LABOUR
BRIEFING
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40p



PHOTO: Stefano Cagliani (Report)

NCU strikers picket in Farringdon Road



PHOTO: Jez Coulson (IFL)

NCU strikers picket in Westminster

RALLY ROUND THE TELECOMS ENGINEERS!

By Pete Cooper
NCU, London West
and
Mick McKeever
Long Distance Farraday

The first all-out indefinite strike ever by National Communications Union British Telecom engineering members looks set to continue for some weeks.

The National Executive Council declared the strike after most engineers had been locked out by BT for refusing management's demands to work "as directed" — including compulsory overtime and working whenever and wherever required.

Scabbing is minimal. This shows the NCU members' depth of outrage at management's high handedness.

The strings which festoon BT's offer are about creating a lower paid, smaller — which they describe as "flexible" — workforce.

Business Week* recently pointed out that the nationalised French telephone service, with a smilarly sized network employs 70,000 fewer staff than BT's 225,000. *This fight is about jobs.

But the stakes for BT, its controlling shareholder the Tory government, and the City are far higher.

They need to smash the power of a union which can hold the City to ransom. They are also desperate to prevent a campaign by a strong and undefeated union for implementation of even Labour's diluted "social ownership" proposals for BT.

BT — the most profitable company in Europe — is too glittering a prize to let slip without a fight. With the union broken they know they can handle a docile Kinnock/Hatersley government.

We demand support from the Labour Party leadership, and from the TUC — but do not expect it, as our struggle cuts across Labour's "respectable" election strategy — even more so than the miners' strike did.

In our favour will be the effect of the deterioration of the telephone network on business and the City. Management personnel and the few scabs wil be hard put to maintain an acceptable level of service. If clerical grades stay solid, their action in support of their own claim will put the squeeze on the corporation's cashflow and future business.

The Claim
10% and no strings (though Golding forgot this!). Separate negotiations on regrading proposals.

The Offer
5.02% on basic rates and £215 for acceptance and implementation of regrading proposals, payable locally, in stages.

The "Strings"

1. Abolition of job demarcation so that one engineer could carry out many duties, giving BT a totally flexible workforce.

2. The abolition of all nationally agreed ratios between grades. This would effectively abolish higher grades and block promotion avenues.

3. The extension of normal working hours to between 7am and 7pm.

To which BT has now added

4. The abolition of the 9 day fortnight working arrangements.

There will be a massive media campaign against us. Stories of the elderly being cut off will be used to condemn us. The government will weep crocodile tears for the same elderly people who were only worth a fiver in the cold weather.

The union offered "life and limb" cover, but was turned down by management. This campaign can be turned round as it becomes clear that management is prioritising business over residential customers in its own emergency cover.

Isolation of the strikers can become a problem, especially in London, where they often live far from their workplaces. Picketting rotas, regular mass meetings and social events can help overcome this. An active and mobilised membership is also the best guarantee against any sell-out moves by the leadership.

It was Golding after all who proposed the jobs for conditions package in the first place. He and the NEC have been dragged along behind the membership at every stage. He will be trying might and main to get the strike called off on any terms at the slightest hint of a weakening in the struggle.

Labour movement solidarity will be vital, in preventing the use of contractors like Plesseys to do maintenance work, to collect funds(NCU pays no strike pay) and to counter media lies. Contact your local NCU branch to see how you can help; in many areas, the most effective form of support organisation will be to revive the miners' support group networks.

This strike is also an opportunity for us to explain the meaning of privatisation in terms of deteriorating pay, working conditions and service to the public. Tell Sid!

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Home News

No relief for Guinness

"Relief for the Guinnless", the successful advertising campaign run by Guinness last year, is probably now being viewed with nostalgia by the Guinness board of directors.

Relief for Guinness looks highly unlikely as each day unveils fresh scandals, and city heads are rolling faster than ninepins.

By Jane Prust
Deptford CLP
and
Rowland Sheret
Scottish Labour Briefing

Guinness's problems began in 1985, when they joined battle with the Argyll Group of the "Campbelltown Grocer", James Guliver, in one of the biggest and most publicised takeover battles ever seen in Britain.

The object of the battle was the Distillers Company, manufacturers of Haig, Johnnie Walker, Dewan, Claymore, White Horse and many more.

Distillers dominates the Scottish whiskey industry and is a major employer in Scotland. The Guinness Group successfully outbid Argyll, but ever since has been rocked by scandal and controversy.

Ernest Saunders, who headed Guinness in their successful bid, has now been sacked, 5 months after being given total command over the Guinness empire. With him have gone 3 other directors and a number of senior management staff provided by a US management consultancy firm.

In their fight to take control of Distillers, the Saunders team at Guinness were somewhat "free" with their cash. The new chair of the board, Sir Norman MacFarlane, has revealed that the company paid out £25 million which cannot be adequately accounted for.

Over 2 million shares in Guinness were bought by institutional clients of the merchant bank, Henry Ansbacher. Shortly after Guinness won the takeover the shares were sold to Down Nominees, a subsidiary of Ansbacher & Co. at 50p a share above the market price.



Ansbacher are claiming that Morgan Grenfell provided the finance for this share dealing. However, it has been suggested that the name of Guinness fiance director Olivier Roux was on the cheque which paid for the shares in this highly dubious transaction.

Ivan Boesky, the Wall Street financier involved in multi-million insider deals scandals, is known to have bought heavily into Distillers at the end of 1985. He became the fourtheenth largest Distillers shareholder with 4.5 million shares just before the takeover.

Shortly after the successful takeover of Distillers, the Guinness Board committed £70m — equivalent to nearly 10% of shareholders' funds — to a high risk fund run by Boesky. Shareholders were not informed of the decision at the time.

With the subsequent fall of Boesky, there is now doubt as to how much of this fund (if any) will be recovered. On top of this Guinness could lose another £50m on the shareholdings organised through Bank Leu in Switzerland.

The real issue at stake here is not the antics of a bunch of corrupt city financiers. It is widely acknowledged that insider dealing and other forms of corruption go on in the City: in this respect Guinness's crime was to get caught with their hands in the till.

The real issue is who has control of our industries and financial institutions. Yet there is no clear strategy in the labour movement for tackling this central question.

Neither Kinnock and Hattersley, nor Willis and his friends, have any intention of challenging the way that the likes of Saunders and Boesky can put thousands of jobs at risk. The pressure to confront the obscene system of capitalism will only come from the workers who suffer at its hands.

The Scottish labour movement can use the Guinness scandal in its campaign for a Scottish Assembly — to demand the Assembly have regulating powers, etc. But with a deepening capitalist crisis, and with other Guinnesses yet to be unearthed, workers' control of our industries and finance houses is high on the agenda for us all.

Leeds anti-deportation campaign

Save Rose and Brian

Though Rose Alaso and her son Brian entered this country legally in 1979, they have faced the threat of deportation since 1983.

In 1974, Rose and her family fled Uganda to neighbouring Kenya. Following the overthrow of Amin, they returned to Uganda. In 1982, her brother and their family members were murdered by government troops.

Again the family was forced to flee, and the governments of West Germany, USA and Tanzania have all at various times given them refuge.

Rose is a member of NALGO, which is fully backing her fight to stay in this country.

The campaign against her deportation has been bedevilled by a series of mysterious events. First, the police broke into Rose's flat looking for a dead body. There was no body and no blood, and the phone box from which the police supposedly received the call about the body had been out of order for months.

By Cllr Garth Frankland
Leeds

Then, last year, Rose was charged with not paying a taxi fare and assaulting a policeman. She was held for ten hours in a local police station. After a series of court hearings, the charge of not paying the taxi fare was dropped. No evidence was ever produced. The assault charge was reduced so that it will now be heard before Magistrates, rather than in the Crown Court.

The Campaign is calling on all supporters to picket the Magistrates' Court on February 11th, at 9.30am, at Leeds Town Hall.

For more information about the Campaign write to *Save Rose and Brian Campaign*, Box 40, L.O.P., 46 The Calls, Leeds 2.

Jailed for opposing gas chambers

Three lesbians and nine gay men, all between 17 and 25, spent a week in jail after a protest organised by the Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement against a Tory Councillor who called for the gassing of gays.

The twelve were arrested in Wombourne, Staffs, on December 21st, while peacefully demonstrating in the garden of Bill Brownhill, leader of South Staffs District Council.

Brownhill's remarks that he'd gas "90% of queers" to halt AIDS had been widely reported in the media, and the demonstrators were reminding him of the Nazis' murder of over 50,000 homosexuals in gas chambers and forced labour gangs.

All twelve were charged with threatening behaviour, and one of the women, who had complained of assault during the arrests, was herself charged with assaulting two policemen.

Next day, the police asked the court to remand the twelve in custody for seven days over Christmas, claiming that names and addresses could not be verified. The protestors say at least four addresses had been checked the night before.

Prosecutor and magistrates have been slammed by the defendants' solicitor, Louise Christian, and Ivan Geffen, who point out that a custodial sentence would be unlikely even on conviction.

"In effect," say the demonstrators, "the police got us a week's prison sentence without even a trial. Some police told us they *agreed* with Brownhill, and we got fascist, anti-gay and AIDS abuse from police and screws. We now know what to expect for opposing Nazis. *They* get protection, *we* go to jail."

All are now on bail until February 23/24, when they reappear at Seisden Magistrates Court in Wombourne. A public meeting has been called at the Red Rose Centre in Islington, London N7, at 7.30pm, on January 29th, and a defence fund set up.

Contact the Wombourne Twelve Defence Campaign, c/o GYM, London WC1N 3XX. Tel 01-833 3912.

Second inquest opens on speeding victim

Hampshire Police above the law?

Retired civil servant Richard Watterson was killed by a speeding police car as he attempted to cross the street in February 1984.

Two years later, a new inquest into the circumstances of his death is being held at Alton Magistrates Court.

The first inquest was held without the required jury and was quashed on application from Mr Watterson's family.

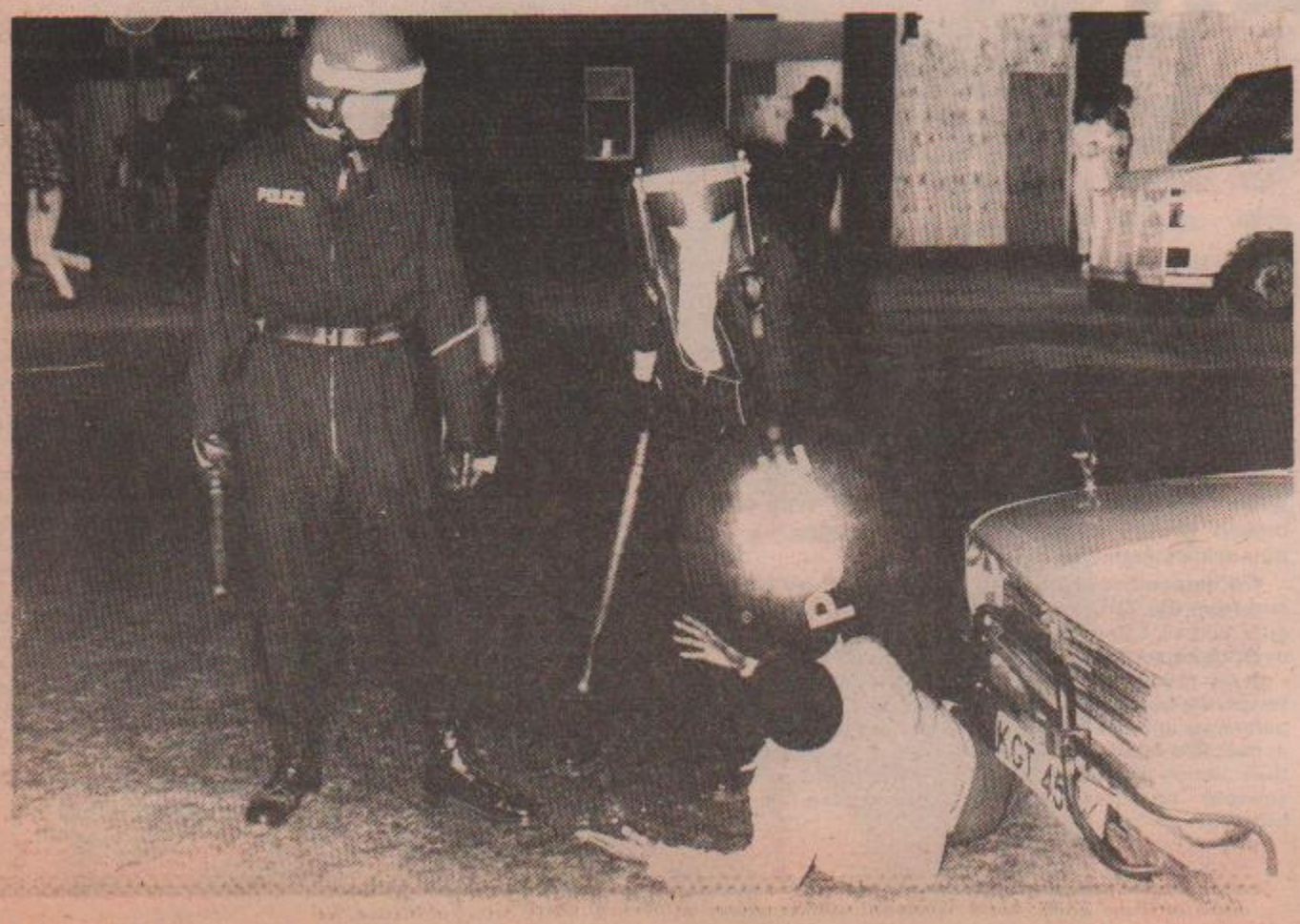
The police investigation into the accident was a farrago of error, inadequacy, and dishonesty. It was carried out by a constable from the same department of Hampshire police as the driver in question.

The investigation attempted to play down the speed at which the car was travelling (estimated by independent calculations as at least 65mph in a 30mph zone). The police also claim their excessive speed was justified by their pursuit of a speeding Cortina — but witnesses saw no other vehicle and the police did not make a radio call about it.

Nor was the police car using its blue lights and two-tone horn, and it appears not to have been using its main beam headlights either.

The police apear unwilling to acknowledge their errors and therefore unable to draw the necessary lessons from the accident. Their attitude that they are above the law, in Hampshire as elsewhere, is a menace to all of us.

For further information
On the Watterson case contact Richenda Power (daughter) 01-980 9119 or 01-987 5503;
On the campaign by *Victim* to press for training and guidelines for police drivers contact Josie Taylor, 54 Knights Hill, London SE27.



Police in action: a law unto themselves...



PHOTO: John Chapman

Editorial

BRIEFING
LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Socialist policies for a Labour victory!

With by-elections in Greenwich and Truro, and local authority elections in most parts of the country, Thatcher will have plenty of opportunity to adjust the timing of a General Election to suit the Tories best.

The Labour response must not wait until an election is called. Neil Kinnock will, it seems, be launching the Party's election campaign — and the main planks of its national manifesto — at its Local Government Conference in Leeds on February 6th-8th.

A Local Government event held in the heart of the mining communities of Yorkshire, where miners and Women Against Pit Closures formed the backbone of the 1984/5 strike and are still fighting the bosses' attacks, could be an excellent setting for launching a Labour campaign on socialist policies.

Even if working only from Labour conference policies, a radical programme could be constituted that would grab the imagination of the working class, making links between local and national issues. It could include:

- Official support to those who have been at the frontline in fighting the Tories — committing a Labour government to lift the surcharges and disqualifications from Lambeth and Liverpool councillors and reimburse them, and to reinstate the sacked victimised miners and grant an amnesty to those jailed.
- A pledge massively to expand the house-building programme, restoring the billions cut by the Tories — tackling both the housing crisis and unemployment by creating useful jobs. Restore the central government grants stolen from councils since 1979, and pledge a major improvement in education and social services.
- Repeal all of the racist immigration laws; support black struggles against racial violence and harassment, and spread the example of those local authorities that have fought racism and taken a stand for equal opportunities for black people.
- Support and build campaigns of women for the right to work, for adequate child care, against low pay and against attacks on social security and rights at work. Ensure that the Ministry for Women is properly funded and responsive to the needs and demands of working class women.
- A massive cash injection to enable the NHS to regain the ground lost under Thatcher, linked to a commitment to increase spending in real terms each year.
- A clear commitment to fight anti-lesbian and anti-gay bigotry at every level inside and outside the labour movement, seeking to build on Haringey Council's lead in implementing Labour's policy on Lesbian and Gay rights.
- Close all US bases, scrap British nuclear weapons, and remove the threat of war.
- Close the nuclear power stations, and develop an alternative energy programme to rebuild the coal industry.
- Take the side of the thousands of workers whose wages and conditions have been attacked under the Tories; pledge fullscale renationalisation of privatised industries and services — and remove the threat of a similar fate from thousands of local authority workers.
- pledge to restore benefit levels — particularly pensions — as well as introducing a national minimum wage.

These are not by any means revolutionary demands: indeed Neil Kinnock could raise them all with the authority of Conference policy. If we did so, we could win an election — with buckets of votes to spare.

This kind of programme could also offer millions of working class people and all the specially oppressed a real way forward, in partnership with the Labour Party, to fight for a socialist society.

But the Labour Party leadership will offer none of these things.

Defend Lambeth and Liverpool councillors? The miners? No! Our leaders can outdo the Tories in their criticism of "loony lefties" who fight the class struggle. They can't wait to throw out campaigning councillors, while they do nothing abut the scabs of the UDM being members and representatives of the Labour Party.

Rights for women? No! Neil "I'm a reactionary" Kinnock didn't even want the Women's Minister in "his" cabinet; even the Shadow Cabinet is all male!

Liberation for lesbians and gay men? No! The NEC cynically recommended support for the Lesbian and Gay resolution at Party conference as a way out of implementing it — or even wanting to talk about it!

Instead of real jobs, Labour offers "jobs and industry" campaigns aimed at persuading the bosses to take on a few more workers — teling workers to be "restrained" about the wages we want for these jobs. Local Authorities have been told they won't get a "blank cheque" tc make up for the years of Tory cuts.

Instead of a bold defence of Labour's unilateralist policy the first people Neil wants tc appease are the Americans. When it comes to nuclear power, Jack Cunnigham's personal interests stand above those of the entire working class — and so it goes on.

So why doesn't the Labour leadership embrace the cause of the working class and all the oppressed, and ride to office on a tide of support for socialism?

Because although they want to see Neil in No. 10, and a few reforms, they are not unhappy with capitalism as a system. They aren't prepared to take any measures that might challenge the fundamentals of capitalism and the power of the ruling class. That's why they want any movement that calls for those meaures to be silenced **now**.

The problems they refuse to face won't go away. Nor will the working class, demanding jobs, a living wage, houses, and basic social services. That's why we won't be silenced. We won't go away.

We don't want another Tory government, or a coalition, with the Alliance sharing power.

