LABOUR
40p FORTNIGHTLY
BRIEFING
No 106 July 4th-September 12th 1990

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40p

CAPITAL SETS THE CHALLENGE

KINNOCK FAILS THE TEST



Kinnock: preparing to take charge of capital

We are living through a period of rapid change at both domestic and international levels.

These changes present the labour movement and socialists within it with a number of outstanding challenges.

●Substantial cuts in arms spending are now a real possibility.

●The changes in Eastern Europe have produced a crisis of all European institutions, leading to a rearguard action — led by the United States and backed by the Labour leadership — to turn NATO into a permanent political alliance.

This move is in sharp contradiction to the hopes for a united, democratic, and non-aligned Europe now emerging across the continent.

●The power of the multinationals has continued to grow; the giant corporations are now able to transfer production from one country to another and rig prices and channel profits at whim.

●British government institutions are as inflexible, undemocratic and unaccountable as they were in the days of Atlee and Churchill — and are increasingly seen as such by the electorate.

●Unemployment is rising for the first time in four years. Accompanying this are growing demands for government intervention from the inner cities, disadvantaged regions, and oppressed groups of all kinds.

●There is confusion in the establishment over entry to the EMS which locks us into the priorities and policies of the Bundesbank, the most conservative force in Europe.

This will result in further rises in unemployment and (in combination with market forces) will impose a veto on increases in public spending.

●The environmental crisis is now recognised as a global crisis which can only be dealt with by new levels and types of international co-operation and government intervention.

●Britain is saddled with an increasingly delapidated infrastructure, making it "the squalid person of Europe".

All these challenges cry out for a socialist response. Instead, Labour's new policy package gives us "business where possible; government where necesary."

The leaden-footed Labour leadership may soon find itself outflanked by the Tories on arms cuts and the peace dividend. And on the EMS the Tories may well steal Labour's only clothing by negotiating entry before a General Election.

The policy package fails to confront the need for control of the City of London and in particular of capital outflows; it has subordinated public expenditure commitments to the needs of "economic growth", as defined by capital.

It has no radical measures to deal with the undemocratic nature of British society.

BY REG RACE

Its proposals on key areas of social policy such as the NHS, housing, and poverty are unimaginative and inadequate.

It now looks like the next Labour government will cut public spending, attack workers' rights and end up merely holding the fort for British capital for four years until the Tories recover enough to win a General Election.

Indeed, in the view of some establishment pundits a Labour government which would take the rap for the harsh decisions required by capital would be no bad thing.

In addition to their "new" policies, Labour's leaders are trying to change the Party's internal structures to make it more autocratic and less responsive to the rank and file.

Part of their purpose is to render recent policy shifts "democracy proof". The membership will lose its powers to overturn these policies and replace them with anything more radical.

It is, of course, essential that over the next 12 months the Labour left organises to get a Labour government elected. Our commitment to this goal is second to none.

But it is also our duty to warn the labour movement of the dangerous consequences of following the Labour leadership's current direction.

Labour Party Socialists and the Socialist Movement will continue to develop socialist alternatives to this direction and to organise support for them both within the Party and outside.

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.
The deadline for letters for the first issue after the summer break is Wednesday, September 5th.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Cherry's red provokes a wail

Dear *Briefing*,

I was pleased to read (*Briefing* no. 105) that Davy Jones welcomes Plaid Cymru members' participation in the Socialist Movement.

Less welcome was F.R. Cherry's letter on the same subject, describing Plaid Cymru in North Wales as "not so much socialist as National Socialist".

The decline of the Welsh economy has been speeded up by Thatcherism. Not only coal and steel have felt the blows, but farming also.

In the South, a low wage economy has developed, based around foreign investment in assembly plant.

In the West and North, agricultural decline and house prices way beyond what local people can afford have intensified a "drift from the land".

In both North and South, wages are falling further behind the national average: in Gwynedd *and* Mid Glamorgan, nearly half the households have an income less than £4,000.

The threat to the patterns of social life that sustain the Welsh language is one of the cultural problems created by change on this scale at this speed.

The immense cultural and political loss resulting from the destruction of the NUM is another.

All this is happening in a country which has never had a Conservative majority, and where less than 30% voted Tory in 1987.

Socialists need to understand both the differences between the "North" and the "South" Welsh experience, and also the processes that bind them together.

This means integrating issues of culture, economics, and political democracy.

As *Briefing*'s report on the Wales Labour Party Conference made clear — Labour has few answers in this respect.

Plaid Cymru, like Labour, has moved rightwards since the Miners' Strike. But some currents in it regard themselves as socialist and reject the process of decline.

Recognising that the party to which they belong has roots in the political traditions and present experience of large sections of the Welsh population, Labour Party Socialists should enter into dialogue with the National Left, planning joint campaigns, discussing political programmes.

F.R. Cherry's allegations (repeating a 50-year old Labourist attitude, beloved of Neil Kinnock) do nothing to make this possible.

Ken Jones,
Hackney, London

Oh for leadership!

Dear *Briefing*,

We are a group of keen activists within the local branch of the Labour Party.

At present we are frustrated at the lack of political leadership being given to working class people in struggle with the Tories by the Party.

We feel we could pull many more people into the local branch on an active basis and at the same time counter the stifling effect of the rightwards shift in policy.

In our attempt to do this the availability of a journal based on a fighting alternative would be invaluable.

Please could you tell us as soon as possible whether it is possible to have you send us a regular batch of *Labour Briefing*?

Yours sincerely,
Paul Walker,
Evesham, Worcs.

***Bundles of *Labour Briefing* are available on a sale or return basis, minimum order five copies — just write in! -*EB*.**



Why Bromsgrove Refuse Staff are being forced to strike

Dear Briefing,

Under the government's privatisation laws, the Conservative controlled Bromsgrove District Council is trying to force its binmen to accept:

- 25% increase in daily workload;
- reductions of up to £20 per week in wages;
- ban on pay rises between September 1989 and October 1991.

Please help by:

- sending letters of protest to Councillor Mrs Margaret Taylor at Bromsgrove District Council, Burcott Lane, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, B60 12AA;
- sending donations to support the strikers to NUPE, 7/8 Friars Road, Stafford ST17 4AA (cheques payable to Bromsgrove General branch NUPE).

Yours,
Bromsgrove *Briefing* readers

Went West!

Dear *Briefing*,

I am a regular *Briefing* reader, but am unable to attend the meeting on July 15th.

I would very much like *Briefing* to continue in its present fortnightly form.

It is one of the few socialist newspapers which encourages articles from anyone on the left, covers all important national and international events — and is readable!

It never flinches from taking a socialist line, however unpopular.

It is, therefore, a major contribution to left-wing thinking, especially during these difficult times.

I hope you will take these views — which I am sure are shared by many of my comrades in the Tory-dominated West Country — into account when considering *Briefing*'s future.

Yours sincerely,
David Hasburgh
Totnes, Devon



Briefing history graphic no. 1: Brighton Labour Briefing hits the streets...

This is not our organ!

Dear *Briefing*,

In *Briefing* no. 105 you headed a piece "*LLL — Lots of Lies about Labour Party Socialists*".

This was factually wrong.

As far as I know, LLL has never made any comment whatsoever about LPS.

And, as I recently said in a letter to *Tribune*, the journal *Socialist Action* is not an organ of LLL.

LLL has proved to be an effective body and has not been sectarian. Please direct your criticisms at the right target.

Yours,
Pete Willsman
South London

PS: As an avid reader, I'll be coming on July 15th!!

PERISCOPE



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

Pre-history

"Now, too, we have Labour eminences disowning ideology and uttering pompous claims to to be the 'natural party of government' with all of the deluded conviction of Hans Andersen's vain and naked emperor.

"They invite the contempt of enemies and friends by generous appeasement of the former and empty flattery of the latter.

"They espouse 'moderation' hoping that its new implication of calm sagacity will disguise the reality that anyone who can be moderate in the face of unemployment, brutality, decay and disillusionment is either too stupid or lazy or timid or terrified to take a stand...

"They try to cajole capitalism into growth and responsibility whilst defending it as a virile guardian of liberty and mainspring of development.

"Their belief that they can make multinational corporations give priority to the demands of democracy is as hollow as the idea that bookmakers are in business for the advantage of the punters."

Neil Kinnock MP in his introduction to Bevan's *In Place of Fear* (1978).

Credit card charity

Ever wished you hadn't said what you did?

After the total collapse of War on Want, look no further than the 1986/7 Annual Report by George Galloway, now Labour MP for Glasgow Hillhead:

"Our financial situation is changed utterly, our income multiplied, secure reserves, freehold property, and unshakeable financial base...

"You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, and if more were broken than necessary, then I'll take full responsibility for that."

Perhaps if War on Want had been a bit less lax with their credit cards, and put a few less leaflets out door-to-door in Glasgow, they might have dumped a few less "Third World" projects in the shit, for other groups to bail out!

Joke

Q. How many Trotskyists does it take to change a lightbulb?

A. None. We never substitute for the working class.

Variations on this theme (i.e., How many LCCers does it take...) are welcome.

Upper Bann By-Election

The Labour loyalists attempts to get the Party to join the Conservatives in standing in the North of Ireland took a further beating in the Upper Bann by-election.

Polling less than 200 votes, the "Right to vote Labour Candidate" was one of the few who gained less than the Conservative Party.

After a disastrous lost deposit, the Conservative candiate who had roped a number of government Ministers into his campaign, was most worried about being beaten by Sinn Fein — "The disappointment is that Sinn Fein should poll such a high vote."

An even bigger insult is that they were beaten by the Workers Party!

Poll Tax abolishes Councils

We have long argued that the Poll Tax was damaging to local democracy.

The extent of this has been shown in two Welsh villages, Rhoose and Cefn Coed, where residents have voted to abolish local community (parish) Councils in order to save themselves the extra Poll Tax that the Councils would cost them.

Farewell then, another tier of local democracy!

Contact Briefing

Well, here we are at the end of another year, and here we are, the *Briefing* production team, penning another last "Contact *Briefing*" column to the sounds of overnight ITV and the sight of the dawn breaking over the rooftops of Finsbury Park.

Thanks to all who lasted the course and thanks too to all those who fell by the wayside.

***Briefing* will be back in the autumn, you can count on it. We would like to be back with a bigger, better *Briefing* — but that depends on YOU. Again, we are looking for new workers. We need comrades who can count, type, or are literate: please contact the *Briefing* office for further details. Failing those skills, contact us anyway. The only really indispensible skill is to have a sense of humour. We also need vounteers to beef up our paste up team (this is not a mad cow joke).**

Keep in touch by writing to *Labour Briefing*, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.

Please use the summer break to get up to date with invoices. Send money for paper sales in the "London" area and for subscriptions to the above address; please send payment for paper sales outside the "London" area to 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.

You can telephone the *Briefing* office on 081(and we're proud of it)-809 3927. If that's not answering during the summer break, make Graham's day and phone him on 081-985 8892.

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BRIEFING
LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

TUC on bended knee — to Kinnock

The decision of the TUC General Council to back Kinnock's commitment to retaining the Tory anti-union laws was a disgraceful stunt.

It was performed for the benefit of the media at the expense of the interests and indeed the policies of the movement which the TUC is supposed to represent.

A few months ago a number of prominent national trade union leaders (Bickerstaffe, Todd, Christie, Gill, Sapper, Jinkinson, etc.) appended their names to a declaration in the name of the Campaign for Free Trades Unions — that Labour must liberate the unions from the Tory shackles when it next forms a government.

Since then, the Campaign for Free Trades Unions has been silent and Ron Todd had to perform some fancy footwork to prevent his own union from pushing the Scottish TUC into calling on Kinnock to scrap the Tories' laws. And it seems that this may soon be followed by the formal acceptance of the Policy Review by the TGWU EC.

The willing compliance from nearly all the top trade union bureaucrats does not stem from any conversion to the laws, but from a commitment not to rock Labour's (or rather Kinnock's) electoral boat.

Hostile to any revival of left power in the Constituency Labour Parties and terrified of the growth of militancy in their own ranks, the union bureaucrats stumble along in Kinnock's wake.

They provide finance, Conference clout, and the odd political filip when required — abandoning any and all other strategies for the advance of the trade union movement.

Kinnock certainly needed the boost provided by the TUC General Council members and the trade union delegates on Labour's National Executive over the Tory anti-union laws — voting, for the most part, against their own union policies.

This is probably the singly most vulnerable plank in the new Policy Review — vulnerable, that is, to rank-and-file opposition.

Union activists know from bitter experience that as long as these laws remain in force they will be fighting the employers with their hands tied behind their backs.

Getting rid of the Tory laws is no "ultra-left" demand but a minimum requirement for democratic and effective trade unionism.

For too long, the Tories and the capitalist class have benefited from the artificial division of our movement between the "political" and "industrial" wings.

The Labour right and the union bureaucrats seek to sustain that division. For socialists the opposite is the case.

The Shadow Cabinet is already preparing to use the Tory anti-union laws to discipline its own supporters once expectations raised by a Labour victory are turned into action for concrete demands. The Labour right see the unions as a pre-election embarrassment and a post-election enemy.

The rank-and-file in the unions and the Labour Party must mobilise to force our leaders to honour their commitments on the Tory anti-union laws.

Labour Party Socialists and the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee have launched a campaign on these lines (details on page 13) which should be a priority for all trade unionists and Party members.

Now beware new tactics from anti-abortionists

The anti-abortionists were clearly disappointed by the major defeat inflicted by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. However, the Bill did not represent the major victory for a woman's right to choose expected by some.

Pro-choice activists may have to fight renewed discrimination over access to Donor Insemination and the New Reproductive Technologies (NRTs) as a result of the welfare clause in the Bill, as well as confronting direct action by anti-abortionists.

The Bill grants some concessions on abortion, particularly with the vote effectively to decriminalise abortion by severing the link with the Infant Life Preservation Act.

The defeat for the anti-abortionists on this issue and on the upper time limits for abortion in cases of foetal abnormality was won by many years of consistent campaigning led by the National Abortion Campaign (NAC).

However, more than 40 Labour MPs voted against the 28 week limit and so against Party policy for a woman's right to choose. These MPs must face the wrath of pro-choice activists in reselection.

During the campaign the Stop the Amendment Campaign (STAC) continued to face problems of New Realism and the unwillingness of many MPs to support a move to allow abortion on demand up to 12 weeks or even to form a register informing women which doctors are anti-abortion.

Faced with parliamentary failure, anti-abortionists may now turn their energies to "operation rescue" activities — terror tactics used in the US against women seeking abortion — and pro-choice activists must be ready for this.

While the anti-abortionists were clearly defeated, the limited victory on access to DI and the NRTs for the sexual fundamentalists came with an amendment from Ann Winterton to the welfare clause specifically "including a child's need for a father".

This clause is a clear attack on a woman's right to choose. Women have always had to prove themselves "suitable" recipients of such treatment — only six out of about 60 NHS and private clinics currently give access to lesbians and single women.

While parliament rejected an amendment specifically denying lesbian and single women access, enormous pressure will now be put on those six clinics to change their procedures and take account of parliament's judgement of children's welfare.

Pro-choice activists must begin to build a consciousness in the Labour Party and in the trade unions that women have a democratic right of access to such procedures and that neither state, church, nor the medical profession should be able to abrogate a woman's right to decide.

Italia 90: All power to the Cameroons!

World War III kicks off!

What did the media present as the key events of the World Cup up to the quarter finals?

English "hooligans" have received their just deserts from the Carabinieri.

And Bryan "Captain Courageous" Robson stubbed his big toe after single-handedly beating the "plucky" Egyptians by a huge one-goal margin.

It should come as no surprise that the English press and TV react in this fashion to the biggest sporting event in history, watched by a record 20 billion people across the globe.

The tabloid press, in particular, prepared us for Italia 90 by pushing the most extreme neo-fascist nationalism.

Not only was one of the most mediocre England Teams in living memory going to win the World Cup from the "Argies".

They were going to do it by crushing the upstart foreigners with their inbred moral superiority and "bulldog" spirit. Someone should have told them that it would be necessary to score some goals as well!

The hypocrisy of the same newspapers condemning the nationalist violence by English football "hooligans" (when their journalists eventually found some) can only be wondered at.

By Glenn Sutherland Our Man in the Shed

There are, of course, small groups of well organised fascist thugs who are in Italy for no other purpose than to have a set-to with their Dutch, German, and Italian counterparts.

This should not lead us into the trap of supporting the indiscriminate violence of the police, nor the equally indiscriminate deportation of many innocent fans.

The methods of the Italian police are no improvement on those of their British counterparts, and socialists should beware of making common cause with Colin Moynihan and Margaret Thatcher in praise of their operations.

Dennis Howell has earned a lot of respect for his statements on this issue.

Depressing as all this is, we might have expected the actual football to provide some excitement. Unfortunately, we would have been disappointed.

