LABOUR
40p FORTNIGHTLY
BRIEFING
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40p

MILLIONS REFUSE TO PAY

BREAK THE LAW– BACK THE PEOPLE!

Every day, the evidence is mounting.

Across the country, far more people are not paying the Poll Tax than any of us dared to predict.

By PAUL GOSLING
Leicester City Councillor

Here in Leicester, the level of non-payment is bound to be higher than the national average. With the Council's computers down since early April people entitled to rebates have still not even received their original bills.

We also have a strong local non-payment campaign.

This campaign was boosted when one third of the Labour Group on Leicester City Council defied our local and national leadership to oppose Poll Tax implementation. We voted against a budget which would not only have set a Poll Tax but would also have led to cuts in important services.

After ten of us voted down the Labour budget, the Council leadership then turned to the Liberal Democrats, who agreed to support a resolution which reduced the Poll Tax by £1.

Our actions were supported by similar defiance on the part of two County Councillors.

We achieved left unity by fighting simultaneously against the cuts, which were targetted at black and youth groups, and Poll Tax implementation.

Our campaign was also boosted by the refusal of our Labour Group leadership to abide by democratic principles. It had decided to ignore the strength of feeling within the Leicester Labour Party against making cuts.

We are now seen by large numbers of ordinary people as the only Councillors who stood up against the Poll Tax. We are the genuine opposition.

All ten of us were suspended by our Labour Group for six months. This was reduced to one month by the Regional Executive, after it heard how our local leadership had behaved.

Since then my ward Party, Charnwood, has been suspended as a result of complaints which can hardly be considered coincidental.

Meanwhile, our national leadership has launched an attack on those of us involved in anti-Poll Tax campaigns.

A number of us are now in danger of expulsion from the Party, supposedly for associating ourselves with an organisation which is a "front for *Militant*".

The truth is that the Anti-Poll Tax Federations contain many different political opinions. In fact, the campaign has been notably successful in bringing in people who have never previously been involved in active politics.

Non-payment has to be a central part of our campaign, not least because so many of our supporters have no means to pay the Poll Tax. However, non-payment is not a strategy in itself; it is only one part of a successful campaign.

Our Party was born of the labour movement, and that is something we must never forget. It is therefore to the trade union movement that we must turn for the second element of our campaign.

We should argue for disruption of legal measures taken by Councils against non-payers and for other selective strike action.

Support for the national trade union conference on the Poll Tax being organised by the Socialist Movement on September 8th in Sheffield is vital.

Unfortunately the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation declined our request for a joint, non-sectarian trade union conference and are proceeding with their own in June in Liverpool.

Anti-Poll Tax activists in the unions should attend both conferences.

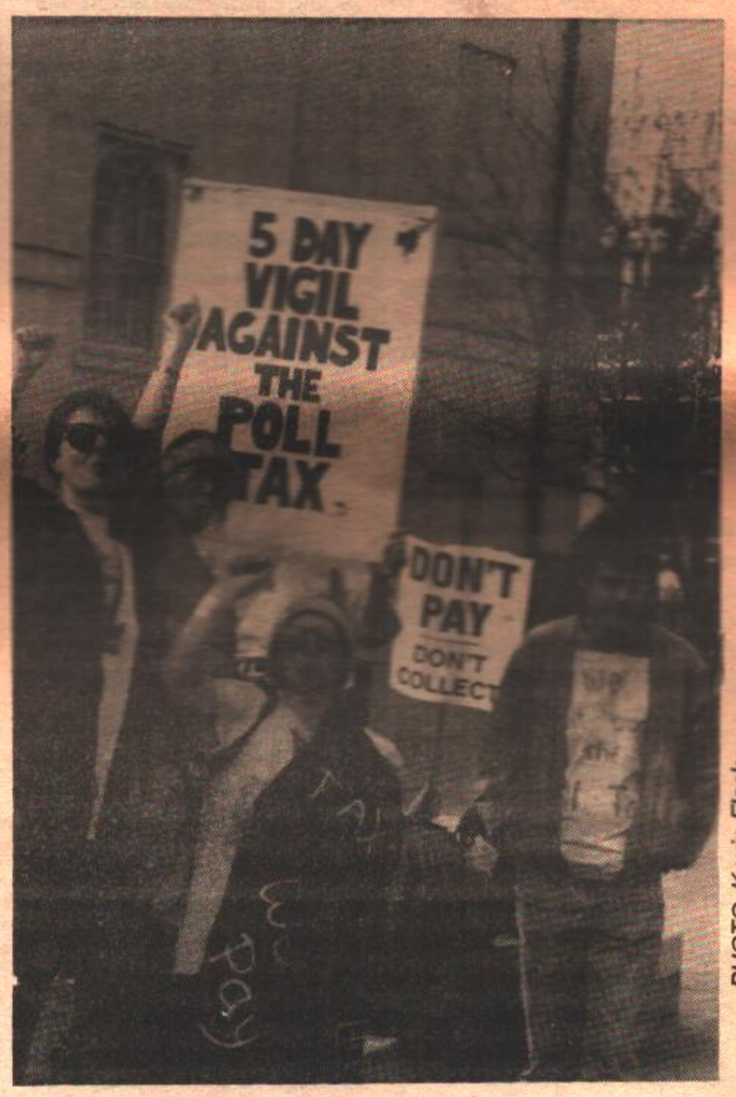


PHOTO: Kevin Flack

Lewisham protestors mounted a five day vigil outside the Houses of Parliament as a focus for the protest against the introduction of the Poll Tax in England and Wales.

In my view, the anti-Poll Tax movement must now develop a broader campaign of civil disobedience.

The left should draw up a campaign of civil disobedience which targets central government and which coincides with legal action being taken against non-payers.

Clearly, one part of a broader campaign will be action against bailiffs, which has already proved successful in Scotland.

Drawing up this detailed campaign should be a priority for all socialists, and particularly for Labour Party Socialists, the Socialist Movement, and its Trade Union Committee.

LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!

Letters

WRITEBACK!

We welcome your letters!
Disagree with something? — write in.
Agree with something? — write in.
Want to raise a new idea? — Write in.
Let's hear your views!
Write to: Writeback, Labour Briefing,
PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.
Please send letters for the next issue to arrive by Wednesday, June 13th if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Ealing exasperated

Dear *Briefing*,

I appreciate the difficult task you face in editing articles to fit the space available.

However, I have every sympathy with Paul Hubert whose article on Bradford appeared in a badly mutilated form. My own report in the last issue on Ealing contained, in its published form, two statements for which I was not responsible.

First, I did not say that "cuts have resulted from Poll Tax capping", but that in order to avoid being capped by the government, Ealing Council made cuts and so "Poll Tax capped itself".

Second, an important point was lost at the end of the article.

Whilst I am all in favour of an open and democratic debate to discuss ways of winning the working class to policies of opposition to homophobia and racism, what I actually suggested was the need for policies to unite the working class, a rather different but I hope equally valid demand.

For the record the end of the article actually said:

"Many on the left think that the crucial factor [in the election defeat] was the absence of policies designed to unite the working class.

"They are likely to demand that the local Party adopts such policies by open and democratic means, at the same time as refusing to apologise for its opposition to racism and homophobia."

Errors of this kind can only damage the credibility of *Briefing*, not only in the Ealing labour movement but also nationally.

Bob Wood
Ealing Southall CLP
and Ealing NALGO

Re-run on reselection

Dear *Briefing*,

Briefing readers will want to join the fight to save mandatory reselection.

The NEC's latest "consultation" document floats the idea of eliminating any reselection of sitting Labour MPs, unless this is demanded by a majority of the CLP's members through a postal ballot.

The powers-that-be are no doubt well aware that such a divisive vote of no confidence would never be carried.

It would be worse than the old system before we won mandatory reselection — under the latest proposals Reg Prentice would still be the Labour MP for Newham North East!

Labour MPs would have a job for life. There would be no accountability whatsoever. Any radical alternative policies that might be produced would be consigned to the dustbin.

To defend reselection we need maximum effort and as broad-based a campaign as possible. For example, many of those in favour of OMOV will be prepared to support the campaign.

Left activists should press their CLP to choose this as their Annual Conference Resolution, or at the very least as their amendment to Conference.

It only needs a simple resolution — that Labour MPs continue to be subject to a full reselection process once in every Parliament.

Yours in comradeship,
Pete Willsman,
South London

Tread the Green path

Dear *Briefing*,

Bryn Griffiths asserts that in talking to the Greens *Labour Briefing* would argue a class perspective and thus the Labour Party and trade unions are central to environmental politics."

We at least agree on two out of three points.

The Green Party does acknowledge that class is part of the system that is creating the ecological disaster. Our philosophical basis states that a sustainable society requires "material security for all."

However, we also recognise that patriarchy, imperialism and the power of the state, have to be dealt with.

Class is not the whole story, and aspects of both the feminist and anarchist traditions have become part of mainstream thinking within the Green Party.

Anyone who has read our policy on trade union rights knows that it is far more progressive than anything put forward by the Labour Party.

We recognise the central role which working people have in helping to transform society, e.g., we support the legalisation of green strikes.

A draft voting paper on workplace democracy going to our next conference outlines several ways of giving workers greater control over what they produce and how they produce it.

The only block to dialogue is therefore your continued support for a social democratic party.

The Greens do not want to go the same way as much of the feminist and black movements who have been enlisted in a doomed battle to transform the Labour Party into a radical vehicle for change.

I respect the hard work you do, but the Greens will tread their own path to change.

Ian Wingrove,
Socialist Green Forum
Steering Committee

Come on in: the water's lovely!

Dear *Briefing*

I found little to disagree with in either Mike Marqusee's article or his letter on the local election results in Haringey, (*Briefing* 102).

Indeed since he provides the evidence he might have drawn it out further and pointed to the Grauniad's talk of the Haringey effect, (as opposed to the Wandsworth effect), which was designed to reinforce ideas of New Realism and spark a further witch-hunt against the "loony" left.

In fact, of course, measured against the national picture, Labour didn't do that well in Haringey.

Where I disagree with Marqusee is in what he left out. First, we need to at least comment on the fortunes of the class enemy, the Tories, (not Toby Harris I fear).

The blood letting in their leadership after May 3rd reflects a deep political crisis in their ranks.

The pro-fascist elements of Tottenham Toryism are now confined largely to Woodside ward, and then with victory only by a narrow margin; while the right may have strengthened its position a little in "wetter" Hornsey.

I suspect, contrary to what Marqusee argues, that the only way the Tories will hold onto the Hornsey and Wood Green parliamentary seat is if they can get the sitting MP, Rossi, to stand again, and even then it will be doubtful.

A few other points. How did some of the major issues in recent Haringey politics fare? Lesbian and Gay politics seem to have been avoided by both the Tories and Labour, although both Parties had "out" candidates elected.

On racism the picture is more mixed. The defeat of Narendra Makanji in Noel Park is a blow dealt largely by racism.

On the other hand in my own ward of Coleraine the only Liberal, L'Estrange, lost his seat. No opening to the right here, as in Tower Hamlets, it would seem.

So what does it mean for the left?

The vote for Labour cannot really be identified as New Realist. If we use the Margaret Hodge definition, Haringey isn't exactly marvellous at answering phones or providing services.

It was striking how many households displayed both Vote Labour and No Poll Tax posters. The comparatively strong anti-Poll Tax campaign no doubt boosted the Labour vote.

But the left seems marginalised, at its lowest ebb for many years. The return of hard right figures like Vic Butler and George Meehan confirms the matter.

I don't expect too many tears were shed over the defeat of veteran witch-hunter Max Morris in Crouch End either.

So not too much to cheer about really.

But step outside comrades! The SWP branches in Haringey, freed from internal Labour Party squabbles have been dabbling their feet in the water of the real world and have found it surprisingly warm.

Membership is growing, and, down below, there is a real mood to fight. One would hope that our comrades on the Labour left will also be focusing their attention on this fight.

Past experience suggests however that too many of you will still be spending too much time in those smoke filled rooms. Or at least wishing you were.

Yours fraternally,
Keith Flett,
Hornsey SWP

Camden TC was there!

Dear *Briefing*,

Congratulations on the centre spread How Not to Pay your Poll Tax.

Please print it in a form in which it could be posted up on bulletin boards (A3, slightly heavier paper?) and is reproducible. If you do please let us know how to get copies to distribute.

One point — the caption to your picture.

This Trades Council banner was on the march, and various affiliated branches, including NALGO and NUT, were represented.

We have written to the press about the police riot on that day, and taken up the case of Andy Murphy.

Fraternally,
Sylvia Bolgar,
Secretary,
Camden Trades Council

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Best wishes to Eric!

Dear Comrades,

I see from *Briefing* (102) that you list me as not voting on the issue of the 18-20 and 22 week limit on abortion.

You are right *I did not vote*, because *under Doctors Orders* I was not voting on any issue and left the House of Commons each night early.

I have been ill for some considerable time, and have recently had an operation.

I nevertheless continue to go into the House of Commons, *for part of the day* to ensure that my constituency work is done and to ensure that as far as possible I keep up the fight for our socialist concepts by questions and brief inteventions.

Those in charge of the Bill, like Jo Richardson, were informed by me of the reason why I would not be around to vote, if the time of the debate went too late. They perfectly understood my position.

I trust you will put the record straight. I am still ill, and unfortunately expect to be out of business and action in the House of Commons for some time.

Yours,
Eric Heffer MP

Thanks, Eric, for putting the record straight. Best wishes from Briefing in your current ill health. Briefing readers may like to send their own good wishes to Eric Heffer MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Disagreeing with Bryn

Dear *Briefing*,

In *Briefing* no. 103, Bryn Griffiths wrote an article explaining why socialists should support Labour Party Socialists.

Indeed, the Labour Party Socialists conference was highly successful; an important step towards organising the left against Kinnockism and New Realism, fully justifying the support which *Briefing* has given to the Socialist Movement, of which LPS is a part.

However, Bryn used some arguments about the relationship between organised Marxist groups and the Labour left with which I do not agree.

Given the prominence of Bryn's article and the fact that he is a member of the Editorial Board, readers could get the impression that Bryn's views are not controversial among *Briefing* supporters.

This is far from being the case.

The disagreements centre on Bryn's account of the National Left Wing Movement in the Labour Party in the 1920s, and the role of the Communist Party in it; and his account of the IMG, the SWP, and the "Bennite" left

Bryn says that the CP was able to build the NLWM because of the CP's struggle to affiliate to the Labour Party. This seems a strange way to pose the question.

By 1925 Communist Party members were excluded from the Labour Party; except for a few secret CP members, the CP was wholly *outside* the Labour Party.

But because of its united front orientation, and — crucially — because of its influence in the labour movement through the Minority Movement in the trade unions, the CP was able to play a key role in building the NLWM.

Sectarian

This invaluable work was destroyed by the CP's 1928-29 sectarian and ultra-left turn (the "third period").

But until then the CP understood the vital importance of building a class struggle opposition in the Labour Party — as part of an overall struggle to build a militant socialist left in the labour movement.

But its experience of doing this *from outside* the Labour Party shows there is no mechanical, once-and-for-all method of doing this.

What it did show was the absolutely irreplaceable role of organised Marxism in such developments and the centrality of the fight in the trade unions for establishing the overall relationship of forces in the labour movement.

Bryn says the IMG did good work building the Vietnam movement and the SWP the Anti-Nazi League, but both were "eclipsed" by the rise of the bennite left.

The reality is much more complex than this dismissive phrase suggests.

There is much vital work in the labour movement which has its origins in the work and traditions of the IMG and SWP in the 60s and 70s.

Examples include the Socialist Teachers Alliance, militant anti- racism, work on women's liberation, and international solidarity. Other examples closer to home could be given.

Of necessity Bryn's article was very abbreviated. But it would be very unfortunate if *Briefing* gave the impression that the sole, or even the main, work building a militant socialist current should always be slogging away in the wards and GCs.

Of course socialists should not abandon the Labour Party, but neither should they be mesmerised by its internal structures and rhythms.

