LABOUR
40p FORTNIGHTLY
BRIEFING
No. 105 June 20th-July 3rd

INSIDE:

☆Lesbian Strength; Gay Pride
☆NALGO Conference
☆Debate: What kind of paper does the left need?
☆Labour government? You ain't seen nothing yet!
☆Labour Women: Wash Day Blues

40p

Trade unionists and the Poll Tax

JOBS ON THE LINE!

"If we don't get rid of the Poll Tax it will get rid of us."

I gave this warning to NALGO's recent Annual Conference when I moved the Ealing NALGO resolution calling on the NEC to campaign among our members for them to refuse to pursue local residents who cannot or will not pay the Poll Tax.

The resolution was defeated by 380,000 to 220,000 — a bitter blow to the movement against the Poll Tax.

But the substantial minority vote and the publicity which the debate received will help us get the vital arguments out to both our own members and other trade unionists over the crucial next few months.

In Ealing the new Tory regime is pledged to slice the Poll tax by £65, which means £13 million cuts.

Hardest hit will be non-statutory services, including equalities work, leisure services, youth and adult education, and the voluntary sector.

By EVE TURNER
Ealing NALGO

Wandsworth and Westminster have already shown what a low Poll Tax means: brutal cuts in jobs and services and wide ranging privatisation.

For the Tories, one of the key objectives of the Poll Tax has always been to force Local Authorities to make cuts.

NALGO members and other local government workers therefore have little choice. In the long run the Poll Tax will mean one round of cuts after another, year in, year out — unless we take action now.

We do not have the luxury of waiting for the election of a Labour government — which is in any case not committed to fully funding local government and which may take years to repeal the Poll Tax.

In enforcing the Poll Tax, NALGO members will be helping the Tories to destroy their own jobs.

Over the next few months our members will face a distressing dilemma. In pursuing Poll Tax non-payers we will be hounding the very people for whom we want to provide services.

There will be one local dispute after another as NALGO members rebel against the implications of the Poll Tax for workload, gradings, working conditions, staffing levels, etc.

The situation will deteriorate as the level of non-payment increases and Councils get desperate.

Disputes will also be sparked as cuts are made to achieve a low Poll Tax or implement Poll Tax-capping and as budgets are refashioned to deal with revenue shortfalls towards the end of the year.

In addition, some NALGO members — with the support of their branches — will refuse to pursue non-payers, despite the Conference vote.

Our job is to harness all these struggles into an overall campaign and to forge links between them and the mass non-payment campaign.

Wages arrestment for non-payment is likely to be a big issue in a number of other unions, some of which will take action to stop employers arresting their members' wages.

Inside our own union, NALGO members will find themselves asked to arrest the wages of other NALGO members.

Links are also needed with other Local Authority unions, including NUPE and the NUT, around both wage arrestment and the cuts.

All these tasks will be addressed at the



PHOTO: Brian James/Public Eye

Local government workers need to take to the streets again to defend jobs and services against Poll Tax cuts.

the NALGO Against the Poll Tax Conference to be held in London in the autumn, as well as at the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee Poll Tax Conference in September.

Of course, no one claims it will be easy to convince the bulk of our members to support sustained resistance to the Poll Tax. However, a call for action from our national leadership would have been a big boost — as it was in last year's pay dispute.

We need to build our members' confidence. We need to show them that they are not alone. The looming threat of more and more cuts in jobs and services and the high level of non-payment give us an opportunity to take our arguments directly to members.

NALGO's National Executive accused the left of wanting to stick NALGO members in "the front line" of the struggle against the Tories and the Poll Tax.

I have news for them. The Tories have already put us there and we have no choice but to take up the fight.

LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!

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 27th if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Plumping up the pillow talk

Dear *Briefing*,

Bryn Griffiths (*Briefing* no. 103) highlights the problems concerned with a Socialist Movement newspaper and in so doing casts some doubts on the rationale behind the Socialist Movement as a whole.

My wife and I attended the first Socialist Conference in Chesterfield and were surprised at the presence of Plaid Cymru.

Last year at a regional meeting in mid-Wales, Plaid were again strongly in evidence and, although the exchange of views was interesting, we could not but wonder where it ws all leading.

We would go off and vote Labour and they would go off and vote Plaid. Furthermore, they were South Walian Plaid.

Here in Caernarfon, the heartland of the language, it is a different story. Labour supporters do not dare put Labour posters in their windows.

Welsh is "essential" for jobs in the public library, where 99% of the books are in English.

The schools are almost totally controlled by Plaid head teachers and the Urdd indoctrinates the children. Here Plaid is not so much socialist as National Socialist.

Thus, although it is tempting to see the Socialist Movement as a forum for resolving differences and creating a unified left, between the ideal and the reality falls the shadow.

It is difficult to see how such disparate bedfellows can produce productive pillow talk, positive enough to be uttered outside the bedchamber.

The future would seem to lie with the Labour Party Socialists, initiated by the movement as if in response to the kind of misgivings I have tried to express, and with *Briefing* continuing in its present role.

Yours fraternally,
F. R. Cherry,
Caernarfon

Labour Briefing Sellers, Writers and Readers Meeting
Sunday, July 15th 12.30pm-4.30pm
Durham Road Community Centre, Durham Road, London N4 (near Finsbury Park tube)
TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF *LABOUR BRIEFING*
The *Briefing* Editorial Board will be presenting the following resolution to the meeting:

"This meeting notes that *Labour Briefing* has strongly supported and promoted the Socialist Movement from the outset. In particular, our paper and our supporters have played an active role in building Women for Socialism, the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, and Labour Party Socialists, all of which have been significant positive advances for socialists in the labour movement. This meeting therefore welcomes the suggestion to set up a Socialist Movement newspaper and resolves to contribute to the further development of the current proposals, in particular to ensure that the proposed newspaper:

1. Is financially and organisationally viable and will not act as a continuous drain on the resources of either the Socialist Movement as a whole or *Briefing* supporters within it in particular.
2. Has a genuine labour movement orientation — this means not only calling for a Labour vote in elections and covering Labour and trade union affairs but acting as an organising focus in the struggle to build a non-sectarian left current inside the Labour Party and trades unions.
3. Is democratically accountable to the grass-roots of the Socialist Movement and reflects rank and file political priorities and activities.
4. Informs, agitates, and organises its readers — rather than merely commenting on events from a distance; it must reflect the views and experiences of activists at the grass-roots of the struggle for socialism, particularly within the labour movement; it must be a paper which activists can *use*.

This meeting resolves:

•to sustain, improve, and extend the coverage, production, and distribution of *Labour Briefing* unless and until a general meeting of *Briefing* supporters, which will be convened by the *Briefing* National Steering Committee, agrees that a Socialist Movement newspaper will meet the above conditions;

•that no decisions about closing *Labour Briefing* will be taken outside such a meeting."

Please discuss this at your *Briefing* meetings and with other readers! If you would like to submit a resolution of any kind to the meeting on July 15th contact the *Briefing* office.

Not quite there

Dear *Briefing*,

Mike Phipps' review of my book *Getting There* misses the point.

I don't argue for utopia; I point out that utopias are often oppressive and always unrealisable because society will never be perfect and one individual's utopia will often be another's picture of hell.

But we stilll ned some idea of where we are going (or we may end up with Stalinism); we need to establish not a blueprint but some parameters within which a number of different societies might exist.

All Marx came up with were some scattered comments on hunting, shooting, herding and criticising. We must do better.

As a supporter of socialist self-management I argue for an approach that draws on Marxism and Michel's analysis of hierarchy but recognises that these are not sufficient.

We need an economic strategy based on working class opposition to capitalism (while recognising power relationships between north and south of the globe that puts us in a relatively privileged position), the community-based eco-socialist party, and an assault on the prevailing capitalist commonsense of society.

Far from rejecting electoralism, I argue that an electoral change is not on its own enough but must be combined with economic action in a local, decentralised context.

Far from rejecting Marxism, I argue that it wuld be most un-Marxist to ignore changing historical circumstances and new ideas that can be used to renew socialist politics without slipping into reformism.

Getting There argues,

"There will never be a definitive handbook of ecologically sound political theory; the task of this volume is to provoke debate but if it does not provoke action it will have failed...

"The point to paraphrase Marx, is not merely to describe the world but to change it. And change it we must if we, our children and our planet are to have a future."

I trust that this is a project that will gain the support of *Breifing* readers.

Yours,
Derek Wall,
Bristol



Briefing history file: proof that Jeremy Corbyn didn't start out the process of winning Islington North from a smoke filled room!

The view from the smoke filled room

Dear *Briefing*,

I found Keith Flett's letter (*Briefing* no. 104) interesting, especially as I had recently contemplated joining the SWP. Keith's letter unwittingly illustrated some of the reasons why I didn't.

Keith airily dismissed people involved in "internal Labour Party squabbles". Since such "squabbles" taught me to be a socialist to a large extent, as well as to reject Kinnockism, I am unable to share his contempt.

The SWP often reminds me of World War I pilots cruising over the shell-pocked battlefields, peering down with patronising incomprehension on the poor bloody infantry struggling in the mud beneath.

The SWP claims to engage in real politics, whereas habitues of "smoke filled rooms" (i.e., everyone else) don't.

In fact, SWP politics are clearly about selling the paper and building the revolutionary party (the SWP).

Everything else is secondary and SWP involvement in anything else is half-hearted, unless it is of assistance in achieving the main SWP goals described above.

SWP tactics are comprehensible and even clever *if* you believe that the SWP is *the* revolutionary party and that Tony Cliff is a greater socialist thinker than Trotsky.

If, on the other hand, you don't aspire to such a religious faith, you might decide not to take your chances with the self-proclaimed revolutionary party.

The SWP has its good points, but I think I'll be filling my lungs with smoke for a while longer.

Yours,
Steve Kaczynski
Reading

How *not* to pay...

Dear *Briefing*,

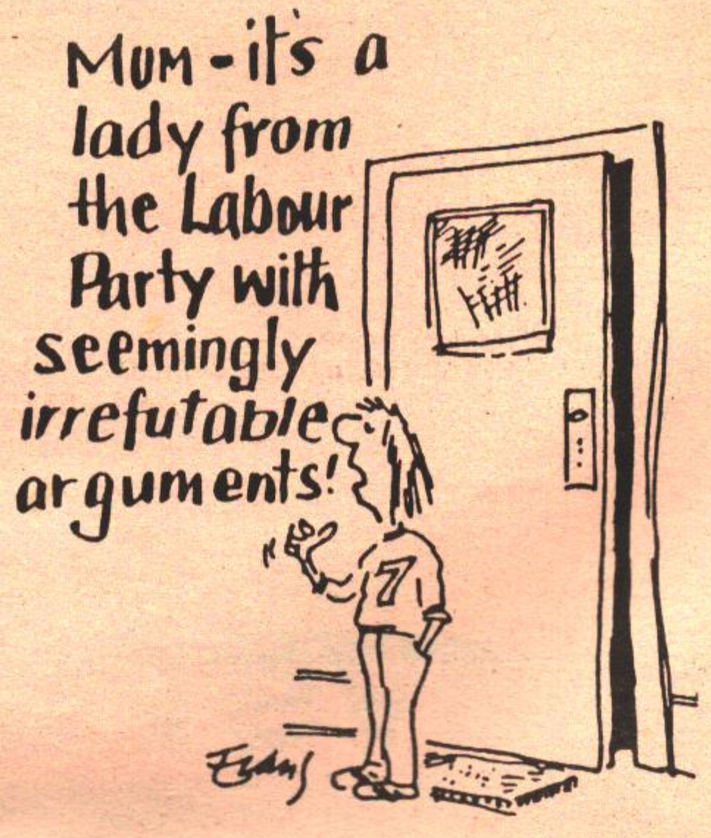
The useful centrespread on "How Not to Pay Your Poll Tax" (*Briefing* no. 103) is, I believe, misleading when it says:

"In court, the Council has the right to demand information from you such as your place of work..."

The CPAG booklet *Guide to the Communituy Charge* says:

"Once an English or Welsh authority has obtained a liability order... the authority may require the person in debt to supply the following information: name and address of the debtor's employer..."

Fraternally,
Alan Leadbetter,
Stoke-on-Trent



Hard working, not mesmerised

Dear *Briefing*,

Phil Hearse asserts (*Briefing* no. 104) that "socialists should not abandon the Labour Party, but neither should they be mesmerised by its internal structures and rhythms."

It's almost an article of faith amongst the British left nowadays that Labour Party work is key to socialist activity. Gone are the 60s when the revolution would be built outside the Labour Party.

Nowadays socialists recognise that the Labour Party's fundamental link to the trade union is vital; that the Labour Party represents the working-class and the working-class identify with it.

It's just as clear that no socialist should be mesmerised by the Labour Party.

No socialist should be mesmerised by any organisation, be it Labour Party, trade unions, anti-Poll Tax campaigns or socialist journal. That way leads to bureaucracy.

It's not difficult to assist bureaucracy if you have a clear political approach and set of aims. You can then work effectively within any bureaucratic structure.

But to achieve your aims, you must be credible. You cannot turn up to a ward meeting once a year and ask for your motions to be passed. You will lose, or win by some accident, but you won't get the argument over to the meeting.

To persuade Labour activists that your politics are credible, you have to work as hard as they do. You have to promote the Labour Party and have to collect the subs and you have to work in election campaigns.

Once you have that reputation, people listen to your politics and listening to you is half-way to agreeing with you!

The classic example is Jeremy Corbyn. He may hold controversial views, but he canvasses every Sunday morning, his weekly surgeries are packed, and he has an amazing memory for faces.

So when he's attacked by the national press, all his constituents defend him. When he's arguing a controversial point, they listen to him. And he's made Islington North the safest Labour seat south of Watford.

So caution is not the answer for socialists in the Labour Party.

If you're cautious, you'll encounter all the tedium of a Labour Party ward meeting with no political results. If you work hard, you'd be surprised how many people you encounter who agree with your views.

Liz Davies
Islington North CLP

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Keep it on ice!

Dear *Briefing*

I read with interest Bryn Griffiths' article on the possibility of a Socialist Movement paper (*Briefing*, no. 103).

It's not a bad idea on the surface. It would almost certainly help to build the Socialist Movement. I am sure that *Briefing* supporters would welcome that idea.

It would be a step in the right direction in forging even stronger links with other left currents in addition to the good work already done by the SM.

But there is a price we cannot afford to pay. Closing down *Briefing* is that price.

To wind *our* paper up, to be replaced by something which could end up as a second-rate *Catalyst*, would be a monumental error of judgement and not something to have on one's conscience.

And the political capital our opponents would make of it would be phenomenal. You can almost hear the champagne corks popping in LCC HQ already.

We should support the SM paper, but not be forced into a corner where we could end up with nothing.

Briefing is not perfect but it's the best thing we've got at the moment. We must continue to build the "non-sectarian voice of Labour's left".

Yours in socialism,
Karl Statton,
Banbury CLP

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Poll Tax: non-payment and the next phase of the struggle

Anti-Poll Tax activists deserve but will not expect an apology from those cynical defeatists within the labour movement who have spent the last two years deriding the prospect of a mass campaign of non-payment.

The sketchy figures now coming in indicate that the scale of non-payment is far beyond anything even *Labour Briefing* or anyone else dared to predict.

On top of that, attempts by various Councils to get non-payers into court have already failed.

Clearly, the anti-Poll Tax movement — a grass roots phenomenon which owes absolutely nothing to the media or the hierarchy of the labour movement — now speaks for the majority in this country.

The movement now needs to take immediate steps to consolidate its success and move on to the offensive.

First, local non-payment campaigns must act to ensure that non-payers are not isolated. The scale of non-payment has to be demonstrated publicly as often as possible. Individual non-payers must be brought together. Legal advice, practical support, and information are all necessary.

Second, we must couple our anti-Poll Tax work with a clear response to the financial crises already gripping Councils as they wrestle with the Poll Tax.

Resistance to local government cuts — among the unions, in the Labour Party, in the Council Chamber, in the community — will be given a new lease of life by the anti-Poll Tax movement.

The Labour right is trying to scapegoat non-payers for the latest round of cuts. This is nothing but the tired old logic of blaming the victim.

From the beginning we said that the Poll Tax would be used by the Tories to destroy what was left of local government services. After Poll Tax capping, there can be no doubt about

Blame for the cuts lies with the Poll Tax itself — not those trying to destroy it.

Now is the time for Labour MPs, Councillors, CLPs, Branches and ordinary Party members to stand in public with — and draw strength from — the millions who are not paying the Tax.

Third, trade union action against the Poll Tax is required. The trade union conferences called by the all-Britain Federation and the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee are steps in the right direction.

If we are to unite the fights against the cuts and against the Poll Tax, if we are to bring together the people being asked to implement the Tax and those being asked to pay it, trade unions at local and national level must be won over to industrial action — the sooner the better.

Finally, the TUC and Labour Party should organise a national demonstration against the Poll Tax in the autumn. The labour movement has the resources and authority to make this a tremendous success and a focus for mass opposition.

The Tax is the most hated of all Thatcher's policies. *What are our leaders afraid of?*

For a deeper red-green dialogue

The UN "green" award to Thatcher was a slap in the face for the worldwide environmental movement.

For Thatcher "green" issues have been nothing but a chance to posture on the world stage, while her corporate backers get on with collecting mega-profits from pollution.

Tragically, Labour offers little more. The new Policy Review contains no real measures to tackle the growing environmental crisis. Once again our leaders have stood by their (but not our) traditional commitment to nuclear power.

The policy document contains not a word on planned energy conservation, or on planned house-building, a key factor in achieving this.