All the South American teams, seeking to conform to the cliche that they never do well in Europe, have — in common with most European teams — adopted "European tactics".

This is a euphemism for packing your midfield and defence so as to make it impossible for your opponents to score, while leaving a solitary attacker upfield in the hope that a loose ball might hit him and go in the net.

This has worked well in limiting the number of goals and the degree of entertainment.

Fortunately Cameroon haven't read the script! My fiver on Cameroon to beat England 4-0 went down the drain after a very lucky victory for England.

The form of Cameroon and, to a lesser extent, Egypt is equally welcome as the spectacle of the USA being humiliatingly crushed. The folly of FIFA's decision to play the 1994 World Cup in America, instead of Africa, has been exposed.

FIFA's decision is a very direct example of how the interests of capital dominate world football. The same thing can be seen in the nationalism which provides the dominant ideology throughout Italia 90.

There is no necessity for football teams to play for "national honour" instead of the enjoyment of playing football with other skillful teams made up of fellow professionals.

Equally, there is no reason why the main interest of football fans shouldn't be to watch and participate in entertaining football matches.



"American soccer has some way to go..."

The poison of nationalism makes the World Cup more like World War III than a festival of international football.

(While I'm on the subject of nationalism, can any readers clarify for me why socialists should support the team from the 26 County statelet against anyone but England?)

In the long run, the only solution to some of the problems I have outlined is for players and supporters to take control of world football — throwing the time servers out of FIFA and the national FAs.

In the meantime, "One Roger Milla, There's only one Roger Milla..."

The US deep in debt

The start of the Big Squeeze?

World economic growth in the 80s was fuelled by a titanic explosion of debt.

Throughout this period, the real rate of interest has been at historically high levels — 6% plus compared to -1% to 1+% in the 70s.

This increased the attractiveness to investors of finance capital activity, which was combined with the largest expansion of credit in capitalist history.

From 1975-1986 the proportion of GNP to combined governmental, consumer, and corporate debt, rose from 120% to 167% in the US, and by similar amounts in Germany and Britain.

In Japan, where finance is traditionally easiest and interest lowest, debt rose from 166% to a staggering 240% of G.N.P.

Media coverage of the structural weakness of the US economy tends to concentrate upon the "twin deficits": the massive trade and budget deficits.

But these are only one aspect of the impending US debt crisis.

The total indebtedness in the US economy far outweighs the Third World debt.

At the end of 1988 Third World debt stood at $1.3 trillion, whereas total US domestic debt stood at $11.1 trillion, a 105% increase in the period 1982-1988.

The era of raids, takeovers, and management buyouts has left corporate America burdened by huge debts.

Finance capital has now merged with "productive capital" to exercise "command and control" functions.

By Dave Palmer
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

Rising interest payments on servicing debt have reduced net profits to just 7% and absorb 31% of corporate cash flow.

The end of the "debt decade" can be traced to two related sources:

•the general slowdown in the US economy and collapse of speculative property values which threatens the financing of the US debt mountain.

•the falling liquidity (availability of money) that has arisen from the general increase in interest rates in all the major economies as a response to rising inflation.

Thus, the US economy is coming under increasing pressure from two directions at once as real interest rates rise and growth is reduced.

The world banking system will face a growing inability by US debtors to meet payments on loans and therefore the overextended financial institutions will risk collapse.

The ability of the international financial system to deal with this crisis will depend on the extent to which the central bankers and money mandarins are able to manage the process of writing off bad debt.

Much Third World debt has already been written off on bank balance sheets and is now traded on secondary markets at a fraction of its original value.

The recent steep fall in the yen initiated a rise in Japanese interest rates and bond prices.

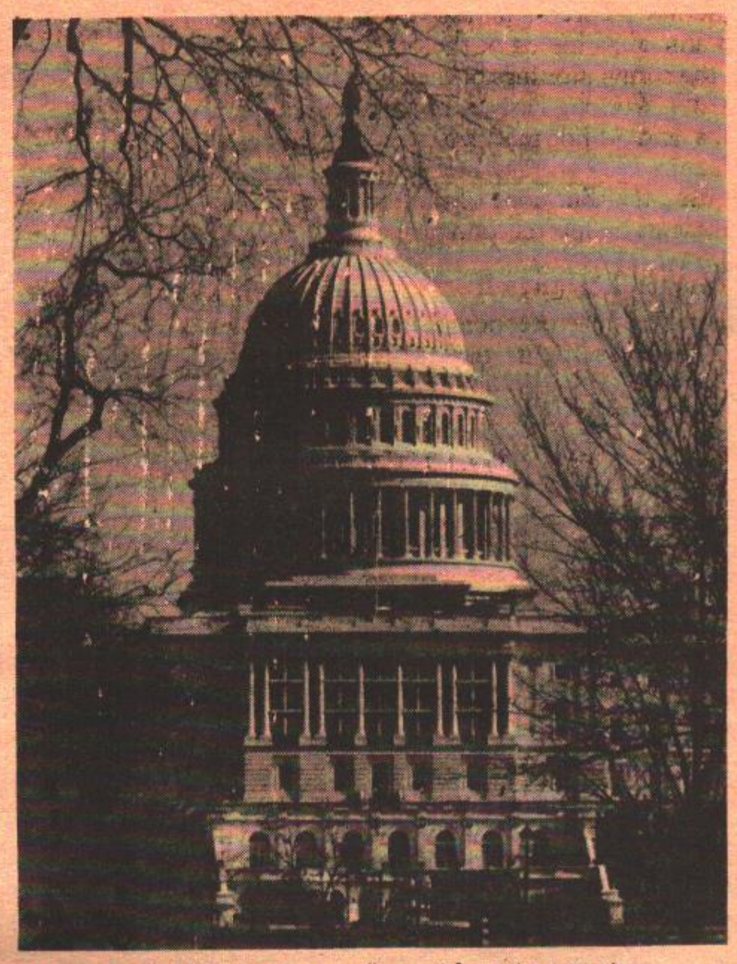
In April this caused the largest ever fall on the Toyko Stock Market and a slump of perhaps 20%-40% in the phenomenal Japanese property values.

The period of low Japanese interest rates seems to have come to an end, which will have significant consequences for the US economy, whose net foreign debt of $544 billion is largely funded by capital flows from Japan.

The flight of Japanese capital from US Treasury bonds, following the sharp fall in the dollar, forced down the price of bonds and in turn precipitated the Stock Market collapse of October 1987.

The reduction in outflow of capital from Japan, and new opportunities for the investment of Japan's financial surplus in Europe, is putting the squeeze on the US.

It has forced the Bush administration to choose between tax increases to close the budget deficit or putting up interest rates, which will only exacerbate the debt problem.



Up on Capitol Hill, they're sending out for extra sweaters...

The latter option could tip the US economy into recession and send shock waves through the world financial system.

It is not, however, the global size of that debt which is the major contradiction for capital — Japan has the strongest economy and carries the highest proportion of debt.

As any Marxist (or monetarist) would tell you, debt must be financed out of consumers' incomes, profits or taxes. However, there are many mediating mechanisms in operation within capitalism.

Following the October 1987 crash the US Federal Reserve halted the rush to liquidity by acting as "lender of last resort".

Agreement between the G7 central bankers on co-ordinated monetary expansion restored financial stability at the price of increased inflation.

The Fed no longer has this room for manoeuvre; we are now in a period of accelerating inflation and rising interest rates in Japan and Germany.

Moreover, the other OECD countries are likely to try to attach major conditions to any "bail out" of the US.

The onset of a US debt crisis is likely to play a major role in the fundamental realignment of power blocs that is now taking place among the major capitalist countries.

For an eco-socialist programme:

What lies behind the "Black Triangle"?

The "Black Triangle" is the name of an area of ecological devastation in the heart of Europe.

It centres on East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

Despite the fact that protection of the environment is written into the constitutions of many Eastern Europe states, this area is among the most polluted regions on earth.

In East Germany 70% of energy needs are met by the burning of brown coal — a process emitting more sulphur dioxide per head than anywhere else in the world.

Poland follows close behind with 100 tonnes of SO_2 emitted per square kilometre. Dangerous air pollution covers almost half of the country.

In Czecholosvakia the burning of brown coal accounts for 60% of energy needs. Sulphur dioxide emissions have killed or damaged half the forests.

The Black Sea around Bulgaria is already poisoned and in ten years the whole sea will be dead.

This bleak record of ecological devastation has made ecology a central issue in nearly all the revolts against Stalinist rule.

The *low* level of technological development in these countries, both at the start of their industrial development and then as a result of imperialist blockade, has contributed greatly.

•Antiquated techniques of processing raw materials, old-fashioned two-stroke engines in cars, and disastrous nuclear technology has produced these unprecedented levels of pollution.

•The suppression of all democratic forms of organisation by Stalinist governments has led to planning and industrial development decisions being taken without respect for the human consequences.

In the 30s in the Soviet Union industrialisation was to be achieved whatever the price, hand in hand with megalomaniac schemes to divert the course of rivers and the like.

In the Brezhnev era similar pragmatic policies were followed, this time in a vain attempt to buy off the working class through higher production of consumer goods.

In both periods there was an uncritical absorption of western models of production and consumption: in the case of Stalin, the techniques of Henry Ford; for Brezhnev, the consumer boom which followed World War Two.

However this problem cannot be exclusively laid at the door of the bureaucrats. Its roots lie deeper in the Marxist tradition.

By Steve Potter
Red-Green Network
(personal capacity)

Marx and Engels were very hostile to the notion that nature could be treated as a free resource to be plundered.

In his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx fiercely polemicised against the view that labour could be seen as the sole source of value:

"Labour is not the source of all wealth.

"Nature is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power."

In his early polemic *Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels shares the anger of contemporary writers like Cobbett at the effects of the industrial revolution, but without lapsing into romanticising a previous Golden Age that was lost.

However, both shared with other political economists of the day absolute hostility to the idea that there was any limits to growth.

Malthus predicted that agricultural production could not keep pace with the population growth. Marx refuted this argument, but failed to see that natural resources — fossil fuels, timber, the fertility of the soil — could be exhausted.

Much of the antagonism between many modern Marxists and the ecology movement can be traced to the former re-running these 19th century debates.

Lenin, Trotsky, and Gramsci all more or less uncritically embraced the creeds of Fordism and Taylorism in the pursuit of growth.

Lenin and Trotsky did this in the context of devastation of the Soviet economy; Gramsci, in prison, faced Fascist reactionary utopias of a return to ruralism.

For Lenin and Trotsky the aim was to boost the productivity of labour, as a a route to increased production as a whole.

Frozen

These ideas have remained "frozen" in the thinking of the Communist Parties of Eastern Europe — and in the revolutionary left today in Britain.

Today, among many on the revolutionary left, there is a reflexive defence of growth as such, rather than the advancing of positive slogans such as a radical decrease in the working day.

Many Greens would agree with socialists that, within the context of respecting the bio-sphere which we inhabit, economic activity should be based on meeting social needs rather than the dictates of profit.

However, the collapse of bureaucratic planning in Eastern Europe has convinced many that the market is the only way in which economic activity can be organised.

The problem with the market however, and still more with alternative schemes based on barter offered by some Greens, is that they only endorse production decisions already made.

They offer little distinction between, say, compact disc players or kidney dialysis machines — except in relation to the amount of profits (or exchange goods) they command.

Democratic planning, on the other hand, offers not only the chance for the population to control their economic activity and its effect on the environment, but also to meet basic human needs rather than the latest consumerist fad.

Eco-socialists can offer an alternative to the Black Triangle other than the rampant laisser-faire capitalism now in vogue in those countries *or* a regression into ruralism which these countries can ill afford.

The alternative is a democratically organised society and economy, based on the twin principles of defending and mending the planet and meeting human need.

However, we must first come to grips with our own political tradition and, through recognising its faults, come to the effective eco-socialist programme which is needed today.

Lambeth

Leaders dither

The ex-Lambeth Councillors surcharged for fighting ratecapping have been dealt a new blow.

They have been subjected to a further surcharge of £200,000, and an additional five year bar from holding Council office (see page 10).

However there is no indication that the present Council leadership, under Leader Joan Twelves, intend to risk similar penalties by leading a fight against the Poll Tax and the consequent cuts.

The present administration in Lambeth took office in May 1989.

The left, who had opposed a massive round of budget cuts in 1988, forged a tactical alliance with a group around ex-Leader, Linda Bellos (who had initiated those cuts).

This was done to fill the vacuum left by the sheer incompetence of the previous right wing dominated administration and was based on opposition to the Poll Tax and a commitment not to go beyond the bare statutory minimum in implementation.

This commitment evaporated last summer, when the Council agreed to purchase a computer system to implement the Poll Tax.

Chief Whip, Councillor Steve French, resigned from the administration in order to remain part of the struggle against the Poll Tax.

The Council leadership pursued a line of opposing the Poll Tax, often to the point of personal non-payment, on the one hand; but agreed to implement the Tax with the other hand.

This line isolated the Council from the Anti-Poll Tax movement.

By ROGER TRENDELL

In spite of a process of "budget scrutiny" which has already reduced Council services, Lambeth set the second highest Poll Tax in England, only to find this "capped" at a level which would imply almost £9 million cuts.

As the legal challenge of the capped Councils has crawled through the courts, Lambeth Council has tried hard not to face up to its financial predicament.

However, on June 13th, the Director of Finance and the Chief Executive used their statutory powers to put a stop on all Council spending until the Council met to consider cuts.

On June 25th Lambeth succumbed to pressure from senior officers eager to shore up money market confidence in the Council's finances and voted to prosecute non-payers of the Poll Tax.

Leadership

The Council leadership also faces pressure from the local Anti-Poll Tax groups, left Councillors, and large sections of the Council workforce, all of whom are arguing against continued collaboration with the Poll Tax.

Accurate figures for non-payment in Lambeth are hard to come by, but it is clear that the effects of popular opposition to the Poll Tax have been magnified both by the confusion caused by capping and the administrative chaos of implementation.



Joan Twelves: leading the ditherers

Support for non-payment among the Council workforce is also high. A recent NALGO branch meeting voted massively against prosecution of non-payers, and decisively to call upon NALGO's NEC to campaign for non-implementation.

Opposition is now being organised by Lambeth Council Workers Against the Poll Tax, an activists group which is spreading beyond its beginnings in NALGO to draw in leftwingers in NUT and NATFHE.

Although the group currently lacks involvement from the manual unions, it clearly reflects the feelings of many Council workers more closely than the confused position adopted by some of the union officials.

The immediate prospects for Lambeth Council are bleak.

The leadership seem to be preparing justifications for cuts — that the statutory powers of Council officers forced their hands; that the union officials told them that their members will not fight.

There is no majority in the Labour Group for unlawful action, and the most that the leadership could hope for would be further delay, and to continue with the strategy of hoping that something will turn up.

All this will achieve is to deepen the cuts that will eventually be made, as less and less of the financial year is available in which to make "savings".

Trapped by the same pessimistic defeatism (with some honourable exceptions) union officials are preparing to negotiate deep cuts in jobs and services in the forlorn hope that this may avert compulsory redundancies.

Whatever positions the "leaders" of the local labour movement may adopt, the struggle against the Poll Tax and against cuts will continue to develop in Lambeth as elsewhere.

Only the left who have argued consistently for non-payment and non-implementation of the Poll Tax can now offer those engaging in this struggle a perspective which shows how, by defeating the Poll Tax, further cuts in jobs and services can be averted.

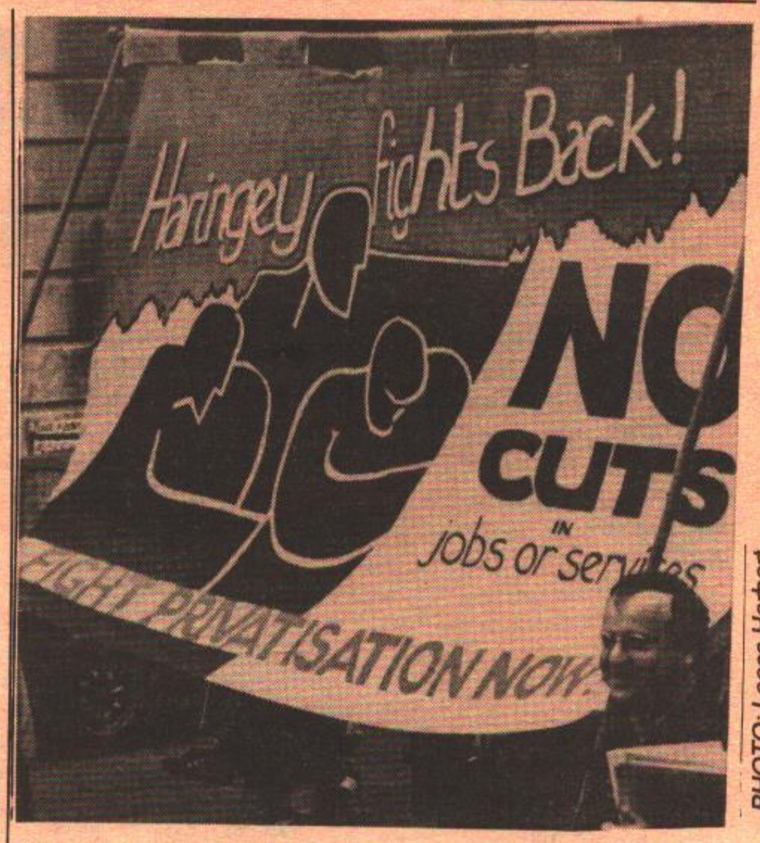


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Haringey Fights Back! organised to stop job losses; now Haringey workers are faced with a further 800 redundancies as the Poll Tax doesn't stretch far enough to pay the wages.