Neither historical experience nor contemporary reality give an y support to reducing the work of socialists to an internal Labour Party fight.

The success of the Socialist Movement lies precisely in its ability to combine work inside and outside the Labour Party, and its correct understanding of the necessity to force an alliance of socialists prioritising these different types of work.

Comradely greetings,
Phil Hearse,
Camden

As many comrades will already know, Jane Kelly, a member of the Briefing Steering Committee, suffered serious injury when a drunken driver ran into her on a pedestrian crossing whilst she was on a work visit to Paris. Jane is expected to remain in hospital in Paris for another six weeks. Cards and messages may be sent to: Jane Kelly, Hopital Beaujou, 100 Boulevard General de Clerc, 92110 Clichy, Paris.

Editorial

BRIEFING
LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Briefing's Future — an open invitation

Labour Briefing will be holding a meeting for its sellers, writers, and readers on Sunday, July 15th in London (details on back page).

It will not be a meeting to debate political perspectives as such nor will it be a passive afternoon of speeches from MPs.

This is a chance for people who care about *Briefing* to discuss the urgent and difficult questions which face us in the new political period now opening up.

Briefing is proud of its ten-year long democratic and participatory tradition. We don't spoon feed our readers a line direct from any Central Committee.

We encourage a diversity of views and see no contradiction between that diversity and an unequivocal commitment to the socialist politics of class struggle.

Because of this we need to know how the people who sell, write for, and regularly read *Briefing* want to respond to the new opportunities and difficulties presented by current developments inside and outside the Labour Party.

All newspapers need to change in order to survive and thrive. Even more so a newspaper, which, like *Briefing*, intends to play a part in a mass struggle for socialism.

We need to know:

•What do *Briefing* supporters want from their paper?

•How can they contribute to developing and transforming the paper?

•How can we improve its coverage, style, appearance, distribution?

•How do we respond to the proposal for a Socialist Movement paper?

•How do we best use *Briefing* to help build Labour Party Socialists?

Important decisions involving *Briefing's* future can only be made by the people who make *Briefing* happen — our sellers, writers, and readers.

This is your chance to have your say. Please make every effort to use it.

Labour Party Socialists — new light on the left

The major strategic task facing socialists in the run up to the General Election is the construction of a united and democratic left firmly rooted in both the Labour Party and the trade unions.

Labour Party Socialists, whose highly successful launch conference was held in Sheffield on May 19th and 20th, provides us with the opportunity to do just that.

With its commitment to building a locally-based Labour left, dominated by and serving the needs of grass-roots activists, it represents a major break with the organisational confines of previous, London-based Labour left structures.

Its broad, non-sectarian, and politically inclusive nature is a breath of fresh air.

Its first major task will be to raise the banner of socialist politics in the pre-election period that will no doubt commence with predictable Mandelson razzmatazz in Blackpool in October.

Labour Party Socialists must articulate the powerful desire felt at the base of the Party both to beat Thatcher and to put socialism back on the political agenda.

There is, of course, no contradiction between the two. Indeed, experience teaches that the one must go hand in hand with the other.

The election of a Labour government would dramatically alter the political context in which socialists work.

Faced with unfavourable economic conditions and armed with a battery of anti-union laws a Labour government turning to auterity policies would rapidly find itself in conflict with its own supporters in the trade unions and elsewhere.

Labour Party Socialists can and must do the ground work now needed to enable us to take full advantage of such a situation.

This means immersing ourselves in trade union and anti-Poll Tax struggles now and trying by every means available to bring them into the Labour Party.

For this reason the proposals raised by a minority of comrades within Labour Party Socialists to abolish the block vote is such a grave political error.

Our job is to make sure as many channels are open as possible for the expression of trade union dissent and resistance within the Party. This must mean a long fight to defend and democratise the Party's historical trade union link.

Labour Party Socialists has the potential to become a most effective and influential forum for the Labour left. But it has an enormous job of work to do now if it is to make the most of the opportunities that will undoubtedly arise.

We urge all our readers not merely to support LPS but to take an active part in building it in their local areas and nationally.

Labour Party Socialist's first AGM will be held on October 27/28th. It will be a vital staging post, following what is likely to be a dispiriting Party Conference, on the left's road to regroupment, recovery, and advance in the Labour Party. Be there.

Behind the headlines

Families and community demand: Release the Tottenham Three!

Three years is a lot of time to spend in prison for something you didn't do

That is what has happened to Mark Braithwaite, Engin Raghip and Winston Silcott since Justice Derek Hodgson sentenced them to life imprisonment for the murder of PC Keith Blakelock.

The campaign to free the Tottenham Three has come a long way since March 1987, winning support which seemed so distant in the aftermath of one of the most sensational and highly publicised murder trials of the decade.

In three years Winston Silcott has been elected President of the LSE Students Union, the men's families have met Jesse Jackson, and a documentary questioning their convictions has been shown on BBC 1.

It is impossible to understand the campaign's success without recognising that much ground had been cleared for us by the work of the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six campaigns.

Indeed the release of the Guildford Four was one of the most crucial developments in the Tottenham Threes case to date.

This release and the associated crisis of public confidence in the police catapaulted the Tottenham Three, and the Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign along with them, into the political mainstream.

The Defence Campaign has never lost touch with the roots of its early success. Much effort has gone into attempts to involve the Farm's residents and other local people in its activities.

Above all, it has remained very much a community organisation, its concerns overwhelmingly local (parochial, even).

This strategy has succeeded in making the Campaign the natural channel for community anger about policing, for example after "Operation Kingfisher" — the massive "drugs raid" and media circus on BWF last September.

It has also succeeded in making the convictions a mass issue in Tottenham, as demonstrated by the picket commemorating the fourth anniversary of the Uprising which was attended by over 500 people, and where the white left were outnumbered.

In the meantime, the families instituted regular meetings with Bernie Grant and others involved in the campaign.

By Shaun Waterman
Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign
(personal capacity)

The commitment of Bernie in particular has advanced their cause a great deal. It was he, for example who arranged their meeting with Reverend Jackson.

At the same time this Defence Campaign strategy has meant that until now, there has been no authoritative voice for the families of the Tottenham Three.

Therefore there has been no organisation capable of properly and single mindedly representing the interests of the prisoners and exploiting the current public concern about miscarriages of justice to get the cases re-opened.

It was the Guildford Four's amazing victory, for example, that first prompted the BBC to blow the dust off *Inside Story*'s long dormant project to make a documentary about the case.

Moreover, the Guildford and Birmingham campaigns represented a model political strategy — of the broadest possible base for a family centred campaign with the straightforward demand that all the prisoners be released and exonerated.

It is only now, however, that the Silcotts, Raghips and Braithwaites have moved positively to follow that lead — the formation of the Tottenham Three Families Campaign is imminent.

In many respects, both the case of the Tottenham Three and the political terrain on which the campaign has had to operate are very different from the Guildford Four or Birmingham Six.



PHOTO: Broadwater Photographic

Anger at Winston Silcott's trial: will justice finally be done?

The most striking example of this is the fact that, in Tottenham, the families of all three prisoners were actively involved in a campaign to free them from the day after the convictions.

There was an enormous upsurge of community anger here over the killing of Mrs Jarrett and the police's military-style occupation of Broadwater Farm after the Uprising.

Not only did this secure Council funding for the Defence Campaign, it also gave it a solid base of political support on the left and amongst black community activists.

If the families of the Tottenham Three had a headstart, it was because mass action by local black people had put the credibility of the trials in doubt before they were even over.

The formation of the Families Campaign has not been without its problems, but at the end of the day, all parties recognise the overriding need that community organisations and the relatives have to work together.

For the rest of us, we must redouble our efforts to gain the release of the Tottenham Three and to build solidarity with Broadwater Farm and other criminalised communities all over the country.

The Tottenham Three Families Campaign,
247a, West Green Road,
London N15 5ED
The Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign,
79, Tangmere,
Broadwater Farm,
London N17 6NB.
Tel: 081-885-3752.

What kind of paper for the left?

Briefing must continue!

"*Labour Briefing* has an excellent record as a left wing paper.

"It stood firm against the realignment of so many of its national supporters while maintaining its characteristic openness."

This was written by Bryn Griffiths in *Briefing* no. 103.

This appeared in an article purporting to open "a debate on the kind of paper the left needs", examining, in particular, whether a Socialist Movement paper should be launched — and even whether *Briefing* should be closed in its favour.

As *Briefing* supporters we are pleased to be asked to contribute to the debate.

But as comrades who believe in, cherish, and wish to sustain *Briefing*'s "characteristic openness" we want to know who decided there should be a debate about the future existence of *Briefing*?

Question

This question has not been raised by or with grass-roots *Briefing* supporters, nor (at the time Bryn's article had been published) had it been discussed by the *Briefing* National Steering Committee.

As we understand it, the question over *Briefing*'s future existence was first raised by *Briefing* "supporters" on the Socialist Movement Organising Committee (SMOC).

In fact, it is commented upon a number of times in the proposals for a Socialist Movement paper submitted to and apparently approved by the SMOC.

By John Wilton & Pauline Purnell
Labour Briefing National Steering Committee

The proposals explicitly state that a number of the financial calculations on which the feasability of the paper is based are dependent "on the major assumption that *Briefing* is persuaded to cease separate publication and come into this project."

The proposals went to the SMOC on May 26th — virtually the same day as Bryn's article in *Briefing* announced the "opening of the debate" and eight days before a discussion on the role of *Briefing* in today's left was held on the *Briefing* National Steering Committee.

It's not exactly a triumph for *Briefing*'s "characteristic openness"; nor a good start for those comrades proposing to create a new "extremely open and democratic" Socialist Movement newspaper.

As Bryn himself says in his article: "*Briefing* supporters are used to high standards in this respect and should not settle for less."

Bryn says, "the most attractive feature of a possible Socialist Movement paper is that it could reach a broad audience."

We have to ask: on what political basis? That of the SWP? The Green Party? Plaid Cymru? The Socialist Society? All have an involvement in the Socialist Movement.

What then would such a paper say at the time of a General Election? Vote Labour or Green or Plaid or maybe not vote at all? Is this a basis for a coherent, attractive, feasible or useful paper for any of us?

Briefing is rooted in a particular type of politics; it aims to help build an organised, democratic left inside the Labour Party and the trade unions.

What would the political roots of a Socialist Movement paper be? It could not be rooted in the politics of the Socialist Movement because its politics are at best only loosely defined.

Bryn is right to argue that "a left paper must also be an organiser."

Briefing tries to organise people to fight for socialist policies and leadership within the Labour Party and the unions. Will Green Party, SWP, or Plaid Cymru members be happy to see a Socialist Movement paper used for that purpose?

We want to make it clear that we are not attacking the "twin track" approach. On the contrary, both of us have fought for this approach and tried to implement it.

We are active in our local anti-Poll Tax Union, in our trade unions, in work with pensioners, tenants, and other groups outside the Labour Party.

We have persuaded some people in these groups to join the Labour Party and in this way have tried to build the left.

Briefing has been a major asset in this effort which would be seriously undermined if we relied on a Socialist Movement paper for the same purpose.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Discussing initiatives at the 1988 Socialist Conference: Mike Marqusee speaks at the Labour Briefing fringe meeting.

Of course *Briefing* is not and should not be solely focused on the Labour Party but to most of the people who support and buy it *Briefing* is inseparable from the Labour Party.

Closing *Briefing* in favour of a Socialist Movement paper would send a clear (and wrong) signal to comrades on both left and right of the Party that *Briefing* supporters are at best downgrading the struggle in the Labour Party and at worst abandoning it altogether.

Perhaps this is what some comrades who support the closing of *Briefing* and the formation of a Socialist Movement paper really have in mind.

If so, they should say so. We are sure this is not Bryn Griffiths' own position.

Finally, Bryn says a left paper should be an organiser. But where does the Socialist Movement's grass-roots organisation exist? Who will sell and buy a Socialist Movement paper?

One of the reasons the politics of the Socialist Movement have never been worked out is precisely because no grass-roots organisation for it exists.

Bryn admits that "at times the Socialist Movement has tended to be a bit of a top-down organisation." In our experience this is a massive understatement!

Instrumental

It is a sad fact that although the Socialist Movement has held a number of excellent and well-attended conferences and has been instrumental in setting up Labour Party Socialists, as a living organisation it exists mainly in the minds of a few people in London.

This is not to downgrade the hard work of people involved in the Socialist Movement, but to highlight the fact that a Socialist Movement grass-roots organisation has not flourished precisely because it has not had a clear focus for its work.

That focus for most left socialists is still in and around the Labour Party — as it should be.

As long as this remains the case we believe *Briefing* must continue as an independent publication. It has a clear political position and is an invaluable organising tool.

In the words of a former Labour politician who eventually left to found a now defunct party, a Socialist Movement paper would have "no roots, no ideology, and no political basis."

The politics of inflation

Economic theorists of the ruling class are once again preoccupied with the link between inflation and the level of wage claims.

They are returning to the old "cost push" theory of inflation of the 70s.

The theory found that British capitalism's dismal rate of performance in comparison with more "efficient" economies was the product of excessive and unjustifiable pay claims from organised labour.

Both Tory and Labour governments introduced incomes policies, resulting in extensive industrial action with, in the case of Labour, the collapse of the "Social Contract" between the government and the TUC.

Some Marxist writers have attempted to explain the inflation-prone, poor performance of British capitalism as a result of the organisational strength of the working class.

By MARTIN ALLEN

In no sense do they seek to *blame* the working class; but they do see a class struggle over distribution taking place.

In fact the blame should be laid fairly and squarely at the hands of the British ruling class for failing to modernise the economy and bring in levels of technological sophistication which would reduce unit costs sufficiently to compete with rivals abroad.

West German capital creates both higher rates of capital accumulation and higher wages.

Kinnock's pledge to "modernise" the economy is a vague and pathetic attempt to reverse years of neglect of the manufacturing base through mild expenditure on technological training and establishing a new ethos of "partnership" between Labour and business.

From this perspective, inflation can be seen as a mechanism whereby British capitalists jack up prices to *maintain* profit margins.

The international consequences are loss of overseas markets and a flagging currency with loss of international confidence in the City. Such a strategy has now become a dead end for British capital.

Other Marxist theories of inflation have concentrated on the role of the state and the expansion of bank credit.

Economies

The "long wave of expansion", which was a feature of all capitalist economies in the post war years, involved postponing the crises of overproduction which have been a regular feature of capitalist economies.

Through injecting extra purchasing power into the economy, "shake-outs" — slumps in the trade cycle through which prices are adjusted and less efficient capitalists removed — were seen to be no longer necessary.

Keynesian economics claimed to have developed a way of successfully managing advanced capitalism.

However, an underlying feature of this period was the permanent, although at first only creeping, inflation as capitalism chugged along on a mountain of debt.

The swelling of public spending and of bank credit prevented the adjustment of market prices to the value of commodities (production prices).

By the mid 70s it was apparent that the "pump priming" role of the state could not generate the regular expansion in investment that Keynesian theory argued it could.

With the increased internationalisation of production, the failure continually to revolutionise the means of production, and (by no means least) the increased confidence of the working class, capitalist economies experienced "stagflation": low rates of growth, increasing rates of unemployment and inflation.

Keynesian "demand management" became identified by the "monetarist" school of economics as the cause of the high rates of inflation in the 70s. The monetarists called for "sound money" cuts in public expenditure even, in some cases, a return to the gold standard.

The battle against unemployment (the basis behind post-War Keynesian thinking) was now replaced by the battle against inflation. Capital accumulation could only follow its natural market course.

Other features of an economic system based on private ownership and free competition can explain tendencies towards inflation.

First, unregulated and unplanned production results in bottlenecks and shortages in particular sectors that are "eliminated" by high price rises.

Second, the huge monopoly of power of multinational corporations makes nonsense of the claims from bourgeois economic theory about efficiency through competition and consumer sovereignty.

Effectively controlling markets, such companies can organise regular across-the-board-price rises — easily side-stepping the limited attempts by governments to control their activities.

