LABOUR
BRIEFING
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40p

WOMEN FIGHT BACK!

Women have been singled out for the full brunt of Tory attacks since 1979. Cuts in welfare, unemployment, deterioration in housing, education, health services — all have especially affected women.

And despite what Edwina Currie says, we're not suffering because we're ignorant, or because we're letting our husbands travel on business trips abroad (what husbands? what business trips abroad?) alone.

The reality under the Tories has been very different.

By Jane Kelly
Peckham CLP

Despite the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts of the '70s, women in work still earn only 75% of the male wage, although they make up 45% of the workforce. The position of working women, who still bear the brunt of child care responsibilities, has been exploited by Thatcher in the restructuring of the workforce and the huge increase of part-time employment. Over 4.5 million people work part-time in Britain, the highest in Europe. Of these, 90% are women.

Along with temporary workers, also predominatly women, this female workforce is overwhelmingly excluded from employment protection and benefits. The high turnover in part-time jobs, due to boredom, poor conditions, low pay and child care problems, means that such workers rarely reach the qualifying period of two year (working over 16 hours a week) or 5 years (working over 8 hours a week) for various benefits and rights.

As one supermarket chain manager put it, "we have 100% turnover every 6 months on the tills — they get burnt out." And he meant the women, not the tills!



THE VULTURE EDWINA

Even the current meagre benefits and maternity rights are now under attack. If you work part time, you will have to work 20 hours a week for 5 years, or you will have:

★ no right to protection from unfair dismissal;

★ no right to return to your job after a baby;

★ no right to earnings-related maternity benefit;

★ no right to a safe job if your work endangers your pregnancy.

The Maternity Alliance have set up Maternity Emergency; a campaign to fight these proposed changes. They are organising a rally in April.

Maternity Emergency:
59-61 Camden High St,
London NW1 JL.

Women are fighting back, just as they always have. In the '60s and early '70s, strikes by the Ford machinists and the Night Cleaners foreshadowed the demands of the emerging Women's Liiberation Movement.

Later Black women at Grunwicks, women in the NHS, women in the mining communities and supporting the strikers at Wapping, man y of whom are themselves low paid women workers, have all shown the strength and courage that is characteristic of women.

There is a long history of women fighting for their liberation and for the liberation of others, and International Women's Day on March 8th is a reminder of them.

The traditional demands of the Movement remain to be fulfilled, but along with the demands for child care, abortion and contraception rights and equal pay, we must also attack the exploitation experienced by part-time women workers in Thatcher's Britain.

Thatcher's answer, Currie's answer, to unemployment may be new, part-time jobs on a massive scale, saving the bosses money, giving them a more "flexible" (exploitable) workforce. But the alternative is to shorten the working week for all, with no loss of pay. Sharing the work in this way would make it unprofitable for the bosses to super-exploit their women workers, and would undermine unemployment. A fight for this should be taken up alongside the other women's demands throughout the trade union and labour movement.

International Women's Day: see centre pages.



PHOTO: Carlos Augusto (IFL)

French and American women join to protest at the defeated Equal Rights Amendment bill in the USA, depriving women of protection under the US constitution.

Women are 45% of the workforce, *but women earn 75% of the male wage.*
40% of women work part-time, *yet only 5% of men work part-time.*
4.5 million people work part-time; *90% are women.*
600,000 people are employed as home-workers, *80-90% are women, mostly Black and/or immigrants.*

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Home News

Salisbury Review on *Briefing*:

More dangerous than *Militant?*

An article in the latest issue of the right wing *Salisbury Review* singles out *Labour Briefing* as the standard-bearer of what it calls the "New Model Labour Party" — the result of "a decade of entryism by numerous Communist/Marxist revolutionaries... hardworking, highly intelligent, politically astute, and a major force in British politics."

By our Special Correspondent

The article dwells at length on the alleged anti-racist misdemeanous of Brent Council (it was written *before* the McGoldrick affair) and concludes that "the policies of the New Model Labour Party (are) part of a plan to destabilise our society and create the conditions for a Communist-style revolution."

The author then informs his readers, no doubt horrified at his tale of Town Hall Bolsheviks, that "the technical Marxist jargon speaks of 'transitional demands'... the transition being from an open democracy to a Communist dictatorship."

He then focuses on *Labour Briefing*, from its origins as *London Labour Briefing* in 1981 to the Annual General Meeting at the Polytechnic of Central London last May, where, according to the *Salisbury Review*, we "decided to relaunch *Labour Briefing* as a fortnightly national tabloid and adopted a sweeping revolutionary Communist/Marxist programme."

After quoting at length from one of the documents presented to the AGM, the author explains: "It is policies such as these which are now being pushed in Labour's municipal strongholds up and down the country — not by the Militant tendency... but by a different and more dangerous, because less visible, revolutionary group."

By now foaming at the mouth, the author concludes with a ringing warning to the Tory right in the shires. Brent is Britain's Czechoslovakia — "a faraway country of which we know nothing" — the place where the appeasement of the Left must be stopped."

Before *Briefing* supporters preen themselves too much on having climbed the dizzy heights of right wing demonology, I should point out that a cursory glance a the *Salisbury Review* reveals just how little the right actually knows about the left.

They seem unaware of the arguments between Stalinists and Trotskyists, no less the many quarrels within these two currents. The ILEA is described in one article as "Militant Tendency dominated". One writer appears to believe Fabians are Marxists.

By the way, the article on the Labour Left is headed by a quote from a Ken Livingstone interview in *City Limits*. Yes, it's the bit where Ken explained that Lenin and Mao would have shot *Labour Briefing* supporters for their "self-indulgence", and that he could understand why.

Perhaps this citation has escaped Ken's notice. By now he must have taken the old advice: never read your press clippings, just weigh them.

Contributors to the latest *Salisbury Review* ("A quarterly magazine of Conservative thought") include:
MPs:
John Biggs-Davison, Conservative, Epping Forest
Higher Education:
Norman Barry, Professor of Politics, Buckingham
R.A.D. Grant, Lecturer in English, Glasgow
Beverly Halstead, Reader in geology, Reading
Paul Helm, Philosophy, Liverpool
David J. Levy, Senior Lecturer in education, Middlesex Poly
Dennis O'Keefe, Senior Lecturer in education, North London Poly
A.W. Purdue, teacher in history, Open University
Roger Scruton, Professor of Aesthetics, Birkbeck college, University of London
Schools:
Ray Honeyford, ex-headteacher (now a "freelance writer")
Patricia Stoll, teacher in "a North London comprehensive"
Jonathan Worthen, English teacher at "a comprehensive school in Essex".
Social work:
David Dale, social worker, London Borough of Westminster
Francis Gardom, priest worker, St Stephen's Church, Lewisham



PHOTO: Broadwater Photograpic

Broadwater Farm trials update

January 28: Gary Potter's second trial for affray ends like the first — with a hung jury. Despite continuous police pressure on other youths to give evidence, the prosecution are still unable to produce real evidence of Potter's offence. We have yet to see whether Potter will be forced to stand trial a third time.

January 30: Paul Barrett, 15 years old at the time of his arrest last January, was treated in police custody contrary to the codes of practice under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. The only evidence against him was alleged "confessions" secured from other defendants under police pressure. The result: a hung jury. Barrett awaits a retrial.

Februrary 6: James Roberts, 19, was acquitted by a jury of all three charges against him: affray, petrol bombs, and handling stolen goods. The jury heard that police threatened Roberts several times during interrogation, saying "You are lucky you gave yourself in or we would have come round and done your mum the same way we did Mrs Jarrett." Roberts, it turns out, wasn't even on the estate the night of the uprising.

February 9: A leading prosecution witness in the trial of six youth for the alleged murder of PC Blakelock admitted in court that he had lied to police in interviews and in previous court appearances. Jason Cobham, 18, has already admitted theft and threatening behaviour and was fined £200. Subsequently, his evidence was used to convict his former friend Simon MacMinn, and will be used against four others awaiting trial, as well as one of the six charged with murder. Cobham admitted that police had found him a place to live, "minded" him 24 hours a day, gave him money, and paid most of his bills.

The jailing of Phil Penn

One of our comrades, Phil Penn, has been jailed for 12 months (8 suspended) for assault. He is a highly respectable member of our Central Committee, a party member for 18 years, active in the trade union movement and recently in campaigns such as that on the Guildford Four.

Our concern in this case is that members of another organisation claiming to be part of the labour movement were, apart from the arresting officers, the *only* police witnesses. This would be like miners giving evidence against miners in the recent strike.

By Dave Temple Chair, Workers' Revolutionary Party/Workers' Press

As you may know, in October 1985, the Workers' Revolutionary Party expelled its former leader Gerry Healy for sexual abuse, violence and slanders against members of the organisation; charges he never contested. A small group of party functionaries — including Corin and Vanessaa Redgrave, Sheila Torrance and Richard Price — supported Healy and were expelled by the majority. This group then formed a bogus party calling itself the "Workers Revolutionary Party" and publishing a newspaper *Newsline*.

Phil Penn was arrested and charged after a demonstration called by the print unions at Wapping, on May 3rd 1986. The events, as reported in court, were as follows:

- In the *News Line* of May 1st 1986, the Workers' Notebook column carried a crude and provocative attack on Phil, insulting his intellect and presenting him as ignorant and illiterate, speaking in grunts.
- On the May 3rd Wapping march, as the conflict between demonstrators and police became increasingly fierce, Phil went to fetch his camera. Once away from the main body of demonstators, he came across members of the Healy-Torrance group. They verbally abused him, taunting him with quotes from the above-mcntioned article. He refused to be provoked.
- Four of them, Richard Price, Eric Rogers, Paul Williams and another man, then attacked him physically, Phil damaged the eye of one of his assailants. Only Phil was arrested.

No organisation calling itself socialist would collaborate with the police against members of the labour movement. This is a point of principle. But members of the Healy-Torrance group eagerly acted as police witnesses.

Three of the four men who attacked Phil did not appear in court but two women members of the Healy-Torrance group gave evidence which Phil vigorously contested. Had he been found guilty on the charge of wounding with intent, he would undoubtedly have been given a much longer custodial sentence.

This is not the first time the Healy-Torrance group have acted in this way. Six of them appeared as police witnesses in Sheffield Crown Court in January this year after an incident between themselves and members of the International Communist Party. On this occasion the court did not believe them and the defendant was found not guilty.

We should point out that members of the Healy-Torrance group again attacked and beat up Phil Penn on June 8th in Leicester. They used sticks and knives. The police wished to prosecute his attackers, but, as a matter of principle, Phil refused to act as a witness and the case could not go forward.

We are asking all labour movement organisations to condemn the anti-working class actions of the Healy-Torrance group, which were responsible for the jailing of Phil Penn. Mesages of support and inquiries should be sent to:

Workers Revolutionary Party/Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS.

Defend Lesbian and Gay rights

Defend the Wombourne 12!

On December 21st 12 young lesbians and gay men were arrested in South Staffordshire for challenging councillor Bill Brownhill, the Tory who wants to "cure" AIDS by gassing 90% of lesbians and gays.

They were remanded in custody for seven days in prisons and detention centres around the country. The magistrates collaborated with the police to remand the 12 after it was claimed that not a single address could be verified. This is just another round of police lies — another attack on lesbian and gay rights.

At the defence campaign meeting on January 29th the decision was taken to mobilise for a demonstration at the court on the day of the trial — February 23rd. A resolution was also drafted for people to take to their organisations, trade union and party branches, and their local trades councils:

"This ... fully supports the action of members of the Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement and Nottingham Lesbian and Gay Youth organisation in confronting councillor Brownhill over his attacks on lesbian and gay people.

We support the demand for equal rights for lesbians and gay men and urge all our members to support the activities of the Wombourne 12 Defence Campaign."

The London branch of Defend the Wombourne 12 meets each Thursday at the Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, N7, near Finsbury Park tube.

We've delegated defence campaigners to go and round up student unions; lesbian and gay youth groups; local authority gay groups, women's committees, police units, etc. We still need to mobilise *areas* of the country. The London-based part of the campaign will try and arrange for all of the South of England to be covered, so that lesbian and gay groups, businesses, peace centre, party branches, police campaigns, etc., can be nudged. Who can help?

Campaigners need to be able to get in touch with each other, and to contact organisations that have yet to be drawn in to the campaign. We'll make a list, though not without the consent of the people on it.

When we've got phone numbers, we'll be ringing up people who've come to meetings or declared an interest, to ask them to do things like collect, leaflet, get us invited to speak, pass our resolution, draw in new groups to the campaign, arrange transport, and organise benefits. You can always say no. But we will be asking you!

PUBLIC MEETING
Support Viraj Mendis in Sanctuary

Monday March 2nd, 7.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1
(nearest tube Holborn)
Speakers:
★Rev David Haslam ★Manchester VMDC ★Fight Racism! Fight Fascism! ★City of London AA Group ★Kings Cross Women's Centre ★CPSA (Queen Anne's Gate branch) ★Jeremy Corbyn MP

MEET
Thurdays, 7.30pm, County Hall, London

PICKET
Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1
(opposite St James Park tube)
Fridays — 1-2pm

CONFERENCE
Stop the deportations!
April 11/12
Manchester Town Hall
Info: 01 837 1688

DEMONSTRATE!
Join VMDC contingent on City of London AA Group's demo to racist South African Embassy
Assemble: 1pm, Whittington Park, Holloway Road (Archway tube).

"I will not voluntarily return to my death in Sri Lanka... I have no alternative but to seek public sanctuary." ***Viraj Mendis***

Contact: Viraj Mendis London Support Group, c/o BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX, tel. 01 837 1688

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

No cuts: anywhere, anytime!



PHOTO: John Smith (IFL)

Trade unionists strike against rate-capping: support from trade unionists over budget questions requires support for workers from Councillors.

In the next month Labour councils throughout the land will finalise their budgets for '87/'88.

This process may have attracted less publicity than recent years, but the choices Councils make will be equally crucial.

Curbing local government spending was a fundamental plank of the Tories' strategy from the day they took office: first, because it represents one quarter of all public spending which the Tories are committed to slashing, and secondly because the Tories needed to undermine all potential seats of resistance to their onslaught against the labour movement.

For socialists the responsibility for funding local government and current financial crisis lies squarely with the Tory government.

The response of the Labour leadership to this crisis has been disgraceful, if predictable. Frequently they joined the media attacks on Labour councils, they actively fought to undermine the struggle of Lambeth and Liverpool in '85, and have given no guarantee to fund local government services at an adequate level if re-elected.

Consequently, Left wing councils and councillors have been left isolated clutching at any straws to avoid the devastation of jobs and services which the Tories seek.

Those on the "soft left" have adopted the "dented shield" approach — any variety of creative accounting to "balance" the books, avoid a confrontation, and wait for the return of a Labour government.

In practice, these secretive juggling exercises have led to hidden cuts in the form of vacancy freezes, or cynical disputes with the workforce to save on wages. They have sabotaged any chance of a national fight to force the government to grant more money.

Briefing alone has brought together almost all those committed to consistently defending jobs and services. *Briefing* gave unconditional (though not uncritical) support to Liverpool and Lambeth and will do so again for any Labour Council which takes on the Tories to defend or extend its jobs and services.

We will support any Council workforce fighting against open or hidden cuts, or deterioration in its conditions and services.

Briefing believes that Labour councils should prepare their budgets through an extensive process of discussion and consultation with local community groups, Party and union organisations and their Council workforce in order to establish clearly the social needs of the borough. They should organise a massive campaign to win full community and workforce backing for their projected spending and the demand that central government foot the bill, linking up with other Councils around the country.

That is the only way to defeat the Tories' devastation of local government finance.

Within such an agreed framework there are differences within *Briefing* about the best tactics to adopt. Some comrades feel that unlimited borrowing or large rate rises are acceptable tactics to implement radical manifesto commitments.

But after a long discussion within *Briefing*, drawing on the experience of recent years the majority of *Briefing* supporters have rejected both these approaches.

Unlimited borrowing may seem initially attractive, given the defeat of Lambeth and Livepool, but its drawbacks are overwhelming. Already the government is moving to block off leaseback deals and deferred purchase schemes from further use, though schemes entered into before government changes are still legal. "Capitalisation" of areas of revenue spending to avoid goverment grant penalties will therefore increasingly eat into the Council's capital programme.

In other words — deferred cuts, to be added to the additional interest to be repaid to finance houses on the extended borrowing schemes undertaken.

But unlimited borrowing is also wrong because it demobilises and divides those who should be united in fighting the Tories. Ever more complex financial tricks by a handful of experts in each individual borough replace a united mass campaign of opposition. It puts off the struggle each year, while the Council's miraculous survival undermines its claim to need more central funds.

Nor are large rate rises a one-off solution for the non-ratecapped boroughs to expand services and start equal opportunity policies, especially in areas where the Tories previously had control and held down the rates.

The experience of other boroughs, now ratecapped, is that big rate rises do attack working class living standards, and tend to identify such attacks with radical equality policies, thereby bolstering popular opposition to such measures.

Indeed, there is a serious case in the context of establishing a genuine social needs budget for socialists in areas of high rates to consider rate reductions.

The latter course threatens to undermine even next year's campaign. When the ILEA introduces a massive cuts budget next month, and when other Councils blunder through the year lurching from vacancy freezes to outright cuts as the money runs out, all socialists must stand shoulder to shoulder with all those resisting. They will be that much more effective to have consistently argued for a strategy of no cuts in jobs, services or living standards in every single borough.

Of course socialists cannot run away from local government because the situation is so bleak and the chances of success seem so remote. But it is better to risk isolation in telling the truth this year — that only a deficit "needs" budget can begin to meet the social needs of the borough and prepare a campaign for taking on the government — than to take responsibility for storing up "deferred" cuts or raising rates through the roof in order to "buy another year".

Minority View

No cuts — and no collusion with Tory rate-capping!

Threats of surcharge, disqualification and government commissioners now make it far more difficult to mobilise support for confrontation strategy.

So such a strategy has to be carefully planned and must recognise the need to convince people that there is no alternative.

We totally agree with the Steering Committee majority's position of opposition to cuts, jobs losses, rent rises and large rate increases. All Councils should adopt a needs budget, including full implementation of all Manifesto commitments, as rapidly as possible and if this can only be achieved with a deficit budget then that is the correct strategy.

On the other hand, if a needs budget can be implemented by extended borrowing and creative accounting it would be foolhardy to insist "deficit budget or nothing!"

To do so then would be seen by the local labour movement as an ultra-left attempt to engineer a crisis and so it would not secure the necessary support.

However, some Councils have used creative accounting so exhaustively already that further use of it will merely serve to cover the cracks of a crumbling service structure. In

By Cllr Ian Harrison
Graham Bash
Chris Knight
Jane Stockton

short, creative accounting is acceptable if it is used to meet predetermined expenditure targets based on a needs budget but otherwise it will only serve to fudge issues. If the fudge point is reached we must support a deficit budget.

In non-rate-capped Boroughs, after the defeat of Liverpool Council it has proved impossible in practice to secure support for a deficit budget. Before last year's elections Hammersmith and Fulham *Briefing* supporters attempted to secure a manifesto commitment against rate rises above the rate of inflation and were overwhelmingly defeated.

