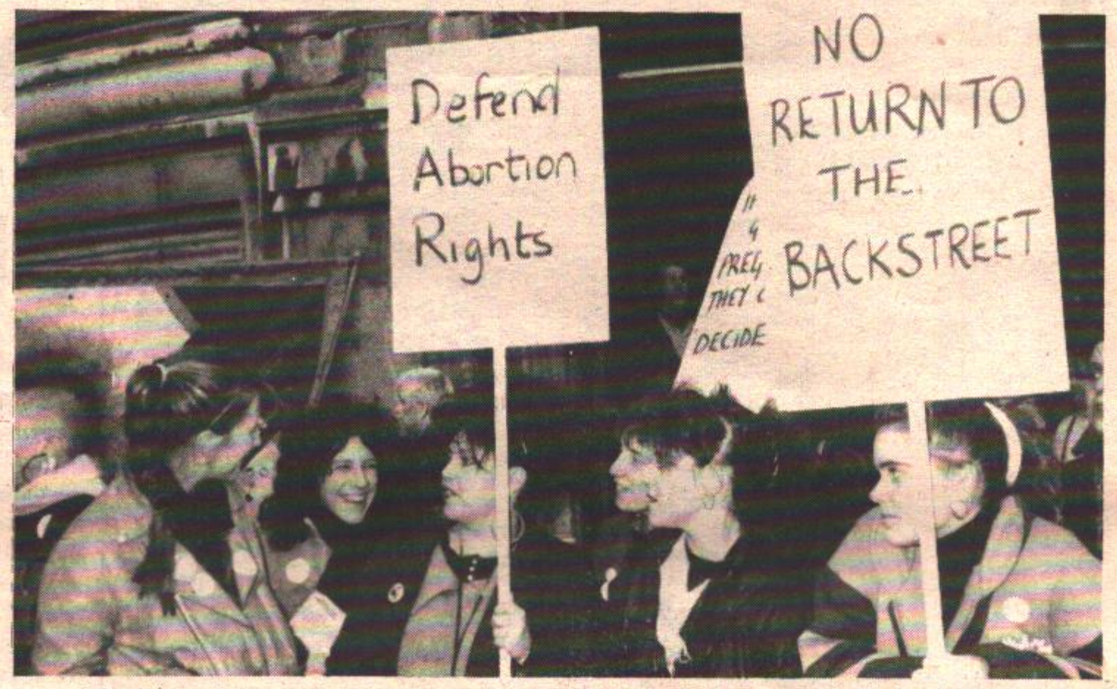


PHOTO: Jane Connor

Anti-abortionists tasted defeat: just as they did in the anti-Alton campaign (above).

But several exceptions were included in this clause which removed **any** upper time limit if there was a risk of:

"grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman" or "of foetal abnormality".

The Infant Life Preservation Act was also separated from abortion law, removing the threat of criminal prosecution of doctors who terminate a potentially viable foetus after 24 weeks.

This means that the doctor's medical judgement will actually take precedence over a statutory definition of viability.

Despite the general reduction, this new clause will offer some protection to doctors who perform late abortions.

This paradox explains the fury of the anti-abortionists who hoped for a 22 week limit. They denounced the new clause as allowing "for abortion on demand".

While the outcome was not as radical as they suggest, they clearly had grounds for anger.

Their expected first parliamentary victory for 23 years ended up with a clause that defended existing medical practice and ensured that doctors would be less afraid of prosecution.

Consensus

The progressive consensus had been established with a large number of Labour MPs and at least a third of Tory MPs voting for 24 weeks and the exceptions.

The Tory vote on abortion, as argued by abortion activists over a long period, can be explained by the clear divisions in the Tory Party over the abortion issue and the fact that many Tories are guided by the medical profession.

Wider economic motives play a part, including needing a mobile female labour force; as does — in the impassioned case of Theresa Gorman — a very bourgeois conception of women's rights.

But while the vote was a big boost for pro-choice activists and many women heaved a sigh of relief, it was not an unqualified victory.

The final choice for a termination, as NAC has always argued, should be with the woman "as early as possible and as late as necessary".

Women always make responsible decisions about such an important event in their lives. The new clause keeps the power with doctors, the majority of whom will never experience dealing with an unwanted pregnancy.

The Embryo Bill is now in committee — the composition of which has dismayed the fanatics in LIFE and SPUC.

Jo Richardson has now tabled an amendment arguing the case for equal opportunity of access to Donor Insemination and the New Reproductive Technologies.

This move is strongly supported by NAC, STAC and CADI, all of whom have made it clear, right from the beginning of this Bill, that women are opposed to discrimination.

STAC and NAC will also be pressing for the abortion law to be extended to the north of Ireland.

Briefing supporters should be putting resolutions condemning the Labour MPs who voted for 22 weeks (or less) and those who did not bother to turn up (see table).

Women should continue to build large energetic local campaigns, ready to pull out the stops for future CADI and STAC events.

There are hopes of promoting an Amendment to the Bill which would allow abortion on request to one doctor in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

If passed, this would bring British Abortion Law fully into line with Europe and a represent a clear gain for all women.

Access to DI

For the sake of the children...

An important new clause passed quietly into the Embryology Bill at the Report stage in the House of Lords.

It states that no woman shall be given access to donor insemination (DI) or infertility treaments unless:

"account has been taken of the welfare of any child who may be born as a result of the treatment, and of any other child who may be affected by the birth."

The intention is, as the Lord Chancellor made clear in moving the amendment, to prevent lesbians and single women from gaining access to DI and infertility treatments in a politically acceptable way.

Lady Saltoun's full-frontal approach of banning access by all unmarried women and Ann Winterton's method of labelling certain groups of women as unfit to be mothers were both rejected in favour of the vague, anodyne and virtually unchallengeable concern for the welfare of the children.

By Rebecca Flemming Women for Socialism

However, the concrete effects will be almost identical.

The "welfare of any child" is far from being a neutral phrase which will be interpreted objectively by the judges, government and medical establishment.

Lesbian mothers who have lost custody of their children in the courts purely because of their sexuality can testify to this.

Nor does the vague or ambiguous wording of legislation offer any protection. It may be very effective in promoting self-censorship, following the example of Section 28.

In a welcome countermove to this dangerous clause, Jo Richardson has tabled an amendment in Committee seeking to ensure that the Authority established to oversee the licensing of clinics must:

"give due consideration to equal opportunities in relation to patients applying for treatment."

Though again rather imprecisely worded, this would enable the Authority to refuse to grant licences to clinics which discriminated in their provision.

There is also the threat this Bill could end up being a trade-off between different women's rights.

If major concessions are made on abortion along while further restrictions are placed on access to DI, the pro-choice movement would be torn apart. Such divisive schemes must be prevented.

A further loss of lesbian rights and a worsening of the situation for single women is too high a price to pay for small liberalisations in abortion law.

Women must be united in the fight for our right to choose!

BOOK REVIEW

A story to test the heart

Eva Luna, by Isabelle Allende, *Penguin*, £4.99

Consuelo pauses from her work of scrubbing floors when her labour pains become unbearable.

She has conceived a child through her sympathy for a native South-American gardener dying from a snake bite.

By Peter Chowney
Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP

She gives birth to her daughter alone and in secret, with the cook intervening as a late and impromptu midwife, greeting the child with an ignominious, "Bad luck, it's a girl."

So begins the life of Eva Luna, named after the Luna tribe to which her father belonged.

Isabelle Allende's book traces the first 25 years of Eva's life through the revolutionary turmoil of post-war Latin America, her fortunes and loves intertwining with poverty, personal and social upheaval, and a background of corrupt officialdom and political decay.