Third, unregulated, international competition has led to the destruction of some currencies, massive debts, and soaring import prices for developing countries.

Socialists should identify inflation as an inbuilt feature of modern capitalism and continue to argue for an economy based on democratic planning and a socialised pricing policy.

Gay Rights

Gay men jailed for consenting sex

Ten men over the age of 21 were sentenced to imprisonment in 1988.

Their "crime" was consenting "buggery", or "attempted buggery", with men aged 16 to 21 years in England and Wales during 1988.

By PETER TATCHELL

This information was revealed by the Secretary of State for the Home Office, John Patten MP, in reply to a parliamentary question from Gavin Strang, the Labour MP for Edinburgh East.

Mr Patten also confirmed that in 1988, the latest year for which figures are available, a further 13 men over the age of 21 were imprisoned for consenting acts of "gross indecency" with men aged under 21 years.

These sentences relate to England and Wales only. According to Mr Patten: "Similar information is not readily available for Scotland and Northern Ireland."

In the cases of those sentenced for acts of consensual "buggery", the maximum sentences handed down in 1988 were to three men who each received between two and three years imprisonment.

Apparently, failure to consummate the act is an even more heinous crime in the eyes of the judiciary. Two men were jailed for three to four years for "attempted buggery" with consent of a 16 to 21 year old.



So far as the prosecutions for "gross indecency" were concerned: six men were imprisoned for six to 18 months, and four others for between 18 and 36 months.

In a follow up parliamentary question, Gavin Strang asked whether the government "has any plans to bring forward legislation to remedy discrimination against lesbians and gay men within the legal system."

John Patten replied: "We have no plans to change the criminal law insofar as it affects homosexual relations or to introduce legislation to prohibit differences in treatment on the grounds of homosexuality."

The revelation of the numbers of men being imprisoned, and the severity of their sentences, is likely to fuel pressure within the Labour Party for Roy Hattersley to abandon his plans for a "free vote" on the age of consent.

Members of the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights are already insisting that since a reduction in the age of consent to 16 is official Party policy, legislation to this effect should be officially sponsored by a future Labour government.

This would involve a three line whip on all Labour MPs, requiring them to attend and vote in favour of lowering the age of consent.

Poll Tax: local report

Organising in Wigan

Fifteen hundred people have attended anti-Poll Tax meetings in the Wigan Metropolitan area in recent weeks.

Nearly 500 came to meetings in Leigh where *Briefing* supporters are active. We also organised meetings of 200 in Atherton, 225 in Tyldsley, 160 in Hindley, and some dozens in Ashton-in-Makerfield and Golborne.

Wigan's Poll Tax of £382 has been capped by central government, making the case for fighting Poll Tax and cuts together even clearer. The equivalent of 150 full-time home help jobs could be cut along with many Council run college courses and community centres.

The Labour Council is so fearful of the Anti-Poll Tax Union that they have banned it from meeting in Council and Party premises, including Labour Clubs. Now they are putting pressure on the breweries to prevent the campaign from meeting in local pubs!

Anti-Poll Tax activists are keen to expose this undemocratic practice to local Party members — but there are only 350 members in the solidly Labour Leigh Constituency — and Party officers are not keen to recruit new blood!

By a *Briefing* reporter

In a letter to the Wigan *Journal*, Leigh Anti-Poll Tax Union Chair Glen Voris points out that numerous APTUs have been formed in Wigan, amounting to a campaign bigger than anything ever organised by Wigan Labour Group.

He goes on: "100 or so local people attended the anti-Poll Tax demonstration on May Day to burn their Poll Tax bills.

"These were ordinary people, not three-headed monsters. They were refused a platform or a speaker. The audience in the Club desperately wanted a question and answer session on the Poll Tax.

"Lawrence Cunliffe MP and the Trades Council refused this. He called everybody who didn't pay the Poll Tax 'parasites and hypocrites'.

"[...]But Lawrence Cunliffe would not be a Labour MP in the first place if thousands of working class people had not broken the law to secure him this right!

"Nor, likewise, could the Labour Party itself have come into existence; nor the trade union movement. Nor would the working class have the right to vote. Nor would any woman in Leigh have that right if not for the bravery of the Suffragette movement."

ST HELENS

In neighbouring St Helens, a town with militant traditions, an estimated one third of people haven't paid their Poll Tax. Twelve Councillors voted against implementation here — whereas Wigan has not one rebel!

Birmingham Six

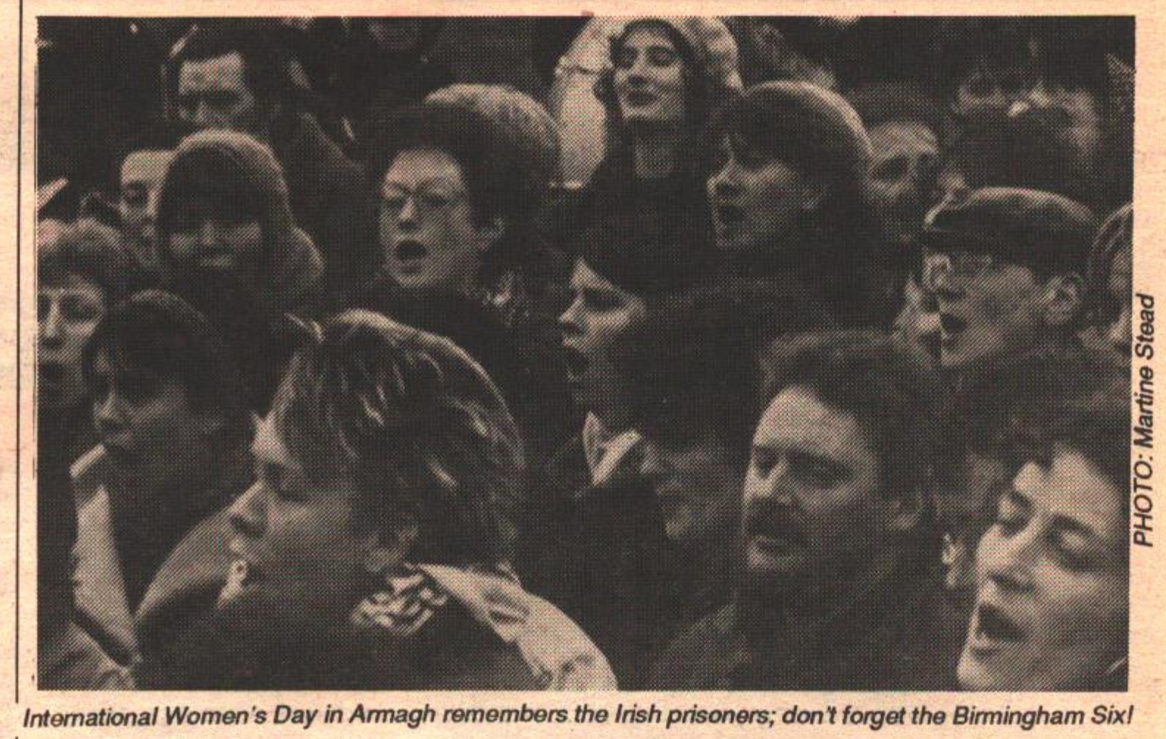


PHOTO: Martine Stead

International Women's Day in Armagh remembers the Irish prisoners; don't forget the Birmingham Six!

Free the Birmingham Six now!

In Birmingham was six men,
In Guildford was four,
Who were picked and tortured,
And framed by the law,
While the filth get promotion,
They're still doing time.
For being Irish in the wrong place,
And at the wrong time!
The Pogues — *Song for the Birmingham 6*

Attention has again been focused on the outrageous imprisonment of the six Irish workers charged in connection with the Birmingham pub bombings.

The belated enquiry into the stitch-up of the Maguire Family and Guiseppe Conlon has revived concern.

The evidence so far reveals a bumbling incompetence of forensic evidence that would shame a 12 year old with a Woolworth chemistry set — yet a whole family was sent to prison on tests now proven totally unreliable.

The only "evidence" proferred by the Police in the Birmingham 6 case (besides dubious "confessions" beaten out of tired and very scared prisoners), was a test carried out by a certain Doctor Skuse.

Dr Skuse was subsequently retired early on the grounds of "reduced efficiency". This same character now turns out to have tested the Maguires and pronounced them as having handled explosives!

In the light of the evidence to the May Enquiry, the already clear-cut case of the Birmingham Six needs to be pushed even higher up the agenda.

By Valerie Veness Islington North CLP

At its recent national conference, NUPE passed a motion condemning the continued imprisonment of the Six and calling for the union to affiliate to the campaign and support it in a number of ways.

This is an important breakthrough and should be followed up at every union conference this summer.

Briefing supporters should ensure their wards, CLPs, and union branches keep up the pressure.

I have visited all six of the prisoners recently and they are in remarkably good spirits considering the things they have endured.

They follow the campaign with avid interest and are keen to continue the battle to vindicate themselves. They reject any idea of parole or clemency and are quite determined to fight on for a pardon and acquittal.

What is vital is that people keep writing to them — every letter of support makes them more determined.

Cash can be sent in the form of postal orders crossed and made payable to the individual (apparently prisoners now have accounts inside!).

The addresses are as follows:

Billy Power & Paddy Joe Hill, HM Prison Gartree, Leicester Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire.

Richard McIlkenny, HM Prison — The Scrubs, Du-Cane Road, London W12.

Gerry Hunter, John Walker, & Hugh Callaghan, HM Prison Long Lartin, Evesham, Worcestershire.

Don't just read this article and shake your head. Sit down now and write to them — and write to your MP, etc. We need to step up the campaign now.

Justice cannot be long delayed. When the six are released, Islington North Labour Party has promised them an evening to even beat the Guildford Four event when they came to see us after their release.

Each ward and section in our Party is "twinned" with a prisoner — why not get your CLP to do the same?

Affiliate and elect a delegate to the campaign. Details from 21 Hatchard Road, London N19.

NEC



Jo Richardson: a disappointment for the left.

Labour's ex-lefts — careers before principles

The record of Labour NEC voting, produced by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, does not make such interesting reading these days.

Fewer and fewer recorded votes are being taken at NEC meetings. One third of the NEC have to request this elementary democratic practice before it is granted.

Consequently the CLPD chart on how the NEC voted on key questions over the last six months is full of question marks; although it can safely be assumed that many "queries" voted with the Kinnock leadership.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

The chief effect of this loss of democracy is that it is more difficult to decide who is doing what and therefore who should be supported in this year's NEC elections.

Presumably this is the aim of ending recorded votes. Sadly, only Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner have an unblemished record of opposing all the attacks of the right wing and in promoting socialist policies.

Many of the votes have been on organisational questions. On these, former lefts have been particularly weak.

Most recently Margaret Beckett, once a regular on Campaign Group platforms and now a shadow Treasury spokesperson, opposed moves to kick into touch a consultation paper on abolishing the mandatory reselection of Labour MPs — a hard-won gain of the 1970s.

This consultation paper also suggested abolishing the trade union input into parliamentary selection contests and restricting CLPs in choosing from a list of "approved nominees" drawn up by the national leadership.

Other erstwhile socialists are thought to have voted for these proposals too — but with no recorded vote, it was all done on a quick show of hands.

Margaret Beckett has made herself useful to the leadership in other ways. According to recent press reports, it was she who went through Labour's latest Policy Review taking out all the financial commitments and timescales.

The aim was to stop the Tories "costing" the review and telling the taxpayers how much their taxes would go up. The effect, though, has been to water down any commitments on job creation and reconstruction to vague generalities.

Walker

Neil Kinnock, it seems, has taken a leaf out of Margaret Thatcher's book. She keeps her "oppositionists" silent by including one or two in her Cabinet — Peter Walker for instance.

The speed at which members of Kinnock's shadow team have travelled from socialist policies shows once again how careers are more important than principles.

The block vote debate

Why we need the unions

Labour's future direction is now a major debate in the unions as well as the Party.

Labour Party Socialists weighed into this debate at its founding meeting in May with a controversial paper discussing the abolition of the block vote and trade union affiliation.

I believe the fundamental issue *not* up for grabs is the relationship between the unions and the Party.

We should not support the power of half-a-dozen trade union barons over Conference decisions.

But rather than challenging the link between the unions and the Party, especially at Party Conference, we should be looking towards democratising the decision-making within the unions.

By Kevin Flack
East Lewisham CLP

Refusing to confront the lack of democracy in the unions is a cop-out by the left.

It would mean ditching the major organisations of the working class for the easy option of gaining majorities within an individual membership party and show we hadn't learnt the lessons of not following up Benn's Deputy Leadership campaign of 1981.

The unions' current 90% of Conference vote is an anomaly that must be reduced — a 60% to 40%, or straight 50/50 split between affiliated unions and the CLPs would be more equitable.

But should the *way* the unions vote be changed?

All of the TGWU's Conference vote is cast in one direction. Some argue that regionalising the vote or dividing it proportionately would be "fairer".

Presumably they mean it would be "fairer" in the way that PR would be a "fairer" form of election in an abstract, non-existent society.

To adopt either argument is to impose liberal and middle class ideals on the workers' organisations.

Unions stand or fall on their *collective* strength; they exist to support and defend their members' interests as a unified whole. Imagine a strike vote being 60% for and 40% against and then allowing four in ten of the members to go in to work!

No, there is a need to democratise the block vote — which should be done by:

- binding union delegations to their own Conference decisions;
- democratically electing union delegations to Labour Conference from among the lay membership;
- and allowing time for full delegation meetings once Conference composites are known.

The reason we continue to be Labour Party members in the face of the total revision of Party policy is because the Party remains organically linked to the working class through the unions.

If these links are broken it will become truly a social democratic party on Western (and now Eastern) European lines.

The Labour Party and its representatives must, as a matter of basic principle, be accountable.

But the accountability must be to the working class as a whole, through a preserved link with the unions, not just to an individual membership that is often dominated by the over-articulate white middle classes, working on behalf of rather than alongside the community it is supposed to represent.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Kinnock: backed by the block vote, but will it last?

One of the key issues raised in the Labour Party Socialists discussion is that of new links with the working class and community organisations.

This idea — of national and local affiliations of Tenants Associations and organisations such as Joint Shop Stewards Committees — was raised in an article I wrote in *Briefing* immediately after the 1983 General Election defeat.

This turn to the working class by local Parties — whereby Councillors become "shop stewards of the local community" — is precisely the role the Party should adopt.

Nature

The Party's federal nature — with its Women's Sections, Young Socialists (where they still exist), and union branches — is the embryo of such community-based organisations.

This must be reflected up to national level, with union representation parallelled through District and Regional level up to national affiliations.

At a local level, Trades Councils — still only affiliated to a small percentage of CLPs — have a vital role to play, particularly in giving a local input for unions such as NALGO, CPSA, and NUT that are not affiliated nationally.

During industrial disputes, such as the Miners Strike, and community resistance, such as the anti-Poll Tax campaign, Labour Parties rooted in the local unions and communities could have a progressive role to play, irrespective of the dictats of the national leadership.

Above all, at a time when the national leadership is attacking the links between trade unions and the Party, we need a healthy debate on how those links should be extended and democratised.

Behind the elections

Soccer success in South London

The Valley Party campaigned exclusively on a platform of returning Charlton Athletic to its old home ground in Greenwich.

On May 3rd it polled nearly 15,000 votes.

In a high profile campaign, they helped unseat the Chair of the Planning Committee and came within 300 votes of taking the seat of the Leader of the Council.

It allowed an obvious display of community feeling against Town Hall bureaucracy — but what do socialist Charlton supporters feel about the issues?

I personally feel that if people are committed enough to spend an afternoon in Croydon once a fortnight (where Charlton currently play at Crystal Palace's ground) then they deserve to be heard.

By DAN CARTER

The main worry amongst Charlton supporters is that their commitment to returning the Club to the Valley is being exploited by members of the Board of Directors more interested in profits.