Given the outright scabbing by the Labour leadership on questions of Council finance, local activists are now forced into choosing between evils. If the left were to vote for a low rate rise in Boroughs such as Ealing and Hammersmith it would result not in a deficit budget but in a standstill budget or worse, and this after years of cuts by the previous Tory Councils in order to hold down and cut rates.

In such non-ratecapped boroughs, the choice now is between an acceptance of appalling services for those in greatest need and a rate increase which will hit businesses and the well-off the most, and worst off not at all, but will have the unfortunate consequence of also hitting substantial numbers of working class families.

Faced with the stark choice between a rate rise and criminally poor levels of service we have to say rates are not the same as cuts. They are across the board where cuts in jobs and services fall exclusively on the working class and predominantly on those in greatest need.

Massive rate rises in Hammersmith and Ealing will do no more than bring those Boroughs into the same rates league as Lambeth. If high rate levels are unacceptable in the new Labour Boroughs we should be arguing for massive rate reductions elsewhere. Comrades are not doing this, because the consequences would be the devastation of jobs and services.

Where there is no realistic prospect of a majority for confrontation we have to choose between real alternatives and, while we could never accept even the smallest cut in jobs and services as a better option than even an unwinnable confrontation, we have to say that fixing rates at high levels for the first time or the umpteenth time is not the same as cuts in jobs and services. Otherwise we should be against the setting of any rates at all and should be flag-waving supporters of government-inspired rate-capping.

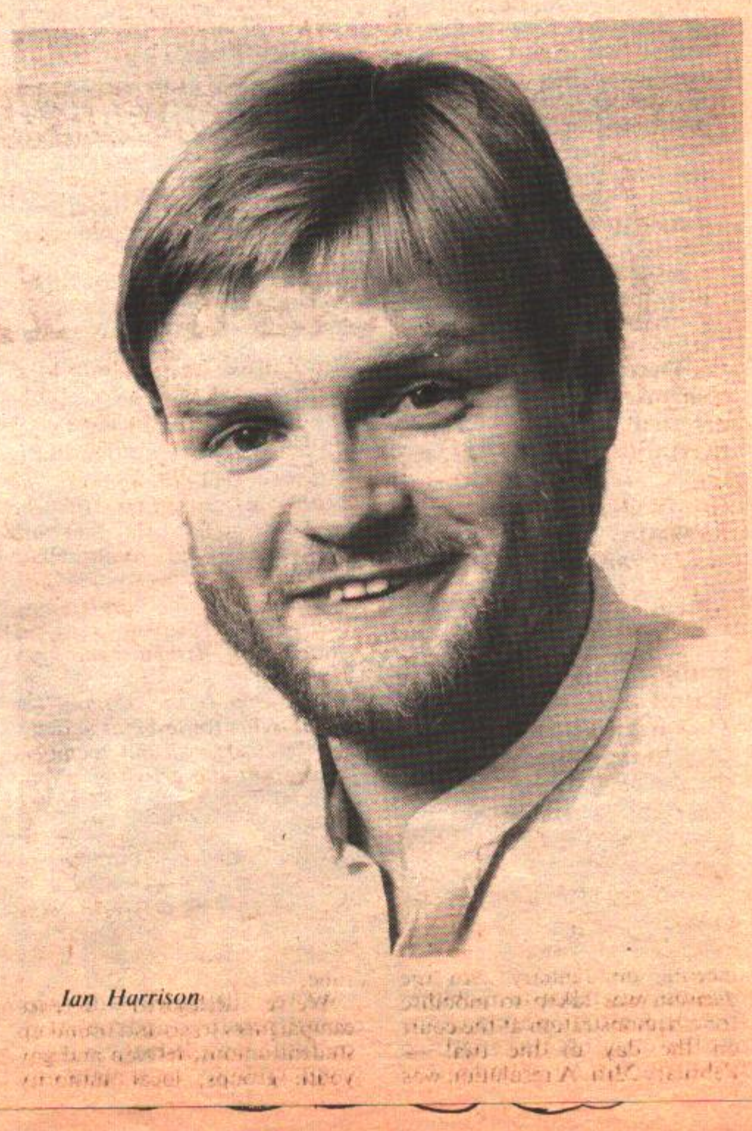


PHOTO: Terry Austin-Smith

Ian Harrison

Trade Union Briefing

Caterpillar

A Glasgow meeting of 350 stewards on February 5th, called by the Scottish TUC, raised pledges of £1,000 per week from Govan Shipbuilders and Ravenscraig steel works and collected £5,000.

Scottish Labour Party leader Donald Dewar and Mick McGahey from the NUM both underlined the need to mobilise all sections of the Scottish people behind the occupation. How? — Through building a mass lobby of parliament...

Dewar, in an apologetic tone tried to justify this dead end course by saying we must have a really *massive*... lobby of Parliament, one which makes sure Thatcher can't hide out in some quiet corner of Westminster and ignore it. He continued "I pledge that the Parliamentary Labour Group will do everything in their power to give you support, and make sure the rafters of Westminster are ringing with the message of our anger."

Assuming that the "ringing anger" fails to make parliament crumble, it's a safe bet that if the workers follow this course their own anger and frustration will surely be dissipated through those same Westminster rafters.

McGahey, when interviewed by a sceptical BBC journalist about the effectiveness of lobbying Parliament, said "for those that are demoralised by this prospect, let me assure them I've lobbied Parliament more times than I've had hot breakfast, but this one must be a real mass lobby, it must be a *classical* lobby." (?)

Just what McGahey means by a "classical lobby" (do we chant in Latin?) is unclear, as the journalist wisely failed to pursue the point. What is clear, though, is that both McGahey and Dewar see this as the way forward for the Caterpillar workers.

The occuption has wide support in the rank and file throughout the Scottish labour movement. The leadership of the Scottish TUC and Labour Party has therefore decided to head off this movement by leading it up the parliamentary path. The reason they get away with this unchallenged is the lack of a clear alternative strategy coming from either the left within the movement or the leadership of the occupation.

Jim Niblock, Glasgow Central CLP

AUEW tass

Hangers Surprise Scabs!

For the past few weeks the sacked workforce have been picketing the Roehampton branch of J.E. Hangers and leaving only a token picket at the small branch in Richmond.

On Thursday February 12th they turned up in strength at 6am and surprised the scabbing staff at that plant. The first bloke who drove in at 6.30 was visibly shaken when he was surrounded by the angry men.

He had to get out of his car and open the gates so he could drive in. And there were no police present!

Les Harrison, a union official, said that it was to the credit of the men that no one laid a hand on the scab. Nevertheless, the police arrived within five minutes.

This site is easier to picket since everyone that goes through the gates is scabbing whereas in Roehampton other companies use the same entrance as J.E. Hangers. The two women who returned to work 4 weeks ago turned up at the Richmond plant ina company car. What price for a sell-out!

David Mellor met a few members on February 14th when they visited him at his Putney surgery. He said that he would get the recently withdrawn offer back on the table by the 16th if the men could guarantee acceptance by the sacked workforce. The representatives of the disputes committee obviously could not make such a commitment.

BTR have issued a press release that they won't interfere with negotiations and that they are producing 97% of the work required in their DHSS contract. Members of the disputes committee find both statements difficult to believe. Graham Croucher angrily said "The press release shows that collusion is occurring between BTR and the DHSS."

BTR is exercising its power and has issued injunctions against FTAT, TASS and 45 men for demonstrating at BTR headquarters in Vincent Square. Writs have been sent to 12 men at their homes and they are to appear at the Law Courts on February 19th. Solicitors for FTAT and TASS are going to attend the Court and hope to obtain a deferment. Three managers have sworn that the 45 men were at Vicent Square on specific days. Their statements with respect to a few individuals will definitely be thrown out of court since the men in question had already taken employment and were working on the days mentioned.

It has been learned that substantial work of the artificial limb industry is going to be tendered abroad! So the government is basically exporting the sacked workers' jobs.

Plans include more surprise picketing and visiting of the other branches to receive their industrial support. They are going to Greenwich for the last week of the campaign to canvass for Deirdre Woods and throw their weight behind her campaign.

Messages of support and/or financial support for the sacked workers, their wives and families can be sent to TASS, c/o Steve Blease, 520 London Road, Mitcham, Surrery CR4 4YQ.

Kathy Pick, (Wandsworth Councillor, Putney CLP)



No Wapping Replay at Docklands Railway

The EETPU hae put in a "bid" to represent the 60 staff who will operate London's new Docklands Light Railway (DLR). It would of course be a single union deal.

After Wapping, no one should dismiss the danger posed to national rail unions, docklands workers and London as a whole.

The Docklands Light Railway does not involve the closure of existing railway lines. The DLR, started by the Labour-controlled GLC, but now run as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the London Regional Transport Board, is a new line which will run from the Isle of Dogs to the City.

By Patrick Sikorski NUR

But which union or unions will represent workers on the docklands railway? The answer to this has major implications for the campaign against the breaking up and privatisation of London Transport tubes and railways.

LRT management see the opening of this new line as a big opportunity. They hope either to induce a split in the Rail Federation (which includes NUR, ASLEF, and TSSA) over which union will represent DLR workers, or to introduce a new union which has never before represented railway-operating staff. They could even achieve both objectives. All they have done so far is insist that they will only negotiate with one union.

Traditionally, ASLEF has represented drivers, the NUR guards and all other station signalling, technical and track maintenance staff, and the TSSA booking office staff. The EETPU represents only electricians in the workshops.

However, on the DLR there will be no guards, no station staff, and one signal box for the whole line. The trains will be fully automatic. The so-called "train captains" will be running up and down the trains between stations collecting tickets.

In this new situation, some officials indicated that they would be in favour of accepting management's proposal for a single-union deal. This was quickly voted down.

As yet, no agreement has been reached. While many socialists and activists on the railways have had serious reservations about the effectiveness of the Federation there can be no doubt that so far it has demonstrated its strategic usefulness in preserving a united front (however limited) over this crucial issue.

DLR workers must be represented by the Federation unions otherwise the whole DLR, plus all the other proposed new light railway/tramway lines will be set up in direct competition with existing LRT tube servies and undermine the jobs, conditions and pay rates of all tube workers.

It would be disastrous if one of the existing Federation unions broke ranks to "represent" DLR workers. This railway will open soon, and will be run on the very same lines — rationalised workforce and subcontracted maintenance — that the Tory LRT Board wants for the whole tube system.

It would signal to the Board that an existing rail union has totally accepted management's vision of the future of the railways and has given up the fight for jobs and conditions. The EETPU would have simply been the revolver held at the head of the Federation unions.

The Federation must prepare a campaign to unonise the DLR. The TUC ust be pinned down on the issue, the EETPU must be told "hands off", and the existing Federation must plan action for union recognition throughout London's tubes.



PHOTO: Stefano Cagnoni

"Now, you may think I'm pointing this loaded finger at my own head, but I can just as easy point it at the TUC and the whole trade union movement..." — Eric Hammond pauses for thought during a speech to the 1985 TUC Conference in Blackpool.

NCU fight

A balance sheet

The return to work at British Telecom was not the "compromise" trumpetted by John Golding, the NCU's General Secretary.

It was a sell-out on terms in some respects worse than the original "offer" prior to the 3 week long strike.

By Pete Cooper NCU, London West

The membership reluctantly voted 53,000-29,000 to accept the 2 year deal primarily because they did not believe that the right wing union leadership would ever negotiate anything significantly better.

At no stage had the "no strings" position even been put to management.

The negotations had only been about the form and detail of the "pay for conditions" package.

In particular, BT achieved all the divisive regrading and flexibility clauses it has been seeking, together with timetables for local negotiations on their implementation.

The 2 year deal which was proposed by Golding will also give BT more time to prepare for the next confrontation.

The strike was seriously beginning to bite, as has become clear since the return to work. BT would have been in serious trouble had it lasted 2 to 3 weeks longer, despite the systematic concealment of information from the membership and from the public by a combination of press censorship through the "D"-notice system on ground of "national security" and the connivance, then silence, of the union leadership itself.

For example, the Monument Exchange in the City "crashed" for two and a half hours on the last Monday of the strike, cutting of amongst others the Lloyds Insurance Market — and Access was cut off for its entirety! These important affects went entirely unreported.

The scene of conflict has now shifted to the local level where management has been attempting to implement changes in working practices on the pretext of clearing up the backlog of work.

The attack seems to be most severe in the City District. Ten branch officials there are either, suspended or "under investigation" under the flimsiest of pretexts, such as "being in the vicinity of a van when it was hit."

The Union officers have been excluded from their normal branch premises and shorter working week day off arrangements have been suspended.

BT clearly wants to smash the union in this strategic area. But the City district membership voted against the national deal by large majorities, so unless management backs down a confrontation is looming. A solidarity campaign with the victimised City District officials is clearly required across the union.

This can also help overcome the local fragmentation imposed by the pay deal and the return to work agreement.

BT management set out to break the union, expecting a rapid collapse, but found that they needed the collaboration of the union leadership to get their way this time. But their aim remains the same, initially to get through the large scale redundancies estimated at 30,000+ or 25% of the engineering workforce by the early 1990s.

Next time they will be better prepared through the accelerated installation of the more reliable System "X" and "Y" electronic exchange equipment. They will also try to complete the training of the Society of Telecom Executives (STE) Junior management grades union, in order to provide themselves with a reliable scab force. If they achieve this, and other measures, prospects look bleak for the NCU in a renewed industrial battle.

The NCU's Broad Left needs to make a careful balance sheet of the strike in order to prepare for future battles. The Braod left will remain the only alternative to the Goldingite right wing for the foreseeable future. Its first and most pressing task will be the removal of the right wing Engineering Executive which failed so dismally to lead the strike. But the Broad Left has to be turned into more than an electoral machine and conference caucus. BL supporters must organise in every District, including London, on a clear campaigning basis.

The centrepiece of such campaigning has to be the return of a Labour government and for the nationalisation of BT and its competitors without compensation and the sacking of their boards of directors.

Even if such a campaign is unsuccessful it will help prepare our members and the labour movement generally for renewed confrontations with BT management.

After Wapping Betrayal

Where next for the unions?

By Harry Sloan

The shameful SOGAT betrayal of the striking News International printworkers has coined yet another jargon term to describe the politics of today's union bureaucracy.

"Deanism", according to one sacked FoC, is the new danger facing the working class.

Brenda Dean was not the first union leader to substitute glossy media presentation and public relations work for any serious policy to fight and win a major dispute; but she certainly brought this approach to a fine art, and confounded those who saw her as giving some kind of radical leadership.

In pursuit of media sympathy, Dean repeatedly denounced the picket-line actions of militant printworkers and their supporters; harped on endlessly about the sanctity of ballot votes (coming to an abrupt end with the SOGAT Executive's unilateral decision to sell-out the struggle!); and placed an utterly hopeless reliance upon public opinion and the toothless "boycott" campaign to bring Murdoch to heel — while SOGAT distribution members scabbed shamelessly and with impunity throughout the dispute.

But alongside "Deanism" we should not forget the more traditional methods which contributed to the defeat: "Dubbinism" — old-fashioned empty bluster and bravado without any conception of building the action necessary to win: and of course the more general problem of "TUC-ism", as we have seen in almost every national struggle for decades — refusing to take any real steps to support the printworkers or kick out the scab EETPU who had cynically stolen their jobs.

Linked in with each of these questions is the problem of Stalinism — the *Morning Star* wing of the Communicst Party in particular seeking to maintain its foothold in the print unions without breaking up its long-standing deals with the SOGAT, NGA and TUC bureaucracies.

The result was a consistent pattern of sabotage of the dispute by *Morning Star* supporters, even while they campaigned for ballot votes to reject the various sell-out proposals floated by Dean.

- From the very start of the strike, they opposed any moves to spread the fight to Fleet Street, with a succession of defeatist arguments.
- Even when their leading figure in the strike, Mike Hicks, was jailed on a clearly political judgement, the Stalinists made no call for strike action in his defence.
- Instead, they presented Brenda Dean's feeble "boycott" strategy as a radical policy to win the strike; and at last year's SOGAT conference *Morning Star* supporters joined in a unanimous vote for a resolution to stay within the law, which Dean quoted as the basis for the sell-out.
- Headed by Hicks, they consistently obstructed serious mass picketing at Wapping, directing demonstrators away from the plant gates.
- *Morning Star* supporters in the NUJ bureaucracy even opposed disciplinary action against the scab journalists who kept Murdoch's presses rolling.
- And Stalinists helped Brenda Dean to muzzle and confine the development of a broad-based women's support group.

The fact is that solid supporting action from the NUJ, and action by distributive workers to paralyse Murdoch's scab circulation network, coupled with resolute moves to extend the fight into Fleet Street to show the full resolve of the unions, could have won the fight, especially had there been stern action against the EETPU from the TUC. But none of these actions were taken.

Immediately after the printworkers were betrayed we saw the clear face of "Goldingism" — cynical, conscious betrayal of the NCU national strike before it really consolidated its strength, enforcing a deal no better than that rejected in the first place.

As the bitter experiences of Austin Rover carworkers have shown, this type of betrayal creates the best posssible conditions for the employer to mount further attacks on jobs and conditions.

But as the role of the Stalinists at Wapping shows, the problem is not only one of the right wing; "left" bureaucrats have been collapsing like burst tyres under the pressure of the "new realism" — leading to the defection of NUPE and the TGWU to the wtich-hunting camp, and the cynical attempts by the Communist Party to isolate Arthur Scargill within the NUM.

In reality we are up against a particularly sharp expression of a historical crisis of leadership in the unions, a crisis which has been cruelly exposed by the economic recession and the Thatcher government's relentless offensive against jobs, conditions and union rights.

The trade union bureaucracies, which grew on the basis of a strong and expanding shop-floor movement in the "boom" years of the 1960s and 1970s, were able to ride upon the relative strength of the movement and could often negotiate certain concessions on the strength of comparatively minimal — often sectional or single-plant action.

The advent of Thatcherism has raised the stakes: it is now virtually impossible to win any major dispute without confronting national agreements, a battery of anti-union laws, police violence, and a series of political questions which no ordinary bureaucrats — and few shopfloor militants — are equipped to handle.

AMong union leaders, only Arthur Scargill, for example, has even seriously attempted to challenge the "viability" argument — that the "right" of an employer or enterprise to make a profit must override the right of the workforce to a job and decent conditions.

The relative strength of the right wing in today's trade union leaderships is not because they have any answers to these problems; indeed they have only one answer — surrender, and hope for a Labour government.

They have succeeded in taking over partly because the alternatives seem daunting to many workers, but also because the trade union left has been so inadequate in arguing any fighting alternative.

On top of this the decimation of shop stewards' organisations through closures, redundancies and victimisations has further strengthened the hand of full-time officials relative to the membership while weakening the union structure, making a rank and file fight back for alternative policies that much more difficult.

While Golding's betrayal will take a heavy toll of jobs and conditions for telecom workers, the Wapping defeat is more severe and damaging to the movement as a whole than the defeat of the miners.