Ealing

Tories cut equality work

The new Tory Council came in wielding its axe on August 3rd.

Since then, it has financially demobilised many groups in the Borough which threatened to challenge its white, male, middle class vision of democracy.

This was preceded by a racist and homophobic election campaign fought with the subtlety of a rugby player after ten pints of lager.

Some of the most aggressive cuts have been to the voluntary sector and in particular black groups in Southall.

By Pattie Friend Ealing NUT

Southall Trade Union Employment Advisory Service (STUEAS) has played an important role in Southall advising black workers, often the poorest paid and least secure, on employment rights. It is the only group of its kind in area.

The Council has cut its grant completely.

Southall Monitoring Group (SMG) has been afforded the same treatment. Both groups are deemed to be "political" by the Leader of the Council.

SMG is the only group in the area dealing with racial harassment.

Its grant was not cut because its work was unnecessary, as some have suggested. It was a transparent and outrageous rejection of a body which has consistently and very successfully campaigned and raised awareness around issues of race.

By closing its special units the Council has arrested funded work on race, lesbian and gay, and women's issues. The loss of jobs and redeployment has occurred with little regard for collective agreements.

In education the Tories have abandoned the Borough's detailed and comprehensive sexual equality statement in favour of an insipid, two paragraph statement.

The sexual equality statement suggested ways of discussing homosexuality in schools and so at least helped to reduce the effects of the potential self-censorship induced by Clause 28.

Documented

It is well documented that women and girls are disadvantaged by the education system, with women occupying the least prestigious and the poorest paid posts and girls less likely to achieve their full potential.

The sexual equality statement was part of a strategy to help redress the balance.

The Council is also reviewing its statement on anti-racist education and fears are that this will also be abandonned.

Oppression, in all its manifestations, does not disappear under a Labour administration.

Sickeningly

The sickeningly violent and racist murder in Ealing of the taxi-driver, Kuldip Singh Sekhon, occurred in a period of ideological opposition to racism when work around race was at least publicly sanctioned and funded, as did attacks on lesbians and gay men and attacks on women.

However, the murderers of Kuldip Singh Sekhon and Michael Booth and the perpetrators of other attacks, both physical and verbal, are receiving messages loud and clear from the new Council.

Those messages will exacerbate the situation and increase the already barely manageable workload of the very groups the Tories have decided to cut.

Closure threat to Hackney nursery

Join the occupation!

Some Councils never learn!

Just two years ago, Hackney Council suffered a damaging and humiliating occupation of three branch libraries which were threatened with closure.

Now, history repeats itself.

Following Council threats of closure, parents and workers have occupied a nursery in Victoria Grove, Stoke Newington.

The occupation began on June 19th, after parents and trades unionists had been given just two weeks notice of the closure on June 29th.

Workers at the nursery have been given only one offer of alternative employment (rather than two as specified in the Council redeployment policy) and parents have found that "alternative" nurseries offered by the Council are full.

The proposed closure has distastefully racist overtones: all but one of the parents is black, and many of them are single.

Both NUPE and NALGO are backing the occupation and have instructed their members to continue working at the nursery after the closing date.

By Peter Chowney Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP

By June 28th Hackney Social Services had made no contact with the parents, nor issued any instructions regarding new working arrangements to nursery staff.

A Council spokesperson had told the press that closure had been postponed until July 10th, but neither the parents nor the workers have been told about any stay of execution.

Management did make one attempt to meet the occupiers, turning up unannounced.

Opposing

Cllr Tom Silverlock, one of just three Hackney Councillors still opposing cuts and Poll Tax collection, was fortunately present and refused to allow them to enter, telling them to come back when they had made an appointment with the parents.

Since then, no Council official has been near.

The reasons why Hackney Council want to close this nursery are unclear.

There are strong rumours that the spanking new fortress Stoke Newington police station, which adjoins Victoria Grove nursery, wants to buy the building for use as a workplace nursery.

Certainly, the new caring Hackney Police have made great play of wanting to set up a workplace nursery; but there is also a rumour that they want to buy it to use the site for a police football pitch!

Cllr Silverlock believes the closure of Victorian Grove is only the tip of the iceberg.

He told *Briefing* that at least four other nurseries are earmarked for closure, including Hillside and Mary Woolstencraft.

The Council claims that it is intending to "merge" Victorian Grove with nearby Linden House. But Linden House has a capacity of only 30; Victorian Grove alone had a capacity of 60.

The threat to close Victorian Grove follows a long campaign by Hackney Social Services to run down its nurseries.

All of them operate at below full capacity, some below half. But even parents in a "priority" category for nursery places can expect a wait of two years or more.

Social Services Chair Sharon Patrick has claimed this is due to "staff shortages", and pledged to sort the problem out after the elections.

It seems she has wasted no time!

Parents at Victorian Grove will shortly be convening a meeting to set up a support group and to find volunteers to occupy the building 24 hours a day.

Bearing in mind Hackney Council's brutal and violent curtailment of the libraries occupations, a lot of hard work could be ahead of them. Anyone interested in getting involved in the occupation should contact the *Briefing* office.

If the occupation is to challenge the Council's overall closure policy, this could be a very long haul indeed.

Labour Party

Mandatory reselection

One member, no vote

Virtually every major policy gain has now been reversed by the Policy Review.

Now the Party Leadership has turned its attention on the one remaining thorn in its side: mandatory reselection.

The campaign for democratic reform in the late 70s and early 80s involved the membership as a whole, not just the left.

Thus the right to reselect or deselect sitting MPs was one of the greatest victories for the membership of the Labour Party. The right policies are useless without the power to implement them, and to remove those MPs who refused to do so.

Less than 20 MPs have been deselected under this procedure — and by no means all of them were on the right.

Why, then, is the Leadership so determined to remove this procedure when it controls policy making, is about to take away Conference's decision-making powers, and has the power to purge much of the left?

It is because it is the last way that a left wing CLP can have any real political effect.

CLP delegates have been cut out of policy making; local government manifestos (witness Lambeth and Tower Hamlets) have been written by the NEC and its regional office appointees.

Even membership can now go through Walworth Road without being properly checked at local level.

By Kevin Flack Lewisham East CLP

But CLPs, even under the present ridiculously complicated system, can still remove unpopular and ineffective MPs by a relatively democratic process.

Much of the resistance to the present system comes from the arrogant and patronising attitude of the MPs themselves.

Poor things, they complain about the amount of time they now have to spend in constituencies during reselection year; of extremist elements daring to question them at GCs about such harmless matters as NATO-funded trips abroad or opposing Party policy on abortion.

The one thing mandatory reselection has done is try to ensure MPs actually turn up in their constituencies regularly.

So what changes are planned to ensure MPs are given a job for life?

Reselection is not to be fully abandoned: it is to be made "more democratic". It will only be allowed if the CLP membership "really want it."

This is supposed to do away with the wasteful current system of challenges if a woman justs gets one nomination; of expensive balloting systems; of secretaries being inundated with applicants' CVs.

How will we tell if the membership wants it? By not allowing it unless over half sign a petition or ballot form asking for the process to take place!

Those of us who actually go out and collect membership subs month in, month out, know how impossible it would be to get a challenge under this system.

We recognise the waste of resources under an "affirmative ballot" on a shortlist of one, and have no fetish over this — obviously if only one person is nominated, they should be selected.

The move to one member, one vote (and we should remembers it's one member, one postal vote) is particularly disconcerting.

This would eliminate any real link at local level with the trade unions, the only organised sections of the working class with any influence on many CLPs these days.

We must resist attempts to remove mandatory reselection; but above all we must resist the postal ballot of individual members. Every trade union election has shown that the postal ballot reduces the number of participants.

We have to stress that the local link — through union branches and Trades Councils — is vital if the Party is really to represent local working people.

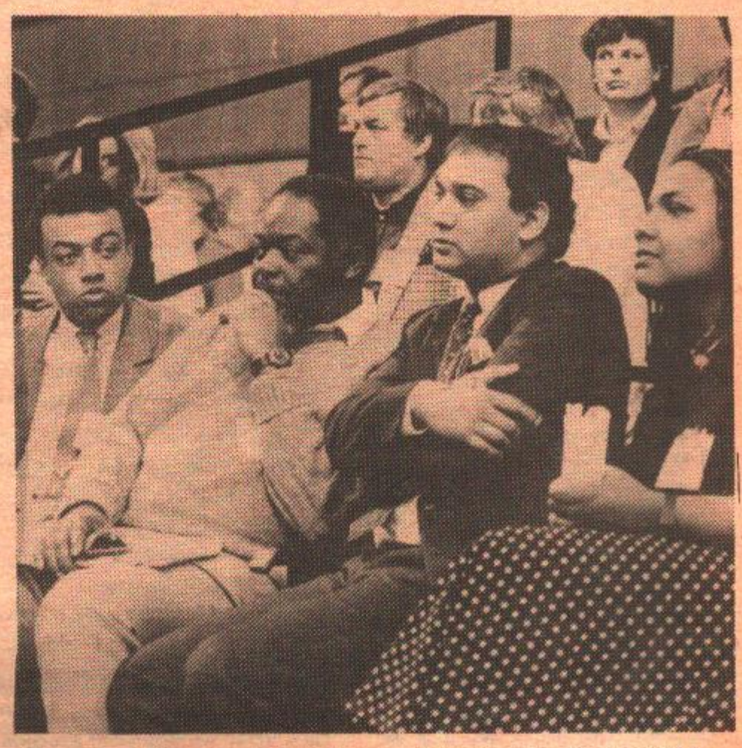


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Four black MPs elected under mandatory reselection: could it have happened under the new system?

If the media — TV and local papers — are not to dictate the "acceptable" candidate — then this fundamental link has to be maintained.

The Labour Party after all has a federal structure — it is not just a bunch of well-meaning individuals who have a benevolent attitude towards poor people. It is a party based on the working class, no matter how right wing its present policies.

Labour Party Socialists

Making decisions the regional way

Labour Party Socialists held its first Conference in Sheffield in May.

One of its central features was a declared determination to enable democratic involvement by comrades from all areas, working constructively in a non-sectarian way with campaigns throughout the labour movement.

The principle of regional involvement in LPS is not an abstract one.

Nor is it just an anti-London blow from the provinces — though it has to be said that almost everyone outside London — and quite a few inside — act as if decision-making rests in the hands of a very few in the capital!

The reality is that it is vital for individual Labour Party socialists up and down the country to meet together and to organise within the Party.

With the leadership openly attacking the principle and practice of activism wherever they find it, real participation is more important than ever for ordinary Party members.

For LPS the challenge is to find ways which genuinely involve the rank and file.

It is not enough simply to try and manipulate a few key conference delegations to vote for one or other candidate for the NEC (even if that was any longer possible).

Capitalism is not going to collapse if David Blunkett suddenly loses his poll position in the popularity ratings.

By John Nicholson Co-chair LPS

Nor is it adequate to create spaces for regional representatives on some national structure if the real weight is given to "national" organisations with "well-placed" contacts.

Youth

That is why LPS has a national Steering Committee of four people per Labour Party region, plus nine nationally elected places, and three further for each of black supporters and women supporters, and one youth place.

Of the 55-strong committee elected in Sheffield, 41 come from outside London.

No-one has an automatic right to be on the committee, whatever their credentials.

This should not lead to complacency. LPS recognises that active measures must be taken to address discrimination.

Black people and women, for example, must be enabled both to become representatives through the regional structures and to participate fully in the organisation.

LPS also recognises that active measures must be taken to develop local campaigning and link it into national struggles. People need to feel part of their local and regional network, and decisions made by LPS need to be open and democratic.

The aim must be to have contacts and supporters in every CLP and trade union branch.

Regional representatives should be collating and updating mailing lists and contacting all supporters in order to bring people together in their own areas.

The national Steering Committee needs to provide support for local initiatives — speakers, leaflets, information packs, so that a meaningful and accessible regional organisation can develop, suited to the needs of people in each region.

Regional bulletins and mailings should be circulated to keep people informed even if they cannot come to meetings.

Space must be found for regional concerns, ideas and practical proposals to be fed back into the national Steering Committee.

Making regional involvement effective requires commitment and cash.

Join us, get your CLP and trade union to affiliate, come to our AGM on October 27th — and start to reclaim the Labour Party for socialism!

GLLP Conference

Left comes close

That the Greater London Labour Party Annual Conference happened at all this year was something.

But happen it did, on June 22nd and 23rd.

It was originally scheduled for March, and then hurriedly postponed once officials realised that was only a few weeks before the Council elections!

Walworth Road officials were obviously terrified of "London Loony Left" headlines appearing before the electorate went to the polls.



The GLLP's finest hour... the left could return...

Loony

In the event, Conference was neither loony nor left, despite the best efforts of some of us. The London Party has been firmly brought into line in the last few years.

The prevailing atmosphere in the Conference was one of moderation, not rocking the boat, and expecting all ills to be solved by the next Labour government.

So anxious were delegates not to be controversial that they voted not to discuss a motion calling for support for non-payment of the Poll Tax because the NEC had said that was against Party rules.

The main debate was around the local election and the national Party's reactions to the London result.

Interestingly, the GLLP was united in undermining the national Party's attempts to control London.

Delegates and Executive members asserted that only the GLLP understood London and how to reach voters in the capital.

Equal opportunities policies were defended as vote-winners in London.

The left had some victories. Conference passed the composite attacking the Policy Review's failure to repeal anti-trade union laws, and calling for these laws to be replaced with positive rights for workers.

By Liz Davies Delegate, Islington North CLP

A motion opposing religious schools and calling for secular education was also passed.

And Conference unanimously called for the release of the Birmingham Six.

The status quo reasserted itself when it came to elections.

Glenys Thornton, current Chair and LCC hack, beat Jeremy Corbyn for Chair.

At one point, though, even that looked unlikely — we thought the left might win, as the TGWU delegation had decided to vote for Jeremy.

Results

The election results show clearly that they in fact voted for Glenys. What happened to make them change their minds?

Two other unions, UCATT and NUPE, also failed to vote for the left candidate despite earlier indications to the contrary.

Right

It was a strange conference. The atmosphere was well to the right, but the left won all its motions and came close in the elections.

Maybe we would stand a chance of winning more in the future — but Walworth Road would clamp down to stop us if we did!

NEC Report: witch-hunt; structures

NEC "untouched by human hand"

Labour's NEC has backed major changes in the Party's policy-making procedures.

This, and a decision to force a re-run of the selection contest in Birkenhead CLP, were decided by the NEC's customary lopsided majority (in this case 28-3).

Though the issues were debated and voted on separately they do have one crucial common element: the Kinnock leadership is trying to make its own ascendancy "democracy proof".

Labour's witchfinder general Joyce Gould had been despatched to the Wirral by the NEC following complaints made by MP Frank Field over his deselection by the local Labour Party.

By Mike Marqusee Hornsey and Wood Green CLP

Gould was unable to substantiate any of the procedural complaints made by Field (she seems to have made no effort whatsoever to look into the complaints made against Field).

Nonetheless she recommended to the NEC that the contest be re-run because six alleged *Militant* supporters took part in it.

However, the selection procedure cannot be restarted until the cases of the alleged *Miltant* supporters are dealt with which could take several months.

Clearly the right's plan is to keep postponing the new contest until an imminent General Election requires the imposition of a candidate — who will certainly be Frank Field.

Paul Davies, who beat Field fair and square in the original contest, is a standard left-of-centre TGWU official.

The fact that Walworth Road would go to such lengths to back Field against someone like Davies indicates just how committed our Party bosses are to maintaining the unaccountable powers of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Gould's report also proposed action against *Socialist Organiser*, which has strong support in the Wirral and in particular in Wallasey CLP (adjacent to Birkenhead) on the grounds that *SO* "is a party within the Party."

The idea seems to be to bracket *SO* with *Militant*, make all its open supporters liable to expulsion, and certainly to prevent Wallasey's PPC, Lol Duffy, from beating Linda Chalker at the next General Election and taking a seat in the Commons.