And it traces the parallel life of Rolf Carle in faraway Austria, son of a brutal Nazi who ends his life strung up in the forest.

Set to converge like two satellites on coincidental orbits, he and Eva are part of the peculiar coincidental scheme of things rather than any logic.

On her journey to this, Eva's weapon is her power as a storyteller, weaving a spell of kinds over those she encounters.

Like the soldier in the town square, she sells them a past, in a country and at a time where no one has a past to be proud of; creating fact out of fantasy, possibly even Rolf Carle himself.

For those who have enjoyed Isabelle Allende's previous books, *House of the Spirits* and *Of Love and Shadows*, this could be disappointing.

There is nothing here of the extraordinary complexities or epic tale of her earlier books.

Here is a simple story, of the politicisation of an oppressed South American woman and the characters she encounters along her path.

These include benevolent prostitutes and transexuals, eccentric Yugoslav artists, corrupt cabinet ministers, paternal Turkish merchants, and earnest young revolution-aries, oozing machismo like an olive press.

But it's an episodic journey, not really tying together nor forming a whole, and we're left wondering what comes next, the tale seems incomplete.

Isabelle Allende does not have the power of Gabriel Garcia Marquez to produce a story which is a delight for its words alone — or if she does, it's lost in translation.

The core of this book, stripped of much of the magic of her previous two, is about stories and storytelling, the mystery of fact and fantasy, how lives are shaped by political realities and the past is reshaped in retrospective.

Approach this book as another *House of the Spirits* and you will be disappointed.

But approach it with a fresh acceptance of a simple story — of political and personal coming-of-age, of a young woman realising her own power and the nature of her oppression, and you may be moved to tears.

This book should be compulsory reading for all left politicos: if you remain dry eyed at its ending, then you have not the soul to call yourself a revolutionary.

MAGAZINE REVIEW



Sandinistas: governing from below?

By JOE JARVIS

The spring issue of *Nicaragua Today*, magazine of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, now on sale, is entitled *Governing from below*.

The main feature, by NSC General Secretary Julian Jacobs, on the recent elections which the Sandinistas lost, is an attempt to come to terms with the unexpected defeat.

Unfortunately, its over optimistic tone and talk of the FSLN already "bouncing back" mar an otherwise vital assessment of the situation in Nicaragua and the prospects for the revolution.

The other unmissable item is the extraordinary interview with Yorlin Ubeda Rodriguez, the first woman kidnap victim ever to get out of a *contra* camp alive.

Yorlin was abducted by the *contras* in 1984 and held by them for five years. She was subjected to repeated torture and multiple rape and in 1987 gave birth to a son in captivity who later died.

Yorlin's story is one of unforgettable courage and epitomises the determination of the Nicaraguan people to win peace and freedom.

The AGM of the NSC on May 19th and 20th will be a timely opportunity to discuss the new situation and the tasks of solidarity activists.

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign AGM

May 19th & 20th

10.30am-5.30pm

Caxton House, St John's Way, London N19

(nearest tube Archway)

BOOK REVIEW



Third World children

The Next Generation, by Judith Ennew and Brian Milne, *Zed Books*, 1990, £26.95, £7.95 paperback.

Over half of the world's population are under age 18.

Children are always the first to suffer the effects of economic and political power — war, famine and disease, yet they are legally and politically excluded from power in *all* societies.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

The catalogue of abuse is relentless. In Turkey children as young as seven are jailed in adult prisons. In many regional conflicts children are pushed into soldiering and are tortured by their captors to betray their families.

Economic oppression is equally intense. In India the young routinely work their way to crippling illness, while thousands of Thai teenagers are held captive in the brothels of Bangkok.

The lack of education or health care makes depressingly repetitive reading in the case studies considered, although the authors acknowledge the improvements in Nicaragua, Cuba and other countries which underwent a popular revolution.

The main problem with the book is a lack of perspective.

Throughout, the child is considered solely as a victim. Yet in South Africa in the 70s and 80s it was *schoolchildren* who led the school boycotts which fuelled the Black upsurge, a point which the book does not adequately develop.

Children who take up arms are viewed as the object of manipulation.

But, as the authors admit, when the Nicaraguan National Guard under Samoza began a "Herod policy" of exterminating the capital's teenagers in May 1979, hundreds of youth volunteered for the Sandinistas.

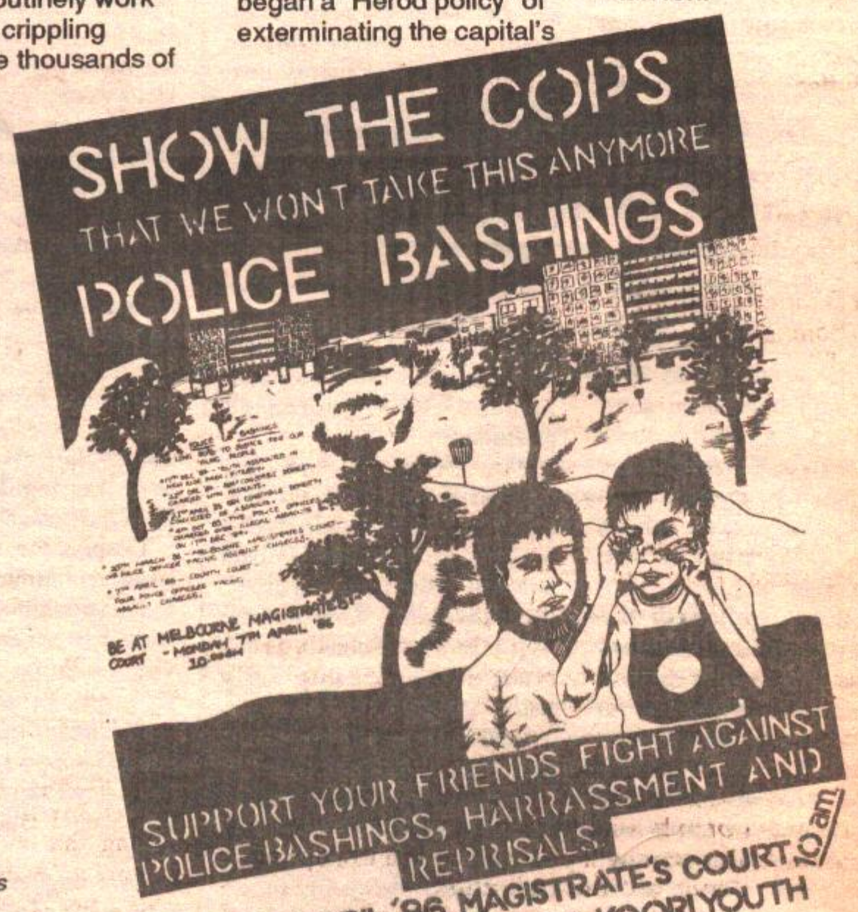
Were they wrong to do so?

Some of the examples of individual brutality against children, like that of Banyo the 12 year old Biafran who was mutilated and tortured then painted a self-portrait before dying, are harrowing.

But the chief reason why this book is so dispiriting is that the solution to the problem proposed is governments becoming more enlightened, changing their ways and adopting the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

The authors' evidence flatly contradicts such a dead-end approach.

It is only in those societies where the established imperialist order has been *overthrown* that the minimum conditions have been established for a better deal for Third World children.



Aborigine poster shows solidarity of oppressed youth against deliberate attacks from oppressor police.

MSF Conference

Bankrupt union; bankrupt bureaucrats!

The third Annual Conference of MSF was held at Harrogate from April 28th to May 2nd.

