LABOUR
BRIEFING
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40p

CAPITALISM IN CRISIS:
DON'T BE PART OF IT!

Concrete moves by Reagan to "resolve" the 2.37 trillion dollar US budget deficit which has triggered the stock exchange collapse around the world over the past weeks have failed to make any impression.

Whatever happens now, millions of large and small shareholders are facing ruin in what the media now call a financial "meltdown" or "holocaust". One shareholder in the USA has already shot his stockbroker — followed by himself.

Yet faced with the disintegration of their financial structures, representatives of capital are unable even

By ALAN THORNETT

to explain what has happened let alone halt the slide. Some hopelessly point to the "big bang" and the computor systems, whilst Reagan has set up a "court of inquiry" to try to find out what is going on.

The fact is that it is no longer possible to explain these historic developments by conjunctural factors — a hiccup in the system or a rash statement by a minister. It is clear that something fundamental is at work in the system itself.

Marxists rightly point to the protracted general crisis of capitalism, particularly the huge unresolved debt problems it has piled up in recent years.

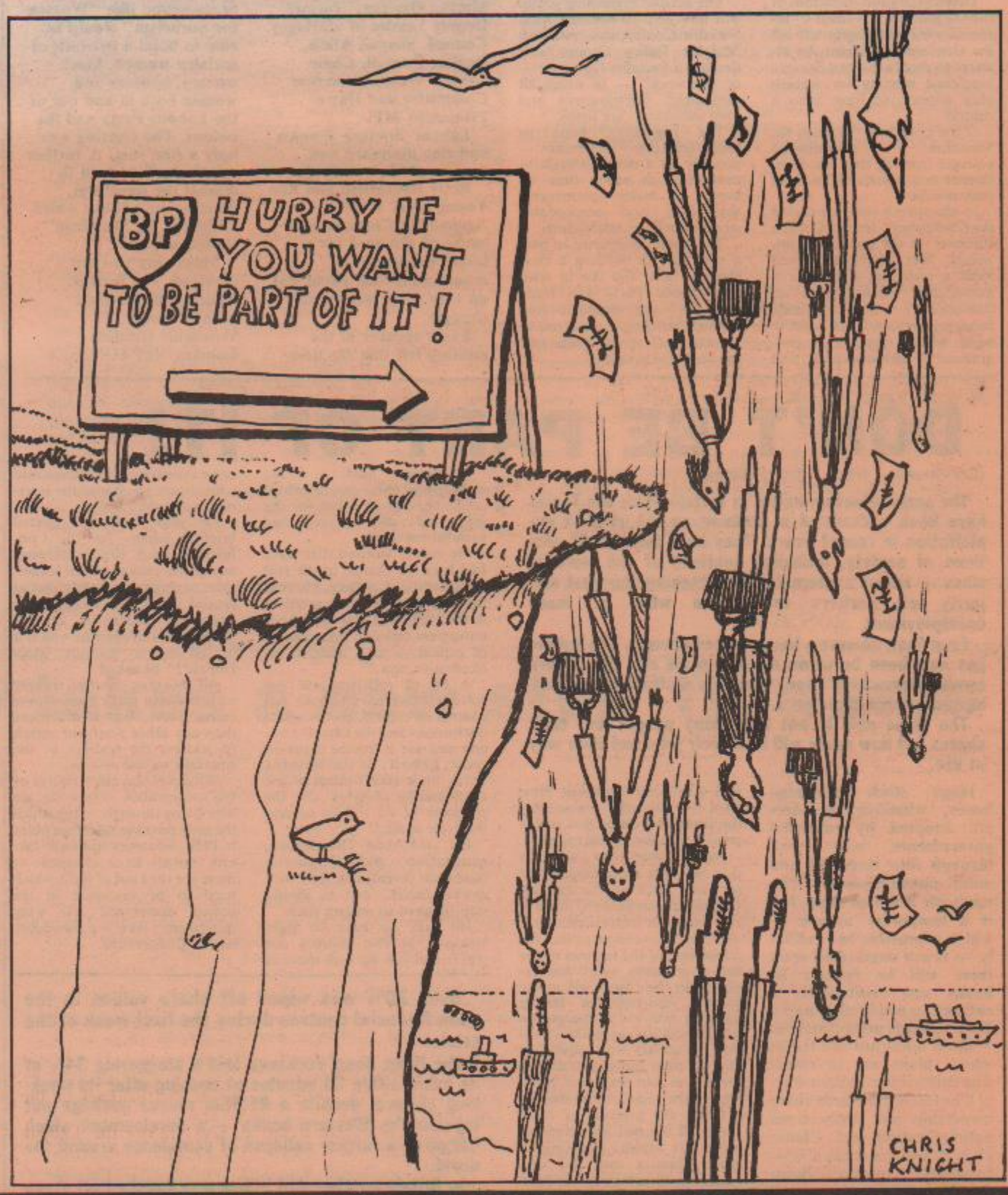
The buck, however, has stopped with Reagan, and governments around the world are looking to the US administration for a solution to the problem — a major reduction of the debt which is fuelled by the massive US arms budget, and a reduction in current interest rate levels.

Such a solution, however, is extremely difficult. The Reagan administration is weak and crisis-ridden and unable to stem the wholesale collapse of confidence which has taken place and the financial markets are like mad-houses as individuals and institutions refuse to believe the only advice on offer — "don't panic"; "if you believe everything will be all right it will be all right."

Reagan has a big problem, since what is required, if it is to have a lasting effect, is nothing less than a reversal of his entire economic policy. It would involve a huge deflationary package, the creation of mass unemployment and a head-on confrontation with the American working class — not so easy for a government which makes a lame duck look like an Olympic runner.

Such measures are, however, necessary. When it comes to the bottom line — in the USA or anywhere else — the only way that capitalism can hope to stabilise itself is raising the productivity of labour — the rate of exploitation of the workers at the point of production.

(Continued on page 2)



LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Chesterfield Conference

Socialism reasserted

Over 2,000 socialists turned up in Chesterfield on October 24th and 25th for the first ever Socialist Conference.

The range of individuals and organisations, from both within and without the Labour Party, attracted by this ambitious event is a measure of its historic significance.

In the face of the capitulationism preached by Labour and trade union leaders, the big turnout was itself a timely reassertion of socialist principles.

Perhaps the most important message of the Conference was simply: we are still here, and we are unrepentant.

With so many different tendencies present, friction was inevitable. This was exacerbated by the conduct of some left groups, who clearly had little interest in building anything lasting out of the Conference. The SWP in particular made no friends by its unenlightening, but nonetheless insistent, interventions.

By the end of the first day, following a series of gruelling and often acrimonious workshops a mood of frustration was evident among many participants, who had arrived in Chesterfield with high hopes.

On the second day, a higher level of debate (and tolerance) prevailed and spirits rose.

Despite the good intentions of the organisers, women's interests were still largely left off the Conference agenda. An attempt to rectify this at a Sunday lunchtime meeting for women only appears to have been a success.

If the proposed "Women for Socialism" organisation emerges from it, then the Conference as a whole will be more than justified.

In the speech that concluded the Conference, Jeremy Corbyn summed up the points of consensus. Our determination to build a mass movement for a non-aligned Britain, with an non-nuclear, anti-imperialist foreign policy, will go hand in hand with a bold new programme of nationalisation, and workers' control and the radical democratisation of British society at all levels.