The abuse of the fans' support was revealed in the programme for the last home game of the season where Vice-Chair Norris discussed the probability of moving to other grounds in Greenwich.

Always one to put profits first, Norris and Alwen, Chair of the Board, provoked the battle with Labour-run Greenwich Council by trying to overdevelop the Valley site with office blocks alongside the football stadium, in a "take it or leave it" package.

As Charlton supporter Dave Hammond told *Briefing:*

"If the Board were really interested in taking Charlton back to the Valley, they shouldn't fool around with grandiose building schemes — if they'd halved the development, the Council would have approved it."

Council

The phenomenal success of the Valley Party in the Council elections has the Council running scared, and now the Chair of Planning has lost his seat, there are new offers of negotiations being made.

The threats to cuddly Nick Raynsford in Greenwich, Austin Walker in Woolwich, and the possibility of the confusion of candidates in the marginal Lewisham constituencies (where Sports Minister Colin "away in Sardinia" Moynihan is MP) makes a compromise possible.

Dave Hammond is clear that "Norris should cut his grandiose building plans and negotiate with the Council a speedy return to the Valley."

Meanwhile, the lessons of the Valley Party's campaign are that if feelings are high enough in the local community, intervening in elections can certainly put pressure on Local Authorities to bring them around the table.

Of course, it helps to have rich backers who can suddenly acquire major advertising hoardings in the weeks running up to the elections.

Labour Party Socialists

Meeting the challenge; organising for change!

There is a huge demand from the Labour left for a non-sectarian democratic organisation.

This accounts for the success of the Labour Party Socialists Conference held on 19-20th May.

By Liz Davies
Islington North CLP

Three days earlier, the Labour leadership introduced their latest Policy Review. The leadership clearly sees no room for socialism or socialists in the Party.

The review is full of vague promises, carefully avoiding commitments on spending. It whole-heartedly accepts the concept of a market economy, suggesting merely that under Labour there will be a touch more humanity than under the Tories.

It offers nothing to the poor, vulnerable and low-paid.

The review was drawn up by committees of experts.

Gone are the days when the Labour Party believed in listening to the people who were affected by policies: Council tenants, for example, on housing policy. Now they listen to highly paid professionals, who have academic knowledge, but no real experience.

Mandate

And gone is any attempt to consult the Party. Now, the leadership just announces policy changes without any mandate from Party members. Labour is increasingly centralised, professional and right wing.

Combined with this are the Edmonds proposals to abolish Labour Party Conference, thereby reducing members' involvement in the policy-making process even more.

The left is being witch-hunted all over the country.

- The NEC is investigating the Wirral and Birkenhead Parties.
- Left candidates in the Council elections in London were suspended and prevented from standing.
- Councillors are being threatened with disciplinary measures up and down the country.
- The Party is disowning organisers of the Anti-Poll Tax Federations.

The Labour left has been on the retreat since the Miners' Strike. Losing the Party's unilateralist policy last year was a major defeat, but symptomatic of a trend since 1984/85.

It is then understandable that the left is demoralised. Some comrades have left the Party, others have stayed paper-members but turned their activities to different campaigns.

Hostile

Others again believe that the left has to continue with the gains of the early 80s and have concentrated entirely on campaigns for constitutional change in a hostile atmosphere.

LPS clearly met a huge demand. Three hundred and thirty people attended and held comradely, sharp political discussions.

LPS differs from the usual vicious Labour left organisations. The Conference was friendly and open. It concentrated on politics, rather than the usual obscure faction fights.

It has the advantage of links with organisations outside the Labour Party, through the Socialist Movement, which will prevent LPS becoming obsessed with Labour Party internal matters and bring sight of wider political issues.

LPS puts great priority on having a regional base. Too often Labour left organisations have become London dominated and lost touch with most of their members.

LPS has built a non-London majority into its Steering Committee and will meet regularly outside the capital.

We have also applied positive action for women, and black and ethnic minority members of the Steering Committee.

LPS will hold an AGM in October — where policy will be debated and voted on. It hopes to organise a series of conferences on policy isues that the leadership fails to address.

It has vigorously responded to the debate on Party democracy, instituted by the Edmonds report.

The Conference was buzzing with discussion over the trade union block vote and everyone putting forward their favourite schemes for restructuring the Party.

The debate on these two issues will continue.

LPS has agreed to campaign on the Free Trade Union Campaign for greater independence from the law for trade unions. It will also become involved in anti-Poll Tax campaigns.

The Labour left has lacked an open, campaigning organisation for too long. LPS will draw in more and more left activists and will soon be in a position politically to challenge the Labour leadership.

The 1990s will see a new restructured Labour Party. Fortunately they will also see a new, reinvigorated Labour left.

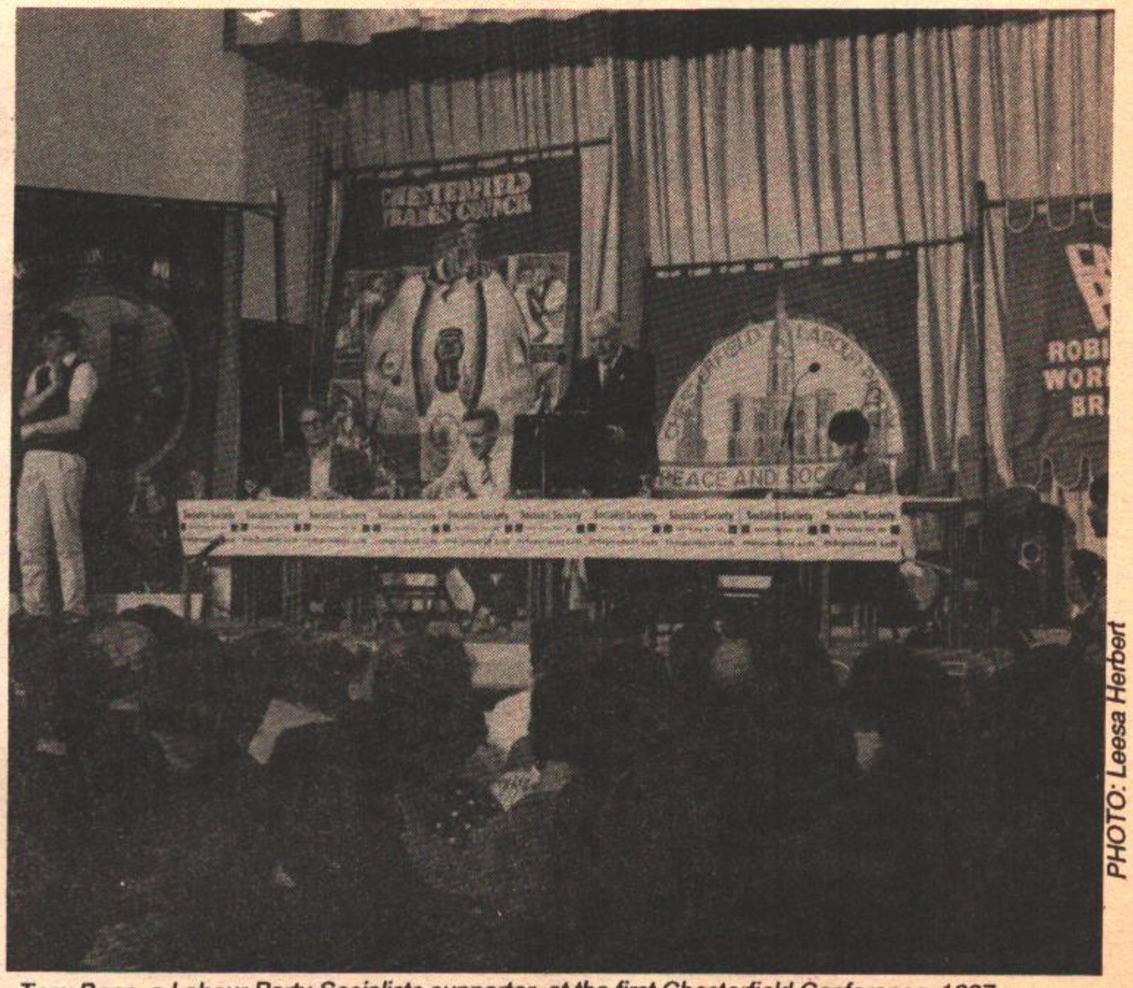


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Tony Benn, a Labour Party Socialists supporter, at the first Chesterfield Conference, 1987.

JOIN LABOUR PARTY SOCIALISTS!

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

CLP.....

Waged £8; Unwaged/Student £4;
CLPs and other organisations £16.
LPS membership will also make you an affiliate of the Socialist Movement.
If you wish to opt out of affiliation to the Socialist Movement please tick here: .....
Send this form to: LPS, PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UD.

Looking to the Future

Front Bench play "Give us a clue"

What the Labour leadership said at the press launch of *Looking to the Future* spelt it out even more starkly than the document itself.

The Party's strategy for government will be to gamble on British manufacturing generating sufficient leftovers for social spending.

"Making comes before taking," Neil Kinnock said in his opening speech.

"Making," he hoped, would pay for health care, education, welfare, and environmental protection.

But Labour's imperative of "making" will cut across wage levels, the right to work, and effective trade unionism.

The equations, said Shadow Chancellor John Smith, run like this. A Labour government would foster investment with the "key objectives" of "economic growth, a reasonable equilibrium in the balance of payments, the control of inflation, and the highest possible level of employment."

In pursuit of key objective three, Labour will "tackle diverse inflationary trends," presumably including so-called excessive wage claims.

But what is the definition of key objective four?

Infamous press conference tough guy Tony Bevins of *The Independent*, primed with a leaked copy of *Looking to the Future*, asked why it didn't promise full employment.

By DAVE OSLER

Kinnock explained that full employment is "a convenient but not altogether illuminating phrase." But "full" was apparently the only forbidden adjective.

"The commitment to the development of employment, high paid employment, hi-tech employment, great choice employment, well- trained employment, high-skilled employment is right throughout the whole document."

Things began to warm up.

Denying tabloid accusations of "new powers" for the unions, Kinnock promised to make it easier to haul the labour movement through the courts.

"The people we're empowering," he said, "are the members of the unions and we're providing a context in which complaints, disagreements, can go to specialist courts without the pomp, the circumstance, the expense, or the delay, or the suspicion about the decisions" that currently occurs.

And Tony Blair chimed in: "There will be no mass pickets, no flying pickets... All industrial action will be subject to a ballot."

Bryan Gould confirmed he *still* hasn't got a clue what Labour might replace Poll Tax with and is now waiting for the Tories to announce the latest version so he could come up with an alternative to that.

The chap from French radio pointedly asked where Labour now stood on the continuum between "Thatcherism and Japan Incorporated".

Kinnock took the piss out of his accent and fielded the question to Gordon Brown, who didn't understand it either.

Blathering

But Kinnock's strangest quote of the day came in reply to the woman who asked whatever happened to socialism.

After blathering on about the individual, freedom of choice, and working with the market — eloquently reclaiming Thatcherite values à la *Marxism Today* — Kinnock maintained there was a:

"strong strain of socialism running through everything we put forward. It could be unwise, but we are convinced democratic socialists." Freudian slip?

The last question also went to Bevins:

"The document doesn't state what the defence policy is. I take it that I can just cut out and stick in the old policy from *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change?*"

Gerald Kaufman agreed that he could.

Defence Policy

Back to the future!



PHOTO: Bob Naylor

Rumours that the meeting of the Shadow Cabinet which agreed the final draft of "Looking to the future" took place at dawn on Whit Sunday at Stonehenge are totally without foundation.

Were there any last vestiges of doubt concerning the present political direction of the Labour Party?

Any ideas that the national Party was heading in a socialist or even reasonably progressive direction have been blown away by the publication of the NEC document "Looking to the Future".

This policy document, written by members of the Shadow Cabinet and accepted without amendment by a compliant National Executive, will be forced through Party Conference this October.

The leadership may disingenuously claim to be "looking to the future", but this document does nothing but return to the discredited and outdated right wing programmes pursued by previous Labour governments.

By Richard Heffernan
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

It is among the most reactionary series of proposals produced by the Party in opposition and probably even in government.

The backward-looking nature of the proposals is most clearly demonstrated in the brief section of the document devoted to the central question of defence policy.

Here, the Party is expected to accept the traditional foreign policy of successive post war British governments, predicated upon the Cold War perception of Europe and the World divided into East and West.

Government

So the next Labour government is once again to pursue a defence policy which involves first the possession of domestic nuclear weapons, second the acceptance of American nuclear bases, and last but not least continuing membership of NATO.

More surprisingly the document contains no substantial reference to multilateral nuclear disarmament, despite this being Party leadership's excuse for the abandonment of a unilateralist policy last year.

Nebulous references are made to various proposals for "negotiations" between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

However, it seems Labour is going to ignore the opportunity to benefit from any peace dividend resulting from the collapse of the Cold War.

The document makes no substantial commitment to reduce defence expenditure as was demanded by last year's Party Conference.

In a truly Orwellian fashion "Looking to the Future" presents the retention of a nuclear capacity as a "new" and "innovative" approach to defence policy.

In reality however, Labour has been prepared to deploy and therefore use, nuclear weapons for all but ten of the 45 years since nuclear technology was invented.

For example:

•it was under a Labour government that Britain first acquired a nuclear capacity in the late 1940s;

•during the 1950s Labour supported the construction and deployment of the Hydrogen Bomb and accepted German rearmament;

•the first Wilson government in the 1960s accepted Polaris;

•it was a Labour Cabinet which was to accept the Chevaline Project in 1977;

•it was a Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, who accepted in principle the deployment of Cruise and Pershing 2 in Western Europe.

The only exceptions to this appalling rule have been in the years spent in opposition, first in 1960/61 and again in 1980/89, when the Party was committed to a unilateralist policy.

Committed

Since 1945 Labour has been committed in both government and opposition to an avowedly pro-Atlanticist policy and to membership of NATO.

Except for the period 1980/86 when Labour (unsuccessfully) attempted to square a circle which included opposition to nuclear armament policy with a loyalty to the Atlantic alliance, successive Labour leaderships have endorsed NATO strategy in the prosecution of the Cold War.

It is therefore no surprise that even in the context of the political transformation of Eastern Europe, the Labour leadership is content to simply reaffirm its unquestioning support for NATO.

The document breathtakingly gives an indefinite commitment to NATO and it concurs with the view of US Secretary of State Baker that the Alliances in the future "should be political rather than military".

An attempt at the NEC to change a commitment from the "need for NATO in the forseeable future" to the "immediate future" was actually defeated by 14 votes to 10.

This clearly demonstrates the complete absence of will on the part of the leadership to even encourage the abolition of the political and military structures of the Cold War.

Successive

Even the modest proposal of successive Party Conferences to seek the mutual dissolution of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact is to be shamefully cast aside.

The atrophy of the Warsaw pact as a result in the overthrow of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe has opened a window of opportunity for the establishment of a pan-European security pact which would involve the abolition of all existing military structures East and West.

Labour is to be invited to set its face against such an opportunity.

"Looking to the Future" in reality attempts to do just the opposite.