It means the smashing of trade unionism in the most profitable sector of the newspaper industry, the end of a traditional sronghold of trade union power, and the finish to the print union's tradition of defying anti-union laws. This will have considerable negative impact, especially on industrial sections of the working class.

So what can the hard left do to turn the tide?

The scale of the political problem — developing and winning trade union support for a programme of class struggle action to meet the crisis — rules out any short-cut solution. Patient work is needed.

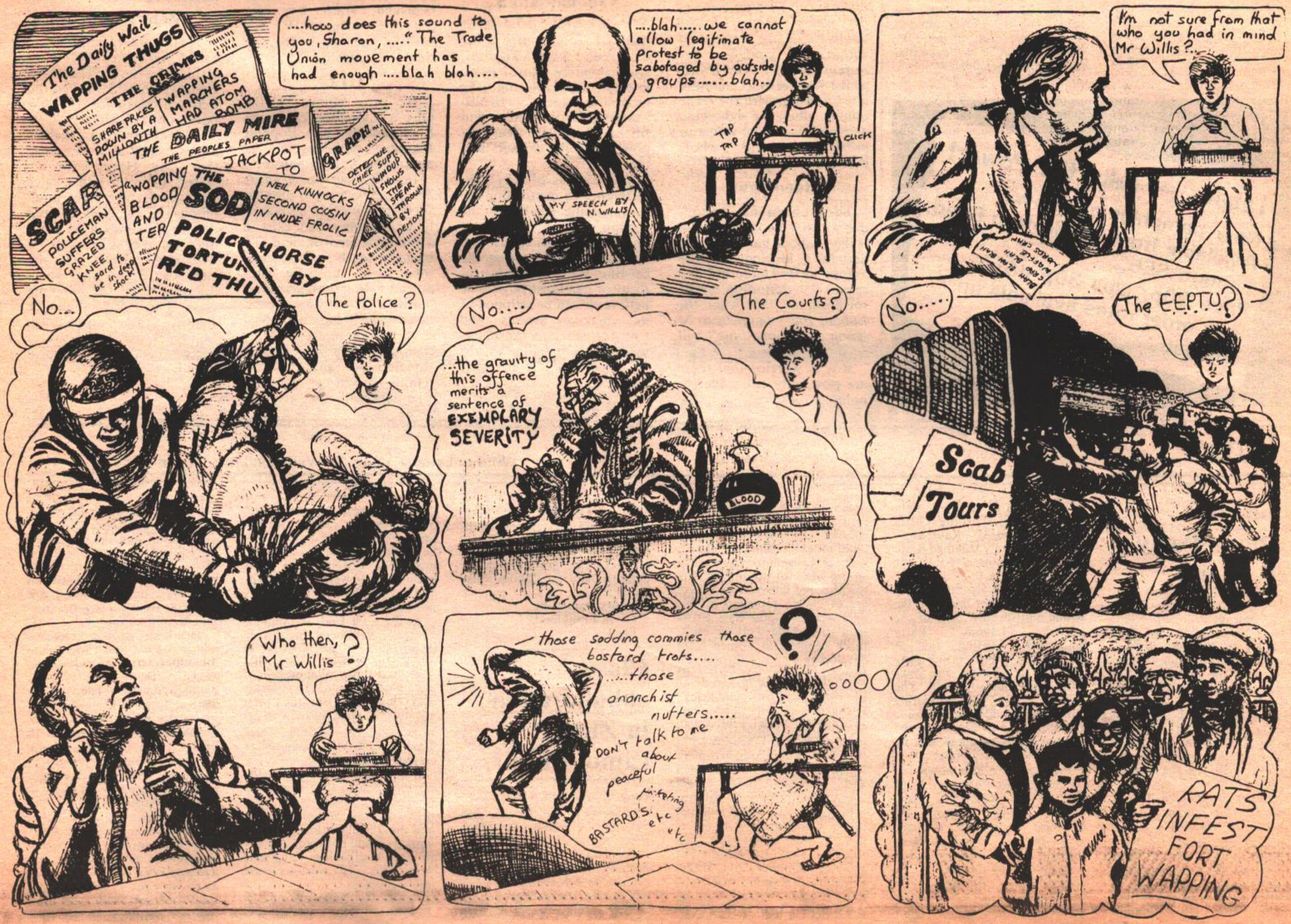
But Labour activists who might feel that they can ignore these issues and concentrate on Labour Party politics had better think again.

No matter how active and ideologically developed may be the constituency left, it will make no real impact on the Kinnock leadership unless it is able to make inroads into his block vote backing from the union bureaucracy.

To do this means working to build or support the building of a serious class struggle left in the workplaces, branches and different levels of the unions.

The first steps in this direction could include an initial conference for trade union militants to discuss elementary solidarity work to support those fights that continue to be waged against the employers, and to begin to lay the basis of a concerted resistance to the politics of the "new realism" in all its guises.

Briefing and its supporters can play a central role in this process.



Reviews

Labour Take the Power!

***Labour Take the Power!*, Steve Reicher. Available from *Briefing*, 26 Crofton Road, London SE5, 30p plus 30p p&p.**

By Peter Bowing
Exeter CLP

Steve Reicher's pamphlet *Labour Take the Power! An alternative way forward for the Labour Party* makes a much-needed contribution to practical Marxist politics in Britain.

In a clear and systematic manner, Reicher confronts the key issues facing socialists in the Labour Party today.

Its starting point is to counterpose those political models between which Labour Party thought and action currently divide.

On the one hand is what he terms the "fantasy of the new realism" and, on the other, class struggle politics, which entails, as part of its very constitution, the struggles against sexism, racism and homophobia.

Kinnockism is concretely analysed under three headings:

- Kinnock's strategy ignores and by-passes capitalist state and class power, which would be exerted against the progressive and socialist policies of a future Labour government;
- Kinnock's strategy requires the *demobilisation* of progressive and socialist struggles in order to accommodate Labour to the interests of capital;
- Kinnockism, by fighting on bourgeois/liberal ideological terrain, is not promoting socialist "common sense" and is thus reinforcing Thatcherite hegemony.

Reicher points out that Kinnock has been able to use the demoralisation and defeat of the working class under Thatcherism — and particularly since the miners' strike — to impose the "new realist" strategy.

In the third chapter, Reicher deals with the capitalist economic crisis. It is this deep seated crisis which finally rules out any meaningful capital/labour settlement, such as that which lasted from the 1940s to 1970s.

The bourgeoisie and their representatives know — as Kinnock does not — that today capitalism requires the stepping up of domestic labour exploitation.

In the final chapter — *The Strategy of Briefing* — Reicher charts out a relevant, contemporary Marxist strategy for socialist transformation:

- the building of a revolutionary bloc, based on an integrated and democratic alliance of the oppressed;
- the extension of class struggle into all human relarelationships, including those in the family, peer groups, etc;
- the "dual power" relationship which must result as the struggle develops between the revolutionary and reactionary blocs on both a national and international scale;
- the measures needed in the transition form capitalism to socialism.

Reicher's *Labour Take the Power!* presents an articulate and readable statement of practical Marxist politics for Britain in the current period.

For too long Marxist politics have been locked into often futile debate in two spheres, namely academia and the fringe democratic centralist parties and groups.

In different ways, both have often concentrated on the irrelevant or the abstract. The power of *Labour Take the Power* is its much needed practicality, and, if only for that reason, is essential reading for socialists.

Labour — Take the Power!
New pamphlet out now.
Available from 26 Crofton Road, London SE5.
Price 30p, plus 30p p&p.
Bulk order rates available on request.

Roy tries to revive the right

***Choose Freedom, The future of Democratic Socialism*, by Roy Hattersley. Michael Joseph, £12.95.**

By Bryn Griffiths
Brighton Labour Party

In *Labour's future — socialist or SDP Mark II*, Eric Heffer described the process by which Neil Kinnock pushed the Labour Party to the right.

In an interview with Terry Coleman in the *Guardian* to publicise his book, *Choose Freedom*, Roy Hattersley referred to this shift:

"I desperately wanted to be leader... But I think the Party made the right choice... Neil brought about changes which because of my reputation and character I could never have brought about at all."

Differ

To understand what Roy is getting at in his book, it is important to grasp how SDP policies differ from those of traditional right wing Labourism. The SDP is on an anti-union trajectory, with David Owen supporting anti-union laws, calling for sterner action during the miners' strike, and for a compulsory incomes policy.

In contrast, Roy wants to include the "new realist" trade union leaders in a corporate state.

Roy favours "income planning" but he does not rely on *"the old model, with its norms, ceilings, and acceptable exceptions."* Instead, he relies on the "new realists' " *"determination to find procedures by which proper trades union rights are maintained within the guidelines of responsibility."* In short, whilst Roy seeks to maintain a relationship with the trade unions, albeit the right wing new realists, Owen wants to break up the whole movement.

Ideology

The problem that Roy addresses in *Choose Freedom* is that Labour has no clearly defined ideology. Roy argues that Herbert Morrison's definition of socialism as *"... what the Labour Party happens to be doing at any one time"* will no longer do.

Roy is worried that there are now only two coherent political choices — the *"Conservative Party's neo-liberalism"* and the Marxism of the *"fringe groups at the edges of the Labour Party"*. Roy aims to place a third option on the agenda, something called "democratic socialism" that looks suspiciously like right wing labourism.

Just before his death, Tony Crossland told Roy: *"Socialism is about the pursuit of equality and the protection of freedom — in the knowledge that until we are truly equal we cannot be truly free."*

Inadequate

As a definition of socialism this is inadequate, but I would support Roy's argument that "freedom" is an aim of socialism and we should not allow the concept to remain the property of Conservative ideologues.

Briefing readers will share Roy's declared aim of a "free" and "equal" society. The disagreement, and it is a big one, is over how we make the transition to such a society.

To achieve freedom and equality we would have to confront the capitalist class and its state. To exercise real working class power we would have to own and control the means of production and exchange. Roy has no such ideas.

Nationalisation

The Morrisonian model of nationalisation comes in for deservedly severe criticism. Unfortunately, Roy has no interest in replacing the monoliths of British Leyland, British Steel and British Coal with real empowerment for workers and users.

The sources of Roy's indifference to controlling the commanding heights of the economy is his lack of understanding of the British state. Instead of seeing the existing state as an instrument of capitalist power, he believes it can be stripped of its coercive aspects and transformed into the paternalistic, enabling state of Neil Kinnock's conference rhetoric.

Roy's inability to understand the British state means that he fails to grasp its international role. He quite cheerfully announces that there is *"... no such thing as a socialist defence or foreign policy."*

It would be a mistake to dismiss the ideas contained in *Choose Freedom*. Unlike Gaitskell, Hattersley does not reject Clause IV, but tries to reclaim it for the right.

GLC

He also points to the GLC's Greater London Enterprise Board's Popular Planning activities as an alternative to nationalism.

In response to *Choose Freedom* we must argue that such initiatives are necessarily limited when they exist in a capitalist environment. To begin to reach fruition local jobs plans must be supported by a national plan.

Roy's arguments, however, will have an appeal to those who reject the Morrisonian model of nationalisation and his attempts to co-opt Popular Planning will also give his ideas a superficial radicalism.

Choose Freedom is a serious attempt by a right wing labourist to respond to a situation where Marxism and Conservative neo-liberalism can be posed as clear alternatives to the working class.

Polarisation

This polarisation has arisen since the 1970s as a result of a severe economic crisis which as destroyed the material basis for the old politics of consensus.

The role of groups such as *Labour Briefing* is to ensure that Roy Hattersley's attempts to muddy the water and thus revive right wing labourism are exposed and defeated. We shall be striving to put forward a *workable* answer to the capitalist crisis, one which doesn't make the working class pay. We shall be fighting to re-establish Marxism as a legitimate force on the political agenda.



PHOTO: Cath Tate

Roy Hattersley

Letters

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

Paint the Labour Party red again!

Dear Comrades,

The short article by Tom O'Malley in the last *Briefing* raises some important issues concerning the control of the media which should be followed through.

However, the dismissal as Shadow Minister of Arts is a measure of how far Kinnock is now in the hands of the extremist right of the Labour Party.

Norman Buchan, a former Chair of the Tribune Group, was one of Kinnock's closest allies. He was one of his loyalist backers for the Party leadership. He has now been removed by Kinnock for publicly standing up for official Labour Party policy. Kinnock of the media to the Party right — the Shadow Home Office Minister Gerald Kaufmann. Brian Sedgemore summed it up: "Kinnock is now a tool of the Kaufmann right."

This shift to the right is no accident and is in line with the whole anti-socialist drift of the present Labour Party leadership. Getting rid of Buchan is Kinnock cutting away the last vestiges of any links with even the soft left. The Labour Co-ordinating Committee and the Tribune Group must now be put on the spot over how Kinnock can be made to tow Party policy.

Problems are also posed for the Campaign Group — with one of its members, Mark Fisher, being chosen by Kinnock to replace Buchan. Will Fisher defend Labour Party policy on the Arts or not?

In order to break out of ghetto politics, Art and Music are important tools. The battle over Buchan poses the question policy on the Arts but whether a turn by the Labour Party on cultural questions can help to build a new socialist world.

Brian Sedgemore has been a strong voice for turning the Arts towards the community. There are of course problems in this approach as middle class artists tend to exclude working class, black people and women from developing themselves. However, the approach of Kinnock — Hattersley — Kaufmann is to restrict art to the Arts Council and to the Middle Class. This of course is a reactionary line inherited from the 1945 Labour government which set up the Arts Council and closed down any sponsorship of popular culture.

Socialists have to get involved in the Community Arts movement in order both to learn and to raise class questions. The growing number of Trades Councils appointing officers is one obvious route. The insistance by Labour Councils on Arts money going to working class organisations and to Community Arts to the same extent that money goes to subsidising art galleries is another. The opportunities are there to paint the Labour Party red again.

Yours fraternally,
Garth Frankland,
Leeds.

Class collaboration in Zionist camouflage

Dear *Briefing*,

It seems to me that the play "Perdition" makes the wrong points about Zionism.

Zionism as an ideology was promoted at the end of the 19th century by a Jewish bourgeoisie worried by the immigration of Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe.

These were a "threat", not only because their arrival threatened to arouse Anti-Semitism in many countries, including Britain, but also because they were proletarian, and threatened the class position of the bourgeoisie.

In the East End of London, for example, there was a very powerful Jewish workers' movement based around the Anarchist paper *Arbeter Frient*. Hence the proposal to move poor Jews from Europe to a Jewish Homeland (not necessarily to Palestine, since Uganda and Madegascar were serious suggestions).

Marxists opposed this for the obvious reason that it was the bourgeoisie that were the problem, not the proletariat, and that the liberation of Jewish workers could not come as a gift of the bourgeoisie (especially when this gift was someone else's country).

When the Nazis set up the Judenräte their membership came from the bourgeoisie. When the Nazis demanded that the Judenräte select Jews for deportation and extermination, the selection was made on a class basis with the bourgeoisie's ideas of what and who was socially undesirable being the basis for selection: i.e. *they* were desirable.

The scale of the holocaust meant that they too were annihilated and the nature and extent of their "class collaboration" has been obscured. But it is important to make the point that it was a collaboration designed to protect class interest and any "trades" were class based. If Zionism was used in this connection it was more likely to be camouflage.

It proves the point that Marxists made from the start: that the interests of Jewish Bourgeoisie and proletariat are irreconcilable and Zionism is fatal to the proletariat in suggesting otherwise.

Brian Elkington
Hull North CLP

Campaign Group of Labour MPs:

Time to move into higher gear

The interview with Bob Clay (*Briefing*, January 28th) begs a number of important questions. Why was the Campaign Group formed? What has it done? What demands and what political proposals should the left be making to it?

These are not idle questions. The tide of opinion in the movement is turning away from a docile acceptance of Kinnock's domination of the Party.

There is now considerable anger, as yet unchannelled, against the policy changes imposed by the leadership — particularly in the area of economic strategy. There is great disquiet at the dismantling of the policy-making structures inside the Party; and there is enormous scepticism about the ability of a weak leader like Kinnock to win a General Election against Thatcher, even after all the concessions on policy have been made.

What is true, however, is that the vast majority of Party members are still very concerned not to rock the boat before the General Election.

In order to work out a viable strategy for the left and the Campaign Group in this situation, it is necessary to understand how the Group came into existence, and why the split with the *Tribune* Group took place.

When I was elected as an MP in 1979, I — like many other young left-wingers — joined the Tribune Group with alacrity. Disillusionment soon set in. The Group turned out to be a purely Parliamentary talking shop whose major purpose appeared to be making right wingers look left wing.

It was impossible even to *discuss* issues without papers being leaked in advance. A paper I had written in my capacity as Tribune's trade union liaison officer was comprehensively leaked in advance to the press and to every member of the TUC General Council by a member of the Group who is now on the front bench and has left Tribune.

This was par for the course. The group became a battleground between those who wished to block every activity with the rank and file, and those who wished the group to become the Parliamentary wing of the great campaign to democratise the Party and obtain a socialist programme and leadership.

This was the background to the decisive break, which occurred during the Deputy Leadership election of 1981. It was the deliberate abstention of the careerist right wing in the group, led by Kinnock, which allowed Healey to win by a whisker and which ensured the defeat of the best organised and most serious challenge to the power of the PLP in the whole history of the Party.

By Reg Race
Tottenham CLP

This experience made some of us take the view that we could not sit down and discuss politics, or take common action with, the kinds of MPs who had a majority in the group.

It was necessary to have a separate group with a clear socialist identity which would campaign on behalf of those ideals and which (some of us hoped) would link up with activists in the trade unions and constituencies in order to win power in the Party and transform society.

There was, however, considerable opposition to the idea of links with CLPs and trade unions. Some of the most active leaders of the left in Parliament were opposed to this concept and wished to have a purely Parliamentary group; and it is gratifying to note that this opposition has largely disappeared.

Campaign

The Campaign Group has performed a vital role in the period between 1982 and today. But its activities need strengthening considerably if we are to turn around the complacency and fear which still haunts the Party.

So what should it be doing now? In my view it should adopt a clear programme to encourage the revitalisation of the left after the General Election. Such a programme might include:

- The organisation of a regular annual conference of the left on a delegate basis, which would elect a small group of trade union and constituency delegates to the regular meetings of the Campaign Group;
- active encouragement to form local Campaign Groups in as many constituencies as possible;
- the positive use of the reselection procedure to elect socialists, and only socialists, to the PLP;
- an immediate campaign to persuade endorsed Parliamentary Candidates not to accept jobs in a future Labour government unless there is an election for the whole of the cabinet based on the electoral college;
- an exposé of the pernicious influence of patronage on the operation of parliament and the role of MPs, coupled with a campaign to repeal the Official Secrets Act, abolish the House of Lords, and establish confirmation procedures for major Prime Ministerial appointments.



Bob Clay

This schedule of activities is designed to do two things: first, to strike at the power of Prime Ministerial patronage which lies at the heart of the problem of the PLP; and second, to take active steps to create the kind of campaign that will reactivate militancy in the rank and file and build support for a Labour Party that intervenes directly to change the values and attitudes of working people in Britain.