By Mark Seaton

There was also a widespread recognition of the need for immediate struggle on many fronts, and the need to link those struggles through practical solidarity work. The fate of local government was a matter of widespread and urgent concern, and opposition to all cuts in Council jobs and services was solidly endorsed by the bulk of participants.

Ken Livingstone's speech received the expected media attention and is a welcome indication of a new type of "realignment" — only this time towards the left! Livingstone argued that the Stock Market crash is the harbinger of a major recession which will undermine the base of Thatcherism and open up new opportunities for the left.

He also argued the necessity of challenging the current Labour leadership. Needless to say, *Briefing* would support any such challenge and has indeed long recognised its necessity.

Briefing supporters attended the Conference in force. Our special 4-page supplement was widely distributed and well received, as was our leaflet on the second day. Many suggestions contained in it were adopted by the Conference organisers.

The ad hoc organising group will now help co-ordinate local Socialist Conferences, establish Socialist Policy Groups and develop a Socialist Directory — or "network" — in which all campaigns, organisations and even individuals are listed.

The organisers hope to reconvene the Conference — possibly on a delegate basis — next year, at which time we hope a more permanent, democratic and accountable structure will be established.

The whole enterprise can play a vital part in building a class struggle rank and file in both the Labour Party and trade unions — an essential step towards building a mass movement to challenge the Tories and the capitalist system.



PHOTO: Lessa Herbert

The Chesterfield Conference

One of the most exciting things that came out of Chesterfield was a meeting organised on Sunday lunchtime under the name "Women for Socialism".

Over 300 women attended, and the meeting was sponsored by many individual women in their personal capacities from different campaigns and political areas, including Martha Osamor, former Deputy Leader of Haringey Council, Sharon Atkin, Pauline Purnell, Chair Labour Women's Action Committee and Dawn Primarolo MP.

Labour Briefing Women had also discussed and sponsored the meeting.

Betty Heathfield and Kim Young from Women Against Pit Closures both spoke of the need for a broad women's organisation that could link up with other women in struggle.

Every speaker at the meeting felt that the time was right to launch and build a broad women's organisation called Women for Socialism. The speakers explained the frustration of women trying to fight back against the Tories and also now against the anti-abortion Bill introduced by Liberal MP David Alton.

It was felt that an organisation like "Women for Socialism" would be able to build a network of socialist women, black women, lesbians and women both in and out of the Labour Party and the unions. The meeting was only a first step. A further meeting will be held to discuss the structures, policies and actions which "Women for Socialism" should adopt.

Make sure you are involved. For further information contact: Mandy Moore, 89 Woodside Gardens, London N17 6UN.

By Barbara Green
Labour Briefing Women

Briefing Women



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Fighting Powell on the streets: now we'll take on Alton!

FAB Groups are being set up all over the country. Recently groups have been formed in Oxford, Manchester, Stoke, the Wirral and Lambeth. Many other groups are in the process of being set up.

FAB was launched at a press conference held to coincide with a token picket of the anti-abortionists' mass lobby of Parliament on October 27th. FAB has already been sponsored by NAC, Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign (WRRC), and the Co-ordinating Committee in defence of the 1967 Abortion Act.

A mass lobby of Parliament is planned for the Second Reading of the Bill which is likely to be called on 21st or 28th January. A demonstration is planned for March. A national petition should be available by the time you read this.

London FAB meets every Monday at 6.30pm at Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU.

What you can do

- **Set up a local FAB group and send details to FAB, c/o NAC at the address below. National FAB can also help you set up a local group by helping you make contact with local supporting groups like NAC.**
- **Pass a resolution at your union, Labour Party, Trades Council, Women's Section against the Alton Bill and supporting the January lobby.**
- **Get your union, Labour Party, Trades Council, Women's Section, etc., to sponsor FAB and make a financial contribution — FAB desperately needs funds in order to get out publicity and finance a temporary worker.**
- **Contact FAB for their regular bulletin which has ideas for organising, model resolutions, latest news, etc.**
- **Write to your MP now, and get others to do so. Send copies of your letters and replies.**

Contact FAB, c/o NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU, tel. 01 405 4801.

DON'T BE PART OF IT!

(Continued from front page)

The same situation exists in Britain. Here the Tories have been successful in pushing up the rate of exploitation in recent years. They have bought off sections of society, including sections of the working class — whilst systematically attacking the vast majority of workers under the whip of mass unemployment.

Even that, however, has not been enough. The bubble has now been burst on a world scale and the "share owning democracy" and "people's capitalism" has collapsed around their ears.

The issue now is not how many people lost their shares but how many will lose their jobs and their way of life.

Huge stock exchange losses, whatever measures are adopted by capitalist governments, will work through into recession and mass unemployment. The timescale is not so clear, but if a temporary upturn — which is possible but unlikely — is not engineered soon there will be failures of banks and institutions, a cutback in production and a drive towards protectionism.

But it is not just the Tories whose plans are in ruins. The drift of the Labour Party Conference towards share ownership and away from nationalisation and Clause IV is shown for what it is — bankrupt Toryism. Brian Gould's ideas lasted 3 months.

The basis of the new realism is undermined as well. The idea that the government is so strong that it is impossible to confront it is a difficult argument these days — although presumably the argument will be that such a crisis is the time to pull together.

At the same time the crisis puts not only class struggle but socialism back on the agenda. Capitalism can hold the line if it can create the impression that it controls the economy, but the reassertion of the realities of the casino economy which has exploded in their faces will create a new anti-capitalist feeling amongst millions of people on which socialists can build. It will polarise society with capitalism and the right moving to defend themselves and the doors opening for the socialist movement.

Under the pressure of these events all the political reference points are rapidly changing — from Kinnock and the new realists right across to the hard left.

This fact was very clear at the Chesterfield Conference at the end of October — and expressed most clearly by Arthur Scargill and Ken Livingstone.

Livingstone made a strong and remarkable speech which could be seen as a bid for the leadership of a revitalised socialist movement.

He rightly stressed that there had been no change in the real class nature of society. He told the Conference that the problem in the 1930s was that the labour movement failed to take control of capital — and "there is no alternative now."

A bit of reflation will not solve it. "We have to take full control of capital, the financial institutions and the City of London and use it for the common good. Labour, in the broadest sense, must take control of the commanding heights of the economy or we will go around the cycle again."

He said that Thatcherism, monetarism and Reaganism have been defeated by their own market forces "and we should step forward to replace them."

He said we have to fight seriously in this country for power and link up with those in other countries across the world who "want to change the international order."

He also explicitly rejected briefing papers for the Conference which urged delegates not be too critical of our leadership, saying quite rightly that at crucial points of struggle the leadership factor is crucial. "How can a struggle be won if it is led by a Ramsay MacDonald?" he asked.

All this may contrast sharply with his own track record over recent years, but it did more than any other platform speech to address the realities of the situation we are now in.

Whatever the exact course of the momentous events we are now living through — for which the only possible reference point is 1929, whatever technical factors mmay have changed — these are the kind of ideas which need to be discussed in the united democratic left wing movement which is a possibility out of Chesterfield.

Over 20% was wiped off share values in the main financial centres during the first week of the crisis.

The Hong Kong exchange lost a staggering 34% of its value within 30 minutes of opening after its week-long closure, despite a £1.56m rescue package put together by Western banks — a development which triggered a further collapse of confidence around the world.

In Britain another £24 billion was knocked off share values on October 26th alone. It was the biggest fall since the start of the crisis on Monday October 19th, when the London market lost a gigantic 508 points — almost twice that of 1929.