Labour and the

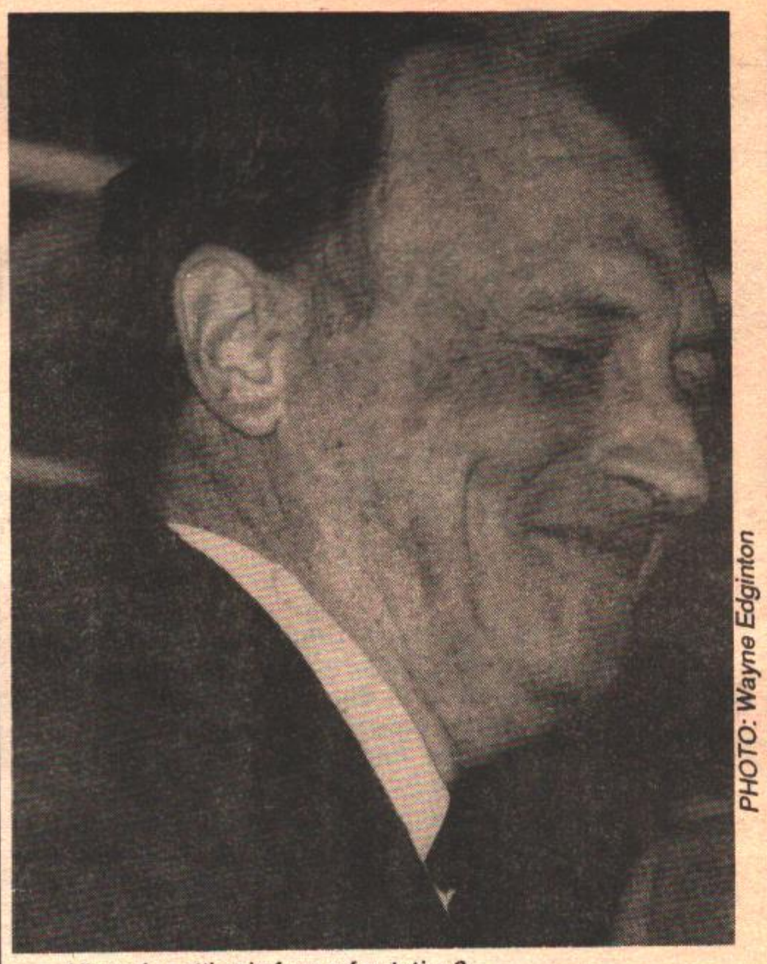


PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Kinnock: setting in for confrontation?



SOGAT workers: expecting La

Kinnock keeps To confrontation wit

Labour's NEC has decided to keep all the anti-union laws which the Tories have enacted since 1979.

The decision, announced in the recent Policy Review Revision, comes after a decade of success for the British ruling class in its constant attempts to shackle the unions.

Legislation against the trade unions has always been a political and industrial issue rather than a legal one. From the outset employers and their political representatives have wanted to criminalise trade union activity.

For most of their existence the unions have faced legal sanctions against collective action and even collective organisation.

The ruling class will impose whatever measures the current strengths or weaknesses of trade union movement allows them to get away with.

Collective

For most of the last century collective action was illegal until immunity from prosecution was established at the turn of the century.

It was achieved by a combination of industrial and political action. The formation of the Labour Party was one of its consequences.

The immunities established stayed in place until the 1980s — despite various attempts to abolish them by successive Tory and Labour governments.

With the real possibility of a Labour government in the next year or two it is worth remembering that the first post-war attempt to legislate against the unions was Labour's.

Barbara Castle's infamous *In Place of Strife* in 1969 proposed giving the government power to order workers back to work for a 28 day "cooling off period".

In Place of Strife was withdrawn by Harold Wilson after massive opposition from the trade union rank-and-file and several one-day national, unofficial strikes.

It was replaced by a deal under which the TUC agreed to "put its own house in order" — which meant stopping unofficial strikes and getting the militants under control.

Two years later Edward Heath broadly modelled his Industrial Relations Act on *In Place of Strife*.

He set up an industrial court with powers to order workers back to work and impose fines on the unions. The Court was greeted with a series of strikes, both official and unofficial, against its decisions and the fines it had imposed.

After the Pentonville Five were jailed for defending dockers jobs against the decisions of the Court and then released by the previously unheard of Official Solicitor, the Industrial Relations Act was dead on its feet.

However, action continued against it, including an all-out strike of the AUEW called on the casting vote of Hugh Scanlon.

After Heath was brought down by the miners, Labour were forced to repeal the Industrial Relations Act and abolish the National Industrial Relations Court.

By ALAN THORNETT

Labour had to avoid a confrontation with the rank-and-file of the trade unions and were unable to breach pledges wrung from them by militant action.

Tory legislation begun in the early 1980s could have met the same fate. The unions were just as strong and the working class just as militant.

Unfortunately there was another development which has proven disastrous for the working class: the development of New Realism at the top of the unions in an attempt to explain the election of a Tory government after the strike action of the 1978 "Winter of Discontent".

New Realism was based on the idea that industrial action was an electoral liability and that the Tories were too strong to beat.

It led to the betrayal and defeat of a series of major strikes in steel, rail, cars and newspapers which sapped the strength of the working class and gave the Tories the space to mount a new legal challenge to the unions.

Resistance

At first the TUC, in public at least, set its face against the new laws. A fund was set up to finance resistance by those unions who fell foul of the law. Unions would be supported by strike action, even illegal strike action if necessary.

Everyone waited for the first confrontation.

It came at Warrington when the NGA was fined in its dispute with Eddie Shah. Instead of implementing TUC policy and supporting the NGA's planned national strike, the TUC ordered the strike to be called off and Shah won the day.

It was the turning point: in no time the TUC had abandoned all opposition to the anti-union laws. It did not take the Tories long to take full advantage of the situation and get more legislation on the statute book.

After the defeat of the miners the laws were again strengthened. Trade unions were tied hand and foot by legislation which became the single most serious problem facing the movement.

The laws were used to break the most militant and best organised sections of the trade

unions



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

our to repeal the anti-union laws used by profiteer Murdoch?

ry laws for
n the unions

union movement such as the Fleet Street unions, seafarers, and the dockers.

These laws are rooted in the betrayals of the TUC — not the strength of the ruling class or a collapse of resistance by the rank-and-file. This is important to remember if we are to map a way out of this situation.

The working class remains willing and able to mount a fightback, as was shown clearly in the strikes on the rail and elsewhere last summer.

Not only did almost every strike ballot go in favour of the most militant option irrespective of the laws, but new forms of self-organisation emerged in response to the legal situation.

This was despite the fact that virtually the whole of the trade union leadership remain committed to working within the law and refused to challenge it!

However, if the trade union leaders were not prepared to respond positively to the strikes last summer the Tories had no hesitation in reacting.

Legislation now going through Parliament is aimed specifically at unofficial strike leaders to prevent any repetition of last summer's strikes.

The measures would end the closed shop and strengthen employers' powers to victimise unofficial strikers and their leaders.

It will become lawful to sack unofficial strikers and unlawful for other workers to take any action in their defence. These proposals are potentially the most dangerous yet.

It is this context that we have to view the Kinnock leadership's new Policy Review document.

Probably

Probably most socialists thought that Kinnock would keep the bulk of the Tory laws — particularly compulsory balloting. But how many predicted that he would keep every single one — even sequestration of union assets?

This is one of the most important decisions Kinnock has made since he begun his journey down the right wing road and we have to look at his motives very carefully.

In my view, the decision to keep the whole of Tory legislation is not for fear of the bad press which would come with a decision to repeal them, but in order to use them against the trade unions and the working class.

The decision signals a confrontation with the working class in the first years of a Labour government.

Expectations will be raised if Labour is elected and there will be an increase in industrial militancy. The NEC has decided to use those laws against the working class in that situation.

Harold Wilson wanted such laws in 1969 and Neil Kinnock wants them now. Tony Blair, speaking to the media since the publication of the Review, made it absolutely clear that the laws would be used to the full.

To reverse this situation and force Labour to repeal Tory legislation more is needed than a campaign inside the Labour Party, although that is very important. This was not decisive in 1974 and it would not be decisive now.

Labour will only repeal Tory laws if they have been challenged and made unworkable before they come into office.

Now the law is complied with as a matter of course. We must change this. They have to be challenged and the courts and the employers made to pay a heavy price for their use.

This, however, implies more than just a campaign against the anti-union laws. It implies a successful campaign against New Realism at every level of the trade union movement.

Labour Party democracy

What future for Conference?

Annual Conference has long been an object of derision among pundits and parliamentarians.

It's chaotic, costly, incoherent, and inconsistent, they claim: certainly no way for a "modern" party to make policy and present itself to the public.

Walworth Road's answer is to "reform" Conference out of existence.

Policy commissions, postal ballots, and an ever-increasing load of unamendable NEC statements are just a few of the steps on Labour's proposed pilgrimage to a (biennial? quadrennial?) US-style "political convention", purged of debate and dissent and pre-packaged for prime time.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Unions are an integral to the Party: T&G delegation voting at 1988 Conference.

By Mike Marqusee Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

In response, a horror-stricken left has raised the old battle-cry: "Defend Party Conference!" Model resolutions have been circulated to this effect, which should be strongly supported.

But while waging an immediate defensive struggle against the Walworth Road juggernaut in the run-up to this year's Conference, we should also seek to transform the debate with our own long-term, positive agenda.

Fraudulent

The best way to expose the fraudulent and deeply undemocratic nature of proposed Kinnockite "reforms" is to counter-attack with a clear account of what we want Conference for, why we are defending it, and what kind of Conference we think it should be.

We need an Annual Conference. No mass membership organisation can call itself democratic if it does not have a single, sovereign, representative, and accountable assembly meeting regularly, as its ultimate authority.

Recent Eastern European experience has confirmed this. Representative, constituent assemblies are recognised there as a necessity for democratic legitimacy. In Walworth Road they are considered an embarrassment.

Kinnock's proposals for Conference are intended to restrict its role and weaken its authority, thereby allowing the further growth of centres of unrepresentative, unaccountable power within the Party.

In contrast, socialists in the Party should be arguing for a stronger and more democratic Conference. The NEC (and the party's full-time officials) should be properly accountable to Conference, as should the Parliamentary leadership.

Rudimentary reforms in this direction would include the right of Conference delegates to amend any and all NEC statements and the presentation to Conference of the full voting records of outgoing NEC members.

The "Parliamentary Labour Party Report" — currently the slot for the Party Leader's set-piece Conference speech — should be a real PLP report and delegates should have the right to challenge any sections of it they please.

Indeed, far too much Conference time is wasted with contributions from MPs, NEC members, and trade union General Secretaries.

The Party should have a deliberate policy of giving preference to CLP delegates and rank-and-file trade unionists — especially to female and black delegates.

Committee

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC), a formal organisation of Kinnock supporters, likes to moan about the inefficiency of Conference as a policy-making instrument.

Certainly, compositing-room carve-ups and Standing Orders Committee agenda rulings leave much to be desired.

However, their criticism would be more credible if pressure was brought to bear on Walworth Road to make policy statements and constitutional amendments available to CLPs and trade unions in sufficient time for real consultation and mandating to take place.

Special policy commissions would be welcome *if* they were genuinely democratic, open to contributions from all sections of the Party, and elected by and accountable to the Party through its Annual Conference.

And special conferences convened on the same basis as Annual Conference itself — on major political, strategic or constitutional issues — would be an extension of Conference sovereignty and Party democracy (which is why they are rejected out of hand by the Kinnockites).

Conference delegations and voting powers need a major shake-up.

There is now wide agreement that the proportion of Conference vote wielded by the trade unions needs to be reduced. But the make-up of the union delegations should also be addressed.

This is a legitimate concern of the whole Party, which should formulate a code of conduct on the election of delegates for all affiliated bodies. This code should require all delegates to make themselves accountable to those whom they claim to represent.

They should seek mandation through democratic structures on all major issues which the Conference is likely to debate.

They should report back — not just to GCs or Executive Committees but to branches and shop stewards committees and workplaces — on decisions made at Conference and their contributions to them.

Why not stipulate that trade union delegations must be made up of elected rank-and-file members?

And why not take a few more practical steps to encourage both CLPs and unions to send more women, black people, and other members of oppressed or disenfranchised groups as delegates to Conference?

Individual

Shouldn't individual CLPs be granted voting strength on the basis of their membership? Is it right that a CLP with 100 members casts the same vote as a CLP with 1,000 members?

This should be balanced by measures to help CLPs with few members meet the cost of sending delegates to Conference. Last year, one-tenth of CLPs were not represented at Conference at all.

These are just a few ideas, then, of the kind of real reforms needed to make Labour Party Conference an open, pluralistic, participatory event.

Of course, such an exercise in mass democratic politics is anathema to our leaders — because it would be unpredictable and therefore politically "unreliable".

I can already hear the LCC gnashing its teeth: what on earth would their friends in the media make of this "circus"?

Personally, I'm convinced that Labour would make great strides by baring the glorious uncertainties of real democratic politics to public view.

BOOK REVIEW

Ex-Marxists exposed

At long last, here is an effective and thorough riposte to "post-Marxism".

This intellectual fraud has, rightly, been re-dubbed by Norman Geras "ex-Marxism".

By Mike Marqusee Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

Thanks to *Verso* for making four articles by Geras previously published in *New Left Review* available in paperback format.

Geras is one of the most sober, insightful, and readable of contemporary Marxists theoreticians.

NLR

Unlike so many of NLR's current crop of contributors he knows how to address both an audience and a question without unneccessary fuss and jargon.

Briefing readers who have been put off many of the important debates within the Marxist tradition in recent years because of the obscurity of the language in which they are couched should give Geras a try.

You will be pleasantly surprised!

In this volume he deals first with the familiar but always thorny question of socialist morality. What is and is not permissible in the struggle for socialism and in particular in the midst of revolutionary circumstances?

Trotsky, in *Their Morals and Ours*, claims that moral norms are irrelevant in a revolutionary situation and that anything is justifiable which really benefits the goals of the revolution and brings closer the triumph of the oppressed.

While Geras shares Trotsky's powerful critique of the inadequacies of liberal moral philosophies he is sceptical of Trotsky's own "solution", not least because in practise it offers no solution.

In a necessarily complicated argument, he asks how we decide what is or is not justified in extreme circumstances — and who does the deciding.

Is it imaginable that torture, for example, or mass executions, could ever really advance the class struggle? Geras says no — and suggests that there are therefore moral parameters to revolution.

Laclau

The second part of the book deals with the fashionable phenomenon of "post-Marxism", and in particular offers a definitive critique of the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

They are not exactly household names but revered theorists of the *Marxism Today* crowd and others who have decided to throw the baby of Marxism out with the bathwater of Stalinism.

As Geras points out, many of these people ask genuine and difficult questions about the Marxist tradition — but refuse to stay for an answer.

Marxism

And when they in turn are asked questions about their putative alternative to Marxism they dismiss the questions as irrelevant.

Marxism is asked to do what it has never really claimed to do — offer absolute "scientific" explanations and predictions of everything — and then damned for failing in this project, which in turn is derided as "reductivist", "essentialist", and "totalitarian".

Geras

Geras shows how these people are not actually arguing with the living, diverse, and complex tradition of Marxism but with an impoverished caricature, designed to suit the needs of their polemic without regard to historical truth.

He goes to expose their own ostensible "post-Marxism" as a pretty familiar bag of rhetorical tricks "conceptually slippery at decisive points and unable to explain anything specific" which can be used to support deeply reactionary ends.

He, also points out how vague their own "radical democratic" politics is when confronted with some of the harsher and more intractable realities of capitalist society and justly accuses them of reviving and relying on the old stereotypes of the Cold War.



Trotsky and Lenin: still offering a way forward for the movement?

On the other side of the argument, Geras is all too aware that socialist thought has made itself vulnerable to the latest bout of ex-Marxism (a plague that infects the intelligentsia once every 20 years of so) by its own bad intellectual habits.

Sober

He emphasises the need for us to be sober, responsible, and thorough in our arguments and exemplifies those virtues in his own writing.

***Discourses of Extremity, Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances*, by Norman Geras, *Verso*.**

BOOK REVIEW

Out to lunch

"Perforation! Shout it out!

"The deliberate punctuated weakening of paper and cardboard so that it will tear along an intended path, leaving a row of fine-haired pills or tuftlets on each new edge.

By Peter Chowney Hackney South CLP

"It is a staggering concept showing an age transforming feel for the unique properties of pulped wood fibre."

Imagine the above statement expanded to a footnote over a page long, and inserted (along with dozens of other obliquely irrelevant and obsessional footnotes) in a book composed entirely of similar detail and reflective meanderings on the minutiae of everyday social interaction, and you begin to get the picture.

The Mezzanine is the story of one man's lunch hour.

Or, rather, it is not the story (for there is no story, as such) but the description in detail of all the objects that impinge upon his lunch hour (shoe laces, escalators, drinking straws, vending machines, paper towels) and his tangential mental meanderings on their social and historical relevance.