It saw an entrenchment of the central bureaucracy at the expense of grass roots activity at branch and regional level.

The key debate in this process of centralisation of power was on the finances of the union.

In 1989, MSF (Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union) had an operating loss of £3.3 million. The union is some £9.5 million in the red.

The National Executive Council (NEC) might have proposed the selling of one of the Union's two London head offices (shortly to be three), clawing back some of the

By Glenn Sutherland Conference delegate

money held in inactive branches, or prioritising recruitment.

Instead, they pushed a rule change through Conference which halved the funding of all branches from 10% of subscriptions to 5%, and reduced the funding of Regional Councils from 3% to 1.5%, with an extra 1% for education to be administered centrally.

Dressed up as a response to MSF's financial crisis, these proposals will in fact have no effect on either the income or expenditure of the union as a whole.

The real result will be to remove political power from the members at branch and regional level and place it in the hands of the NEC and unelected National Officers.

Many branches will have real difficulty meeting their administrative costs, let alone funding local activity.

Crucial to the NEC obtaining the required two thirds majority for these proposals was the so-called "Unity Left" organisation.

In some parts of the MSF, "Unity Left" includes many militant union activists. At national level, however, this "son of the TASS Broad Left" operates as an electoral and political machine, transmitting the commands of the MSF leadership down to the members.

"Unity Left" has now drawn in members of the bureaucracy from the old ASTMS side as well as TASS.

With the CPB (*Morning Star*) in complete political disarray, the dominant political (more accurately, *apolitical*) line in "Unity Left" is that of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

As a consequence, although Conference reaffirmed some policies to the left of the Labour leadership — in particular on unilateralism and the repeal of all anti-union legislation — most of the political debates resulted in a procession of defeats for the left.

A motion on the Poll Tax which called for industrial action, non- prosecution by Labour Local Authorities, and support for mass non-payment was roundly defeated after the arguments had been won by the movers.

Progress

The same fate befell a composite calling for withdrawal from Ireland, although significant progress was made in that the Irish Region of the union was no longer able to impose a veto on discussion of the national question.

Instead, after a good debate, the NEC supported the position of the Irish Region to oppose the composite. Conference dutifully concurred, with about 10-15% supporting withdrawal.

The strategy of the CPGB, and, by extension, of "Unity Left" is a dead end. The belief that MSF can be built into an effective militant union by central direction is a delusion.

Our aim must be to win the best activists to a fight for democratisation of the union structures and *against* the leadership both of the union of of "Unity Left".

Such a fight should include the following demands:

- The restoration of branch and regional funding as of right to a level that will sustain grass roots campaigning.
- The restoration of an Annual Conference at which every branch is represented.
- Fair and efficient election procedures — leading to the election of full-time officials.
- Curtailment of the power of the NEC and full-time officials — NEC members to step down after a fixed period of office.

These reforms must be coupled with support for economic and political struggles in the workplace and the community. There will be no shortage of these over the next year or two.

"Unity Left" is incapable of leading, or even participating in, this fight as a national organisation. As a long term aim, we should support the formation of a new national left organisation.

In the meantime, activists in the regions should be organising locally and drawing in as many as possible of the supporters of "Unity Left".

In some regions the balance of forces may make it impossible to organise outside "Unity Left" structures, but in any case the fight for democratic reform cannot wait.

If MSF members want to discuss the ideas raised in this article further, write to Glenn Sutherland, c/o Labour Briefing, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.



Stickers produced by left conference delegates in response to the NEC's (Ken Gill's) plea for money for MSF head office.

Rail unions

Leaderships duck a fight

The acceptance of 9 .3% increase is a bitter blow for thousands of low paid rail workers.

Faced with massive increases in rents, mortgages — not to mention the Poll Tax — the increase is a pittance.

To add insult to injury, the anniversary date has now been moved from April to May, so the real increase is only 8.52%, and the unions had already turned down 8.5%.

The NUR and the drivers union ASLEF believe the membership will be conned by the "breaking of the 9% barrier". Nothing could be further from the truth.

As jobs continue to go and productivity increases, the members know what is at stake.

By a *Briefing* supporter in the NUR

No one was prepared to take industrial action over one or two per cent, but for a really substantial increase of 15-20% there would have been solid support.

The unions' leadership are not prepared for another summer of discontent while Labour rides high in the opinion polls.

But this "don't rock the boat" argument could be used next year — a possible election year — and the year after — Labour's first year in office — and so on.

But a demoralised workforce will not go out and vote Labour — whereas a combative one will force a Labour government to make commitments to improve workers' living standards, not ask them to make sacrifices.

British Rail is still on course for privatisation.

Their proposals on re-organisation of the various grades will result in greater productivity, job losses, an end to national bargaining, individual contracts and a worsening of hard won conditions.

These are the very issues the dispute was about last summer!

The union's claim that acceptance of the pay offer will leave them free to fight on these issues.

But the NUR Executive, lacking stomach to confront BR head on, will leave different sections to fight on their own — a recipe for defeat.

Some sections are being permitted "trial periods" — exactly what happened with the introduction of Driver Only on the Bedford-St Pancras line. BR has never looked back.

Part of this year's pay claim was for a reduction from 39-hours to 37-hours per week (which the salaried staff already have).

There appears to have been no progress on this except a statement from BR to say that any reduction must go hand-in-hand with increased productivity.

The NUR is moving towards merger with the National Union of Seamen (NUS) to help stem its falling numbers and halt a dire financial crisis, and keep Jimmy Knapp on the TUC General Council as the NUR's membership falls below 100,000.

ASLEF continues to see itself as the "elite" union.

But the complete sell-out by both bureaucracies over this pay claim and the preparations for privatisation clearly shows that the members of both unions have more in common with each other than any loyalty to their leaderships.

Car industry

Rover workers reject "the best deal in the world"

Rover workers at Longbridge have decisively rejected management's much vaunted thirty-one and a half hour week deal.

In a ballot, the workforce voted 7,000 against and 5,000 in favour.

This may have surprised those who saw Jack Adams, TGWU national officer and senior negotiator, on the television praising it as a huge victory for the unions.

Adams described the deal as "the best hours agreement negotiated in any car company anywhere in the world."

Readers of the *Morning Star* must be baffled as well. It used its whole front page to praise the deal to the skies under a glowing headline: "37-Hour Triumph at Rover".

What the *Morning Star* did not say, however, was that the deal was highly contentious from the outset.

Despite the strongest possible recommendation from the national officials, shop stewards throughout Rover voted almost unanimously against it.

In **Cowley** the deal failed to get the support of any of the shop stewards, who voted that they would rather stay on 39-hours.

At **Longbridge** the works committee accepted their views were rejected after a heated session of the joint shop stewards committee.

In fact the only people who were in favour of this world historic breakthrough were people who would never have to work under it.

What the media, including the *Morning Star*, also forgot to mention was that the deal was not the result of a claim by the unions — it was management who made the running from the start.

By Alan Thornett

Rover workers' annual wage review is not until November. This fact alone should have suggested that management were not about to offer the best thing since sliced bread.

Management want major changes in shift patterns including continuous working — 24-hours-a-day 7-days-a-week — in the engine plant. They also want speed-up on the tracks and they see this type of deal as the way to get it.

The Confed campaign for the shorter working week was not directly involved, since Rover are no longer a member of the Engineering Employers Federation.

They have no doubt seen the advantages other employers have been getting from the strings attached to the various 37-hour agreements.

Since they will eventually be confronted with the problem, they have chosen to get in with a good deal now.

They may also have been encouraged by the gains they made a few years ago in the move from 40-hours to 39.