National Abortion Campaign

12th Annual Conference

Wesley House
4 Wild Court
London

Sat/Sun
31st October
1st November

20
YEARS OF THE ABORTION ACT

Speakers:
Jo Richardson MP, Diane Munday (BPAS), Madeleince Simms, Jo Chambers (CO-ORD), Alison Frater (Brook Advisory Centres), Angela Phillips

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Desperately Seeking...

Outwrite Women's Newspaper

is looking for
women to join the collective and work towards its relaunch.

For five years, *Outwrite* brought you news and analysis of feminist politics internationally. Now we need you to help us come back. We've lost our funds but are determined that Thatcher won't silence us. If you have time, energy, ideas, commitment to feminism and internationalism then write to us. Design, writing and administrative skills particularly useful.

Please write (with your telephone number) telling us about what help you could offer, your areas of interest and what direction you think a feminist publication like *Outwrite* should be moving towards.

Outwrite Women's Newspaper, Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2 6HG.

Editorial

BRIEFING
LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Who are the realists now!

"We must base ourselves on reality!" So our "new realist" leaders in the trade unions and the Labour Party have been telling us for the past ten years.

We'll give them "reality"! The Stock Exchange "meltdown" has torn away the veils and illusions, and revealed that reality for all to see. As Ken Livingstone so powerfully put it in his speech to the Socialist Conference in Chesterfield:

"This crisis is a devastating setback for those who have told us that Thatcherism, Reaganism and monetarism is some new way of life that we have to adapt to.

"Those who say 'accommodate to the centre' have had their entire platform fall away from under them.

"It's not just a slump that has happened on the Stock Market: it will be the worst recession that has happened since the Second World War and it will change all political relationships and all economic and military relationships."

The truth is that US imperialism's bluff has been called, and the mightiest economic power on earth has been shown to be in effect bankrupt.

It is not just Mexico whose debts will have to be written off. It is now clear to all — and this was the realisation which sparked off the crash — that the massive debt owed by the United States to the rest of the world will ***never be paid.***

The fast money which has been sloshing about in Thatcher's "Big Bang" City, and which has been financing all those yuppie voters so beloved of Gould — was pure fantasy. It was make-believe money, credit piled high upon credit, an immense house of cards resting ultimately on a completely unfounded confidence in the financial viability of the world's dominant capitalist power.

That confidence was a product of history — of two world wars and of the period of post-war reconstruction, and was closely linked with United States' imperialism's military predominance over the globe. Now that confidence has collapsed, it cannot be artificially recreated. The simple fact is that there is no way the United States can pay back what it owes whilst retaining its arms-programme, its standard of living or its dominance over the globe. With the collapse of US economic predominance, the entire post-war global system of alliances, treaties, banking, markets and institutions has come unstuck.

Though the immediate trigger for the price collapse was catastrophic US trade figures (showing a deficit of $15 billion for August alone), the problem is not just economic but political.

The Reagan government has been spending money as if it were going out of fashion — handing out massive tax cuts, while *increasing* military spending to record peacetime levels.

In adopting this line, Reagan has more than followed the traditions of previous hawkish administrations. He has been seeking to roll back revolutionary developments that rocked US imperialism in the 1970s — the Vietnam defeat; guerrilla victories in Angola and Mozambique; the Iranian Revolution; and the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua.

On the *political* level Reagan's aggressive line and escalation of the nuclear arms race won eager support from other imperialist governments — Thatcher (of course), Kohl in West Germany, and Nakasone in Japan. But this has not prevented the economic contradictions steadily sharpening.

For while Japanese and German economies, modernised after World War 2 (and prevented from wasting resources on armies, warships or missiles) have been investing in highly competitive industrial development, US administrations have continued to funnel billions of dollars into their burgeoning war machine.

Meanwhile complacent US manufacturers grew smug on profits from their relatively protected home markets — only to find themselves overtaken by a tide of Japanese, European and "third world" imports.

The eclipse of US economic dominance has been rapid. In the last two years the US share of international bank assets has fallen from 26% to only 18%, while Japanese banks have risen from 23% to 33%. More and more US firms are owned or in hock to Japanese or European enterprises. By 1991, foreign loans and investment in the USA will exceed American loans and investments abroad by $1 *trillion*.

But still the tide of imports pours into the USA. Cumulative trade deficits, and the burden of profits and interest on foreign loans mean that by the early 1990s the USA will need not only to stem the trading loss, but generate a huge $60 billion *surplus* on trade simply to stand still.

Ronald Reagan's reluctance to admit the scale of the problem is paralleled by Thatcher and Lawson insisting that the British economy is "sound". They know of course that the profits bonanza in the City has been produced by flogging off lucrative privatised industries at giveaway prices, by squandering North Sea Oil revenues in tax handouts, and by a runaway credit boom prompting punters to buy largely imported goods in High Street shops.

It could never last. It requires a constant stream of subsidy from irreplaceable assets — declining oil monies, and once-only privatisation offers.

But one reason the world's bankers have connived at the myth of an endless expansion here and in the USA is because nobody can contemplate the consequences of trying to rectify the imbalances of the world economy.

The world's biggest debtor nation is also the global policeman of imperialism, its leading military power and political leadership. Nobody is strong enough to call in the cash from US imperialism. The sheer scale of the upheavals required to restore US trade to a balance would send shockwaves throughout the capitalist world:

- Reagan's policies would need to be scrapped and reversed, with a massive austerity programme to put a clamp on US domestic consumption, while producing more goods for export.
- To achieve this, US manufacturing would need to expand by 30% in just five years.
- Even if this were possible, it would create recession in Europe and Japan: US firms would have to recapture markets at home and abroad worth $220 billion — a tenth of world trade.
- Even partial success would mean disaster for weaker capitalist economies and infant manufacturing enterprises in the "third world" which would have to be crushed at birth by a US trade juggernaut.
- This in turn could trigger working class resistance and government crises almost anywhere in the world.
- The whole impasse exposes the myth of a common interest between European, Japanese and US capitalists: though the lines are blurred by multinationals, they remain deadly rivals, at loggerheads in the fight for world markets.

A look at the problem shows the huge dangers for the working class. Every possible escape for capital involves striking new blows at working conditions and living standards.

While Reagan continues to fuel the war machine and each capitalist class attempts to urge or bully its "own" workforce into fresh sacrifices for the sake of the economy, a new danger that economic conflicts might escalate into another war or wars for markets and profits cannot be forgotten.

The crisis shows that huge reserves of productive capacity have been developed by a capitalist system that is incapable of planning to use it for socially responsible objectives.

It shows that only in the hands of the working class can the latest technology and resources be developed in the interests of fulfilling social need.

It shatters the timid reformist dream of tinkering with and "planning" the capitalist system through piecemeal parliamentary legislation alone. In this way it puts the necessity for socialist policies of expropriation and international solidarity firmly at the centre of the agenda.

We were right all along! In short, we have entered, quite suddenly, an entirely new stage. Leon Trotsky wrote in 1938 that the crisis of humanity boiled down to the crisis of leadership in the working class. These words have intense relevance now.

For socialists in the labour movement in Britain today, the tasks are immediate. In the *Briefing* alliance, we have already gained leadership positions on a local level in many parts of the Labour Party. With a new network emerging from the Chesterfield Conference, more possibilities should be opened up.