Sounds boring? On the surface, perhaps.

But Nicholson Baker's book, right from the first page, is peculiarly compulsive. Although it's about nothing at all, it's almost impossible to put down. It's also highly original and very funny.

If it has a "message", then it's about the obsession of modern society, particularly American society, with the trivial. Outside, in the real world (which is notable by its absence) is arms proliferation, global warming, ozone depletion, and pollution.

Male

Here is a typical American male spending his lunch hour contemplating the history of cardboard milk cartons, social interaction in the men's room, ice cube trays, and why shoe laces wear out simultaneously.

The fact that all this is so absorbing, in a way a book about "real" issues could never be, is comment in itself.

Where the book does fall down (for me, at least), is that a good deal of its detail is very American and not sufficiently familiar to non-American readers, especially if they've never been there.

English

But by its nature this is really unavoidable — perhaps we need an English version, called *The Half-Landing*.

But attempts at political explanation aside, this is a very enjoyable book.

It's quite short and very readable — just the thing to tuck in to when you've got a lazy day away from Poll Tax demos and left caucuses.

It may not change your life, but you'll never tear off a *Briefing* raffle ticket from its stub in such a casual way again.

***The Mezzanine*, by Nicholson Baker, *Granta Books*, £4.99.**

MAGAZINE REVIEW

South Africa strategy

The latest issue of *Frontline Worker* is now out, packed with analysis of the situation in South Africa.

The centrepiece of this second issue is a lengthy article by Roseinnes Phahle on the tactics of the socialist currents in the liberation movement.

By Mike Phipps Chair, Greenwich and Bexley Anti-Apartheid

He highlights the disorientation on the left caused by the question of negotiations.

It is very difficult to reject out of hand *any* negotiations towards a political settlement in South Africa today. With the legalisation of the ANC, it has a headstart in building support in South Africa.

In current conditions, declares Phahle, the amount of international backing a current gets determines its strength within the country.

With the ANC on the ground both more militant than its exiled leadership and at the centre of the Mass Democratic Movement, currents like the Azanian Peoples Organisation and the NACTU union federation could marginalise themselves if they stay away from the MDM.

Phahle goes further, arguing that for NACTU it was a mistake not to go into COSATU, allowing the ANC to contest the field without a rival. Likewise the Black consciousness currents should have affiliated to and built the UDF.

Phahle's worry is that revolutionary purism may isolate the socialist forces around AZAPO and the former Cape Action League — now in WOSA — from the growing mass movement.

Socialists may not agree with all his conclusions. But no-one can doubt than he is raising the central strategic question facing the left today.

In another strong article, Peter Blumer argues that negotiations between De Klerk and the ANC are not just the result of the pressure of sanctions on the government.

They also reflect the ANC's desire for a settlement, spurred on by new thinking in Moscow.

Original material from South Africa comes in the form of a Cape Action League statement on negotiations, which are seen as a compromise and betrayal.

An *Action Youth* statement argues that meaningful negotations must be preceded by a build-up of working class self-confidence.

Briefing

There is also an article on developments in Hungary by Gus Fagan and a fascinating review article on Mozambique by Leonara Lloyd, both regular contributors to *Briefing*.

Frontline Worker is the best journal of debate on South Africa around.

***Frontline Worker*, £2 from BM Box 4863, London WC1N 3XX.**

Ravenscraig and Scotland's economy

Tories go for the jugular!

The original purpose of the EEC was to form cartels to control the production of food, coal and steel.

The UK's entry into the Common Market following the Heath referendum and the labour movement's disastrously chauvinistic campaign, has exposed the Scottish economy to severe pressures.

Rural and fishing communities face extinction due to mills and fish quotas. The Scottish coal fields have all but disappeared and are faced with total closure by the influx of cheap coal from South Africa and Poland.

And now British Steel have threatened the closure of the strip mill at Ravenscraig

The defeats suffered by the NUM and ISTC leave the workforces in a poor position.

Nonetheless, the continued resistance to the Poll Tax and the Tories' rock bottom opinion poll ratings mean that there would be a massive response to any call by the STUC or the Labour Party for action.

It is a sad indication of the effect of New Realism that despite a pledge by the ISTC to support any move up to a national strike, a meeting of 100 stewards on May 18th, the day after the closure announcement, ruled out industrial action.

Tommy Brennan, the plant convenor said, "Industrial action does not save plants, although when conducted by a union at national basis, it can put pressure on people. But in isolation, it will never be part of our thoughts."

Isolation

This isolation is partly the result of the steelworkers' refusal to boycott coal shipped in through Hunterston during the great Miners' Strike, and is therefore of their own creation.

Malcolm Rifkind, Secretary of State for Scotland, has until now been able to offer limited protection to the Scottish steel industry. Before the privatisation of British Steel this was easier.

But now, despite its so-called "Golden Share" in the company, the government has little influence.

By Dave Fowler Scottish Labour Briefing

The fact that it refused to make use of a similar arrangement in BP to prevent its virtual closure of Britoil (a company bought by BP from the government) bodes ill for the Scottish steel industry.

Rifkind was able to extort concessions over the Poll Tax following Major's budget; but it is an indication of how marginal Scotland is in Thatcher's view that these concessions were not announced in the budget itself.

Horrendous

The closure of British Steel in Scotland would have horrendous effects.

Ravenscraig produces high grade, high value-added steel in slabs or strips. Some of this is supplied to Shotton, North Wales, for vehicle, radiator, and white goods. Some strip goes to South Wales for tin plate and electrical steel manufacture.

Slab goes to Dalyell for plate rolling and finishing at Clydebridge for marine hulls, armour plate, high-spec offshore work and earth moving machinery.

Tube with sophisticated threading capacity for pipe joints is produced at Clydesdale and Imperial mainly for offshore oil operations.

Five thousand workers are directly employed by these four units: but upwards of 10,000 jobs, mainly around Lanarkshire, rely on them.

Implications

By far British Steel is the South of Scotland Electricity Board's largest customer.

The implications for the coal industry are obvious. Scottish Steel is British Rail's largest freight customer in Scotland and probably Britain as a whole.

Huge tonnages of raw materials and semi-finished products are carried, including products from the dedicated ore and coal facilities at Hunterston.

This is the only viable commercial operation of the Clyde Port Authority and closure of British Steel would threaten dredging operations.

This in turn would close the last remnants of shipbuilding on the Clyde (Kvaerner at Govan Yarrows and UIE). Rothesay, King George V docks, and Finnieston Quay would close.

The closure of the giant crane at Finnieston would have a detrimental effect on engineering giants like Babcock and Wilcox, John Brown Engineering, Weirs, Howdens, and Motherwell Bridge, which are intermittent but persistent users of this facility.

Considerations

The steel industry in Scotland is an integrated part of Scottish industry.

Its fall threatens a devastating domino effect, but such considerations weigh little with the likes of "Black Bob" Scholey, a disciple of market forces, who has never made any secret of his belief that Ravenscraig should never have been built.

His plan is to shut up shop in Scotland and buy capacity elsewhere in Europe ready for the single market.

Nationalised

Nonetheless, Ravenscraig and its attendant finishing facilities are commercially very viable. This explains the acute interest shown by the nationalised Austrian steel corporation in buying Ravenscraig in advance of Austria's application to join the EEC.

The idea was only shelved after Franz Kranitzky's cool reception last month at Downing Street, when he canvassed for Austria's early entry to the Common Market.

Leadership

But the last thing Scholey would contemplate in British Steel's drive for monopolizations of the European steel market (or, more modestly, leadership of a cartel) is the complex of factories around Ravenscraig falling into the wrong hands.

This explains British Steel's policy of starving Ravenscraig of the relatively small amounts of capital investment required to keep it in the forefront of current technology and gradual rather than wholesale, immediate closure.

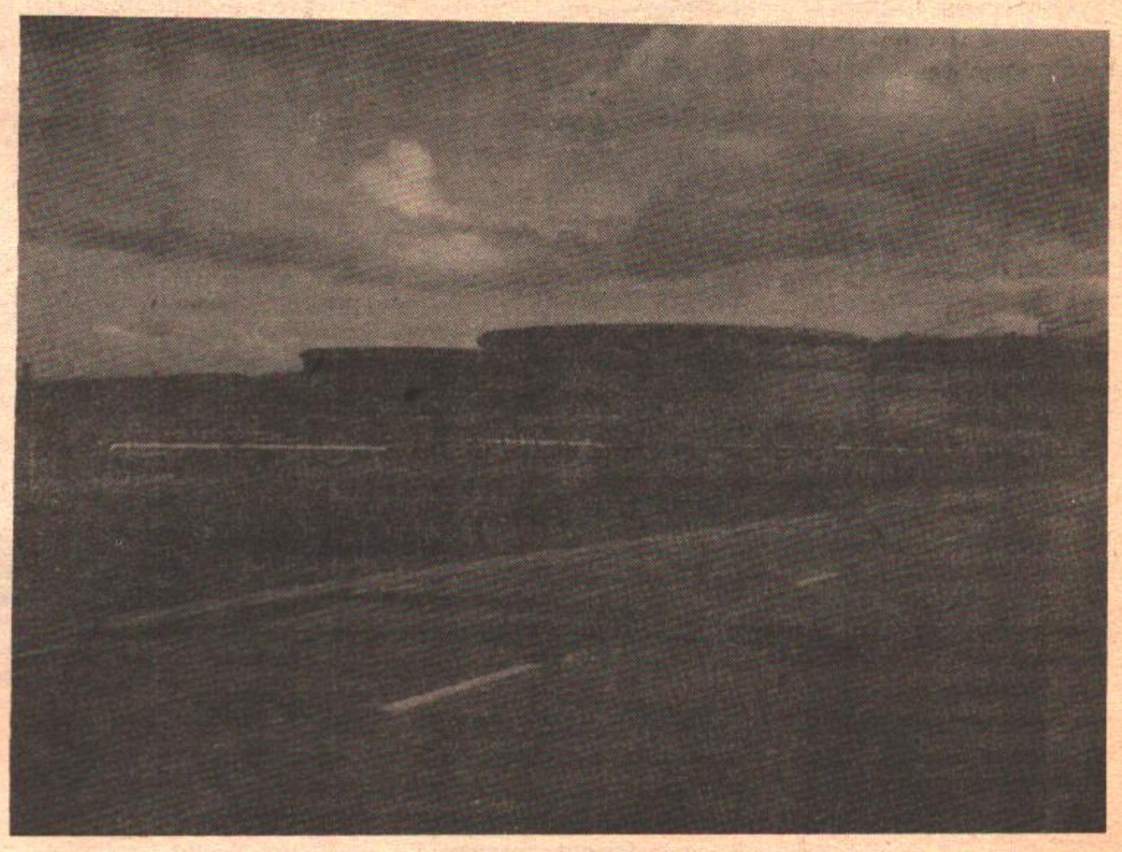
The one missing element is a policy from a Labour government. A pledge to renationalise British Steel would force Scholey to tread more carefully.

On the other hand, a Scottish Assembly with real economic powers would have the same effect.

Workers

But Labour's proposals for government contain no such promises, despite Bryan Gould's statement when he was Labour's Trade Spokesperson that the steel industry "is most appropriately owned in a form of public ownership."

A little mealy mouthed perhaps, but true — under workers' control of course!



BR Grangemouth: the clouds gather for Scottish industry.

ROVER

Hours betrayal at Longbridge

Car workers at Rover's Longbridge plant have now been ballotted for the second time over the same deal.

Management are trying to push through an hours/productivity package.

The first ballot rejected the package by a majority of 7,000 to 5,000, even after Jack Adams, TGWU chief negotiator, had promoted it as the best hours reduction agreement negotiated anywhere in the world.

The deal involves reductions in hours from 39 to 37, 36 or 31.5 for various parts of the Longbridge complex. In return, management get continuous production 24 hours a day, seven days a week where they want it.

The deal is self-financed by an increase in track speeds to achieve the existing production in the new hours. Where seven day working was to apply there would be no premium payment for work done at the weekend.

By ALAN THORNETT

To self-finance the deal involves an increase in effort on the tracks to a level in excess of 100% of the British Standards Institute's scale of work effort measurement. Workers on the tracks would be required to do up to 60.9 minutes in the hour.

Nor does it just involve the track workers. Ancillary workers are required to do a 39 hour work in 37 by working on the track where necessary.

The principles of the deal were due to be applied to the Longbridge plant straight away and introduced into Rover's other plants as and when necessary.

Management had approached the unions eight months before the end of the current contract for a reduction in working hours, after they had seen the benefits achieved in other sectors of the engineering industry with such deals.

After the vote for rejection, management made it clear that they would not recognise the vote (since it did not go their way) and would impose the deal.

Empty

It was in some ways an empty threat, since it is easy to "force" people to go home after 37 hours rather than 39 — but not so easy to force them to work 60.9 minutes in the hour.

They need not have worried. The national officials soon sorted it out — there would be another ballot!

This time the workforce would not be required just to vote for or against the deal but for or against an all out indefinite strike to oppose it!

Under these conditions management finally got their vote. The figures were reversed. Seven thousand voted to accept it and 5,000 for an all out strike.

The speed-up, however, may still be difficult to introduce despite the ballot result.

There could well be resistance section by section as inhuman levels of effort are forced onto track workers who have been speeded up repeatedly and are already streched to breaking point.

SOCIALIST MOVEMENT PAMPHLET

THE WAY FORWARD FOR SOCIALISTS IN THE UNIONS

Foreword by Tony Benn

This new pamphlet from the Socialist Movement will help to develop an effective alternative to New Realism in the unions and put forward the arguments for socialism in trade union branches and union conferences.

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NUPE Conference

Left puts the pressure on

In a spectacular and unexpected victory, this year's NUPE Conference voted to sponsor the Time To Go campaign.

The victory, against the wishes of the NEC, makes NUPE the third union (after NALGO and the bakers union) to affiliate.

Conference also voted to support the Birmingham Six campaign, this time with EC support.

One of the Northern Irish delegates, though later criticised by fellow delegates, used his speech accepting the award for the fastest growing branch to attack the Islington movers of the Time To Go resolution.

The Time To Go decision was heavily featured in the Irish press and, on a much more serious note, threats have been made against the NUPE officers in Belfast.

These threats show why it is important that trade unionists in Britain do not keep quiet about Ireland and why it is vital there is no retreat from the Time To Go decision.

Overall, the Conference was a contradictory affair.

While it saw the continued dominance, and even a certain deepening, of New Realism there was also evidence of the willingness of NUPE members to fight back against Tory attacks and, on occasion, to defy the union bureaucracy.

The composition of Conference is slowly changing. Many of the same old faces were there — many of them branch secretaries — but there were more women delegates than usual. Numbers of black delegates and of young people remain however, pitifully small.

Although the left was heavily defeated on the issue of non-payment of the Poll Tax, we were able to win support from about one-fifth of the delegates.

Many of those who voted against non-payment have no intention of paying themselves. As far as we know even some of the most right wing members of the Executive have yet to pay a penny!

By Geoff Ryan
NUPE Central
Manchester
Health Authority

The hypocrisy of the vote against non-payment emerged in the massive applause — including some from the platform — received by retiring officer Ron Keating when he stated he had once been jailed for conscientious objection to military service.

The frustration over the lack of action and a clear lead from the Executive boiled over in the discussion on local government.

There was a close vote (3,604 for; 4,819 against) on a motion to refer back the section of the EC report dealing with Local Management of Schools, as many members — including the traditionally least progressive, school caretakers — expressed their worry at the effects of LMS on their jobs and wages.

On a number of issues the Executive was forced to back some forms of action. NUPE is now committed to industrial action, if necessary, against the Tory's proposals for the NHS.

In order to head-off criticism for their failure to carry out a mandate from last year's Conference, the Executive announced that a demonstration against the Community Care Bill was being organised for later this year.