In a letter to the NEC, *Socialist Organiser* points out that it has never been formally informed of the existence of an inquiry into its activities, that it has been given no notice of any charges against it and no opportunity to state its own case in any form.

Gould is expected to bring specific proposals for dealing with *SO* to the next NEC meeting.

Labour Party Socialists and everyone else on the left should take up the defence of *SO* and of the Wallasey and Birkenhead CLPs as a top priority.

Above all, socialists must not allow themselves to be bludgeoned into silence by these tactics.

If Kinnock and his supporters were as confident of their dominance within the Party as they claim they wouldn't be so worried about a relatively small group like *SO* or the presence in the PLP of one or two dissident voices.

Just how fearful Kinnock and Co. remain of a left revival in the Party was shown by the other key vote at the NEC meeting.

In backing a package of Conference and policy-making "reforms" the Labour right hopes to institutionalise its latest policy shift (yet to be approved by any Party body except the NEC) which amounts to repealing Clause IV by the back door.

Gaitskell was never so clever. He argued his case to Conference — and lost. Kinnock wants to do away with Conference — or at least its role as a sovereign policy-making body of the Party.

The much-publicised reduction in the trade union vote from 90% to 70% (with possible incremental decreases to 40% over the years if CLP membership doubles to 600,000 at the same time) was not actually opposed by the left.

In fact, CLPD and most others on the left (including *Labour Briefing*) have for many years been calling for a reduction in the proportion of Conference votes cast by the trade unions and an increase in the proportion cast by CLPs.

The unacceptable part of the proposed Conference changes concerns policy-making.

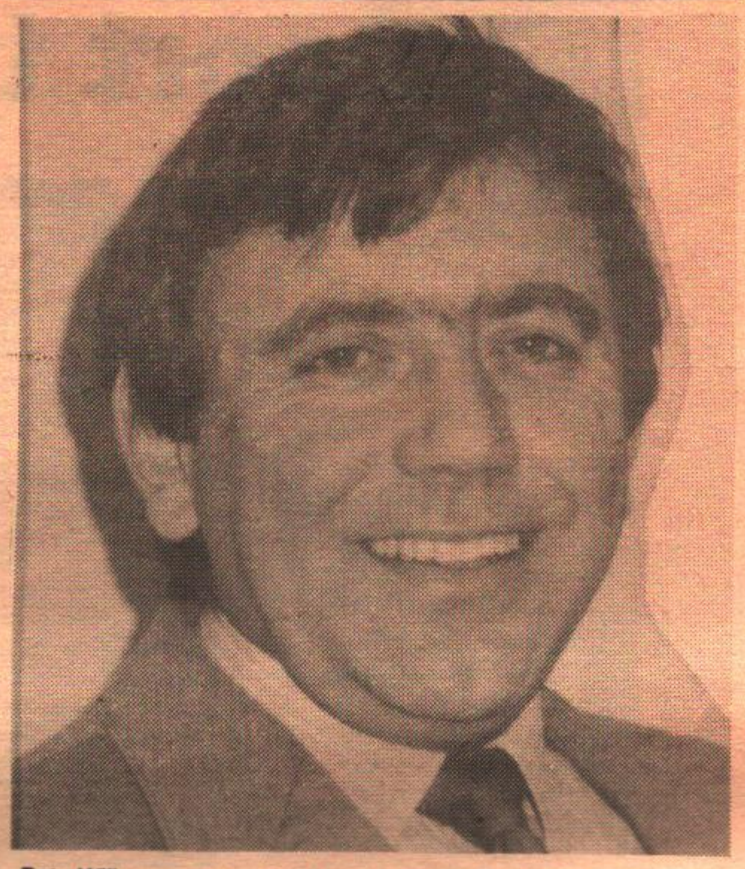
Ostensibly the package put to the NEC was the result of the phoney consultation exercise mounted by Walworth Road on "the future of Conference".

In reality it reflects nothing more than the whims of Labour's right wing power-brokers.

A "policy forum" is to be established to supervise a "rolling policy programme".

Details have yet to be made available to Party members, but it seems that this forum is to be made of indirectly elected and appointed members allegedly "representing" Labour Councillors, Regional Labour Parties, trade unions, MPs, and others.

Sub-commisions of the forum will be set up to work out detailed proposals in different policy areas.



Pete Willsman: preparing to guide us through the Conference confusion.

The problem here is not the idea of a "rolling" policy-making process nor the suggestion of special commissions to work out detail.

The problem is that there is no effective mechanism for ensuring that the forum and the commissions are democratically representative of and accountable to the base of the Party.

As the proposals stand, it will be almost impossible for Party members to get their policy proposals debated at Conference.

CLPs and trade unions will be offered policy packages like last year's Policy Review on a take it or leave it basis, without real facilities for discussion and without power to amend or defeat them.

Under the new proposals, Conference will retain the right to approve the ideas worked out by the policy forum and the NEC will retain the right to amend or delate these ideas before they are presented to Conference.

But the reality will be that actual power over policy formation will be usurped by a self-appointed, perpetually self-renewing elite. Conference will be reduced to a rubber-stamp.

There is nothing "modern" or "efficient" about the proposed new system.

It is simply a cumbersome mechanism for filtering out radical ideas, rigging debate at Conferences, and securing the power of the PLP to decide what is and is not Labour Party policy.

The fact that only Benn and Skinner voted against this transparent attempt to stitch-up the Party's policy in perpetuity is an indictment of that coterie of "yes-persons" whose collective noses are now shoved so far up Kinnock's asshole it's a wonder they can breathe at all, no less submit their names to Conference as "left" candidates for the NEC.

Membership

Numbers set to fall?

By John Hayball Membership Secretary, Chessington South BLP

Comrades may have come across a curious circular from Walworth Road entitled: "National Membership System — Questions and Answers."

The circular contains 23 questions and answers dealing with the operational mechanics of the dual system of processing membership through the constituencies and nationally.

It is only at question and answer 23 that 1991 is raised and it is just left as if no problems are expected with this transition. From 1991 each individual Party member will be required to register their renewal of membership annually with Head Office.

This development had been heralded for some years since direct applications first became processed by Head Office. Now it is a blanket situation which may well do untold damage both financially and politically to the Party as well as to our chances of victory at the next General Election.

One thing is certain: the working class is not used to being treated like yuppies. Working class people will not join and pay dues by post.

If there is to be a mass drop-out of members, the loss of revenue coupled with the already soaring £2m debt to the Bank would devastate the Party.

One of the hallmarks of social democracy has always been its apparent will to lose election battles with the bourgeois parties. Under Kinnock this tendency has become heightened — not least by his incredulous contempt for the rank and file.

Electoral activity needs an army of activists on the ground. The worsening state of local organisations in the constituencies during the Kinnock years has rendered victory in the coming General Election almost impossible — bar lucky accidents.

Kinnock's marketing techniques have ensured a growth in membership recruitment — although not a net rise in Party membership. His new recruits are armchair supporters, whose commitment does not go far beyond the payment by cheque of their subscription.

Annual conference 1990

Kinnock goes for broke

Many people on the left do not seem to realise how critical this year's Annual Conference will be.

The left has suffered so many defeats in recent years that people think it will just be more of the same.

This seriously underestimates the leadership's plans.

Kinnock realises that the Party has gone along with the Policy Review because of the desperate desire to win the next General Election and get rid of Thatcher, and not because the revisionists have won the arguments.

By Dorothy Macedo Hendon South CLP

He knows that once Labour is in power, the honeymoon will be short.

As he has no intention of taking on the City and big business, he will try to solve the economic crisis at the expense of the people who elected him, and this is when the left in the CLPs and the unions will come to life.

He must act now while he can get away with (almost) anything.

That is why we have had the spate of constitutional consultations in the last year on the future of the Conference, the composition of the NEC, the reselection of MPs, and the question of quotas and the Women's Organisation.

The NEC plans to change the rules this year to prevent the Party expressing opposition in future.

This year's Conference will be asked to approve a virtual re-writing of the Party constitution.

They plan to stop CLPs sending a resolution direct to Conference, while resolutions (and delegates!) will be chosen by membership ballots instead of the GC.

Sifted

As this will not stop all criticism, the resolutions will then be "sifted" by policy commissions.

Next, the amendment stage will be abolished. The NEC will be reorganised to minimise the chances of any left-wingers being elected and the PLP will be given extra representation at Conference.

Impossible

Deselecting an MP will be next to impossible. And if anyone wants to alter the rules in future, it will only be possible at rules revision conferences every three years.

The idea of the Party approving these changes has been likened to turkeys voting for Christmas. So will they do it?

Unfortunately most people find constitutional matters boring (not to mention confusing), and some have been taken in by the claim that "one member one vote" ballots are more democratic than delegate meetings.

Quotas for women may be introduced (though not in the PLP!) to give the impression of better representation for women.

However, they will actually be *used* to divert attention from the demand of the Labour Party Women's Conference, repeated this year, for real *power* for women — such as the right to elect the women's division of the NEC.

Sadly, many CLPs did not take part in the consultation process. Their silence will of course be treated as approval of any changes the NEC feels like making.

Resolutions

But some organisations have submitted Conference resolutions opposing the likely changes (a bit difficult since we won't see the final NEC proposals until after the closing date — I wonder why!)

There is still time to submit an amendment (possibly your last chance!)

Insist your CLP takes action this year, if necessary by officer action or at its July EC meeting.

Next year may be too late!

We need a socialist analysis

Support the Socialist Movement, but build *Briefing*

Bryn Griffiths (*Briefing* no. 103) was absolutely right to open up the debate on possible effects of a Socialist Movement periodical on *Briefing*.

But I dramatically disagree with the views expressed in the last paragraph of his article.

By Hyder Prodhan
Barrow CLP



Jeremy Corbyn: longstanding Briefing supporter, out canvassing with a copy of The Independent.

Briefing does indeed have an excellent record as a left wing paper, carrying a consistent socialist analysis of developments in Britain and internationally.

The approach of fighting within the Labour Party against the contemptible strategy of boss-grovelling, Kinnockite New Realism and fighting within the many campaigns of the working class and oppressed (Poll Tax, anti-racist, trade union, womens' movement, etc.) has always been the correct way forward.

The idea that the wider struggles against the ruling class can be reflected and fed into the Labour Party in order to transform it into a vehicle for revolutionary socialist politics is an appealing one.

Briefing has consistently sought to build a united, participatory socialist left within the Party, whilst maintaining its own perspectives.

Briefing supporters have fine records as class fighters, particularly in local government against ratecapping, against cuts, for genuine equal opportunities for women, black people, lesbians and gays, disabled people, and most recently against the Poll Tax.

Briefing has consistently fought within the Labour Party for a socialist economic policy, public ownership with workers control, withdrawal from NATO, and troops out of Ireland.

We have fought for democratisation of the Party, defending mandatory reselection of MPs, defending Party Conference and strengthening the union-Party ties, making union votes at Conference reflect the rank and file's determination to fight back against the Tories.

All these and more emphasise the importance of maintaining, improving and building *Briefing* as a platform for a socialist transformation, irrespective of a proposed Socialist Movement periodical (welcome though that will be).

Bryn goes on to mention that a possible paper would reach a wide audience.

Surely *Briefing* does reach a relatively wide audience and with building it can be wider. It is supported by key Campaign Group figures, such as Jeremy Corbyn and Tony Benn.

Briefing is capable of mobilising large forces and unity on the left but we must build the paper's profile in order to achieve this.

The Socialist Movement fills a vital and much needed role, in particular initiating discussion on the socialist agenda.

Its concentration on trade union work is also much welcomed, especially as the left have neglected this at times.

All this comes at a time when the Labour leadership refuses to discuss anything other than their own pathetic, class collaborationist policies.

Democratic

All on the left can only benefit from the existence of a democratic, activist led Socialist Movement and this makes it possible to establish a monthly Socialist Movement journal.

Such a journal would naturally be supported and built by *Briefing* supporters, as we have already done so much to build the wider Socialist Movement.

I agree with many of Bryn's arguments — that a socialist paper must be not just about information but must organise its supporters to fight for the policies of the paper, have democratic structures, an accountable editorial board, be agitational in character, and an activist paper.

These are all features of *Briefing* which can be built on further to strengthen *Briefing* and raise its profile.

The current political climate offers socialists great hope. The anti-Tory mood is very strong, most obviously on the fantastic mobilisations against the Poll Tax.

Briefing must raise its profile within the Labour Party, the campaigns of the oppressed and in the struggle against the Poll Tax. We can show the wider movement that our presence as class fighters can inspire confidence and trust.

Briefing issue no. 100 "Unite to Smash the Poll Tax" is a case in point.

Jane Connor's front page and other articles clearly laid the blame for the events of March 31st where it belonged, with the paid thugs of the British ruling class, the police.

Our analysis was sharp and telling, unlike the cowardly Kinnock, who in an effort to grovel to the Tories condemned the protesters, praised the police and wasn't even on the march!

We must as always seek to improve our coverage of events in Britain and internationally and seek the widest range of topics (remember the personal is political!).

Vitally, I believe *Briefing* must publish a "Where We Stand" pamphlet, more detailed than "Labour — Take The Power", outlining our strategy for socialist transformation in the here and now.

Such a pamphlet must involve all *Briefing* supporters in drawing up its arguments in order to truly reflect our views.

It would help raise our profile and reach out to workers and the oppressed as our alternative to the wretched pro-capitalist policies of the Labour leadership.

If launched through public meetings across the country, it could be used to help build local Labour Parties, and local *Briefing* groups.

Bryn is correct to state that any debate on *Briefing* must involve all our supporters.

We must continue to build the Socialist Movement, build *Briefing* and seek to continue and strengthen the fight for a socialist Labour Party that smashes capitalism in the interests of workers and the oppressed.

Witch-hunts will never stop our determination to fight for our class!

Labour Party Conference Greetings

Once again, Conference season is almost upon us.

And once again, *Labour Briefing* will be producing a special issue for the Labour Party Conference, and will be including Conference greetings from supporting organisations.

Special rates for Conference Greetings ads will be:

£50: Quarter Page
£25: Eighth Page
£15: 5 column inches
£10: 3 column inches

Please make sure your organisation, trade union branch, Labour Party branch or CLP knows about this opportunity to puts its message across to delegates at Party Conference and to make its views known to activists across the country.

Send your message plus payment (cheques payable to "Labour Briefing"; receipts provided on request) to:

Labour Briefing,
PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.

Help develop

How to fo necessary

The debate in *Briefing* "What sort of press for the left?" is about the system of alliances now needed to defend the working class.

What alliances are necessary to defend workers against Thatcher's offensive on wages, conditions, democratic rights and social benefits?

What alliances will help the working class take forward its struggle against a Labour government which would be well to the right of any Labour government since the war, committed as it is to preserving the main planks of Tory trade union legislation, privatisations and cuts.

By Gill Lee
Dulwich CLP

Alliances

The necessary alliances are being forged by the Socialist Movement among the left social-democratic MPs, the Labour left, leading trade union militants, and mass campaigns, such as those against the Poll Tax.

A means must be found to unite all those prepared to struggle against the bourgeoisie and New Realism. The Socialist Movement represents the beginning of such a unity.

That's why *Briefing* supporters have been active in the Socialist Movement since its formation, playing leading roles in Women for Socialism, organising the Trade Union Conference, the Poll Tax Conference, the Eastern European Conference.

It's why *Briefing* supperters helped build Labour Party Socialists.

Until now the initiatives of the Socialist Movement have been restricted to national sectoral conferences (such as that on the trade unions, on women's liberation, and on the Poll Tax) and a loose national and regional structure.

Often this has meant nothing for most Socialist Movement members beyond an occasional mailing.

The establishment of a national network with regional and even some local structures, which can organise the left in the Party at both local level and at Annual Conference, shows the way forward for the Socialist Movement.

But in order to develop serious local structures, or even a clearer national profile, the Socialist Movement needs its own paper which can mobilise, agitate and debate.

How should *Briefing* supporters view such a paper and the consolidation and strengthening of the Socialist Movement?

Our attitude has to be more than just support from the sidelines. We need to become involved from its in-

Labour Briefing Sellers,

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*

Registration:
£5 (waged); £1 (unwaged)

Registration fee covers contribution to pool fare. We feel it is fair to announce beforehand that we will be aiming to run a fare subsidy scheme (no one likes attending meetings with a low registration charge and then finding that they get stung for a huge pool fare). However, we would not like comrades to be deterred from attending because of special financial circumstances: so if these rates are too steep for you, please ask for a concessionary rate at the door. The registration fee applies to observers too; and all/any profits will go to Briefing.

The *Briefing* Editorial Board will be presenting a resolution to the meeting (see below/right). 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 please contact the *Briefing* office. Please help the meeting run smoothly by providing the office with advance notice of resolutions and amendments so that we can make copies of them.