Then they were able to negotiate the abolition of one-hour 40-minutes of relief times plus speed-up in turn for a reduction of one hour in the working week! The workforce would have been far better off staying on 40-hours.

The Rover deal is aimed at Longbridge which will be its only mass-production plant after most of Cowley closes down next year.

They are introducing two new models — the Rover 200 and the Rover 400 — and want to make the maximum use of the investment and automation involved.

The deal involves workers on continuous working on the engine tracks, working a thirty-one and a half hour week over a five week period; workers on a three shift system on a 36 hour week; and workers on days and nights working 37 hours.

All three involve a worsening of the general conditions of work — working weekends without premium payments and with less than the average pay earned at the present time.

It also involves cuts in relief time — which are a major problem, particularly for line workers — and an increase in work effort to provide the self-financing element of the deal.

Relief time is often called "tea-breaks", which is something of a misnomer since they are the only time a worker is off the track during a shift — maybe ten minutes in a four hour stint with the track running bell to bell at 100% effort.

The problem of strings has dogged the 35/37-hour campaign in engineering from the outset.

It is clear that the attitude of union leaders sitting behind their desks in their offices is that any deal which results in a reduction in hours is a good thing, particularly if you get some publicity from it.

On the shop floor, however, it is a different matter. A reduction in hours is a good thing providing the workforce ends up with improved conditions at the end of the day.

According to the *Morning Star* (which after a full front page praising the deal had a couple of paragraphs on the back page reporting its rejection), management is now to meet national officials to discuss what went wrong in the ballot and what can be done about it.

Management are said to have considered imposing the deal but have decided against it at the present time.

No doubt they will try their other usual tactic of making minor, irrelevant changes until confusion sets in and a ballot goes the right way.

NUPE CONFERENCE PREVIEW

NUPE-COHSE-NALGO

NUPE NALGO

A merger of convenience

Plans to create a new public sector "super union" of 1.6 million members are progressing fast.

A common report is to be submitted to the NUPE, NALGO and COHSE conferences.

The report "The Challenge of a New Union" — is very general, vague and/or contradictory, reflecting the positions of three union bureaucracies.

It accepts there will be a union with members, Branches, an Executive and a Conference, but more than this is not clear.

On branches, at one point the report talks about the kind of "single service" often very large branches as NALGO has now.

But by the end of the same paragraph the Report has come out in favour of "a variety of branch arrangements and ... local structures, for example, based on existing small branches".

Integrated

It wants an integrated union, but refers to service groups, e.g. Health and Local Government, in a way which gives the impression that a federation of independent unions is planned.

On political funds, it seeks to balance the NUPE and COHSE links to the Labour Party with NALGO's pledge on a further ballot before affiliation to Labour.

Two, or even three, funds are suggested and it is not clear how this is anything other than contracting into the Labour Party in the new union.

This scheme seems to fit in with Tom Sawyer's plans for the Labour Party and needs to be watched closely.

At the very least there should be a campaign in NALGO for the second ballot and for the Executive to lead the call for a "yes" vote.

Though such a merger is overdue and to be welcomed, this Report is very much the bureaucracies' response to their failure to resist the massive Tory attacks on public services since the 1987 election.

In local government there has been:

- Compulsory Competitive Tendering, with massive cuts in jobs and conditions even when the "in house" bid has won;
- the Housing Act, which threatens the whole basis of Local Authority housing;
- the Education Act, which transferred effective employment of workers in schools and colleges to the individual establishments;
- and of course the Poll Tax, which was designed to force councils to slash jobs and services and may result in the government taking on the job directly.

In the health service there have been further rounds of cuts and privatisations, with the threat of wholesale dismemberment of the NHS contained in the Health Service and Community Care Bill.

But public service cuts have been a fact for the last 15 years and yet the bureaucracies were more than willing to let the divisions exist.

It has always been easier to attack the other union for "selling out" than to organise a fightback.

Excuse

It has always been easier to use the lack of unity as an excuse for doing nothing, easier to attack NALGO for looking after "management" jobs rather than fighting cuts.

("Why do you always cut real jobs? Why don't you go after those Mickey Mouse NALGO jobs?" asked one NUPE full-timer of a London Councillor in 1986).

It is a bitter truth that there are activists who seem to hate the other union more than they hate the employers and left

By Brian Elkington NUPE

branches that are mirrored by right wing branches of the other union.

On a larger scale it was the NUPE bureaucracy who promoted the tactic of "keep your head down and wait for Labour to win the 1987 election".

Their attacks on Liverpool and the London Boroughs caused such demoralisation and demobilisation that the new Tory attacks after 1987 were introduced with virtually no opposition.

Wholesale

It is the wholesale loss of jobs and conditions, the loss of whole departments, and ultimately the loss of many thousands of members which have forced the bureaucracies to look to merger to defend themselves and their positions as much as to defend their members.

With this track record the bureaucracies want and need the union stitched-up.

It is easy to assume that, despite the references to the need for stewards' committees, activist involvement, etc., when the report talks of the merger being "membership centred" it means the "beads and mirrors" policy of avoiding the fight and only offering services, is top priority.

The real problem of the merged conferences and executives is not their size, but that they could overturn the platform or not go along with the wishes of the bureaucracy.

In spite of the bureaucracies' previous failures, the new, merged union should be in a better position to fight against the Tory attacks.

However, the left needs to be organised within and across the three unions now, as it must fight to defend existing democratic structures, the Labour Party links, and other better features of the existing unions.

The left must lead the fight to overcome the sectionalism the bureaucracy has created, and fight for a programme and a leadership which will defend jobs, conditions, and services.



20-24 May, 1990

BLACKPOOL

Local Government APT&C pay claim

Another hot summer of "will they, won't they strike?"

At the 1989 Conference of NUPE, the National Local Government Committee was challenged on its total lack of guidance, let alone leadership, in the 1988/9 payround.

This 1990 Conference should be roundly condemning a "leadership" who seem determined to ignore the anger of many activists.

Most upsetting to activists are the backdoor attempts of central government last summer to stamp out national pay and conditions and, by the way, the need for national unions!

By Sally Morawetz Chair, Nottingham City NUPE (personal capacity)

"Delegates must condemn our national "representatives" who clearly had no intention of leading a fightback — let alone informing their membership of what the strings would mean.

(I wasn't the only one depending absolutely on *NALGO* literature for publicity and news.)

Determination

The vote for no action was hardly surprising given NUPE's determination to wish itself invisible in the face of a struggle.

For all the guidance we've had so far, this year's pay claim might also not be happening as far as NUPE members are concerned.

NUPE

For once the claim really does cater for the low paid APT&C workers: a flat rate of £1,500, 35 hours week, and a minimum of 28 days holiday.

We need to demand a campaign, *starting now*, of information and industrial action in support of the claim *and* we must throw out any attempt by our "leadership" to play down the success of the strikes led by NALGO last year.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Now is the time to fight!

By SALLY MORAWETZ

As the Poll Tax bites Councils are selling out on yet more workers.

Local Authorities, in their headlong rush to comply with government legislation, are helping to ensure that local services are handed over to local cowboys (or at least that the workforce's terms and conditions are totally devastated).

Many NUPE branches are now beginning to realise that action against cuts in jobs, conditions and services cannot and must not be hived off until we have a Labour government.

Labour Councils cannot be let off the hook — either Labour Councillors support workers interests or they act against us.

Tired of watching backroom deals to trade off members jobs and conditions, Hackney, Amber Valley, and Motherwell Branches are calling for concerted action against privatisation.

Conference delegates should support their calls and ignore the predictable pitiful bleats from the platform about the need to wait.