We'll fight for a Labour government — **but we give notice that we will be fighting for socialism before, during and *after* any general election campaign.**

***Briefing** has organised a national conference — **Socialist Policies for a Labour Victory** — *for details see **Building Briefing**, page 12.**

A travesty of justice

When Inspector Lovelock walked free from the Old Bailey, a bloody chapter was added to the history of police oppression of the black community.

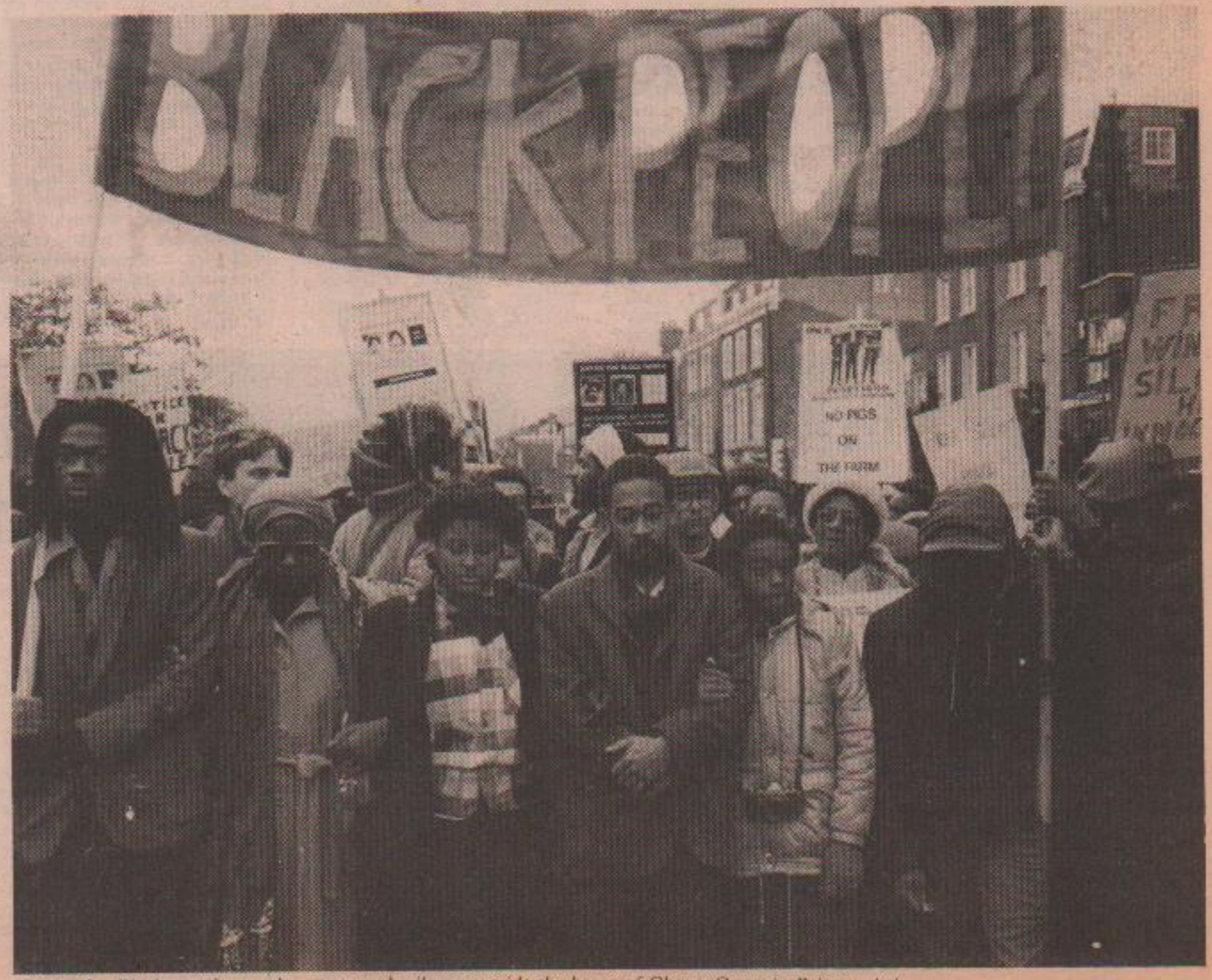
The "not guilty" verdict was a breath-taking miscarriage of justice which was treated with anger and disgust by the black community.

Police carrying out the raid did not know what the person they were after looked like, except that he was black. And that seemed to be sufficient.

Lovelock shot the first "black shape" he saw. It was shoot first, ask questions later. The police used sledge hammers as their calling card and a bullet as a lasting reminder of the special treatment meeted out to the black community.

The acquittal comes after "Operation Condor" and a stream of police inspired media stories, which make Brixton out to be the most violent inner city area this side of Beirut. The verdict seems to me to suggest that police can gun down black people with impunity and have the backing of the courts in doing so.

***Julian Lewis*, Chair Lambeth Police Committee**
(personal capacity)



Justice for Black people march: a moment's silence outside the home of Cherry Groce in Brixton, led by her son (centre).

Trade Union Briefing

Reinstate ILTA Council

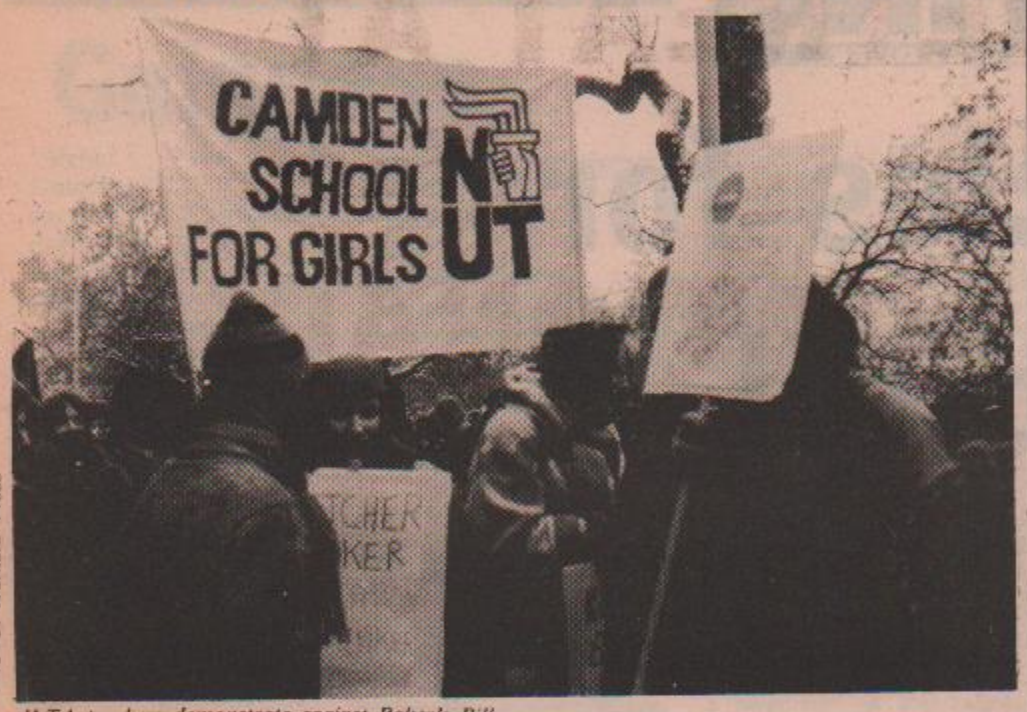


PHOTO: Workers' Press

ILTA teachers demonstrate against Baker's Bill

The Baker Bill is a major escalation of the Tory attack on the rights of trade unions to organise.

If passed, it will impose upon teachers a contract of service which will mean several hours added to the working week; five days added to the working year; larger classes; compulsory cover for absent staff; compulsory attendance at after school meetings; annual assessment and annually reviewed job descriptions.

The Bill means the destruction of teacher trade unionism and the further deterioration of all educational provision. It is thus a threat to all public sector workers, and the labour movement as a whole.

The NUT Executive has argued that the only alternative to Baker is a deal stitched up with local authorities at Nottingham through the mediation of ACAS. This deal includes nearly all the conditions of service that Baker wishes to impose on teachers.

The Executive position was endorsed by a small overall majority at a special union conference and in a subsequent ballot of the membership. Far from showing Baker that the NUT was firm in its opposition, the acceptance of the ACAS deal has delivered the union into Baker's hands.

Throughout the long salaries dispute, teachers in Inner London have been the best organised and most militant. In the ACAS ballot, London teachers voted overwhelmingly for rejection of the Nottingham deal.

On December 10th, a meeting of the Divisonal Council of the Inner London Teachers Assocation (NUT) voted *unanimously* for industrial action againt Baker on January

By Hilda Kean
Hackney South CLP, suspended ILTA member

13th. In the week of January 6th, before the ILTA Secretary was informed on whether the union was to make the strike official, all members of ILTA council were suspended from the union.

Amongst the over seventy members suspended were a national executive member, most divisional officers, the secretaries of all Inner London branches, and many other branch officers. The charge was that the divisional council had voted for a motion calling for industrial action.

The decision to continue with the strike, despite the suspensions, was taken at a meeting of over 300 Inner London NUT representatives.

On January 13th hundreds of ILEA schools were closed as 6,000 teachers went on strike and 3,000 took part in a demonstration and rally against the Baker Bill. It is clear that the actions of the suspended members of ILTA Council reflected the wishes of London teachers.

The rally of striking teachers was addressed by a GCHQ trade unionist, a representative from ILEA NALGO, the divisional secretary of NAS/UWT, and a spokesperson from the Campaign Group of MPs. The rally voted unanimously to continue the fight against Baker by building for massive strike action when Baker's Bill returns to the House of Commons on February 19th. The rally also called for the immediate reinstatement of all suspended members of ILTA council.

Although the Labour Party nationally has opposed Baker's Bill, London's teachers have received little support from Labour-controlled Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). Rather than support the strike, ILEA has sent disciplinary letters to all those who took part in the action.

ILEA has now withdrawn credentials from our negotiators and in so doing is an employer intervening in an internal trade union matter. In the run up to the ILEA budget, London's teachers will not be represented in negotiations. Bodies negotiating the proposed tertiary colleges in Islington and Tower Hamlets cannot function. The vital work of employer/union working parties on asbestos will cease. All the agreed negotiating procedures have been jettisoned *unilaterally* by ILEA.

At the same time, we have also learned of ILEA proposals to reintroduce the compulsory transfer of 500 teachers, thereby reneging on hard-won agreements.

What needs to be done? First, opposition to the Baker Bill needs to be built throughout the trade union and labour movement. This means passing resolutions through wards, school governing bodies, and trade union branches. Second, we need support for and solidarity with the suspended members of ILTA Council, who are in the forefront of the campaign against Baker.

London's teachers have built up a fine tradition of supporting other trade unionists and labour authorities in struggle. ILTA is now, in its turn, asking for support of all trade unionists and Labour Party members. Pass resolutions and send them to the NUT with copies to the ILTA Defence Committee.

The Committee will provide speakers, leaflets, and petitions for any Labour Party ward or trade union branch. A lobby of the disciplinary hearings at Hamilton House is the first step in reinstating ILTA Council. The strike call for February 19th is the next. Teachers are involved in a long and hard campaign. We urge all trade unionists and Labour Party members to join us.

Building Worker column

Ballot-riggers sell us out

In the last article we wrote for *Labour Briefing* we highlighted examples proving that ballot rigging and electoral malpractices were endemic in UCATT — all of this officially orchestrated.

This we explained was the result of the serious bureaucratic degeneration of the union over the last few years.

We now follow this up by illustrating how corruption within our union and the denial of democracy to the membership affects UCATT members in struggles — struggles which are invariably in line with official conference policy.

We have the well documented evidence of the official sell outs of the Grouch, Tarmac and Laings lock out dispute. Two of these disputes involved the TGWU in the official sell outs, and all of them were totally in line with UCATT and TGWU Conference policy!

On November 7th 1986 a number of UCATT members were sacked by McCarthy Stone, retirement home builders (for whom?), at Cedar Road, Sutton, in spite of a union/management agreement to the contrary.

The men, mostly inexperienced in the trade union sense, went into action and put a picket on the job on Monday, November 10th. To their tremendous credit they stopped the job.

The employers applied for and got a High Court injunction against the union under the Tory anti-union laws.

But the 1986 UCATT National Delegate Conference voted democratically and overwhelmingly that our union should officially oppose the Tory anti-union laws and support any members in struggle against those laws! But of course the grovelling full-time cowards who make up the UCATT Executive and General Secretaryship are not interested in union democracy.

In line with the Tories and the state, the UCATT General Secretary and the Executive Council instructed the men to withdraw the pickets and to *cease all* action against McCarthy Stone in the UK! This disgusting betrayal and collaboration with the employers, Tories and state was done under the guise of the need to protect UCATT funds and the union from contempt of court.

Instead, we can have nothing but contempt for these full-time collaborators and these laws which in fact are designed to deny the very democratic rights they so hypocritically pretend to be defending.

We only need to refer the UCATT E.C. to the example of the Laing's lock-out to show how to fight the Tory anti-union laws. Five rank and file members of UCATT *successfully defied* the Tory anti-union laws, the High Court and the threat of massive fines and terms of imprisonment which accompanied this. They *defended* Conference policy!

By The Building Worker Group

We would like to thank *Labour Briefing* for inviting us to write a *Building Worker* column in their paper. But before going on to the writing of any article we state categorically that as a rank and file organisation we are independent of any political organisation and are in fact a united front of workers of differing politics who campaign and organise around a specific set of militant policies for our unions and industry. We of course support all principled campaigns and democratic struggles within the class struggle where and when possible.

In fact if concern for money and the threats of the state were put before the need to defend basic democratic rights and freedoms by our forebears in the movement, then there would be no trade union and labour movement as we know it today!

However, even after the UCATT Executive Council's instructions, some of the lads decided to defy the Executive and to carry on picketting. They were supported in their actions by lads from around London, including some from the Direct Labour organisations, the London Joint Sites and the Building Worker Group.

In furtherance of this unofficial support, but in support of UCAT and TGWU Conference policies, a delegation from the Building Worker Group was on the picket line on December 10th last year. Among the police present there was one in plain clothes — almost certainly a Special Branch man.

A minor incident "arose" and quite simply, the "Special Branch" man issued instructions for the Secretary of the Building Worker Group, Brian Higgins, UCATT, to be arrested.

He will stand trial on March 4th at 10am in the Sutton magistrates court at Wallington. We are asking people to come along and protest against this blatant and sinister political arrest and trial!

Of course this kind of state interference can only be encouraged by the craven performance of the national leaderships of UCATT and TGWU and in UCATT's case by the denial of democratic rights and freedoms to the rank and file membership of UCATT.

The need to restore and advance democracy to and within UCATT must be the primary objective and major task facing our union membership today. It is of course a political as well as an industrial task.

To carry out any such task successfully, we need an industrial and political united front of all the democratic forces in the union prepared to *fight* around a programme of action based on demands such as:

- for the expulsion of all ballot riggers and supporters;
- for a national lay, i.e. rank and file, leadership as opposed to the present 5 man full time executive;
- for an *annual* delegate conference as opposed to the present once every two year affair;
- for the complete restoration of all his democratic rights as a UCATT member to Dominic Helier.

In furtherance of the need for such a campaign a public meeting has been called in the small rooms of the Conway Hall, Holborn, London, from 1pm to 4pm, Saturday February 14th.

There will be trade union and political speakers present. There is an invitation to all people genuinely interested in building a campaign for democracy in UCATT to come along. But we feel of course that there is a crying need for democratic campaigns in every union in the UK.

The meeting is supported by the Southwark, Islington and Hackney DLO Building Works Shop Stewards Committees, and the Building Worker Group.

The workers, united, will never be defeated!

Management offensive derailed — for the moment

The blitzkrieg on tube workers' pay, jobs and conditions by London Regional Transport and the management of London Undergrond Limited (LUL) has been temporarily halted.

In the recent secret ballot, a massive five to one mandate was secured in favour of the union's position, including an endorsement of industrial action and the threat of a 24 hour strike followed by a work to rule and a ban on overtime. In the face of this mandate, management have been forced to return to the negotiating table on all the disputed issues and to abide by the negotiating machinery.

By Patrick Sikorski
NUR

Crucially, there will now be full renegotiation of the 1986-7 pay "offer" to canteen workers. Previously management had been insisting on a £30 per week pay cut. Canteen workers were told that unless they signed a new contract of employment agreeing to these rates of pay and other radical alterations in conditions by September 15th last year they would face the sack. Thanks to union action, the canteen workers have not lost a penny and have not had to sign a thing. There will also be renegotiation of the mangement demand for 450 redundancies in LRT builders.

As a result of these concessions the one day strike called by the NEC of the NUR for Wednesday January 14th and the work to rule from the following Monday have been suspended.

Of course, nobody on the union side, least of all the union membership, are under any illusions that this is the end of the story.

The previous experience in the fight to stop the introduction of one person operation (OPO) on the District Line is fresh in everyone's mind.

Management's initial implementation date had been September 1984. In the face of opposition from the NUR's national negotiators and the threat of industrial action, mangement backed down. But of course the most important factor was that this was during the 1984-5 miners' strike. For the bosses any industrial action, whether in direct solidarity with the miners or not, had to be avoided at all costs.

Once the miners had been defeated a new implementation date of May 20th 1985 was introduced. The union called an all-out strike from that date which completely crumbled within twelve hours. Since then management have simply informed union negotiators at all levels of a never-ending series of implementation dates for new attacks on jobs and pay.

The central issue of competitive tendering and the resultant introduction of private contractors into almost every area of the tubes remain unresolved. Management's plans, determined as they are by the Tories' need to cut all workers' living standards by at least a third and to open up the whole economy to "privateers", can only be finally dealt with by all out action. Continuing the campaign amongst the membership and avoiding at all costs any further defeats like May 20th 1985 is the task of the NUR District Council and National Executive.

★There are different views amongst *Briefing* supporters about the implications of the industrial action being suspended. We hope to represent these views in our next issue.

Trade Union News In Brief

Silentnight Fight On

The Silentnight strike is over — official.

At least that's the view taken by the Furniture, Timber and Allied Trades Union of the 18 month long dispute involving its members and the bedding firm based in North Lancashire and Yorkshire.

Yet the members still on strike take a different view. Some 80 workers remain in dispute, picketing the plant and calling for a boycott of beds. They are incensed at the unanimous decision of the "progressive" FTAT Executive in pulling the plug on the spurious grounds that the dispute is "no longer winnable".

In abandoning the dispute because the employer refuses to negotiate, FTAT have given a green light to other employers currently in dispute in the industry. By failing to mobilise support for the picket lines and boycott campaign, they have lost the opportunity to force the employer from its position of strength.

The strikers have appealed for continued support. Already the Lancashire Association of Trades Councils, Preston, Burnley and Blackburn Trades Concils have responded positively. Other labour movement bodies should follow suit and demand that FTAT support their members in the fight for union organisation in the industry.