"This meeting notes that *Labour Briefing* has strongly supported and promoted the Socialist Movement from

the SM paper!

rge the alliances



PHOTO: Leesa Harbert

Activists gather at the first Socialist Conference.

ception and fight to help develop a Socialist Movement paper which can successfully take forward the working class in action.

By being fully involved from the start, *Briefing* can argue for the kind of agitational, labour movement orientated, democratically accountable paper we know from experience is necessary.

Sectarian

Any other approach would be sectarian, retaining traditional allegiances to "*Briefing* the paper" as a substitute for retaining and strengthening our allegiances to the alliances required to defend and take forward the interests of the working class.

Briefing's traditional strength was as an organiser of the Labour Party and local government left.

That traditional base has declined, with the capitulation of former left layers to New Realism in local government and with the outflow of Labour Party members caused by Kinnock's witch-hunt and Policy Review.

In response *Briefing* has tried to maintain its traditional strengths while reaching out to new layers; increasing our trade union coverage; debating ecology and socialism; turning our efforts and attention to the mass campaign over the Poll Tax.

The Socialist Movement represents in many ways the best of what *Briefing* has tried to build. *Briefing* must now take full part in the discussions on a new Socialist Movement paper.

riters and Readers Meeting

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."

A Labour Party strategy



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Haringey Briefing supporters set up a stall at a local festival: can there be an alternative to Briefing?

Why we stand at the crossroads

The possibility of a Socialist Movement paper obviously raises questions for the place of *Labour Briefing*.

By Steve Reicher
Exeter CLP

We claim to be non-sectarian, we have been prominent in building the Socialist Movement — so why carry on when there is a broader organisation to carry on where we left off?

Bryn Griffiths suggests that if we were convinced that the new paper is even better than *Briefing* we might make the decision to close *Briefing*.

What does that mean? A paper which is agitational, activist orientated, democratic and clear in its attitude to the Labour Party, implies Bryn, would be something worth handing over to.

These various elements must be seen integrally linked, rather than items on a checklist.

Checklist

A checklist attitude will get us into all sorts of difficulties — why just the right attitude to the Labour Party? What about its position on Ireland, on South Africa, on women...?

Rather than count the good and bad attributes of the paper, we need to ask what is fundamental to the project of *Briefing* and how can it be extended. Only then can we decide our relationship to other projects in the offing.

The first, most basic point is that *Briefing* must not be seen as simply an exercise in providing information and analysis.

In those well known words, the aim of *Briefing* is not to interpret the world, but to change it. Therefore we do not just sell *Briefing*, we organise *Briefing* supporters.

Discussion in *Briefing* is oriented to how we organise our political interventions. Thus *Labour Briefing* as a paper gains its character and its appeal through the clarity of our political strategy.

It is unsatisfactory to sum up a political position in a few sentences. However, amongst the phrases that we have used to characterise our position, the one that strikes me as clearest is that of "organising at the crossroads".

By this we mean bringing together of disparate forces in order to pose the central question of state power. In particular, we have focussed on the relationship between the Labour Party and anti-capitalist struggles.

We have stressed the interdependence between the two: the need to turn the Party outwards towards these struggles as the main source of their strength, but also the need for activists to bring their struggles into the Party and to seek the structural changes necessary to their ultimate success.

This stress on the Labour Party is because it is the natural place where the struggles come together and raise the question of political power.

The Labour Party is constituted as an alliance of workers organisations and their allies, such as women's organisations, socialist societies and so on.

That is why it is logical to call for black sections and representatives of other oppressed groupings.

There will be those who scoff and point out the consistently pro-capitalist positions of the Labour Party.

They would be right in their observations, but wrong if they conclude that one should ignore the Party.

The argument is akin to saying that if the working class "get it wrong" then one ignores the working class or, even worse, one wishes a new working class.

The disastrous history of the "Red" unions in Weimar Germany should teach us the dangers of that path.

The key point is that one should judge a body, not on the policy it adopts at a given moment — on that basis Lenin should have condemned the Soviets in the spring of 1917 — but rather on the basis of the social forces it represents.

The Labour Party is controlled by organisations of working people. If that organisation leaves much to be desired, we fight to transform it. There is nowhere else to go but depart the working class.

That is why, for *Briefing*, Labour Party membership and the fight for leadership at all levels of the Party is not a tactical matter, an issue of coming in while it looks as if Tony Benn might win, but rather a long term strategic orientation.

Strategy

If our strategy depends upon our orientation to the Labour Party, then we cannot compromise on the issue without losing all ability to organise politically.

A paper which gave no clear organisational lead might still contain fascinating debates, but it would be of little use in bring about a socialist transformation of society.

As Bryn himself points out, there is little chance of getting the Greens, the SWP and others in the Socialist Movement to accept our strategic position.

Therefore there is little chance of a SM paper being used to "organise at the crossroads". Such a paper would destroy rather than extend the project of *Briefing*.

Now, with the prospect of a Labour government and the explosions which will result as Kinnock seeks to discipline the exploited and oppressed, such a liquidation would be little short of criminal.

In concluding, let me make two crucial qualifying remarks.

Arguing

The first is that I am not opposing the Socialist Movement nor a Socialist Movement paper. I am only arguing that it does not substitute for *Briefing*. It is a different, rather than an inferior, project.

The Socialist Movement is of great importance in bringing together those involved in anti-capitalist action and in co-ordinating their activity.

The issue of how to give political focus to these forces remains open, but it has to be posed and it gives an important forum to argue our position.

It is precisely because the Socialist Movement complements *Briefing* that we have done so much to build it. That effort should not stop.

My second point is that within the Socialist Movement we have seen a drawing together of those who regard the position of the Labour Party as central in any social transformation.

Although differences exist, the prospect of a broad strategic agreement is not fanciful.

Now, if the Labour Party Socialists were bring out their own paper, I think that we might seriously discuss the future of *Briefing*...

The left press

Invaluable in their variety!



Thousands of people must have attended their first demonstration as opponents of the Poll Tax.

Like so many before them, they must have been bemused by the plethora of left wing papers.

Think back to your first demonstration. What did you make of the left press? Which papers did you buy? Why?

My first demonstration was for "Jobs not Bombs" in Manchester over ten years ago.

I bought copies of *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Challenge*, probably because they seemed less bizarre than the others.

They were well produced and addressed the aim of the demo.

I spent ages pouring over them when I got home. I was quite excited. It was great to see there were so many socialists fighting for nuclear disarmament.

I was intrigued by the differences between the two papers. After much deliberation I decided it had something to do with the Labour Party!

Which papers would the new Poll Tax activists have bought?

For production quality, they would have undoubtedly plumped for *Living Marxism*. Professionally produced on glossy paper with imaginative design, this journal leaves the rest of the left standing.

Unfortunately, our Poll Tax protester would have been disappointed to find that 250,000 demonstrators had made no impression on the Revolutionary Communist Party. There would be not one column inch of Poll Tax coverage in *Living Marxism*!

By Bryn Griffiths
Tottenham CLP

One can only assume that having set themselves the unenviable task of creating a new labour movement to replace the existing one, which they hold in contempt, they have finally lost grip on reality.

It is more likely that the Poll Tax demonstrator would have plumped for a copy of the *Militant*.

Media coverage, Labour witch-hunts, and its prominent role in the Anti-Poll Tax movement are likely to have made it the most famous of the left press.

Along with *Socialist Worker*, the *Militant* must be the sales leader on the British left.

Both papers have lots of Poll Tax coverage, although *Socialist Worker* does it with a bit more flair.

However, having noticed the prominence given to the fighting fund (*Militant*) and self-aggrandising "Go for growth" (*Socialist Worker*) articles, the new reader might conclude that the main rationale for such publications is "build the party".

Demonstration

This is the world where the success of a demonstration is judged by the number of papers sold and recruits won. OK if you're a supporter; a bit of a piss off if your main concern is building the Poll Tax movement.

To follow *Socialist Worker* and the *Militant* perhaps something a little more mainstream would be worth a try: maybe the *Morning Star*, *Tribune*, *Socialist Campaign Group News* or even Neil Kinnock's favourite Marxist paper the "Communist" *Marxism Today*.

The *Morning Star* is a funny kettle of fish. Once the daily paper of the Communist Party, it fed its loyal readers on a diet of apologia for the Eastern block and the TUC.

Today

Today it finds itself all at sea.

Having severed links with its erstwhile Euro-communist allies and suffered a massive cut in its East European orders, it now limps on with one foot in the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain and the other in the TUC General Council!

The unenviable blows to their traditions have made the *Star*'s political coverage less predictable.

One minute they're criticising Ken Livingstone's assault in *Tribune* on Labour Party Socialists, the next minute they're championing the moderate Jinkinson's campaign for NALGO leadership.

I suppose it's nice to back winners after such a bad patch.

To be fair, it does come out daily and gives reasonable coverage to campaigns and trade union disputes.

Marxism Today is a success story that has gone slightly off the boil of late.

Built on the back of the demoralisation arising from Thatcherism, it became the think tank for some of the more thoughtful sections of the Labour leadership.

It provides the political rationale for much of Labour's soft left and it has championed the post-Miners' Strike political realignments with gusto.

Its success rests on excellent production, a clear political project, and an ability to address questions ignored by the more traditional left.

Its superficial openness makes it attractive to many. Unfortunately this openness only extends rightwards to the likes of Edwina Currie; not leftwards to Arthur Scargill.

Socialist Campaign Group News and *Tribune* function as the semi-detached publications of their respective parliamentary groupings.

This parliamentary influence makes them a little dull when placed alongside *Socialist Worker*.

Tribune has a tremendous history. Launched as a Bevanite journal way before my time, it was always a thorn in the side of the Labour leadership.

In the early 80s under the editorship of Chris Mullin the paper was required reading for the Bennite left.

The downwards spiral started with Nigel Williamson, now a columnist for Rupert Murdoch.

Today its only useful role is to act as a surrogate *Labour Weekly* providing in-house Party news about selections and the like.

The rest of the left press is pretty marginal. *Socialist Action* attempts to pose as the theoretical journal of Labour Left Liaison, but in fact it is the narrow magazine of a particular tendency.

Many *Briefing* supporters read it for the attacks on *Briefing*. I'm not sure why — or if — anyone else bothers. An obscure publication, it's a difficult taste to acquire.

Socialist Organiser appears weekly as a result of the heroic endeavours of a few.

Between

It falls between many stools, aiming for a mass audience on its front page and then inside you find huge theoretical tracts that have been known to run for a number of issues.

It's not for me to suggest changes, but perhaps a few more of the tracts could be bunged in their theoretical review, *Workers' Liberty*.

Unlike *Marxism Today* it does not have a clear political project or audience. Is it an organiser of the Labour left or a fanzine for its leading thinker, John O'Mahoney?

At its best it carries informative news items about the Labour left. At worst, it gets completely carried away, abuses everybody else, and doubles as the Labour left's answer to the *Spartacist*.

In writing this article I've suddenly realised how much of the left press I read. I agree with Tony Benn that the left press in all its variety is invaluable.

By this point you've probably noticed that two publications, namely *Labour Briefing* and *Socialist Outlook*, haven't been mentioned.

I didn't feel I could offer anything like an impartial view, so perhaps someone else would like to have a go on those!

LAMBETH 29

Another pound of flesh

As they near the end of their "sentence", 29 former Lambeth Councillors face a £200,000 fine and another five year ban from office.

In April 1986 31 Labour Councillors in Lambeth delayed setting a rate until central government gave more funds to the Borough.

This attempt to prevent massive cuts in services led to these 31 Councillors being "fined" £320,000 for surcharge and legal costs plus a five year ban from office.

Since then the former Councillors have been "doing their time" and paying off their crippling "fine" at a rate of £5,000 a month.

This was made possible by the magnificent support of small contributions from working women and men to the Lambeth Fighting Fund. The battle was nearly won — £300,000 paid off, just £20,000 to go.

But no: instead of "time off for good behaviour" the Lambeth 29 (two of the 31 have since died) have just been handed down a new sentence.

The District Auditor has redone his sums and now demands another £212,726 and a further five year ban from office.

While most people will regard this as an affront to natural justice there is obviously no money for further legal appeals. The only answer is to pay off the new "fine" to avoid further prosecution of the former Labour Councillors.

We are looking for 8,000 individual donations of £24 over the next two years to raise the bulk of the money — either a one-off cheque or a standing order for two yearly payments.

We'd be grateful for whatever you can afford.

For more details contact: The Lambeth Fighting Fund, 081-670 1454.

**Taken from a Lambeth Fighting Fund leaflet*

Support for the Lambeth 29 comes from right across the Party:

David Blunkett:

"The obvious injustice of fining these men and women again for something laid to rest five years ago must be clear to everyone. A further disqualification is unique in British legal history. The former Lambeth Councillors who have been surcharged a second time deserve our support. Please give that support by sending a standing order to the fund."

Larry Whitty:

"We have to see that these 29 individuals and their families do not suffer the grotesque penalties of bankruptcy. I hope that you will do all you can to contribute to the Lambeth Fighting Fund as generously as you can."

BOOK REVIEW

Inside No. 10

Hugo Young's *One of Us* is the most comprehensive biography of Margaret Thatcher to date.

It is now out in paperback with a new epilogue.

One of Us is an important book. Hugo Young may not break new theoretical ground but he comes much closer than many other writers to accurately defining Margaret Thatcher's approach to government.

He starts by tracing her roots in pre-war Grantham and the influence of her father, a Methodist Town Councillor.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

This theme of Thatcher as "outsider" has been taken up by many writers, but Young sees here the origin of Thatcher's populism, her sense of "moral rectitude", her anti-intellectualism and her hostility to much of the establishment — particularly top civil servants and the High Church.

The ideology came later. Once she had married into money and could concentrate on a political career, Thatcher proved herself a mainstream Conservative, an astute supporter of whoever had the majority — until the fall of Heath.

Only then does an alternative ideological Conservatism, based around Keith Joseph's Centre for Policy Studies, emerge in 1975.

The calculated distancing of herself from the beleagured Heath suggests she is much more flexible than her opponents give her credit for.

Indeed one source of her resilence, argues Young, is her pragmatism and her manoeuvrability. In this her deputy till 1987, Whitelaw, was indispensable in tempering her stridency with caution.

Once in late 1980, he had to dissuade her patiently from taking personal charge of the police investigation into the Yorkshire ripper case, so irate was she at the police's inability to catch the culprit!

As such insights show, this is also a book about government.

It documents the contempt shown by top civil servants for the Cabinet's monetarist dogmas in 1979, and Thatcher's equally contemptuous response: "I make up my mind about people in the first ten seconds and I very rarely change it."

One official noted that she underlined lists of civil servants with either a dotted or solid line:

"I soon realised that the dots were for the goodies and the line for the baddies, as she saw them. There were only two categories, and everyone fitted into one or other."

Behind this doctinaire approach lay Thatcher's obsession not to be forced into the sort of U-turn her predecessor, Edward Heath, had preferred in 1972. She made it clear she would rather bring down the government than change policies.

In May 1980 the Cabinet nearly split over the European Common Agriculture Policy.

A year later she threatened to resign if striking civil servants were granted a pay increase 1.5% over the Treasury's 6% cash limit — even though this was in fact the deal struck by the government a few weeks later.

The delay had cost half a billion pounds in lost interest on uncollected taxes.

Two examples of the internal workings of Thatcher's government stand out especially.

The story of how she forced through the huge spending cuts of 1981 against the opposition of Heseltine, Walker, Pym, Gilmour, Soames and the normally loyal Biffen and Nott, has never been so well documented.

Walker called for an incomes policy, and Lord Hailsham warned that the consequences of spiralling unemployment could be similar to Nazi Germany.

Unable to win, Thatcher appeared to retreat, but instead reshuffled her cabinet, sacking or demoting the spineless "wets" who went without a murmur.

The second intriguing section of the book is on the Westland affair, which brought down both Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine and Trade and Industry Chief Leon Brittan.

Indeed, it came close to bringing down Thatcher herself, so implicated was her office in unauthorised leaks and cover-ups.

Apparently, before leaving Downing Street for the critical Commons debate on January 27th 1986, she said to one associate: "I may not be Prime Minister by six o'clock tonight."

Young adds: "That was the measure of disillusionment she knew to be present in the Conservative Party."

In fact, Thatcher's bacon was saved: first by Neil Kinnock's complete inability to pin down her culpability clearly in his speeches; second, by Cabinet Secretary Robert Armstrong's deft evasiveness before the Commons Select Committee.

Young

Young observes: "Instead of the Minister being responsible for the conduct of the civil servant, here was the chief civil servant assuming responsibility for the integrity of the Prime Minister."

It was Robert Armstrong who later told an Australian courtroom in the *Spycatcher* case that in his line of work it was sometimes necessary to be "economical with the truth."