More importantly, though, **the time is fast arriving when we will be forced to nominate a challenger to Neil Kinnock himself.**

The catastrophic economic crisis will be a powerful boost to us in such a campaign. Our leaders must be told, in no uncertain terms:

"Resist this capitalist lunacy! Mobilise and unify our movement! Campaign to take over the banks, the insurance companies and the monopolies! — **Or make way for those who will!**"

Briefing Women

Our struggle takes a new step forwards

It is a bitter irony that the policies of Britain's first woman Prime Minister have hit women especially hard.

Women fought in the 1970s and won many gains. They were not easily won, and will not be easily given up.

Thatcher, since '79, has been opposed by women in the labour movement and community. In particular women have fought to retain their right to choose when, how and where to have children, the right to abortion and the right to paid employment on an equal basis with men.

Mass unemployment has affected women in ways which are often hidden. First, women don't always appear on the much-revised statistics. They don't appear because when they lose a job and their companion is in work they cannot claim benefit. Women have to show they have childcare arrangements permanently arranged — or they are not classed as "available for work". It's hard enough to arrange childcare once you have a job; making arrangements in advance is virtually impossible. The Catch 22 situation keeps women out of the figures.

After redundancy women often take low-paid or part-time jobs, losing any state benefits in the process. They are also expected to deal with the other side of unemployment — depression and loss of self-confidence — while continuing to maintain their families.

The role women are expected to play in the family — as comforter, carer, feeder, emotional supporter and the rest — has been ruthlessly exploited by Thatcher and the Tories. Gradually at first, then rapidly, they are smashing up the welfare state.

As hospital wards are closed and elderly people's homes are privatised, women are expected to step in and cope with looking after the elderly and sick without support. The expectations of nursery places for kids is now unrealistic for many women.

But there are many examples of women fighting back. The year of Thatcher's first election was also the year that John Corrie MP tried to introduce an anti-abortion bill. An alliance between women of all ages and the labour movement forced a retreat and the Bill was defeated.

By Barbara Green and Jane Kelly
Labour Briefing Women

The Women Against Pit Closures movement was an inspiration for many. It followed on from a long history of women organising, but particularly from the lead given by women taking direct action against Cruise missiles at Greenham Common; and the example of Women Against Pit Closures inspired women to organise as women in further industrial disputes.

Women in the Labour Party, under continual attack from the right wing leadership of the Party, were one of the only groups visibly to object at this year's Labour Party Conference. Black and Irish women continue to fight the racism and sexism of government legislation and actions

But many women have fought without the support of the whole labour movement. The leaderships of the Labour Party and trade unions continue to pay lip service to demands of women. For the Labour Party during the election campaign "targeting" women voters meant going to white, professional, home-owning women.

In their attempts to turn the Labour Party into the political equivalent of the Midland Bank, our "listening party" has quite definitely closed its ears to black women, unemployed and lesbian women.

But these voices are getting stronger and more united in struggle. Socialist feminists across the labour movement and community need and want to work together. This is particularly urgent, given the attack on women's abortion rights being spearheaded by Liberal David Alton. His Bill to reduce the time limit for abortion to 18 weeks is an explicit attack on abortion rights as laid down by the 1967 Act; and a strong attack on women's hard-won gains.

Also, out of the recent Chesterfield Conference has come an idea to help this unity. Under the name of "women for socialism", women want to come together from inside and out of the Labour Party to discuss campaigning and to provide a forum for women to meet and discuss issues and policies that we as women want to develop and win within society.

This idea is ambitious and exciting, and is exactly what women have been crying out for for many years. For all of these reasons we shall work to make this a success.

Labour Party

KEN SEIZES THE

After three difficult years of relative isolation, KEN LIVINGSTONE has returned to form.

Through his interventions at Labour Party Conference and at the Chesterfield Conference he has shown that he is firmly realigning himself with the left and establishing his credentials as our most articulate spokesperson. With capitalism world-wide plunging into crisis, he has chosen his moment well!

***Briefing* is pleased to be able to publish the following interview with him, conducted by JENNY FISHER and CHRIS KNIGHT. The interview took place in the House of Commons on Friday October 16th — the day of the "hurricane" which devastated the landscape across the South East.**

This was also the day on which — unknown to Ken or to the interviewers — the Wall Street crash, harbinger of a far greater hurricane, was just getting underway.

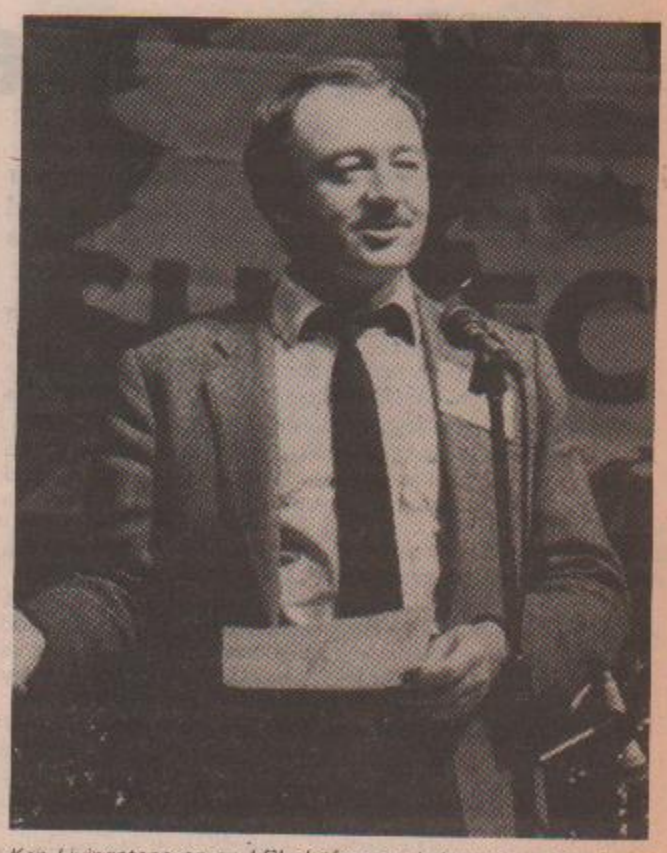


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Ken Livingstone on an LCI platform at Labour Party Conference

***Chris:* What significance do you attach to your election to the NEC?**

Ken: Not much. Of course, there were incredible scenes in the press room when the result was announced, with the man from *The Sun* screaming *"Bugger me, we're going to have to go bananas on this!"* and so on. But we shouldn't have been surprised.

I'd have got pretty much the same vote last year (but I wasn't prepared to be used by people who just wanted to knock Eric Heffer off).

All of us associated with the local government left have received a battering which damaged us with the public. Those MPs who stood silent, refusing to defend our record, while Tebbitt put the boot in — particulary over lesbian and gay rights — they contributed to the loss of three seats in the South East.

The "London effect" was to that extent their doing. But since the election the focus has been to say "It's all Livingstone's fault." Vicious personal attacks in the press, fed by leaks from some quite perniciously unpleasant right wing MPs, created the impression that "Ken Livingstone is finished," that I'd been marginalised.

They believed it; you believed it; I even nearly believed it myself. I went to this year's Conference thinking I might just squeeze on in seventh place!

But the rank and file of the Party refused to be part of all this; they just thought "sod it", and voted the way they would have done a year ago.

They don't believe we lost the election because Labur councils support lesbian and gay rights. They know we lost it primarily because we had no coherent economic policy, and secondly because we fudged on defence.

***Chris:* And your assessment of Labour Party Conference more generally?**

Ken: Much better, I think, than the left could have hoped for. This was the Conference, don't forget, at which it was said that the left was going to be soundly thrashed.