That, and nothing less than that, is the historic task of the Campaign Group. They have made a good start, but it is now time to move into higher gear.

Black Sections Annual Conference

Policies to move us forward

The Black Section's fourth annual conference in Nottingham next month will see delegates from all round the country consolidate policies and campaigns launched over the last 12 months.

A call to set up a parliamentary Black Section will be particularly timely given that six of our Black supporters are likely to be MPs by the end of the year.

Along with other socialist newcomers to the Parliamentary Labour Party (and those who already exist in the Campaign Group), our representatives will see as their prime objective turning back the tide of eight years of Tory misrule.

One of the top priorities must be to take advantage of splits in the ruling class brought on by the sharpening crisis of capitalism, by dealing swiftly and decisively with the big business concerns who have piled up big profits from Thatcher's attacks on the working class.

Hardship

Britain's economy is in ruins. Nowhere is this more apparent to our supporters than in local government. Billions of pounds will be needed if Labour authorities are to continue to shield the workers from even greater unemployment and services are to be provided to all sections of our class including Black people, women, lesbians and gays.

Yet our Party's national leaders, as the recent local government conference in Leeds proved, are stubbornly refusing to commit themselves to making available the necessary funds.

Speakers at the Black Section fringe meeting at that conference also took up the question of the current spate of "race attacks" by the Tories on the three Black Council leaders. A motion from Vauxhall Black Section, which covers part of Lambeth, has ensured *our* defiant response will be heard at our annual Conference even if the Labour front bench are too weak or cowardly to deal with this racist onslaught.

The attacks on Bernie Grant, Merle Amory, and Linda Bellos must be countered because these socialists in town halls are carrying out Party policy and defending jobs and services whatever the odds.

Any cuts in expenditure will hurt Black workers the most. They were the last hired and stand to be the first fired. Such a situation is totally unacceptable to Black people who, to date, have been among Labour's most loyal supporters.

It is intolerable that we should be asked to face even more hardship in the face of attempts by the right to roll back the equal opportunities policies in Brent, Lambeth and Haringey.

By Kingsley Abrams
National Assistant Secretary, Black Sections

In places like Tower Hamlets, Newham, Southall, Birmingham and Bradford racist attacks on our communities have increased following the Tory-orchestrated broadsides against Black people in the gutter press. The Black Section intends to step up our support for campaigns committed to defending our communities — particularly those involving Black youth like the one on Tottenham's Broadwater Farm Estate.

Our youth committee is stronger than ever and thanks to the dedicated leadership of our candidate for the Young Socialists' place on Labour's National Executive, Steve Jomoa, it is in the good shape needed to play a much greater role in this vital solidarity work.

The increase in discriminatory immigration laws, especially the racist visas, must be stoutly resisted. Our national immigration campaigns co-ordinator Sanjiv Vedi will be presenting to conference a national executive committee paper on this key question. It is a fleshing out of existing policy which needs to be refined. Sanjiv will also be presenting plans for a stepping up by the Black Sections of our work in support of those facing deportation from Britain.

The crucial issue of education will be a major topic for discussion. Renewed support for Brent Council's stand against the Tories and the National Union of Teachers white chief in the McGoldrick case is expected.

The national committee's position on Black people and Police is likely to be fully adopted by delegates — especially since so much has been proved true since it was published in our newsletter. There has been the killing of John Mikklesen, resolutely taken up by Hounslow Black Section, the maiming of Trevor Monerville, and the Old Bailey show trials of Broadwater Farm youth.

Nottingham East Black Section, who staged a 600-strong demonstration against the American bombing of innocent Libyan civilians, have submitted a motion in support of the demands of the Palestinians. Finally, renewed backing for those fighting for Black national liberation in Azania is also on the agenda.

A mottled Britain in a muddled World

Those who lament the passing of the old globes with their vast swathes of imperial pink will find the cover of the first issue of *Labour Party News* ("the magazine for all Labour Party members") reassuring.

A Union Jack patterned Britain, swollen to hemispheric proportions, bestrides a storm-covered planet earth.

John O'Groats reaches to Murmansk, Land's End touches the Malvinas, and Northern Ireland floats like a red, white and blue glacier somewhere in the North Atlantic.

Much of the magazine's first issue is dedicated to Labour's defence policy ("a modern Britain in a modern world") and how Party members can "get the message home" — the message in question being that Labour will "secure the defence of Britain and play an effective role in NATO".

Chauvinist waffle about Britain's "power", "strength", and "security" is matched by comic-book visual imagery. A page reproduced from the *Sunday Mirror* purports to show "How Labour Will Defend Britain".

An annotated map of Europe is surrounded by stark, tabloid style drawings of military hardware and a lone soldier in combat gear. In Maxwell's version of the Party's defence policy, apparently endorsed by the NEC, Labour's disarmament initiative counts for little more than a footnote. The big boast is that Labour will: build 250 new "secret" European fighter aircraft, get more surface-to-air missiles, more Harriers, more Tornado jets, more heat-seeking missiles, a new generation of nuclear-powered subs, keep troops "in Ulster, Falklands, Cyprus, etc." (etc.?) and "allow the USA to keep 32,000 troops, 130 military facilities" in the UK.

NATO, we are told, is "a partnership of democracies to defend democracy" (tell that to the Greeks and Turks). The Americans will not really be angry with us for asking them to remove their nuclear weapons because "it is in the US interest to use Europe as a buffer for its defence and in its economic interest to retain good relationships with European governments."

Labour Party members will be relieved to know that Labour has no plans to do anything that might be contrary to US interests.

By Mike Marqusee
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

In what threatens to be a regular *LP News* feature, "The Leader Column", we are treated to a full page of the Kinnock prose. Hattersley clearly aspires to the vacuous convolution of Bernard Levin. But on whom does Kinnock model his style? Woodrow Wyatt?

An article on low-pay starts off promisingly with an attack on the Tories for creating an "army of part-time works in unskilled jobs with little security" and offers Labour's solution: a national minimum wage. However, *LP News* is then obliged to note that "Labour has not yet decided what the level of the minimum would be" and that "the minimum figure would be decided following consultation with both unions and employers".

Furthermore, the "minimum would not be introduced overnight" and would be enforced by union reference to an "arbitration body" (with employers' representatives?) and "minimum wages inspectorate" which would "prosecute in cases of *persistent* underpayment" (my emphasis). Firm pledges like that will knock them dead on the doorsteps.

The article on the Ministry of Women is welcome but worryingly short of specific commitments. It also states, dishonestly, that the decision of the last Labour Conference to give Cabinet status to the Minister for Women was "fully endorsed by the Party leader".

A brief interview with Brent Council leader Merle Amory informs us that she has four cats and that she "takes a tough line with black rasesism" (sic). There is no reference at all to the McGoldrick affair or to Brent's anti-racist initiatives.

The magazine is prefaced by a genial mumble from Larry Whitty, who assures us that "*LP News* is absolutely free to all members" and then notes that it will be paid for "through increased subscriptions".

WIlliamson

In theory, *LP News* could provide much-needed support for Labour's under-resourced, over-worked rank and tile. However, the news of Nigel Williamson's appointment as editor bodes ill for the future. Williamson has been rewarded for services rendered during his tenure at *Tribune*, which he turned into a spearhead for the witch-hunt and a left cover for a gaggle of Labour careerists. Under Williamson's supervision, *LP News* will be presentable and perhaps even readable. It will also continue to be a mere mouthpiece for the Party leadership.

A useful *LP News* would carry reports of debates and decisions at the NEC, the Regional Conferences, the LPYS, and the Women's Conference; it would rebut the smears of the Tory press and spread the word of socialist initiatives taken by Labour Councils; it would print honest, specific accounts of what current Party policy is and what it isn't; it might even open its columns to dissenters within the Party.

After all, this isn't aimed at the general public, but at Party members, who should be credited with an intelligence that this first issue of *Labour Party News* does its best to insult.

There's nothing else for it: you'll just have to subscribe to *Briefing*!

Women now

National Labour Women's Committ
Women's Organisation Review

For grass roots consultation
More power to women!

By Mandy Moore
EC member, LWAC
Member, National Labour Women's Committee
(writing in a personal capacity)

Recent articles in *Tribune* and *Socialist Action* have accused *Briefing*, and me personally, of organising to sabotage the review of the Labour Women's Organisation.

These attacks are sectarian, totally untrue and in the case of *Socialist Action*, libellous.

They have come because of decisions made by the National Labour Women's Committee (NLWC), of which I am a member, concerning the implementation of the resolution passed at Annual Conference 1986. This called for a review of the Women's Organisation on 6 organisational issues, involving "a widespread consultation process with CLPs, affiliated organisations and the National Conference of Labour Women", and for proposals to be brought back to the 1987 Annual Conference.

What happened was this. The NLWC met in November and asked for an urgent meeting with the NEC Women's Committee during December to discuss the review. They could not meet us until January 13th.

Timetable

On that day the NLWC held a pre-meeting, and discussed a timetable for the review drawn up by Party Officers. This showed that if we wanted to put proposals before the 1987 Annual Conference, a consultation document would have to be dispatched by the end of January and responses be in by March 20th.

To meet such a timetable, the NLWC and the NEC Women's Committee would have to have at least 3 joint meetings within a space of 2 weeks to:

- discuss the format of the review;
- come back to discuss a first draft; and
- finalise the document before dispatch.

Between these meetings, options on all 6 issues would have to be drafted and the implications thought through. Party organisations and affiliates would then only have a maximum of 6 weeks to draw up responses or alternative options.

Many of the issues involved will be completely new to rank and file members: for example, formulae for weighting the trade union vote at Women's Conference, the structure of the Conference Arrangements Committee, integrating the decisions of Women's Conference into the Party structure, etc.

The NLWC recognised an inherent conflict in the resolution between the call for a 1987 decision and the desire for a widespread consultation.

To stick to the 1987 deadline would mean a highly restricted consultation, excluding the lower echelons of most organisations. We therefore decided we wanted a 3 month consultation.

If we had to chose between meeting the deadline and a "widespread consultation", we would choose the latter. **We believed that if fundamental changes are to be made in the Women's Organisation they should be done on the basis of maximum participation and agreement within not only the Party generally but, more importantly, the Women's Organisation itself.**

Endorsed

This view was endorsed without dissent by the NEC Women's Committee and the trade union representatives present at the January 13th meeting. Indeed several trade union representatives were concerned to have a proper period to consult their wider membership.

Ann Pettifor in *Tribune* and Jude Woodward in *Socialist Action* totally distort these events. Instead Ann Pettifor launches a vicious sectarian attack on "an alliance of *Briefing*, *Labour Herald* and *Militant* supporters" which she thinks exists on the NLWC and which according to her "scuppered" the review.

Jude Woodward's article is simply a tissue of vicious lies. The most outrageous of these include saying that "supporters of the right wing, *Briefing* and *Militant* combined forces at the NLWC to sabotage the consultation" and that I was in collusion with *Militant* to oppose Women's Conference policy and to somehow subvert the dissemination of the Labour Women's Action Committee's policies. All I can say is if I had the money I'd sue for libel!

The truth of the matter is that I, *Briefing* and the National Labour Women's Committee want to see changes in the Women's Organisation; but changes based on a democratic consultation exercise that presents the options, that gives time for debate and decision-making, and that doesn't allow just the hierarchies of organisations to choose the structure they want to see.

Ann Pettifor and Jude Woodward may think they know what's best for women but I cannot subscribe to this elitist view.

If changes are to be made to the Women's Organisation which are to be with us for decades to come then taking a little time to get them right cannot be a crime.

Indeed the fight for greater democracy and accountability in the Party and the whole ethos of the Women's Organisation demands it.



PHOTO: Andrew Wiard (Report)

Labour women at Conference — overturning the Chair!

LWAC's proposals for a powerful Women's Organisation

We decided to take up *Briefing's* offer of space to reply to your report of our December AGM as, unfortunately, your reporter spent the entire article sniping at the organisation of the AGM — attended by over 70 women — leading the discussion away from the real substance of the matter.

The real issue to be discussed is LWAC's proposals for restructuring the Labour Women's Organisation.

Our AGM devoted mst of its time to a discussion around the most important matter confronting it — our detailed proposals for reorganising and strengthening the Women's Organisation — putting flesh on the bones of the principles adopted by the last four Women's Conferences.

This was the first time that women in the Party had sat down to seriously discuss *how* precisely we wanted to organise ourselves.

In approaching this discussion we were guided by several vital considerations. We want, and we think Labour women want, a Women's Organisation that genuinely brings together women active in all sections of the labour movement, and which can link up with women in the working class communties. And we want this Women's Organisation to have real power, a real say in the Party, based upon the right of the Women's Organisation to elect their own representatives onto the Party leadership.

The point has been made repeatedly by Women's officers in the unions, especially from those which support the Women's Conferences' proposals like NUPE and COHSE, that a powerful Women's Organisation also means involving the unions more centrally in its Conference and committees. While we and they are utterly opposed to the introduction of a straight bloc vote into Women's Conference on the model of Party Conference, we agree with them that the present system of election of delegates is unbalanced, unfair and a weakness not a strength of the Women's Conference.

By Jude Woodward
Asst. Sec. LWAC
(writing on behalf of the executive)

At present all unions are entitled to send 20 delegates whether they have 1,000, 10,000 or 100,000 women members. Of course most unions do not fill their quotas, but it would not make it a fairer or more balanced system if they did.

We propose instead that the delegations that the unions are entitled to send, and consequently the vote they can cast, should be weighted according to the number of female members of each union.

Some unions, like APEX for example, simply want the unions to have a crushing majority at Women's Conference. This is opposed by LWAC, the Women's Sections, and many of the unions themselves.

At our AGM, we discussed, and are now putting forward in the Women's Organisation, a comprehensive proposal for a system based on *parity of weight* between the trade union section and the Women's sections and councils at Women's Conference.

This would involve introducing an electoral college system into Women's Conference with the trade union votes counting for 50% and the Women's section votes counting for 50%. Many of us consider that this system should be applied to the Party Conference as a whole — however, you don't have to agree on this to support this system for the Women's Organisation.

Within the Trade Union Section it would be up to the unions themselves to determine the basis of weighting between them, as long as it broadly related to the number of women members they each have.

This principle of parity can then be carried through the entire Women's Organisation with reserved seats on the NLWC — where the trade unions are not represented at present. But most importantly this creates a basis for agreement with at least some unions on the transfer of the election for the women's places on the NEC from Party Conference to Women's Conference.

Again on the basis of the parity principle we propose increasing the number of places from five to six, and allocating three places to the unions and three to the Women's Sections for election at Conference.

We think that these proposals would be a huge gain for women in the labour movement, and provide a reasonable basis for uniting women across all wings of the movement in a campaign for a strong and powerful Women's Organisation.

These proposals are serious and substantial, and the result of seven years hard work by the Labour Women's Action Committee. We think they will be supported by women in the Party as they are the only comprehensive and workable proposals on the table. However, if any women think they can see a better way of approaching the matter then we are always ready to discuss alternatives on their merits.

This discussion was the meat of the work at the AGM and we think that the outcome is significant and useful.

Rather than sniping at our hardworking membership secretary, who reported that we had 278 fully paid up members one month before the AGM, or claiming that resolutions were voted on the basis of who put them forward rather than their content when at least two resolutions put forward by *Briefing* women were supported by the executive and by the AGM, or griping at the hard working women from all round the country who devote their time to building up support for LWAC, *Briefing* should address itself to the susbstance of the matter — restructuring the women's organisation. It would be good to see *Briefing* in the forefront of this campaign.

ee and the

How do we consult?

By Jane Prust
Convenor, Labour Briefing Women

The review of the Labour Party women's organisation called for by the 1986 National Conference has already run into trouble.

The Conference resolution called for the NEC to bring proposals for the restructuring of the Women's Conference to the 1987 National Conference: these proposals to be drawn up in consultation with the National Labour Women's Committee (NLWC).

Briefing was opposed to this method because it gave the final say on the proposals to the NEC — a body notoriously hostile to women's demands. The likely result would be reduced power for rank and file women in the Party and in the trade unions. We have always argued that the final say should rest with Women's Conference.

However, the resolution was carried and we committed ourselves to fighting for the best possible outcome.

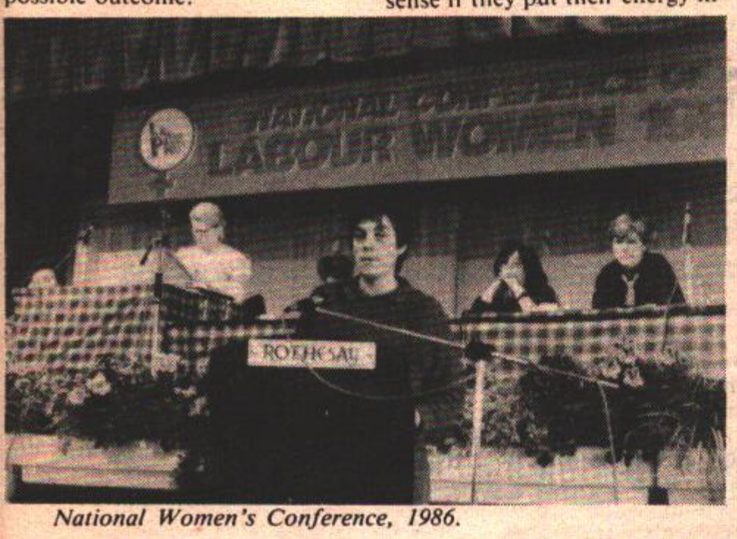
see the introduction of the block vote at women's conference organised on the same lines as National Conference: giving all the effective power to a small group of trade union men.

But however tactically wrong we may feel the decision of the NLWC to have been, there is no doubt that they passed the resolution with the intention of enabling the largest possible number of women to have their say, and not with the intention of sabotaging the whole review process, which has been suggested in some quarters.

The attacks on Mandy Moore in particular, in *Socialist Action* and *Tribune*, must be strongly condemned. To single out an individual for vicious personal persecution on the grounds of a political disagreement is both anti-socialist and anti-feminist.

One possible reason for this strange attack from *Socialist Action* could be that they are hedging their bets, and setting up Mandy and the National Labour Women's Committee as scapegoats to be blamed for the failure of the review process (if it should fail).

Having strongly supported the resolution calling for the review, it would make more sense if they put their energy in-



National Women's Conference, 1986.

to the debate and into the campaigns we need — not indulging in unprincipled attacks on other women, who are fighting for the same aims — more power for women in the labour movement.

Immediately problems arose. The timescale for consultation if proposals are to go to the 1987 Conference is extremely tight. Matters are not helped by the outbreak of "election fever" at Walworth Road, which has meant that no one there seems to have the time for the administration required.

The NLWC decided in January that widespread consultations would be very difficult in the time allowed; and passed a resolution calling for a longer consultation process — meaning that proposals would go before the *1988* National Conference.

There is an inbuilt risk in this decision. The original resolution specified that proposals should be taken to the 1987 Conference. **The NLWC decision cannot overturn that process.** It is the NEC's decision on how to proceed, given the contradiction of a short timescale *and* consultation with the NLWC in the resolution.