And the attempt to woo industrialists and financiers bodes ill for any serious legislation to protect the environment — which would inevitably entail an attack on profits.

Maybe Labour's Front Bench thinks last year's big vote for the Greens in the Euro-elections was just a mid-term aberration. Maybe they think the Greens will just fade away.

But global warming, food scares, nuclear fuel induced cancers, ozone depletion, acid rain show no signs of fading away.

As long as these problems exist — and they will undoubtedly intensify and multiply — a strong environmental movement will also exist. Indeed, such a movement is indispensible.

Faced with this reality, socialists need to make a distinction between the Green Party and the green *movement* — which has an essential contribution to make to radical politics and to the labour movement.

It is inadequate for socialists in the Labour Party to call on the Greens simply to come on in and join the fight.

Indeed, in present circumstances, with a Front Bench apparently indifferent to the real dangers threatening the environment, such a call is unlikely to be heeded.

Socialists have much to learn from environmentalists — in particular, we must absorb their lessons on the finite nature of the planet's resources and the need for an ecologically sustainable economic strategy.

A genuine two-way dialogue is therefore needed between socialists and greens.

The early stages of this dialogue have already increased the pressure on Labour's leaders to adopt a greener strategy. This process can only be advanced by building a vibrant green-socialist wing of the Labour Party which works to make Labour attractive to environmentalists.

Meanwhile, the strengthening of *independent* health, environmental and safety campaigns will benefit all those engaged in the struggle for socialism.

Behind the headlines

Animal Rights

Why animals excite the activists

The Bristol car bomb provoked predictable press reaction.

The outrage was stronger this time, because the Animal Liberation Front bomb had seriously injured a baby which was being pushed past the car as it exploded.

By Peter Chowney
Hackney South CLP

But no one really attempted to tackle the question: why does a small number of people feel so moved about animal experimentation?

Why, when so many human injustices exist, do the rights of animals generate such powerful emotions?

First, a confession: it's about time I came out as an ex-vivisectionist.

But before I find packages taped to the underside of my Citroen, I should point out that this was ten years ago, that I refused to work directly with animals, and that I left the job after a few months convinced that animal experiments, for any purpose, could be eliminated.

I worked at the Central Public Health Laboratory, in Colindale, as a research microbiologist.

CPHL identifies and classifies notifiable diseases, and produces much of the country's vaccination materials.

The process of production and quality testing of these materials uses literally hundreds of thousands of rabbits, all of which die an unpleasant death from typhoid, cholera, tuberculosis, and so on.

But without this mass carnage, it would not be possible to carry out vaccination programmes, and human life expectancy would be 20 years or so less.

Is it therefore justified? Perhaps it is on the surface, but only if you accept the argument that animal life is subordinate to human life — an argument which environmental considerations are wearing increasingly thin.

But there are alternative methods to the use of animals. They are experimental, and not yet perfected.

They have been experimental for almost 20 years. While governments and vivisectionists are prepared to justify millions of painful animal deaths on arguably legitimate grounds, they are not prepared to fund the research which would eliminate the need.

This is at the heart of the animal research argument: that experiments can be justified purely on the grounds of their huge benefit to humanity.

Regardless of the ethics of this, it isn't even true — any reaction given by an animal to a chemical can be duplicated, more cheaply and probably more reliably, in human cell and tissue culture.

There just does not seem to be the will to develop these to mass reliable usage.

It is this lack of will to find alternatives, and the inability of animals to organise protests and liberation struggles for themselves, which has lead to groups like the ALF taking "extreme" measures.

Violent struggle, they claim, is necessary where democratic rights are denied. Animals have no such rights.

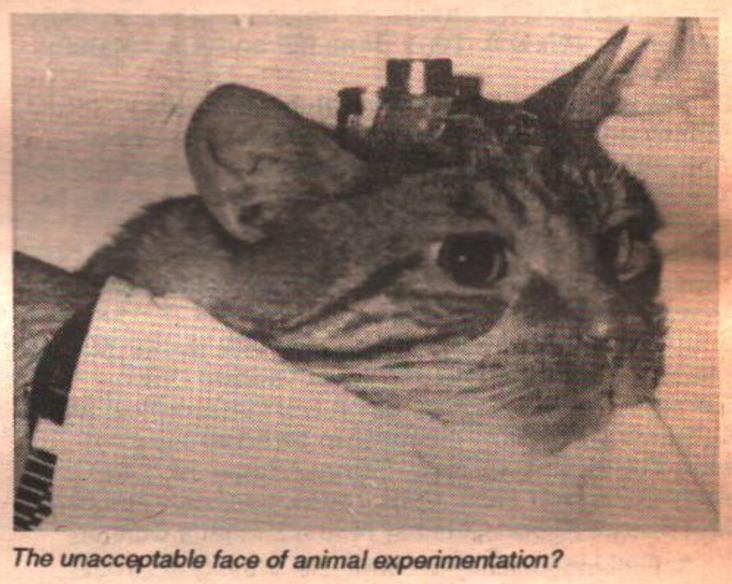


PHOTO: Plymouth Sunday Independent

The unacceptable face of animal experimentation?

The ALF has not tended to recruit amongst organised political groups. Instead, they have drawn on members of direct action animal rights groups and disenchanted animal researchers who have seen the horrors for themselves.

Consequently, many would have a scientific background, and would not find the task of manufacturing explosives too difficult.

Is the use of terror to end animal experimentation justifiable?

Previous campaigns, aimed at property, have been enormously successful. The fire bombing of fur trading stores resulted in every store involved ceasing to sell furs — even Harrods fell in line eventually.

But campaigns aimed against individuals are rather different, and not so likely to elicit public sympathy.

Murder of individual animal experimenters is difficult to justify.

But having experienced the callous indifference of some animal experimenters first hand, I would have found it difficult to shed a tear if some of them had died from an ALF bomb.

It would be rather less painful then the thousands of deaths they had inflicted themselves.

Poll Tax

3D: building a national network

3D Regional Contacts

London: Sham c/o Tottenham APT, 72 West Green Rd, London N17
South West: Danny c/o Avon Federation, 34 Belle Vue Rd, Easton, Bristol
Eastern: Nick c/o Cambridge APT, 34 Devonshire Rd, Cambridge
Katya c/o Norwich APT, 72 Connaught Rd, Norwich
West Midlands: J. Brown c/o Redditch APTU, 33 Leysters Close, Wingates, Redditch
East Midlands: Alex and Tess c/o Hyson Green APTU, 47 Foxhall Rd, Forest Fields, Nottingham
Allison c/o Warsop APTU, 30 Fenwick St, Warsop, Mansfield
Yorkshire: Ian c/o Leeds CAPT, Trades Council, Saville Mount, Leeds 7
Northern: Linda c/o Middlesborough APT, 45 Athol St, Middlesborough
North West: Nick c/o Wythenshawe APTU, 20 Troutbeck Rd, Gatby, Stockport SK8 4RR
Scotland: c/o Refuse and Resist, 2/3 182 Ark Lane, Glasgow G31 2JS

On Saturday June 2nd over 50 people met in Sheffield for the first national 3D Conference.

More than 30 Anti-Poll Tax groups from every area in the country were present, apart from Wales and the West Midlands.

The meeting was aimed at establishing a network of independent activists committed to building the Anti-Poll Tax movement in an open, non-sectarian way and addressing some of the problems that the movement faces.

Local reports indicated the enormous growth of the movement over recent months, but were realistic as well, acknowledging the problems and difficulties with the struggle.

These include the stance of the Labour Party leadership, people's fear of legal action over non-payment, and the weakness in terms of trade

By Jane Connor
Tottenham APT

union action against the Poll Tax.

This was followed by a wide-ranging and open debate on strategy to defeat the Poll Tax.

Many people felt that we had to go on the offensive against the tax, but it was also emphasised that this was going to be a long and hard struggle.

The need to understand that the Poll Tax is fundamentally an attack on local democracy, and to link the Anti-Poll Tax campaign to the fight against cuts was stressed.

Running throughout the day was the theme of the centrality of workplace organisation and action in the strategy to defeat the Poll Tax.

Reports of action by student nurses, DSS workers, Council workers in housing benefit offices and Poll Tax units showed that action is possible.

The final part of the agenda was dominated by discussion about the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation (ABAPTF) and the future direction of 3D.

The handful of activists who run the ABAPTF can't possibly service the kind of mass movement that is developing, however hard they as individuals work.

The national federation should exist primarily to service the movement, to co-ordinate national actions, and above all circulate information about what's happening on the ground throughout the movement.

The ABAPTF has been extremely weak in keeping the movement in touch with itself.

It was argued that this was the task of the 3D network: to improve communication within the movement and make the ABAPTF more representative of the movement.

However, 3D as a newsletter and a network can only perform this function if activists are prepared to report on local initiatives, organise regional meetings, and raise money to ensure that the newsletter can be produced.

The meeting ended with the decision to elect an editorial board for the 3D newsletter, to organise regional 3D conferences, and to have a national 3D conference in Leeds on Saturday September 15th.

The meeting also proposed a mass affiliation drive to the ABAPTF to ensure that its next national conference is fully representative of the forces involved in the anti-poll tax movement and that its elected leadership reflects the movement as a whole.

To affiliate to the ABAPTF write to PO Box 764, London E5 9SX.

THE POLL TAX AND THE UNIONS

DEFEND RIGHTS, JOBS, SERVICES AND DEMOCRACY!
Saturday September 8th
Polytechnic Students Union Sheffield
(Opposite Sheffield BR station)
Opening address: Tony Benn MP
Registration will be from 10am.

Trade unionists across the country are affected by the Poll Tax which attacks democracy and erodes living standards. Many workers cannot afford the Tax, others will not pay — all will face wage arrestment. Postal workers, civil servants, local government workers among others are expected to administer or enforce the Tax. There will be rationalisations and major job losses amongst council workforces and all workers will lose local services through cuts.

Union leaders must be forced off the fence and organise a fightback. The TUC should lead the struggle, not condemn non-payers. The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee is calling this conference to bring together all trade unionists who want to fight the Tax.

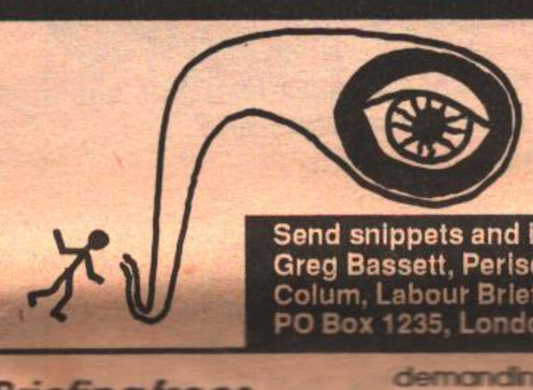
This will provide a democratic forum with workshops and full open discussion on all aspects of the poll tax and its effects on unions and the strategy needed to defeat it. Tony Benn MP and Alice Mahon MP have said:

"We welcome the initiative of the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee to organise a national conference of trade unionists against the poll tax. We call on trade unionists across the country to support it and ensure that it is a broadly based working conference that can build solidarity with those fighting this grosssly unfair system of taxation that hits the poorest hardest".

Sponsors include: Tony Benn MP, Alice Mahon MP, Joe Merino General secretary BFAWU, Richard Lynch, Secretary GLATCs, Sham Singh (TU Liason officer All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation in personal capacity), Mike Tucker NALGO NEC, Bernard Regan NUT NEC, Andy Dixon NUT NEC, Chris Eades, Secretary NALGO Met District, Kieran Connolly NUJ NEC, Jane Connor, Vice-chair London Federation, Newham NALGO, Bury NALGO, Manchester NALGO (benefits), Manchester NALGO (housing)SSC, Manchester Health NALGO, CPSA Broad Left, CPSA Socialist Caucus, CPSA PSA branch, CPSA Notts area, CPSA DHSS Merthyr, CPSA DHSS Cardiff, CPSA Wales and South West Regional Committee, CPSA St Chrstopher, Nottingham Trades Council, Southwark Trades Council, Islington Trades Council, Birmi ngham Trades Council, Tyne and Wear Trades Council,Spennymoor and District Trades Council, Humberside County Association, Camden Trades Council, Cambridge Trades Council, Reading Trades Council, Haringey Trades Council, Camden Teachers Association, LT District Council NUR, AEU Acrington No 6, AEU Acrington No 9, NCU Broad Left, NUR Broad Left, Manchester District NUR, Socialist Teachers Alliance, Nottingham City NUPE, NUPE Hackney Officers Branch, MSF St Pancras, MSF Bolton No 6, TGWU 6/234, TGWU 9/3, TGWU 6/389, Chiltern Line NUR, 3D Campaign against the Poll Tax, Tamil Action Committee, Labour Against Cuts and Poll Tax Manchester.

For further details contact: Carolyn Sikorski, 53a Geere Road, London E15.

PERISCOPE



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

Briefing frees its hostage

As no-one on the left reads *Tribune* any more (see right), *Briefing* readers will have missed Phil Kelly's two-page attack on Labour Party Socialists entitled "Will the Left Ever Matter Again?"

Full of unattributable quotes from supporters of the amorphous blob that is Labour Left Liaison, it criticised the Campaign Group for "having lost its way".

If the Campaign Group has lost its way, the Tribune Group hasn't even started down the right road!

With regard to LPS supporters, it states "There aren't any of these people outside London".

Presumably the Sheffield Conference was merely a day-outing for Londoners on a chartered train. And the two hundred people who attended the various non-London regional workshops were imposters.

The best quote of the article must go to the anonymous leaders of LLL, who state, "Mr Benn has been "captured" by *Labour Briefing.*"

Never a paper for holding hostages to fortune, *Briefing* has immediately released Comrade Benn.

The only ransom we are demanding was an article in *Tribune* that doesn't describe *Briefing* supporters as "former members of the now defunct Trotskyist International Marxist Group."

On that basis we could describe Murdoch's *Times* as containing "former editors of *Tribune.*"

Apology

Our recent Tower Hamlets election report described campaign leaflets from Park ward as "reassuring the electorate that the candidates were heterosexual, fecund, and kind to animals."

The first opportunity to sell *Briefing* in Tower Hamlets came at the GC, a couple of days after *Briefing* hit the streets.

The Park GC delegation were not tempted to make a purchase. They seemed already to have obtained copies, and were quick to criticise the report.

"We did *not,*" they said to a person, "say *anything* about being kind to animals."

Apologies to the aggrieved candidates. Apologies also to the many *Briefing* readers in the constituency who approached us to complain that we omitted to mention the vote-winning reference in the said leaflet material to scuba diving.

LLL: *Lots of Lies* about *Labour* Party Socialists

Readers of *Tribune* (are there any left on the left?) and of *Socialist Action* (are there any left at all?) will have noticed a spate of intemperate attacks on *Labour Briefing,* Labour Party Socialists, and the Socialist Movement by supporters of Labour Left Liaison, including Ken Livingstone.

In their obsessive determination to smash up any left bodies which they do not dominate, LLL activists are disseminating all kinds of lies and distortions, not only on paper but by word of mouth.

A quick run down might be useful to *Briefing* readers.

1. LPS was set up by *Briefing.*

Briefing supporters were joined by other left groups and a number of independent left activists to organise the highly successful Sheffield LPS Conference, at which the majority were unaffiliated socialists.

2. LPS is in favour of "One Member One Vote".

Nonsense!

3. LPS wants to break links with the unions and smash up the block vote.

LPS wants to strengthen and democratise links with the unions. There is (as there should be) a debate within LPS over how we do this, but only a tiny minority in LPS is in favour of actually ending the trade union vote at Conference.

Briefing's own position is quite clear — see our editorials.

4. LPS is more concerned about fighting the Labour leadership than the capitalist class and the Tories.

Wow! Coming from people who have played little or no role in the anti-Poll Tax movement and who have argued that the left must concentrate *exclusively* on Party Conference and constitutional matters, this is rich.

5. The Socialist Movement is dominated by forces hostile to the Labour Party.

Over 70% of Socialist Movement members are also Labour Party members.

The SM national Co-Chairs are Ruth Clarke and Reg Race, both prominent Party members.

6. LPS and/or *Labour Briefing* plans to leave the Labour Party and set up something else.

This is the big one, folks. Insulting squibs of this sort should be left to LCC.

LPS is all about keeping and recruiting socialists into the Labour Party and so is *Briefing.*

7. *Briefing* didn't discuss setting up LPS with the left.

In fact, there was quite widespread discussion about the desirability of a new left forum for many months prior to LPS Sheffield conference.

What LLL are really saying is that other sections of the left (including the vast majority of independent grassroots Labour left activists) would not allow them a veto over the new project.

There are major strategic differences between LLL and *Briefing;* we want to see those debated at length.

However it is impossible to have a serious debate when one side is constantly lying about the other's positons.

Comrades, please, a little perspective.

Debate: what kind of paper does the left need?

The left needs a Socialist Movement paper!

By Davy Jones
Socialist Movement Organising Committee

***Briefing* should enthusiastically welcome the plans of the Socialist Movement to launch a new paper.**

I say this as someone who has been heavily involved with *Briefing* since 1983, and a member of its Editorial Board for much of that time.

In particular I was a prime mover of the plans for *Briefing* to transform itself from a monthly magazine primarily dealing with inner-Party battles into a fortnightly paper dealing with a wider range of Labour, trade union and campaigning issues.

I well remember the enthusiasm of that period leading to launching the fortnightly and its success in preventing the whole of the "Bennite" left within the Party from disintegrating under the onslaught of Thatcherism and New Realism.