There were some small moves to blur the edges of policy. But when given the chance to vote on a clear issue, Conference quite often came out with a good policy.

Clearly, major fudges are being prepared on nuclear weapons and that will be the main debate over the next year.

Given all we've been told about the left having lost us the General Election, there was actually a lot of strength in the left's slate for the NEC this year within the overall results.

I don't think we lost much ground. If anything, we came away in better heart than when we went in. But there's a long period of struggle ahead on virtually every aspect of policy.

***Chris:* Do you really believe that Conference came out "quite often" with *good* policies?**

Ken: Yes. There was clearly a fudge around nuclear weapons, with contradictory resolutions. But apart from that, you can't really point to any debate in Conference where policy advances made by the left in previous years were rolled back.

There was a small shift to the right on women's and black people's right to self-organisation, but this didn't represent a movement in the constituencies at all. That was a few people shifting in a trade union block delegation.

All the furore was around what individuals said — what Neil Kinnock did or didn't say in television interviews outside Conference, or what Brian Gould said on the way to Conference.

***Chris:* What's your opinion on the policy review?**

Ken: I'm completely in favour of the policy review. I think the policy we've been lumbered with over the last two general elections has not been a particularly socialist policy at all.

It was fatally flawed on all the key areas. It was a joke of an economic policy, for example.

Now clearly, a lot of right wingers want to use the review to water down our policies. They want to accept as irreversible many of the changes Thatcher has made in society, and turn us into something which will fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the Alliance.

But it was particularly revealing, and I think it's an indication of the hidden strength of the left, that virtually nobody on the right honestly stated their position.

The key question we have to face, which every Labour government will fail on until we have answered it, is: *How does a Labour government impose its will on the financial institutions?*

***Chris:* But surely Conference is the last place you'd expect them to be honest about their positions?**

Ken: Of course. But now that the review has started, we're going to see a series of major debates. We've got to make sure that debate is genuinely open and takes place throughout the movement, not within some small circle of fans meeting with the shadow cabinet around a ouija board asking for guidance.

***Jenny:* You think the review will give us an opportunity to shift policy to the *left*?**

Ken: I think we can shift it to the left. The problem with the '83 election programme was that it was drafted not by the left but by John Golding.

He got hold of the NEC that year, sat down with two or three others and produced a fatal mish-mash of compromises and fudges — totally unconvincing to any elector, let alone the press or media who were going to hack over it.

None of us supported the ideas around borrowing of that election, nor the mish-mash of taxation changes this year.

That's not how you achieve a socialised economy. The issue is the control of capital. Anything which takes the focus away from that actually helps to blur the issues.

My objection to Brian Gould isn't that he says we can buy shares. People can buy shares all day as far as I am concerned. But if somebody working for Ford decides to buy shares in their company, it won't change the balance of power. It's wholly irrelevant.

But it would be extremely dangerous if people around Gould were to lead the Party off saying, "Look, we've tried borrowing in '83, we've tried taxation this time, neither of these worked — so now we'll go for a share-owning democracy!"

That won't work either. It's a diversion that lifts the eyes of the movement away from the key question we have to face, which every Labour government will fail on until we have answered it: *"How does a Labour government impose its will on the financial institutions?*

Any Labour government which takes office without having solved that question will fail. It's probably impossible even to win an election without having convinced people how we're going to pay for the reconstruction of Britain.

***Jenny:* At Conference, Tuffin was saying we couldn't afford to renationalise the privatised industries, let alone take nationalisation further. The NUM said that control over industry is impossible except through nationalisation. Tuffin won. Against this background, how are we going to have the strength to win in the review?**

Ken: I'm not surprised Tuffin's position won. It's wholly incredible to suggest the next Labour government should spend tens of billions of pounds buying back all that's been sold off. It would be a total waste of money.

We're hooked on one of those wonderful old slogans, "you can't control what you don't own." Like a lot of such slogans, it's total nonsense.

You don't buy back all those shares; you take control over the governing body concerned. You impose change at that level, ensuring there are Labour nominees controlling the boards of all these large corporations.

It's probably impossible even to win an election without having convinced people how we're going to pay for the reconstruction of Britain.

***Chris:* Well, I wouldn't expect much if we sent a comrade off to sit on a board in the City somewhere, saying "take control".**

Ken: If you put someone like Len Murray in there, no. But if you popped along to your local GC and got Chris Knight nominated, I'm sure there would be much more impact.

***Chris:* I doubt there would be any impact at all if it was just Chris Knight sitting around on some board!**

Ken: But it wouldn't be, you see. Once you've defeated Thatcher and elected a Labour government, every aspect of life in Britain will change overnight.

There will be a degree of confidence amongst workers. The state will be worried. Industrialists will start to be concerned. Finance capital won't know what to expect of that government.

The shifts to the left in the Labour Party start during a Labour government, as confidence builds up. The track record of success for industrial action is best under a Labour government. As confidence starts to build up, there's pressure from below, and the Party can start to move in that direction.

The problem in the past, as you know, has been that nobody leading the labour movement had the slightest degree of determination or courage to seize that movement and pose change. What we've got to do is build a leadership in the movement, in the trade unions and the Labour Party, which can do it this time.

***Jenny:* And the policy review will pave the way for such a process?**

Ken: The review gives us a new chance. Yes, it's a chance for the right to drop our non-nuclear policy and say we're going to keep nuclear weapons. But also it's a chance for the left to place unilateralism at last within the framework of a coherent international policy which doesn't involve us being a doormat for America.

There's an intellectual coherence to what we're saying; and an intellectual coherence to what the right are saying. I believe the vast bulk of the rank and file of the movement will prefer our coherence to theirs.

We may lose on the block votes. But even then, we will be winning the arguments, year by year by year. And at some point, you break through. All the other recipes will be rejected election by election by election, and even if you get another right wing Labour government — it will fail.

***Chris:* While we're on "coherence", what do you think of Joan Ruddock's statement, supported by Kinnock, that we should keep Trident as a bargaining counter?**

Ken: I think Joan was offering Neil a handle.

There was a major push by the right to try and ditch unilateralism. She was just saying we wouldn't object to Kinnock's going to Gorbachev and telling him: look, we're getting rid of all these bombs, how about you throwing something in as well? That's fine. Who could object to that?

***Chris:* And you call that unilateralism? Keeping Trident until the Russians have made more concessions?**

Ken: I'm saying you do all this now, before you get into office. Hopefully, by then, Gorbachev would have indicated some further concessions, we'd be getting rid of Trident, and all that wouldn't be an issue.

Gorbachev would very likely give us a positive response — much more positive than what Kinnock got from his visit to Reagan. We are dealing now with a genuine peace-monger in the Kremlin.

***Jenny:* But the wording of the resolution Joan was supporting implied that because a Labour government would never actually *use* Trident, we could *keep* it as a bargaining counter, not actually getting rid of it until further concessions had been gained.**

Ken: As I understand it, Joan is saying — and certainly I am saying — not that we're keeping Trident until we win some deal, but that we're committed to getting rid of it, hopefully beforehand, since Neil would have gone and got some corresponding further reduction in the arms stocks from the Soviet Union.

It all depends on whether you actually go looking for a betrayal or not. I see Joan as someone who has spent years and years not putting any personal ambition forward, plugging away at an issue, not following any careerist route. Since coming into Parliament, she's been playing an active role in the Campaign Group and taking the correct positions on a whole range of issues instead of moving, as some may have expected her to, to the right.