The NEC can override the NLWC desire to organise even wider consultation before formulating "women's" views — by drawing up NEC proposals (in consultation with a few trade union bureaucrats), and putting them to conference, without any input from the women's organisation at all.

Any such proposals are not likely to give increased power to women! We are more likely to

Tactics

We have no guarantee that the NEC will listen to women. The consultation on Black Sections was extremely thorough, but when it came back with recommendations which didn't suit the NEC, i.e. the setting up of officially recognised Black Sections in the Labour Party, it was totally ignored.

Similarly, when the Irish working party set up by the NEC looked as if it might recommend against the Anglo-Irish agrement, it mysteriously stopped meeting.

The question of the National Labour Women's Committee decision is one of tactics rather than a fundamental disagreement of principle. The important task now is to mobilise women in the Party and in the unions to fight for the defence of the women's conference and an extension of its powers.

Claims that the process has been sabotaged before it has even started are not going to help us with this.

The origins of International Women's Day

By Leonora Lloyd

On March 8th women all over the world, under many different types of regime, will be celebrating International Women's Day.

Historically speaking, its origins are mixed and it has not always been celebrated on the same day, or called by the same name.

It was probably first called International Women's Day in 1920, making this the 67th IWD.

On February 28th, 1907, women socialists in America organised the first "Women's Day" to demand political rights for working women. In 1910 Clara Zetkin proposed to the second International Conference of Socialist Working Women that an annual celebration of Women's Day should be held and the following year it was indeed held — on March 19th, an anniversary of an uprising of the Prussian proletariat in 1848.

In 1913, the date was changed to March 8th, to mark a specifically women's struggle — an important strike by women garment workers in New York in the 1880s. It has remained on that date ever since.

Significance

The Day took on a new significance in 1917. Under the pre-revolutionary Russian calendar, March 8th fell on February 23rd, and traditionally women workers marked the day, often with a strike.

But in 1917, with Petrograd in ferment, the revolutionary leaders felt the workers were not ready for revolution, so asked the women not to strike, in case it led to premature uprisings.

However, the women were determined to celebrate their day as usual. Women textile workers struck and called on the metal workers for support. This spark led to the February Revolution!

In 1920, Alexandra Kollantai, Minister of Social Welfare in the first Bolshevik government, wrote a pamphlet about "working women's day" which she called "International Women's Day" — as far as I can trace the first use of this expression. (Clara Zetkin had called it an international *working* women's day.)

In the pamphlet, Kollantai outlined the history of the day. According to her, it was not just in America and Russia that the day had been marked. In 1915 Norwegian women organised an international day on March 8th. In most countries during the war, socialist women tried, with limited success, to organise women into anti-war demonstrations. They tried to organise international meetings in neutral countries, but were refused passports.

By 1920

By 1920, Kollantai believed that Soviet women had won their political rights, but still needed to be organised to make use of them. She wanted the 1920 theme to be production: "Everyone into the struggle for bread and firewood and raw materials."

For her, IWD was about women — together with men — overcoming the forces of capital and building socialism "in the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat — the proletariat of both sexes!"

Since then, in the Communist world, IWD has been consistently celebrated. But its original meaning, purpose and dynamism is completely lost. On March 8th, in the USSR, IWD is celebrated in just the way we celebrate Mother's day — women are waited on by their families and given flowers. It is not used as a day to highlight the many continuing inequaltites under which women live and work, and the problems facing women and their families.

Double shift

In fact, the "special" aspects of the day merely serve to highlight the fact that Russian women, perhaps even more than in the west, have to work the double shift — few of their men normally do any domestic or child-caring work outside of IWD. A similar pattern is followed in the other Soviet bloc countries — there are articles in the papers and speeches made by party dignitaries, and on March 9th everything goes back to "normal".

In the West, the tradition of IWD seems to have died. In Britain, the "Six Point Group", a "child" of the suffragette movement, campaigned (certainly into the '70s, after which it seems to have vanished) for what it considered the six most important political demands for newly enfranchised women. I believe that they held meetings on IWD, but there was no autonomous women's movement which could carry on the tradition.

In Britain

With the growth of the women's movement in the late '60s and early '70s, IWD began to be celebrated again in Europe and America, although I do not have details of where and when it began again. In Britain, demonstrations were held, certainly from the early '70s, in London. Initially, they were mixed and were used to highlight the "four demands" (later 6, then 7) of the women's movement — equal education and opportunity, 24-hour nurseries, free abortion and contraception on demand, equal pay for work of equal value.

Fringe

However, the demonstrations were increasingly used by fringe political organisations to push their own publications and politics and one year in particular the SWP and the antics of its male comrades upset the women so much that men were forbidden to take part. At the time, the WLM was becoming increasingly fragmented, and the result was that from then on the march became less important, in that fewer women took part. Occasionally, attempts have been made to organise other types of events, notably a few years ago, when the Communist Party organised an indoor rally.

Lease of Life

With the coming of women's committees, particularly the GLC, IWD has taken on a new lease of life, with a variety of meetings, social events, exhibitions, etc., taking place. In many areas, including outside London, whole weeks — or even a month — of activities take place.

There is still a march in London, usually on the Saturday nearest to March 8th, with a committee of volunteers deciding the theme. Despite months of planning, the march is still very small, with the fragmentation of the women's movement and the variety of other events as the main causes.

International

In other countries, IWD is still often marked with a demonstration, usually around one or more key demands for the women of that country. The most important and often-used theme internationally has been abortion rights — demonstrations and even strikes have been held for abortion rights in Japan, Holland, Italy, Spain and many other countries.

Demonstrations

In America, for a number of years, large scale celebrations stopped. But last year, stirred by the continuing threats to abortion posed by the bombing of clinics, the changes in the Supreme Court, and many attempts to introduce anti-abortion bills, women organised by NOW staged one of the largest-ever IWD demos in several cities across the States.

International

Although most countries celebrate by calling for demands important to them, most do mark the international theme in some way, and women try to travel to different countries with greetings and messages of solidarity, as well as staging international events in their own country.

Of course, the very fact that IWD is being celebrated all over the world is important, but it seems to me that half the significance of the day is lost if we only mark it as *women's* day and forget the *international*.



PHOTO: Derek Speis (IFL)

International Women's Day 1980. Outside Armagh jail.

Youth Briefing

Youth Briefing Sexuality Dayschool:

A forum for debate and campaigning

The *Briefing Youth* Youth and Sexuality Dayschool will be a forum for young people to discuss various experiences of the struggle for lesbian and gay liberation.

The sessions planned so far are:

Morning (3 "educational" choices):

- AIDS. The response of the government, press, church, Labour Party, trade unions, etc. How can we fight the prejudice? And the disease?
- Laws on the age of consent (gay and straight), abortion, sex discrimination, and immigration are all used against young women and young lesbians and gays. How should we face up to these attacks? Is it worth campaigning to change the law?
- Women in the global workforce. Is the family being broken up by the influx of women into the workforce? How do traditional socialist theories match up to reality? Women as workers in the "Third World" — effect of imperialism, migrant labour, plantation farming, etc., on women and the family in underdeveloped countries.

Afternoon:

- The family. Rape and child abuse are common within families. How do we provide support and challenge this oppression? (Women only)
- Is sexism, and its most violent expression, rape, the fundamental oppression in our society? Or will it disappear with the abolition of class society? How does socialist feminism synthesise the fight against gender, class and racial oppression?
- Sex education in schools. How should local authorities fight government attacks? How can school students organise? What sort of education are we fighting for?
- A woman's right to choose. What prospects for the abortion and contraception rights struggle? Will Gillick make a comeback? What demands have black feminists raised? How do NHS cuts affect the limited abortion rights that exist? We need to fight the use of abortion and contraception to oppress women, especially in the "Third World".
- Trade unions. Lesbian and gay caucuses (e.g. NALGO). How can we force unions to represent the interests of women? TU responses to AIDS. Unionisation of part-time and home workers.

The day will finish with a plenary discussion on our demands, e.g.: how do we counter the arguments of *Militant* in the YS? What attitude should we have to the Ministry of Women? How do we fight for the autonomy of the Labour Women's Organisation?

Contact Fran Rayner (01 431 0357) to put forward ideas or find out more details.

By Dani Ahrens
Youth Briefing

Briefing Youth
RAFFLE
Prizes include:
Bottle of whisky
Trotsky photograph book
Tickets 20p
from Fran Rayner
(01 431 0357)
and at *Briefing* events
Draw at LPYS conference

Our right to choose

By Katrina Holyoak
NAC member (writing in a personal capacity)

The National Abortion Campaign (NAC) is a campaign which fights for all women's rights to determine for themselves whether or not to continue with a pregnancy.

We campaign for freely available contraception, abortion, sterilisation, and fertility treatment, for all women — regardless of race, age, marital status or sexual orientation — to be available on the NHS, and for adequate sex education, public information, and counselling services for all women and men.

Focus

During the past few months, our main focus has been young women.

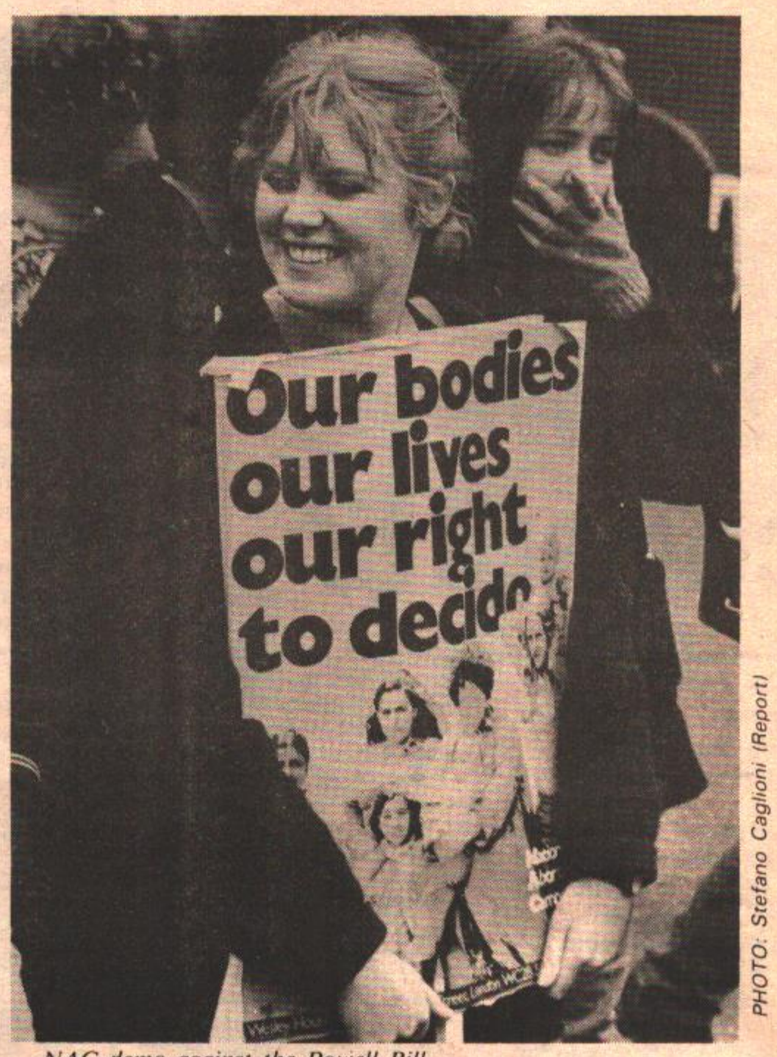
Because NAC believes women need information and facilities to help them take control over their own lives — including their sex lives — we believe that young people in schools should have access to sex education without a moral bias, and we fight against Tory plans to give parents' rights priority over those of the pupils.

Young women and men have rights too! We are not the property of our elders: we can make up our own minds about when to have sex and when not to, who to have it with and how, and what sexual orientation to choose.

We don't want censorship on lesbian and gay sex, and we don't want to be told that our sex lives must be confined within the moral sanctity of marriage and family life.

The majority of abortions are on women under 25, and moral legislation will be most severe upon young women. NAC relates especially to younger women — so please join us and our campaigns!

Our bodies, our lives — our right to decide!



NAC demo against the Powell Bill

PHOTO: Stefano Caglioni (Report)

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

BRIEFING Youth

Youth Briefing
DAYSCHOOL on SEXUALITY
March 21st, London

Following the success of the last dayschool held by *Briefing Youth* on international issues, we are organising a further dayschool on the issue of sexuality to discuss various issues relating to women's liberation and lesbian and gay liberation.

Further details from Fran Rayner, Flat 7, 35 Maresfield Gdns, London NW3. (01-431-0357)

Youth and AIDS

Over half as many people died of AIDS in January alone, as died in the whole of 1986.

It is up to all of us in the labour movement to pressure the government and local health authorities to provide adequate treatment and care of AIDS patients.

Despite the government's much vaunted education campaign, not nearly enough resources are being devoted to physical care of those who have the disease. Not everyone with AIDS wants to go into hospital; some prefer to stay at home, nearer to family and friends, and they need adequate social services and housing resources.

As well as a socialist answer to the reality of the disease, we must also have a response to the ideological offensive of the far right. Young people especially must demand a public information campaign free from moralism. It's not the number of partners you have, it's whether you have safe sex.

We must also defend lesbians and gays at work. As well as increased harassment of lesbians and gays generally, significant numbers of gay men have recently lost their jobs as the media whips up homophobia.

A socialist strategy must fight both the prejudice and the disease. Young lesbians and gays should be at the forefront of this plight.

By Alan Holder
LCLGR
Finchley LPYS

Student Briefing

The occupation of Sussex University

Under the guise of "improvements in *management* to ensure full value for money", Sussex University Administration has proposed:

- **the loss of 90 campus jobs in real terms;**
- **a 10% cut in library funding;**
- **the closure of 2 common rooms;**
- **a restructuring of our system of tutorial teaching.**

This was the students' response:

Jan 8: Emergency Union General Meeting (UGM) calls a library work-in for Jan 13.

Jan 13: Work-in held. Mass meeting of around 200 spontaneously decides to occupy Sussex House Admin building — "the nerve centre of the University".

Jan 15: Emergency UGM recognises the occupation: later invalidated because it was held in an "illegal building" (ultra vires!).

Jan 17/18: Mass meetings, attendances from 50 to 300.

Jan 19: French student from Paris strike committee addresses the occupation, organised by *Labour Briefing*.

Jan 22: UGM (valid due to being held outside) overwhelmingly decided to support the continued occupation. Support isn't translated into action — voters do not join the occupation.

Jan 23: Police arrive around 8am, check registration cards, take names. Whispers about possible victimisations, fines against the SU — £100,000?

Jan 29: Emergency UGM: call to reoccupy admin building defeated. Campaign committee set up, but so far this has only fairly bleak prospects in terms of fighting the cuts.

From the outset there was an acute lack of leadership. The first UGM should have pressured the NUS leadership, and organised a campaign against the cuts operating at *many* levels, culminating in some mass display, such as an occupation.

In the absence of any clear leadership or strategy, students' frustration exploded into immediate occupation. As *Briefing* supporters, we saw our role as aiding the occupation, and helping to widen it out to the rest of the campus. Unfortunately, our views were not shared by the Labour Club. Apart from a few individuals, NOLS abstained from the struggle.

By Abra Quinn
Sussex University Labour Club

Labour Briefing tour success

The tour organised by *Labour Briefing* of the French student militant Patrick Sant'Anna from Tolbiac faculty in Paris, was generally agreed to be a success.

From January 19th to 23rd, Patrick spoke about the massive student and rail strikes that shook Chirac's right wing government in France.

Audiences at the 8 meetings, organised by Labour Clubs and *Briefing* supporters, varied from around 15 to around 70. There was a particularly good reception for him at the occupation of Sussex University, where he said:

"With students mobilising all over Europe, in China and in Mexico, it is good to see that at least some students in Britain are taking action. Our experience in France shows that the best way to fight governments like those of Thatcher and Chirac is mass direct action."

Student supporters of *Briefing* are hoping to organise further tours in the future and continue to produce our new Student Supplement to *Briefing*.

For copies of the supplement (10p) or to get in touch with other student supporters of *Briefing* write to: Patrick Baker, 6 Clissold Ct, Greenway Close, London N4.

Campaign Student: going nowhere fast

The January national meeting of *Campaign Student*, an organisation set up largely by comrades from *Socialist Action* and CLPD, degenerated into chaos and ended in uproar — largely due to the arrival of a number of supporters of SSiN (Socialist Students in NOLS) who applied to join.

They were refused, on the grounds that they did not agree with the policy statement of *Campaign Student* — a sheet of fairly non-contentious policies, with one or two others tacked on the end with the obvious intention of excluding supporters of *Socialist Organiser* — the major component of SSiN.

Outnumbered

SSiN supporters, who outnumber *Campaign Student* by around 10 to 1, argued there was no basis for excluding them: agreement on every policy had never been a condition of membership of *CS*.

Chair Kingsley Abrams, from Black Sections, agreed.

One of the members of the *CS* committee was also a member of SSiN, and would also have to be excluded on the grounds that *Socialist Action* put forward!

In the chaos, an invited French student activist (organised by *Briefing*) was unable to speak; and the meeting ended in uproar, with no decision being taken.

The arrival of SSiN in force was undoubtedly a wrecking tactic, but given the incredibly schematic way in which *CS* attempts to transpose the "politics of Campaign Forum" (which doesn't formally exist yet) onto the student movement, its political future was never very bright — their credibility as an opposition to SSiN on the hard left of the student movement is pretty slim.

It appears that it is not altogether popular elsewhere either: the Campaign Group of MPs has asked *CS* to stop using its logo and to make it clear that *CS* is in no way representative of the Campaign Group of MPs in the student movement.

If the political groups involved in the French student movement had conducted themselves like this, Devaquet wouldn't have had many problems!

By Patrick Baker
N. London Poly Labour Students

NHS TENDERING

The "competition" that patients can't win!

The latest target of the Tory privatisation drive is Local Authority services. As councillors, unions and service users begin to look for ways of fighting this attack, they must study the experience of competitive tendering in the NHS — and learn the lessons of the struggle against it.

In the first part of a feature on privatisation of services in the NHS, JOHN LISTER looks at how the Tories used the NHS as a testing ground. In Part II, he will describe some of the effects on workers, patients and the companies themselves — and some of the struggles against these back-door cuts.

In many respects the attempts of Tory ministers to force through competitive tendering and privatisation of ancillary services in the NHS can be seen as a "practice run" for the current moves to impose similar moves on local authorities.

One difference is important, however: while health authorities are appointed bodies, in no way accountable to the local population, and in general susceptible to government pressure through cash limits, local authorities are a different kettle of fish.

This in part explains why the enforcement of tendering in local government is backed up by rigid — if questionable — legislation, while Ministers have never issued any formal instruction to health authorities to privatise.

Indeed several health authorities have still not yet carried out competitive tendering, and one — Sunderland — which decided to halt the process in the face of strike action, has still not been instructed by Ministers to complete it.