Briefing is one of the few left journals in Britain that can look the workers of Eastern Europe in the face, having never wavered in supporting their demands for socialism and democracy.

It has a proud record of supporting the struggle for Irish self-determination.

It has always backed the struggles of all the oppressed inside and outside of the Party, and stood firm in support of the miners and every other group of trade unionists.

That is why its traditions and strengths should be identified with and involved in the project of a Socialist Movement paper.

Briefing, almost alone on the left, welcomed and enthusiastically participated in the launch of the Socialist Movement.

From the outset it recognised the importance of its "twin-track" approach, bringing together the consistent class struggle left in the Party with other campaigners and trade unionists outside it.

It defended this strategy even when bitterly attacked by people in CLPD and the Labour Left Liaison for this "heresy".

Briefing also provided crucial support in launching Women for Socialism, the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, and Labour Party Socialists.

These organisations would not exist today were it not for the work *Briefing* put in with broader forces to launch them successfully.

All these organisations have faced a major problem since their successful launch conferences.

It is the same problem which numerous local groups set up by Socialist Movement has faced: they need their own paper to organise their activity, mount political campaigns and to establish a genuine movement on the ground.

It is no accident that the keenest supporters of the launch of a Socialist Movement paper are those building its local groups from Stirling to Southampton; are those trying to build Women for Socialism and the Trade Union Committee into genuine national currents.

The Socialist Movement, Women for Socialism and Labour Party Socialists already have many active local groups, but it will be very difficult for more to develop without a paper.

In fact, without such a paper the Socialist Movement, Labour Party Socialists, the Trade Union Committee, and Labour Party Socialists will all decline.

That would be a major setback for the left. The Socialist Movement has assembled an important, broad current of socialists committed to opposing imperialism, Stalinism and New Realism.

In the context of the events in Eastern Europe and the real prospect of the end of Thatcherism such a current could play a vital role in rebuilding the left across the labour movement.

Why a *new* paper? The Socialist Movement has judged that none of the existing left journals in and around the SM can be miraculously transformed into its paper.

It needs a new paper which fully reflects the greater breadth and support which the SM as a whole has over all its component trends.

What type of paper is planned? The SM's political programme is quite similar to that of *Briefing*.

It plans a campaigning and organising paper aimed at arming and informing the wide layer of activists which exist around the country within the trade unions, inside the Labour Party, amongst the oppressed and within political campaigns.

It will be a vital tool for Labour Party Socialists, Women for Socialism, and the Trade Union Committee.

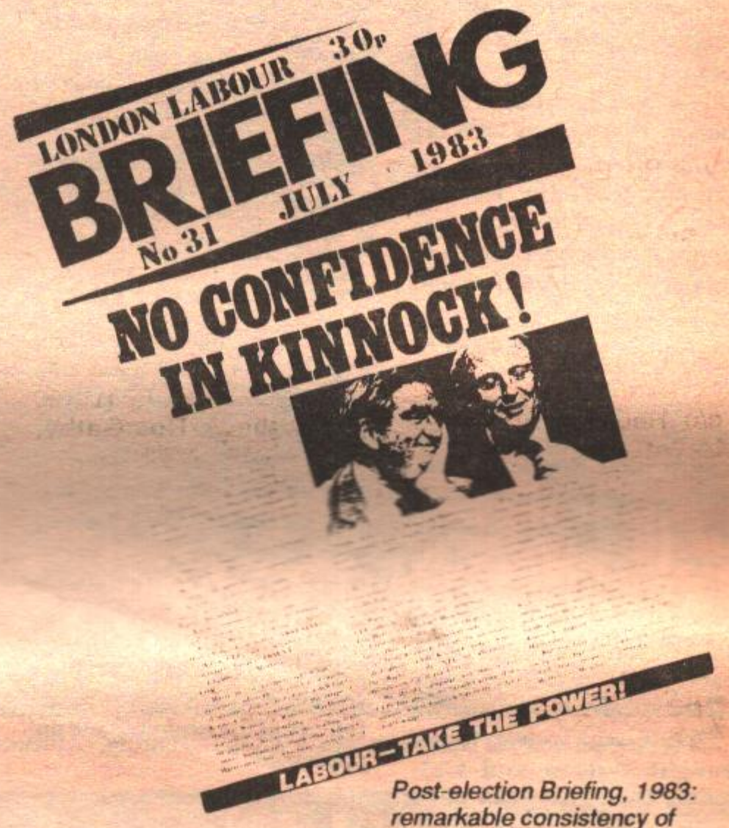
It will have a network of journalists and activists providing material on different issues and from around the country and around the world. It will be a damn good read.

How would it run? The SM proposes that the paper be run with structures rather similar to that of *Briefing*.

There would be a broad bimonthly Editorial Advisory Board elected by the SM and its associated organisations, together with a smaller Editorial Board elected from the EAB to decide on the paper's contents issue by issue.

What about the involvement of socialist currents from parties other than the Labour Party? The level of involvement in the SM from socialist currents in the Greens and Plaid Cymru is quite weak. I wish it was stronger!

It is a strength not a weakness that they want to be involved. Nevertheless it remains the case that 70% of the Socialist Movement's members are in the Labour Party.



Post-election Briefing, 1983: remarkable consistency of line!

The SM has consistently had a labour movement orientation — that is why it launched the Trade Union Committee and Labour Party Socialists. That orientation will continue, including around the General Election.

The latter is being discussed in detail at a forthcoming SM Organising Committee and *Briefing* comrades should participate in that debate to express their views.

The last SM Organising Committee endorsed the outline plans for a fortnightly paper unanimously. There was that same enthusiasm as when *Briefing* itself went fortnightly, including from a number of *Briefing* supporters at the meeting.

Briefing could make a tremendous contribution to a SM paper. Its traditions and strengths could be expressed through the paper and reach a far wider audience than at present.

Briefing can never be accused of sitting on the sidelines, nor should it over this issue. It should unambiguously welcome the moves towards a Socialist Movement paper and throw its resources behind the launch.

Doing it in style

GEOFFREY SHERIDAN continues our debate on the criteria to be taken into account if the left is to launch a new paper.

The development of *Briefing* or a new paper must take on board style and presentation, in the framework of the readership it is aiming for.

Many years ago, in the time before Thatcherism, there was a lockout at *Times* Newspapers which lasted 11 months. For a while the IMG's *Socialist Challenge* included "Our Times". It was a sobering exercise.

Through the use of formal titles and by avoiding opinionated descriptors, a moderate tone was cultivated so that argument could be conducted in a quieter place than that created by the clamour of the far left's typical jargon: *Sell-out... The left/Labour/TUC must... Kick out... Smash...*

Not a dilution of the armaments or of the demands, but an attempt to have them heard; to engage a wider readership.

Socialist feminists had said they did not wish to be hit over the head with a shovel by screeching headlines. The early 1980s made the requirement more apparent.

Bennite

New Socialist, the Labour Party's first ever official discussion magazine, launched on the high tide of Bennism with a Bennite perspective, achieved sales of over 20,000.

Marxism Today sold around 15,000 copies. Debate, discussion, argument — not sloganeering, that was the order of the day. Is there any reason to think it has changed?

Socialist Worker is the far left's most consistently well produced tabloid. By the mid-70s it had locked into a *Daily Mirror* style presentation, and there it has remained.

Skill

It is a hard act to follow, since it requires a higher degree of designer and journalistic skill than a magazine format.

SW peaked around the time of the Pentonville Five in the early 1970s, when it sold 40,000 copies.

The labour movement was out to get the Heath government, and every day brought fresh developments. There was a need to know; the most powerful requirement there could be for a *news*paper.

The SWP has been able to sustain a system of press, from a weekly tabloid to a theoretical review.

Those less fortunate have tougher decisions to take, especially when the left's readership has shrunk along with its influence.

For any left journal, the first question to ask is: Who, realistically, do we expect to read it?

If, as will often be the case, the answer is people must like ourselves, then ask: *What would I like to read? What subjects, written and presented in what manner?*

Be honest — pages on events in the labour movement and a page of cultural reviews and features, or the other way round? Or perhaps somewhere in between?

NIBS — news-in-brief — comes in handy. If you have one thing to report, there is no shame in that; no need to pad it out to several hundred words.

Brevity

Many articles can be halved without any material loss. Brevity is partly about respect for readers. Why detain them any longer than you need to?

Socialist Challenge once sent someone along to delve in the files of Fleet Street picture agencies.

One photograph he came up with was of Margaret Thatcher with a hair grip still in place. These were the photos the mainstream press was too kind, or weak-kneed to publish.

Another was of the Queen Mother celebrating her birthday with an appearance at the backgate of Buckingham Palace. She stood on a soap box, all smiles and that familiar wave. Her entire audience consisted of a bemused police constable.

Royalty commonly does better than that. The left often does not.

Addressing the audience you have got, rather than an imaginary one, and now browbeating or being condescending to them is the primary task of any journal if it is not to be boring or look ridiculous.

Geoffrey Sheridan was a journalist on Socialist Challenge and business manager of New Socialist.

Labour Briefing Sellers, Writers and Readers Meeting
Sunday, July 15th
12.30pm-4.30pm
Durham Road Community Centre, Durham Road, London N4
(near Finsbury Park tube)
A meeting to discuss the future of *Labour Briefing*

Labour Party

Looking to the next Labour government

You ain't seen nothing yet!

It has been said that the Labour Party speaks fine words in opposition, but just watch it change when in office.

Now the Labour Party does not even bother with the fine words.

In the past, the Labour leadership talked about improving health, education and other services, even if would not take the necessary steps to redistribute wealth in order to pay for them.

Now we are told that the need to encourage enterprise, to keep taxes low and incentives high must come first and public spending comes second.

In the past there was some lip service to public ownership, but now all but the "natural monopolies" will stay private.

The message is clear. **If you thought Wilson and Callaghan were bad, you ain't seen nothing yet.**



A Labour government will have achieved office by tying itself unequivocally to the capitalists of Washington, Brussels and London.

If anyone expects such a government to reverse the decline of the Thatcher years — to increase wages, restore benefits or revive services — they will have a rude awakening.

By Steve Reicher
Exeter CLP

Both the process of electing a government, and the nature of the government in power, will have tremendous impact on the balance of social forces. It is on this basis that we call and campaign for a Labour government.

It is not because we have illusions in Kinnock, Smith, Brown & Co., but rather because, despite them, Labour in office will boost the confidence of the exploited and the oppressed.

Leadership

Imagine the day after Labour get elected. Despite all the leadership policies, the confidence and combativity of all those who have suffered under Thatcherism will be massively enhanced.

They will demand to be heard and to be satisfied. They will use the Party to that end.

Kinnock, is not unaware of this. He has a simple solution — to take the Party away from us by breaking the link with the trade unions and removing the power of Conference.

It is this, rather than nuances of policy, which really distinguish him from that long line linking Ramsey MacDonald to Callaghan.

This is what is really meant by turning Labour into a European Social Democratic party. Labour, for all the distortions, is still a Party of the working classes and the struggle to maintain it as such transcends all other issues.

Legislation

If people try and take action, they will find a Labour Party armed with Tory legislation to use against them.

In the week of the new Policy Review, Tony Blair was asked on BBC's "Question Time" whether Labour would allow a return to the mass picketing of the 70s.

He assured listeners that such mass action and most secondary action would be illegal.

The only exception would be "solidarity" action where a second employer conspires with the first to frustrate a dispute. In such a case, said Blair, pickets would be entitled to ask workers in the second plant to hold a ballot on action.

If the attacks of recent years will not stop if Kinnock replaces Thatcher at No. 10, why support Labour? Why call for socialists to campaign for a Labour victory?

The question is hardly new. No Labour Party has gone into an election promising to end capitalism.

No socialist could ever vote for Labour on the basis that socialism would be legislated into existence. To believe that this is possible would be to believe that parliament acts in isolation from the rest of society.



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Kinnock cuddles up to Yorks NUM Leader Jack Taylor: what relationship do they envisage for the future?

We know this is false. The law is as much determined by, as determining of, social struggles. It is important for socialists to stress both sides of this equation.

While it is wrong to say that elections and parliaments are everything, it is equally wrong to claim that they are nothing.

Divorced

Policy can and will change. But once the Party is divorced from those whose interest it is to transform society, then the finest policies in the world will mean nothing.

Our tasks in the immediate future are therefore obvious:

- to retain the Labour Party as a Party of the working class and its allies;
- to get that Party into parliament;
- to force the interests of the class against the betrayals of the leadership.

Wales Labour Party Conference

Rampage of the right

The recent Welsh Labour Party Conference held in Swansea offered further evidence, if any was needed, of New Realism's continuing stranglehold on the Welsh labour movement.

The major areas of debate were devolution and the Poll Tax.

A NUPE resolution calling for the next Labour government to establish a Welsh assembly with revenue raising and legislative powers was decisively rejected by delegates.

Instead, Conference supported a motion calling on a future Labour government to create a 76 member, proportionately elected Assembly but leaving real power over Wales in Westminster.

Despite this expression of support for an Assembly, doubts remain about the likelihood of the next Labour government fulfilling this commitment.

Doubts that were not eased when Neil Kinnock's Conference speech contained only a fleeting reference to plans to create a Welsh Assembly, and the question did not figure in Shadow Welsh secretary Barry Jones' Conference speech at all.

By a South Wales correspondent

The debate on the Poll Tax, if it could be called that, undoubtedly represented a new low for the left in the Welsh Party.

It came as no surprise that a resolution from Swansea West Women's Section, calling for support for a campaign of mass non-payment, was overwhelmingly rejected by Conference.

The most disappointing and disturbing feature of the debate was the hostility Conference reserved for delegates supporting non-payment.

The role of the defeat of the miners in 1984-85 in undermining the strength of socialist ideas amongst the organised Welsh working class cannot be overestimated.

However we must continue to point out the inadequacies of Labour's current programme in dealing with the enormous economic and social problems generated by over a decade of vicious Tory assaults on working class people and communities in Wales.

When a delegate, *Militant* supporter Alec Thraves from Swansea West CLP, objected to the fact that the Chair appeared to call to the rostrum only those delegates who opposed the resolution, he was threatened with removal from the Conference.

Worse still, as he protested at his treatment by the Chair he was slow hand clapped and jeered by a large section of Conference.

This was followed by speaker after speaker denouncing *Militant* supporters and the non-payment campaign with a virulence one might expect at a Tory conference.

Robin Cook brought better news, promising that the next Labour government would meet health employees' pay awards in full and that any hospitals opting out of the NHS under current Tory legislation would immediately be brought back in under Labour.

Delegates also gave overwhelming support to a resolution calling on the next Labour government to establish a New Welsh Language Act.

Tony Benn's meeting, jointly organised by the Campaign Group Wales and Swansea Labour Left, easily proved the most popular of the fringe gatherings. Even a few prominent local right wingers were amongst the audience of 300!

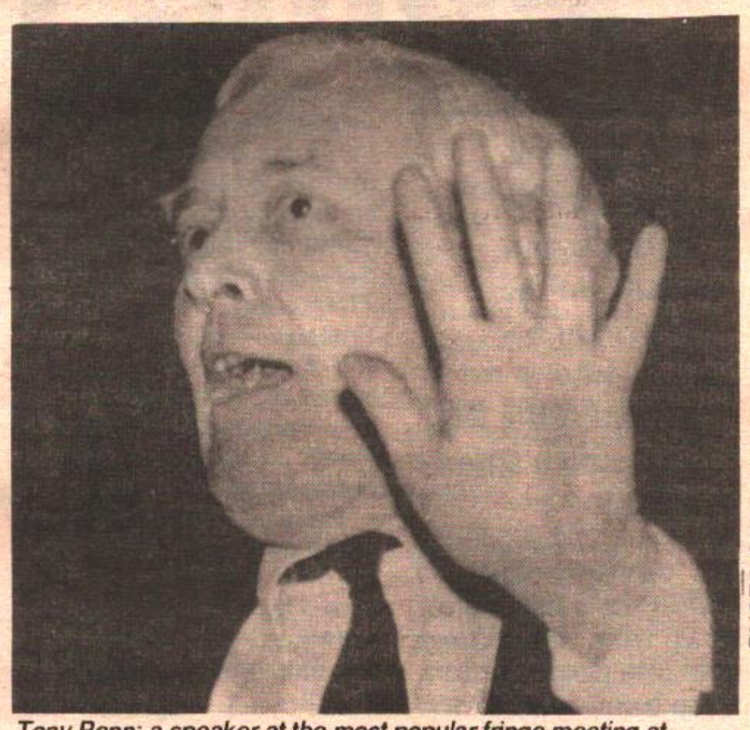


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Tony Benn: a speaker at the most popular fringe meeting at Wales Labour Conference.

Benn described the NEC's latest policy document as possibly the most anti-socialist document ever produced by the Labour Party, pointing out that previous attempts by Labour governments to pacify the city and manage capitalism in a fairer way than the Tories had ended in ruin.

The gloomy picture for socialists at this Conference must be understood in the context of the weakness of the Welsh left in comparison to other parts of Britain.

Labour Party Socialists

Zeroing in on trade union laws

Labour Party Socialists is mounting a concerted campaign for a Labour commitment to repeal all Tory anti-union laws.

This is among the initiatives agreed by the first meeting of the LPS National Steering Group.

The latest policy package to be put before Party Conference in Blackpool promises to keep the laws which devastated miners, printworkers, seafarers, dockers, etc.

In particular, it proposes to criminalise mass picketing, nearly all types of secondary action, and any industrial action called without a "properly conducted ballot".

These laws are to be enforced by a new set of "industrial courts" with powers to fine and imprison individuals and to sequestrate union funds.