***Chris:* Before the general election, you could have made at least a plausible case, on grounds of tactics, for not publicly criticising Neil Kinnock's leadership of the Party. Given the powerful surge to the right on policy issues which Kinnock is now clearly organising on behalf of the right, can you still really justify such restraint?**

Ken: The strategy which emerged from Peter Hain's letter in 1983 after the election — trying to unite the left to build a block of pressure to move Kinnock to the left — was, I think, right. But it had obviously failed by last year's Party Conference, as I made clear then.

Since then, the debate has moved on to another question: on what grounds can there be unity on the left, accepting maybe that the leadership isn't going to get involved in that? We've made much more progress in that direction than I thought possible a year ago.

I don't believe we'll see the left setting the agenda whilst we devote most of our time to fighting amongst ourselves. Largely that's stopped. We're all guilty of it, myself included.

The 15-point plan we put forward at the start of Conference was put together quickly to block the incipient growth of a drive towards coalition with a new centre party. For all its inadequacies, we were able to set down a full set of positions, taking the initiative whilst the right was still weak, hadn't done its ground work, hadn't nobbled the trade union block votes.

We haven't heard the end of coalitionism and there's a long struggle ahead, but our tasks on this issue may be a little easier from now on.

I don't go along with the mechanistic view which says that the Party can just be wrenched to the right, because the right just haven't got the necessary coherent set of policies.

MOMENT!

Chris: **Alternatively, you could say they're being drawn towards an extremely coherent set of policies, put forward by Thatcher. She's setting the agenda in a very profound way, while Brian Gould, Neil Kinnock and those around them are basically saying "look, if you want votes, this is the direction to move in."**
Ken: Well, there's no doubt that many people in the Labour Party are making the mistake of assuming that what Thatcher has done is a mirror-image of what Labour did in 1945, and that we have to live in the world that she has created. I think that this grossly overestimates the strength of monetarism. Unlike in 1945, when the Labour leadership and the capitalist state represented a massively powerful consensus about post-war regeneration, Thatcher is polarising society. In opposition to her policies, there is in the country at the moment a majority in favour of full employment, a majority in favour of the welfare state and so on; the tragedy is that the Labour Party has failed to mobilise that majority and realise its potential.

Chris: **Isn't that failure intrinsically a criticism of the leadership?**
Ken: **It's a criticism of all of us. We kept our mouths shut on too many issues. For example, how many people on the left kept their mouths shut about NATO over the last couple of years? Not just the LCC but the whole of the left...**

Chris: Briefing **didn't.**
Ken: OK, *Briefing* didn't, wonderful old *Briefing*. But apart from that, it was a historic compromise between the left and the right, wasn't it? And like all compromises, it's a disaster. You have to take one clear path or the other.

Jenny: **If we're not going to compromise on policies, why compromise on using the electoral machinery? Wouldn't it be a good idea if someone who supported the coherent set of policies you've outlined actually stood in a leadership election?**
Ken: If this two year review period devises a series of policies opposed by the leader of the Party, then I would assume they'd resign. If they didn't believe in the policies, they would go.

What I strongly suspect is that by the time this review is completed, there will be a broad unanimity between the view of the leadership and the new policy consensus. We've got to make sure that the policy consensus is as strong in the direction we want as we can make it.

Chris: **Now that the soft left has so emphatically gone over against any radical direction whatsoever, the question our supporters are asking is how long do you see yourself being able to straddle the fence as the gap between the two camps gets wider and wider?**
Jenny: **If you stay were you are, you'll certainly need long legs!**

Ken: Well, if you headed the coalition which won the GLC, you had to have extremely long legs.

The gap between Jeremy Corbyn and, say, Nigel Stanley, is no greater than the enormous gap which existed around the GLC between, say, Ted Knight/Jeremy Corbyn on the one hand and the camp of Harvey Hinds and Illtyd Harrington on the other.

Of course, it's a lot easier to do this when the left's moving forward...

Chris: **Yes, and when the left's moving backwards, the roles are the exact opposite. There's an important distinction, isn't there, between splitting the right and pulling parts over on the basis of an agenda largely set by the left — which is what we together did with the GLC — and the present situation of allowing the right to split us as they set the agenda and pull parts of our ranks over to their side?**
Ken: Well, a year ago, I was a completely isolated voice inside the LCC saying there's got to be left unity. They were saying "The man's mad."

Now you've got Ruddock, Galloway, Haine coming quite clearly down the line, without any internal discussion between us. In that post-election LCC Goulderama thing, Haine was quite clearly spelling out the dangers of coalitionism, warning he was not going to go down that road, and getting barracked for it.

Now there's this drive from the right wing of the LCC to keep me off the Executive. That's going to be interesting.

I'm not doing any work to stay on it. If the LCC now decide to dump me, that will define their politics. As long as a majority think they can work with me, I'll welcome that.

Don't forget, the LCC has now come out in favour of withdrawal from Ireland within the lifetime of a parliament. That's really important.

The problem in the past, as you know, has been that nobody leading the labour movement had slightest degree of determination or courage to seize the movement and pose change. What we've got to do is build a leadership in the movement, in the trade unions and the Labour Party, which can do it this time.

For the first time, all the strands of opinion on the left now favour withdrawal. It means you can now put campaigning for withdrawal at the forefront of a left-unity agenda. You could never have done that in the last twenty years.

There are sectarians in the LCC who are the mirror image of the sectarians on the left who never want to work with anybody. However, the vast majority in the LCC are committed unilateralists, committed to some form of workers' control in industry, and are committed to the democratisation of society.

Of course there'll be internal conflicts; but my whole approach over twenty years has been not to run away from these but to seek to build the biggest possible coalition around the agenda of the left.

I'm not going to change at this stage. So if I can bring the LCC in the right direction, that's fine. If they want to throw me over, that's up to them.

Chris: **I think *Briefing* supporters would still like to know how long you intend straddling the fence, and which side you will come down on if it becomes impossible to bridge the divide any longer. We would like to feel that ultimately you're with us.**

Ken: If you have any doubts on that, you're mad. Jesus Christ! I mean, how easy it would be for me to sell out! Think how much would be on offer! Think of my value to our opponents!

Given my age, the standing I have in the constituencies — which I have kept despite being battered by the right and by a lot of the left in recent years. If I wanted to sell out, I would have done it long before now. There are much easier routes.

Chris: **Good. But let me continue with a further question. At the LCC rally at Conference, you sat next to Brian Gould on the platform. If you were using that platform on our behalf, instead of letting them gain credibility by politically co-opting you, why did you miss what seemed to many of us a perfect opportunity to have a go at Brian for his endorsement of popular capitalism and wider share-ownership?**
Ken: Because I had given a guarantee that I wouldn't use their platform to attack them or the other speakers. Otherwise, they were going to throw me off it.

I experienced a wonderful bit of realpolitik, of the kind you just don't normally run into in the LCC. Peter Hain had stuck me as a signatory on his left-unity statement, as you'd expect. When the statement was published, people began saying it was all a Livingstone plot!

The driving force behind it was Hain; I'd just said that if I was given a left-unity statement, I'd sign it; I left it completely up to him and the other signatories.

There was then a vote to remove me from the panel of speakers! So I pointed out that Joan Ruddock, who was on there, had signed it, Diane Abbott was a supporter of it — why just go for me? Perhaps because of the illogicality of their position, they lost by seven votes to six.

There's an intellectual coherence to what we're saying; and an intellectual coherence to what the right are saying. I believe the vast bulk of the rank and file of the movement will prefer our coherence to theirs.