Paradoxically it is on the two biggest events of the Thatcher government's first two terms — the Falklands War and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike — that the book is weakest.

This is chiefly because of the limitations of Young's analysis, alternating from admiration to hand-wringing in a style typical of a *Guardian* leader-writer.

Thus statements like "the Falklands War showed her qualities of decision making and fortitude at their most brilliant" sit alongside observations like that of Scottish Secretary, George Younger, who said that Thatcher's May 1982 address to Scottish Conservatives "reminded me of a Nuremburg rally."

Hugo Young's approach is flawed and the passages on the Labour Party are particularly irritating.

But overall this is a highly readable 589 pages with essential insights into Thatcher, her policies, and her style.



Thatcher: what is the reality behind the enigma?

***One of Us*, by Hugo Young, *Pan*, £7-95**

SUMMER BOOK ROUND UP

Getting away from it all

DAVE PALMER, *Briefing*'s bookworm and purveryor of select tomes to the incogniscenti, provides some tips for summer reading on the beach.

POLITICS

***The Retreat of the Intellectuals – The Socialist Register 1990*, Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch, *Merlin*, £8-95.**

You never could trust intellectuals — always vacillating and backsliding. This year Geras, Meisling Wood, Jameson, et al take on the post-modernist, post-Fordist, post-deconstructionists, post-office, or whatever they are post now.

***Farewell Perestroika – A Soviet Chronicle*, Boris Kagarlitsky, translated by Rick Simon, *Verso*, £8-95.**

Talking of intellectuals, from the man who brought us the *Thinking Reed*, and is surrounded by people who think that Hayetz and Milton Friedman represent pluralism and Friedman.

The other Boris whips out his account of the crisis of perestroika. Pretty prolific, this guy.

***Eurocentrism*, by Samir Amin, *Zed Books*, £7.95.**

Amin takes on "Europe's present intellectual ascendancy" and "the relative failure of Third World nationalism and its benighted successor Islamic Fundamentalism" and posits the alternative of a truly univeral culture. Quite a task; hope he gets somewhere.

***A Dictionary of the Environment*, by Steve Elsworth, *Paladin*, £6.99.**

From acid rain to whales and whaling; your easy guide to the greenhouse effect, deforestation, and desertification. Be an ecological know-all at dinner parties with this quick guide to the planet's demise.

***The History of Sexuality, Volume Three*, by Michel Foucault, *Penguin*, £6.99.**

The doyen of the discourse theorists brings us part three of his blockbusting epic. It deals with the "transformation of discourse about aphrodisia from the Hellenistic to the Roman world."

So now you know. Not a fan of Foucault's posturing on the subject myself, but then I'm just a stick-in-the-mud Hegelian.

***How Safe is Safe? Radiation Controversies Explained*, by Dr Barnie Lambert, *Unwin Press*, £7.99.**

It's everywhere. Official reaction is chaotic and "lacks openess". Governmental safety standards are unacceptable. For late night reading (and stay away from the microwave).

***The Hite Report on Male Sexuality*, by Shere Hite, *Optima*, £9.99.**

1,100 pages with appendixes; started in 1974 and based on 7,239 questionnaires. "Often fascinating," claims Jeffery Weekes. Easy reading on the beach?

FICTION

***A Prayer for Owen Meany*, by John Irving, *Black Swan*, £5.99.**

Irving's latest best seller. Poor little Owen (aged 11) hits a foul ball in a little League baseball game and kills his best friend's mother. Not a good start for a sporting career, but clearly a useful springboard for a novelist.

***To Do Something Beautiful*, by Rohini, *Sheba*, £6.95.**

Indian feminist novel set in Bombay, India's most industrialised and cosmopolitan city. Deals with the lives of working class women in this pressure cooker city where 60% of the population lives on the streets or in shanty towns.

***Summer People*, Margo Piercy, *Penguin*, £4.99.**

A ménage à trois between Dinah, Wille and Susan among artists on Cape Cod is Piercy's latest theme. Sounds like the perfect subject for a Robert Altman movie.

***Burn Marks*, Sara Puretsky, *Chatto & Windus*, £13.95.**

From the author of *Toxic Shock*, V.I. Warshawski, America's well known fictional private eye returns to uncover arson and corruption amongst Chicago politicians and discovers where the political stakes are high, friendship is cheap! (You can say that again...)

BIOGRAPHY

***Ties of Blood*, by Gillian Slovo, *Headline*, £4.99.**

Joe's daughter brings us an account of the interaction between two families in South Africa, one black, one white. A young Jewish woman and her husband (the political activist), Evelyn and her husband Nathaniel (the son of a tribal chief, a leader of the black movement).

Any resemblance to well known relatives and acquaintances is presumably accidental.

***Against The Grain – An Autobiography*, Boris Yeltsin, translated by Michael Glenny, *Johnathon Cape*, £12-99.**

Big Bozza lays it on the line. Bet you didn't know he used to coach a women's volleyball team. Left alternative to Gorbachev? I hope nobody's still proposing that.

***The Cloning of Joanna May*, by Fay Weldon, *Fontana*, £3.50.**

New novel from Fay Weldon. Joanna wakes up one day to find that she's surrounded by four clones of herself. Her former husband's a genetic engineer!

***James Baldwin – Artist On Fire*, A portrait by V J Wetherby, *Michael Joseph*, £17-99.**

Written by Baldwin's friend of 30 years. Ridiculous that most of Baldwin's work is out of print in the UK due to copyright problems.

The Women's Page

HFE Bill

Embryos laid to rest

The parliamentary debate on the Embryology Bill had its Third Reading in the House of Commons on June 20th-21st.

It was a suitably ignominious end.

The first day covered issues around embryo research, new reproductive technologies (NRTs) and donor insemination (DI).

Amendments to restrict research, to put religious people on the Licensing Authority, and to remove the anonymity of the donors were defeated.

By Rebecca Flemming Women for Socialism

However, Ann Winterton's amendment to the "welfare clause" requiring account to be taken of a child's need for a father before doctors decide whether to provide any woman with DI or infertility treatments was carried by 226 to 174.

There was no whip on the question but both Labour and the Tories indicated which way MPs should vote.

Health Minister Virginia Bottomley "commended" the amendment to the House for its support, while the Shadow Minister for Women, Jo Richardson, "invited" MPs to vote against.

The majority did as they were told and the Tories were joined by most of the SLD and the smaller parties.

Hampered by Labour's image as the "real Party of the family", Jo Richardson's opposing speech was half-hearted almost to the point of inanity and conceded the central point of the nuclear family as "ideal".

Some Labour MPs just silently voted for the amendments. David Blunkett went much further — with a most nauseating and offensive speech which must surely shatter any lingering "soft left" illusions in him.

Blunkett stated that single women who conceive by DI differ only from men who abuse women in the gender of the person they use as a "convenience"!

He went on to advance a variation on the theme of "lesbians and gay men are all right, but don't let them near children".

Though women have a right to "reject contact with men or to shun any physical contact with them," he said, "they *do not* have the right to have children."

"Childbearing is not a right. It is part of the unfathomable life force. That is why man and woman together must take responsibility for the wellbeing and love of the child."

There was no reticence or timidity amongst the Tories.

David Wilshire demonstrated a particularly clear grasp of his class interests with his statement that, "For me, the word 'family' means three things.

"It means the family as a social unit, a financial unit, and a biological unit... We tinker with it at our peril."

Virginia Bottomley spoke less of the financial role and stressed the love and stability fathers provide.

Winterton's amendment both strengthens the restrictive effect of the "welfare clause" and gives it ideological support. It fits in with the Tories' general offensive around fathers' essential role in the family.

Lesbians and single women will not only find it practically impossible to get access to DI and NRTs but also have their status as "bad mothers" officially confirmed by a law stating that children need fathers.

The effect of this amendment on the interpretation of and judicial practice concerning the many other pieces of legislation including the phrase "welfare of children" (particularly those relating to child custody) remains to be seen.

Longstanding demands of the pro-choice movement finally made it on to the parliamentary agenda on the second day of the debate.

As the (unfortunately named) Sir Bernard Braine said:

"I am profoundly disturbed by the group of amendments now under discussion, the like of which I have not heard discussed in this place in the 40 years I have sat here."

In a debate packed with facts and figures rather than dripping with blood, a cross party proposal that abortion should be available on the referral of a single doctor up to 12 weeks was narrowly defeated by 200 to 228.

An amendment which would have created a pubiic register (or "blacklist", as the anti-abortionists dubbed it) of doctors who "conscientiously object" to abortion was more resoundingly defeat by over 100 votes.

The suggestion that the new abortion clause should, along with the rest of the Bill, extend to the Six Counties of Ireland was given short shrift by the Tories.

This, the only amendment the Party, was defeated; a clause exempting the 6 Counties won by 267 to 131.

The last ditch attempt by the anti-abortionists to claw back some of their losses by reintroducing a 28 week time limit for abortion on the grounds of "foetal abnormality" was defeated by a mere 14 votes.

At the end of the day the Bill as a whole was passed by 303 to 65,

It was perhaps predictable that the issues on which both the women's and labour movement are weakest — on access to DI, on lesbian reproductive rights — are the issues on which the pro- choice movement has suffered a severe setback.

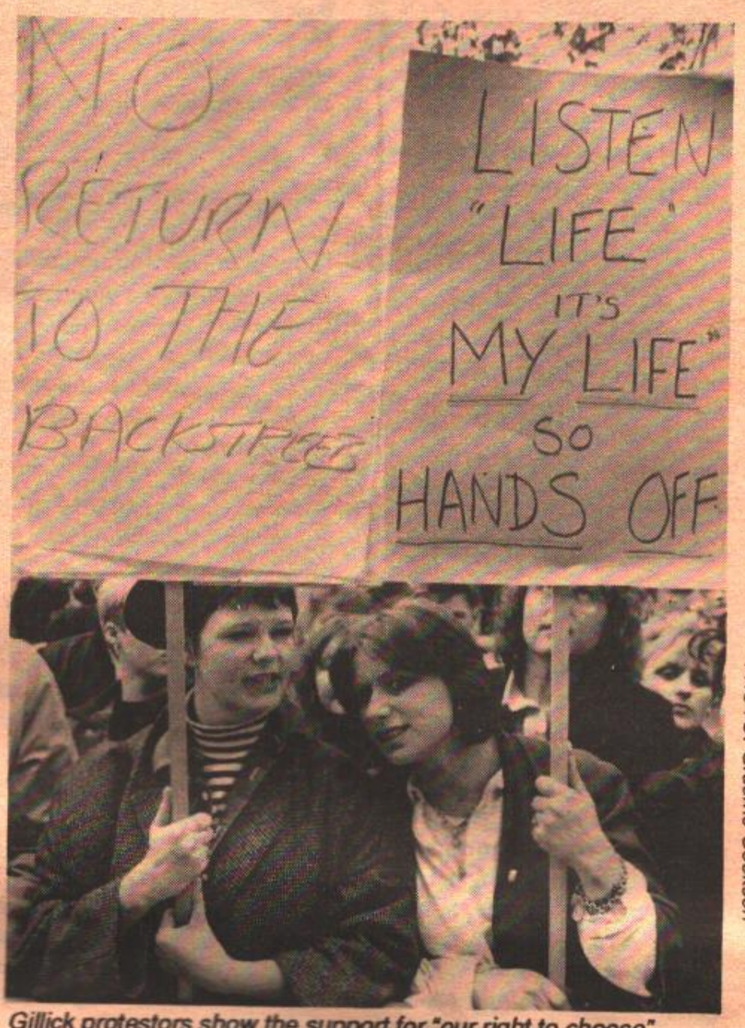


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Gillick protestors show the support for "our right to choose".

It became almost inevitable after the campaign in defence of women's rights was weakened and divided by a refusal to link issues and build the broadest campaign.

However, the struggle for women's reproductive freedom continues. The appointment of the Licensing Authority and its drawing up of the Code of Practice are immediate battles to be fought.

Along with these go pressurising clinics to continue to provide non-discriminatory access and trying to ensure that the liberalising potential of the changes in the abortion law is fulfilled.

Most of all, the wider issues of the family, of *all* women's right to choose, must be taken forward in the labour movement.

Nottingham NAC

After the Act — onto the offensive

Nottingham NAC is in a post-legislation lull.

The last few months have been full of frenetic activity: petitioning and leafletting, holding public meetings, talking to the media, speaking to labour movement bodies and squeezing money from every possible source.

In contrast, the last few weeks have been a time for quiet reflection.

Where the legislation has left us and where to go next are discussions which will be a priority for NAC up to its National Conference in October.

During the campaign, Nottingham NAC attempted to take up both sides of the right to choose issue and decided to oppose the Embryology Bill as a whole since it enshrined state control of our bodies.

NAC

This put us a little at odds with national NAC's and STAC's position but did not appear to hamper our success at gaining support on the streets and in the local labour movement.

Despite some claims that this was a particularly difficult Bill to campaign around and that the issues of abortion, embryo research and DI had to be separated, we found that most women readily appreciated the links.

By Tina Yemm Nottingham NAC (personal capacity)

It gave us centre stage in arguing for real choice for women to have or not to have children and appropriately followed on from a recent campaign we ran against the closure of local family planning clinics.

We were pleasantly surprised by the outcome of the Bill for abortion legislation and the scale of the anti-abortionists defeat.

However, despite gains on time limits and decriminalisation of doctors, there remains real apprehension for the future about the legal status now afforded the foetus and the consequences of the Bill for access to infertility treatment of lesbians and single women.

The extent of the opposition to the attempts by pro-choice MPs to make abortion available earlier and easier and to ensure that licensed clinics do not discriminate against unmarried women and lesbians should also warn us against complacency.

There is still a lot to fight for!

As with the original 67 Act, the lack of facilities to implement the legislation properly remains crucial and with the state of the NHS this is more desperate than ever.

During the campaign we lobbied Kenneth Clarke and asked him about provision of services, but he seemed unprepared to discuss this in the context of the Embryology Bill!

Act

We have another date booked with him and if the new Act is to be worth more than the paper it's written on he shouldn't be allowed to dodge the issue.

Neither should our token supporters in the labour movement be allowed to get away with less than making abortion and fertility services a major priority for pre-election campaigning and the manifesto.

Pill

Self-referral for abortion for women in the early stages of pregnancy and the availability of the abortion pill RU486 could form the basis of other positive campaigns aimed at bringing Britain into line with other countries as European "unity" approaches.

Focus

While we have yet to decide what we want to focus on locally, there seems much more room now for optimism and proactive campaigning, following years of what has felt like continually being on the defensive.

NAC has grown locally and nationally during the past months and clearly remains the best vehicle for taking forward demands across all aspects of control of our lives, our bodies, and our right to decide.

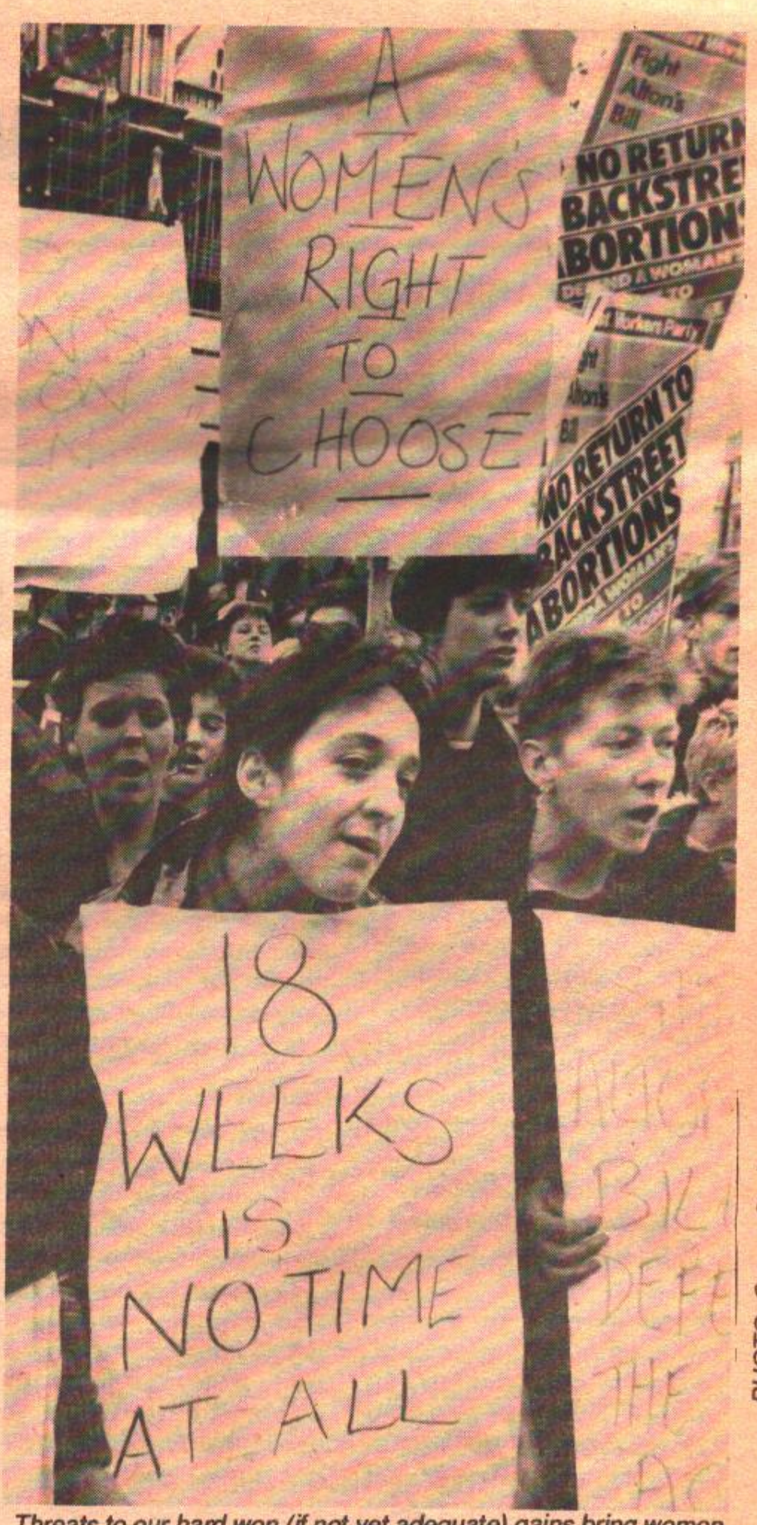


PHOTO: Grame Cookson

Threats to our hard won (if not yet adequate) gains bring women out campaigning!