Tory pressure on health authorities began to force the introduction to the NHS of "competitive tendering" for ancillary services (cleaning, catering and laundry) in September 1983. The idea has always been that the element of "competititon" enables the most cheap-skate cowboy contractors to set the going rate in hours, pay and conditions. That is because the "norm" is that the lowest tender should win the contract — irrespective of quality of service.

As a result, one factor has been common to almost every one of the hospitals where competitive tendering has been carried through, whether the contract has gone to a private firm or to an "in-house" tender involving loss of hours, bonus payments and reduced workforce.

In every case, the cash "savings" realised by competitive tendering or privatisation have been at the expense of real *cuts* in standards of patient care, hospital hygiene, and the break-up of the experienced, dedicated workforce that has endured decades of low pay to carry out vital tasks for the NHS.

Apologists for privatisation have set out to downgrade the importance of ancillary services in our hospitals, and to equate them in some way with simple commercial transactions. The term "hotel services" has been coined — effectively suggesting that the work of domestics who clean, bring clean laundry and support the caring work of nursing and medical staff is some kind of superfluous luxury over and above "real" treatment.

If this one-sided notion of domestic services is accepted, it is relatively easy to suggest that money cut from this type of work might be better spent "treating more patients".

This ignores the fact that in many cases the jobs left undone by reducing the hours of work done by domestics are vital for the welfare of the patients — and wind up falling on the shoulders of over-stressed nurses.

Quantity - or Quality of care?

Hospitals are not fast-food joints or factories, in which "efficiency" can be adequately measured simply by the quantity of patients rushed through in minimum time by a minimum of low-paid staff.

Just as it would be ridiculous to suggest that a doubling of class sizes in schools would amount to a doubling of efficiency for each teacher, to whittle down the size of the caring team in our hospitals while boasting of the increase in numbers of patients treated each year is to substitute quantity for *quality* of care.

Much of the work undertaken by domestics is labour-intensive, manual work, not readily susceptible to mechanisation. To cut back on the hours of work and numbers of staff employed must necessarily cut back on the level of service, the actual care delivered to the patient.

Reports received by London Health Emergency on the new contracts awarded under competitive tendering confirm that just such a decline is underway. Indeed many average successful tenders under the new system have involved cuts in working hours of as much as 60%, with a 40% cutback commonplace.

Doubtful values

In return for these sacrifices in standards and the massive loss of jobs involved, competitive tendering has "saved" comparatively small amounts of money. The latest claims by the government, that competitive tendering is "saving" the NHS £73m each year, must be set against a total NHS budget of £18 billion, and against the loss of 34,000 full-time equivalent ancillary jobs since the exercise began.

This "saving", better understood as a £73m cut in service, must also be seen in the context of the pressures piled onto nursing staff by extra unpaid tasks, declining standards and reduced specifications of services provided, on top of which has come the wasted time and havoc created by numerous contract failures.

For a fistful of dollars

But of course competitive tendering was never simply about "efficiency": it has also been centrally about attempting to bring private firms into the arena of the NHS, to exploit a multi-million pound market, using low-paid labour.

Firms were set up specifically to take advantage of these opportunities opened up by the government, and looking for profits — necessarily at the expense of services.



PHOTO: Stefano Cagnoni (Report)

NHS week of action, April 1985: staff meeting in the grounds of St Bartholomews hospital.

Private companies set the pace, by cutting back on staffing, conditions of work, and specifications, and throwing in "loss-leader" bids in order to get themselves established in this new market. Nursing staff have found themselves saddled with jobs previously done by NHS domestics — and their efforts thus exploited to help make profits for private firms.

For a few dollars more

However, it soon became apparent that the high profits the private contract firms had first expected were not forthcoming. Also, as time progressed, and the September 1986 deadline for the completion of competitive tendering exercises drew closer, more and more contracts were being awarded in-house.

The latest figures available show that of 365 tenders settled only 107 have gone to private contractors, with private firms standing less and less chance of winning.

This negative development from the point of view of the contract firms had two effects upon services and standards in the NHS:

★First, NHS management have themselves begun to reduce the standard and staffing levels of in-house NHS domestic tenders — so much that they began to *undercut* the lowest bids of the private contractors — in order to maintain control over their ancillary services;

★Secondly, faced with fewer contracts and less profits, the private contractors began to lobby the government, urging Ministers to "move the goalposts" to make it easier for private firms to win (and retain!) ancillary contracts.

This has happened in various ways:

★Ministers have in several cases intervened to prevent a health authority awarding a domestic contract to a more expensive in-house tender against a dubious tender from a private firm. in the case of Chesterfield's Scarsdale Hospital, this resulted in the contract going at an unworkably low price to contractors ICC — who were thrown out a year later for demanding a £35,000 increase, which made them *more expensive* than the in-house tender.

★After Bromley DHA gave contractors Hospital Hygiene Services the boot, following six miserable months of failure to achieve specified standards, Ministers were button-holed by angry HHS director Marcus Fox MP.

Then Health Minister Kenneth Clarke obediently issued new directives to health authorities making it even more difficult to throw out an incompetent firm: DHAs were required to clear such a move directly with the Ministry. Thus the odds were stacked further in favour of the contractors.

★When, early in 1986, Maidstone DHA finally managed, despite this, to break through the bureaucratic log-jam and terminate its contract with Crothalls, yet another new set of directives was issued by then NHS Chair Victor Paige, amounting to a real "cowboys' charter".

This added another series of restrictions on the dismissal of incompetent contractors, discouraged the imposition of penalty payments for unsatisfactory work, and attempted to make it easier for them to obtain contracts. DHAs were debarred from asking contractors to specify performance rates of employees — (opening the way for some of the more impossible workloads which have previously been the basis for artificially cheap private tenders).

And DHAs were told not to inquire into the *profit margins* expected for particular contracts, thus giving scope for profiteering on the one hand or "loss leader" tenders on the other, and for bids which leave such small margins that firms will be forced to skimp on specified standards to remain in business. Health authorities were even told to avoid "intrusive" questions on the finances and competence of contract firms on whom the lives of patients could depend.

This battery of proposals to tilt the balance even more in favour of private firms came as a result of heavy lobbying by the bosses' cartel, the Contract Cleaning and Maintenance Association, whose 46 member firms had been losing out heavily to "in-house" tenders: most have won no NHS contracts at all.

One reason why the contractors have had problems is that DHAs fear loss of direct management control over crucial ancillary services and are less than impressed with the performance of the contractors already at work in the NHS, which have run up a string of failures, fines and fiascos.

In this context it is doubtful whether the Paige letter, adding massively to the already formidable legal and bureaucratic obstacles in ditching an incompetent contractor, has significantly helped the firms concerned.

A Riverside Health Authority report last year on the performance of Crothalls in cleaning the prestige Westminster Hospital gives a hint of why NHS management are reluctant to allow firms which they cannot control to take over vital services.

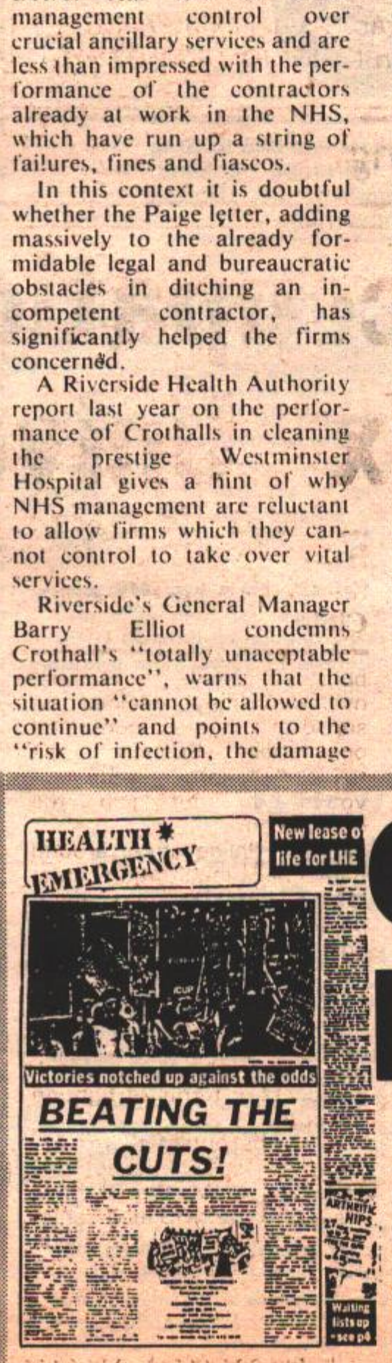
Riverside's General Manager Barry Elliot condemns Crothall's "totally unacceptable performance", warns that the situation "cannot be allowed to continue" and points to the "risk of infection, the damage to the hospital's reputation and image, and the impact on staff morale".

None of the efforts made so far — including daily work checks, reduction in Crothall's monthly payments and meetings with management — have resulted in satisfactory improvements in standards of cleaning, which have undergone a "significant deterioration" since Crothalls took over.

Elliot also points out that Crothalls have had enormous difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff on the pay, hours and conditions they offer, and that few of the old NHS workforce opted to work for Crothalls. This experience is replicated in hospital after hospital across the country, with staff turnover as high as 550% being reported after competitive tendering.

Barry Elliot's conclusion is an important warning note for all would-be privatisers of ancillary services:

"The problems associated with the Westminster contract have demonstrated that regardless of how good monitoring systems and procedures are, there is little direct action that we can take to get a contractor to perform."



Out Now!

New *London Health Emergency* Paper of London Health Emergency
20p from LHE, 335 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1.

Building Briefing

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The winner of this issue's 500 Club draw is IAN COLEMAN, a councillor in Hammersmith & Fulham. Congratulations!

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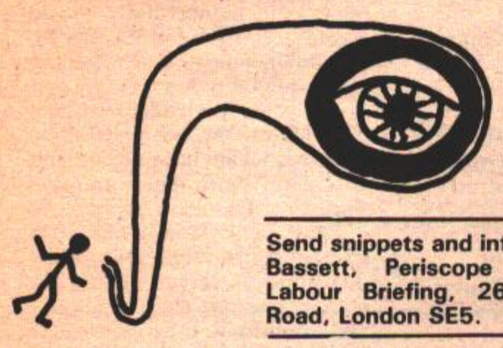
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Red Front?

The Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) are using the Greenwich by-election to launch a "Red Front", their latest attempt to lure socialists out of the Labour Party.

Here's how it works. Where there's a right wing Labour candidate, Labour left wingers, the RCP, and other willing groups will get together to back a "Red Front" candidate. This candidate will then attract enough votes to frighten the Kinnockites into defending working class interests.

If only it was that simple! I don't know who chooses the candidates, but cheques for the campaign should be sent to... The RCP.

Incidentally, the RCP, who take pride in their "revolutionary" politics on sexuality and the family, use space in candidate Kate Marshall's leaflet to state that she is married. Labour's candidate thought marital status was irrelevant and nowhere in Deirdre Wood's publicity is her relationship to her partner, or whether she has one, mentioned.

Will the real revolutionary please stand up? *D.C.*

Another fine mess...

More wacky goings-on from those topsy-turvy, privatisation-crazy Tories on Merton Council (a subsidiary of Hawley Group, plc).

This time there are red faces over the incompetence of contractors Provincial Ltd (part of the Hawley Group) in their schools cleaning contract.

Figures extracted by Labour councillor Geoff Martin reveal that the firm was fined for "serious and persisent infractions" of their contract no less than 14 times during the autumn term 1986 and early 1987. The fines totalled £6,333.68.

Perhaps this is why their contract price has risen 20% in 3 years, despite no increase in the miserable £1.90 per hour paid to staff?

Worzel Gummage tops Mr Greybastard

Michael Foot's old donkey jackets, floppy hair and horn-rimmed glasses may have been replaced by the new leader's suave grey suits and trendy media packaging, but **Neil "Bananas" Kinnock** still cannot match the older windbag's feeble popularity ratings, according to a recent MORI poll.

Unimpressed by his polysyllabic outpourings and glossy insubstantial leaflets, the public believe Kinnock is *less* knowledgeable about international issues, and have *less* confidence in him as leader than the old duffer whom every right winger conveniently blamed for Labour's 1983 electoral fiasco.

No room for realism?

David Blunkett may have got away with his casual confession that Labour could lose the next election — but in many far left groupings such uncomfortable doses of realism can be an expulsion offence.

One classic example was the old Workers' Revolutionary Party, whose tyrannical leader **Gerry Healy** used to wax hysterical and expel Central Committee members on the spot for "pessimism" if they were unguarded enough to query the latest campaign targets (on one occasion the target in question was 3,000 recruits in the 10 days prior to an anticipated military coup in Britain!)

Sixteen months ago, Healy vanished from sight amid horrendous revelations of his rape and sexual abuse of women members of the WRP, and of massive financial and political corruption. Since then, he has popped up from time to time in various places around the world, most recently waxing enthusiastic about the Gorbachev leadership.

But are there now signs of a political comeback to rival even those of Gary Glitter?

Healy was recently spotted sitting in a cafe close to the *Briefing* office: rumours that he was about to volunteer help with the paste-up seem less likely than the possibility that he will propose *Briefing* go daily (renamed Libyan Briefing?)

Leave it to the wife

Snooker player **Ray Reardon** recently blamed his wife after he suffered defeat by an unknown challenger. With this in mind, perhaps Labour's squeals of outrage against **Edwina Currie's** latest jibe may have been a little hasty.

Currie suggested that **Glenys Kinnock** was the real Labour leader, "leading the party by the nose," travelling the country committing the Party to new policies. "No bad thing, she's better than Neil," we hear you respond.

thought of any woman actually shaping policy in a Party where Neil and the lads in the all-male Shadow Cabinet feel they should reign supreme — was plainly the key factor in the instant protests.

After all, none of the protestors object to Kinnock or Hattersley inventing policies off the tops of their heads — though some draw the line at **Michael Meacher's** more eccentric ramblings.

But with Labour's poll ratings well down in the key marginals perhaps Neil and the lads should push Glenys and other women further to the fore and claim that they really *do* influence policy.

Then, if it all goes horribly wrong in the Election, they can do what men do so well — blame women for their own incompetence!

Kremlin softies?

Mikhail Gorbachev's "new look" Kremlin bureaucracy may be cultivating a "liberal" image by releasing some jailed dissidents — but there is no sign of any such enlightenment among the traditional British "Tank-brigade" Stalinists who run the white collar union **TASS**.

Gorbachev has freed Sakharov and given him freedom to speak to Western reporters; but TASS General Secretary **Ken Gill** remains determined to endorse the life sentence he has inflicted upon **David Kitson**, the anti-apartheid fighter who served over 20 years in a South African jail.

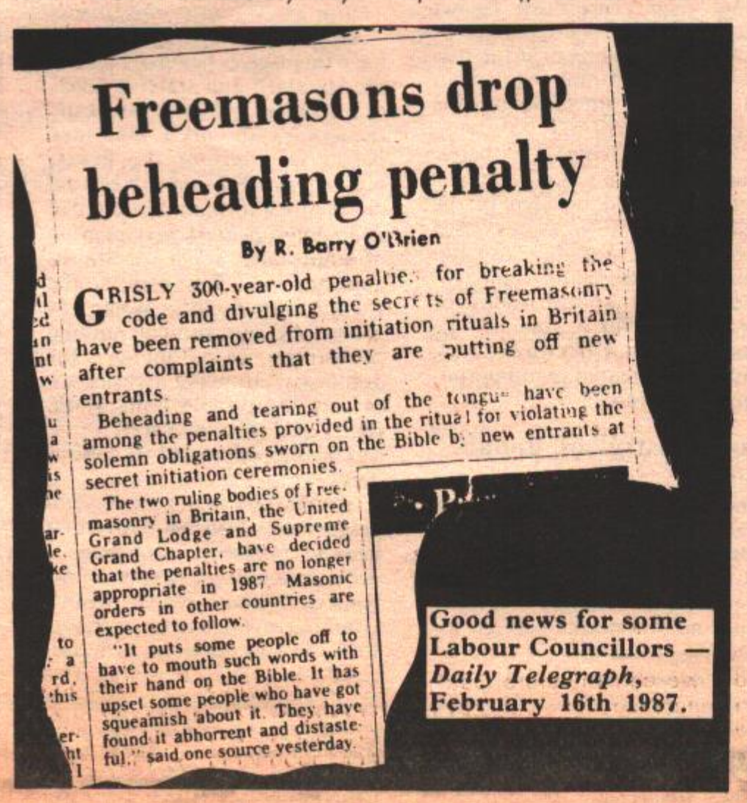
Because Kitson, a TASS member, has refused to tow Gill's political line and dissociate himself from the City of London Anti-Apartheid group (which campaigned most vigorously for his release) he is being victimised — by the loss of his livelihood.

The TASS Executive is reneging on its long-standing promise to provide financial support to enable Kitson, 67, to "rebuild his life" in Britain after losing all pension rights while in prison.

Labour movement bodies writing to TASS to protest at this brutal attempt to impose censorship are being told that TASS will pay another few months' money to sustain Kitson's Ruskin College teaching post until the end of this academic year.

But TASS do not deny that for the "crime" of disagreeing with Ken Gill, Kitson would then be left without *any* financial support from the union.

Uncle Joe Stalin would no doubt have preferred the likes of Ken Gill to woolly "liberals" like Gorbachev. What do TASS (and ASTSMS) members think?



Freemasons drop beheading penalty

By R. Barry O'Brien

GRISLY 300-year-old penalties for breaking the code and divulging the secrets of Freemasonry have been removed from initiation rituals in Britain after complaints that they are putting off new entrants.

Beheading and tearing out of the tongue have been among the penalties provided in the ritual for violating the solemn obligations sworn on the Bible by new entrants at secret initiation ceremonies.

The two ruling bodies of Freemasonry in Britain, the United Grand Lodge and Supreme Grand Chapter, have decided that the penalties are no longer appropriate in 1987. Masonic orders in other countries are expected to follow.

"It puts some people off to have to mouth such words with their hand on the Bible. It has upset some people who have got squeamish about it. They have found it abhorrent and distasteful," said one source yesterday.

Good news for some Labour Councillors — *Daily Telegraph*, February 16th 1987.

The Lost Leader

The *Briefing* Editorial Board was shattered, stagged at the news. More than a tear was shed. Our great leader, who boldly showed the way through so many bitter, relentless struggles, has finally cut loose from his roots.

He was always the gutsiest, grittiest, of class fighters, a champion of the oppressed and downtrodden, a leader steeled in battle from boyhood; a shopfloor stalwart who rose on a tide of mass militant support from the thriving stewards' movement he helped to build, to his rightful position at the helm of the union.

After years — decades — of fiery, class conscious, passionate, inspiring leadership, heartfelt rhetoric, personal sacrifice, fearless confrontation with employers, endless conflict with police, and, long spells on picket lines and in prison for his beliefs; and after leading enthusiastic members time and again into battle, the greatest workers' leader since **Walter Citrine** has finally hung up his briefcase, and reached for the ermine.