They are also committed to organising a major campaign, including one-day strikes and possibly all-out action, to gain a substantial increase in ancillary workers' pay — to at least bring it up to the level in local government.

If ancillary workers accept this year's pay offer in the current ballot, the campaign is to be built around the 1991 pay claim.

However if ancillary workers reject the present offer, then the campaign is to begin now.

Given the NUPE leadership's past record, NUPE members need to begin preparing a campaign now — whatever happens in the ballot.

Whilst the EC take the attitude "Vote Labour — but don't expect anything in return", they were forced into supporting some demands on a future Labour government, such as:

•the reversal of all the Tory proposals for the NHS;

•a national minimum wage of two-thirds the average male manual earnings within five years of the election of a Labour government.

•reductions in defence spending and transferring resources to economic and social priorities;

•the abolition of NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Policies passed on the relationship between the union and the Labour Party were contradictory.

The involvement of unions in parliamentary selection and reselection, the right of CLPs and unions to make two submissions directly onto the agenda without restriction, and maintaining Annual Conference, and election of the NEC were all reaffirmed.

But Conference also supported less frequent Conferences and a rolling policy programme.

Possibly the strangest debate came over a resolution calling for the repeal of all the Tory's privatisation legislation and instructing the EC to make every effort to ensure this is included in Labour's manifesto.

Ovation

Many delegates clearly expected that the EC would oppose this motion. It was a welcome bit of comic relief to watch them dutifully follow the eventual Executive recommendation in favour!

The Executive managed to deflect most of the criticism about their handling of the ambulance workers dispute.



PHOTO: John Arthur

NUPE nurses organise.

Some, opposing any reduction in potential funds for branch campaigns, voted with right wing stewards and branch secretaries who are solely concerned about the amount of money they can make out of the union.

The standing ovation received by Roger Poole was not a vote of confidence for the way in which he had organised the dispute — it was a gesture of solidarity with the ambulance workers.

The Executive also suffered defeats on rule changes. A massive rise in subscriptions was rejected and the size of next Conference will now be increased as the minimum branch size for a delegate was reduced to 200 members.

The Executive's proposals to reduce the amount of commission paid to branch secretaries and shop stewards were defeated. But the left were split.

Other left wingers supported the EC recommendation, along with those who slavishly follow the EC line on everything, because they are opposed to secretaries and stewards being paid anything other than genuine expenses.

Black people and the left suffered a major defeat in the rejection of a resolution allowing black people to have a union solicitor from a similar ethnic group — so much for NUPE's commitment to equal rights.

Briefing supporters helped organise a joint meeting of the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee and Women for Socialism on "Women in NUPE" with Betty Heathfield.

We also raised support for the Pergamon strikers, though unfortunately the resolution calling for NUPE to boycott Maxwell fell off the agenda.

Fightback

Virtually the only reference to Eastern Europe in the whole Conference was in an amendment moved by a *Briefing* supporter. We also helped give out leaflets in support of SOTSPROF.

NUPE Broad Left organised a meeting on the Poll Tax and a very successful meeting in defence of Bexley branch secretary Steve McKenzie whom the Executive are trying to remove from office.

Although the New Realists remain in control there are now some real opportunities to organise a fightback and to build a genuine broad left.

UCATT Conference

Building turn to left!

The left got off to a good start at UCATT Biennial Delegate Conference.

Over one third of Conference delegates and a number of visitors came to the eve of Conference Broad Left meeting.

Four themes dominated the week: wages, merger, health and safety, and the self-employed — with class struggle vs. New Realism the clear dividing line on all these issues.

In the debate on the Labour Party, delegates voted to keep automatic reselection of MPs; for the trade unions to have no less than 60% of the vote at Conference; for the right to submit and amend resolutions; and to continue links with CLPs.

The massive vote against any merger was a real setback for those trying to build a right wing block made up of UCATT, EETPU, and the AEU.

Deaths and injuries in our industry are at a post-War high and delegates from many regions supported the high profile Construction Safety Campaign as opposed to the "talk and glossy brochure" approach of the Executive Council.

Many delegates recognised that the struggle to unionise the self- employed could not be separated from the wages issue. Union negotiated rates of pay of £135/week compared with some London self-employed rates of £500/week certainly don't help.

The self-employed are also wage labourers — who pay a different form of tax. Delegates voted for a £7/hour wage claim for all building workers.

By Paul Davidson
Conference
Delegate

Despite the recent announcements from the Labour Party, Conference voted to support the closed shop and became the first union in the nuclear power industry (20,000 members) to call for a complete phasing our of nuclear power.

On all the major issues, the UCATT Executive were clearly defeated.

However, as early as Tuesday morning General Secretary Albert Williams was telling the *Morning Star* that it was the Executive Committee, not Conference, which instructed him what to do; and some issues may even go to to a direct ballot of the members.

Policies

At the post-Conference Broad Left meeting, delegates agreed that building an active Broad Left would be the only way of ensuring that these policies were carried out.

As a first step delegates agreed to encourage big turnouts for the Construction Safety Campaign AGM in June. We will also be organising a rank and file wages conference later this year.

Three of the five posts on the Executive Council are due for election, and all will be contested by the left. Voting for one of the places has just begun, with left candidate Peter Lenehan challenging sitting member Jack Rogers.

UCW Conference

Kinnockites tighten grip at Conference

The Post Office has decided to split the corporation into its component businesses.

There will be separate management structures and rates of pay.

The decision is having a marked effect on the attitude of UCW activists. Many seem to become bored quickly with matters which do not directly effect grade or business, making this year's UCW Conference a low-key event.

The tone was set on the Monday morning. A Broad Left motion calling for affiliation to the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation and supporting industrial action to defend members victimised for non-payment was smashed.

This was largely because it misjudged the mood of the Conference and the hold of Kinnockism over the majority of delegates.

Deputy General Secretary, Tony Clarke, a Kinnockite axe-man, made a furious speech warning delegates that the Federation was a *Militant* front, that there is no such thing as a roof tax, and that a Labour government is at hand.

More interesting, if less theatrical, was the General Secretary Alan Tiffin's address, which concentrated on what was needed to meet the challenge of the future.

Normally this sort of thing means a stitch-up is at hand; and sure enough he did try and justify some awful regrading agreement.

But the most significant development facing the union is its decision to begin recruitment outside the Post Office and British Telecom.

By a *Briefing*
supporter in the
UCW

The recruitment of workers in companies like BHL, UPS and Federal Express, to say nothing of small private carriers, is a great step forward in unionising the large number of workers in anti-union firms.

The debate on pay was disappointing. Basic wages for postal workers are low and the hours are long and anti-social. In the South bonuses and special payments to retain staff are a vital part of take-home pay.

Attempts to scrap these payments in favour of a proper wage, and linking pay increases to the Retail Price Index were rejected in favour of loosely worded resolutions about "substantial" increases and fiddling with catchment areas for special payments.

In line with BT and other companies, Royal Mail is thinking of getting rid of a lot of its first and second line supervisors.

It has suggested replacing them with team leaders — that is, someone on the same grade receiving a special payment for being a sort of chargehand. Conference decided to refuse to co-operate with any such arrangements.

On most of the major issues the EC and the Post Office management got what they wanted. The wave of industrial action underlying the last two Conferences has subsided, which was reflected in the support won by the leadership.

Pergamon dispute

One year on; still going strong!



Pergamon speaker [left] prepares to address Tribune Rally at Annual Conference.

A year is a long time to be on strike.

This is especially true when you are facing the might of Robert Maxwell's transnational media empire!

But the Pergamon 23 remain undaunted and are now more confident than ever that they can win.

Their confidence stems form the widespread support received from the labour movement. Optimism was reinforced by the march and rally in Oxford on May 26th to commemorate the anniversary of their struggle.

The march was notable for the splendid turnout of 500 (larger than the anti-Poll Tax march in Oxford) and the magnificent array of trade union banners, including banners from unions outside the media industry such as the TGWU, MSF, and NALGO.

Another first for Oxford was the sight of the Labour City Councillors marching behind a banner they had specially made for the event.

Even more heartening was the arrival of several coachloads of NUJ and SOGAT members who came from far afield to demonstrate their solidarity.

Speakers at the rally in the centre of town included Oxford East MP Andrew Smith, who brought the happy news that 131 Labour MPs have already signed his Early Day Motion tabled in support of the strikers' demands.

He also urged Maxwell to follow the advice given in the pages of his own paper, the *Daily Mirror*, and read the recent Labour Party policy document, which states categorically that trade union members *must have the right* to union representation.

Glyn Ford, Leader of the Labour Group of MEPs and Deputy Leader of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, brought greetings from the Labour Group of MEPs.

He told the rally that he hoped the current negotiations would lead to a speedy resolution of the dispute. If this did not happen he would raise the issue in Strasbourg. "This has been going on for too long," he said.

By a *Briefing* industrial correspondent

In another reference to the current negotiations, Bob Norris, Assistant Secretary of the NUJ, reiterated the union's commitment to a settlement based on reinstatement and recognition.

"The Pergamon 23 are not for sale," he declared.

Mary Hufford, Deputy General Secretary of the NUT — one of the four education unions boycotting Maxwell's products in support of the dispute — also addressed the rally.

Given the impressive level of commitment shown by all their speakers and their obvious confidence in the likelihood of victory it came as no surprise when striker Debbie Puleston finished off the speeches by telling the rally that one year on the Pergamon Chapel was more confident than it had ever been before.

It is not difficult to understand why this strike of 23 people commands such support from the upper reaches of the labour movement.

The tenacity of the 23 sacked members of the Pergamon NUJ Chapel is one factor. Their determination to hold to principle has been unshakeable, and was clear right from the start of the dispute.

The sackings of Wednesday May 24th 1989 followed a one day protest strike by the 23 journalists who picketed outside Maxwell's Oxford based publishing company to defend their right to be represented by the NUJ.

The strike was the culmination of a five month dispute which started when the company sacked an NUJ member without going through agreed procedures.

All negotiation proved fruitless in the face of Maxwell's intransigence — and the Chapel realised that strike action was the only way to secure recognition of the NUJ to represent its members at Pergamon.

This decision had the official backing of the NUJ, but it was taken in the face of an obviously genuine and twice delivered threat emanating from Maxwell's London HQ that anyone taking industrial action would be sacked.

The Chapel took the view that it was better to be sacked and take indefinite strike action than to see their most basic right to collective organisation disintegrate without a fight.

Their demands remain the same as they were in May 1989: reinstatement for all sacked members, recognition for the union throughout the company, and compensation for their member sacked in January 1989.

But tenacity on its own wouldn't have been enough. It is only by campaigning widely through the labour movement that the Chapel has focused high level attention on the denial of their basic rights as workers.

Given the strikers' lack of industrial muscle and the legal block on solidarity action in Britain, a long term and internationalist political strategy was essential.

The international aspect of the solidarity campaign was launched in July 1989.

The Chapel has won the support of such powerful bodies as the Brussels based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Prague based International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ) — between them representing over 400,000 journalists East and West.

The NUJ Executive has called on these two bodies to join it in a worldwide campaign against Maxwell's interests, and a European-wide day of action has been mooted, involving boycotts, demonstrations, and workplace meetings.

European workers are rapidly becoming aware of Maxwell's prediliction for cheap labour, and individual unions have also pledged support, especially French media unions and Solidarnosc.

The search for political support began with the June 1989 Labour Party NEC unanimously voting through a resolution condemning Maxwell's actions and calling for immediate reinstatement of all strikers and full recognition of the NUJ at Pergamon.

Tony Benn, who moved the resolution, told the strikers he could not remember ever before proposing a resolution which the NEC passed unanimously!

The support continued at Labour Party Conference in October. Maxwell was attacked twice from the platform during the "People at Work" debate.

SOGAT General Secretary Brenda Dean, mindful of the derecognition of SOGAT at Nuffield Press, Oxford, replied:

"Yes, my members do question the compatibility of Robert Maxwell's membership of the Labour Party and of a trade union with the actions of his companies against their workforces."

That night Maxwell's reception at the Grand Hotel turned into an excruciating farce, as 300 delegates, Brenda Dean, and the Chair of the Labour Party, Dennis Skinner, demonstrated outside — as a handful of invited dignitaries turned up for the binge.

At TUC Conference in September a Composite condemning employers such as Maxwell for attacks on trade union rights was approved unanimously. This opened the way for the Pergamon dispute to be taken up by the whole trade union movement.

The NUT, AUT and the EIS and SFHEA in Scotland have launched a consumer boycott (considerably raising the level of industrial solidarity) and the Oxford UCW have refused to bow to any pressure to cross picket lines.

Come the autumn, the strikers had no hesitation in throwing out Maxwell's offer of £80,000 to go away. Over the winter, signs of progress have included:

- the apparent sacking of all Maxwell's senior staff responsible for the conduct of the dispute;
- the unanimous decision by Oxford East CLP to launch an inquiry into the compatibility of Maxwell's anti-trade union activities with his Party membership;
- recent talks between Norman Willis, Harry Conroy, and Maxwell, at which the TUC Leader reiterated the Chapel's position of reinstatement by rejecting a further offer of a buy-off.

Briefing readers can help the strikers by raising the dispute in union meetings and Labour Party wards and by prioritising the issue for Labour Party Conference resolutions.

A **model resolution** and **background notes** are available from **10, Golden Road, Oxford OX4 3AR** or by phoning the strike office on **0865-60762** (24 hour answerphone).

Requests for further information, letters of support, and donations (cheques payable to "NUJ Pergamon Press Chapel") should be sent to the same address.

NALGO

Conference preview

The result of the NEC elections says a lot about NALGO at the moment.

Over 26% voted for Bannister and Goody, two "hard" left candidates.

This reflects the militancy and confidence of NALGO members arising from last year's successful, first ever national strike by local government members for their pay claim.

Until now the union's leadership has been able to maintain a left-of-centre consensus because NALGO members in local government have not been as savagely attacked as other public sector workers.

NALGO has avoided prolonged national strikes or confrontations with the anti-union laws. The leadership has kept local disputes dispersed, and not attempted to bring them together in a national campaign of industrial action.

By Fred Leplat Islington NALGO

It has adopted left wing policies on a range of issues, such as equal opportunities, while heading off industrial action, for example refusing to take serious industrial action against the abolition of the Metropolitian Authorities and rate-capping.

But the NALGO leadership cannot continue this approach any longer.

The Poll Tax is a key issue at this year's Conference.

Last year, the union leadership just scraped a majority for a policy of non-implementation only if mass non-payment existed. Today, millions of people are not paying.

NALGO members in Housing and Finance Departments are taking action against the attacks on their conditions resulting from the Tax and NALGO branches are resisting cuts in jobs and services from low Poll Taxes.

With support from the national leadership, NALGO members would refuse to co-operate with the Poll Tax and that could kill it stone dead.

The employer's 9.4% offer makes action around the current flat claim unlikely. But there is a possibility of action in support of a substantial increase in London Weighting.

Merger

The proposal for a merger between NUPE, NALGO and COHSE is motivated by bureaucratic self-interest. The leaderships of the three unions are protecting themselves from predators like the GMB.

Financial considerations are also important as NUPE is nearly bankrupt while NALGO has huge reserves.

Whatever the motivations of the bureaucracy are, the left must support the merger, arguing for:

- democratic structures with autonomous branches free from the bureaucratic control of unelected officials;
- a sovereign annual conference with delegates from branches;
- and affiliation to the Labour Party.

The new situation is polarising the union into those that want to fight, and the leadership that does not. As this process deepens, the basis for an ongoing left will emerge.

Initiatives such as the new journal "NALGO Action", which has the backing of 30 branches, can reach out to all those on the left.

A united and fighting left wing co-ordination is vital in renovating the labour movement and defeating New Realism.

POLAND

Railworkers strike; Solidarity dithers

Interview with the spokesperson of the Railwayworkers' Inter Depot Strike Committee, Jerzy Sadko, conducted by Maciej Guz, a car worker from the FSO plant in Warsaw Slupsk, Poland 24.5.90. Translated by Dave Holland Kensington CLP.