But even then, it would have been childish to accept somebody else's platform purely to attack them. There are large areas where I agree with the LCC and I spoke on those.

I also knew they'd spent so long getting guarantees out of me that they'd overlook Diane Abbott who would do it much more effectively!

I therefore sat with some considerable pleasure as I saw Robin Cook and Diane Abbott being much ruder about Brian Gould than I, with my respectable working class upbringing, would have dared to be about somebody who is so clearly more intelligent than I am.

Chris: **I don't think any of us would expect or want you to be uncivil or impolite. But these are crucial questions of policy. The man's been advocating wider share-ownership as a form of "social ownership"!**
Ken: Benn, myself and others did rubbish such views fairly extensively at the launch of *Labour's Future*, the alternative document to the NEC one being put forward by people like Gould.

I went to Conference committed to the left unity statement and the *Labour's Future* document, which were a complete, wide-ranging rejection of the prevailing views and ideology around people like Gould.

Yet I don't necessarily want to attack Gould. Brian is a genuine socialist; had he been on the GLC, we'd have had no problems giving him a role to play in chairing a major committee. He would have done that job with vigour and intelligence.

We still might have some disagreements about the best way of winning the next election. That can be done on a comradely basis.

If you actually devise a set of policies that work, who supports them or not is largely irrelevant. The policies themselves will carry people with them.

My own appalling involvement in the total disaster of the GLC's response to rate-capping (...) doesn't leave me in a position to cast the first stone.

Robin Cook said at the end of the LCC rally, the current within the Party which finds a convincing answer to the question: "how to win?" will sweep all else before it. He's right.

Chris: **You're no longer directly involved in local government. But how do you view the conflict bewteen those now in the forefront of the struggle against cuts — led in London by *Briefing* — and those, notably former supporters of *Briefing*, who as members of Council leaderships are in fact leading the struggle to impose cuts?**
Ken: You mean yesterday's heroes of rate-capping? I take some small pleasure from all this, I must say!

I've made clear to my own Labour Party that I don't support the cuts that Brent is carrying out. They are absolutely disastrous in their impact, and I wouldn't have voted for them.

You're talking about 2% of the budget. I'm sorry, but that is an accountancy problem. There's no way you have to put up school meal prices and cut discretionary grants.

It's the standard officers' technique of hitting them while they're demoralised and getting them committed down a road of degeneration. If those comrades are not careful, the officers will be running Brent Council totally by the end of the year. So we've got a major fight on now.

In relation to somewhere like Camden, where clearly the crunch has come with 20% cuts across the board, I come back to the position I put when we were drawing up this strategy, of borrowing to get to the next Labour government.

If you don't get that Labour government, you have a choice: you either break the law by refusing to make cuts, or you make cuts on such a scale as will most probably put you on the other side of the class divide for ever, and I think that's the problem these people face.

However, I'm not going to be in the forefront of the campaign to vilify them, for two reasons. First, because of my own appalling involvement in the total disaster of the GLC's response to rate-capping, which doesn't leave me in a position to cast the first stone.

My objection to Brian Gould isn't that he says we can buy shares. (...) But if somebody working for Ford decides to buy shares in their company, it won't change the balance of power. It's wholly irrelevant.

Second, I'm no longer burdened with running a Council, nor am I out of money, nor am I faced with the risk of being surcharged. Instead, I'm sitting here with this vast bloody great salary, in total security, with a law which says I can't even be arrested unless I leave the precincts of the House of Commons.

So it's not really on for me either to start telling Councillors in the front line what they should do, or to vilify them for not doing it. Yes, I'll fight to reverse the position in Brent, but I think there are some things you just cannot do.

Jenny: **Do you reject the "Margaret Hodge" line of implementing "caring cuts"?**
Ken: There aren't such things as caring cuts. The only boroughs I know anything about are Brent and Camden; the cuts there have gone straight to the weakest sections of the community. They have by-passed the Council's own bureaucracy.

It's a vicious attack on the homeless, on children, on the school meals service, and so on.

People in the community see it this way; but also for years they have seen appalling inefficiencies, they see very poor standards of service, and they are not going to be mobilised in a campaign in defence of a Council which doesn't seem to have the will to tackle such problems.

To be effective, an incoming socialist administration would have to restructure its bureaucracy and retrain its workforce completely.

This kind of thing I've been saying for years. Now, Margaret Hodge has been leader of a left Council for years and has had time to do some of this. It's a bit late now to come out and say "Oh, it's all gone wrong." And then she talks about "caring cuts".

But equally, I'm not surprised. I remember her response as soon as Islington began to get some flack over lesbian and gay rights. She began to back off. She made it quite clear that she was prepared to sacrifice lesbians and gays to get a few more homophobic votes.

A person who is prepared to do that will be prepared to sacrifice almost anything.

OUTLOOK FOR SOCIALISM 87

CAXTON HOUSE 129 St JOHNS WAY LONDON N19

14 & 15 NOVEMBER

Fri. 13th November:
★ Seventy Years Since the November Revolution ★
Ernest Mandel, Harry Wicks, Cathy Porter

Saturday 14 November, 10.00am-5.30pm
Sunday 15 November, 9.30am-5.00pm

★ Future of Feminism ★
Cora Kaplan, Munira Thobani (Women in Black Sections, invited), Liz Wilson (invited)

★ Future for Britain's Left:
Ken Livingstone MP, Tariq Ali, Jane Kelly (Socialist Outlook), Hilary Wainwright (author of *A Tale of Two Parties*)

For reasons of insurance, the creche can only be used if booked before 31st October

Tickets for entire weekend: £10 waged, £8 student, £5 UB40 or OAP.

Tickets for Friday only: £1.50 waged, concessions 75p

Saturday 14, 6.30pm:
★ A socialist policy for the media: ★
Ken Loach (director of Kes), John Pilger (journalist), Stuart Hood (author on the media), Mark Wadsworth (black broadcaster), Valerie Mason-John (black journalist)

Saturday 14, 8.30pm:
NOVEMBER REVOLUTION SOCIAL
(food provided)

The Tory agenda

THATCHER'S FIVE YEAR PLAN:

"Catch 22" for Kinnock RESOLUTE

What plans does the new Thatcher government have in store for the working class? On these pages, we examine some of the details of the Tory plans for their third term. Here, PHIL HEARSE (Islington North Labour Party) explains that the proposed measures represent a major escalation in the attacks upon us.



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Thatcher warned us she was resolute: now the revolution is entering its third — and final — phase.

In this third term of Thatcherism, the Tories intend to complete the job they initiated eight years ago.

This amounts to nothing less than the *destruction of the post-war settlement in British politics*, which under the Attlee government reordered British society around the welfare state, a strong nationalised sector of the economy, and government intervention to iron out the worst effects of the market.

This broad consensus is now being swept away. With it the whole panoply of institutions and practices designed to integrate the labour movement, and especially the trade union bureaucracy, into the joint planning and running of the economy is also doomed.

Changes

The changes at a political level will have a profound impact on the lives of ordinary people, and on the structure of our society.

In other words, Thatcher's political "revolution" is going to lead to an economic and social "revolution" as well.

A few examples suffice to give us a whiff of what the next five years have in store:

- The social security system will be ended. Payments to claimants will be replaced with loans from the "social fund".
- The health service is intended to complete the transition from the old NHS to an "American" system — private medicine for those who can afford it, and a run down skeleton "public" system for the poor.