A summer offensive

Labour: unshackle the unions!

By Mike Marqusee Labour Party Socialists

Labour Party Socialists and the Socialist Movement Trade Union Commitee have launched a campaign to commit Labour to the repeal of all Tory anti-union laws.

We're asking all comrades in every sector of the labour movement to take part in our summer offensive by:

•Supporting the model resolution printed below in their CLPs and trades unions (whether affiliated to the Labour Party or not).

Already several CLPs have put this resolution forward to Labour's Annual Conference. To ensure it is debated, please try to get your CLP or union to submit a suitable supportive amendment.

•Getting their trade union or Labour Party branch (or any other trade union or Labour Party bodies) to support the campaign and agree to have their names listed in a leaflet to be delivered to all Party Conference delegates in October (and possibly published in *Tribune*).

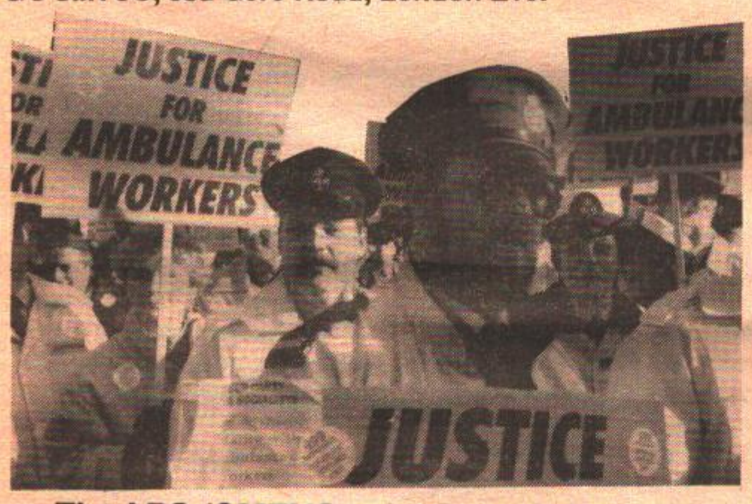
Individual trade unionists are also encouraged to add their names to the list.

•Get their trade union branch or other group to agree to send a deputation to join the "Unshackle the Unions!" trade union lobby of Labour Party Conference on Sunday, September 30th, in Blackpool. Banners and bodies are needed!

•Send a donation to the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee to help fund this initiative.

•Circulate all this information everywhere you can in the labour movement.

•Please contact Mike Marqusee or Carolyn Sikorski, c/o SMTUC, 53a Gere Road, London E15.



The LPS/SMTUC model resolution:

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

"It therefore 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 Trade Unions issued a statement earlier this year consisting of the four demands listed above. It was backed by 33 trade union leders, including Bickerstaffe (NUPE), Gill and Switzer (MSF), Christopher (FTAT), Cameron (FBU), Marino (Bakers), Heathfield (NUM), Christie (STUC), Jinknson (NALGO), Fullick (ASLEF), Sapper (ACTT), Conroy (NUJ), Todd and Morris (TGWU).

Poll Tax and the unions

Organise the counter-offensive!

Support is growing for the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee's anti-Poll Tax Conference.

The conference, on the trade unions and the Poll Tax, will be held on Saturday September 8th in Sheffield.

It already has 60 sponsoring organisations, and many other bodies have already elected delegates.

Fourteen million people in England, Scotland, and Wales are now refusing to pay the Poll Tax — an unprecedented mass movement of civil disobedience in Britain.

It represents the biggest single problem to the Tories face in trying to cling onto office and recover their position by the next election.

This level of mass non-payment has serious implications for the trade unions.

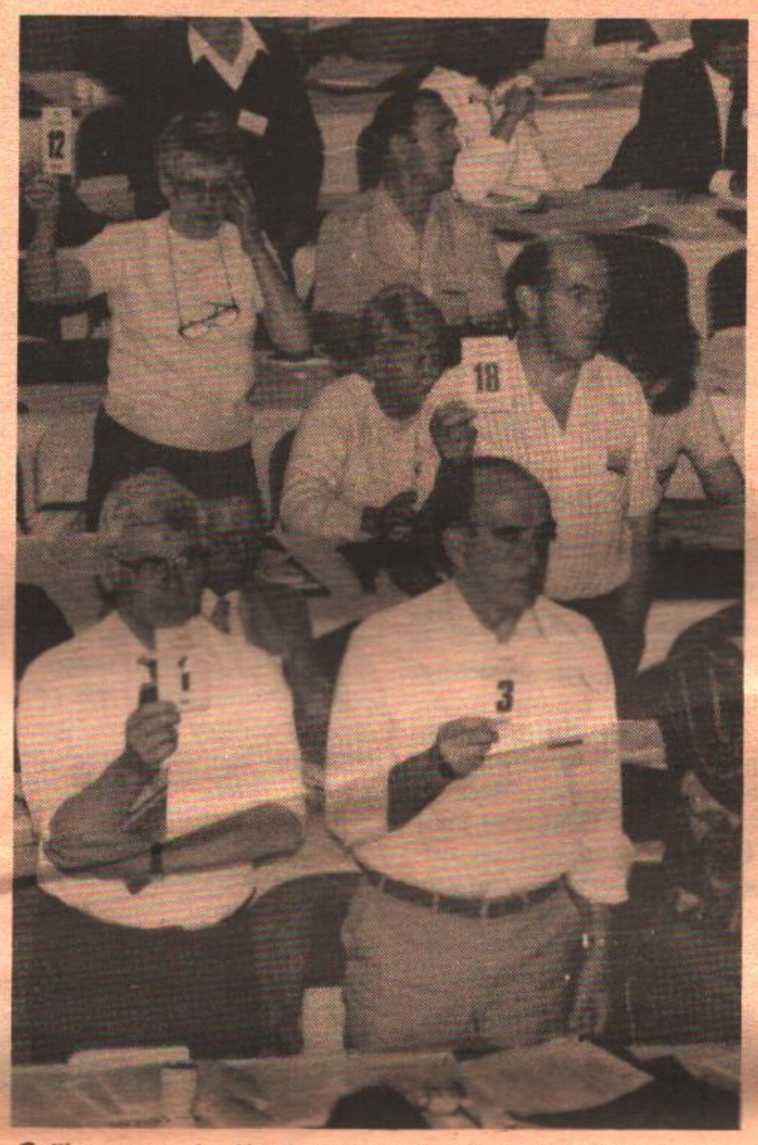
By Alan Thornett

As the courts grapple with the problem of collecting the money, it is becoming clearer that their principal method of collection will be attachment of wages orders — implemented through the employers.

In most cases the attachment orders will have to be administered by trade union members. Will they allow employers to interfere with wage packets with impunity, or will they take sanctions to stop this action?

Mass non-payment also creates the basis for non-collection of the Tax and for effective support to be organised in support of workers refusing to operate the system — including local government workers, postal workers, and civil servants.

The Tax is directly eroding living standards and transferring money from the poor to the rich — wage increases to compensate are needed.



Getting mesmerised by the internal structures of the unions: not responding to the anti-Poll Tax movement.

Redundancies

There will be mass redundancies and attacks on the wages and working conditions of Local Authority workers, and all workers will suffer losses through cuts in services and loss of local democracy.

The biggest area of trade union action, however, is likely to be in defence of jobs directly destroyed by the Tax.

The operation of the Poll Tax and Poll Tax capping is already affecting and threatening tens of thousands of jobs in Local Authorities — teaching in particular.

The fight against the Poll Tax will not be complete unless it organises to defend those jobs which are threatened by it, and to support those workers who are made redundant by it.

The gap between the mass popular movement against the Poll Tax and the New Realist dominated trade union leaderships is huge. The gap must be closed, by challenging New Realism, so that the unions and the TUC can be brought into the campaign.

The TUC should be calling for mass demonstations against the Tax: clearly, if it did issue a call, the resulting demonstration would be absolutely enormous.

It is with all this in mind that the Conference is being organised.

The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee supported the trade union Conference called by the National Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions on June 23rd.

It was a good initiative and well attended. But it was very brief, effectively only three and a half hours.

It was unable to provide much of the detailed tactical discussion, sector by sector, union by union, which is necessary if successful trade union action is to be expanded and made more effective.

Achieved

The Socialist Movement Conference aims to build on what was achieved on June 23rd.

It will be a full day, with workshops on the main aspects of trade union action and the Poll Tax, and meetings of members in individual unions to discuss the problems industry by industry.

It will be addressed by Tony Benn and other leading figures of the Socialist Movement as well as representatives of those who have already taken action against the Tax.

By the beginning of September, most Local Authorities will have started operating their chosen tactics for attacking the non-payment movement. Come to Sheffield to help organise the counter-offensive!

Federation Conference

Massive meeting boosts morale

This Conference was timely if nothing else.

The first All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation trade union Conference took place as the pressures of capping and the success of the non-payment movement brought cuts and court actions quicker than expected.

Before the Conference, rumours were rife about registrations being sent back and delegations refused credentials. The SWP put out a leaflet to this effect.

In the event, the Conference was huge, with 1,400 delegates from 600 trade union and workplace organisations. It appeared that everyone who wanted to attend did so — at least as an observer.

By Doug Thorpe Islington NALGO

The agenda was structured around the 23 motions, with speakers spread throughout the day.

From the Chair, Tommy Sheridan, Chair of the ABAPTF, opened the Conference with a report of the level of non-payment.

Other speakers included Terry Fields MP, a Greenwich striker, and the Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign.

The resolutions were grouped in themes, but there was little time for debate as each separate resolution had to be moved. Many of them could easily have been composited, allowing more time for discussion.

Most of the decisions were uncontroversial: calling on the TUC and Labour Party to call a national demonstration; for a one day strike in local government against cuts; for action against wage and benefit arrestments; supporting the people's march and October demonstration.

Repetitive

Thus as they day wore on, speeches became more repetitive and blurred into one another. Workshops could have allowed a useful opportunity for delegates to discuss with fellow union members how to organise to put the resolutions into practice.

Without such plans being laid, initiatives such as the call for a day of strike action across all Authorities facing cuts or job losses through capping or budget reduction are unlikely to be fully effective.

Indeed, throughout the day the scale of the pending cuts was ignored by most speakers.

Where the Conference did work was in boosting confidence by bringing together so many delegates and in the all too few speeches which gave concrete information about local actions.

This was a useful beginning, which the different structure of the Socialist Movement Conference can try to develop.

Coming "out in the East"

Learning from the past

The first ever Christopher St (Lesbian and Gay Pride) Rally was held in Alexander Platz at the centre of East Berlin on Saturday June 23rd.
Hundreds of lesbians and gay men from both East and West listened to speeches and bands, and crowded round stalls from a range of different groups — from West Berlin trade unions to East German AIDS organisations.
The most visible and organised lesbian and gay political group present was the PDS (the successor of the SED).
REBECCA FLEMMING interviewed COLIN SHERMAN, one of the leading members of this group, at the Rally.

***RF*: What have the recent political developments in the GDR meant for lesbians and gay men?**

CS: By the middle of 1989 there were already groups in all the major cities.

Most operated under the protection of the Church, which gave them space to meet and so on. This was the easy way out: it meant that the State couldn't touch you.

The non-Church groups had more trouble, from the Stasi, in hiring rooms, etc.

After the "changes" new possibilities for organising opened up.

For example, in March 1990 we launched a newspaper, *Die Andere Welt*, which literally translated means "The Other World" but is also the German title of James Baldwin's novel "Another Country".

That would not have been possible before. We would not have been able to get paper, to get it printed...

Organising meetings is much easier than before. But now we have trouble from fascists — with the growth in German nationalism that has come with re-unification there has been an increase in "German is Good" ideas.

Fascists have attacked hostels for foreign students, gay bars, and lesbians and gay men in the streets.

We wanted to organise this event today in the other half of Alexander Platz, but we couldn't — partly because it is full of people selling second hand cars, but also because the Police couldn't guarantee our safety.

So we are here and the police are keeping their eyes open for trouble. This is very ironic, given that this event marks Christopher St Day when police attacked a Gay Bar.

Many of the groups attached to the Church have separated from it and become more open.

Lesbian and gay groups can now be registered as "judicial persons" which makes them legally safeguarded. Groups can then ask for money. To receive a grant you have to demonstrate that a group is useful to the community.

If you don't get a grant you may get premises anyway. For instance, the "Sunday Club" has been given a flat where it has opened a cafe and meeting centre.

"Courage", which is a more political group, of which I am a deputy leader, has offices attached to the "Union of Free Thinkers" (an official organisation) but we are going to apply for our own premises.

***RF*: Will this development of organisations continue after monetary reunion on July 1st?**

CS: Yes, certainly. Just after the opening of the Wall many East German lesbians and gay men, particularly gay men, descended on West Berlin's sex shops, clubs, saunas etc and some groups suffered as a result.

Members were going elsewhere. I think this will come to an end.

Of course there will be many economic problems for GDR citizens with re-unification.

***RF*: How did the lesbian and gay group in the PDS develop?**

CS: It is part of the process of learning from or overcoming the past.

In March a lesbian and gay group was set up to advise the leadership on relevant policies. Since then PDS lesbian and gay groups have been set up in all regions and districts.

The Party stood out lesbian and gay candidates in national and local elections.

***RF*: Are many lesbians and gay men joining the PDS, and if so why?**

CS: Yes, they are, because they see it as the Party most actively putting forward lesbian and gay equality policies. We helped organise this rally, we are the only Party here handing out leaflets...

Of course, many will not join us.

Interestingly, in contrast to West Germany, all the political parties here have policies which are in some way progressive for lesbians and gay men: the Liberals, the Greens, New Forum.

Even the CDU said in its election literature that it supported partnership rights for long term lesbian and gay relationships and there is an out gay CDU member of the East Berlin Council.

It will be interesting to see what will happen when the East German CDU merges with the West German CDU which is very reactionary on these questions.

In the East, in comparison with the West, lesbians and gay men work together. The "Sunday Club" is about 50/50 men and women and "Courage" is about 60/40. Lesbians play a leading role in the groups in the PDS.

***RF*: What are your currently campaigns?**

CS: We are campaigning against Article 218 of the W. German Penal Code which very much restricts women's abortion rights. In the GDR there has been abortion on demand since 1972 and it must be kept this way.

We are also campaigning against Article 175 of the West German Penal Code which imposes a discriminatory age of consent for gay men. In the GDR the age of consent is equal.

***RF*: Is lesbian custody an issue in the GDR as it is in the West?**

CS: Lesbian custody has not been a problem at all in the GDR (I don't know about the 60s but certainly not since then). The woman almost automatically gets the children in every case.

Of course, that makes it very difficult for gay men to get custody, but judges will grant access unless there is some extraordinary reason why not.

***RF*: Do you have links with lesbian and gay groups in other East European countries?**

CS: The political situation has made it very difficult to develop these links.

There are groups in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and I have heard that there is an underground organisation in Bucharest University in Romania. In Bulgaria the sexual culture means that no-one has yet thought it necessary to start a group.

I know that the West German gay magazine *Magnus* together with *Gai Pied* in France and a Dutch magazine are producing a special magazine in Russian.