By Mike Marqusee Labour Party Socialists

Labour's Front Bench is keen on keeping the panoply of Tory anti-union laws not merely because they believe it is electorally attractive (it isn't) but because they want these laws in place *in order to use them.*

A Kinnock government inheriting an economic crisis from the Tories and comitted to operating within boundaries laid down by the City and the IMF would come up against industrial resistance from many of its own supporters.

It would then use the Tory laws against them — a disaster for the whole labour movement which could usher in a new cycle of reaction.

However, this is the most vulnerable section of the new policy package, not least because the majority of Party members are undoubtedly opposed to it.

Party

Further, a majority of unions affiliated to the Party (and many more unaffiliated, including NALGO and NUCPS) are committed by their Conferences to support the repeal of all Tory anti-trade union laws.

The positive rights for workers mentioned in the policy document (and the much more comprehensive agenda of Wallasey CLP's Workers' Charter) can only be implemented and protected in practice by free and effective collective organisation in the workplace.

This cannot be achieved as long as the current legal restrictions remain in force. The mainstream of the union movement knows this. It is therefore extremely unhappy with recent statements on union laws by Kinnock and Blair.

The debate on trade union law at Blackpool promises to be one of the sharpest — and the ensuing vote one of the closest — in an otherwise dispiritingly one-sided Conference week.

In the past, the Labour left's links to the trade union rank-and-file have been weak. Repeatedly we have failed to argue our case to the only people in a position to take it forward — the organised working class.

As a result, the divide between the so-called industrial and political wings of the labour movement has been allowed to stand unchallenged — to the detriment of all.

Recognisng this, LPS is now circulating a model resolution (on this page) and (more importantly) organising a campaign in support of it. We hope the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee will join us.

We need as many CLPs and trade unions as possible to back this motion (or anything along the same lines) to ensure it is debated. Please let us know if your Labour Party and/or trade union branch has voted to support it.

We will also be circulating a petition along the same lines as the resolution. We'll be asking all trade union and Labour Party bodies as well as individual Party and trade union members to sign it.

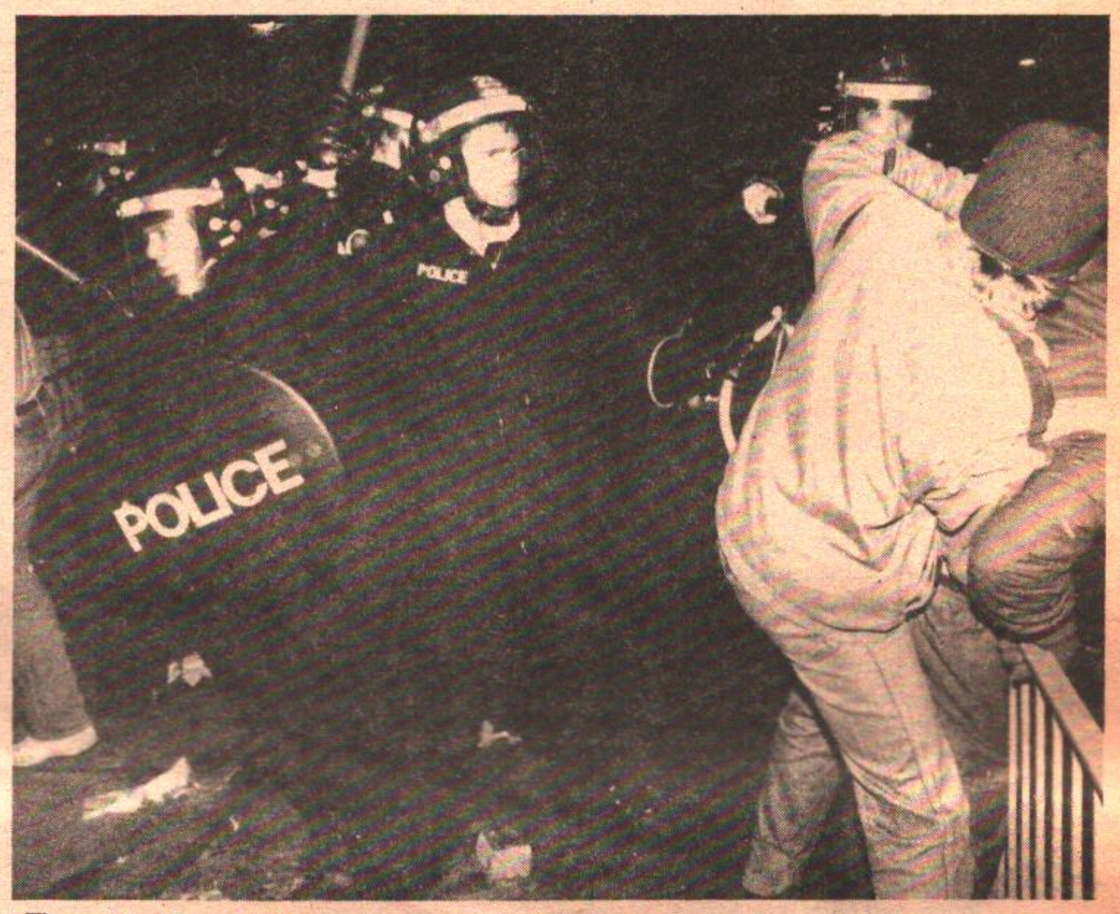
We hope to use the petition to build a lobby of Conference on the day of the trade union law debate.

We need active trades unionists — in particular trades unionists who have suffered under the Tories' laws — to make our message to the Labour leaders loud and clear: *repeal all Tory anti-union laws!*

We will also be organising a fringe meeting on this issue on the same day.

Ours is not only a short-term campaign to overtum Labour's reactionary position on trade union rights; it is part of a long-term struggle to build a new, dynamic Labour left that links activists in the CLPs and trade unions.

We need positive suggestions and practical help — in particular from active trade unionists.



The reality of Tory anti-trade unionism — which the Labour leadership wants to keep enshrined in the law.

Labour Party Socialists Model Resolution

Conference recognises the necessity for employees to have free, independent, and effective trade unions.

It calls on the next Labour government to repeal immediately all Tory anti-union laws.

It also calls on the next Labour government to introduce legislation based on the principles of the Campaign for Free Trades Unions:

1. The right to belong to a trade union, to recruit fellow workers into unions and to have your union recognised by the employer for collective bargaining;

2. The right to be active in your union and to take industrial action without fear of the sack;

3. The right to strike, to picket effectively, and to take industrial action in support of other groups of workers, without fear of losing your job or legal attacks on your union;

4. The right of union members to determine their own rules, in line with the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association.

Note: The Campaign for Free Trades Unions issued a statement earlier this year consisting of the four demands listed above. The CFTU was backed by 33 trade union leaders, including Bickerstaffe (NUPE), Gill and Switzer (MSF), Christopher (FTAT), Cameron (FBU), Marino (Bakers), Heathfield (Miners), Christie (NUCPS), Christie (STUC), Jinkinson (NALGO), Fullick (ASLEF), Sapper (ACTT), Conroy (NUJ), Todd and Morris (TGWU).

Contact Mike Marqusee c/o Briefing office for more information.

JOIN LABOUR PARTY SOCIALISTS!

Name.....

Address.....

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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.

Labour Party Socialists AGM October 27/28th; Sheffield

Wallasey witch-hunt

Field's revenge

Wallasey CLP and *Socialist Organiser* are the latest targets of the Walworth Road witch-hunt.

"Investigations" into Wallasey CLP, Wirral DLP, and *Socialist Organiser* are now being conducted by Joyce Gould, Labour's National Director of Organisation.

They are a result of "Labour" MP Frank Field's vendetta against local Party members following his deselection in Birkenhead.

Wallasey has an excellent record as a campaigning CLP.

By MARK SEATON

In 1987, its left wing candidate Lol Duffy cut Tory Linda Chalker's majority from nearly 7,000 to 279 — making it one of the most marginal seats in the country.

In recent years the local Labour Party has succeeded in seizing seven seats from the Tories in Council elections.

Membership of the CLP increased by 34% last year — no doubt the result of constant public campaigning on the NHS and the Poll Tax, as well as an active Women's Section and strong links with local unions.

The first glimmerings of the witch-hunt came in 1987, when the NEC dragged its feet over endorsing Duffy as PPC.

During the General Election campaign, Field, MP for neighbouring Birkenhead, called for a vote against Labour in Wallasey because (in his opinion) Duffy was too left wing.

This was one of many political misdemeanours committed by Field — others include his support for ET, his opposition to abortion and his threat to resign and fight a by-election as an independent if deselected.

This last led to his replacement as Labour's candidate in Birkenhead by TGWU official Paul Davies.

Field retaliated by compiling a lengthy dossier which purports to detail the subversive activities of the left — particularly *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* — in the Wirral.

This dossier is crammed with salacious gossip, hearsay, sexist tittle-tattle and outright fabrications — but was nonetheless solemnly received by Labour's NEC, which decreed that an "investigation" must be held.

Joyce Gould met local Party officers once at the beginning of this year but since that time local Party members have been kept informed of the progress of the investigation mainly through the press.

to call for the expulsion of six named *Militant* supporters.

The NEC will probably carry out the expulsions and then order that a new selection takes place in Birkenhead.

Political

This manoeuvre is unlikely to save Field's political skin. His behaviour since being deselected has so outraged local Labour Party members that he will probably be dumped by an even bigger margin at the second asking.

Field's allegations in regard to Wallasey were so spurious that little option was left to Gould (if she wasn't to dump the dossier entirely) but to target *Socialist Organiser.*

In her interim report to the NEC she declared that she would now be looking into *Socialist Organiser's* local activity and national organisation.

The attack on comrades in the Wirral and on *Socialist Organiser* itself is a threat to Labour Party democracy and the left as a whole. Raise the issue in your CLP.

Contact the Secretary, Wallasey CLP, 39 Orchard Road, Moreton, Wallasey for copies of a booklet on the witch-hunt and a model resolution against it. Speakers who can detail this latest outrage are also available.

"We oppose expulsions of Labour Party members for their political views. We believe that the right for Labour Party members to associate to publish and distribute journals such as Socialist Organiser is an essential part of the democratic life of the Labour Party."

The Socialist Organiser Editorial Board is seeking signatures to endorse this statement. Please send names to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

The many people named in the dossier have been given no opportunity to put their case.

Conduct

Apparently, Gould has decided that despite Field's accusations there were no irregularities in the conduct of the Birkenhead reselection. However, she is likely

SHAKTI

Asian Lesbian and Gay i

We reprint here an article from *Lesbian and Gay Socialist* (the magazine of the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights) by SHIVANANDA KHAN of the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Network SHAKTI.

Asian lesbians and gay men do not only have to deal with racism within the "gay scene".

We also have to deal with ignorance of our cultural and historical background.

For many of us,the only way to be accepted is to become white ourselves in clothes, food, music, and behaviour. We have to lose our Asianness to be gay.

Then we have to fight the converse in our own communities, where being gay is a "white disease" and we can no longer call ourselves Asians.

Gayness as it is currently understood is Eurocentric. Ethnic minorities get no part of developing the context in which gay issues are debated.

To add to the difficulties we face as Asians and blacks we must deal with institutional and hidden racism in the gay culture. For us it is Catch 22, either way we lose.

SHAKTI formed in response to this, to make a stand before the gay community and within our own Asian communities.

We are aligned with black lesbians and gays against racism, and with the gay movement as a whole for our sexuality.

As Asians and gays we are alone, but it is our debate, for us to lead, to create and formulate.

These extra dimensions intensify our situation and it is this which is not understood.

SHAKTI is a sanskrit term meaning the feminine principle of the universe which in Hinduism is an active principle of regeneration, creativity, and rebirth, unlike the western equivalent which is seen as passive.

In conversational Hindi it means power, strength, energy.

While SHAKTI is recognisably Hindi, we also wanted a defined geographical area, South Asia. SHAKTI is for people from the subcontinent, or descendants, or those who have one parent from there.

We identify as Asian and black, which signifies the political debate on racism. Other issues reflect the ethnicity of our part of the world and a Eurocentric society which ignore our history and contribution.

Of course there are aspects of our traditions which must be transformed, such as the oppression of women within marriage, but as South Asians we have our own traditions which are equally valid as those of Europeans.

We had to create a framework where we can debate the issues of being Asian and being gay. The struggle for us is triple edged, for we are non-white and we stand on the boundaries that divide the Asian communities from the host community.

"Assimilation", which is often thrown at us, is not equality but a form of imperialism, telling us we have no value as Asians, only as brown English.

The "gay scene" is all white — the music, ideology, beauty images, fashion. Any smattering of black imagery is usually within a sexual context, the black male seen as a sexual object.

We are expected to accept the images of white lesbians and gay men that surround us as being positive, alluring, and beautiful. There are are no images that Asians can turn to and identify with.

Is it any wonder that we can get confused about ourselves as Asians and so often want to reject our Asianness?

SHAKTI is in coalition with other ethnic minority groups in terms of fighting racism, but we also address the ideas of positive images of Asians.

We also face this debate within our own communities.

The Asian communities were formed as a defence against racism, a means of mutual protection, close family networks and cultural solidarity providing a sanctuary against constant harassment, violence, and abuse in our everyday lives.

Because of this, our communities have been defensive and antagonistic towards any threats they deem to be against "Asian values".

Homosexuality is seen as a white phenomenon. Any Asian who is homosexual is seen as being seduced by white liberalism or infected by a "white disease".

This leads to denial, or calls for "treatment", or total rejection by family and community — and the family means the extended family of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins.

The concept of an Asian gay person is very difficult to comprehend because there isn't the language to discuss it.

The issue is hidden. The assumption is that homosexuality does not exist "back home".

While for some families homosexual behaviour can be dealt with as long as community duty is also followed by getting married and no talking about it, being gay cannot.

Rejection by our community is particularly horrendous. We are brought up by an extended family network and sheltered in the solidarity of our community.

We are raised within our traditions, customs, and codes of familial responsibility and community duty and honour, providing an intensive web of relationships.

In order to maintain or communities,marriage is central. Marriage is not between two people so much as between two families.

Being gay brings shame to all members of the family. Thus the pressure to marry is intense. All relatives are brought in to cajole, persuade, threaten.

For many, the issue is reduced either to confirming and getting married, or leading a secret life, or leaving a family and community behind to live in the white community.

This becomes a choice between being Asian or being gay.

For Asian lesbians it is even more difficult. Men have more freedom of movement as well

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Pride in adversity

Lesbian and gay men will be taking to the streets again on Saturday June 30th for *Pride 1990*.

This year's street carnival will be the massive centrepiece of hundreds of smaller events, meetings, marches, films, plays, discos, and parties taking place all over the country — a far cry from the first courageous demos of the early 70s.

Despite the razzmatazz and commercialism brought by success and the "enterprise culture" the message at the heart of it all is faithful to the Stonewall Riots which it commemorates — a defiant pride in being lesbian or gay.

This year it will be pride in the face of adversity. The march will take place in a climate of rising homophobia and increasing violence against lesbians and gay men.

•Police prosecutions of gay men for "public indecency" have reached levels unparalleled since the 50s.

•Attacks on lesbians and gay men have been growing — often these attacks end in brutal murder.

•Lesbians' right to have children is gravely threatened by the government's Embryology Bill.

The assault has been encouraged and the prejudice deliberately cultivated by the Tory government, with its reactionary offensive on behalf of the "nuclear family" and the institutionalised bigotry of Section 28.

The government has been aided and abetted by right-wing pressure groups and local Tory activists, who waged a number of vicious homophobic campaigns (often mixed with racism) in the recent local elections.

In the face of bigotry, the labour movement — and in particular Labour Councils — has too often retreated.

Briefing supporters must redouble their efforts to ensure that the labour movement confronts homophobia and fully involves itself in the struggle for lesbian and gay equality.

Trade union and Labour Party banners should be prominent on the "Stop the Killings" demo in Ealing.

This *Briefing* centrespread is a small contribution to a struggle which is vital to all socialists.

***Briefing* Editorial Board**

Stop the killings!

End violence against lesbians and gay men

At 1am on the morning of Sunday April 29th, a gay man named Michael Boothe was kicked and beaten to death outside a public toilet in Ealing, West London.

Before he died, Michael was able to say that he was attacked because he was gay.

Many lesbian mothers live with the constant threat of physical violence and other forms of abuse from ex-male partners.

These men are able to extort money from, sexually harass, and even rape women, who in many cases are unable to approach the police for fear of further harassment or exposure in the courts, therefore risking loss of custody of their children.

Fifteen gay men have been murdered in Britain in the last 12 months. Lesbians and gay men face violence on the street, in the home and in the workplace every day of our lives.

The level of physical attacks against lesbians and gay men has been on the increase for the last five years.

The motivation behind attacks on lesbians and gay men is clearly based on homophobia — the fear and consequent hatred of lesbians and gay men.

Many lesbians and gay men supported by evidence

By Tim Foskett
LCLGR

gathered by Galop, the Gay London Police Monitoring Project — believe that a majority of these attacks are not organised initiatives by the National Front or other extreme rightwing groups.

They believe that widespread violence against lesbians and gay men is simply a manifestation of the homophobia ingrained throughout British society, and promoted by a large number of institutions.

The Ealing Lesbian and Gay Forum was set up initially to condemn the killing of Michael Boothe and all violence against lesbians and gay men.

It claims that it is no coincidence that Michael was killed four days before the Local Government elections, at the height of a racist and homophobic election campaign by the Ealing Conservative Party.