CPSA

On January 12th, 25 Unemployment Benefit Offices in London were shut by a one-day strike against the planned introduction of Availability Testing.

Initiated by acivists in London Region CPSA Department of Employment Section, the action culminated in a lively seventy – strong picket of Department of Employment headquarters in Westminster.

Availability Testing is the government's latest scheme to get claimants off the register by making them answer trick questions about their readiness for work. It is expected to reduce the unemployment figures by 6%, thus improving the Tories' electoral chances, further attacking the unemployed, and providing an excuse to cut jobs in UBOs.

Sadly, the national leadership of the CPSA DE Section, dominated by the right wing "moderates" and the soft left, refused to give the strike official backing. They say we should not oppose the tests themselves ("too political") but simply demand more staff to adminster them.

Hypocritically, they claim they want to give the fight against ethnic monitoring priority.

Rank and file activists in the DE, including supporters of the bulletin *Workhouse*, are now planning how to build on the January 12th success and pressure their leadership into taking real action.

By a CPSA member

Hangers' Women's Support Group on the Move

It is the general consensus in the trade union and labour movement that the Miners Strike would not have lasted as long as it did without the help of the women's support groups.

It was easier for these to be set up since the striking miners were concentrated in villages. At Hangers and at Wapping, the workforce is scattered throughout the South East.

Even so, several wives and mothers of the 300 sacked artificial limbmakers at Hangers decided to set up a support group. At their inaugural meeting on 26th October 1986, Yorkshire Women Against Pit Closures and SOGAT women from Wapping shared their experiences on strike with the 25 women who attended the launch.

They discussed various ways to help their husbands and families emotionally, financially and physically on the picket line. The Hanger's Women's Support Group has been extremely successful at fundraising, raising £642 so far. They've held Women's pickets, organised a children's disco and a Christmas party. They've spoken at meetings throughout London, held street stalls and helped Hangers be the largest contingent on the Jarrow March when they marched through London.

At their meeting on 11th January 1987, the women discussed the pressures on their families, especially where both parents are active in the dispute. Problems occur with childcare responsibilities when trying to be on the picket line by 7.00am.

Hanger's management have threatened to close down the Roehampton plant by 28th January if there's no further agreement by the unions by 5.30pm on the 27th.

Sadly, three people crossed the picket line last week for the first time in four months. One changed his mind after an hour back in and now only two women are still going in.

Please send messages of support and=or money to Women's Support Group for Hanger's, c=o Sue Blease, 231 Tildesley Road, London, SW15.

Kathy Pick, Wandsworth Councillor, Putney CLP

National Justice for Mineworkers Campaign
(South East Region)
MINERS BENEFIT
with
Hangers, Silentnight, Printworkers
at Wembley Conference Centre
7.30 Sunday 1st March
(date and artistes to be confirmed)

National Justice for Mineworkers Campaign
(South East Region)
Joint public meeting with
NUM, Hangers, Printworkers, Silentnight
Speakers:
Peter Heathfield, Irene Scott (Silentnight), Alan Barnes (Hangers), Liz Short (printworkers).
7.30pm
Friday 30th January
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

NO RETREAT AT NEWS INTERNATIONAL

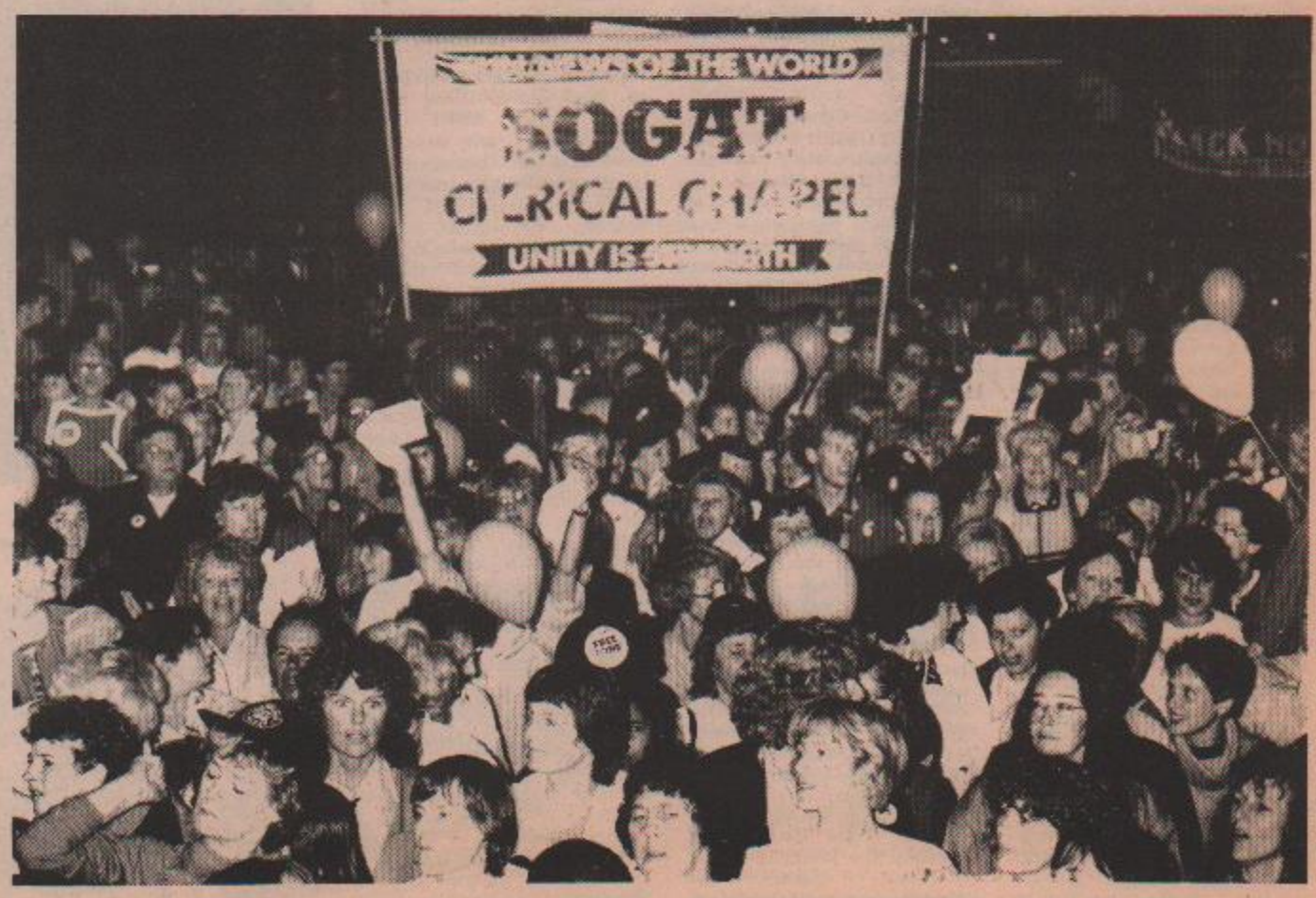


PHOTO: Andrew Wiard (Report)

Trade unionists, women, local residents and many supporters have marched at Wapping at intervals throughout the dispute.

We go to press just after the magnificent display of solidarity with the printworkers shown at their anniversary march and rally.

The size of the event showed not only the strength of support for the strikers, but also how effective solidarity action can be in disrupting Murdoch's operations. If mass picketting action on the gates of Fortress Wapping is backed up with solidarity from other trade unionists — including those in SOGAT — still handling material for News International, Murdoch can still be brought to his knees.

The anniversary action comes on the heels of a ballot rejection by the SOGAT membership of a national levy for the strikers. The Executive Committee of SOGAT had power to raise this levy without a ballot. Having decided to ballot, they utterly failed to mount any campaign in the regions, and in London all it amounted to was a glossy magazine. It was undoubtedly a deliberate act of sabotage.

With a 56.2% turn-out, 51,187 voted against the 58p per week levy, while 44,265 supported it. As expected, all the London branches backed the levy, although the turn-out was low even here.

What is to be feared now is that the ballot result wil be used by the national leadership to withdraw suport from the strike. Already there are talks of withdrawing support for the boycott campaign — the main plank of the national leadership's "strategy".

By John Tuite

While clearing the decks with the media in this general election year may be convenient for Kinnock, for the News International strikers who have solidly rejected Dean's deals by ballot it is a stab in the back.

Meanwhile Murdoch may be taking SOGAT back to court over the spontaneous action at the Wapping gates by about three hundred strikers who decided six pickets was just a bit too small. A financial penalty would be most likely.

It is the sorry state of SOGAT finances that is ostensibly the reason behind the discussions on amalgamation of branches that is going on behind closed doors at present. The question of amalgamation with the NGA may eventually be posed.

The Fleet Street Support Unit supports the idea of one union for the industry, but demands the membership should be in on the discussion. Perhaps the national leadership of SOGAT are aiming for a regional structure like the NGA's, that would cut out the strength of the London branches, who are a thorn in their side.

So it is important in response to the restructuring of both the industry and the unions that the NUJ broad left has invited members of the other print unions to meet at the end of the month to discuss the future of the industry. A national plan for the industry is vital if the bosses are not to continue dividing resistance regionally and locally.



PHOTO: Andrew Wiard (Report)

Labour Party

Labour Party Black Sections:
Victories of '86: aims for 1987!

The Labour Party Black Sections approach their fourth annual national conference in Nottingham on March 14th having increased their support within the Black communiites and within the white-dominated labour movement.

This success has, in turn, led to vicious attacks from the Tory government and its bootboys on the streets, in the police force and in immigration department.

Within the Labour Party, Black Sections secured two major objectives; Cllr Amir Khan and Kevin Scally were reinstated as Party members after a campaign lasting 14 months. Khan and Scally had exposed the corruption in Hattersley's Sparkbrook CLP; for this service to the Party, they were unceremoniously dumped with phrases like "lancing a boil" being uttered by the godfathers.

Facing certain defeat, Hattersley was forced to munch humble pie and recommend their reinstatement at his GC meeting last November.

Birmingham City Council's right wing Labour Group took revenge within days by sacking Cllr Phil Murphy — a close ally of Khan and a leading member of Birmingham Black Section — from the race committee. Murphy is expected to contest the Chair of this committee at the Group's AGM after the Council elections (May) when the Black Section strength is likely to be increased.

The other major success of 1986 was the discrediting of the divisively-named "Black and Asian Advisory Committee" — the seventh attempt by the Party bosses to establish a neo-colonialist structure as a sop to the one million Black voters.

It was shunned by conscious Black people and by the majority of white Party members. The chief advocate for the setting up of BAAC failed to attend a single meeting — none other than Roy Hattersley.

The local Council elections provided another boost for LPBS, confounding all the political commentators. In London Boroughs with the largest Black populations and determined campaigning Black Sections, Labour won resounding victories. Elsewhere, Black councillors took their places in Town Halls for the first time.

By the end of May, Merle Amory and Linda Bellos had joined Bernie Grant as council leaders, with scores of others occupying key positions in Councils up and down the country.

Fleet Street went beserk — assigning even more reporters to rubbish these successes and ensure that Black politicians would fail.

The Tory cabinet aided this onslaught as Lambeth, Haringey, Ealing and, most viciously, Brent received a caning. Their racist message was: "Black people aren't fit to be councillors, spokespersons or Parliamentary candidates."

The Labour Party machine backtracked as fast as it could, with one senior Party ofiical confiding to a journalist — off the record of course — that Labour would neither defend nor attack on the issue of racism as "there were no votes in it." It appeared that the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* were more important than millions of Black voters.

By Narendra Makanji
Secretary, Labour Party Black Sections

Internationally, the liberation of Azania occupied the attentions of all LPBS branches. Consumer boycotts were stepped up in Bristol and Nottingham; Tesco's new superstore in Brixton agreed not to stock goods from racist South Africa whilst major corporations such as IBM, Coca-Cola and Barclays pulled the plug on Botha's regime.

Black Sections joined with a number of other Black organisations to form BALSA (Black Action for Liberation of South Africa) as the Anti-Apartheid Movement failed to mobilise Black people.

The murder of Samora Machel in October sparked of the largest Black protest against the presence of the racist regimes through its Trafalgar Square Embassy. In contrast, the head of the AAM — Labour MP Bob Hughes — "regretted" the action of Black countries in pulling out of the Commonwealth Games!!

The forces of imperialism struck another blow when, in April, Reagan, Thatcher and Kohl conspired to murder innocent people in Libya by bombing Tripoli, Benghazi and some coastal towns. Nationally, LPBS condemned this outrage as state-orginated terrorism, whilst in Nottingham 600 marched in a demonstration led by the local Black Section.

These bombings — together with the later "Irangate" revelations — exposed NATO as an offensive alliance ready to smash Black liberation struggles throughout the world. That is why Black people will support British withdrawal from NATO.



PHOTO: John Chapman

Narendra Makanji addresses London Labour Party Conference

Throughout the year, actions of the government and Fleet Street led to increasing numbers of racist attacks all over the country. The worst example came last autumn when the Home Office conspired with a scab union — the Immigration Service Union (*not* affiliated to the TUC) — to introduce visa requirements for visitors from six Black countries — Sri Lanka, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Ghana.

Lurid headlines were splashed across the front pages; Black newspapers, on the other hand, were carrying stories condemning the government and reporting the increasing numbers and viciousness of racist attacks. A mosque was bombed, newsagents shop set alight and petrol bombs thrown through front windows.

The best that the Labour Party could do was to promise "non-racist immigration laws", ignoring the fact that *all* immigration laws have been racist in intent and practice. However, Gerald Kaufmann gave the game away, writing in *The Observer* that there would be no change when the Labour Party policy was implemented.

In 1986, Black Sections showed whose side we are on. Policies on police, Azania, immigration, race attacks and jobs were published and received widespread support. Campaigns were mounted against racist visas, bombing of Libya, racist policing and in support of sacked workers at Kenure Plastics and Wheelers Restaurant (Brighton).

BS supporters have played a dynamic role in all sections of the Labour and Trades Union movement and the success and the fighting spirit displayed have struck a chord amongst all Black people and socialists.

1987 will be the key test; the General Election will provide the important breakthrough. The struggle to implement the anti-racist socialist policies and to remain accountable to Black people will continue.

Scottish Labour Briefing

Devolution poses question of power:
NUM challenges UK parliament

For several weeks the Caterpillar Factory at Uddingston near Glawgow has been occupied by its workforce in a struggle to prevent its closure and the loss of 1,200 jobs.

At Seaforth colliery, the NCB has demanded increased production targets to compensate for the loss of coal faces due to a fire over the New Year. The NCB has almost halved its Scottish workforce since the start of the Miners' strike.

Overall, in Scotland unemployment continues to rise, by 5,092 last month, despite modest falls in the rest of Britain. The decline in oil prices in 1986 has caused 30,000 redundancies and devastated Aberdeen.

The main theme coming from much of the press and from the Labour Party is that a Scottish Assembly is necessary to effectively fight unemployment.

The joint leaflet produced by the Labour Party and the STUC, outlining their Devolution policy, boldly states:

"The Assembly will work directly to deal with the appalling problems of unemployment and help to build the Scottish Economy for the Future."



PHOTO: John Chapman

Scottish miners on the march

By Gordon Morgan
Glasgow Central CLP

After years of playing down their commitment to an Assembly, Labour has now made it a key-note of its election strategy for Scotland.

In doing this Labour have changed course. In 1979 it was Labour MPs, including Neil Kinnock, who introduced the 40% wrecking amendment, which made it impossible for a YES vote to succeed in the assembly referendum — no matter how large the majority in favour. Labour at that time also proposed an Assembly with no tax raising powers.

Now Labour promotes an Assembly with responsibility for: Health, Welfare, Education, Local Government, Transport, Agriculture, the Law, and all the Development and Economic agencies. It would also control income tax, rates and other taxes.

They are also launching a campaign which states that an Assembly with the correct policies can improve the standard of life of the Scottish people; that the present form of government is bruteaucratic and undemocratic in Scotland and that a vote for Labour and a Labour government will ensure the setting up of an Assembly.

This campaign is almost certain to succeed. Votes for Labour will increase in Scotland and substantially more Scottish seats will be won for Labour.

This does not, however, ensure a Labour government. It is perfectly possible that as in 1983 Labour will take a majority of Scottish seats and yet not have government at Westminster. The Glasgow Herald have nicknamed this the "Doomsday" scenario.

It is this scenario that is being increasingly discussed in the press and television, to resounding silence from the Labour leadership.

When asked "What will you do about a Scottish Assembly if there is no Labour government?" Labour leaders from Denis Healey to Tony Benn have refused to answer.

Having built up expectations regarding an Assembly, however, the subject will not go away.

If it is necessary to have an Assembly under a Labour government to combat unemployment effectively, how much more necessary must it be with a Tory or coalition government.

Responses to the Doomsday scenario have been explored in the press and on television by Denis Canavan MP, amongst others.

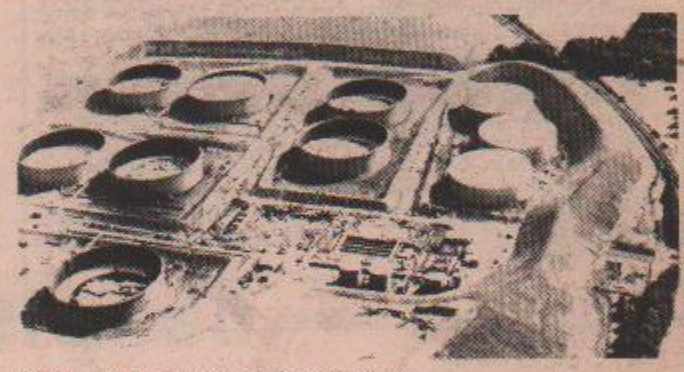


PHOTO: Labour Party Photo Library

Massive redundancies in the oil industry

The key resolution to the Scottish Labour Party Conference from the NUM calls for a campaign to establish an Asembly in the next parliament whatever the goverment in Westminster.

Possible responses after the election are pure conjecture at this stage, but include introducing a Bill in Westminster and not accepting a negative response, a disruption campaign at Westminster, the establishment of a Constituent Asembley in Edinburgh and a challenge to the legitimacy of Parliament.

The Labour leadership doesn't want open discussion as it distracts from winning the next election. Thereby it weakens preparation for an effective campaign.

It is quite clear that only the Labour and trade union movement can supply the policies and leadership for an effective camapign for an Assembly.

Such a Labour led campaign is necessary before an election to ensure a Labour victory. It is even more necessary to start such a campaign now to prepare an effective response after an election if Labour are defeated.

School on Socialism and Nationalism
Saturday 4th April
10am-6pm
City Hall, Glasgow
Speakers: Gunther Minnerup, Denis Canavan MP, George Kerevan (Edinburgh councillor), Jim Young

Labour Local Government Conference

Wanted: action and money

The Labour Party's Local Government Conference in Leeds on February 6-8th should provide a major platform for the Party leadership to issue an unequivocal statement of support for all those Labour councillors struggling to defend jobs and services in the face of Tory slanders, government financial restrictions, and the threat of privatisation.