This will be smuggled into the Soviet Union to tell lesbians and gay men about the situation in the West.



The "changes" began with the scaling of the Wall. Now East German lesbians and gay men will discover whether the social gains of the East will withstand the prejudices of the West as the Germanies move to politial reunification.

Middle East

War government prepares for new offensive

When seven Palestinian workers were murdered in Rishon Le Zion last month, Israeli leaders were quick to dismiss the event as the action of a lunatic.

They made no mention of the brutality in the Occupied Territories, or of the plastic bullets fired by Israeli soldiers against Palestinian children.

Nor did they mention the deportations and house demolitions, or the thousands of political prisoners incarcerated in the Ansar jail in the sweltering heat of the Negev desert...

Ami Popper, who committed the Rishon Le Zion massacre, is presently undergoing psychological tests in prison — while those who laid the foundations for the massacre have just formed a new government.

After almost three months of back door negotiations, Prime Minister Sjarmir has put together a cabinet that resembles a rogues' gallery.

Ariel Sharon, architect of the 1982 Lebanon invasion, has been given the housing portfolio. Rafael Eitan, leader of the ultra-right Tzomet Party, is Minister of Agriculture.

Rehavam Ze'evi, leader of the semi-fascist Moledet party which calls for the "transfer" (mass expulsion) of Palestinians from Israel, is maintaining the new government's majority with his two Knesset seats.

War

The government of Israel is a war government.

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are bracing themselves for a new round of repression. The intifada has lasted for two and a half years and the indications are that it will continue.

By BENJAMIN COHEN

It was in response to the intifada that the US began trying to accelerate the diplomatic process, opening a dialogue with the PLO in Tunis.

Now, in an effort to placate the Shamir regime, the US has broken off talks with the PLO, citing the abortive raid by the PLO commandos on a beach near Tel Aviv, in which no-one was killed, as an excuse.

Only a week before, US Secretary of State James Baker had bluntly told Israel: "the telephone number [of the White House] is 1 202 456 1414. When you're serious about peace, call us."

However, the relationship between US Imperialism and its Israeli surrogate demands that the boat is not rocked too much.

Whatever is decided in Washington or Jerusalem will not stifle the intifada. The pristine surroundings of a Geneva conference cannot compromise the resolute struggle of the Palestinian masses for an independent State.

The Israeli government knows that it has, so far, failed to defeat the intifada, and that the uprising might well spread to Palestinians inside the 1967 "Green Line".

Zionist

It knows that there is an escalating social and economic crisis in the Zionist State itself, with the growth of Israeli protest movements, and the deep resentment shown by underprivileged Oriental Jews towards the current mass immigration of Jews from the USSR.

The big debate current among Middle East analysts is whether there will be a war.

Egyptian President Mubarak thinks there will be; the PLO's Farouk Qaddumi agrees; and Iraqi tyrant Saddam Hussein has made it clear that he is ready to fight.

Arab

The Arab summit, held in Baghdad in May, blamed the US for Israeli policies.

Israel, the only State in the Middle East with nuclear weapons, is also ready for war. The Kuwaiti daily *Al-Rai Al Am* quoted Israeli deputy chief-of-staff General Bar Kochba as saying that war is "inevitable".

Israel has denied that the General made these remarks, but the composition of the new government suggests that a war would give a most welcome signal for a bloody crackdown on the intifada.

Socialists should pay close attention to what happens in the region over the next few months, maintaining these demands: full solidarity with the intifada, and defence of the PLO against Imperialism.

Romania

Beyond the headlines

"Mob Rule in Bucharest!"

"Ceausescu Smiling in His Grave!".

The British media once again churned out its glib formulas.

Unfortunately Mike Phipp's article on the events of June 13th, 14th and 15th ("Stalinism without Ceausescu", *Briefing* 105), though written from a socialist perspective, hardly rose above this level.

It avoided any mention of most of the elementary facts.

Towards the end of March, the Provisional Council of National Unity, with representation from all parties, held a four-day debate on the organisation of elections.

Among other things, the resulting law, passed by 289 votes to 1, specifically excluded from standing anyone:

"who has committed abuses in their political, juridicial, or administrative functions, who has violated basic human rights, or organised or been an instrument of repression on the part of the security organs."

In the course of April, rallies demonstrated massive support for the NSF, without anyone comparing them to the stony puppet-shows put on by Ceasescu.

Instead, the anti-NSF dailies — *Romania Libera* and *Dreptatea* — launched a strident campaign to cancel the electoral law, demanding that ex-Communist Party activists should be banned from standing in the next three elections.



Ion Iliescu: thumbs up to democracy?

First to step down, of course, would be Iliescu himself, who had remained a Party member and minor state official, despite having fallen foul of Ceausescu in 1971.

This anti-democratic demand was widely seen as a desperate manoeuvre to revive the fortunes of the two "historic" right wing parties — the National Peasants and National Liberals.

On April 22nd, just as the election campaign was getting under way, several hundred protesters occupied University Square, paralysing Bucharest's main crossroads.

For the next month, the presence in the square — mainly students and anti-NSF activists, but with a distinct minority of uprooted urban youth — probably averaged around a thousand.

Numbers rose to a maximum of ten thousand for the evening rallies that called for the blackballing of all former Communists.

The anti-NSF parties and papers lent varying degrees of support, and the so-called Group for Social Dialogue generously offered to "mediate", while its own banner flew prominently on the square.

The "historic" parties simply could not accept that the country did not want a return to the 30s.

The self-appointed elite of right wing intellectuals could not believe that the Romanian people were unwilling to place themselves under their tutelage.

For its part, the NSF leadership could doubtless have been more subtle and outgoing, particularly in response to the student ferment. But it is to their credit that, for two months, they disregarded the destabilising provocation.

In the first week, the Provisional Council — not a secret conclave of policemen or cabinet ministers — debated the situation for three hours on prime time television.

By PATRICK CAMILLER

There were several calls for the square to be cleared "without violence", but when the Bucharest police chief pointed out the obvious difficulties, it was decided to leave things as they were.

The election results on May 20th removed any last doubt about the popularity of the Front. Both the government and some of the protesters began to make some conciliatory moves.

But an intransigent core calling for "a second revolution" remained in the square, and early on June 13th a squad of riot police finally cleared it.

In the afternoon, a crowd of a few thousand drove the police back out of the square, and arson attacks were launched against police headquarters and the interior ministry.

Most alarming, however, was the Molotov-cocktail assault by a crowd of some five thousand on Romanian Television — a key installation and centre of the December revolution.

To understand what happened next it is not necessary to believe that there was a fully-fledged coup attempt.

The police had demonstrated its incapacity for sustained operations. Soldiers on duty were untrained and likely either to melt away or to engage in undisciplined gunfire. The loyalties of sections of the officer corps were in doubt.

Western governments had made clear their hostility.

In these circumstances, Iliescu turned to the working class to restore the elected government's authority.

Workers from the giant IMGB complex in southern Bucharest helped to recapture the TV station, and the next morning miners from the Jiu Valley and elsewhere began to arrive.

Violence

This display of working class strength was enough for the insurrection to melt away.

What could have been more normal — or more desirable? But unfortunately the miners did not stop there.

Determined to leave a lasting mark on the streets of their capital, many of them engaged in indiscriminate acts of violence and repression that actually weakened their moral and political position.

But could this not have happened anywhere in the world, let alone in a country where any kind of public life was frozen for 20 years?

Who were these miners, anyway? The British "quality" papers, on this occasion competing with the Murdoch gutter, were in no doubt.

The miners were scarcely human: "dirty faced runts" – *Observer*, an "army of warrior ants" – *The Independent* — in short, rather like the British miners.

Mike Phipps has his own unique explanation of why the miners did what they did. They were not really miners at all: "since 1977 coalfields have been worked only by hand-picked pro-government personnel". What a joke!

The truth is rather more prosaic.

The Romanian miners, like the great mass of the working class and peasantry, regard the present government as in some sense their own, as their only protection against a Thatcher-style capitalist earthquake with catastrophic social effects.

That there are also forces in the NSF who want to travel down the anarchic free-market road is a secret to no one.

Moreover, the University Square fever has strengthened authoritarian and chauvinist currents within Romanian officialdom that the Front government has a duty to combat.

But it is a long way from there to "Stalinism without Ceausescu".

Against enormous odds, and in the face of huge pressure from Western reaction, the Romanian working masses are struggling to overcome the political, economic and cultural legacy of the Ceausescu era.

They are trying to do so in a way that retains elements of working class political economy.

USSR

Party conservatives prepare new offensive

The Party conservatives are back on the offensive.

The crucial 28th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) is about to start as we go to press.

This follows abortive attempts by the Gorbachev camp to put it back to the autumn.

They were hoping for more time to change the composition of the Congress to Gorbachev's advantage. However, it is not clear if this was possible in any case.

They are mortified by what has happened in Eastern Europe and by the increasingly vocal calls at home for denationalisation and a market economy.

The recent conference of the Russian Communist Party (RCP), the foundation of which Gorbachev belatedly supported, was dominated by the apparatus.

It presents yet another centre of power to compete with the CPSU and the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and Russian Federation. The election of the conservative, Ivan Polozkov, as First Secretary of the RCP was a bitter blow to Gorbachev.

By Rick Simon Labour Focus on Eastern Europe

Moreover, the make-up of the conference was a powerful pointer to the likely outcome of the 28th Congress. The same delegates will comprise some 40% of the forthcoming Congress, giving the conservatives a powerful platform to attack Gorbachev's leadership.

It is already clear that the apparatus has tied up much of the representation at the Congress.

"Democratic Platform" which claims 40% support inside the CPSU, has only 2% of the delegates and seems certain to split.

Ygor Ligachev, the leading conservative in the Politburo, has, until recently, been out of the picture.

Although in charge of agriculture, he has been removed from the central arena of policy-making, which is increasingly that of the Presidential Council rather than the Politburo.

Nevertheless, Ligachev is not a person to be dismissed lightly. At the RCP Conference he called for Gorbachev's resignation as CPSU General Secretary, arguing that he could not effectively carry on both that role and the Soviet Presidency.

Ligachev's stance has undoubtedly modified as the political transformations have occurred. He now talks of a multi-party system; but essentially he defends the line of the 27th Congress.

Ligachev argues for a planned market economy — as distinct from the regulated market economy of Gorbachev's supporters.

He wants real guarantees against unemployment and a referendum on whether the Soviet Union should be restructured along socialist or capitalist lines.

But what Ligachev means by "socialism" would leave the interests of key sections of the ministerial bureaucracy, defence industries and armed forces untouched.

His policies have nothing in common with the awakening working class but it would clearly be premature to write-off his contribution to the future evolution of the Soviet system.



Gorbachev: treading a fine line between conservatives and radicals.

LABOUR BRIEFING

Poll Tax

Twelve arrests in Hackney police raid

At 6am on 21st June, six flats on the Holmleigh Road Estate in Stamford Hill, Hackney, were raided by police.

In all cases, doors were smashed in and the occupants were confronted by screaming riot police wielding axes and gas canisters.

Personal belongings were turned over during a "search", and telephones were ripped out of the wall. One flat was totally ransacked, furniture smashed with axes and central heating ducts ripped open.



PHOTO: Tom Loucas

Police in Trafalgar Square on March 31st: "gloves off" tactics start here!

By Peter Chowney
Hackney South and Stoke Newington CLP

In another flat, occupied by a young couple with a ten day old baby, the woman was surrounded by four male police officers and not allowed to dress, nor to pick up her baby.

Meanwhile, her partner was taken outside and beaten up, in front of astonished neighbours.

A few days later, a second raid took place elsewhere in Hackney and another arrest was made.

Police were at first reluctant to divulge the purpose of this extraordinarily violent operation, initially claiming that it was to "evict squatters", although the flats were a mixture of long term squats, co-ops, and Council tenancies.

Charges made varied from theft of a traffic cone (found in the flat) to criminal damage.

Press reports varied too: some newspapers claiming that the arrests were in connection with Animal Liberation Front activities.

It soon emerged that all the arrests were made in connection with the Trafalgar Square Poll Tax demonstration, and were based on police photographic evidence.

None of this evidence has yet been produced, and even the police solicitor admitted that he had not seen it.

All those arrested were members of Hackney Solidarity Group, a local anarchist organisation which has been active and very hard working in organising Anti-Poll Tax Unions, as part of Hackney Against the Poll Tax Federation.

Coincidentally, they had also organised a picket of the opening ceremony for Stoke Newington police station, due to be attended by Home Secretary David Waddington on the day the arrests took place.

Hackney Solidarity Group wasted no time in arranging legal representation and a picket of Bow Street Magistrates' Court the following morning.

Of the eleven arrested, ten were allowed bail of £1,000 each. However, one was remanded in custody due to the "seriousness" of the charge — assaulting a police officer during the arrest.

Predictably, this was the one who had been dragged from his bed and beaten up outside his flat.

After suffering five days in remand this case was reviewed by a judge in chambers, and bail of £6,000 was allowed.

Hackney Solidarity Group knew they had been under surveillance for some time. Odd people, very obviously police officers, had been prowling around the estate for several weeks.

One woman even came and sat on a wall in the estate leafing through a photograph album!

Two weeks before the raids, flats had been entered by "electricity board officials" looking for "illegal" electricity fittings — no search warrant is needed for this.

Nevertheless, HSG are concerned by the detailed knowledge which police had of those they intended to arrest, including full names and detailed background information.

In one case, police even knew that one of those arrested lived with his twin brother — whom they didn't want.

The role of Hackney Council in all this must be questioned. HSG believe police had access to a flat on the estate, which would not be the first time Hackney Council has allowed police to use flats for surveillance purposes.

Hackney Against the Poll Tax Federation, Hackney Solidarity Group, and Hackney Community Defence Association (a local group set up to help the dozens of people assaulted and wrongfully arrested by Hackney police) are organising support for the "Stamford Hill Twelve".

There will be a picket of Bow Street court when the cases are heard on July 13th, at 10.00am.

The broader implications of these raids are very disturbing indeed.

In many ways, those arrested at Holmleigh Road were lucky, belonging to a well organised radical political group that cares about its members.

But without some nifty legal footwork, at least one of them would be on remand. And without £16,000 sureties, all of them would be.

A successful campaign to guarantee the failure of these completely artificial charges is just a first step — action will then be needed to ensure such police thuggery is exposed and stopped.

To Hackney police, this may be just another raid — but the terrifying brutality with which such raids are now routinely carried out is an indication of the way any kind of dissent is handled in Thatcher's Britain.

If Hackney police are allowed to get away with these *Securitate*-style tactics, it will surely catch on. None of us in the Anti-Poll Tax movement can be safe.

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COUNCILLORS AGAINST THE POLL TAX

CAPT supports the fight of NALGO activists to step up the Union's opposition and action against the Poll Tax.

We plan to hold a national conference on Saturday July 28th.

We say:

1. The Poll Tax is an unfair and unjust tax imposed on local people against the wishes of the majority.

2. The Poll Tax is a tax which shifts the burden of local taxation from those *most* able to pay to those *least* able to pay.

3. The Poll Tax is a continuation of Tory attacks on local democracy combined with other legislation such as privatisation, the Housing Act, and the Education Act. It starves local government of funds and undermines its ability to provide desperately needed services.

4. As local Councillors, elected to defend the interests of our communities, we are not prepared to be part of an attack on those communities.

5. We refuse to pay the Poll Tax and we stand alongside the millions of people in Scotland, England and Wales who simply cannot, or will not, pay.

6. We refuse to support punitive action against those people not paying; we will not vote for wage or benefit arrestments, for bailiffs, or for the imprisonment of non-payers. We oppose disciplinary action against Council employees taking industrial action to oppose the tax.

7. We will fight against cuts in local jobs and services caused as a result of Poll Tax capping and the withdrawal of government funds to local Councils. We demand the return of the £40 billion stolen from local government by central government over the last 11 years. Any shortfall in Council revenue due to non-payment should be made up from central government funds.

8. We protest at the enormous powers given to non-elected Council officers to determine Council expenditure and policies through the imposition of Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act (1988).

9. Above all, we will support the non-payment movement and action taken by trade unionists to disrupt the collection of the Poll Tax, and campaign alongside them to defeat this hated tax.

Contact: Steve French, 56 Ashby House, Brixton, London SW9 7SL. 071-733 3403.

WE'RE NOT PAYING THE POLL TAX!

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

Send your name, address and order to:
Labour Party Socialists (Poll Tax Badge),
11 Springfield Road, London N15 4AY.

Recommended Retail Price: 35p.
Bulk order rates:

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20 Badges:	£06.00
50 Badges:	£13.00
100 Badges:	£23.00
200 Badges:	£40.00

Please make cheques payable to Labour Party Socialists.
No orders dispatched without pre-payment!