Now is the time to go the offensive and build on the success of mass action against the Poll Tax.

Hungary

Who stands for the working class?

Following Hungary's elections, GUS FAGAN gives a comprehensive breakdown of results and analysis of political parties invaluable to all socialists following developments in the battle between planning and the market.

The two main parties of the centre-right won an overwhelming victory in the Hungarian elections.

The Democratic Forum (MDF) and the Free Democrats (SZDSZ) received two-thirds of the votes.

The old Communist Party, now the Socialist Party (MSZP), won less than 9%; while the newly-formed Social Democratic Party (SZDP) didn't even make it to the second round, having won only 3.5% in the first round.

The Forum has now formed a coalition with the Smallholders and Christian Democrats.

No party defended any socialist alternative or put itself forward as the defender of working class interests during the transition period.

Anti-communism was a strong element in the campaign and no party wanted to be identified with the past (communism, socialism).

Hungarian workers responded with apathy. Voter turn-out was only 63% in the first round and dropped to 45% in the second.

None of the parties have a base in the working class and there is a law which prevents them from organising in the factories. The working class was not an actor in this political drama.

The election campaign itself was a glossy and rather tasteless imitation of American-style campaigning financed by U.S. and German money.

Hardly a square foot of wall space, even in the backstreets, was free of large glossy posters of benovelent, well-dressed and beaming politicans — offering lots of image and charm but not much politics.

The Parties of the Centre Right

The Forum and Free Democrats differed very little on basic policy.

Although officially disapproved of, there were many manifestations of right-wing nationalism and anti-semitism in the Forum's campaign.

There are only 80,000 jews in Hungary. Many old communists leaders were jewish, as are some of the national leaders of the Forum' main opponent, the Free Democrats.

The Free Democrats were the hardest defenders of a rapid privatisation and integration into the capitalist market. The Forum appeared to argue for a more controlled and regulated transition.

A televised pre-election debate between Janos Kis and Jozsef Antall, leaders of the Free Democrats and Forum, failed to uncover any great differences, however, on the question of the economy.

The major parties in the Hungarian parliament are now committed to capitalist modernisation of Hungary.

It seems to me unlikely that any pre-war type of reactionary nationalism or anti-semitism will play an important role in future Hungarian politics.

Hungary's Social Democrats

Formed last year, the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (SZDP) declares itself the successor of the historic party of 1890-1948.

Party leader, Anna Petrasovits, claims 20,000 members, a large number of them older people who supported the social democrats after the war and during 1956.

After much internal wrangling, the SZDP finally adopted a programme and elected a leadership in November 1989.

It attributes its poor showing in the elections to lack of time and resources to adequately prepare. Its confused programme and right-wing image, however, were no competition for the real parties of the right.

In its election programme, the SZSP called for a market economy, "controlled privatisation" with state companies sold to a "cash-paying real owner" and for "uneconomic enterprises" to be "liquidated".

On land ownership its position is to the right of the Forum, saying that "it must belong to the original owners and their descendants of the year 1947-48".

Anna Petrasovics sees the first major tasks as "the creation of a national entrepreneurial class and the integration of the economy into the world economy." She describes these tasks as "not classical social democratic".

The SZDP is now part of the Socialist International.

The Ex-Communists

On the day after the elections, large lorries were loading cases from the back entrance of the massive building next to the parliament that once served as headquarters for Hungarian communism.



The party was moving to new headquarters more appropriate to its size and to its support in the elections — less than 10%.

The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the name adopted by the old party in October 1989, is a traditional social democratic party.

It is committed to the mixed economy, welfare state and has already wants to join the Socialist International.

Because of its long history of defending market reforms and privatisation, the MSZP had no real ideological or political argument against the anti-communist parties.

Its defence of welfarism (something not rejectd by the other parties) was the closest it came to representing working class interests.

It claims a membership of 50,000 and it provoked a bit of scandal during the election period with the news that it was selling off a major party-owned newspaper chain to the West German press baron, Axel Springer.

Those members of the old party who didn't join the MSZP continued as the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, winning around 3.5% in the first round of voting.

The party elected a completely new leadership in December 1989. Its new leader is the 36-year old Gyula Thurmer and it claims a membership of 80,000.

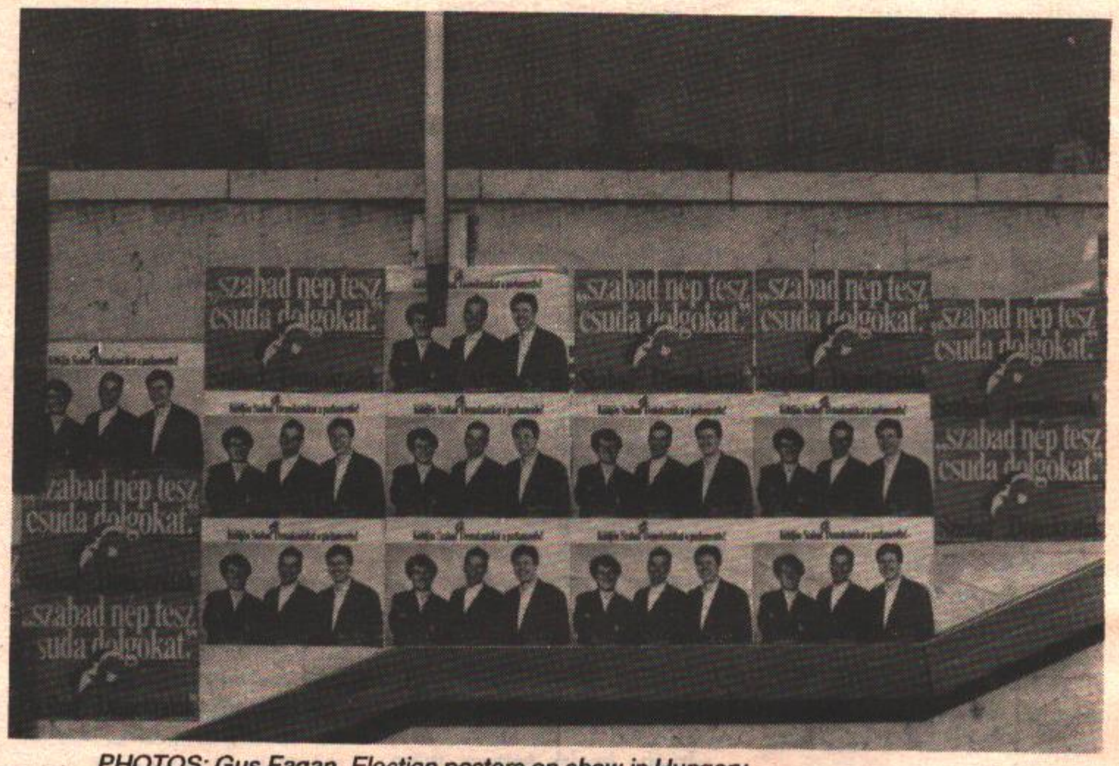
Its election programme opposes "domination by the big capitalist monopolies" and condemns the "illusion" of a free market economy.

The Left

The left is a tiny minority in Hungary today. At the conference of the Social Democratic Party in November, a breakaway group established the Independent Social Democratic Party (FSZDP).

Led by Gyorgy Ruttner and with only a few hundred members, the party represents a more traditional type of social democratic politics.

They stood very few candidates in the election but, unlike the official MSZDP, actually managed to get a candidate into the second round.



PHOTOS: Gus Fagan. Election posters on show in Hungary.

Established in 1988, the Left Alternative, which has a few hundred members, bases itself on "a Marxist inspired critical theory of society".