It should be an occasion for proclaiming that a Labour government will implement Party policy, restore grants to 1979 levels, end restrictions on expenditure and restore elected regional authorities in London and the metropolitan counties.

But will it be a repeat of 1985, when Kinnock, in the name of unity and moderation, proclaimed his support for cuts and "the dented shield"; and Liverpool and Lambeth councillors were denounced for carrying out Party policy? Or of 1986, when only "99.9% of Labour councillors" were worthy of support from the Party leadership?

Labour's frontbench spokespersons on local government have just been given a propaganda gift by the Tories. With all the Tories' rate settlements since 1981 declared unlawful, Nicholas Ridley is rushing the Local Government Finance Bill through Parliament in order to cover himself and his cronies retrospectively.

Now is the time for the frontbench and Kinnock to stand up and defend those local councils who have been on the receiving end of ratecapping, and in particularly to challenge the legality of the disqualification of the 31 Lambeth councillors.

But what can we expect, either at the Conference or in Parliament? Over the last few weeks, leading London borough leaders have been trying to cobble together a deal with Kinnock, Cunningham & Co. "We won't rock the boat at the Conference," their argument goes, "if you'll guarantee to bail us out when you're elected."

These same borough leaders complied with the "dented shield" rather than fight ratecapping, but even so they still haven't been able to extract more than half-hearted promises from the Party leadership.

By Joan Twelves
Chief Whip, Lambeth Council
(personal capacity)

The NEC's Local Government Committee has just published its plan for local government reform and this will be the major item under discussion at the Conference. Many of the demands which have been articulated in resolutions to annual conference are included in the document, and it should therefore be welcomed.

But, although released to the press, it has yet to be approved by the NEC. And the major weakness of the document — the lack of clear commitments on finance and the lack of a timetable for implementation of reforms — are precisely the areas where we can least trust the NEC or the frontbench.

We are told that ratecapping and the personal surcharge of councillors will be abolished. But what about those councillors who have already been surcharged? Will the legislation be retrospective? Will the thousands of pounds paid out in court costs and surcharge be paid back?

There is absolutely no point in abolishing the Rates Act unless the Rate Support Grant is restored to at least 1979 levels; unless restrictions on capital and revenue expenditure are abolished; unless massive resources are pumped into the areas of greatest need — the inner cities; unless the consequences of creative accounting are unravelled and debts written off.

We are told that local authorities will have a central role to play in job creation. But local authorities cannot plan to create jobs if they don't know what resources they will have.

And they cannot plan to create jobs when their first priority has to be to defend existing jobs and services. Otherwise the only jobs created will be replacing workers made redundant now.

For many local authorities, the debate on what the Labour government will do is secondary to how they are going to survive this year. The creative accountancy options are running out — and so is the money. Faced with the choice of deficit budgets or cuts, many councils have resorted to prayer — not for action, but for a general election.

We need a timetable for the implementation of reform. We are told in *Labour Weekly* first that "Party leaders insist that decisions on priority must be left to a Labour cabinet"; then, that an "early" paving bill would starty setting up regional authorities, starting with London, Scotland and the North of England.

This is not good enough. The London Labour Party is determined to get a clear commitment from the Party leadership *now* to take urgent action within the first year of office to restore city-wide government to London.

A report has been produced which spells out in detail what needs to be done to restore an elected strategic authority for London and what its powers should be. Major lobbying will be taking place at the Conference to win support for London's approach.

There is also support from outside London for pushing hard on restoring a GLC. It is recognised that once London's regional authority is restored, there is a strong argument for not delaying elsewhere. The "mets" can hang on to London's coat-tails.

However, there is also resistance to this approach, particularly from Cunningham, who has never shown himself to be friend of the GLC or the London Labour Party. He would much prefer the Royal Commission, Green Paper, delaying approach in order to have a never-ending debate on the future of shire counties.

The Local Government Conference needs to be a fighting, organising conference. It needs to pledge support for those councils in the front line of Tory attacks and in the front line of tackling the deprivation, poverty, economic decline, and homelessness of the inner city.

The Audit Commission is about to launch a vicious attack on eight London Labour boroughs, accusing them of inefficiency and waste. The national leadership must denounce this blatant piece of Tory propaganda, make it plain that it will defend those councils all the way, and that it recognises, through the commitments it makes now, that the root cause of the problems facing local authorities is a lack of financial resources.



Unions and councillors must fight back together

National Constitutional Committee

Ready for the task ahead

The National Constitutional Committee has now been elected.

Four left members — three CLP representatives and one TU representative — face seven determined right wingers.

By Mandy Moore
CLP representative, NCC

standing orders, and rules of

The role of the NCC is to deal with disciplinary matters referred to it by CLPs and the NEC and to hear appeals against the withdrawal of the Labour Whip.

It is supposed to "enforce" the constitution, the Party, and can impose "punishment" as it sees fit up to and including expulsion.

Our main tasks as Left representatives are clear:

1. to defeat or delay the expulsion of socialists from the Party by every means possible, and

2. to ensure that Party members are fully aware of the nature of the cases brought before the NCC and where the moves for expulsions are coming from.

The task is not an easy one but it is crucial if we are to end the Party leadership's attacks on the left and put the Party back on the road to socialism.

The first meeting is on February 5th. We will then begin to see just how the right intends to use the new body.

Kinnock sacks Buchan:

Media reform deformed



PHOTO: Melanie Friend (Report)

Back in 1984: Norman Buchan, a newly appointed Arts Spokesperson, at the New Half Moon Theatre.

On January 13th Neil Kinnock dismissed Norman Buchan as Shadow Minister of the Arts.

The rift came over the Home Policy Committee's decision to dump Buchan's proposal for an integrated Arts and Media Ministry, and to leave control of broadcasting in the hands of the Home Office and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Buchan believed that his policy had Kinnock's backing, and had made this clear in public. An integrated Ministry with Cabinet status would have allowed the government to co-ordinate its Cultural Policies in the same way as global multinationals like Murdoch's News International co-ordinate their activities in print, video, film, satelite, and cable.

In Buchan's view the new Ministry would have provided the impetus for radical initiatives in democratising the Cultural Industries. Kinnock's amendment to Buchan's paper on Arts and the Media not only undermined this position but made it impossible for Buchan to continue in place.

Labour will go into the election with a commitment to an inquiry into broadcasting and a new Arts Ministry with some interest in, but no power over, the area.

This policy will not upset those people in power in the BBC or the commercial sector. It has abandoned the idea of a coherent, interventionist cultural strategy for a Labour government.

But this issue is by no means closed. Media Unions are committed to encouraging a more radical line on Cultural policy. Growing demands for more public control over the media will not go away.

The next step has to be a concerted effort at constituency level to win the argument for systematic media reform. The proposals exist. They need to be debated, modified, and translated into constituency, regional and ultimately national policy.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom's *Media Manifesto* (available from 9 Poland St, London W1V 3DG, 01-427 5909) provides a tool for this kind of debate.

Only if media reform is taken seriously by activists in CLPs and unions will it be difficult for major programmes to be wiped out at the drop of a hat in the recesses of Walworth Road.

By Tom O'Malley
for *Spark* collective

***Spark* is a bi-monthly trade union and community publication based in Harrow. Copies of *Spark* are available for 20p, from 40 Grafton Road, Harrow. 427 5909, 863 7258.**

POSTAGE STAMPS

A new way of raising money for *Briefing* — painlessly! Save us your used postage stamps; and send them in with your paper money or bring them to the Steering Committee. It won't make us millions — but with your help we'll have "a nice little earner"!

Orange March in Exeter

To mark the 300th anniversary of King William of Orange landing in Devon, Exeter City Council have organised a programme of events in 1988, including a pageant in the town.

On hearing of these proposals, Devon Labour Briefing supporters immediately protested. Whatever his past role, King Billy is now a prime symbol of loyalist bigotry in Ireland, and celebrating his anniversary would be seen as a public statement in support of it.

In addition, given the close association between Ulster loyalists and mainland fascists, the celebrations would inevitably attract groups such as the NF to Exeter and allow them to gain a foothold in the area.

These arguments won out at the November 1986 General Committee ⅜GC½ of Exeter Labour Party, and we thought that was that ⅜see December Briefing½. However, the Labour Group on the Council voted to continue with the celebrations and, by procedural sleight of hand, this decision slipped past the December GC. At present the events are still going ahead.

To make matters more serious, our arguments were confirmed in a letter to the local press by Mark Cotterill, South West Organiser of the National Front. Cotterill supports the anniversary and writes King Billy has become the symbol of the Loyalist people of Ulster, and so he should ... If celebrating his anniversary is seen by Irish Republicans as the English identifying with the Loyalist people of Ulster, so what, if the Republicans don't like it, hard luck ... the National Front is the only true friend of the Ulster Loyalists here on the mainland and we plan to put across their message to the people of England and try and get their support. We have a lot of plans in the pipeline for 1988, when we hope to bring our supporters from all over the country to Devon.

If the Labour Group goes ahead with the tercentenary events, it will not only be taking a sectarian stand on Ireland, but also contributing to the growth of fascism. It cannot be allowed to do so.

Locally, a campaign against the celebrations is being organised. We are lobbying the next Council meeting on February 3rd, to be followed by a public meeting with speakers from the Labour Committee on Ireland and Anti - Fascist Action. Support from all over the country would be welcome. Pressure needs to be put on the local Labour Party to take a strong stand against the tercentenary. Get your organisation to pass a resolution to that effect and send it to Exeter Labour Party, 26 Clifton Hill, Exeter.

For more information, contact Neil Todd, 48 Portland St, Exeter. Tel 0392 - 30556.

Economy

NO COMPROMIS

The Social Ownership Hoax

Thatcher's privatisation offensive has benefitted from the unpopularity of existing nationalised industries.

Although opinion polls have shown majority opposition to privatising gas and water, most ordinary people do not strongly believe any nationalised industry represents their needs and interests.

By Phil Hearse

Last year's Party Conference document on "social ownership" seemed to propose a radical and innovative alternative to both 'old fashioned" nationalisation and '80s privatisation. In fact the "social ownership" proposals are a hoax, a right-wing move masquerading in radical colours.

For years the hard left inside the Party has been the most vehement critic of the defects of nationalised industries inside a capitalist society. The left was the first to point out that these bureaucratic monoliths served the interests of capital at the expense of ordinary people.

Now these same arguments are being deployed by the centre and right to justify an abandonment of *any* kind of nationalisation.

What exactly is 'social ownership" put forward in the paper by David Blunkett and industry spokesperson John Smith, and so eloquently sold to last year's conference?

Scrape away the rhetoric and you find a combination of two specific proposals: employee share ownership plans (ESOPs) and workers co-operatives. Both are linked with the proposal to establish a National Investment Bank under the next Labour government.

ESOPs would amount to giving government money (through a National Investment Bank) to companies which give workers voting shares. This has been presented as a cunning, innovative mechanisim for diversifying the ownership and control of British industry. In reality, it cannot possibly work.

Most companies in receipt of money from the NIB will already have numerous existing shareholders, and in most companies a small group of shareholders will own the bulk of the shares.

Giving workers voting shares will not, in most cases, really affect the ownership and control of companies.

Suppose a company runs the risk of being taken over by the workers through being "ESOP-ised"? Its existing owners will investigate every possible alternative form of financing rather than accept cash from the National Investment Bank, and as long as the banks are busting a gut to lend money, as they are at the moment, most will come up with an alternative.

The recent Guinness affair shows that capitalist owners have immense resources to fiddle the books to prevent worker share-holders becoming a majority.

Employee Share Ownership Schemes would in fact turn out to be much simpler and more mundane affairs than they appear in Blunkett's fantasies. Workers would own few company shares and thus "participate in the profits" of the company concerned — just as is proposed by Liberal plans for "co-ownership", or for that matter in most privatisation plans, which throw a few shares to the workers as a sop.

What about worker co-operatives? Surely they are a progressive step? Potentially they are. But the whole history of capitalism since World War II shows that worker co-operatives can never be anything more than marginal to a capitalist economy, unless of course they are backed by immense reserves of finance, enabling them to compete on equal terms with existing capitalist concerns.

Are we really to belive that under a Kinnock-Hattersley government huge reserves of investment are going to be mobilised to build a gigantic worker co-operative sector of the economy? There is no such proposal in the Blunkett-Smith document. Besides, such a move would have to be made in the teeth of the opposition of industry which doesn't want its existing markets interfered with, and incidentally in the teeth of opposition from those very financial institutions which are supposed to be putting money in the National Investment Bank.

An important worker co-operative sector *can* be built, but only within an overall socialist plan for the economy which includes a nationalised financial sector.

The problem with the existing nationalised industries is that they were nationalised not as part of a move towards socialism, but rather to strengthen and rationalise the existing capitalist economy. The industries which were nationalised during the 1945-51 Labour government, with surprisingly little opposition from the capitalist class, were those (like the railways) considered to be inherently unprofitable, yet whose continued existence was necessary for British capitalists. Proposals that there be an element of industrial democracy in the nationalised industries were vigorously resisted by the Attlee government.

It is hardly surprising that the nationalised industries which emerged from this process took precious little notice of the rights either of the workers within them or of the needs of their consumers.

Socialists must avoid giving the impression that their conception of socialism is "200 National Coal Boards" — a caricature used by the LCC and *Marxism Today* ideologues. There *is* a notion of "social ownership" which is neither tinkering on the margins of the economy, nor promoting bureaucratic monsters. The socialisation of major industry, under workers' control, guided by a democratically-decided national economic plan.

Such a proposal is perfectly compatible with workers' co-operatives, local planning initiatives, and indeed a private sector of small and medium-size enterprises.

The fight for this alternative begins with the fight against privatisation and for renationalisation of privatised industry. It includes the fight for workers' control and for the opening of the books to expose the capitalist swindlers. And, above all, it needs a fight for the nationalisation of the banks and finance houses, without which any socialist planning is a pipe dream.



PHOTO: Melanie Friend

Standard Bookbinding was GLEB-funded: for what kind of treatment would it be a candidate for under Kinnock?

City Scandals open t

Deal with the dis the symptoms!

Like the froth on a pint of Guinness, the latest bout of City scandals sits above the main body of British and international capitalism.

We have seen insider dealing, dodgy takeovers, asset-stripping, multinational monopolies shutting plants in Britain, and Tory vote-buying privatisation at giveaway prices.

By Jack Dobermann

Every time, Kinnock & Co. protest at the *symptoms* yet lack the commitment to deal with the *disease* — a system which functions purely for profit and the remorseless accumulation of capital.

Labour answers everything, from the shameful annual cold-weather cull of the elderly to the decimation of jobs in the traditional manufacturing areas, with ever more pledges to "control", "plan", prop up, and expand capitalism, warts and all.

While Reagan, Kohl, Nakasone, and Thatcher stoke up reactionary nationalism, Kinnock answers them with laments over "a fractured kingdom" and promises to rebuild imperialist British capitalism.

Of course, the capitalist system does not function purely through swindles or speculation, despite appearances. Beneath the froth of fraud and fiddles, the only means of *creating* new value, and thus creating a surplus as a basis for renewed profit and accumulation, is through the exploitation of human labour.

Machinery used in production *transfers* a portion of its own value to each finished product as it depreciates over time, and thus augments the productivity of human labour. But this labour remains the heart of the process. Capitalism depends upon the crude fact that it costs an employer less to hire a worker for a week than the value that can be extracted from that week's work.

The size of the surplus created by the worker, and creamed off by the employer who owns the plant and materials of production, is the *rate of exploitation*. This will vary according to place and historical period. It is determined above all by the balance of forces between the two main classes.

Thatcher knows this: that is why she has waged such unrelenting war against tra union organisation, agai jobs, and against the welfa state. The object is to intimida and press-gang workers in ever-increasing rates productivity — thus maximisi the rate of exploitation wh minimising the tax and rat overheads of British capital.

Nor is there anything mag or exceptional about the va "invisible" earnings of t banking and insurance secto They draw their huge intere payments from loans extend to productive industry not on in Britain but around the worl feeding off the poverty, miser and exploitation of the mo oppressed sections of t international working class.

Highly profitable "service industries, which have cashed on Thatcher's burger bar a carpet warehouse econom play a largely parasitic ro redividing wealth alrea created — by exploiting t sweated labour of millions low-paid shop and cateri workers.

While these "services" sw the wallets of the wealth services essential to the worki class — education, housin

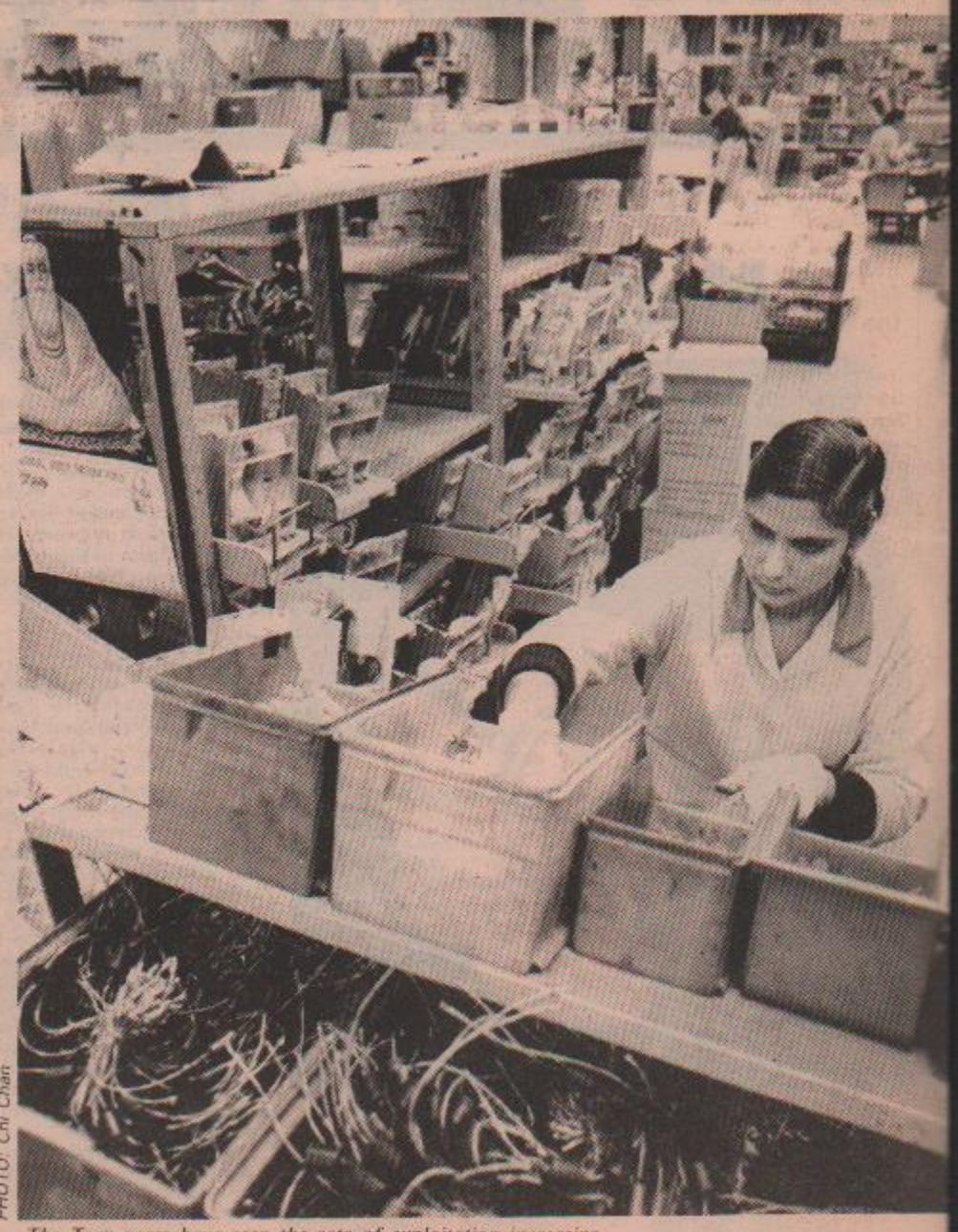


PHOTO: Chi Chan

The Tory years have seen the rate of exploitation increasing...