Nor is it a coincidence that the rise in street violence against lesbians and gay men has occurred within the context of Section 28, the Embryology Bill, and the relentless abuse of the HIV/AIDS crisis by the Tory Press to scapegoat and repress lesbian and gay activity — sexual and political.

However, while the Thatcher Government has actively fuelled the fires of homophobia and persecution, they have been burning for a much longer while.

Action to end violence against lesbians and gay men will require enormous change, stretching to the very basis of society. The Ealing Lesbian and Gay Forum have set out the following demands as a beginning:

•police registration of violence and harassment against lesbians and gay men;

•legislation to outlaw the incitement of hatred towards lesbians and gay men;

Legislation

•legislation to establish and secure the right of lesbians and gay men to bring up children, and to meet and display affection to one another in public places;

•the outlawing of agent provocateur tactics used by the police to entrap gay men, and the redeployment of police resources to protect lesbians and gay men from violence and harassment;

•positive images of lesbians and gay men in the schools curriculum, and action to tackle anti-lesbian and anti-gay prejudice in schools and colleges;

•safe, accessible, and well-resourced meeting places for lesbians and gay men in the community.

Violence against lesbians and gay men will end only when the basis of homophobia is tackled, and a comprehensive revision of the institutional treatment of lesbians and gay men is undertaken.

Until such time, lesbians and gay men will continue to be beaten and murdered, and will continue to live as a community under siege.

STOP THE KILLINGS DEMONSTRATION
Tuesday 10th July 1990
Assemble 7-7.30pm at Elthorne Park, Boston Road, Ealing (nearest tube: Boston Manor, Piccadilly line)
The demonstration will proceed to Ealing Town Hall for a rally at 9pm.
There will be transport for people with disabilities/mobility difficulties who wish to use it.
There will be a sign language interpreter at the rally.

dentities

as financial freedom.

The Asian woman is under more intense pressure, restrictions on going out and with whom, tied to the home to help with housework, lack of money; and the general oppression of women by a sexist society.

SHAKTI in a sense provides a context of an extended family network, supporting Asian lesbians and gays.

A whole new language needs to be created in our communities. Homosexuality has a long history within the subcontinent, but for two men or two women to live together as loving and sexual partners there is no terms.

This means we have to fight the "white disease" syndrome, showing the historical validity of homosexuality as well as developing the rights of the individual.

What we do has a bearing on the debate in the subcontinent. We are part of an international network and respond tot he oppression of our brothers and sisters in the home countries.

In Pakistan, homosexuality is stoning offence, and while this is not in general carried out, the homosexual suffers imprisonment, torture, and abuse.

In india, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, homosexual expression is imprisonable. Harassment and violence are part of the story.

The issue of gay liberation stems from a Eurocentric view of the world and the rights of the individual. This does not address the Asian, brought up in our extended families.

Furthermore, in the subcontinent, only those with financial independence can afford a gay lifestyle.

Families sleep in one room, there is very little private space, the poor are very poor, there is a caste system and a developing class system.

To express one's sexuality requires space, freedom, and the ability to meet others.

The gay debate in the subcontinent must therefore also address the inequalities of society as well as global issues of "third world" debt, ecological issues, etc.

SHAKTI can and does incorporate ideas, arguments, and concepts from western struggles, but it must also develop its own context and history, which will include issues affecting lesbians and gay men in the subcontinent.

Part of that debate will include the imperialistic notions of westerners with their terminology of "third world", ethnocentric values, traditions, and history.

We are willing to act in cooperation with any organisation and individual who addresses these issues, whether they be black organisations fighting racism,, lesbian and gay organisations fighting for equal rights, international organisations fighting for a just economic order.

But always we stand as South Asians who have the capacity, ability, and right to develop our own models and frameworks, to control our own destiny.

General Election



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Keep up the pressure from the lesbian and gay movement!

Labour must deliver!

The next Labour government will "prohibit discrimination on grounds of race, sex, sexual orientation or disability and repeal the notorious Section 28."

So says the latest Policy Review document.

It is five years after the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) won its first debate at Labour Party Conference, after four campaigns and twice overturning the National Executive.

At last the Party has accepted it has a lesbian and gay rights policy and has put it in its programme — although not in words we would use.

It is the only progressive policy to have forced its way into the Policy Review.

As the Policy Review process rolls on, LCLGR has launched a campaign entitled "Labour Must Deliver" in the run-up to the next General Election.

Why do we need such a campaign and why should the left throw its support wholeheartedly behind it?

Despite late changes of heart by Roy Hattersley and others, there is little confidence that the next Labour government will exert itself to implement its promises.

By Peter Purton Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights

It will be necessary to maintain a strong, continuous pressure from the lesbian and gay communities, from the labour movement, and from supporters inside Parliament.

Only then will a new government take the measures early in its period of office to repeal oppressive laws and to make discrimination illegal.

The Tories will use the issue to rouse popular prejudice against Labour, as they did in the 1987 Election and in recent local election campaigns.

Labour's cowardly failure to respond left the field open to bigotry — and left lesbians and gay men exposed to an increasing wave of violence and murderous attacks.

It will be a massive job to force Labour to confront the issue in public and to begin to change the climate of the debate by answering, instead of hiding from, the homphobic smears.

There are, also worrying gaps in the Party commitment: two central questions, in addition to the discrimination, which have finally won overwhelming support across the labour movement.

The rights of lesbians and gay men to custody of children must be enshrined in law and the age of consent for gay men must be equalised with heterosexuals. Neither commitment is secure.

Hattersley has already said that he will offer only a free vote on the age of consent. To win a free vote will require a dramatic change in the opinion of today's MPs and in public opinion.

There is finally, a well-founded cynicism among many lesbians and gays about the Labour Party. We have to convince them to vote Labour — and keep up the campaign.

The left can claim no better reputation for consistent support for lesbians and gay men than any other section of the labour movement.

For that to change and for lesbians and gay men to be won to socialism in large numbers, the left itself has to understand why the issues of lesbian and gay liberation are intrinsic to the struggle for socialism, and it has to play an active role in promoting the struggle.

Labour Must Deliver is a campaign aimed not just at lesbians and gay men, but also at the whole labour movement.

There is to be a rally in London on September 11th at Lambeth Town Hall, and there is a national conference in 1991.

There are lesbian and gay rights struggles going on at this moment such as the ones covered elsewhere on this page. It would be a good start for the left if these events were to be widely and vigorously supported.

Self-organisation begins

Out in the East!

Great possibilities have been opened up for the small, isolated, and persecuted lesbian and gay communities of Eastern Europe by recent tumultuous events.

The first, tentative steps towards lesbian and gay self-organisation and the recreation of a lesbian and gay subculture in post-capitalist Eastern Europe were taken in in the 70s and early 80s.

Discreet gay male intellectual discussion circles were established in several Polish cities.

Lesbian groups in the GDR led the struggle for the right to lay wreaths at Concentration Camp sites in memory of lesbians and gay men murdered by the Nazis.

The coming of *glasnost* opened up the political landscape and allowed more lesbian and gay groups to grow.

In 1988 Hungary's first lesbian and gay rights organisation — Homeros Lambda — was officially recognised by the government; while in Poland informal lesbian and gay groups were founded in Wroclaw, Lodz, Gdansk and Warsaw.

The greatest progress was made in the GDR under the hardline regime of Erich Honecker.

Here, in contrast to the almost exclusively male composition of various groups, lesbians played a prominent role in organising for change — a legacy of women's greater economic independence in the GDR combined with the historical strength of the women's movement and lesbian subculture before the war.

Not only did lesbian and gay groups spring up in many cities but the attitude of Party and state underwent a considerable change.

Police harassment slackened, wreaths were permitted to be laid and in May 1989 the age of consent was equalised at 14. The line emanating from the media became more and more that prejudice, not homosexuality, is the problem.

However, vicious repression continued unabated in Ceaucescu's Romania. Male homosexuality remains a criminal offence and lesbians and gay men were beaten by the *Securitate*, imprisoned, tortured or put in psychiatric hospitals.

The pace of change has accelerated since the fall of the old Stalinist regimes.

However, lesbians and gay men are also caught amidst the contradictions of the processes set in motion by the continuing political and economic upheavals from Berlin to the Balkans.

In Poland, new association laws allow the creation of "circle organisations"". A Polish Feminist Society has been registered recently whose activists regularly discuss lesbian issues, including in official interviews.

By Rebecca Flemming Islington North CLP

Gay activists from across the country have founded the Lambda Groups Association of Poland. This national organisation will "promote social tolerance towards homosexuality, build up positive consciousness among gays and lesbians and deal with the problems of AIDS."

The special police troops who used to organise roundups of gays, and kept comprehensive files on the lesbian and gay community are being wound up.

Lesbian and gay social events are being held in student clubs and Poland now has its very own out, gay popstar — Slawek Starosta — lead singer of Balkan Electique.

However, though the highpoint of Solidarnosc's struggles in 1981 also marked a highpoint of liberalisation on questions of sexuality in the media and arts, lesbians and gay men are discovering that Solidarnosc in government is quite different.

Activists

Many activists think they would have got more support from the old regime which had allowed the Warsaw Homosexual Movement to meet on state premises.

The growing power of the Catholic Church, long the main purveyor of oppressive sexual ideology and self-proclaimed "guardian of morality", is a particular threat.

Both Lambda and the AIDS helpline have recently been evicted from premises at the Warsaw University Students' Club.

There have been breakthroughs in Czechoslovakia where there are now two lesbian and gay rights organisations.

Lambda Czechoslovakia has been joined by the "Movement for the Legal Rights of Gay Citizens".

This group is campaigning for equalisation of the age of consent (currently 18 for lesbains and gay men and 15 for heterosexuals) and the repeal of laws against lesbian or gay sexual activity in public and against lesbian or gay prostitution.

In the GDR the growing women's movement, in particular the Independent Women's Federation, is taking up lesbian issues and supporting autonomous lesbian groups.

Lesbian custody rights are a central question in a society where the majority of lesbians have been married and many have children.

The Pink Archive in Liepzig has joined the ever growing number of lesbian and gay organisations, as East German lesbians and gay men try and reclaim their past.

The future is uncertain, however, and many lesbians' and gay mens' fears about the pace and terms of imminent reunification can only have been heightened by the recent attack on a gay bar in East Berlin by 100 West German skinheads.

Many were seriously injured. The PDS (renamed and revamped SED) was alone among the major parties in making any commitment to lesbian and gay equality during the elections.

In Romania there is now a glimmer of hope and both Homeros Lambda in Hungary and Hosi-Wien in Austria have pledged their support for campaigns to repeal Articles 200 and 204 of the Romanian Penal Code which criminalise homosexuality.

Lesbians and gay men across Eastern Europe are taking advantage of the new political openess and the dismantling or disarray of much of the old Stalinist repressive apparatus to organise, socialise and communicate.

New groups and campaigns have developed and co-ordination between countries is increasing.

The progress that has been made has been through the efforts of lesbians and gay men themselves. It has not been handed down from new, "liberal" regimes or provided at the behest of the IMF or imperialist pressure.

Prejudice and discrimination have not disappeared with the demise of Stalinism but remain as strong as ever.

However, the uprising of the peoples has created a space for lesbians and gay men to organise in against their oppression. Socialists in this country must support this struggle for liberation.

Special GREEN feature

Global warming

Not just a lot of hot air

Unprecedented famine, disease, drought, flooding, mass displacement of people...

The scenario could be taken from my biblical vision of the apocalypse.

It could be the plot for some giant box office smash of a disaster movie.

The implications of the greenhouse effect are, however, far from fiction. Of all the world's ecological problems, the greenhouse effect presents humanity with one of its biggest challenges.

By SAM INMAN

Sadly though, there are far too many on the left who dismiss the green debate as a load of middle class hot air.

The greenhouse effect shows that this position is chauvinistic nonsense.

Green issues are fundamentally class issues and as such need to be incorporated into a socialist programme — one which is genuinely internationalist.

Carbon dioxide is the chief culprit in global warming. By 2030 it is likely that we will see a doubling of carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere.

It is expected that such a rise in carbon dioxide levels will produce a rise in the average global surface temperature of between 1.5° and 4.5° centigrade.

This doesn't sound very much. But it will mean that the Earth is warmer than it has been certainly for the last 125,000 years, and possibly warmer than at anytime in the past two million years.

Such a rise in temperature will have profound consequences for "natural" plant and animal ecosystems, agricultural ecosystems, fresh water supplies, sea levels, and, consequently, the shape of coastlines.

The greatest warming will occur at high latitudes particularly the polar regions; the least in the tropics (between 0.5° and 1° Centigrade).

The regional impact on climate and weather systems will vary considerably.

The effect of global warming on agriculture illustrates how catastrophic it could be.

At present the US is the world's only net exporter of grain, the bulk of its production coming from the "corn belt" states.

A rise in temperature of 2° centigrade would shift the corn belt northwards onto poor, acid soils, which would need extensive treatment (costing millions of dollars).

It would also accelerate the development of crop plants, which cause a decrease in yield of between three and 17%.

The combined effects are likely to cause significant drops in crop yield with huge consequences for global food markets.

As always, the effect will be most dire in the "Third World" countries, already groaning under the burdens of imperialism.

Many millions of people in these countries live under constant threat of starvation, many are already dying. This will increase through the 90s and into the next century.



"The effect will be most dire in the 'Third World' countries..."

It is high time that socialists in the imperialist states woke up to the reality of this situation.

Interestingly, whilst global warming may have negative effects on the US economy, it is possible that there may be substantial agricultural benefits for the Soviet Union. If this turns out to be the case the imperialist pressure for capitalist restoration will grow even more intense.

The implications of the greenhouse effect must be recognised and incorporated in our policies on energy, transport, health, agriculture, industry, housing, and most other areas.

We must start a serious debate on how to do this now.

If Labour win the next election, the Party will be under increasing pressure to weigh up the green angle in all its actions.

Socialists must be ready in advance so that the expected betrayal by Kinnock & Co. results in a swing to the left.

Food Quality

Whose pound of flesh?

A year ago, *Briefing* reported on the link between Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and human transmissible encephalopathies.

It has taken the popular press a year to catch up and invent the comfortably sensational label "mad cow disease".

But renewed press interest in the dangers to the human population from BSE come as just one more link in a chain of disturbing food safety scares.

The list includes: listeria in cheese, salmonella in eggs, botulism in fish products, general contamination of cook-chill foods, unknown risks of food irradiation, use of somatotrophic hormones in pig and cattle production...

Justified

Any one of these could be justified or explained away in isolation. But they combine to illustrate some very serious problems with the way our food is produced, sold, and regulated.

In Britain, both food production and food quality is monitored at central government level by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF).

MAFF was set up after the last war to link the processes of production, distribution and control, in an attempt to end food rationing as early as possible.

Now the Ministry has become outdated; it is clearly inappropriate to represent both the interests of the commercial producers and consumers through the same body.

By Peter Chowney
Hackney South & Shoreditch Labour Party

But MAFF, unlike virtually every other government ministry, has proved to be a resilient survivor — largely thanks to the powerful agricultural lobby which has a far greater direct influence over its affairs than consumer pressure groups ever could.

This gives the food producers a big say in controls over the production process.

In response, the government has pointed to "independent" research and watchdog organisations for the monitoring of safety and development.

But such organisations, including the two major food research institutes at Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire and Leatherhead in Surrey, are funded by the industry itself.

Research is geared to increasing sales and productivity, not to consumer safety.

Such government funded research into food quality that takes place has been dramatically cut and one organisation, specialising in meat research, has been forced to close altogether.

Assessment of food quality at the point of sale, and inspection of premises where food is produced and handled, is exclusively the responsibility of Local Authority environmental health departments.

But cuts in Council services have affected such routine inspections dramatically — food premises can now expect to be inspected, on average, once every 30 years. In practice, many food premises will never be visited.

The Institute of Environmental Health Officers has expressed concern at these service cuts, and believes that food quality is bound to suffer.

Obliged

Because EHOs are obliged to respond to public complaints which may often be of a racist nature, most EHO visits will tend to concentrate on kebab shops, Chinese takeaways, halal meat shops and the like.

The big chains, with few public complaints, go unchecked. But pink lights and shrink wrap packaging can often hide the truth. Next time you pop into your favourite supermarket, take one of those little plastic fridge or freezer thermometers with you.

If chilled foods are displayed at more than four degrees Centigrade, or frozen foods at more than 18 degrees Centigrade, they're breaking the law — and the food is unsafe. It shouldn't take you too long to find some!

None of this, however, really tackles the question of why food quality appears to have deteriorated recently.

As Edwina Curry said when she made possibly the only entirely true statement a Tory government Minister has ever made, "Most egg production is contaminated with Salmonella."

Of course; it always has been. But what's so different now?

As markets become more competitive, producers have to come up with newer, more profitable, and more trivial products.

This presents a challenge to the food producer — short of inventing new animals or plants, there is a limited range of products to work with.

At the production end, market pressures have consequently produced more and more of the same thing — far in excess of our needs, and at the expense of absolute safety by the use of yield-inducing chemicals and hormones of dubious effect.

Packaging

The sales end has responded by dreaming up new ways of packaging, presenting and processing this ever-increasing supply of unchanging raw materials in an attempt to extend their markets perpetually.

This has lead to tighter and tighter margins of error:

- extended shelf life;
- super-clean limited contamination factories for putting "ready meals" together;
- more sophisticated processing and packaging techniques working to finer tolerances;
- corner-cutting on quality control;
- a (quite synthetic) image of "uncontaminated" food.

Problems

Problems arise when the technology simply fails to live up to expectations because the margins are just too tight (fridges a degree or two too warm), or because consumers are taken in by the super-pure image of it all.