It sees the main task as the defence of workers interests and the promotion of ideas of self-management and "the collectivisation of economic and political power".

The leading figures in the Left Alternative are academics from Budapest. Most of them are members of the Hungarian Socialist Party, although the LA has members from other parties also.

One of their leading figures, Tamas Kraus, is lead[illegible] f a democratic socialist current inside the HSP.

They have links with left wing currents in other East European countries and are a leading force in the new movement to establish workers' councils.

Workers Councils

Workers councils in the factories began to be formed last year, in most cases as a response to imminent closure and redundancies and the inactivity of the traditional trade unions.

In February of this year left wing intellectuals took the initiative in helpin[illegible] organise a national federation of these councils. About 30 councils are now affiliated to this federation.

The precise role of these councils is as yet unclear.

Left Alternative members like Laszlo Thoma (member of Workers Councils Information Bureau) would like to see the councils develop a strategy of self-management.

The HDF, now the leadi[illegible] party in government, however would like to use then to break up the old trade unions.

The Forum has been instrumental in setting up a number of councils that are not affiliated to the federation. Some see workers participation on the West German model as a more realistic alternative.

Different political forces sees the councils as a way of gaining a foothold in the factories and the battle over the future of the councils will now be stepped up.

Independent Trade Unions

Formed in 1988 the Democratic League of Free Trade Unions (FSZDL) now has about 17 unions affiliated to it. These are mostly small groups of intellectual and white collar workers, numbering around 60,000.

Politically the League is promoted by the Free Democrats and most of its full-time workers and volunteers are active supporters of the Free Democrats.

One of the groups affiliated to the League is Workers Solidarity whose principal leader, Gyorgy Kerenyi, was a candidate for the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) in the election.

Some see Workers Solidarity as an attempt by the Free Democrats to gain a base among non-intellectual workers.

The unknown element in Hungarian politics, as in Poland, is the response of the working class to the austerity and unemployment that will accompany privatisation.

That's why working class organisations (the official unions which the workers have not left, the new councils and the independent unions) are an important factor as the different political forces prepare for the inevitable struggles ahead.

★Documents from the Left Alternative, as well as from the Independent Social Democrats, will be published in the next issue of *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*.. There will also be speakers from these groups at a conference organised by *Labour Focus* in June.

Winchester Three

Tories caught out over frame-up

The convictions of the Winchester Three were quashed last month.

This is the first time in the current phase of the "Troubles" that Irish defendants on terrorism charges have won a first appeal.

By PIERS MOSTYN

There is now unprecedented pressure for the release of the Birmingham Six as innocent men, especially given the far greater publicity and breadth of support for their case compared to the Winchester Three.

It also highlights the need for greater prominence for the case of the Broadwater Farm Three, recently boosted by Jesse Jackson's visit to the prisoners' relatives followed by a message of support.

Coming only six months after the Guildford Four's release, the Winchester Three victory underlines the disarray of Britain's criminalisation policy on the North of Ireland and the criminal justice system's increasing inability to deliver on it.

The appeal was upheld on the single ground of Tom King and Lord Denning's well publicised comments equating an exercise of the right to silence with guilt in "terrorism" cases. But a much wider range of issues has been thrown up.

First and foremost, it highlights the Government's long stated desire to abolish the right of silence (already removed in the North of Ireland).

Opposition

It is a timely reminder to up opposition to this move, which is expected in the next parliamentary session.

Second, it shows that in such Irish cases, especially where conspiracy charges are involved, convictions are based on amounts of evidence that in normal criminal trials would be regarded as insufficient.

There was never any evidence that the Winchester Three actually did anything illegal. It was all circumstantial.

Third, it underlines the tremendously prejudicial role of media comment and publicity in all Irish cases.

This effectively reverses the "burden of proof", so that those charged have to prove their innocence instead of the prosecution proving guilt.

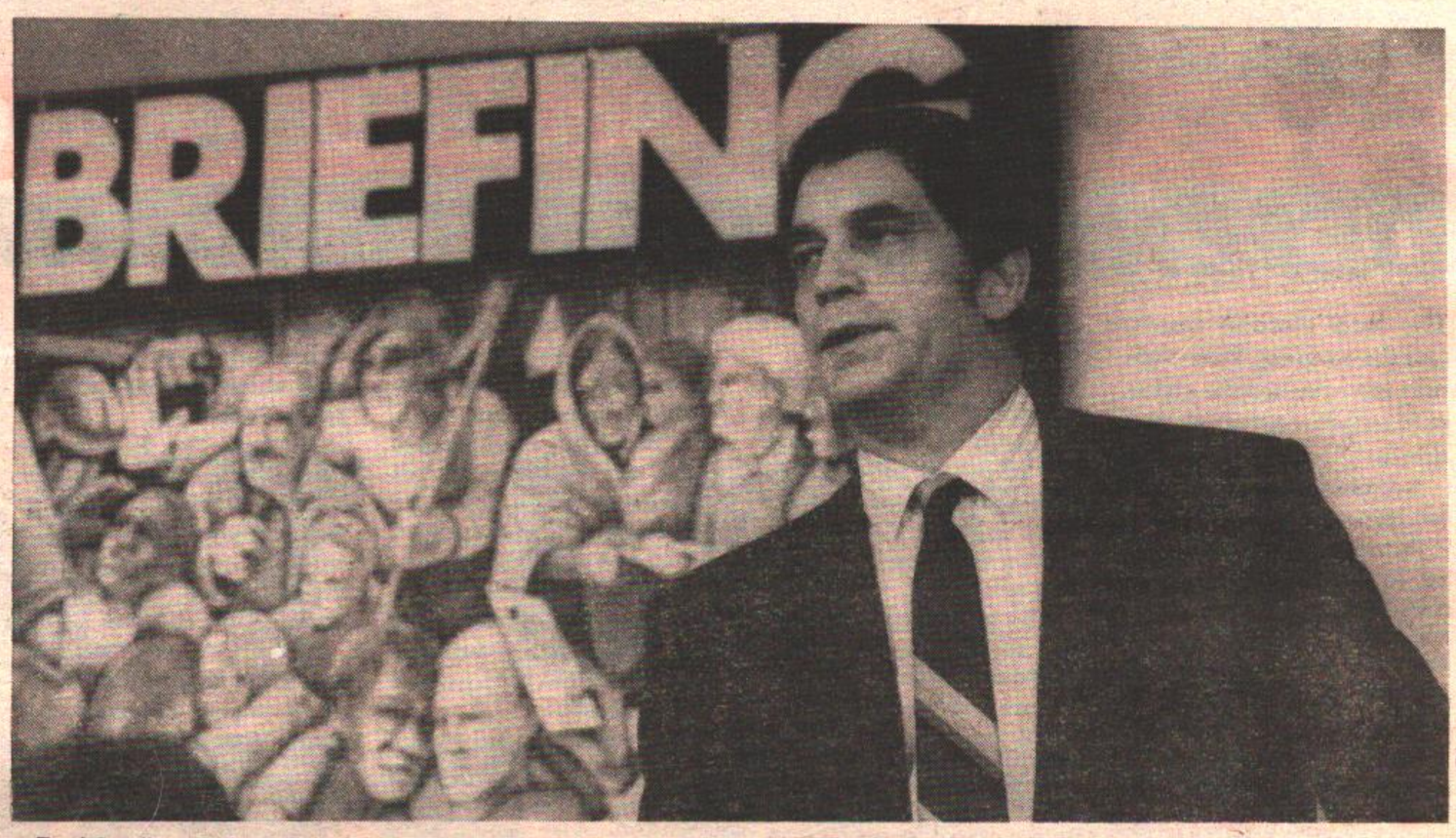


PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Errol Smalley, uncle of Guildford Four victim Paul Hill, addresses a Labour Briefing fringe meeting at Labour Party Conference. The Winchester Four's release has followed that of the Guildford Four.