Break with capital! — Nationa

E WITH CAPITAL!

the debate:
ease, not

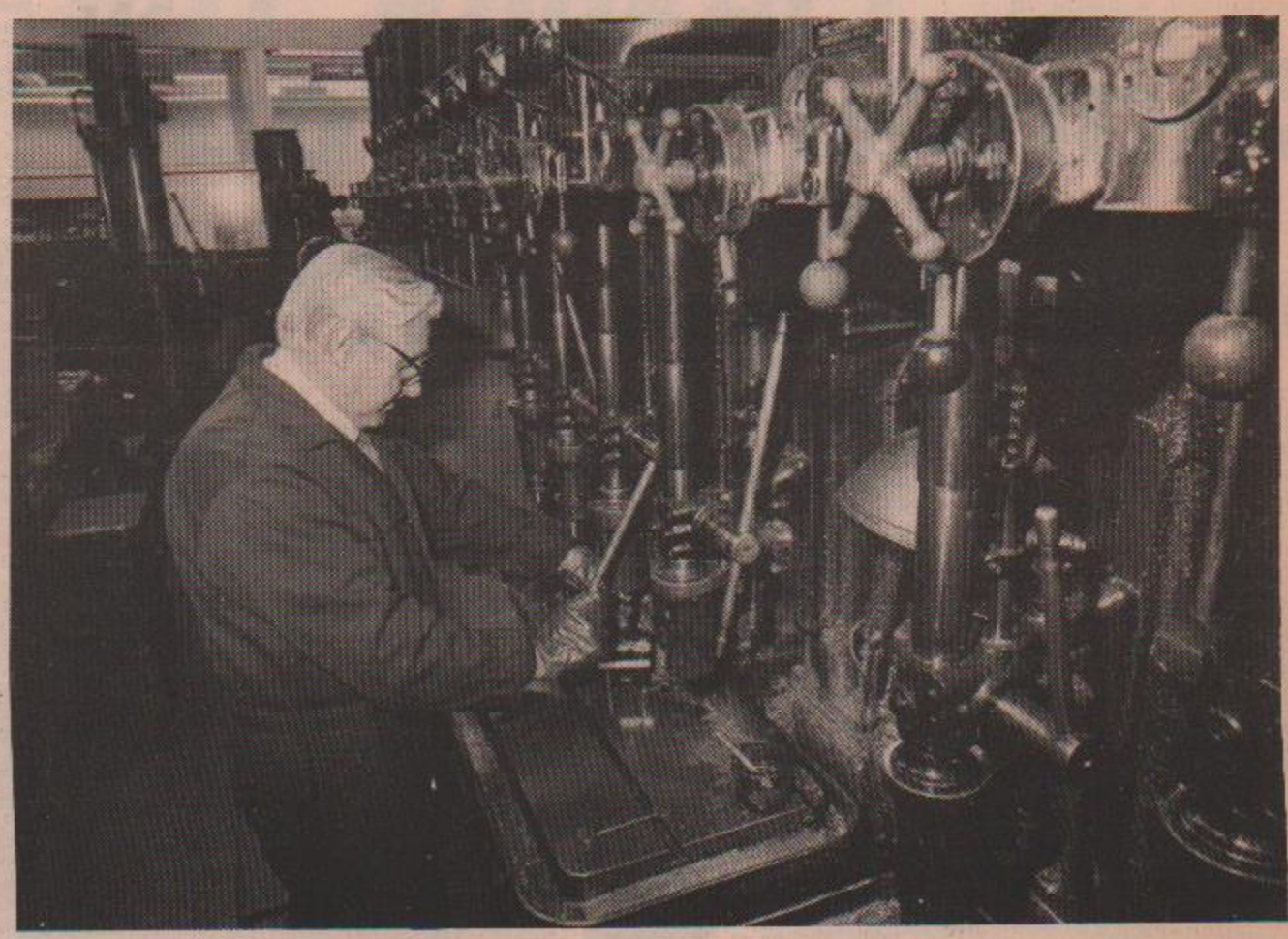


PHOTO: Chi Chan

Millions exist below the poverty line — for back-breaking work...

health and social services — are run down, increasing the exploitation of low-paid, largely female, often black, labour, while handing over the potentially "profitable" sectors to private capital.

While millions exist below or on the poverty line, vast multinationals squander billions in takeover bids and cut-throat competition for markets, aiming to drive their rivals out of business. Nothing is sacred. As the Hangers strike shows, employers will even sacrifice the production of artificial limbs for people with disabilities in their quest for bigger profits.

Within this system, by bartering with this same Mafia of bankers, bosses, and speculators, Labour's leaders hope to arrive at "planning agreements". Hattersley hopes a few laws and inducements will control these corrupt profiteers.

The fact is that these exploiters are the ones who will benefit when Kinnock insists wage increases should take second place to hopes of new (low-paid) jobs for the unemployed.

These capitalists have already creamed off billions under Thatcher in tax handouts and asset-stripping, and divided between themselves most of the "privatised" industry shares. They have no real commitment to the British — or any other — economy; still less to the creation of jobs, or anything that might cut into their profits, interest, and dividends.

Any economic policy which seeks to operate in this kind of beargarden can only end — like every previous Labour attempt at tinkering with the system — in disaster, with Labour leaders implementing policies dictated by the bankers to attack the workers.

Any serious plan to tackle poverty and unemployment, or stamp out the City scandals, must begin with the basic question of ownership and real power: the nationalisation of major industry and the finance houses, with compensation only to the poorest small savers.

To achieve such nationalisation in the teeth of vicious opposition from the capitalists, their mass media, and their state machinery will require much more than Labour's traditional, timid Parliamentary action. It must be based upon the mass action of the working class, uniting employed and unemployed, youth and pensioners, men and women, black and white.

It requires a direct challenge to the authority of capital, its "right" to a profit and its "right" to manage, at every level — from the factory to the corporation, from local to national. Workers must take control of their own workplaces and neighbourhoods — and then seize control of the capitalists' own nerve centres: the financial institution of the City and the state institutions of Whitehall.

The first step is to expose the real facts about particular firms, industries, banks, and the City as a whole, and in this way explain the need to change the system which supports them. Strikes, occupations, demonstrations, conferences drawing up plans for production that can *solve* the problems of the working class will create the mass base to raise the demand for a government that will confront and break the power of capitalism.

Needless to say, such a class struggle perspective is anathema among the "New Realist" bureaucrats of Congress House and Walworth Road. But for those who want to do more than splutter and rant against the scandal that is capitalism, those who really believe socialism is the only answer, it remains the single serious perspective for solving the economic crisis.

After all, we don't just want a pint of Guinness — still less the froth off the top. We want the whole bloody brewery!

Nationalising the City

No programme for socialism can succeed without the public ownership of the major financial institutions and the City of London.

The management of merchant and clearing banks which control vast amounts of capital has been appallingly inept.

By Paula Watson
City of London and Westminster South CLP

The recycling of the oil surpluses in the seventies has led directly to world financial instability, causing a debt crisis in Eastern Europe and the third world, and (along with high interest rates) has resulted in a net *outflow* of funds from the poorest to the richest nations.

Only the use of huge sums of public money has prevented major banking collapses in Britain and the USA. Continental Illinois, Chase Manhatten, and Johnson Mathey were kept afloat with taxpayers' money and every year 90 or more of the smaller, privately-owned banks crash in the States. The show is only kept on the road by the knowledge that capitalist governments will always bail the big banks out.

What is true of the Banks is equally true of other financial institutions. The managers of insurance companies and pension funds are not interested in directing resources where they are needed, but in the largest return on capital, which often means investment in office and hotel development, property speculations or overseas ventures.

To those who argue that workers will never accept the nationalisation of their pension funds we reply that public ownership is the only way of guaranteeing the *security* of those funds, given the increasing instability of world finances.

The stock exchange is simply a casino designed to help the rich get richer. Movements of share prices are manipulated to ensure quick profits for speculators. They bear little relation to the real value of the companies concerned. On average only 7% of new investment capital is raised on the exchange. With the major institutional investors in public hands the gambling tables at the Stock Exchange casinos can be finally closed.

Likewise, there should be no place for the foreign exchange market, where profits are made from buying and selling currencies. Individuals, industries and whole national economies can be ruined by currency speculators over whom they have no control. To prevent this, an incoming Labour government may well need to make sterling non-convertible, while a system of stable exchange rates is agreed with other socialist and developing countries.

The commodity exchanges, in which speculators gamble on commodities, often produced by poorer countries, should be replaced by planned trade agreements and guaranteed stable prices.

All this may sound rather ambitious, but either we control capital or it will control us. The task is made only more urgent by the rapid internationalising of the City following the Big Bang.



PHOTO: John Chapman

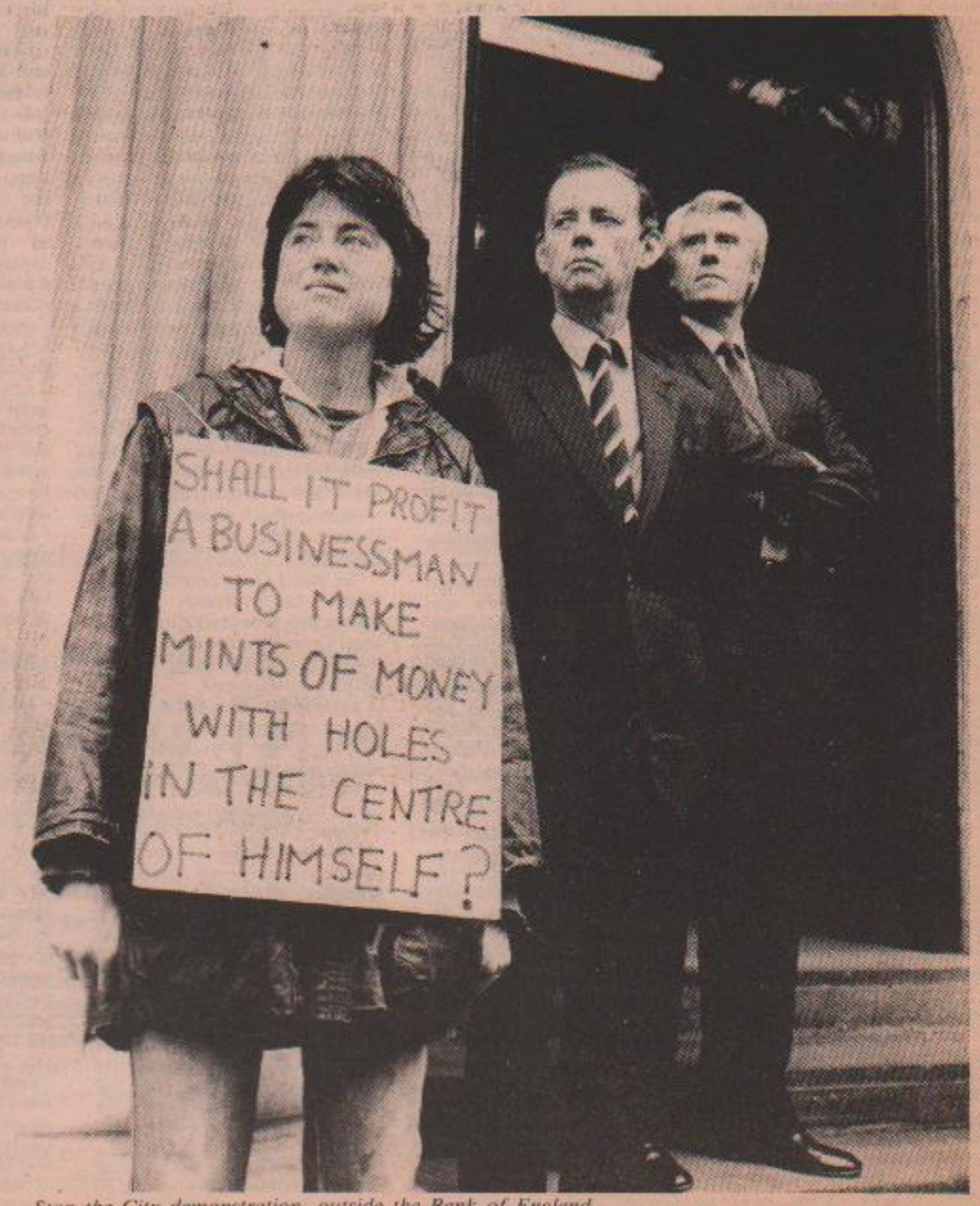


PHOTO: Paul Mattsson (Framie)

Stop the City demonstration, outside the Bank of England

lisation under workers' control!

Interview

Bob Clay speaks to Briefing: Looking at the Campaign Group of Labour MPs

***Briefing* spoke to Bob Clay, newly elected Secretary of the Campaign Group of Labour MPs.**

***Briefing:* Bob, can you outline what you see as the main priorities for the Campaign Group in what's obviously going to be an election year?**

Bob Clay: The main priority for the Campaign Group — inside and outside Parliament — has to be joining in the united efforts to defeat the Tories and return a Labour government.

There are some very fundamental questions to be asked at the moment, such as how it is that after everything the Tories are still showing between 38% and 42% in the opinion polls — to the extent that you take any notice of opinion polls. The second question is how is it that our popular policies, such as the removal of nuclear weapons and the phasing out of nuclear power, are seen as in some way damaging and divisive within the Party?

I think the Campaign Group should be campaigning on clear policies for a fundamental change in British society, which would actually be raising the question of socialism — even though it is difficult because of conditions in the Party at the moment, and because of the kind of hostile media that we always have.

***Briefing:* Our dilemma, as local activists, is how to campaign with some of the material that's going to be produced centrally, for instance that stresses Labour's commitment to increase conventional arms spending, and some of Labour's economic policies. What would be your advice to local activists who want to fight for a Labour victory on a socialist basis?**

Bob Clay: Well, my advice — the advice I'm going to take myself — is that if you're unhappy about commitments to increase or maintain conventional defence spending, then you emphasise the commitment to remove nuclear weapons. To be fair, nuclear weapons are an even greater threat to humankind, and an even greater waste of money than conventional weapons, and it would an important step, although only a step, if we could remove nuclear weapons.

We can have a mass of people behind us on those questions, and that is what I would concentrate on.

There is also the question of British membership of NATO — and withdrawal is not the Party's existing policy. Nevertheless there is a very strong feeling in this country for Britain to be more independent. There have been opinion polls which say that people actually think that the government of the United States is a greater threat to world peace than the government of the Soviet Union.

It seems to me that we can talk about those things within the context of Party policy. It's still, for instance, Party policy as I understand it, to campaign for the mutual dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. So I think there's plenty of scope to be talking about an independent Britain, a Britain playing a different role in the world — and we can campaign on those lines.

***Briefing:* Last year's Party Conference, in basically endorsing Hattersley's programme, marked a sharp shift to the right, certainly compared with the programme we had in 1974. What are we going to do when we know that this policy is, frankly, rubbish?**

Bob Clay: A lot of people — not just journalists — are going to ask, quite rightly, how we can actually make a significant difference to unemployment; put millions of people back to work; expand socially necessary services; and rebuild manufacturing industry on the basis of the financial and economic policies that we are putting forward.

As far as I'm concerned, talking from a Constituency with one of the highest unemployment rates in Britain, massive youth unemployment, and all the associated problems, I'm simply going to argue that if we're serious about restoring full employment and so forth, then we will have to do what is required. It's a pragmatic argument really.

A particular level of reflation, or the public sector borrowing requirement, or what may or may not happen to a specific industry, or whether compensation would be paid or not in the event of a restoration of public ownership are not necessarily written in tablets of stone.

I think the important and central commitment is the restoration of full employment, and we have to do whatever is necessary for that. I actually believe that if you create an atmosphere, before, during and after the General Election campaign, where there are mass expectations of real change, then you can get that real change.

***Briefing:* Bob, you recently became secretary of the Campaign Group. The Campaign Group was founded with different aims and ideals from the other Parliamentary Groups, like the Tribune Group. How much do you feel it's fulfilling the aims it set itself originally, and the aims of being a campaigning group that would turn outwards to the Labour Party activists. And how do you see your future role in building that?**

Bob Clay: The Campaign Group of Labour MPs was formed before the 1983 election, arising from the dissatisfaction of a number of socialist MPs with the role of the Tribune Group — particularly on the contest between Tony Benn and Denis Healey for Deputy Leader. It was put on a more formal basis after the 1983 election.

I think it has given the left more of an identity — popular or unpopular — within the Parliamentary Labour Party, and within Parliament as a whole.

I think it's a fact that a lot of SDP or Liberal MPs feel at times that they get a sharper going-over and more embarrassment from the Campaign Group than from some other quarters.

I think the same applies to the Tories. If you go through the history of City scandals, the campaign over the sinking of the Belgrano, the question of the miners' strike — and many "sub-themes" within it, like the robbing of supplementary benefit, and increased claw-back, where we actually stopped the House of Commons for a



Bob Clay

while — I think the Campaign Group has had an active role within Parliament as a whole.

In some ways, the Campaign Group has reached out from the Parliamentary Labour Party to the left outside Parliament.

One of our key aims was always to get MPs involved in extra-Parliamentary activity, to get MPs on picket lines, to raise money for strikes, to do more meetings, and because of that we started producing a paper, *Campaign Group News*. I think it is a paper for activists, with no pretensions to being a mass circulation populist paper. It is monthly now, and tries to feed out information about what's happening in Parliament, within the Party and on the National Executive Committee — particularly information people might not get elsewhere.

We've published a number of useful pamphlets now, relaying information about the City, and about the nature of Parliament — again, which comrades in the Party might not have got elsewhere.

As you know, people in different constituencies started saying they would like to form a local Campaign Group — an initiative we didn't instigate, but which we welcomed.