If you buy a chicken from a farm and it's covered in feathers, blood, and shit, you're more likely to wash it and cook it thoroughly than a completely unblemished, white shrink wrapped carcass off the supermarket shelf.

In truth, the latter may be more risky simply because it will have been hanging around a week or so longer.

But press stories surrounding the more "romantic" food scares are only the tip of the iceberg.

The incidence of minor food poisoning incidents, sub-clinical, but serious enough to affect our overall quality of life, remains unmonitored.

Add to this the increasing lack of independent checks and balances on the food industry overall, and the recent spate of food scares does not seem too surprising.

Failures

All the recent failures — BSE, listeria, salmonella, botulism and so on — could have been averted if the food production industry were properly monitored, and if all development were not geared entirely to maximising production and creating new markets.

And what of the future? The next major development looks likely to be genetic engineering of new animal and plant species.

Regardless of the ethics of the process or the desirability of a strawberry flavoured beefsteak, an explosion of entirely new raw materials for market forces to shape into even more bizarre and dubious products does not sound like good news for the consumer.

Commission

The need for an independent, government-funded Food Quality Commission is overwhelming; instead, we have a MAFF dedicated to protecting the profits of the industry and devoted to the principles of the free market.

Can Kinnock do any better? It remains to be seen — but for now, decent proposals of any kind for serious regulation of food production, processing, distribution and sale look pretty thin on the ground.

National Labour Women's Conference

Wash day blues

The 65th (but they stopped counting in 1987 for some inexplicable reason) Annual Conference of Labour Women was like the weather.

It was mostly bad, tending to awful, with the odd sunny spell.

It was held in Skegness: a town with oustanding, undistilled English seaside culture — it could have launched a hundred Falkland fleets.

Islington North Women's Section was holed up in a b&b which offered plenty of grease with its breakfasts. We had bronchitis, bad temper, but stoic forebearance between our two delegates.

The Conference was characterised by a flatness akin to stale perrier, monotonous calls for card votes *especially* if there was but the merest whiff of militant odour, and large numbers of nervous male minders.

Male minder-in-chief, Labour's General Secretary Larry Whitty, made a sudden brief appearance during our first hint of sunshine, the debate on Women's Representation.

But we only had a sunny spell — and no card vote — for the Reproductive Rights debate.

There was unanimous agreement that these were a good thing, even for lesbians, though our delegate's references in her proposing speech to "state of the art reproductive technologies" and straws for donor insemination, sailed way over some delegates heads.

Labour is washing whiter with new blue rinses, but a whiffy Poll Tax resolution from Liverpool staged a rearguard action just to get on to the agenda.

That was card vote number one and needless to say trade union block vote enzymes zapped it down the drain 26% to 56%. (If you're curious about the other 18%, so are we.)

Childcare didn't require any card votes. Well, even the Tories support childcare. Card vote number two swiftly followed, though, with the next debate on Education.

By Sarah Roelofs Conference delegate

Compositing washing agents had cleaned this up thoroughly, removing all those awkward references to Black people, to racism, to a secular state school system, to a non-racist society, to anti-racist rather than multi-cultural education, to opposition to separate religious schools for girls.

The whiter than white result was carried 55% to 29%.

Single parents required two card votes. Absent fathers loomed large.

But we had a choice. We could be blithely unconcerned about absent fathers believing in mothers' right to an independent income and oppose Tory family ideology; or we could "welcome the principle of the government's proposals to force absent fathers" to pay up.

The EEPTU advised us that "it takes two" and "men must take responsibility". (We had a fleeting fantasy of a Point of Order to explain that it actually need only take one, a straw and some semen, but thought the better of it.)

The former proposal was of course defeated — Labour being the Party of the Family — 31% to 49%. Welcoming the government was carried with the most votes thus far: 66% to 21%.

And so it went on. Public ownership of the drugs industry ensured defeat for a resolution urging action against the industry's massive profits.

The Conference backdrop gave some explanation. "Labour Women — Looking to the Future" it said amongst the roses. The future was clearly the General Election and Labour Women had to look to how many disaffected Tory voters they could win.

The biggest defeat was on our Women's Representation resolution: 22% to 69%. But there was actually a political debate, further enlivened by the delegate from Islington South snarling and spitting a verbal assault on the T&G's women's officer.

(The delegate later publicly apologised explaining she was really attacking the T&G. It didn't wash.)

Women's Representation is actually about that picture on the cover of Policy Review Mark II — the one of the blonde, blue-eyed woman with the blonde, blue-eyed little girl.

Labour's leadership is desperate for more of the same to change its image from a macho male Party.

Hey presto, we get *Quotas* — the very latest active ingredient to clean up the Labour Women's Organisation from that mid-80s mess of support for women's self-organisation, Black Sections, and British withdrawal from Northern Ireland.

One can have whiter than white quotas of women on the NEC, the PLP, local GCs, LGCs, parliamentary shortlists — you name it and it can have a Women's Quota.

And the beauty of it is that one can then abolish the Labour Women's Organisation, Women's Sections, etc — though this is vehemently denied by those from the NEC who are leading the "groundswell" of desire for quotas.

Some in their naivete have rushed to support quotas "unequivocally" — no matter that they were being offered at the expense of demands for effective power for Labour women!

These very demands — directly to elect Labour women accountable, recallable, responsible to and mandatable by Labour women themselves — are the ones that these women and all of us have fought for so hard for over a decade.

Islington North Women's Section wasn't playing. We wanted quotas, sure, but we wanted quotas *and* women's power. We didn't get very far, but it was a good debate.



Briefing scoop: Ardent newshounds have tracked down the model for the "Looking to the Future" front page. This children's wear mail order catalogue contains the original patterns used!

Conference raised the issue of the trade union block vote. Male minders ensured that the trade union delegations voted the "right" way, ie. according to the wishes of the labour movement bureaucracy.

Not every union delegation had a male minder. Sometimes there's no need. Many individual women trade union delegates found imaginative ways to tell their minder where to go.

One delegation, forced to vote against abortion rights because of their union's policy, wore NAC right-to-choose T-shirts through the debate.

To conclude, however, that block votes are bad per se is to throw the washing out with the powder because it's come out grey.

It's perfectly possible to have a democratic block vote that reflects and maintains the direct link with organised labour.

That washing powder is called socialism (surprise, surprise) — non-biological, enzyme free, kind to all the hands in our communities, and environmentally friendly — except to Kinnockism.

Economic Notebook

Money tightens the noose

Britain is not the only major capitalist country with slowing output growth, rising inflation, and rising interest rates.

This unhappy combination can be found in the leading capitalist economies, the US, Japan and West Germany, although they are not as bad as in Britain.

The problems in these other economies will make the British situation worse.

The Reagan boom of the 1980s, which fuelled world expansion, is running out of steam, as the US government tries to curb its national balance of payments deficit and federal government deficit.

Output growth is now down to 2% a year in the US, 3% in West Germany and 4% in Japan. Employment is beginning to fall.

But despite this slowdown in output, inflation is increasing in each of the major countries.

This is remarkable, given that unemployment remains so high in the US and West Germany, and that raw material prices are continuing their ten year decline.

Increasing inflation is partly due to inadequate investment in new capacity, partly to inadequate infrastructure and rocketing land prices — especially in Japan.

By Jamie Gough Holborn and St Pancras CLP

But a feeding through of the monetary relaxation carried out after the October 1987 stock market crash — the price of steadying markets at that time — is also a contributory factor.

In reaction to this increasing inflation, Japan and West Germany have, over the last 18 months, raised their interest rates quite dramatically — Japan's from 5.5 to 8%, West Germany's from 4 to 6.5%. The US interest rate was already high.

Rising interest rates are further depressing world output. They could also cause the now astronomical pile of debt to come crashing down, particularly in the US. For more on that spine-tingling tale, get next fortnight's *Briefing*!

These increasing common difficulties are mixed up with increasing tensions between the US, Japan and West Germany.

Most dramatically, since the beginning of 1990 the Tokyo stock market — the largest in the world — has dropped 30%. The Yen has dropped 25% against the DMark.

Tokyo

In the 80s values of shares on the Tokyo stock market were massively inflated by the enormous volume of Japanese capital in search of profitable outlets.

Share values reached 50 to 100 times the annual return from dividends, compared with a modest eight to 15 times in London.

In Japan this baloon has been deflated by the slowing growth, increasing inflation, stagnation in exports, and by the increases in interest rates.

Capital

Despite the intense investment in Tokyo, there has still been enough surplus capital for an enormous outflow, especially to the US.

The scale of this outflow has been largely responsible for the fall of the Yen. And the Yen's fall is now set to further increase Japanese inflation by making imports more expensive.

Japan has not had the clout to get the other imperialist powers to defend the Yen, as they have defended the dollar in past years. The Japanese government is therefore having to hold or even increase the interest rate, preventing any Stock Market recovery.

The fall on the Tokyo Stock Market has hit the big Japanese banks hard, as their lending is secured largely against the value of stocks which they hold.

They will be forced to cut back on their lending. This is bad news for the US, since a large part of the financing of the twin deficits comes from the Japanese banks.

But the US borrowing is also being squeezed from another direction. The other major international lender, West Germany, has less and less to lend because of the changes in Eastern Europe.

The West German government is going to have to borrow heavily. And West German capital — and indeed Japanese capital — is diverting investment money towards Eastern Europe.

Deficits

It looks as if the funding for the US deficits is going to dry up — or become extremely expensive. But meanwhile Washington is doing nothing to cut them.

The balance of payments deficit is not coming down because high interest rates for anti-inflation policy and deficit funding are keeping the dollar high.

The US government will probably eventually have to engineer a recession to cure the deficits, pulling the rest of the world down with it.

Money

Part of the reason for this chaos are the multiple functions of money — and thus of interest rates — in capitalist societies.

At the moment, interest rates are being used to rein in money supply and so fight inflation; to adjust relative international prices and so correct balances of payments; and to attract loans to cover deficits.

These needs tug in different directions. No wonder the governments have no answer to the worsening world economic situation.

Teachers' pay

Fight now, or wait for Labour?

On November 3rd the NUT Conference will reconvene in Scarborough for a special salaries conference.

In the run-up a "consultation exercise" will establish the membership's views on the issue.

This is the result of a motion from the leadership tabled in a desperate manoeuvre designed to postpone debate on one of the key issues facing the Union.

It had somehow escaped their notice that members had already expressed their views in the resolutions submitted by associations.

In the Conference debate on salaries, priority was given to a motion calling for a flat-rate claim of £3,000 and a clear strategy of industrial action to achieve it.

Promoted by the Socialist Teachers Alliance, it had been supported by Associations across the country.

This was the debate that the leadership wanted to avoid and the tactic employed was consistent with General Secretary, Doug McAvoy's, outrageous assertions, both in the press and to the Conference, that the delegates were not representative of their members.

The signs are, however, that it may have backfired.

After three years of imposed settlements the leadership's new realist strategy has failed to convince large sections of the membership.

By David Wahl
Ealing NUT

While around £1 million — much of it from the union's sustentation (strike) fund — has been spent on obscure advertisements in the press, teachers have seen both their pay and their conditions massively eroded.

Workloads are fast becoming intolerable following the introduction of a string of new educational initiatives, the latest and most unmanageable being the National Curriculum.

Now, with Local Management of Schools and the Poll Tax, many areas are already facing large numbers of redundancies.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that Conference delegates demanded tough action.

When they voted against the leadership, for the escalation of strike action to a national level if local action failed to prevent redundancies, it was by a large majority.

But, since then, the leadership's lack of fight has been only too apparent. The bureaucracy has done everything in its power to sabotage *any* industrial action.

Ballot papers have arrived late and national officials have gone over the tops of local branches to discuss job losses.

The question of the Tory trade union laws is central. The NUT bureaucracy, using these as a smokescreen for inactivity, has often interpreted the legal limitations in the strictest sense.

It is against this background that the "consultation exercise" is to take place.

Document

The document sent out for the initial consultative round deals in great detail with issues of teacher supply and the erosion of teachers' earnings. It has much less to say about the claim and the strategy required to secure it.

Members of the STA will be continuing to argue for the £3,000 flat-rate claim on the grounds that it will unite members around a clear objective.

Whilst benefitting the lowest paid, the majority of whom are women, it would also do most to solve the problems of teacher supply.

Naturally the claim will to be allied to a clear strategy of industrial action designed to secure it. Unity with the NAS/UWT should be a key objective where possible.

McAvoy's pathetic slavishness to Kinnockism is becoming exposed and Jack Straw's pronouncements on teachers and their pay have only served to underline the fact that a Labour election victory will not resolve the issue.

Meanwhile the government has already introduced some scope for discretionary payments and it is known to favour further targetting of pay to deal with subject shortages and regional difficulties in recruitment.

These moves avoid the real issue of low pay and are designed to produce division and a more manageable workforce.

Faced with the potential break up of national pay bargaining and a massive onslaught on working conditions and security of tenure, increasing numbers of teachers are becoming aware that the time has come to act.

All NUT activists should try to support the local association conference in Nottingham on July 7th where questions of jobs and pay will be discussed.

With some serious campaigning between now and November 3rd, Scarborough could prove to be a watershed for New Realism within the NUT.

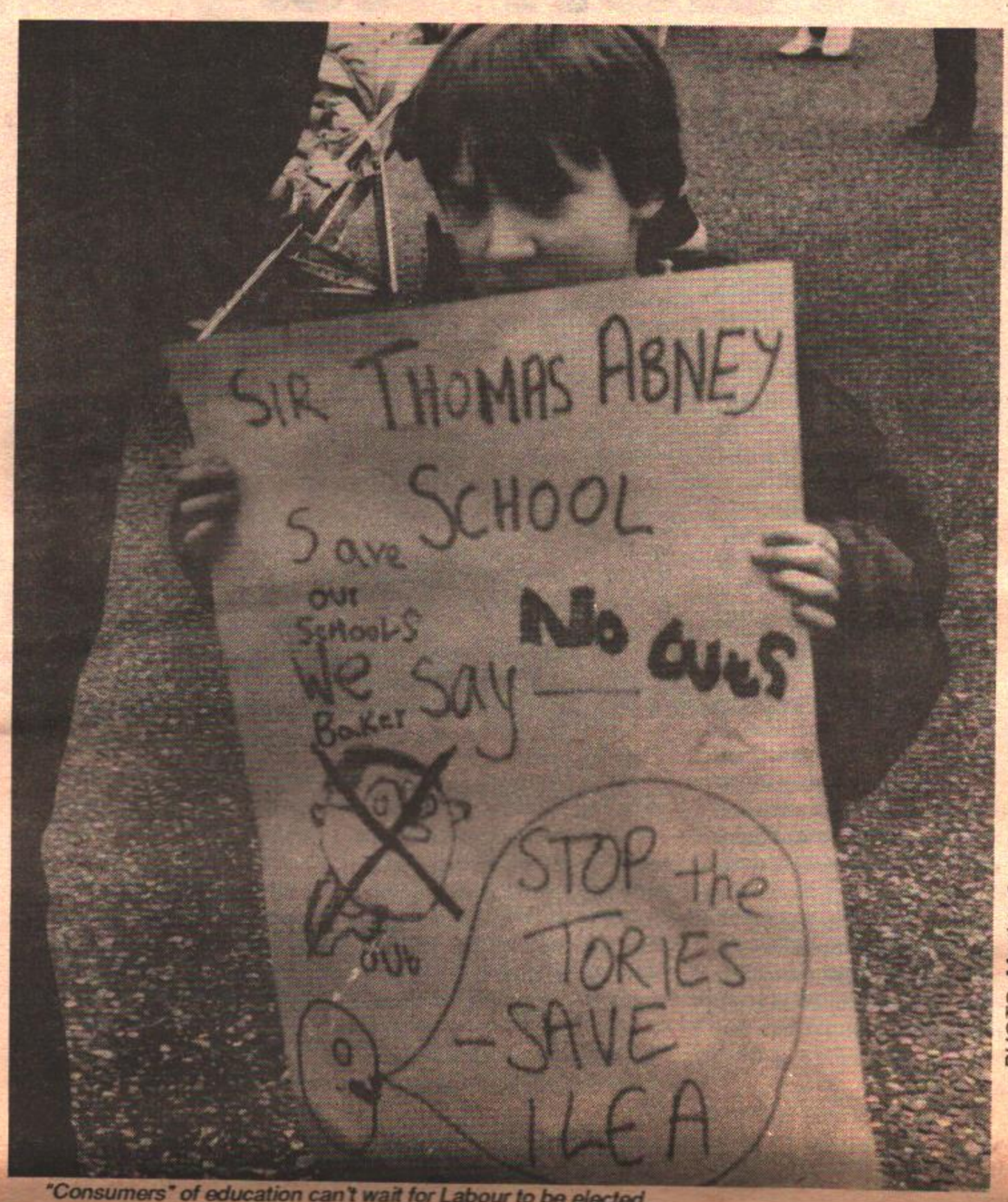


PHOTO: Martine Stead

"Consumers" of education can't wait for Labour to be elected...

Waterford

Support the crystal workers!

Two thousand three hundred workers at Waterford Crystal have been on official strike since April 5th.

The dispute was provoked by the company, which broke longstanding negotiated agreements.

This dispute, which affects the families of the workers, is the first major dispute in the 40 year history of the industry.

The workforce has been subjected to four years of unbelievable mismanagement. Grades of pay in the non-craft areas (50% of the workforce) range from £147 to £169 plus bonuses of between £30 and £35.

Craft rates of pay start with an average basic of £215, which can be increased through productivity.