***Q:* Can you tell us about the existing wages structure and work conditions?**

JS: Railway workers get some of the lowest wages. Earnings range from 250,000 to 350,000 zloties monthly (*about £15-£21 per month*). And work is irregular, with 12 hour shifts, and quite complicated.

Drivers and guards cannot work more than 12 hours, but this does not take into account that after a five to six hour break they may have to come in to work again.

Workers don't have much free time to themselves. They can't get younger workers, because our work goes on, holiday or no holiday, Sunday or no Sunday, night and day.

We are now fighting for what was agreed and signed a year ago but has been ignored. It seems as if neither the Department nor the General Management are at all interested.

***Q:* In the mass media they only talk about the wages demands; they give people the impression that everyone will have to pay for these railway workers.**

JS: This is the normal manipulation of opinion. None of the ticket price increases have been passed on in our wages. People are being misinformed.

***Q:* The Strike Committee wants the Railway Industry restructured...**

JS: Absolutely — we are for restructuring, but this should be a sensible restructuring, not introduced in one year, but systematically, step by step over five to ten years.

That way it will benefit the railways. The restructuring should win over the rank and file. People should be consulted. Otherwise it's an imposition by the hierarchy.

***Q:* Can you outline the history of the strike up until now?**

JS: It started in October. Official discussions were being conducted. Everything was going so sluggishly that we started displaying flags as a protest. The discussions continued and as usual, nothing came out of them.

As a result of this we organised a "warning action", which we informed the Department and the General Management about in good time. Both the Department and the General Management paid no attention.

Then we started a hunger strike. This went on and after ten days still nothing had happened.

On the tenth day a representative of General Management, Mr Jagodzinski, came. His visit was some kind of "survey". He didn't offer us anything.

After a couple of days a second commission came, which had absolutely no mandate to conduct negotiations — it was concerned with speeding up traffic around the station.

Eventually, we appealed to all the union centres and to their leaders for a joint meeting to undertake common action.

Lech Walesa was invited, Alfred Miodowicz (*leader of the pre-Solidarity OPZZ unions*) and Marian Jurczyk (*leader of Solidarity '80, a split from Walesa's Solidarity*).

***Q:* Miodowicz and Jurczyk responded, but not Walesa. What do you think about this?**

JS: Lech Walesa was and remains the idol of the workers. But we were stupified and shocked by him not turning up. As the leader of our Solidarity, he carried with him the aspirations of all our members. He should have been here a long time ago.

It seems to us he's got a bit big-headed. He should be a worker, like he was in 1980. He is losing not only popularity, but credibility too.

The head of a union like Solidarity should be looking after the interests of the working people and not telling us off!

***Q:* In the present situation, with Solidarity supporting restrictions on incomes, especially the poorest, is Solidarity losing popularity?**

JS: Yes. Solidarity has lost its direction. Unions are to defend working people and not for playing politics. And now Solidarity is taken up with politics, thinking only about armchairs and comfy positions.

Democratically

Even the most democratically elected government must have competition from unions which will properly defend workers' interests.

And the present government, partly elected in democratic elections, absolutely will not negotiate and make agreements with the unions.

It amazes me that Solidarity and its leader practically terrorise us. I am afraid that one *nomenklatura* is being replaced by another one.

Solidarity has no monopoly. Only the whole lot of us can have a monopoly.

It is already being said that Solidarity has already replaced the PUWP monopoly, only under another emblem (*PUWP: Polish United Workers Party, the old Communist Party in Poland*).



Polish workers — coming into struggle

***Q:* The Balcerowicz Plan for the railways comes from the dictates of the IMF. That is what is deciding things in Poland and determining the conditions in which Poland has to act. What do you think about this?**

JS: The Balcerowicz Plan, without preparation of the base, will produce bankruptcy. And there has been no preparation. The West is dictating the tempo and that is why Balcerowicz is carrying out this plan.

***Q:* In my opinion, the IMF's dictates will not, as we have been promised, lead to Poland becoming a highly developed Western country; they will only make Poland politically and economically dependent on the West. Poland will be a second Bolivia.**

JS: To be quite frank, we're part the way there already.

***Q:* Finally, would you, like to say anything to the people who will read this?**

JS: Victory will only be won by speaking the truth and being as close as possible to the people, by presenting the situation as it is.

SOTSPROF

Organising workers in the Soviet Union

Contact C/o The Socialist Movement, PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UD

South Africa

Socialist current launched

In April a new South African socialist organisation was founded.

It is the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action: WOSA.

By Mike Phipps Chair, Greenwich & Bexley A-A Group

WOSA brings together socialists from the Cape Action League, Action Youth, Students of Young Azania, and many individuals.

The formation of a new socialist current on a national basis is an important step. WOSA's founding resolution states:

"Only through its self-organisation and activity can the working class bring about socialist transformation. By implication, we reject all reformist roads to socialism."

It defines its principles as "leadership of the black working class, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, anti-racism, anti- sexism, one-person-one-vote in a non-racial undivided unitary country, and we believe in collective leadership, accountability, and democracy.

"The organisation is committed to the building of a principled united front of liberating organisations which actively promotes and does not compromise working class interests."

It concludes: "Internationalism is a fundamental principle of socialism sine capitalism is an international system. Consequently, socialism cannot be built in one country.

"The struggle for socialism is therefore a worldwide struggle in which the organisation recognises that its struggle is linked to the struggles of oppressed and exploited people throughout the world and commits itself to support and defend working class organisations in all countries."

WOSA plans to bring out a monthly newspaper *Vukani Basebenzi* (*Workers Arise*) and is appealing to socialists internationally to help publicise its ideas and material.

WOSA is planning a speaking tour in Europe for the early summer. Watch this space for further details.

Baltic States

A struggle for independence

Representative bodies in all three of the Baltic states have now declared their countries independent from the Soviet Union.

The prime justification for these moves is the will of the majority of the inhabitants of these countries — and the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of native origin — as expressed in elections.

The legal basis to which all the independence declarations have referred is the illegality of the Soviet occupation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania which resulted from the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939.

The Soviet state is thus held to have no right to rule in these countries, and its army is considered an army of occupation.

However while the Lithuanian government has attempted to act as if independence already existed, the Estonians and Latvians have taken the view that they are in a "transitional phase" to independence dictated by the balance of forces (and not legitimacy).

Deputies from anti-independence movements in these Republics did not vote on any of the independence declarations.

Although all the states are small, and on the edge of the Soviet Union, the Soviet leadership and Gorbachev, have viewed Baltic independence as a root and branch challenge to their authority.

By COLIN MEADE

The Soviet leadership must be particularly alarmed by the prospect of the collapse of recruitment to, and discipline in, the Soviet army, as conscription amongst non-Russians is increasingly challenged.

For the time being Moscow has tried to avoid resorting to massive force, preferring to bring the maximum economic and political pressure to bear.

Lithuania has been subjected to an economic blockade, while on 24th March a column of Soviet vehicles rattled through the streets of the Lithuanian capital Vilnius.

Organisations claiming to represent the Russian and other non-Baltic populations have been agitating against independence.

Anti-independence Communist parties — representing a minority of the CP in Estonia and Lithuania and a majority in Latvia — have split from the pro-independence wing.

Efforts have been made to split Estonia and Latvia away from Lithuania, including an offer of special status to the two former republics if they drop their claims to independence.

Imperialist

Statements from the major imperialist powers making clear their opposition to the rash acts of the Baltic states, along with a multitude of leader articles from "responsible" Western newspapers have been given prominence in the Soviet Union, to underline these republics' isolation.

However the Baltic States have one major ally — the radical wing of the opposition in the Soviet Union.

Movements

Powerful movements of protest against the attacks on Lithuania have arisen in Georgia and the Ukraine, where tens of thousands of people demonstrated in support of Lithuanian independence on 21st March.



Are the Baltic states eating away at Gorbachev's "infallibility?

Some 75 of the 463 deputies of the Moscow City Soviet telegrammed Lithuanian president Vytautas Landsbergis condemning the:

"interference of the President of the USSR and the government of the Soviet Union in the internal affairs [of Lithuania]."

A conference of independent workers organisations and strike committees held in Novokuznetsk between 30th April and 2nd May called for:

"the immediate cessation of the economic and political blockade and the beginning of negotiations between the governments of the USSR and Lithuania without any preconditions."

The resolution also talked of work collectives maintaining economic links with the besieged Republic — an open call for Soviet workers to take the initiative in breaking the blockade.

Forces explicity adhering to socialism both in the USSR and elsewhere often sound as if they find the Baltic events something of a distraction from the *real economic and social questions.*

But the national question will not go away.

Indeed it stands at the heart of the storm that is brewing in the Soviet Union (seen as impending "chaos" and "anarchy" by the pro-capitalist media) as the CPSU approaches its split congress.

The forces rising up to sweep away the bureaucratic system will not, on the whole, consider themselves socialists.

But Western socialists can play a part in changing that if they show themselves to be the only true and consistent defenders of democratc, including national, rights.

Now is not the time to lose our nerve!



Will Gorbachev find himself swept away in his turn?

Soviet Union: Debate

Yeltsin is back!

The election of Boris Yeltsin to the Presidency of the Russian Federation of the USSR marks a watershed in Soviet politics.

By Mike Phipps Woolwich CLP

Three years after his dismissal, Gorbachev's best known critic is back in executive office.

The precise powers of the head of the Russian Republic are constitutionally unclear. But by calling for Russian laws to be supreme over all-Union laws and by immediately opening a dialogue with the rebel Lithuanian leadership, Yeltsin is clearly indicating he means to use the position to pressurise and oppose Gorbachev.

Many on the left in Britain have a cautious attitude to Yeltsin. Like Ken Livingstone, they argue that the Gorbachev road is the only way to avoid chaos.

Socialists are also right to be wary of Yeltsin's support for free market principles and western ideas. But to view Yeltsin's election merely as a victory for these things would be wholly one-sided.

Precondition

Yeltsin is in favour of those Republics like Lithuania seeking independence from the Soviet Union. This is a precondition for overcoming Moscow's dictatorship over the national aspirations of the USSR's oppressed peoples.

Although keen on the free market, Yeltsin is also opposed to the grim effects on people's living standards now being brought about by the removal of state subsidies.

He contrasts this with the continuing privileges enjoyed by the legions of bureaucrats linked to the Party, state, and economic managers.

Yeltsin is part of an organised opposition to the Soviet leadership. His reappearance at the centre of Soviet politics foreshadows the end of the one-party dictatorship that betrayed the Russian Revolution.

Above all, Yeltsin's election will lead to a rise in the expectations of Soviet workers and provide an impetus to grass roots opposition to the bureaucracy.

A strengthening of the independent trade unions and working class opposition to Gorbachev is the only way to prevent full-scale marketisation and bureaucratic buy-outs of state industry.

Yeltsin's election, whether consciously or not, may strengthen that opposition.

LABOUR BRIEFING

Don't pay the Poll Tax!

Stuff the Poll Tax — stuff the NEC

Mass non-payment is a reality!

At the end of May, the *Independent* published a poll which illustrated that 31% of people *are not paying the Poll Tax.*

By Jane Connor
Co-Chair London Federation

In the inner cities initial non-payment levels are much higher. The London Borough of Hackney has so far only managed to collect 18% of the amount of Poll Tax due in April!

Despite large scale benefit and wage arrestments in Scotland, the level of non-payment continues to grow as more people stop paying the Tax, now into its second year.

There are now over 2,000 anti-Poll Tax groups and unions across the country. In Avon alone there are 65 groups affiliated to the Avon Federation.

Although not all these groups are affiliated to the All-Britain Federation (the majority have been launched since the Federation's founding conference in November 1989) the Federation is clearly seen as the national leadership of the movement.

Labour's NEC certainly takes this view. At a specially convened meeting two weeks ago the NEC voted to call on all Labour Party bodies to have nothing to do with the Federation as it was "a *Militant* front".

Although *Militant* supporters hold a large majority of the places on the Federation's National Committee, on the ground around three quarters of the local groups have no involvement from *Militant* supporters at all.

Militant

The strength of *Militant* on the National Committee is a reflection of the state of the movement in November 1989, not today.

Even the *Daily Mail* was recently forced to admit that other forces were involved in the movement, including "the most revolutionary" group inside the Labour Party — *Labour Briefing*!

The Labour Party leadership itself is responsible for the influence that *Militant* and other currents have within the movement.

It is their hostility to and hatred of the mass movement that has left a vacuum which has inevitably been filled by those forces prepared to take a stand and provide leadership for the movement.

Although the NEC stopped short of making the All Britain Federation a proscribed organisation, Regional Labour Party officials are already writing to branches telling them not to affiliate, or to disaffiliate, and threatening action if this is not complied with.

The last two years have seen a growing number of expulsions of *Militant* supporters from the Labour Party, many on the basis of their involvement in anti-Poll Tax activity. Tommy Sheridan, National Chair of the All Britain Federation is just the most famous example.

Added to this there has been a low level witch hunt against other anti-Poll Tax activists which reached its height over the local elections, with tens, maybe hundreds, of potential Council candidates being barred from standing for election or selection.

The NEC has stated that although affiliation to the All Britain Federation, or membership of its committees will not in itself be a disciplinary offence, such involvement *will* be taken into consideration in cases of disciplinary action.

Our response to this latest witch hunt must be unequivocal. Labour Party branches, Women's Sections and affiliated trade unions should affiliate now to the All Britain Federation, as well as local anti-Poll Tax groups and federations.

Labour

Labour Councillors and Labour MPs need to put their full support behind the anti-Poll Tax movement, including the All Britain Federation, and must be prepared to defend activists faced with disciplinary action.

It is not enough for elected representatives to say that they are personally not paying. They have to show a lead and come fully behind the movement.

As the attacks from the state intensify, both around the Trafalgar Square events and against non-payers, all socialists have a responsibility to defend the movement — and get involved!

The Future of Labour Briefing

A meeting for *Briefing* sellers, writers, and readers.

Sunday July 15th; 12.30-4.30pm

Durham Road Community Centre; Durham Road, London N4
(near Finsbury Park tube station).

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Contact the *Briefing* office for further details: 081-809 3927

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POLL TAX DIARY

Councillors Against the Poll Tax.
Saturday June 9th, 1-4pm, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton, London SW2 (near Brixton tube station). Phone Steve French, 071-733 3403 for details.

Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign
National defendants and witnesses meeting, Saturday 16th June, 12-6pm, TCP Hall, 628 High Road, London N17 (Seven Sisters tube, then bus 259, 76, 279 or 149). *Essential for all defendants.* Fares should be paid by local anti-Poll Tax groups. For more details contact 081-801 9464.

Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign
National Solidarity Conference, Sunday 17th June, 11-4pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn Tube, Picadilly line). Legal and welfare issues; mobilising mass support; publicity; fundraising. The TSCD has the full backing of the All Britain Federation

All-Britain Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions.
Conference for Trade Unionists. Saturday June 23rd, Liverpool. Phone 071-737 3301 for further details.

3D National Activists Meeting.
Saturday 15th September. Phone 081-808 5893 for details.

Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee Conference.
"The Poll Tax and the Unions: Defend rights, jobs, and democracy." Saturday September 8th, 10am onwards, Polytechnic Students Union, Sheffield (opposite Sheffield BR station). Opening address by Tony Benn MP. £5 per delegate; £5 observers (£3 unwaged). For further details and/or supplies of leaflets contact Caroline Sikorski, 53a Geere Road, London E15.

STOP PRESS: Thatcher's flagship Wandsworth Council is summonsing 4,800 Poll Tax non-payers to court on June 14th. The London Anti-Poll Tax Federation is organising a public meeting and a mass lobby outside the Court. For details phone 071-737 3301. Meanwhile, Coventry Council has issued 25,000 summonses to non-payers.

Please phone information about non-payment figures and/or legal action in YOUR area to the Briefing office (081-809 3927) as soon as you receive it. PLEASE take the trouble to phone — it is important we all collect figures as often as they are released to keep an up-to-date national picture.