The possible existence of such prejudice in Irish cases has never been officially recognised before.

Linked to this is the exposure of Tom King's role.

It is widely believed among the Winchester Three's supporters that King's press conference, like the timing of the trial to coincide with the first Tory Party conference in Brighton since the bombing, was planned deliberately.

Even if there was no high level state conspiracy, which we shall probably never know, at the very least this reflects a grave misjudgement by a cabinet member who was Northern Ireland Secretary of State and "victim" of the Three's alleged conspiracy.

The outrage from the British establishment at the Irish courts' refusal to extradite Father Ryan last year because of prejudice caused by Thatcher's comments can now be knocked down a peg or two.

Indeed this and more recent refusals to extradite can hardly be attributed to IRA-sympathising judges in Dublin any more, as the right wing tabloids would have us believe.

The argument from Westminster, and Britain's allies in the Irish establishment, is that the Winchester Three appeal underlines the integrity of British justice and the fact that Irish defendants are treated fairly.

In fact the decision reflects nothing of the sort.

What it and the Guildford Four show is that Irish defendants on terrorism charges have been subject to the most horrendous miscarriages of justice that the system has only belatedly, reluctantly and under pressure begin to rectify.

That this occurred reveals more about fractures within the various wings of Britain's ruling circles than anything else.

Soviet Union

CP verges on a split

It now seems certain that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) is heading for a split at, or before, the forthcoming 28th CPSU Congress in June.

The leadership of the CPSU has launched an attack on the so-called "Democratic Platform" (DP) tendency within the Party.

It has effectively declared that support for DP is incompatible with the CPSU programme and those adhering to such positions should leave the party. Igor Chubais, a leader of DP, has already been expelled.

"Democratic Platform" is the Party's equivalent of the Inter-Regional Group (IRG) in the Congress of People's Deputies. Many of the latter's leading figures are also members of "Democratic Platform".

DP was founded on January 20th-21st 1990 in Moscow at a conference representing 55,000 Party members. It is claimed that DP is supported by up to a third of Party members.

DP's founding document, the "Democratic Platform", was even published in *Pravda* on March 3rd 1990 as part of the debate for the 28th Congress.

This is the first time since the 1920s that a programmatic statement of an organised tendency other than that of the party leadership has been published in the official party press.

The "Democratic Platform" is a counterposition to the official Draft Platform adopted by the CPSU Central Committee in February 1990.



Soviet miners.

By Rick Simon
Labour Focus on Eastern Europe

It argues for:

- democratisation of the party and the elimination of "democratic centralism";
- the abolition of Article 6 of the USSR Constitution guaranteeing the CPSU's monopoly of political power;
- for the CPSU to fight for its positions in society within the framework of competitive elections and a multi-party system as a parliamentary, rather than a "vanguard", party.

The CPSU as the sole, legal, political party, with a membership of 19 million, has encompassed a wide spectrum of political views, which have now been exposed by the depth of the crisis in Soviet society.

DP is a reflection of this. Within its ranks are liberal free-marketeers, social democrats and revolutionary Marxists.

There is, moreover, a tension in DP between the need and possibility of reforming the CPSU and thus staying inside it and of forming a new party as part of the transition to a multi-party system.

Yuri Afanasyev, a leading proponent of social-democratic ideas within DP, has resigned from the CPSU.

He repeated the old Menshevik argument that Russia was too immature for socialist revolution and has been deflected from its natural course of development.

He has concluded that the CPSU is irreformable and that a new, distinctly different, party must be founded.

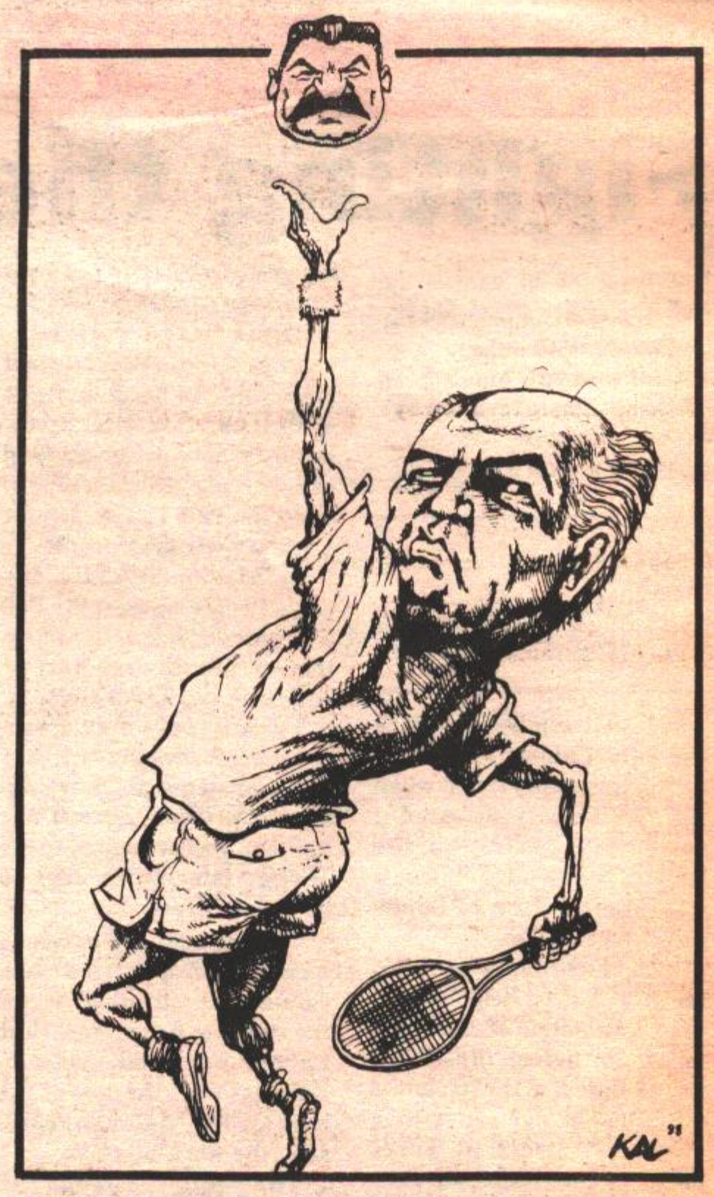
Others have argued the danger of a split comes from the Party leadership's endless compromises rather than the formation of platforms or groups in the Party: therefore those responsible for slowing down the processes of renewal should be the ones to go.

A number of local party leaderships have been forced to resign but the procedures for electing Congress delegates are unclear.

So many will be elected on an undemocratic basis and the whole legitimacy of the Congress will be open to challenge.

Yeltsin is confident that the Draft Platform can be radically amended at the Congress if delegates are elected democratically. What his reaction will be when this does not happen is open to question.

The CPSU's disintegration is only just beginning, it will not be settled at the 28th Congress.



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Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign

DEFENDING THE DEFENDANTS

The local election results and the on-going Tory crisis may have pushed the events of March 31st out of people's minds.

But the state has certainly not forgotten.

A special unit has been set up by the Crown Prosecution Service, the first of its kind, resourced by over one hundred police officers, to bring to trial alleged participants in the "Battle of Trafalgar".

By Jane Connor
Co-chair London Anti-Poll Tax Federation
(personal capacity)

Not even the events on Broadwater Farm in 1985 elicited such a response!