High earners are exposed to burn-out. Disabilities such as cutter's elbow (similar to tennis elbow), dermatitis, burns, lacerations, and exposure to high lead environment are part of the daily hazards of the job.

In 1986 the company was profitable and financially sound. By 1987, 1,000 redundancies costing £50 million had totally disrupted the industry.

A year later, demand exceeded supply to £30 million worth of orders because of reduced capacity.

In 1989 the union and the company signed an agreement to reduce costs by £8.8 million by measures including: increase of 5% contribution of gross wages to pension fund; increase in retirement age by three years; three year wage freeze; changes in sickness and disability schemes; redeployment of craft workers.

This was not enough, and this year the company presented the workforce with a 52 point proposal based on wage cuts ranging from £76 per week (cutters) to £34 at the lower end of the wage scale.

The workers assessed the company's position and agreed to negotiations to maximise production and efficiency to safeguard the industry's future viability.

The company broke agreements and implemented the wage cuts — triggering the present dispute.

Waterford and Dungarvan Crystal strikers are appealing for solidarity from other trade unionists.

Messages of support and financial contributions should be sent to: ATGWU, Keyser Street, Waterford.

**Taken from AT&G strike leaflet.*

NCU Conference Report

30,000 jobs at stake

This year's NCU Conference was even more depressing than usual.

The pattern of recent years has been the regular defeat of the "top table" at Conference — followed by a year of total inaction by the Broad Left (BL) dominated National Executive Committee.

By an NCU member

This year Conference tamely went along with them on all key issues, particularly in voting down anything that smacked of industrial action.

Project Sovereign, BT management's restructuring plan, hung like a sword over the proceedings.

Sovereign involves the creation of five national divisions, the abolition of the current district structure, and the loss of 30,000 out of 250,000 jobs.

Some of these new divisions will be ripe for hiving off in BT's bid to become one of the big five multinational telecommunications companies which Chief Executive Ian Vallance envisages for the future.

BT's British role would be reduced to minimum network provision.

BT is already investing heavily in McCaw Telecom, a mobile telephone company in the USA.

But despite the adoption of militant-sounding propositions on this issue, the most important one, calling for action on a 32 hour-4 day week, was easily defeated.

The NEC also defeated a challenge to its feeble 13% pay claim in favour of a flat-rate claim (in the face of BT's £2.6 billion annual profits).

NEC propositions on multilateralism and opposing Poll Tax non-payment were also carried.

Procedural manoeuvering enabled the NEC to prevent debate on BT's sacking of men over 60, traditionally allowed to work until 65.

The BL is in disarray and in danger of disintegration, even in its own electoralist terms. A New Realist BL leadership is now once again in a minority on the hard right dominated Engineering Group EC.

On the Clerical Group EC the BL encompasses both left and right.

Arrogance

Such is the arrogance and cynicism of the BL soft left Clerical Group leadership clique that they successfully backed their own candidates Terry Banks and Rob Hull for union positions against the official BL candidates, Rachel Ashworth and Elaine Way.

Rob Hull is National Chair of the BL. So much for their commitment to women's advancement within the union, let alone respect for BL decisions.

Not surprisingly attendance at the daily BL fringe meetings was well down and discussion inconclusive on major items such as pay and hours. There was, however, a well-attended meeting on the Poll Tax with Tommy Sheridan.

Unfortunately, neither the comrades in *Militant* nor the smaller forces in the SWP seemed able to offer any way out, stuck as they are in their own sectarian ruts.

Militant is on the right of the left in the union on such issues as flat rate pay increases, reserved seats for women on the NEC, and action for a shorter working week.

The struggle will now continue at a local level, where, for example, Westminster branch is currently balloting for action in defence of the over-60s.

NALGO

New Realists offer no answers

A call for industrial action to disrupt the Poll Tax was defeated at NALGO Conference.

The main Poll Tax motion before the Conference in Bournemouth earlier this month called for NALGO members to refuse to process action against non-payers.

Its defeat by 380,000 votes to 220,000 was a blow against both the left in NALGO and the anti-Poll Tax movement.

The vote followed a red-baiting speech by General Secretary-elect Alan Jinkinson who attacked demands for action against the Tax as part of the "Trotskyist litany".

By Carolyn Sikorski Newham NALGO and Eve Turner Ealing NALGO

Anti-Poll Tax activists outside NALGO will have welcomed the media coverage of the debate and taken heart from the sizeable support given to the motion. But for NALGO activists, defeat was a disappointment.

Nonetheless, the left did win significant victories at Conference.

A resolution was passed demanding democratic structures if the proposed merger with NUPE and COHSE goes ahead.

The Executive was almost lynched by the whole Conference over its refusal to give financial support to Gill Emerson, a NALGO member from Gravesham who was sacked after last year's national pay strike.

The Conference gave her full take-home pay and a standing ovation.

And the Executive was forced to pledge that it would campaign on the union's *Time to Go!* policy on Ireland.

Despite the Executive's tacit New Realism, new General Secretary Alan Jinkinson was forced to distance the union from Labour's proposals to keep most of the Tory anti-union laws.

In particular he called for the restoration of the right of "secondary" solidarity action, and an end to legal limits on picketing.

NALGO's self-organised groups — the black members', women's, lesbian and gay, and disabilities conferences — won the right to send delegates to and to submit two resolutions each to Annual Conference.

However, the attempt by the black members' group to establish the right to decide its own structure was defeated.

There was a similar defeat for women, though not as damaging, when a motion instructing the NEC to carry out all decisions of National Women's Conference was narrowly lost.

Clearly there is a substantial section of the union that is either suspicious of or hostile to self-organisation. In future years this is certain to be a major issue of contention.

Despite the left's limited victories, the central aim of the whole left — to strike a major blow against the Poll Tax — was rebuffed. Analysing and acting on the lessons of this defeat is crucial for the struggles ahead.

While their position has been eroded, white collar workers in local government have not faced the kind of full frontal attacks which have decimated the blue collar workforce.

Therefore, when the left argued that the Poll Tax would mean huge job losses and sharp attacks on pay and conditions, a majority were sceptical.

Thus industrial action against the Poll Tax seemed a purely political fight, bringing the union into confrontation with the law, which the majority were not prepared to risk.

The Executive played on fears that the union's resources could be sequestrated by the courts.

The refusal of Conference to vote for action except in the concrete instances of existing disputes is a result of the lack of political leadership.

Underpinning the line of the Executive was Kinnockite thinking — a "wait for the election of Labour" position.

And it has to be said that the demagogic ultra-left ranting of some on the left — in particular the strong SWP contingent — failed to engage the delegates in a real dialogue and debate.

There was real contradiction in the attitudes and approach of many delegates.

Involved

NALGO is currently involved in a rash of local disputes. More than a dozen branches have taken strike action over the arrangements for implementing the Poll Tax.

Gas workers, medical secretaries, and local government workers are involved in dozens of local disputes.

All these struggles were enthusiastically supported by the delegates, despite their refusal to back national action on the Poll Tax.

These disputes and the implementation of the Poll Tax mark the beginning of a new phase for the union.

Since 1981 NALGO's membership has fallen from 790,000 to 750,000. Many of those lost were in privatised utilities like transport, gas and water. But the core half million local government membership has held up, despite small local redundancies.

The next period really is crunch time in local government. Hundreds of Local Authorities will cut back most of their non-statutory services; many are already trying to opt out of the national pay and conditions agreement. The key issue is how the union will respond.

Waiting for Kinnock is going to prove useless. Even if Labour is elected, the Poll Tax will not be repealed for three years.

Labour economic spokesperson John Smith has repeatedly made it clear that there will be no "easy ride" for the public services. However, NALGO members will now have to submit their pay claims to Councils under pressure to keep the Poll Tax low.

The conclusion is simple: in local government there will be no more easy pay victories like this year's 9.3 per cent without a strike, and NALGO members are going to lose their jobs in droves.

How the left responds is crucial to whether there will be a prolonged fightback.

The vote on Poll Tax is a defeat, but shows the strength of the left. The 35 per cent minority can easily become a majority if the left acts correctly.

The first and most basic issue is to build support for all those branches involved in disputes over the implementation of the Poll Tax.

Ealing NALGO, which moved the anti-Poll Tax resolution, is calling a conference in the autumn to build support for action against the Tax.

Attempts by employers to opt out of the national pay agreement will lead to a new round of struggles. The key to these fights will be to break the isolation of local branches involved in long strikes, through the generation of national solidarity.

But the key failure of the left is its inability to build a united left co-ordination like the Socialist Teachers Alliance in the NUT.

The disunity of the left cost it dear at this year's conference. We were hampered by competing motions on the same issue, deliberately clashing fringe meetings, and the SWP's approach of prioritising their own line above the demands of the left as a whole.

A significant part of the left is made up of SWP and *Militant* supporters. Between them, they have turned the Broad Left into an irregularly meeting battle ground.

It seems unlikely, while both put their own interests above the needs of the fight against the right wing and the employers that the Broad Left can be revived.

Supporters of *Briefing* and the Socialist Movement, which held a highly successful fringe meeting with Jeremy Corbyn and Bernard Reagan from the Socialist Teachers Alliance, have helped launch the *NALGO Action* bulletin which is sponsored by 20 branches.

NALGO Action itself cannot unify the whole of the left. Its supporters have to create a climate for unity on the left for unity in struggle, while respecting differences.

Most NALGO members are low paid workers who are looking for a lead.

They deserve a left which takes their fears and worries seriously, which has a dialogue with them rather than lecturing them, and puts their interests above sectarian concerns.

It was heartening to see that this reality is now understood by large sections of the left.

There is a gut feeling that the current fragmentation simply cannot continue. In the coming months it is vital for the Socialist Movement and all non-sectarian socialists to address the urgent need for left unity in NALGO.

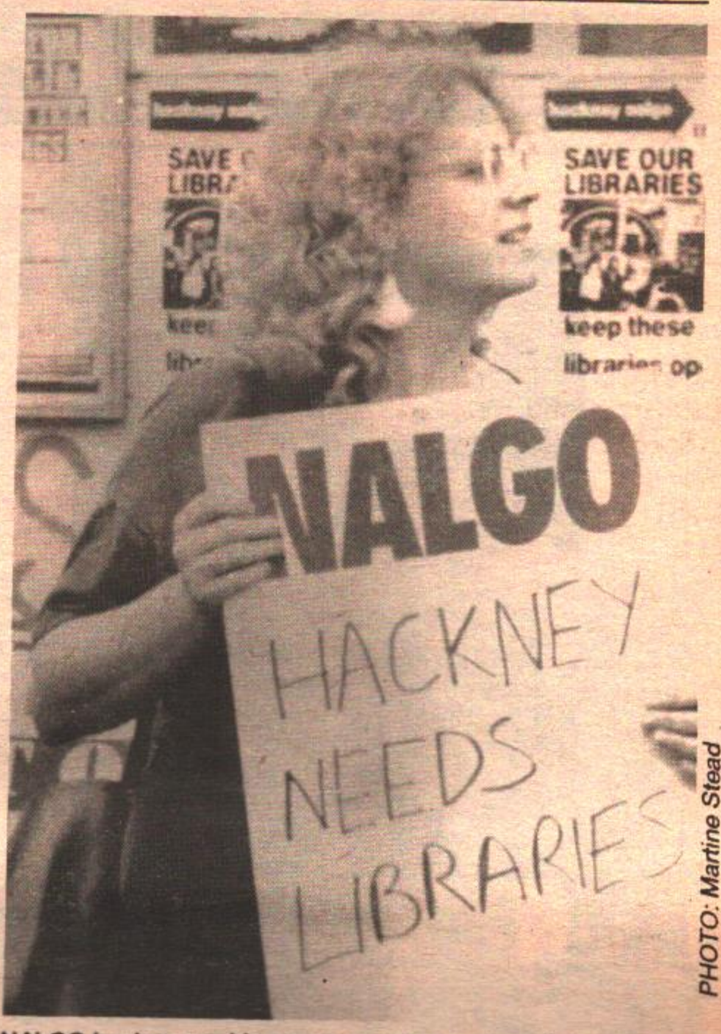


PHOTO: Martine Stead

NALGO leaders provide no answers to members defending jobs and services on the ground.

Greenwich

Strikers take on the Poll Tax

160 Greenwich housing estate workers are currently into their eighth week of all-out indefinite strike.

The action is in support of cashiers in the same department who are pursuing better pay and conditions for the extra duties and responsibilities involved in collecting the Poll Tax.

The SWP who, by virtue of being well placed in the department, are leading the strike, make far more ambitious claims about its origins and objectives.

They are saying that the strike is grounded in workers' willingness to take on and lead the struggle to defeat the Poll Tax.

In fact, the strike is for the same reasons as so much of the current industrial action in local government around the country: it is about Council workers being faced with the brunt of the Poll Tax in its many guises.

Not only does the government require Councils to collect the Tax from people who cannot afford it, but it must do this on the cheap and slash its own services at the same time.

By Ai Meun Lim Greenwich NALGO

The Councils understand that the only way that this can be achieved is — as a leaked Greenwich management document outlined — by taking on the unions.

It would therefore be fair to say that any form of industrial action taken by any section of local government workers, including teachers, is action directed against the Poll Tax.

There is, within all current disputes with management, the potential of a massive radicalisation of workers against implementation of the Poll Tax.

This has certainly been proved by the Greenwich strikers, who have gained much confidence from the general unpopularity of the Poll Tax.

The strike could be resolved if Greenwich Council coughed up some more money to collect its Poll Tax more efficiently. However, the cuts programme Greenwich began in order to comply with Poll Tax capping requires that all action be stamped on.

Any substantial compromise now would open the gates to more demand from Poll Tax staff about their low pay, increasing workload, and exposure to violence.

Any concessions would also be seen as a retreat in the face of one of the strike's most powerful weapons: non-payment.

Greenwich currently has 30% non-payment amongst a population already resentful with the services on offer, and the Council cannot be seen to encourage that option.

Conditions

While Town Hall workers' battles over pay, jobs, and conditions are usually uneven and isolated, Greenwich Housing workers have brought many of these issues together.

The strike has also demonstrated the contradictions the Poll Tax has exacerbated: the people eligible to pay Poll Tax will not automatically support a reduction in pay and conditions made to keep their bills within government levels.

Workers have begun to understand the need to oppose collection of the Poll Tax, and interest in a workplace Anti-Poll Tax Union has been revived.

The Greenwich strike is a major boost for the anti-Poll Tax campaign. It is not a strike directly against the Tax, but it answers the NEC's lie that to take action over the Poll Tax is to put NALGO members' jobs at risk.

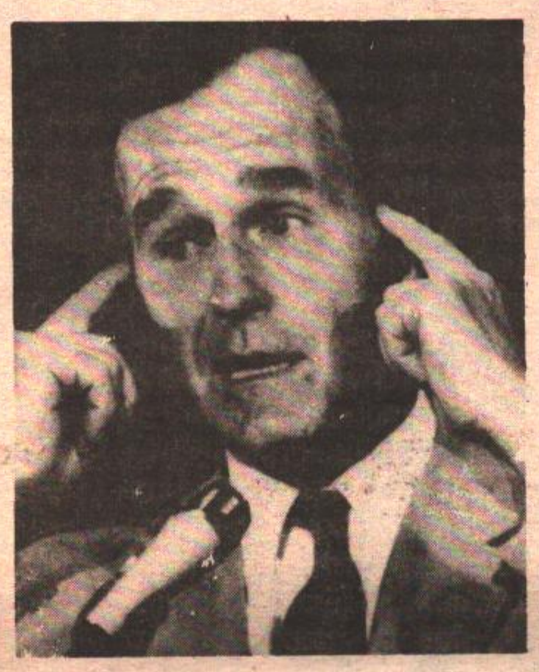
Those jobs are at risk now, and Council workers have no choice but to oppose the Tax now to survive future rounds of job cuts and increased exploitation.

NALGO Conference recognised the radical implications of the Greenwich strike. NALGO leaders are so desperate to downplay all current action, they are even disregarding its consequences for union membership levels!

The high figures for non-payment in England and Wales have provided a boost to workers under pressure to implement the Tax.

Workers spurred into action can, in their turn, further boost the size and determination of Poll Tax non-payment.

Lockerbie Report



George Bush: where will the finger point next?

Licence to kill

The presidential commission recently produced its report into the Lockerbie bombing.

It seeks to claim a mandate for US intervention *throughout the world* in pre-emptive strikes against "terrorism" and its "state sponsors".

It talks of the unacceptability of waiting for "proof" of a "terrorist's" intentions before taking action.

By IAN McLARTY

At the very least, this report signals publicly a change in the way the US presents its interventions.

This ideological offensive on foreign policy has been pursued by the hard right ir the US since the International Court of Justice (ICJ) case between the US and Nicaragua concerning the funding of the *Contras* and the mining of Nicaragua's harbours.

Before this case the US had been one of the largest "consumers" of the ICJ — for example the hostages in Iran and land disputes with Canada.

However, when this case started the US refused to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the court and would not attend the proceedings, clearly demonstrating the ineffectiveness of the court in dealing with imperialist nations.

A similar result occurred when France was taken to court over nuclear tests in the Pacific.

The "academic" hard right sought to justify the US state's actions.

First, they argued that the ICJ, UN and other international agencies had basically been hijacked and were hostile to the US — which since the US was the centre of democracy was therefore an undemocratic act.

Second, since the US was the most democratic of countries it was the best judge of how other countries are behaving.

These arguments attempted to give an academic veneer to the notion that the opinions of a country's population are irrelevant compared to the overriding interests of the US state.