I think that was an extremely important development because we could be a sort of non-sectarian umbrella for people to work together under. Some have been started by former Tribune Groups, from a group of *Briefing* supporters, or from people from some particular tendency who felt that they wanted to get together with other people on the left from their own constituency or area.

There are now quite a number of local Campaign Groups. Inevitably, there are some problems. But in many cases these local Groups are doing a very useful job knitting the left together and campaigning in what are fairly hard times for the left.

We've tended for the last year or two to develop things on an ad hoc basis, including a relationship with Labour Left Liaison, which we welcome. We're now reviewing these things, hoping to consolidate our activities — given that we are still actually primarily a group of MPs.

***Briefing:* Obviously there's a wide political parameter within the Campaign Group, although the most leading members would are on its left wing. What will happen after the election, when more MPs will want to join the Campaign Group?**

Bob Clay: That will have to be thought about after the Election, although I'm sure many of the Campaign Group are also thinking about it now. There are so many permutations and possibilities, depending on the Election result, and on who constitutes the new Parliamentary Labour Party.

I think personally it also depends on what happens to the Tribune Group. At the moment some Campaign Group members are also members of the Tribune Group. My personal view is that the Tribune Group cannot really claim in any sense to be a Left group. For instance their refusal to participate in a recorded vote for the Shadow Cabinet elections tells one a lot about the nature of that group. That's a matter of fundamental principle: anyone seriously committed to accountability in the Party wouldn't refuse to tell people how they were voting in the Shadow Cabinet elections?

Anyway, I would like to see a Labour Cabinet elected by a wider constituency than the PLP. What you have now in government is pure patronage by the Prime Minister, which has had a major impact on previous Labour governments. We've had a lot of arguments about that, and I think we're not going to get a real Left identity around one group until we settle that question.

I'd like to see a left unity in the PLP based on the real socialists in the Tribune Group joining together with the Campaign Group. I'm not particularly interested in whether you call that a merger, takeover or whatever — I would like to see one group in here which encompassed the present membership of the Campaign Group and the minority of decent socialists in the Tribune Group.

But there are questions like the witch-hunt which would have to be settled. I would personally not join a Group unless it had a clear line against witch-hunting. In my view witch-hunting has done more than anything to tear the Party apart, and if we didn't win the next election I think that will be one of the main reasons why.

***Briefing:* A lesson from past years has been that sometimes left-supported candidates for the NEC have not been accountable to us, and have then taken decisions contrary to our interests. That's a problem for the whole of Left, but obviously the Campaign Group, playing a leading role, has got to face up to the questions. How can we make sure that the people that are on slates don't go over?**

Bob Clay: I think the first thing is that people are human beings, and there's nothing you can do to stop human beings changing if they will. So sometimes we all have a nasty shock and are very dismayed when someone who we thought would support a particular issue doesn't.

Also, there's the question of how we agree within the Left on who we want to promote. I believe that every organisation within the Left of the Party has the right to determine who it will support on the basis of how they see the situation. But I think that all the groups recognise that the more unity there is over a slate, the more likely that slate is to get elected.

There's a tension between those two things.

One argument says that it doesn't really matter whether people are electable or not, we just go for the people that we think would be best. On the other hand there's no point in putting up seven absolutely fantastic socialists if we know we can't get any of them elected. We have to steer a path between those two important principles.

I hope that there will be more and more consultation between the different organisations on left, including this year, to aim at the most widespread agreement possible.

The elections for the National Constutitional Committee — at least the Constituency section — are quite a hopeful sign. At fairly short notice, at a fairly difficult time, a reasonable slate emerged and was elected by a very comfortable margin. This was despite the fact that quite a number of constituencies seem to have felt that the NCC was the sort of committee they weren't bothered about and didn't vote, or, if they did vote, didn't take who they voted for too seriously. Nevertheless three people were elected on a platform of opposition to witch-hunting, which is a hopeful sign.

***Briefing:* During the miners' strike, there were good links between the Campaign Group and the NUM. What is the role of the Campaign Group in building links with trade unions and left activists in the trade unions?**

Bob Clay: I think that that's a very complex question.

I don't see as the job of Labour MPs as telling the trade unions at any level what to do.

However Labour MPs must assist in any way they can with struggle — that was the basis of our relationship with the NUM during the strike.

It would have been quite absurd if we in here had been saying to the National Executive of the NUM we think this is what you should do at this particular stage or over this particular question. But when they had a major lobby of the House of Commons or a march in London we did everything we did to assist in that.

We did a lot of fund-raising, we continually raised the issue in here and we went on picket lines and so on.

We've done that with other unions and other struggles. Two examples: we did our best, and still are, to support the Silentnight strikers; and it was our proposal that the Opposition should have a supply day on the Hangers' dispute.

There's also Campaign Forum, which is conceived really as a three-legged animal. There's the Parliamentary wing, us; the "outside-Parliament left" of activists, campaigning organisations, and different sections of the left which at the moment are operating together in Labour Left Liaison. But there's clearly got to be a third leg of that animal: the left in the unions.

Our realationship with this left operates at a number of levels: with some leading figures in the trade union movement (one or two general secretaries and other national officers), and also with genuine rank and file bodies, organisations like BLOC, and with particular Broad Lefts or similar organisations in particular unions.

We need active comrades in the trade union movement, particularly Labour Party members, to understand that a great deal of what happens in the Party — and thus how much your can influence a Labour government — depends on the role the trade unions play in the Party, particularly at Conference.

Recently the left has been losing out because of the political balance in the trade unions. There's a history behind that, but certainly it's important. If we're ever going to make any fundamental change we need a mass of people in the trade union movement fighting to commit the unions to policies which are actually in their own interest.

Recently, some trade unions, both in relation to the Party and what they do in industrial terms, tend to act against the interests of their own members on occasions. We need to talk to our colleagues in the trade union movement about those problems, so they can go back to playing a central role in the Party and are a progressive force in the Party.

***Briefing:* How can *Briefing* supporters, who are organised in rank and file Labour Left and *Briefing* groups throughout the country, Campaign Groups and other sections of the left in the Party, work together to avoid a duplication of effort? What kind of co-operation you see as possible.**

Bob Clay: There's a tension between two healthy objectives. It's very important that there should be scope for everyone to pursue their particular style of politics or political position within the Party.

Briefing has some important and positive characteristics. For instance, its well known for its attention to local government. *Briefing* could claim to be, in a sense, the publication that more than any other focussed the attention of the left on the importance of local government. That's one example of the positive role a particular publication can play.

I think there are times when I read things in *Briefing* that take a particularly sharp position which I personally felt needed saying and I am pleased that someone's saying that.

That observation could go for a number of other publications which brings us on to the other side of the problem. The left has been going through a bad time for quite a while, and the Party itself has gone through a bad time: but everyone does desperately want to defeat the Tories. So you have to ask if are we duplicating each other.

It would be good if the coming period still sees different points of view within the left, with different — growing — publications. But I would hope there would be less duplication and more co-operation — that's why I think LLL is very important.

I would like to see the positive sides of the publications we have now expressed as well as they are now through fewer publications. It is a bit sad to see the dedicated way very fine comrades give so much of their time, effort, and lives, to selling a paper which has to be sold in the way that it is because it's not sold through newsagents, and one doesn't have the money... we're not capitalist organisations!

There are no magic solutions. A lot of it is about unity through action. But I think you always have to bear in mind that we actually might sell more papers and have more people supporting us and get our views across better, if we were selling them with less louder voices, that's really my feeling about that.

Debate

Defend Council Housing — *against Jeff Rooker?*

By Matthew Warburton
Vauxhall CLP

Recent speeches by Housing Minister John Patten have left little doubt about the shape of government housing policy if the Tories get back.

Councils will be forced to break up their housing stock and hand over the pieces to a variety of private and semi-private agencies. New provision of rented housing will be by a new breed of institutional private landlord, freed from Rent Act controls.

This much is clear. The only element of doubt is how far Labour's housing front bench agree with this.

Patten himself claims with glee that there is cross party consensus on this strategy for the future of the rented sector. He points to Jeff Rooker's support for assured tenancies, his equivocal line on large chunks of the Housing and Planning Act and his public attacks on the housing management record of Labour Councils.

Whether or not Rooker thinks he agrees with the Tories, it is plain that he has swallowed the Tory sales pitch in its entirety. In "Roof" magazine recently, he argued for both planks of the Tory policy with only slight variations.

He supported, claiming "choice" as his justification, a "balanced" housing programme involving the sale or transfer of properties out of council ownership and management. And he backed new rented provision by housing associations on assured tenancies on the grounds that "any scheme by a landlord with a democratic input ... has got to be good."

No socialist could defend much of Labour's record on council housing, either in central or local government. But the alternatives aren't any better.

Taking into account the different cross section of properties and tenants housing associations manage, their record is arguably just as bad, on design defects, unresponsive mangement and lack of accountability.



What is the future of Council housing under a Labour government?

Instead of backing the argument for taking estates away from councils, Rooker ought to be demanding more accountability and better management in both the councils and the housing associations. It is either dewy-eyed innocence or outright cynicism that leads him to say that "democratic input" makes any housing association as good as any council.

The government's privatisation experiments, Stockbridge Village and Thamesmead Trust probably have more "democratic input" than most housing associations, and the Abbey National Building Society more than some. Does this make the Abbey National as acceptable a landlord as a Council?

What, in any case, has democracy got to do with assured tenancies? Since when should any socialist back a tenure invented to avoid rent controls and security of tenure, let alone on the claim that the landlord has a "democratic input"?

The extreme case of democratic input is a co-op. Everyone thinks co-ops are a Good Thing. So if council tenants choose to set one up, who are we to argue?

In fact, there is plenty to argue about. There is no obvious need to transfer ownership; councils run co-ops too. They use trade union direct labour, not self-employed jobbing builders. They leave open the safety-valve of council finances, so that co-operators do not find themselves taking a vicious line on evicting their colleagues in rent arrears just to make the books balance, or running into a financial crisis when the roofs start leaking.

There is also the issue of who gets housed. Co-ops which block black tenants should have no place in Labour's policy.

Of course we should give tenants the right to choose. But supporting privatisation — individual or co-operative — as a choice we accept is not a policy but an admission of defeat.

Rooker shares with Neil Kinnock a desperate fear about doing anything significant about mortgage tax relief and the rest of housing finance, let alone taking land out of the hands of the speculators.

A decade ago, Reg Freeson (remember him?) as Housing Minister, plumped for housing co-ops as the cure-all for housing, rather than tackling the basic problems of the housing market. It was a tragic missed opportunity. With 20,000 homeless in London's worst hotels and thousands more on the streets, it's not funny the second time around.

"There is nothing inherently socialist about council housing," Rooker told "Roof". **No, and nothing inherently socialist about a labour government either.**

'Perdition' closes after Zionist pressure

KEN LOACH, director of the play *Perdition*, written by Jim Allen, spoke to Graham Bash for *Briefing* after the play, due to open at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, was cancelled.

The director of the theatre, Max Stafford-Clark, cancelled the play 36 hours before it was due to open on January 22nd. This was a direct response to pressure from the Zionist lobby.

The play says that in Budapest in 1944 some of the Jewish and Zionist leaders made their first priority the creation of the State of Israel, and only their second, the saving of Jews from the extermination camps.

The play took the form of a trial. A leading Zionist escapes from Budapest after the War, and some years later a pamphlet appears in Britain accusing him of collaboration with the Nazis. He sues the writeer, an Israeli women, for libel and in the course of the trial evidence accumulates as to what happened in Budapest in 1944.

The play examines the politics of Zionism and its connection with the collaboration that occurred with the Nazis.

The fact of Zionist collaboration is widely accepted. For example, a play along similar lines dealing with a factual trial involving Kastner, the leading Hungarian Zionist of the time, was staged in Israel last year.

The charges of anti-semitism is the usual trick to avoid discussion of Zionist politics. There is an interntional confusion of anti-Zionism with anti-semitism. Jim Allen is a life-long socialist, perhaps the leading socialist playwright for television. He has a long record of internationalism, and of opposition to all forms of racism.

The Royal Court Theatre has always claimed to be the leading theatre in the country for new writing. Never to my knowledge have they previously banned a play on political grounds.

This is most unprofessional. It damages all our reputations with the taint of anti-semitism — which we have no means of answering through our work.

The anger of outrage felt by everyone connected with the production of the play — including Jewish members of the cast — is overwhelming.

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Socialist Policies for a Labour Victory!

Conference organised by *Labour Briefing*

Sat/Sun 28/29th March
Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton

Speakers include: Eric Heffer MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Mildred Gordon PPC, Joy Hurcombe PPC, *Chair Labour CND*, Nadine Finch *Chair LCI*, Narendra Makanji *Chair Labour Party Black Sections*, John Palmer *Socialist Society*.

It's now becoming clear that the Tories won't be able to win another election by riding on the back of Thatcher's "determination". This "determination" is fast turning people away from the Tories. None of the promised benefits — an upturn in the economy, decrease in unemployment — have materialised, despite the harsh measures we have to suffer supposedly to achieve them.

The Thatcher recipe isn't working. The problem is that the Kinnock recipe is uncovincing. It doesn't inspire confidence that there is a credible alternative; it doesn't even fool the ruling class that a Labour government is a necesasry concession at the moment.

Labour Party and union activists who want to fight for a Labour victory *and* for socialist policies urgently need to discuss how to campaign before, during and after the coming election.

How can we use the pre-election period and the coming General Election campaign to build support for trade unionists in struggle and other current campaigns? How can we bring the demands of the specially oppressed into the centre of Labour's politics? How do we ensure that local election campaigns are not reduced to doorstep slogging to complement Kinnock's media image? How do we fight for radical socialist policies irrespective of the national Party manifesto? And how do we ensure that there remains a strong, radical campaigning left in the Party whoever wins the election?

***Briefing* has called a national conference of Labour activists on these and other themes.**

Join us and help organise the socialist fightback!

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Labour Party Black Sections AGM

Saturday, 14th March
Nottingham
Notify secretary of delegates, observers, National Committee nominations and motions by end of January
Further details from:
Secretary: Narendra Makanji, 41 Darwin Road, London N22 (01 889 7734)

Letters

As *Labour Briefing* moves into fortnightly production, we shall be featuring more room for your letters. We offer readers the right to reply or to start debate on the issues that concern you.

Write to Letters Editor, 26 Wattisfield Road, London E5.

Dear *Briefing*,

On Bury Metropolitan Borough Council we have one woman Labour Councillor. It was the consensus within the Labour Party that a drive should be made to select more women this time round. So when the panel was approved, what did we find? Three women had been nominated for the ward members to select!

But there are further problems. In our selection process the safe Labour seats are asked to select their candidate first. None of the women were selected for these safe seats, and all three will find themselves battling hard to win in marginal or unwinnable seats.

In my ward, we had a sitting Councillor on the shortlist, and it was highly unlikely that anyone else would stand a chance of being selected against him. Of course, all safe seats are in this situation.

It would seem that we need a mechanism which enables women to be selected, and yet does not negate the democratic decision of members in the branches, or fall foul of the tendency to pack selection meetings with "loyal" sleeping members.

I would be interested to hear of other comrades' experiences in this area — especially if they have suggested constitutional changes to redress the balance.

Sue Arnall
Bury North CLP

Dear *Briefing*,

I strongly oppose the traditional "bread and circuses" view of sport summed up by Garry Whannel (*Blowing the whistle*, Pluto, 1983) as "viewing sport and leisure as distractions, keeping the oppressed masses from more disruptive activity." We could be debating and developing a socialist policy for sport rather than largely ignoring it.

Craig Brewin's recent article wasn't only about civil liberties. Football fans don't want to be told which matches they can watch any more than demonstrators want their movements restricted.

My point is that we may be missing a chance to influence and radicalise players and spectators alike.

The Sports Council has encouraged Local Authorities to take sport seriously, particularly since the 1981 uprisings, but a recent report claims that the government receives five times more in VAT duty and tax than the public expenditure on sport. Apart from employing 376,000 people full-time it generates £6.85 billion every year. Whatever our personal or ideological views on sport I would argue that we cannot afford to ignore it.

I can think of several areas of Labour Party policy which need challenging, but in common with Garry Whannel I'm sure that most politicians and planners see sport "as a way of defusing social tension, as a form of social control."

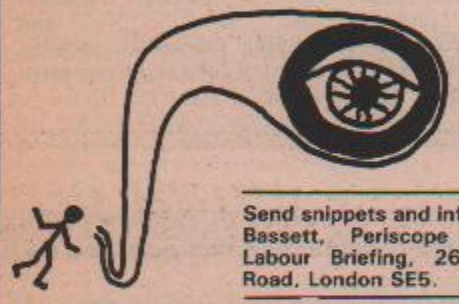
Boxing may be one of the more dubious popular sports but I'm disappointed that you don't seem to recongise the importance of Lloyd Honeyghan's decision voluntarily to relinquish the WBA welterweight title. By refusing to fight the WBA's number one contender, South African Harold Volbrecht, he's reputedly turning down £1 million.

Unlike the more famous Frank Bruno, Honeyghan's putting his principles before personal gain and unlike the mass media who tried to ridicule him we must applaud his decision regardless of the morality of boxing.

I write not to criticise but to keep a debate going and perhaps inspire more informed articles. Because of the many glaring inequalities in sport we have a lot to gain by developing a dialogue and encouraging players and spectators to organise themselves.

Andy Gibbons
Merionydd Nant Conwy CLP

Periscope



Send snippets and info to Greg Bassett, Periscope Column, Labour Briefing, 26 Crofton Road, London SE5.

Church News

It has been a busy few weeks for our Ecclesiastical Correspondent **Neil Down** as he has struggled to keep up with the latest clerical capers and the antics of assorted Bible-bashers.

●Once again our *Freud Egg* winner for Cuckoo of 1986 **James Anderton** has hogged the limelight. He lost no time in celebrating his *Briefing* award with a brain-curdling rant proclaiming himself a "prophet of God".

This man who found madness in his methodism is now offering to sign up for any suitably hysterical and barbaric religion that will have him, reminding us that — love or hate them — those lads of the old Spanish Inquisition certainly kept the AIDS problem under control.

Today's equivalent to the zealotry of the old Catholic Church is of course Khomeini's Islamic fundamentalism, offering pleny of scope for dismembering potential AIDS victims, persecuting women, and even full scale battlefield slaughter.

While Anderton books his flight to Teheran — or Manchester's Police Authority buy him a one-way ticket — we can at least be thankful he has not become a Jehovah's Witness.

The prospect of a crazed Chief Constable, backed by the gun-toting, plastic bullet-firing Tactical Aid Group of cops he formed in Manchester, gettting his foot in your front door would daunt even the most stout-hearted aethiest.

Worse — he could direct his militaristic approach to launch a guerrilla wing of the Salvation Army , flogging "Watchtower" and taking collections at gunpoint and terrorising harmless drinkers.