This unit has already amassed over 90 hours of film and video, 30,000 photographs, and is hoping to prosecute a further 100 people on top of the 341 already facing charges.

The offences alleged against those people already charged include attempted murder, affray, threatening behaviour, assault and numerous other public order offences.

One of the biggest problems facing any defence campaign is the sheer number of defendants coupled with the fact that many of them until now had no links to the organised anti-Poll Tax movement.

The initial response from the All-Britain Federation leadership which sought to blame demonstrators, rather than the police, hasn't helped matters either.

However, prior to the initiative taken by the Federation officers a meeting was called by a number of anti-Poll Tax groups to set up a defence campaign.

On May 3rd the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign was launched at a meeting at Conway Hall in London, attended by defendants, solicitors and anti-Poll tax activists.

Campaign

It was agreed that the campaign would:

•unconditionally support all those arrested

•be run by and accountable to those arrested

•be independent of all other organisations

•demand the support of the whole anti-Poll Tax movement and other sympathetic organisations.

The meeting also agreed to seek out and contact all defendants, co-ordinate legal defence, publicise what happened at the demonstration from the point of view of those arrested, and call for donations and fund-raising for a bust fund for legal and welfare costs.

The campaign is producing a newsletter and is organising weekly meetings in London. Any defendants and witnesses are urged to contact the campaign immediately.

It is important that the needs of defendants are put first and not pushed aside because of the differences within the anti-Poll Tax movement.

Hopefully both the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign (TSDC) and any campaign launched from May 12th can co-operate. It is also important that local campaigns, along the lines of the TSDC are organised outside London.

Although Steve Nally and Tommy Sheridan have subsequently explained that they were misrepresented by the media, a number of defendants have been worried about coming forward to the Federation.

Because the Federation leadership were on the defensive after Trafalgar Square they were slow off the mark in organising proper, co-ordinated defence for those people charged.

Despite claims to the contrary, not all the initial hearings were covered by Federation representatives, and many defendants were unable to even contact the Federation office.

Under pressure from solicitors handling the cases, from defendants, and from a realisation of the scale of the state's operation, officers of the Federation have now called a meeting for defendants, witnesses and anti-Poll Tax activists.

It will be on Saturday 12th May, at 10.30am at 365 Brixton Road, London SW9 (nearest tube Brixton).

The aim is to launch a national defence campaign which would primarily highlight the political and civil liberties at stake and also support the defence of people not in touch or organised by the local defence campaigns that have been set up.



This initiative should be supported and not counterposed to local defence campaigns under the control of defendants.

The national campaign will have to convince people of its political neutrality if it is to win the confidence of both defendants and many activists in the anti-Poll Tax movement who want to support defence activities.

Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign
Meetings for all defendants
Thursday 10th May
7.30pm at Haringey Unwaged Centre,
72 West Green Road, N15
(near Seven Sisters tube, Victoria Line and BR)
Thursday 17th May
7.30pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1
(near Holborn tube, Picadilly Line)
The TSDC can be contacted c/o Haldane Society of Lawyers, Room 205, Panther House, London WC1. Telephone messages to 071 833 8598. Cheques should be made payable to TSDC.
Recommended solicitors
Bindmans & Partners (071 278 8131)
Siefert Sedley Williams (071 831 3030)
Kapil Juj & Birnberg (071 403 3166)
Trevor Hamlyn & Co (071 821 1199)
Civil Rights UK (071 274 0100)

POLL TAX: Local Report

Fighting the class war in Barrow

Barrow's battle against the Poll Tax really started at the beginning of this year.

Four women from a strong working class area of the town formed Women Against the Poll Tax.

By Hyder Prodhan Barrow CLP

A previous attempt to kick the local Labour Party into action miserably failed when the GC heavily defeated a resolution calling on the Labour controlled Barrow Council to refuse to implement the Poll Tax.

The resolution also called on the CLP to help build a mass-campaign of non-payment. Its defeat illustrated the weakness of the left in the CLP.

WATPT were at great pains to ensure people they were not party political but that this time Margaret Thatcher had gone too far! Still some protest was better than none.

A public meeting held by the group was attended by a broad range of local people.

There were activists, Labour Councillors (most reluctant to lead a fight against the Poll Tax), Communist Party members, and the general public terrified of what the Poll Tax means for ordinary working people.

In March WATPT became People Against the Poll Tax and organised a well attended rally through Barrow ending at the Town Hall.

The march was good humoured, despite a heavy police presence. A 15,000 signature petition against the Poll Tax was presented to the Mayor, later to be sent to Downing Street.

The message Barrow's working and oppressed class, common to all other areas, wanted to hear was that Labour would take sides in the class war: the side of the class Labour claims to represent, the working class.

The applause from the crowd was for a clear socialist message.

Labour Councillors must have an answer for those that can't or won't pay the Poll Tax.

The crowd warmly responded to the fact that over 1 million people haven't paid in Scotland and the estimates that over 10 million won't/can't pay in England and Wales.

At a PAPT meeting of over 100, which partially endorsed support for non-payment, the loudest cheers were for non-payment speakers.

Group

In the end the group, against the wishes of those who set it up, agreed to support all forms of opposition to the Poll Tax including non-payment.

The local newspapers report of this meeting signalled the beginnings of a local witch-hunt.

Tory Group Leader Ted Smith, said Barrow Labour Party and Labour Group should disassociate themselves from me, as a Council candidate, for advocating non-payment.

He went on to say I should be disowned and withdrawn as an election candidate in the light of my refusal to obey the law.

Dead right Ted: I won't, and don't think that socialists should obey laws made by a ruling-class parliament, which passes laws to make the rich richer and the poor poorer!

The local Party, controlled by a politically bankrupt alliance of the ultra-soft left (Stalinist tendency) and the anti-socialist right wing, attempted to make me lie low and not say I was a Labour candidate and advocating non-payment together.

My attempt to include in my election address a commitment to a mass campaign of non-payment of the Poll Tax and a pledge for Labour to defend those can't pay/won't pay people was defeated.

I was told it was contrary to Party policy.

Party

I was reliably informed regional office wanted me deselected immediately but that the "benevolent" local Party didn't want a "witch-hunt"!

I agreed I wouldn't misrepresent local Party policy, which I hadn't. And even if I wanted to fool working class people that the Labour Party was standing up for their interests they wouldn't believe me.

PAPT has become more and more identified with non-payment while the initial leaders have become marginalised for not wanting to build a mass campaign and for refusing to encourage the working class to lead *their* own battle.

A highly successful lobby of the last full Council meeting before the bills was held, with an excellent intervention by hard left Councillor, Dave Mason, who said he wouldn't be paying the Poll Tax because he couldn't afford to.

At a picket of hated right wing Tory MP Cecil Franks' surgery the police were called, following an attempt to speak to him and two Labour Party members, Paul Clark and Les Burns, were arrested.

This was a clear strategy of attempting to isolate the ringleaders. Both were later released without being charged. Predictably local Tories hauled about the local Labour Party for supporting extremists and law breakers.

Franks the MP referred to the protesters as scum. Good try Cecil, but it is you who is scum as far as the people of Barrow are concerned; a fact you'll discover when you lose the next election (if indeed Franks fights it).

Local Tories have already issued a letter condemning his comments that Barrow should have a Poll Tax of £194 in line with Government recommendations instead of £328, the actual figure.

Burning

Barrow's campaign against the Poll Tax will march on relentlessly. We are planning a mass burning of Poll Tax bills and more public meetings.

We *must* work with and inside the unions and on the estates in working class communities. We must continue along with all those other campaigns to turn the Labour Party into a vehicle for class struggle socialist politics.