What the right was arguing for was a restatement of the Monroe Doctrine (essentially the policy that Central America is the US's backyard and it is therefore legitimate to do anything here to further US interests) and its extension to cover most of the "Third World".

No longer would the US need to create client regimes in short-lived states, as in Vietnam, so it could allegedly come to the rescue of a capitalist regime threatened by the spread of communism.

Instead it could pursue a foreign policy of naked aggression in the name of democracy.

What the presidential commission represents is this ideology being brought into mainstream US politics.

It shows the adoption of a policy of a global public order, championed, monitored and enforced by the most powerful imperialist country.

What *The Times* laughably described as a "panel of two Senators, two Congressmen and three *independent* experts, personally appointed by the President" (!) was in fact a display of the executive adopting this line.

The question of how such a world order will be administered was quickly answered by the US's staunchest supporter.

Mrs Thatcher addressed the NATO conference in Turnberry with a speech on the new "policing" role she (and others!) had in mind for NATO!

USSR

Yeltsin's election adds new twist to Gorbachev's crisis

Boris Yeltsin has added a new twist to the social and political crisis faced by the Soviet Union.

He has been elected as the equivalent of President of the Russian Federation (RSFSR), the dominant republic in the USSR.

The election also marks the completion of a remarkable political recovery which, ironically for Gorbachev, has only been made possible through the political changes he has initiated.

Back in October Yeltsin was dispatched into the political wilderness, following outspoken attacks on bureaucratic privileges.

Yeltsin had made his mark as boss of the Moscow Party and had won massive support for his common touch.

He preferred public transport to chauffeur-driven limousines and eschewed bureaucratic perks in favour of queuing in shops like everybody else (well, at least his wife did the queuing!).

Yeltsin also argued that the cost of economic reform, of which he was a staunch supporter, should not be borne by the working class and that social guarantees (subsidised prices, full employment) had to be maintained.

Yeltin's popularity was confirmed in the elections to the Congress of People's Deputies, where he won almost 90% of the vote in Moscow after an energetic campaign, which pulled together a variety of progressive forces.

Sakharov

From this point his views evolved rapidly towards those of the radical marketeers of the liberal intelligentsia, who formed a parliamentary faction known as the Inter-Regional Group.

He was particularly influenced by the late Andrei Sakharov. The liberals were afraid of Yeltsin's ability to rally the masses but were unable to prevent him becoming a co-chair of the IRG.

Inside the Communist Party, Yeltsin has also assumed a leadership role in "Democratic Platform", a similarly disparate group united by its opposition to the apparatus, which harbours increasingly fewer illusions that the Party can be transformed.

Yeltsin himself has called for the formation of a new party and how long he will stay is a matter of conjecture. The crunch will almost certainly come at the 28th Party Congress in early July.

Finding out exactly what Yeltsin stands *for*, rather than what he is against, is not an easy task.

The lack of a concrete programme has enabled him to consolidate and organise around him a very wide social base. His manoeuvring en route to becoming Russian president does raise some doubts about his political principle.

By Rick Simon
Labour Focus on Eastern Europe

Despite having previously signed a statement against anti-semitism, Yeltsin is reported to have met representatives of the Russian neo-fascist organisation, *Pamyat*.

The emphasis placed in his campaign on Russian nationalist positions has fuelled chauvinist feelings against other nationalities.



Mikhail Gorbachev: can he compete with Yeltsin's populism?

Yeltsin has, however, coupled this with calls for a multi-party system and for freely negotiated relations between the Soviet Union's constituent republics.

The Russian parliament has itself added to the incipient constitutional crisis by declaring that Russian laws take precedence over Soviet ones, although the formulation is less strong than that adopted by the Baltic republics.

Lithuania

Yeltsin made a point of meeting the Lithuanian Leader, Vytautas Landsbergis, at the earliest opportunity.

Russian control of resources, particularly oil and other energy sources, could cut across Moscow's economic blockade of Lithuania and has led to increased endeavours to find a negotiated settlement.

Gorbachev has dropped the earlier precondition that Lithuania revoke its declaration of independence before negotiations can commence and has agreed to meet Landsbergis and other Baltic leaders.

Reforms

The total reformation of the USSR as a voluntary union of independent states is now open for discussion.

Yeltsin undoubtedly favours the introduction of the market. Earlier this year, he said that it is necessary "to carry out the transition to a market, competitive economy based on numerous forms of property".

For Yeltsin and the liberals, the key to a market reform is in changing property forms in the economy and increasingly strong calls for denationalisation are being voiced.

The reform package currently being debated in the Soviet parliament does not find favour with Yeltsin and the liberals because of the projected price rises — inevitable under any market reform — and because it is not accompanied by institutional measures which would make the market a reality.

The projected price rises simply increase state prices and shift the burden of the economic crisis onto ordinary people. As one Soviet economist has put it, it is "shock therapy" without the "therapy".

Soviet society is becoming increasingly fragmented as the economic crisis bites deeper and different class programmes are beginning to be articulated.

For the liberals the answer to inefficient bureaucratic planning is not genuinely democratic planning, involving elements of a market in consumer goods and services.

They are looking to privatisation, the removal of price subsidies, unemployment, and ultimately a liberal-democratic capitalist economy.

Yeltsin's advocacy of the market is tempered by his links with the masses. He is still the most popular politician in the USSR; but now he is in a position of real influence his lack of a programme may be exposed.

In any event, there is a limit to how far you can walk the tightrope between marketisation and defending workers' living standards.

Hesitation and confusion surround the switch to a "regulated market economy" and a proposed referendum on the notion of economic reform has also been abandoned.

Strike

Marketisation and privatisation will encounter resistance from the ministerial bureaucracy, whose power and privileges derive from the nationalised economy, and the working class, as was amply demonstrated by the Soviet miners' strike last summer.

Strike action by oil-workers and miners is again on the cards and the formation of an independent miners' union appears to be going ahead.

Despite the postponement of any reforms another long, hot summer is in prospect.

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Germany

Kohl accelerates drive to unity

It now appears likely that by the end of 1990 Germany will have its first freely elected, all-German government for 57 years.

It will be "freely elected" by the rules of bourgeois democracy.

Following the implementation of the economic and monetary union treaty this July, it will rule over a capitalist market economy.

The German Democratic Republic, until a year ago the Soviet Union's most important and most prosperous ally in the socialist camp, will have ceased to exist.

If this timetable for German unity, thought impossible even by members of the Bonn government only a matter of weeks ago, can be achieved, Chancellor Kohl will have scored a big personal victory.

More than that, given the inability of the opposition Social Democrats to agree on a coherent alternative approach, it is almost inevitable that Kohl will win the all-German elections now planned for December and head the first united German government.

It is true that SPD Leader Oskar Lafontaine remains personally more popular than Kohl and that the SPD as a Party remains marginally ahead of the Christian Democrats in the opinion polls.

By GÜNTER MINNERUP

Following the recent regional elections in Lower Saxony and Northrhine-Westphalia, they even have control now of the Upper House of the West German parliament.

Theoretically, this enables them to block the first stage of Kohl's unity drive — the submission of the GDR to the diktat of the Frankfurt Bundesbank.

But here lies the rub: the SPD will not block economic and monetary union.

Lafontaine's desire to oppose Kohl's unification policy head on is rejected by the majority of the Party leadership, leaving Lafontaine isolated and publicly contemplating resignation.

The East German SPD is a member of the de Maiziere coalition government and clamouring for speedy implementation.



Unity on the wall has given way to an uncertain future.

In the run-up to the December elections the Social Democrats will make various critical statements, but they will not mount any systematic challenge to Kohl's nationalist and free market demagogy.

The only other force which could conceivably threaten Kohl's drive, the Soviet Union, also appears to have tacitly accepted the fait accompli.

In theory, the legal legacy of the post-war settlement between the Allies gives Moscow a veto over German unification, but it is unlikely to exercise it.

Gorbachev and Shevardnadse will not risk their good relations with a Germany set to emerge as Europe's dominant power for an insistence on their rights which, given the actual relationship of forces, is likely to prove futile anyway.



Kohl

Even if the terms of this unification include NATO membership for Germany and the withdrawal (after a period of grace) of the Red Army from the heart of Europe, the temptation to veto unification will not be strong enough.

Instead, the Soviets hold out the prospect of their eventual agreement to NATO membership as a carrot to win some Western concessions on security, trade, and diplomatic arrangements for the emerging new European order.

But Kohl's breakneck pace in forcing German reunification is also a sign of weakness.

He must strike quickly to exploit the disarray in the opposition ranks before one of the many timebombs ticking away just below the surface explodes to threaten the ascendancy of Christian Democracy.

On the domestic front, there is the prospect of escalating social tension once the East German economy is fully exposed to the whirlwind of marketisation.

Kohl is gambling that a December election will be too soon for the left to benefit from widespread unrest.

On the international front, it is already clear that most of the fundamental issues raised by the shake-up of the old European order remain unresolved and will become the focus of intense political conflict in years to come.

Kohl must proceed at maximum pace before the inherent contradictions waiting in the wings reach centre stage:

- the nature and role of the NATO alliance;
- the relationship of the EC to the emerging market economies of Eastern Europe;
- the place of the Soviet Union in the new European settlement.

It is therefore high time that the German and European left stopped sitting back and hoping that something will turn up to halt the juggernaut.

Neither the SPD nor the Gorbachev leadership in their present shapes can be relied upon to do so.

It is necessary to look beyond the completion of German reunification and think about the prospects for a socialist Europe in the emerging new landscape, not the familiar old one.

Romania

Stalinism without Ceausescu

Soviet miners had just announced that the Communist Party could no longer represent them.

In the same week, Romanian miners were being mobilised by the Iliescu apparatus to club oppositionists in Bucharest.

By Mike Phipps Woolwich CLP

Not all of them were miners. Known members of Ceausescu's Securitate were recognised operating alongside miners who had been bussed in to the capital to deal with protesters.

The brutality of the often indiscriminate attacks by the miners stunned many observers, as did the fact that the police stood by whilst unarmed demonstrators received severe beatings.

The offices and homes of the opposition were ransacked.

Many of those singled out stand well on the right of Romanian politics. But the idea that the miners' rampage was some kind of proletarian defence of the revolution is, to say the least, far fetched.

Unlike their counterparts in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, Romanian miners are not one of the more class conscious sections of the working class.

Since 1977 coalfields have been a "forbidden zone", worked only by hand picked pro-government personnel. After the National Salvation Front took over, miners received large wage increases, and a shorter working week.

Using the paternalistic tactics of Brezhnev in this way, the regime consolidated its base among the miners and drove a wedge between them and the more troublesome intellectuals in Bucharest.

With the country so unstable and the loyalty of many sections of the state apparatus not guaranteed, Iliescu needed a firm body of supporters for use as a last resort.



Russian miners: more class conscious than their Romanian counterparts?

In January this year he had already brought the miners in by train to put on a personal show of support.

The roots of the present crisis lie in the conduct of last month's election.

While economic concessions to the peasantry, and the fact that the revolution was least developed in the countryside, ensured strong backing for the Front in rural areas, results were mixed in the capital where dissent is strongest.

In addition, many observers noted blatant abuses in the run up to the elections, including preferential access to the media for government supporters. Many areas never received the publicity of the opposition parties.

The rapid re-emergence of many Ceausescu supporters in the National Salvation Front indicated that Romania's popular revolution was in danger of being hijacked.

Recent events, given the weakness of the opposition currents enjoying mass support, confirm that the prospect is one of Stalinism without Ceausescu.

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK London Forum

Poland: the Socialist Alternative with Josef Pinior
(Solidarnosc Executive, Lower Silesia; Co-ordinator, Socialist Political Centre)
Lucas Arms, Grays Inn Rd (near Kings Cross tube), 28th June, 7.30pm

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POLL TAX REPORTS

Home counties in revolt

The small villages of Swanscombe and Greenithe in Kent would not be the first places to spring to the minds of many socialists as hot beds of working class militancy.

However in the five weeks since their local anti-Poll Tax union was formed to fight Kent's highest charge of £352, the local residents have shown a remarkable ability to organise in opposition to the Tax and the Tory controlled Borough Council.

Working class people in the area were either brought up in Swanscombe and Greenithe or moved here because the property and rents are cheaper than in any of the neighbouring towns and villages.

For them the Poll Tax is a bitter sting in the tail of austerity and cuts that has engulfed them since their Labour Council was dissolved into the Tory stronghold of Dartford.

Residents who have seen their library and swimming pool shut down in recent years and now face the closure of their local high school are all too aware of the reality behind Tory promises of "efficiency" and "value for money".

By Paul Field
Dartford CLP

The first indication of the peoples' anger was shown when 500 turned out to a meeting that was called by the local Mayor, Mike Crosby, in an attempt to find an explanation for why their charge was so high, £30 more than Dartford's.

The inability of any Labour Councillors to offer a reasonable explanation and the refusal of the Tories to even attend provoked a few of those present to set up an anti-Poll Tax union.

After persuading nearly every shop and pub in the village to display anti-Poll Tax posters in their windows, the public meeting on April 30th attracted over 800 people out of a total population of 5-6,000 Poll Tax payers!

Since then the union has been consolidated by building a membership of 250 activists, electing a committee of 12, and by organising a lobby of the Council at which over a hundred people, including the Mayor, burnt their Poll Tax bills.



Mayor Mike Crosby leads the queue to burn his Poll Tax bill.

Labour Councillors Against the Poll Tax

As decided at the Labour Party Socialists Conference, the national meeting will be:

Saturday June 30th
11.00am-4.00pm
Castle Community Rooms
2 Tower Street, Leicester
(Next to Leicester Prison!)

AGENDA:
Reports from around the country
Socialist Strategies to fight the Poll Tax
The fightback against witch-hunting
Contact network.

ORGANISERS:
Paul Gosling (0533-740964).
Bob Waterton (0533-625260).
C/o 143 Bridge Road, Leicester LE5 3QN.
There is no fee, but a modest contribution towards organisation costs may be asked for on the day.

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE POLL TAX JUNE 30th

For further details contact:
South West Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions,
c/o Bristol & Avon Federations, 84 Colston Street, Bristol.
Tel.: (0272) 255504
Exeter Anti-Poll Tax Union,
Box 200, The Flying Post, 1 Parliament Street, Exeter, Devon.
Tel.:
Tim Price:
(0392) 431352
Dave:
(0392) 72519

Hammersmith & Fulham

Fewer fans than Donny Osmond

By Hammersmith & Fulham *Briefing* supporters

Just six per cent have paid the Poll Tax so far!

Most people in Hammersmith and Fulham have ignored the Council's appeal to pay — not least because of Poll Tax capping.

This news came hard on the heels of the successful conference to launch Hammersmith & Fulham APTU to bring together the separate campaigns previously working in the area.

The founding conference included delegates from local APTUs, trade union branches, the Trades Council, and Hammersmith Labour Party.

The campaign will continue to be based on this kind of broad delegation.

Represented at the Conference were the unions likely to be involved in administering the Poll Tax locally, including CPSA reps from the local DSS and dole offices, and NALGO and Post Office workers.

Wandsworth

Tory flagship hits iceberg

The 4,800 summonses issued by Wandsworth Council and subsequently withdrawn are only the tip of the iceberg.

They only cover those people who live on streets A through C.

There are five other teams working on issuing approximately 25,000 summons to people who live on streets D through Z. The total number of non-payers is around 30,000.

By Kathy Pick
Joint Secretary,
Wandsworth Against the Poll Tax

Wandsworth Council gave two reasons for withdrawing the summonses:

•the brevity of time allowed for the summonses which could (and would) have been challenged in court (as in Medina on the Isle of Wight);

•they did not realise there would be opposition, protests, and demonstrations at the court by local Poll Tax groups.

We understand that all 4,800 were due to be heard at 1.30pm!

It may come as a surprise to Wandsworth Council that there is active opposition to paying the lowest Poll Tax in England and Wales. However, even with the £148 fiddled as an election bribe, one third of the Borough's residents are worse off.

Remember, Wandsworth had the lowest rates in London, if not England, as well as the second highest Council rents last year.

About 8,000 households refused to register and about 7,000 were registered without their permission using social services, the electoral register, and other records.

Wandsworth Against the Poll Tax (WAPT) has been active and thriving since it started in January 1989.

The public meeting held on 17th April 1989 with Dennis Skinner as main speaker attracted 200 people — the best attended Poll Tax meeting in London during the first half of 1989.

WAPT's membership list is 150 strong, including Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Councils and several trade union branches, like Wandsworth NALGO.

Both Battersea and Tooting CLPs affiliated to WAPT last year (only Putney refused to do so) and the Green Party, Communist Party, and SWP are also affiliated.

However, Tooting CLP has refused to re-affiliate this year over our non-payment stance and only Bedford Ward (in Tooting) has re-affiliated recently.

We handed in a petition last October with 3,400 signatures calling on the Council to do everything in its power not to implement this pernicious Tax.

Subsequently thousands of signatures were collected on non-payment petitions, but it was agreed not to hand this in since the Council could use it for nefarious purposes.

Meetings

Both WAPTU and Tooting Anti-Poll Tax Union (TAPTU) organised meetings on June 12-13th with legal advisers from the Poll Tax Legal Group present.

Even with the withdrawal (momentarily) of the summonses, the meetings are still relevant and have gone ahead as part of the ongoing struggle against the Tax.

The problems I had as a Labour Councillor with the Labour Group and the LGC over the Poll Tax would make another article.

Equally important is coverage of the proposed savage cuts in jobs and services contemplated by Wandsworth Council to ensure that the Poll Tax stays low next year and doesn't rise to over £400.