●**Terry Waite** is clearly finding it hard to work the old magic, with his backstage partner, Colonel Oliver North, unable to pull strings on his behalf in Lebanon.

Now Waite's periodic trips to the Middle East have become even more boring than NASA space missions before last year's shuttle spectacular.

Perhaps Waite's best bet to recapture media attention would be to ape the NASA disaster and get kidnapped **himself**.

On the other hand, maybe he fears that if he did so, the largely forgotten Archbishop of Canterbury (what **was** his name again?), who has been so squeezed into the background by his "special envoy" might be in no hurry to bail him out!

●**A businesslike** approach to religion saw Polish Prime Minister **Jaruzelski** leave his tank at home and travel by civilian transport to the Vatican. He was there to strengthen links between Poland's Stalinist bureaucracy and what some Italian jokers have termed the "deformed Workers' Pope".

Both leaders are at least agreed that the worst oucome in Poland would be for the working class to lay hands on the levers of power. In this sense, both have an interest in upholding communion rather than risk communism.

●Elsewhere, the firebrand **Bishop Jenkins** of Durham will no doubt have ruffled a few feathers in the dovecote of *Marxism Today*, with his swingeing attack on the immorality of the City of London — to a business audience that must have included a good few devote supporters of the "Broad Popular Alliance". Labour leaders have been much more diplomatic in their criticism of recent City scandals.

Salmon goes bananas

●Bananas started the downward slide of a former health chief, a bankruptcy court was told.

When Chair of SW Surrey health authority, **Patrick Salmon** found himself up the creek when he lost £100,000 of borrowed cash on a failed banana import deal. The boatload of fruit, not allowed into Britain, was "towed away into the Solent".

Still rising to the bait, Salmon borrowed another £35,000, which he handed over in cash towards a fishy gold bullion deal — followed by another £20,000 — only to find himself again left high and dry!

Health authority chairs are all personally appointed by Social Services Secretary Norman Fowler. If the luckless, half-baked Salmon got through the net, surely a few sharks, plus some Arfur Daleys and "Delboy" Trotters, must have got through too!

*(Information from **Health Service Journal**)*

National Abortion Campaign

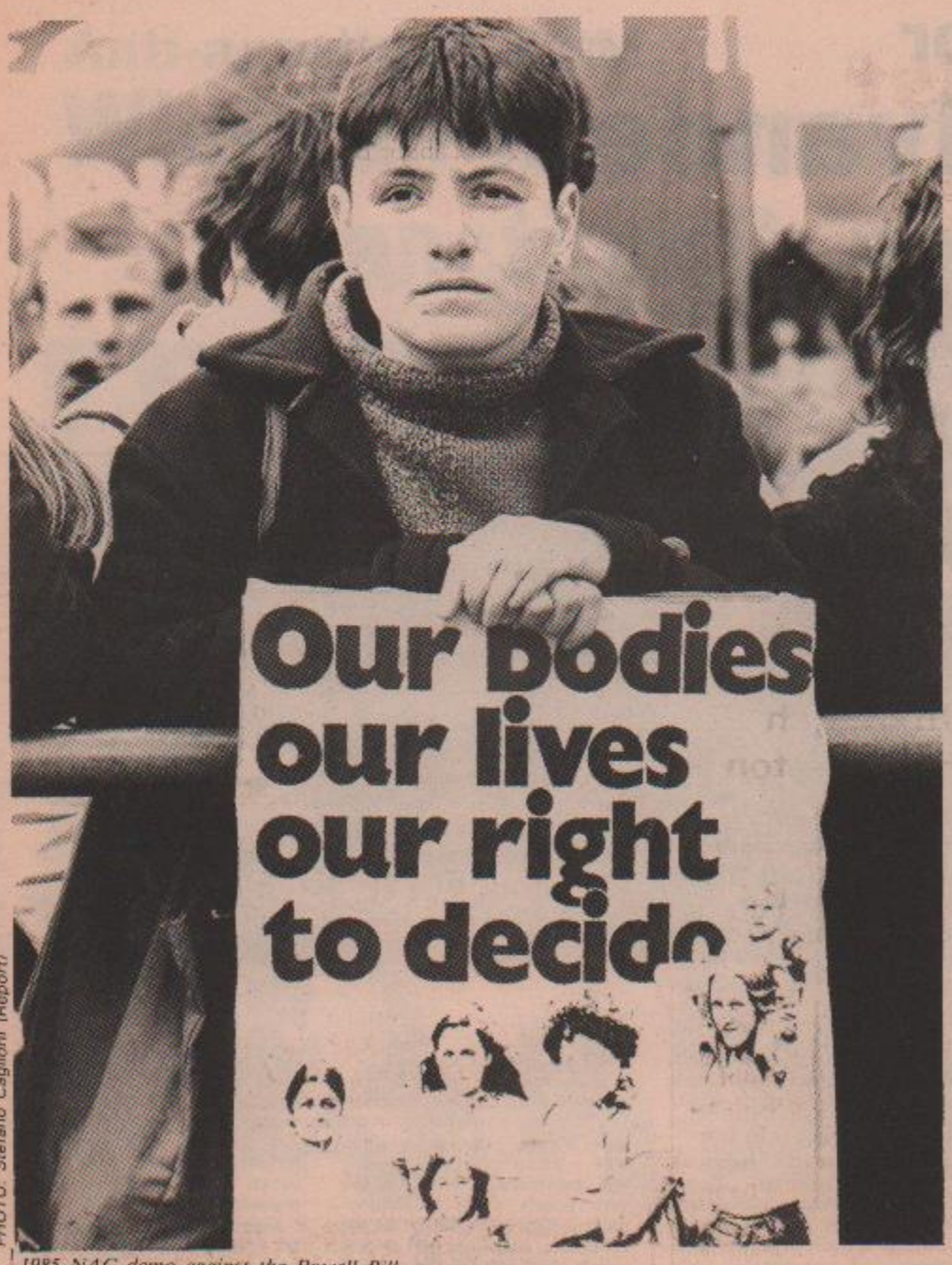


PHOTO: Stefano Caglioni (Report)

1985 NAC demo against the Powell Bill.

Twenty years after the Abortion Act:

NAC is still campaigning

On October 27th 1987, twenty years will have passed since the 1967 Abortion Act received the Royal Assent.

The National Abortion Campaign intends to use the six months following this (the Act came into force on April 27th 1968) to highlight both the benefits the Act has brought to millions of women and its shortcomings.

Irish Women

In particular, we are working closely with the Northern Ireland Abortion Law Reform Association to campaign for their demand to extend the 1967 Act to the six counties.

While we recognise (as they do) the limitations of the Act, its introduction in the province would be a tremendous step forward for women there.

At the moment, every year some 3,000 women (the offical figure — the reality is probably twice that) make the uncomfortable and expensive journey to the mainland for an abortion. With the threatened closure of the Liverpool ferry, that journey could become much worse.

Whilst we have lots of different ideas about how to mark the anniversary — including a national week of action, local activity, a large fund-raising benefit, and so on — the key activities will be determined by the needs and wishes of our Irish sisters.

In the meantime, we continue to be active. A Bill has been introduced into the House of Lords by a Bishop to reduce the legal time limit from 28 to 22 weeks, and if this is passed it could well find a lot of support in the House of Commons.

Very few women have late abortions, and recent medical advances mean that even fewer will need them in the future, but this only emphasises that those women who do are the most serious cases and should not be penalised. In practice, doctors tend to allow 2-4 weeks to be on the safe side. Therefore, a time limit of 22 weeks would mean few abortions done after 18 weeks, which would particularly penalise very young women and some older ones.

NAC has recently made a particular effort to get our message over to young women. Our new NAC News is a special young women's issue, with many of the articles being written by our younger members, and it includes a free poster with a Charter for Reproductive Rights for young women.

Our next NAC News will be a special international one for International Women's Day, and we also hope to be organising some activity during that week to demonstrate our solidarity with women struggling for abortion rights abroad.

Women are now facing court action in the Irish Republic, where SPUC have taken two clinics to court because they counsel women on abortion, and in Spain, where a liberalisation of the law has been declared unconstitutional after challenges by ultra-right forces.

Women from both these countries rely heavily on services provided in Britain and it is for their sakes, as much as for ourselves, that NAC must continue its campaign to safeguard and extend our rights.

NAC NEWS
Latest issue
— young women's special —
available for 78p including postage from
NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU.

PHOTO: Andrew Wiard (Report)

Youth Briefing

YS Regional Conferences:

Sound the alarm!

This year's LPYS regional conferences take place as usual from late January till early March. But they could be the last round of conferences in the present form.

As *Briefing* has already reported, proposals agreed at the Party's conference last year set the framework for reducing these conferences to little more than youth rallies without decision-making powers.

The package of proposals put forward by Tom Sawyer weakens the constitutional role of the YS, not least by removing the right of its National Conference to elect a representative onto the Party NEC, and increase the direct control over the YS of local regional and national party committees. Hardly the best way to increase the participation of young members of the Party.

Under attack

The whole of the left has an interest in fighting these proposals. Kinnock is at present steam-rollering over the selection procedures of local parties and preparing an assault on Women's Conference. The unilateral decision to postpone London Women's Conference, Greater London Labour Party Conference, as well as London Region YS Conference against the wishes of its regional committee, show that an assault on one section of the Party can't be separated from the others.

Not serious

Attacks on Labour's youth organisations are nothing new. What is new is that the YS leadership is not waging any serious fight against the attacks. Instead, in an astonishing display of double-think, *Militant* is welcoming the proposals as an important step in building the YS.

True, they demand more money and disagree with reducing the age limit to 21, but no amount of muttered prayer combined with requests for money is going to save the YS unless it mobilises itself and all possible allies to sound the warning.

The roles played at successive conferences by YS representatives Frances Curran and Linda Douglas in summing up *against* Black Sections and taking up places on the discredited Black and Asian Advisory Committee will not save them from the Kinnock juggernaut.

The Party leadership will act to remove anyone who stirs up trouble against its refusal to offer real improvements in young people's lives today. To offer real jobs, education, training, and housing for youth would cut right across Kinnock's election plans?

By Tracy Doyle and John Tuite

So the first thing these regional conferences should do is begin to defend the YS. This means not only "building the YS", as *Militant* naively claim — a task which is made increasingly hard by the attacks on budget and organisation. It also means seeking all available allies opposed to the Sawyer proposals to press home this debate on the YS's future in the Party and trade unions. Primarily those allies are to be found in LAW '86 which the YS must work with. We should be building towards a national mobilisation for Party Conference rejecting the Sawyer proposals.

To judge from the motions proposed by *Militant* suporters, other issues at the regional conferences in this general election year are likely to keep the YS out of tune with the politics of *Briefing*. No opposition to NATO, against self-organisation of black people and a position on Ireland that appears to be getting worse. (No more fudging from *Militant* on the issue of building a Northern Ireland Labour Party inside the partitioned six counties.)

It is also worth noting that London Region had not a single motion concerning the major industrial dispute occuring in its very heart, the print dispute. In only one area can *Briefing* supporters welcome the motions from *Militant*, and that concerns Lesbian and Gay Rights, where motions calling for work with LCLGR and a campaign around AIDS are to be supported.

On the face of it, it would seem likely that the YS regional conferences will continue the recent trend of increasing isolation and decreasing size. This makes it all the more important for the left and YS members to dismiss *Militant*'s triumphalist rhetoric of "we are building a mass YS". Instead, we urgently need to organise and mobilise all available allies to defend the very existence of the YS.



PHOTO: Andrew Wiard (Report)

Linda Douglas

Dayschool on Youth and Sexuality

Following the success of the last dayschool on international politics, *Youth Briefing* is holding a second dayschool on the theme of "Youth and Sexuality" on March 21st.

We will discuss not only the right wing attacks on youth sexuality and on any "deviations" from a family-based society but also the ways in which socialists can fight back.

Briefing has always recognised that control, whether ideological or economic, of the forms of social relationships is one of the major ways in which the ruling class reinforces its system. Despite the increasing number of women in the workforce in the past 10 years, the maintenance of the family as the basic unit of society has meant that the majority of women are forced into part-time, badly paid jobs.

Women's experience of the family continually falls short of the happy bourgeois ideal, with many women suffering rape, abuse or beatings by their husbands or fathers or other men in the family which are never reported.

AIDS has had a profound effect on the lives of many gay men and, by association, lesbians because of the rapid escalation of prejudice and homophobia. AIDS raises many questions for the left far beyond the response to government initiatives. The recent attacks on sex education in schools and the anti-gay rampage in the popular press show the state attempting to impose a monogamous, heterosexual norm on society and particularly young people.

The *Briefing Youth* dayschool will take up questions like these and provide a forum for young people to take forward the struggle for women's liberation and lesbian and gay liberation in the LPYS, student and labour movement. Watch future issues of *Briefing* for further details.

By Dani Ahrens
Youth Briefing

International Briefing

Trade unionists in El Salvador
On the advance

FENASTRAS, the Federation National Sindical de Trabajadores Salvadornos (National Trade Union federation of El Salvadorean Workers) is the largest and most influential trade union body in El Salvador. We had the good fortune to be invited to their 18th Congress in San Salvador last November and spent some time in their offices where we had a formal interview (with the aid of an interpreter) with some of their leaders.

The questions and answers should speak for themselves, but a few observations may be helpful.

The situation for trade unionists in El Salvador cannot really be compared with our situation in the UK. The severity and scope of the state repression, combined with a debilitating war, makes life for trade unionists extremely dangerous. Many Fenastras leaders are under 20 years old.

Their response on the question of the FMLN was unequivocal and clearly understandable in the circumstances. Fenastras' position is that the workers want peace and they call on the Duarte government to commence meaningful negotiations with the FMLN. Hopes of this are not assisted by the USA, who gave aid of $170.7m in 1980, $723.2m in 1984 and $45m in the first half of 1985. 45.6% goes directly to the war effort and a further 40.7% indirectly.

The economic situation in El Salvador was getting worse, even before the earthquake, which has accelerated the process. Wealth has always been and continues to be concentrated in a very few hands.

The purchasing power of urban workers has fallen by 17% in real terms over the last 5 years. Unemployment in the cities was 36% in 1984 and is now far worse and in rural areas "underemployment" is estimated to be around 80%.

Margaret Grant, (NALGO, Health Service Branch), Formerly Stirling / District Trades Council Executive
Bill Day, ASTMS
Nicaragua, Nov. 1986.



PHOTOS: Pietro Gigli (IFL)

Farmer brings fruit to guerrillas in El Salvador

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

***Q:* You now have a public office in central San Salvador and have just concluded an extremely successful Congress, so it would appear that the degree of trade union repression has lessened. How true is this? How openly can you operate and how much danger is there of full repression returning?**

Fenastras: There has been no significant improvement in the repression — only the methods have changed. Because of pressure from the US government, who are embarrassed by the glaring human rights violations of the Duarte regime, there have been some cosmetic changes — but they are only cosmetic. Before, in order to instil fear in the workers, they would kill trade union leaders and leave their bodies lying around, as an example — now the bodies are hidden. People simply "disappear".

There are no free trade union rights. Trade union leaders are not allowed into most workplaces and workers are not allowed to meet together at their place of work.

There were severe problems in the few months before Congress. For example, one of our affiliated unions, STITAS, a textile workers' union, had two separate disputes, one lasting 33 days and the other 18 days. SOICSES, the construction workers' union was on strike for 30 days before all the workers were sacked.

When workers try to organise the company instils fear... they repress them... work against them.

In El Salvador major disputes have to be referred to the Labour Ministry who are supposed to be independent. But I can't recall even one single instance when the findings are on the side of the workers — all cases are resolved in management's favour.

Really we are facing the same problems as always.

***Q:* Despite this, Fenastras is clearly growing and having at least some successes. How has this been possible?**

Fenastras: It is true that we have successes and that we are a growing organisation. This is because of the work we do in maintaining and enlarging our base membership. Also Fenastras gives good organisation and direction to affiliated unions and the different unions in the Federation support each other.

For example, during the recent textile workers strike other unions took solidarity action and held protests outside the CIRCA workplace. Fenastras was able to build up pressure on the owners and bring them round to direct negotiations with the union.

But, I must stress, the selective repression against union leaders continues. Just recently we had the case of Febe (Febe Elizabeth Velasquez, Fenastras' International Secretary) who was imprisoned for six days and also Rodolfo Prieto (General Secretary of SETA, a Fenastras affiliate) who was held for 30 hours.

Actions such as these are commonplace, along with the physical and psychological torture of union activists by, for example, threatening their families or pressurising them to admit a "connection" with the FMLN.

***Q:* What is the relationship, if any, beween Fenastras and the FMLN?**

Fenastras: There is none whatsoever. The government continually tries to manufacture a relationship to "justify" even more attacks on the unions. And if an individual trade unionist is "proved" to have links with the FMLN, they face years in prison or even death and cannot continue their union activities.

***Q:* How has the earthquake affected your work?**

Fenastras: It has created more problems — especially for the people whose homes were destroyed. The government has declared a state of emergency which makes things harder. Fenastras is managing to hold its own and the level of struggle has been maintained. We have had to shelve some of our short-term plans and will have to wait a little before we can move forward as we would like.

The government and employers are trying to use this catastrophe to further squeeze the workers. The Labour Ministry building was one of those damaged by the earthquake and, as I said, disputes have to be referred there. They moved to another building but wouldn't tell us where it was. It took nearly a month for us to track it down, which held back our work considerably.

Before the earthquake, there was a dispute going on at one of the hospitals, where the union organisation was strong. It was damaged in the 'quake, but not as badly as many buildings which have since re-opened, and the hospital has closed down. To date the workers are not able to work and are not getting paid.

The international aid which has been sent to the government is not going to the communities most damaged. Fenastras, and the churches have been working hard in these communities, trying to distribute the little aid that has been received by organisations which aren't controlled by the government.

We would ask those in the international labour movement to ensure that aid is not sent through government agencies but through the church or UNTS. In this way we can guarantee that it will go where it should.

***Q:* You mentioned UNTS (Unidad Nacional de los Trabajadores Salvadorenos). What is the relationship between Fenastras and UNTS, and other trade union organisations such as the CGT?**

Fenastras: First, whilst there are some other trade union organisations, outside Fenastras, who are independent of the government, the CGT and others like it certainly do not come into this category. To all intents and purposes there is no difference between them and the Duarte regime. As an example, the CGT have an affiliate which is supposedly a telecommunications union. It has six members, but is the organisation which the government recognises as the official trade union for the industry.

Incidentally it is also accepted by the International Telecommunication Trade Union Federation as the El Salvador representative. The Fenastras affiliate STET is not recognised, though it has well over one thousand members.

The formation of UNTS in February 1986 was an extremely important event for the workers in El Salvador. It brings together a whole range of progressive forces including the trade unions, agricultural workers, peasants groups and the co-operative movement, who are united in their desire for peace, equality and human rights.

We recognise that we must be concerned with broader aspects of life for working people, and we are committed to working in UNTS, though Fenastras as a federation of independent trade unions still has a separate function — in carrying out the work we've referred to.