Of course we know **Lord David Basnett** means well; we know he, like **Scanlon, Gormley, Murray** and many others — will battle on tirelessly in that new tough cockpit of class politics, the House of Lords.

But who can deny that when Basnett cut his strong links with the rank and file — the ordinary working class folk from whom he drew such strength — he seriously discouraged the movement he has done so much — so very much — to build?

Bye bye to a boring bureaucratic bastard.

Loyalty to the national security state vs. socialist internationalism

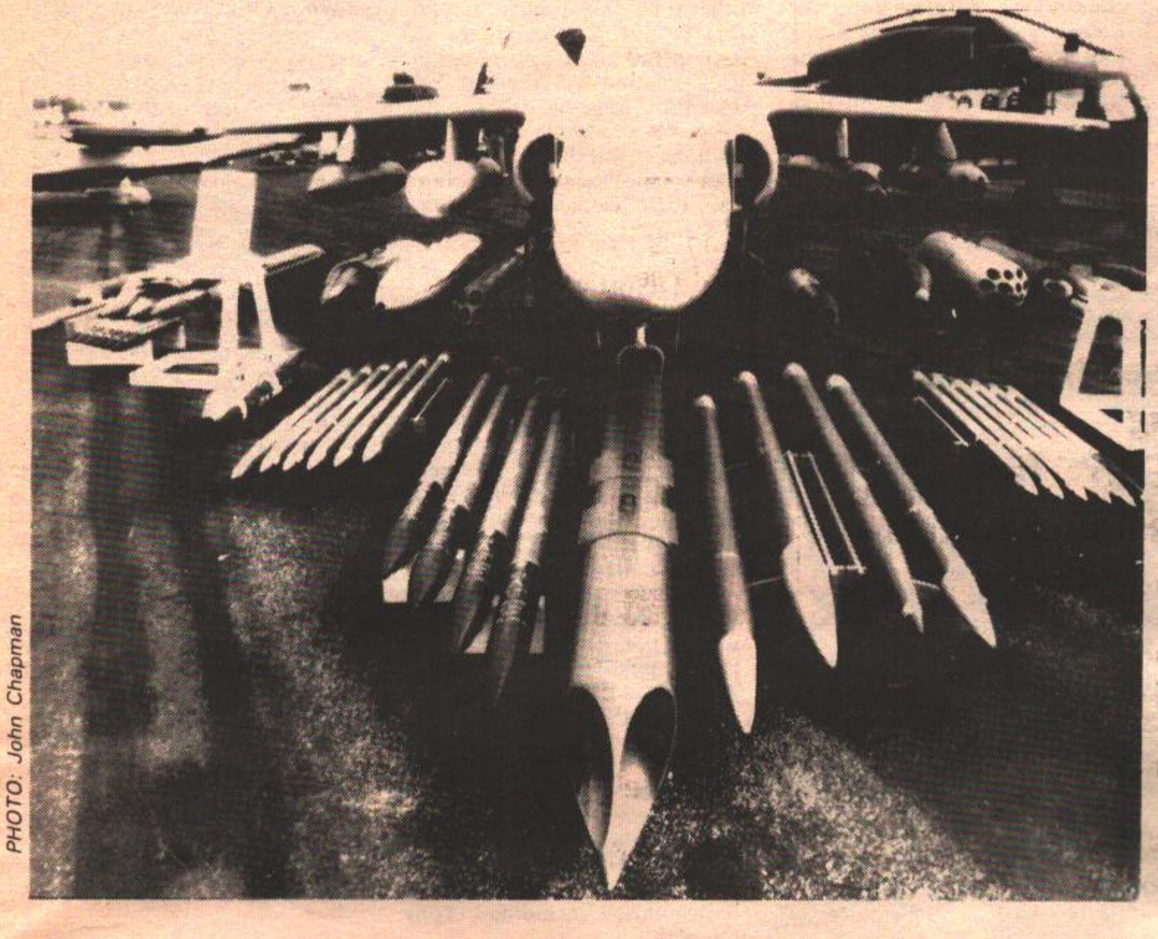


PHOTO: John Chapman

Any pretence of socialist or even anti-Cold War objectives in Labour's foreign policy has always been the first thing jettisoned by Labour governments in the post-war world.

One justification for this always seemed unanswerable to practical trade unionists and the like: radicalism abroad is a luxury that will only upset the powers that be, in Britain and the US, and turn them against the positive, working class gains in domestic policy that they have been prepared to accept — full employment, the welfare state, and the like. Labour should back butchery in Vietnam and support the British national security state as a trade off for domestic benefits.

Masquerade

Today, this argument has collapsed. Thatcher's election strategy hinges on persuading people that the *very existence* of the Labour Partry is a threat to national security. And this is not just propaganda: it is the settled view of the Reaganauts in Washington and the bankers in New York.

As one former US Ambassador the West Germany explains, in a book just out, the West European welfare state is a threat to the security of the West!

As the facts over the assassination of Olof Palme begin to emerge, the labour movement should draw the appropriate conclusions about the current thinking of the American and British security officials.

Those who are prepared to face the facts of life must therefore accept that the survival of a strong labour movement in Britain depends upon a systematic challenge to the national security state and the external policies that go with it.

Nothing could be more idiotic than Neil Kinnock's naive support for secrecy over the Zircon project. There is no "Labour" policy for Zircon any more than there is a "Labour" way of using nuclear weapons.

The starting point for a realistic *Labour*, never mind socialist, domestic and foreign policy should be a plan for the surgical amputation of the cancerous imperial, national security and "special relationship" superstructure of the British state.

End to Embargoes

This point can be grasped by people on the centre and right of the Party as well as on the left — indeed even in the Liberal Party and in sections of the media. It is as much about domestic as about foreign policy and there is nothing specifically socialist about it.

The Left should take the lead in building a coalition around the following points: scrapping all British nuclear weapons, removing the US bases, scrapping GCHQ and the special intelligence relationship with the US, scrapping MI6 and MI5, etc., scrapping the British bases outside the NATO area and cancelling the world naval role that goes with them. Such measures seem unthinkable only to people who fail to grasp the A-B-C of Reaganism-Thatcherism.

By Oliver MacDonald

But this leads on to the second key point in developing a new foreign policy for Labour: you cannot grasp the A-B-C of Thatcherism — and you certainly cannot challenge it — unless you are ready for a reorientation of policy towards the USSR.

If the USSR is seen as *the threat* to peace and freedom then in today's world Thatcherism follows. Only socialists can lead an alternative foreign policy coalition because they alone are prepared to state the obvious: the real threat to peace, the war-mongerers, the enemies of survival for billions in the third world, lie in Washington, New York, Whitehall, and the City.

If this truth is not spelt out, it is difficult for voters to grasp why the Labour Party wishes to scrap British nuclear weapons and to weaken US military power in Europe. Yet voters far beyond the Labour Party recognise that Reagan *is* the main danger to peace.

Before Thatcher goes to Moscow in the Spring Labour should place the following demands upon her: first that she makes clear her opposition to Star Wars; second, that she will end her agreements with Washington over Star Wars; third, that she will return to the trade peace with the USSR that existed in the 1970s, tearing up the Comecon trade embargoes that deny jobs to the unemployed here and achieve nothing except blocking improved relations between Eastern and Western Europe.

Terrorist politics

Once again, these points are widely accepted beyond the socialist left and there is a strong current of opinion that would like to oppose the whole drift of Reagan-Thatcher policy on the Cold War. But, they argue, we must make our opposition on the quiet, through the "reform" of NATO. By stealth, by conspiracy, we will fight Reaganism-Thatcherism.

This is faint-heartedness masquerading as naivete. We must publicly campaign *against* the terrorist politics of Reagan and Thatcher in the third world and *for* withdrawal from NATO, an imperialist alliance masquerading as a defensive "democratic" bloc.

In place of NATO, socialists should campaign for a non-aligned Britain working for a socialist, democratic, united Europe — from the Atlantic to the Urals — a Europe organising a new economic and political relationship with the Third World.

A start can be made in this direction by linking up with socialists on the continent to produce a socialist charter for Europe as an alternative to the Helsinki charter of the diplomats, and by redoubling our solidarity efforts with Nicaragua and South Africa.

Socialist Policies for a Labour victory!

Conference organised by Labour Briefing
Sat/Sun March 28th/29th
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, Secretary Labour Party Black Sections; John Palmer, Socialist Society; Joan Twelves, Lambeth Chief Whip.

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Register now! Write to Briefing, 51 Musgrove Road, London SE14.

New Defence Campaign angers activists

Reject this drivel!

A leaflet, intended for public distribution, from the Party's new defence campaign pack *Modern Britain in a Modern World* states *"Without Trident we could afford to build the equivalent of 90 frigates, 500 fighter aircraft, or 10,000 armoured vehicles."*

I couldn't believe my eyes!

Why are we not saying that without Trident we could repair all the hospitals in this country and build 450 new ones? Why are we not saying that for the cost of installing Cruise at Molesworth we could fund 120 primary schools?

Can someone please tell me when Annual Conference policy was changed to say that with the savings on nuclear weapons, the next Labour government would build conventional forces?

I believed that we have a commitment to reduce our defence expenditure to at least that of the level of Britain's NATO allies, in relation to Gross Domestic Product.

By John Wilton PPC, Birmingham Edgbaston

In the policy document *Defence and Security for Britain*, agreed at 1984 Annual Conference, it states: *"We are opposed to any major increase in NATO conventional defence spending. This could lead to a conventional arms race and undermine the political intentions of our policy of easing tension and reducing the risk of war."* (p35)

Perhaps someone from Labour Party Head Office Policy Directorate can explain how we can therefore justify an increase in our own conventional defence expenditure?

Resolution number 27, passed by 5,268,000 to 1,087,000 votes at 1986 Annual Conference and supported by the NEC stated: *"Conference calls upon the Labour Party in its peace and its other campaigns to stress the need for a planned transfer of public spending from weapons to welfare and industrial development..."*

Perhaps 5 to 1 is not good enough for the Policy Directorate! I suggest that if they do not understand a 5 to 1 vote they should not be presenting our defence policy!

It is obvious that someone, or some people, at Head Office are scared stiff to argue for Resolution 27. Instead, they have concocted a compromise based on increasing conventional weapons. This compromise is ludicrous and is not even arguable as a credible policy.

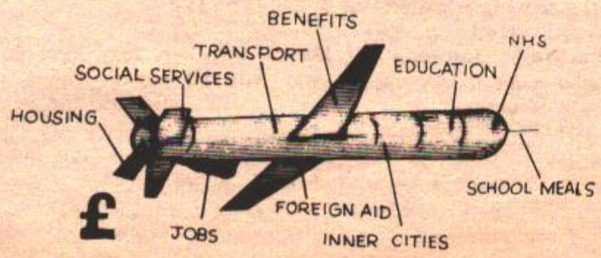
The most common argument against the removal of nuclear weapons used by our opponents is that "the Russians will walk in." Presumably we want to argue that this is not so, and we can therefore get rid of our nuclear weapons. Now we must argue that we need to build up our conventional forces — to stop the Russians marching in! How much are we paying people in the Policy Directorate to come up with this drivel?

What has happened to the morality we heard to much of at Blackpool in the leader's speech? When we are already spending nearly 50% more in Gross Domestic Product terms than Britain's NATO allies, where is the morality in spending millions of pounds more on conventional weapons, money which could be spent on building and repairing homes, schools and hospitals?

I am disgusted that the Labour Party should launch a campaign for more spending on conventional weapons. I am also disgusted (though not surprised) that Annual Conference policy has been ignored once more by the leadership and the Policy Directorate at Head Office.

I urge members to put resolutions through their branches and constituency parties condemning this policy and the accompanying campaign *Modern Britain in a Modern World*; calling on the Party to adopt a vote winning policy based on the transfer of money from Trident to health care and education.

I also urge members to push resolutions for Annual Conference this year (if we have one) which re-emphasise the Party's commitment to a *reduction* in conventional arms expenditure in DDP terms (as well as a non-nuclear defence policy) and call upon the leadership to recognise and implement that policy in the next Labur government.



International Briefing

Eire elections

By Piers Mostyn
Holborn & St Pancras CLP

The 26 county election result looks like a return of the one before last, in February 1982.

Again, Charles Haughey will form a minority government, reliant on the support of independent MPs.

Again the media have tried to laugh Sinn Fein out of court as an electoral failure with no support. But the picture is more complicated.

Haughey is criticised for his inability to capitalise on the unpopularity of the outgoing coalition parties, Labour and Fine Gael. Although the Fianna Fail vote is at its lowest since 1961, at 44% of a 75% poll, it is head and shoulders above its rivals — a level of support Thatcher would crave for right now.

But clearly Fine Fail is in difficulty.

Combined with the decline of Fine Gael's base (at its lowest level for 30 years) and the continuing disintegration of Labour's support — this shows that popular enthusiasm for the traditional ruling politics of the "Free State" is at an all time low.

However traditional bourgeois nationalism, in the form of FF, remains the political framework to which other forces must relate. In part this is due to the failure of attempts to break Ireland out of its "isolation" in the last few decades — merely opening the door to economic crisis and political instability. People aren't enthusiastic about Fine Fail, there just isn't yet a strong alternative.

Disintegration

The new Progressive Democrats are on the wings hoping to fill this space. However, its emergence signifies a disintegration of the main political currents as much as anything else, shown by the fact that they mainly gained support from Fine Gael, a party with a similar outlook.

But if PD and FG manage to form a bloc in opposition — whilst not strong enough to form a government — this will provide a new right wing alignment that will put Haughey under some pressure at the next election.

Another opposition bloc likely to emerge in the Dail, may be formed by the so-called "left" parties — Labour, the Workers Party and a couple of individuals, including Tony Gregor.

Its platform will be minimal — restricted to calls for investment and mild criticism of austerity measures, not very different to the British SDP — and will have nothing to say on the national question, except probably to support the Accord.

However, in generating hopes of a socialist alternative that was absent from the coalitionism of Labour in the 1970s and '80s, this could undercut attempts by Sinn Fein to present itself as a radical break from the status quo.

James Connolly is probably smiling in his grave at the continued demise of the Labour Party — not even a shadow of the party he hepled to create.

Dustbin of History

Its post-war popularity was confined to a brief economic boom, when workers had more jobs. It is now consigned to the dustbin of history. One wonders how much longer the British Labour Party, including *Militant*, can continue to relate to it as the force representing working class politics in the South.

The pro-partitionist and Stalinist Workers Party hopes to take over this mantle. Its steady growth shows that many disillusioned working class Labour supporters see it as preferable to the main capitalist parties. In this sense, the WP, along with the PDs, has been a beneficiary of the hostility towards the traditional parties.

Both share a zeal for mould-breaking — particularly when it comes to turning their backs on the national question and welcoming multinational capitalism. But neither provides a real alternative at the level of policies.

Sinn Fein's vote was less than hoped for, but to claim — as the press have done — that it has no support and has failed, is hardly credible.

Sinn Fein faced a vicious campaign of special branch intimidation, raids and harassment. They were ignored by the press and censored by the state media; one example being the exclusion of SF from a current affairs programme on the "smaller" parties in the election.

At 32,933 votes (1.9%) they clearly have a base to build on. An equivalent in Britain would be over half a million — hardly something to laugh about.

Neither should they be simply tested against the electoral support gained by H-Block/Armagh candidates in 1981, who polled 3% on a single issue platform at a high point of struggle.

Furthermore, achieving 5-10% in four constituencies means they are not out of the running for a TD in the future — particularly if they pick up disillusioned FF supporters, as they are likely to do at the next election.

Long way

Clearly, though, the Republican movement has a long way to go in the 26 counties. Adams has said that the next election will be the first real test of their electoral strength, but as this will happen within two years, it is doubtful that a very significant increase can be expected.

The reality is that breaking with abstentionism is only one of many steps necessary for Sinn Fein to become "relevant" in the 26 counties. The need for a proper strategy, and a set of clear policies on a range of issues, is likely to be high on the agenda at this year's Ard Fheis.

The Sinn Fein leadership will have to choose between going all out to beat the other parties at their own game — a disaster for Irish republicanism — or strike out and build a genuine radical alternative giving a powerful voice to all those challenging the British-backed status quo, in the women's movement, the unions and among the urban and rural dispossessed.

But this won't be easy — requiring a more activist and interventionist profile than they've had to date — and the party is still to develop the social and economic programme and the kind of structures and local leaderships necessary. Building a revolutionary challenge to the 26-country state in the most reactionary society in Europe is going to be a long-term job.

As British socialists we should side with all those in Sinn Fein and elsewhere who are engaged in this fight.



PHOTO: Eamonn O'Dwyer (Report)

Soldiers respond to riots after death of Hunger Striker Patsy O'Hara. Republican voting has increased during high points of the struggle.

Audit Commission Blues:

New York, New York!

By Mike Marqusee
Haringey Labour Briefing

Following the Audit Commission's lead, the press has played the New York-London parallel for all it's worth.

Left Labour authorities are turning once-fair boroughs into future South Bronxes. Socialist profligacy is creating financial catastrophe. The imagery of urban deterioration — crime, squalor, chronic inefficiency, with its unsubtle racist overtones — has been exploited in a big propaganda push against London's Labour Left.

In contrast to the negative New York parallel, the Commission holds up sun-belt success stories like Atlanta as examples of efficient waste-free management.

What are the real parallels? And what are the differences?

New York City, like most American municipalities, raised funds through local taxation and through issuing bonds. In the years leading up to the crisis of 1977, these bonds were issued in large quantities every year and were sold, primarily to banks and financial institutions, on the open bond market.

The funds thus raised were not used to finance capital projects but simply to sustain revenue at a time when New York's tax base was fast eroding — due to the flight of jobs and industry to the non-unionised south and south-west.

Meanwhile, the unemployed, the chronically poor, the historic victims of American racism and imperialism came to make up an ever greater proportion of the City's population, and to make corresponding demands on its services, which, by American standards, were generous. (They would be politically unacceptable, however, anywhere in Britain.)

What precipitated the crisis was a loss of confidence in New York City by the big financial institutions — and their consequent refusal to refinance maturing debt (that is, they wouldn't extend repayment arrangements on long-term loans).

In the end, the City did *not* go bankrupt. "Confidence" was restored by a tri-partite agreement between the banks, the politicians, and the union bureaucrats. New York was re-financed — at a high cost in jobs and services.

No attempt to build a mass resistance to this deal was made by the right-wing Democratic Party leadership who had mismanaged the city for generations or by the union bureaucrats who told their huge membership that there was no alternative to the deal.

The underlying causes of London's debt problems are similar to New York's — international recession, the spiral of urban decay, de-industrialisation, lack of support from hostile central governments, etc. But the nature, extent and history of their debt burdens is quite different. Above all, the *politics* behind the accumulation of debt in the two cities are worlds apart.

One of the main reasons for New York's chronic inefficiency is, of course, its endemic corruption — recently exposed in a series of major million-dollar scandals — based on the long-standing collusion between local politicians and businessmen. Not even the Audit Commission could accuse London's Labour Councillors of that particular offence.