***Q:* Throughout the world there is a connection between trade union activity and the wider political arena. This would seem to be even more the case in El Salvador. What is Fenastras' position? Do you ever see either Fenastras or UNTS putting up candidates in elections?**

Fenastras: Fenastras is not politically affiliated. We are an independent trade union organisation. Our main aim is to improve the wages and working conditions of our members, whilst at the same time strengthening trade union organisation throughout the country.

As can be seen from our "fighting programme", we are concerned about democratic rights, reform of the political constitution, the repeal of anti-labour and anti-popular laws, agrarian reform, the plight of thousands displaced by the war, and so on. UNTS is not a political party. I don't know what might happen in the future but to date there has never been an election with a single candidate standing who represented the interests of the workers. So we have never advocated support for any political party.

***Q:* Does Fenastras organise white collar workers as well as those in industry?**

Fenastras: Most certainly. We have affiliates in a cross-section of areas, including bank and insurance workers, government employees, private offices and factories, hospitals, quasi-governmental institutions, etc.

***Q:* How easy have you found it to recruit women to the trade union movement?**

Fenastras: I don't think it is any easier or harder. In fact, more than 50% of Fenastras' members are women. In some unions this is especially the case. Two examples are CIRCA in the textile industry, which has more female than male members and where, with one exception, the Executive Committee is entirely comprised of women, and the fish processing industry where the union membership is 95% women. Women seem to have more consciousness.

***Q:* Finally, what can workers and trade unionists in other countries most usefully do to assist you in your struggle?**

Fenastras: International solidarity is very important for us. When someone is captured the more international pressure that can be built, the greater is the chance of the person being released at an early stage. The case of Febe Velasque is a good example of this. Our friends in other countries were able to build up pressure quickly by contacting the Justice Minister and Duarte, which helped greatly to ensure her release.

Effective networks for communication need to be built up. We would like contact names and telephone numbers in Britain. Hopefully we can build up a permanent relationship with trade unionists in Scotland.

Economically, it is a particularly difficult time, especially after the earthquake. As I said before, the government uses it as an excuse to squeeze the movement. Workers are very poorly paid. Unemployment is high (over 40%). As the economic situation gets worse things get worse for the unions.

At the same time, at our Congress, we have just agreed on a number of future projects: schools for union leaders to teach them skills; schools for women trade union members; we want to set up a women's committee; and we want to have workshops in carpentry, photography, etc., to help young people gain some skills. Any financial assistance would be very welcome and would help us to build a more efficient organisation.

Can we say how pleased we are to have trade unionists from Scotland to visit us. Please tell other trade unionists that our door is always open to them. We would like to pass on greetings to workers in Scotland and look forward to more contact with them in the future.



Relatives queue to enter Mariona Prison in San Salvador on visiting day.

Anti-apartheid AGM

Who can implement sanctions?

By Fred Leplat
ILEA NALGO delegate
to AAM AGM



PHOTO: Jez Coulson (IFL)

Anti-apartheid AGM, with Bob Hughes in the Chair

The Anti-Apartheid Movement's Annual General Meeting, attended by over 700 individual members, witnessed the culmination of the long-running contest between supporters of the City AA Group and the AAM National Committee.

Newspapers and leaflets were banned from the hall and bags were searched at the entrance. Throughout the meeting, Chairperson Bob Hughes bureaucratically manipulated the agenda and was greeted by regular heckling from City AA supporters.

Hughes refused to take a proper count on the vote to adopt the Standing Orders Committee Report (which dropped some resolutions from the agenda and put a guillotine on others). When City AA supporters vociferously denounced this, Hughes adjourned the meeting and cleared the hall. After the meeting was reconvened, thirty minutes later, a count was finally taken and the report was adopted by two to one.

The meeting amended the AAM's constitution in a number of significant ways. Future AGMs will be attended by delegates from local branches and affiliated organisations.

This extension of constitutional democracy could be a step towards making the AAM a real, mass-based democratic organisation. Unfortunately, this development has been linked not only to the continuing bureaucratic attacks on City AA and its supporters, but also to the introduction of new rules which enable the AAM National Committee to discipline and restrict the work of individual members and whole groups. Furthermore, the National Committee now has the sole right to submit constitutional amendments.

A single-issue mass campaign like AAM cannot prosper under such bureaucratic control. The National Committee should rescind the disaffiliation of City AA, which should, in turn, recognise that attempts to pack the AGM are no way to win political debates.

The AGM endorsed the continuing campaign for "People's Sanctions" — boycotts of South African goods, pickets of banks, supermarkets, etc. The brief discussion on trade union work failed, however, to develop the crucial aspect of this campaign, which remains the organised refusal of workers to handle South African and Namibian goods.

Actions such as those taken by Dunne's Stores workers in Dublin and workers in Portsmouth Health Authority should be supported and extended. The National Committee's "People's Sanctions" campaign seems to attach only minor importance to getting British workers to impose sanctions themselves, rather than waiting for the state to do it.

This is a reflection of the Committee's continuing search for respectability and "all-party support". The launch of the "Manifesto for Sanctions" and the lobby of all parliamentary candidates is clearly addressed to the SLP/Liberals and Tory wets.

The real question has not been faced: how will we police any sanctions introduced by a Labour government? Have they already forgotten the lessons of Harold Wilson's sanctions-busting?

One result of this "apolitical" strategy was the appalling public letter by Bob Hughes and AAM Scottish Secretary Brian Filing urging Commonwealth countries not to boycott the Games in Edinburgh because Scottish people would suffer.

The AAM must be built into a popular mass movement that can tap the hatred for apartheid felt by millions, especially youth, and thus mount a real challenge to Britain's imperialist role in Africa.

This cannot happen unless the bureaucratic and political stranglehold of the AAM by the Stalinists and their allies is broken.

Unfortunately, the main opposition to the misleadership of the AAM — the City Group and the RCG (Revolutionary Communist Group) — are not up to the job. They have shown the potential of the movement in linking up with youth, women and black people; they have rightly demanded support for the 24-hour picket outside South Africa House; they have rightly called for direct links with all organisations fighting apartheid in South Africa.

But their limited tactics of heckling and disruption, however understandable, have alienated most of the independent AAM activists and are used as an excuse by the National Committee for suppression of debate.

Only independent action by the working class can give the South African people the solidarity they need. The AAM should focus on the labour movement and carry its call for sanctions into workplaces, trade unions, and Labour Party branches. Socialists should make this the central theme of the March month of action and the national demonstration in October.

In this way, we can bring new forces — from the labour movement, from youth, from the black community — into the AAM to challenge the National Committee and win the fight against apartheid.

Chirac has a rough ride ahead!

By John Mansfield and
Sue Laker
Paris

The events of the last two months have certainly tarnished Chirac's "tough guy" image.

Following his disastrous encounter with the student movement in December the premier's main hope was to let things blow over, as he opted for an extended Christmas break. In under two weeks, however, the biggest strike movement for years was gathering pace.

The first sign of this was the train drivers' strike, launched from Paris-Nord on December 18th. Discontent on the SNCF had been building up over several years. The strikers' demands centred on conditions of work, which for train drivers are notoriously hard and anti-social.

Regular meal breaks are practically unheard of, and drivers are often forced to take the 9-hour break between shifts in dormitories surrounded by machine noise. Statistics reveal the consequent high divorce rate and low life expectancy (58) in the job.

On top of this, over the last five years, one-driver trains have become the rule. A series of fatal accidents in the summer of 1985 led to a strike about safety, but no review of conditions and working practices has since occurred. Salaries were also an issue, with 1 in 2 SNCF workers earning less than 6,000 FF a month. Chirac's policy of a 2% pay limit in the public sector was obviously derisory.

The final straw was a proposed new "grille" salary structure, with promotion on merit rather than seniority.

The impetus for strike action came from the base. At the station where the strike began, the majority of workers — like most in France — are not unionised. The CGT (Communist union federation) was at first unenthusiastic — which helped to reinforce the existing distrust of union organisations.

From early on this strike set itself apart in the forms of organisation adopted. Local strike committees in each depot formed a National Co-ordinating body. Although the make-up of the strike committees varied from place to place, all were characterised by their democratic functioning, with recallable delegates. Independent of the trade union organisations, they could organise both unionised and non-unionised workers.

The National Co-ordinating body asserted that "it is the General Meetings of strikers which are the sovereign bodies and should decide everything," (statement, 29.12.86).

The conflict led to pressure for action throughout the public sector. Pay grievances spread the strike to the RATP (metros and buses), the EDF (electricity workers) and to some extent the post office workers.

A railworkers' rally in central Paris was greeted with a power cut, extinguishing lights and traffic signals. Travel in the capital became virtually impossible as the RATP strike hardened.

Maintaining momentum at this stage was all-important. There were demands for the unions to call a general public sector strike. But faced with Chirac's intransigence, and the lack of lead from the unions, a drift back to work began, leading to the opening of negotations.

The working class had scented Chirac's vulnerability after one major defeat. The premium put on keeping wage increases below the 2% guideline, coupled with abolition of taxes on large fortunes and amnesty for those found exporting capital illegally, has fuelled discontent. This time, however, any major policy retreat would have signalled catastrophe for the government.

The plight of the Franc added to Chirac's worries and was only partially alieviated by the face-saving formula worked out at the EMS (re-evaluating the Mark, rather than devaluing the Franc).

Chirac's handling of the crisis left him open to attack from different quarters. Even coalition partner Barre expressed misgivings, and the National Front called an anti-strike, anti-government demo. In turn, the RPR organised its own anti-strike demo of outraged shopkeepers brandishing uncooked dough and the like!

Mitterrand, wanting to appear the stronger partner in the "cohabitation", met strikers on New Years Day ("My father was a railworker.") Chirac refused to talk and fell 7 points in the polls.

However, Mitterrand later stated that "absolute priority must be given to the fight against inflation." Only under pressure from the movement will he support workers in struggle.

Having gambled the credibility of his government, it was in one sense an important victory for Chirac. However, although the strikers' main demands weren't met some concessions were forced. The infamous "grille" has been shelved; Chirac's 2% maximum now looks more like a 3% minimum, and negotiations are continuing. But perhaps the main achievement of the strikes is the increased willingness of people to take on the government, and already, with the civil service pay round, fresh confrontations loom.

Watershed elections in 26 counties

The watershed 26 County Election in Ireland on February 17th will not result in any dramatic policy changes.

At a time of acute political and economic crisis, with the government's popularity slumped to an all-time low, the opposition, Fianna Fail, has captured 51% support in recent opinion polls.

By Piers Mostyn
Holborn & St Pancras
CLP

The direct cause of the election is the break up of the coalition between the Irish Labour Party and Fine Gael. This is not due to any sudden critique by Labour of Fine Gael's pro-NATO, Thatcherite, austerity policies. Rather it is because after 14 years of yo-yoing in and out of coalition government, Labour's support has halved from its original 17%.

If Fianna Fail win, as generally predicted, Garret Fitzgerald is unlikely to remain leader. If Fine Gael manage, by some miracle, to scrape together a coalition government with the Progressive Democrats (PD) (a new party formed as a breakaway from Fianna Faill, Haughey's future seems similarly insecure.

However, even a new PD-FG bloc that doesn't win will herald a new potential for the growth of a homogenous and coherent rightist current.

The keenest interest will be around the performance of Sinn Fein, which has discarded its traditional refusal to take seats in the Dublin parliament to pose a real challenge in the 26 counties. The Republicans threaten trouble for the establishment parties of the South, being the only party of any significance to break from the pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist mould of "Free State" politics.

However, Gerry Adams has warned against using this election as a meaningful test of Sinn Fein's capabilities, pointing to the one after as a more realistic target — enabling the development of a serious electoral intervention.

The main parties' agreement to avoid the contentious issues of the North and the Anglo-Irish Accord reveals their true colours. It also leaves Sinn Fein as the only party in the election with a clear political alternative on the national question.

Steering the debate away from these questions and towards "economic" issues will hardly avoid trouble for the capitalist parties. The political crisis of the 1970s and '80s, the result of the inherent weakness of Irish capital and industry, has led them to give a free hand to multinationals. They have bowed to the austerity dictates of the IMF and EEC and have built a national debt of "third world" proportions.

The 250,000 registered unemployed (in a population of 3 million) has brought a return to high level emigration — the biggest single blemish on the outgoing coalition government from the electorate's viewpoint.

With none of the "constitutional" parties offering any serious solutions to these problems, Sinn Fein has an opportunity to provide an alternative if it fulfills its promise of presenting a radical social and economic programme, alongside militant opposition to British imperialism.

As Kinnock joins the mole-hunt:

MORE GOVERNMENT POLITICAL CENSORSHIP

Hot on the heels of the spy and City scandals come the disclosures on the spy satellite Zircon. Despite the banning of the BBC programme revealing the £500 million secret signals project, all the relevant details have been published in *New Statesman*. The Special Branch are now desperately searching for the mole who leaked the information to Duncan Campbell, are searching the *New Statesman* offices and interviewing Campbell.

The programme, the Secret Society, was banned on security grounds. But is this the real reason? If it is, why was there no injunction to stop the publication in *New Statesman*? If it is, why was the personal writ taken out against Campbell *after* the leaks were out?

In fact, the MOD knew for at least 6 months that Campbell was investigating the Zircon project, that he had discovered that Heseltine, then Minister of Defence, had approved it in 1983, and that the project had been hidden from the Public Accounts Committee.

The bungled attempt to suppress the BBC

By Jane Kelly
Peckham CLP

programme after the information was out was *political* censorship. The excuse that the revelations on Zircon would cause "serious damage" to our "national security" is a nonsense. If it was a question of national security, they could have stopped the programme being made at all.

In Parliament, the attempt to injunct 15 MPs seeing the film was stopped as unconstitutional. Instead, the Speaker barred the door!

But perhaps the most disgusting spectacle of all was Kinnock's outdoing Thatcher in the defence of "national security". Instead of attacking the decisions made by a small unaccountable group, decisions kept secret from Parliament and the Public Accounts Committee — let alone ask what we were doing developing spy satellites in the first place — Kinnock simply criticised the imcompetence of the government in their inability to stop the *New Statesman* article being published. He *supported* the government's late attempt to do so.

No wonder the Tories are still well ahead in the Opinion Polls...

Non-alignment Conference

About 100 people attended the first conference of the Campaign for Non-alignment. This reflects the strength of interest in the issue, despite the low key publicity for the Conference.

Discussions were lively, but suffered from a lack of participation by peace and labour movement activists. The main discussion in the plenary sessions was concerned with the nature of the Non-Aligned Movement and the tasks of socialists in Britain.

Briefing supporters argued that any campaign coming out of this conference must focus on British withdrawal from NATO.

There was a lot of enthusiasm for initiating a campaign and anyone who wants to be involved should contact Jeremy Corbyn, Red Rose Centre, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7.

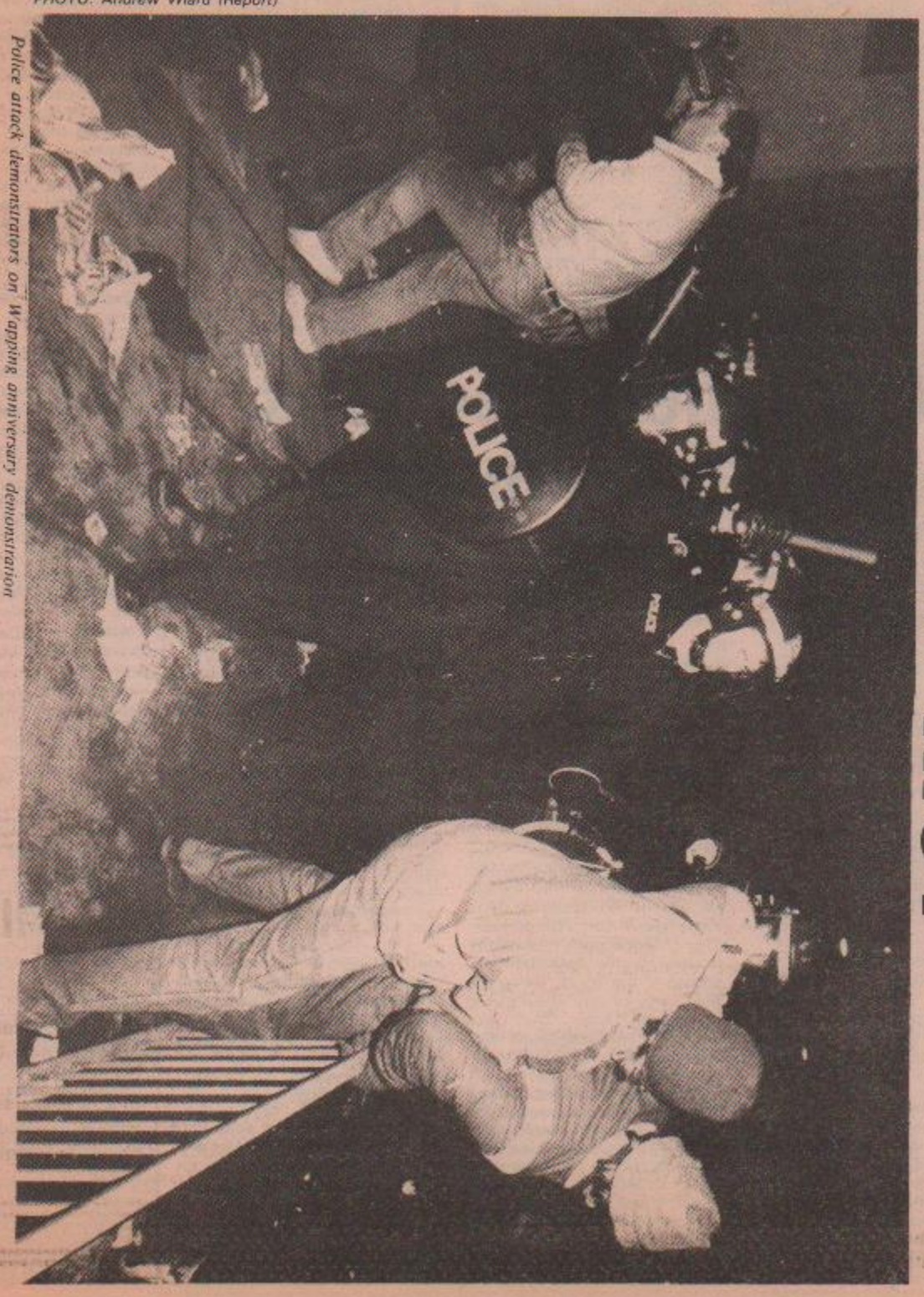
Dani Ahrens

Labour Movement Conference on Central America
Peace, Self-determination and reconstruction

Saturday, February 28th
10am-6pm
Congress House, Gt Russell St, London WC1
Organised by: El Salvador Solidarity Campaign

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PHOTO: Andrew Wiard (Report)



Police attack demonstrators on Wapping anniversary demonstration

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

WAPPING ANNIVERSARY
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