Are the prosperous sunbelt cities like Atlanta really the models they are held up to be? In effect, these south and south-western cities are *new* cities. They have emerged into the twentieth century only in recent decades and consequently enjoy many advantages denied to the old citites of the north eastern rustbelt.

They have more open space for development, opportunities to renew and extend their infrastructure, favourable national economic policies (including defence spending initiatives), and they are not burdened by the political and financial obligations (like paying municipal workers a decent wage) which are unavoidable in New York.

The Commission uses these false parallels to make people believe that London's problems are simply managerial — not political.

Why didn't the Commission make reference to Houston, one-time managerial model of the sun-belt The oil-based boomtown is now a ghost-town, its municipal authority nearly bankrupt — because it based its revenue largely on taxation of oil profits.

With the demise of the oil boom, many of Houston's glass and steel towers stand empty, while its City managers desperately seek alternative funding — not for improved services, better housing, better wages for its workforce, but simply to keep the city from falling apart.

True, London is getting more like New York every day. There is a sizeable elite making large amounts of money in the "soft" economy (leisure, information, design, retail, etc.) living cheek by jowl with what the Audit Commission calls the "underclass" of the unemployed, the partially-employed, the dispossessed.

More and more, London, like New York, is becoming a divided city. But this phenomenon is not the result of policies pursued by Labour-controlled authorities. As in New York, it is symptomatic of the world development of capitalism.

The Audit Commission, of course, did everything it could to avoid precisely this point — the only real basis of comparison.



PHOTO: Andrew Moore/Reflex

Gerry Adams

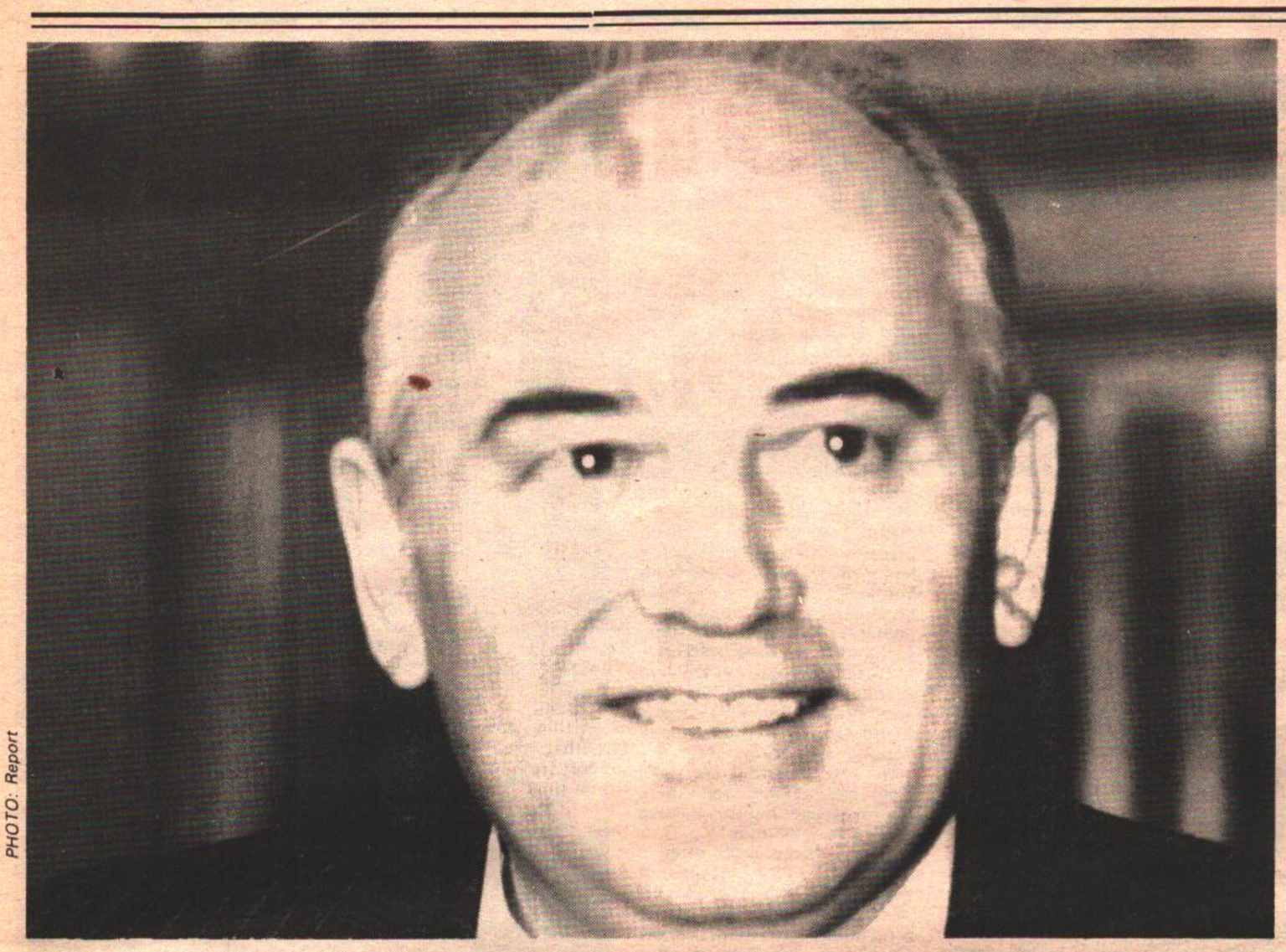


PHOTO: Report

Gorbachev: are the "reforms" sincere?

Gorbachev unfurls new banner... in bits

The political process now underway in the Soviet Union is of potentially immense historical significance, but the January plenum of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union witnessed only its bare beginnings.

The western media gave headlines to proposed electoral changes (in both the Soviets and the party) and sugested that Gorbachev and the reformers had triumphed. In fact the electoral changes are not, in themselves, far reaching, and the reformers still have a long way to go.

The new Soviet electoral system will establish multi-member constituencies, but not necessarily involve competition between candidates — an arrangement far less radical than the existing electoral system in Hungary or even Poland.

Secret ballot

The key change in party elections is to have a secret ballot not only for executive committees but also for specific posts within these committees, including the crucial first secrtaryship.

This is less far-reaching than the arrangements in, for example, the Polish Communist Party. It is simply an extension of the practice during the Brezhnev period in regions like Stavropol and Krasnodar.

Furthermore, the Central Committe Plenum failed to promote two key reformers — Moscow party leader Yeltsin and ideological secretary Yakovlev — to the Politburo. Despite the conservative Kenaev's removal and the additional two vacancies on that body no new full members were appointed.

By Oliver MacDonald

Rumours that a retirement age was to be imposed on officials, thus opening the way for Gromyko's departure, remained merely rumours. Gorbachev is being prevented from achieving a decisive reforming majority within the politburo.

The events surrounding the demonstration in Moscow over an imprisoned refusenik, make clear the attitude of KGB chief and politburo member Chebrikov towards the reformers.

What was remarkable about the incident was not the fact that the KGB broke up the demo, but that they did so in the way most calculated to humiliate and infuriate the reformers within the Party leadership.

Attention

Instead of stopping the demonstrations before they had even started, the KGB let them build up to gain the attention of the Western media, then staged an elaborate show of force to gain maximum publicity for the banning. This was an unmistakeable message to the party as to the limits of the reformers' power.

Has the western media, then, been making a fuss about nothing? Far from it. But what was not important about the report Gorbachev made to the plenum was the bit the Western journalists have most difficulty in understanding: the ideological bit.

Key points

The key points referred to the theoretical tradition of the Soviet Communist Party going back to the Stalin period. Gorbachev's words on this are worth quoting at length:

"The theoretical concepts of socialism (within the CPSU) *remained to a large extent at the level of the 1930s and 1940s... The causes of the situation go back far into the past and are rooted in that specific historical situation in which, by virtue of well-known circumstances, vigorous debates and creative ideas disappeared from theory and social sciences while authoritarian evaluations and opinions became unquestionable truths that could only be commented upon. The forms of organisation of society that had emerged in practice became absolutised in a way.*

Moreover, such ideas were actually equated with the essential characteristics of socialism, viewed as constant and presented as dogmas which left no room for objective scientific quest..."

All this produced:

"serious shortcomings in the functions of the institutions of socialist democracy, outdated political and theoretical concepts that often did not correspond to reality, and conservative managerial machinery."

These apparently mild words conceal a blunt lesson: that the CPSU has not, since the 1930s, really been operating with a genuinely Marxist theoretical basis, but with authoritarian dogmatism at the service of a conservative, bureaucratic government machinery.

In place of this, the CPSU and the Soviet state need genuine socialist democracy; this, Gorbachev says, is a question of principle, not of tactics.

Opened

In short, the January plenum did not introduce radical reforming *resolutions*; it did not unveil even a concrete and definite *programme for democratisation*; it did not even present a new, clear *theoretical principle*; but Gorbachev's report *did* declare the need for such a new theory and opened the way for others to spell out an authentic and concrete conception of socialist democracy with which to fight the Stalinist legacy.

The basic issue now is whether there are the forces within the CPSU to take up this task in the course of a general struggle for anti-bureacratic democratisation. Of fundamental importance is whether independent socialist platforms, with their own means of expression, their own journals and papers can be built within the CPSU itself.

Stimulate

The effect of the January Plenum has been to stimulate further the reform curent without actually defeating, or indeed weakening, the hold of the authoritarian conservatives.

A victory for genuine socialist democracy in the USSR would be the greatest blow against imperialism and the war-mongerers in the West since the crushing of Hitler or even the October Revolution itself.

The more alert people in Washington and London know this perfectly well and will at this moment probably be mulling over the Olof Palme option for Gorbachev.

Historic

The left must seek to make its voice heard in the historic process that has just begun within the CPSU. It must try to show how greatly the defence of the USSR against imperialism would be aided by authentic progress towards socialist democracy and popular sovereignty, and how this would open the way to a new international reunification of the working class movement.

National CND Demonstration April 25 1987

Details to be announced

Making sense of Lebanon

Palestinian pawns

By Phil Hearse

The western news media, obsessed with the kidnapping of Terry Waite and other western hostages, at first ignored the increasingly desperate plight of the Palestinian refugees trapped in their Lebanese camps under attack from the Shi'ite Amal militia.

Only as the refugees face starvation and the attacks threaten to become a full-scale massacre has the seige attracted media attention.

The Palestinians are now desperate; thousands have already died, and thousands more may die in coming weeks. Such is the "normality" of daily life in Lebanon. Once again, the ordinary Lebanese people and the Palestinian refugees have become the victims of competing foreign powers and contending militia groups.

The western media can make no sense of it. They prefer to see the Lebanese tragedy in terms of frenzied terrorists and sinister war lords. But there is a logic which unites the hostage crisis, the seige of the camps, and the role of the US and Israel. It is the logic of the struggle to dominate Lebanon, and the rise of the Shi'ite movement.

The key power in Lebanon is Syria. Syrian president Assad maintains an army of 30,000 in the country to secure the domination which makes Syria a frontline power in the struggle with Israel, and gives Assad a central role in Middle East politics, as well as huge financial subsidies from other Arab states.

The dominant militia leaders in Lebanon — Nabi Berri of Amal, Walid Jumblatt of the Druze PSP, as well as various Christian factions — all pay tribute to Assad in return for military, financial, and political patronage.

The seige of the Palestinian camps is a Syrian-sponsored attempt to prevent the re-emergence of Yasser Arafat's PLO. Assad is only prepared to tolerate Palestinian groups in Lebanon which are under his own control.

The most dramatic change in Lebanese politics since the 1982 Israeli invasion whch ejected the PLO, has been the rise of the Shi'ite Amal movement.

The Shi'ites have been Lebanon's poorest community, but also its fastest growing. For years they were excluded from any major share in the power structure, but in the 1980s they have asserted themselves politically and militarily through Amal ("Hope"). After the Christian Maronites, they have become the strongest movement in the country.

On the fringes of Amal grew up fundamentalist Shi'ite groups, especially the Hizbollahs and "Islamic Jihad". These groups, linked to Iran, have been the main hostage-takers. They have tried to use the hostages towards two different ends.

First, the Hizbollahs and Iran have made deals with the US. The Irangate scandal was one pay-off — huge shipments of arms for hostages. Hostages have also been used as bargaining counters for the release of Islamic militants held in Kuwait after an Iranian-organised bombing campaign.

The second purpose involves Israel. Southern Lebanon, on the Israeli border, is dominated by the Shi'ites. Here, Shi'ite militias have often clashed with the Israelis and their Christian allies, and hundreds of Shi'ites, militia and civilians, have been taken prisoner to languish in Israeli jails. These prisoners are also hostages, held by Israel in part as a bargaining counter for their own captured servicemen.

The US and Israel have the power to secure the release of at least some western hostages by giving up these prisoners. But no one at the moment wants to be seen to "capitulate to terrorism".

The hostage-taking business is a sordid game. To get hold of hostages, militia factions have employed gangster freelancers. The case of the western hostages, relatively few in number, should be placed in the perspective of the much more tragic events surrounding them. Nonetheless, no socialist can endorse the kidnapping and even execution of innocent academics and journalists.

Westerners are the targets of hostage-taking because of the role of western imperialist powers in the region, and their backing for Israel. The danger is that the United States will use the hostage crisis as an excuse for savage military reprisals on the Libya model. Solidarity with the Palestinian people and opposition to US military adventures remain priority tasks for the left.

Free Michel Warchawski

Israeli socialist arrested

The Israeli police have closed the Alternative Information Centre, a press agency which circulated information on the Israeli occupied territories throughout the world. Its director, Michel Warchawski, has been arrested and imprisoned.

***Labour Briefing* wishes to alert its readers to the seriousness of this event which is a blatant attack — using "anti-terrorist laws" — on the democratic rights of socialists and on the rights of journalists.**

The arrest of Michel Warchawski, known in the anti-war movement for his opposition to the policy of the Israeli state and his refusal to participate in the war in Lebanon, is in contradiction with the basic democratic right of freedom of speech and information.

***Labour Briefing* asks its readers to send labour movement resolutions or letters demanding that the Israeli government release him immediately.**

Write to: Israeli Embassy, 2 Palace Garden, London W8.

Socialist Society

The future of freedom: or galloping authoritarianism?

One of the central issues at the coming election is one that will probably not feature prominently in any Party's manifesto or publicity.

It is the future of freedom in Britain.

It will not look like a Party issue because, with the possible and partial exception of the Liberals, no party will think it worth campaigning around.

Of course, Thatcher, Tebbit and their followers will rant on about the threat the Labour Party supposedly poses to freedom. But after nearly eight years, we know well enough what Thatcher means by "freedom". She means the freedom to make as much money as possible by any available means, fair or foul; the freedom of the rich to buy advantages in education, in health, in childcare and every other form of welfare.

Since the Thatcherite view is that the welfare state constitutes an infringement of personal freedom, the freedom she believes in is also the freedom of the poor to starve quietly for lack of adequate public provision, and the freedom of the old to die quietly in midwinter for lack of adequate heating allowances.

By Anthony Arblaster
Socialist Society

That is not the freedom I am talking about! I am thinking of ordinary civil liberties and rights; of the powers and rights of other public authorities besides the central government in London.

These freedoms are currently under threat. They have already been whittled away to such an extent that it is doubtful how much of them would survive a third term of Thatcher-style Tory government.

Over the past decade or so there has been a good deal of comment on "creeping authoritarianism'. E.P. Thompson, among others, has written about moves to undermine trial by jury, and the ever-growing political power of the police.

It would make more sense now to talk about "galloping authoritarianism". Recent weeks have seen the latest in a series of government-inspired attacks on the freedom of the media. On the ever-ready pretext of national security, special branch police raided Duncan Campbell's home, the *New Statesman* offices, and BBC Scotland. In two other equally ominous developments, the BBC Board of Governors sacked the Director General, and the police assaulted news reporters outside the Murdoch lie factory in Wapping.

Naturally the government disclaims any involvement in any of these events. This is what is now known as being "economical with the truth". Alastair Milne would not have gone without the repeated government attacks on the BBC, and attempts to interfere with its political coverage.

Police arrogance and brutality now flourish because the government has given them a blank cheque to act against trade unionists, mining communities, sacked print workers and all other "enemies within".

The legal foundations for this are the new Police and Criminal Evidence Act, and the new Public Order Act — which Hurd has promised (threatened) to make still more restrictive.

This galloping authoritarianism will gallop apace if Mrs Thatcher wins a third election. In the name of freedom (Murdoch's freedom) and security, freedom will be destroyed.

It would be reassuring to see the Labour Party as the resolute champion of our liberties, and a Labour government as one which would halt this sinister progress towards constitutional fascism.

But, Kinnock's craven response to the Zircon affair has destroyed any such confidence. In its current unprincipled, opportunist phase, Labour has been trying pathetically to beat the Tories at their own game, claiming that Labour is the Party of law and order, the policeman's friend, the real protector of national security...

It is a grotesque and disgraceful charade, and there are few signs that it is helping Labour to win votes.

We are faced, as so often in elections, with a choice of evils. But in spite of Kinnock's miserable performance, there is no doubt in my mind that the future of freedom in this country depends upon defeating Thatcher.



PHOTO: John Chapman

The Tories stand for freedom (see right): by simply marrying into the right family you too can have the right to clothing, warmth, travel and food. Warning: only one such post still available. If you're not the lucky one — tough...

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LABOUR BRIEFING

NO MORE DEPORTATIONS

Only a last minute intervention in the High Court, and the dramatic demonstration at Heathrow Airport, stopped the immediate expulsion of 58 Tamils from Britain on February 17th.

The order from the High Court allows the Tamils to stay in Britain until their appeal is heard — in effect delaying deportation until February 23rd.

The case highlights not only the contradictions in the Immigration Laws, but also the sinister motives of the Tories.

The Tory case for expelling the Tamils was that they were lying about seeking *political asylum*. They should be deported at once, as an example to others engaged in the "immigration racket".

The High Court order demanded that the Tamils stay, to allow time for an investigation into the status of the refugees, and their right to stay.

Yet the next day, in the Commons, the Tories were insisting that the Tamils be deported at once, without investigation: for the Tories the case was proven their way without investigation.

The platform of the House of Commons allowed the Tories to be heard on afternoon radio, talking about "immigration rackets" as if it was a well-known fact that all black people coming to this country were illegal, criminals and just out to profit out of Britain!

This is rich coming from a government that is striving to keep up Britain's imperialist role — a role that has in so many countries caused the political problems that so many have to flee from.

Not only this, what better way to whip up racism, and to reassure those who commit racist attacks that their direct action is legitimate?

The same Tories who deport Tamils to shore up their political position also allow whites from South Africa, fleeing from what they see as likely Black majority rule, into Britain without question.

The Tories did get a savaging from some Labour MPs on their views — though not from the Front Bench.

If Labour wins the next election, the scrapping of all immigration laws and the Nationality Act will be a small repayment for the support at Black people in this country have traditionally given Labour. Until then, we must fight racism where it occurs — in the streets, on the estates and in the workplace.



Heathrow late last year, as extra racist visa restrictions were imposed.

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!