By Phil Hearse
Islington North CLP

- Housing policy aims to destroy public housing, and to create a private renting market with unrestricted rents. Zooming property prices will drive working class people out of the newly-fashionable inner-city areas threatening Labour's political base.
- Education will be totally restructured and centralised, with the reintroduction of grammar schools and other forms of elitism, and the end of free schooling.
- Local government will be progressively dismembered and put into private hands, again attacking an area of Labour influence.
- Denationalisation will continue with the privatisation of electricity and the introduction of water meters in private homes.
- The powers of the police, the courts and the judges will be progressively strengthened.
- New anti-union laws will be introduced.

These are just a few examples. Thatcher has set her face against the policy of the "consolidation" urged by former Leader of the House John Biffen. No, she wants to push her counter-revolution to its logical end.

But what is that end? And what should the socialist response be?

Thatcher's aim, which she has pursued more consistently than her critics like John Biffen, is significantly to alter the relationship of class forces in Britain, by introducing social and economic policies which would weaken the organisations of the working class, divide the working class and create a new social and political "settlement" with the scope and permanence of that of 1945.

Settlement

The post-war settlement lasted for 30 years. Thatcher's settlement is meant to last for the foreseeable future, well into the next century, to enable British capitalism to restore its profitability and overcome its historic crisis. Essentially, she is the executive of British capitalism's make or break survival plan.

Thatcher is not aiming at the destruction of the parliamentary system — fascism or anything like that. The logical end to which she aspires is a free market economy, an authoritarian but not fascist state, and the *locking of the working class and the oppressed into a permanently subordinate and powerless position*.

If the working class and oppressed can be broken, if they can be rendered defenceless on the factory floor and in social and political life in general, capitalism can weather the current crisis, and survive. This is the reality behind the cunning rhetoric demanding a "leaner, fitter, more competitive British industry".

The boldness and scope of this scheme, breath-taking and far-sighted by comparison with anything the Labour leadership even dreams of, has thrown the labour movement into its worst crisis since the second world war.

The Kinnock leadership is thrashing about trying to work out how the Labour Party can deal with Thatcher by being "moderate". The answer, of course, is that you can't.

The irony of Thatcherism is that the changes being undertaken are so vast. A Labour government would have to embark on a massive programme of nationalisation and restoration of the welfare state — of the same scope as the Tory changes have been — just to return to the situation before 1979, let alone go forwards to socialism. Such action would lead inevitably to sharp conflict with the big business interests which back Thatcher.

Fear

Thus the fear of challenging big business which usually holds Labour back from making real strides out of post-war consensus towards a socialist transformation of society will now act to deter even a challenge to the Thatcher post-'79 changes. A Labour government which accepted the Thatcherite restructuring of society would be colluding in the operation of British capitalism's survival plan.

This is the "Catch 22" that Thatcher has got Kinnock into. She has said to him, effectively, "if you want to be a moderate in politics, then you have to accept the basic changes of my counter-revolution." Bryan Gould eloquently announced the surrender of the Kinnock leadership to this "Catch 22" when he made his speech on wider share ownership at the Labour Party Conference.

Only really radical action both in fighting Thatcher's plans every inch of the way, and at government level in the future (with rank and file labour movement support), can undo the handiwork effected by Thatcher if the new "five year plan" is implemented in full.

There is, then, no alternative, but for the minority who are prepared to resist Thatcher's onslaught and Kinnock's treachery to stand and fight now. The more a tradition of resistance is created now, the easier will be that transformation in the years to come.

Tory attacks on local government

An erosion of democracy

Thatcher's election night pledge to "turn attention to the inner cities" this term was no idle threat. It was a warning that the plan to drive socialism from the political map in Britain was to move into its final phase.

Now, just 4 months later, the Tories have unveiled a battery of legislation designed to smash Labour's base in the inner cities and bring to an end the era of progressive local Labour Authorities.

The proposals include:

- The privatisation of at least six key areas of local services, with the Secretary of State having the power to add more at will. Services will become determined by profit, not need — and jobs will be lost by the thousand.
- The outlawing of effective contract compliance measures by Local Authorities, thereby undermining the Sex Discrimination and Race Relations Acts, health and safety, and good employer practices.
- Drastic curbs on the rights of Local Authorities to publicise or campaign for their own policies or against the government's proposals on local government.
- The break up of Council housing, already undermined by Right to Buy, by encouraging tenants to opt out of Council estates for private landlords — a move prepared for by central government restrictions in Council spending, increasing dissatisfaction with the standards of Council House provision.
- The forcing up of Council rents by a massive amount by ending the right of Councils to subsidise their local rent levels out of the general rate funds.

By Davy Jones
Islington South CLP

- The increase in local poverty by reducing housing benefit via the Social Fund.
- The undermining of democratic control over education by allowing schools to opt out of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and encouraging the break up of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).
- The undermining of local democratic accountability of services and more massive, scantily hidden subsidies to big business by establishing further unelected Urban Development Corporations (UDCs).
- The redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich through the community charge or "poll tax" — the final removal of any real power of councils to act as the "thin red line of defence" of working class communities.

These attacks are *intended* to lead to huge job losses in local government — literally hundreds of thousands of jobs could go. They are *intended* to lead to widespread cuts in the already inadequate services of local Councils, especially those services to the most deprived and oppressed sections of the community.

Poverty

They will lead to huge rent rises and a major increase in inner city poverty. They will undermine the gains made by equal opportunities policies introduced by local Councils.

They will deepen divisions within the working class on the grounds of race, gender, disability and sexuality, and between white collar and manual workers; and further undermine the confidence of the class in their ability to fight, as Labour leaders capitulate and turn round to argue their own version of Tory ideology.

They will lead to a dramatic erosion of democratic accountability of local services, as big business, government quangos and unelected groups take control of whole areas of local services.

Unless these plans are stopped, there is a serious question mark over whether there would be any role for and possibility of Local Authorities being able to introduce any progressive policies.

Tory attacks on education

Tories try to demolish the consensus



PHOTO: Workers' Press

Inner London Teachers lead last year's march against Baker

KEN JONES looks at the Tory plans for education. This article is based on the Socialist Teachers' Alliance paper for the Socialist Conference in Chesterfield.

The Tories' new Education Bill aims to bring the work of demolishing the social democratic consensus in education to near-completion.

By Ken Jones
Socialist Teachers Alliance
(personal capacity)

Kenneth Baker hopes to reduce the influence of local Councils and reverse the remaining progressive trends in education through:

- a combination of greater control at the centre;
- local arrangements that use parental "choice" and school autonomy to break up the power of elected educational authorities.

Power

In the new system central power will be inflated, while the local units of educational management will be multiplied but reduced in size.

To substitute for the LEAs, Baker will strengthen the power of governors and — especially — school heads. Headteachers, who have emerged from the pay dispute as a much tougher managerial force, gain greater control of budgets, staffing levels and hiring and firing. Their authority over teachers, Baker intends, will be strengthened by parents.

Choice

Baker is offering greater parental "involvement" — but on his terms. Parents won't actually have much say in what is taught in schools, nor will they be able collectively to determine the level of educational resources. Their role is more to act as the consumers in an educational market place.

By compelling popular schools to expand to their physical limits, the Tories intend a greater role for *individual* exercise of parental choice. The aggregate of all parental choices will determine the fate of schools: those least popular will close.

Market

While local educational planning is determined by the market, Baker will be encouraging the setting up of schools that are controlled either by private trusts or by central government. The intervention of these well-funded institutions, with their subsidies from industry, will further fragment the system.

Everything that is known about the relationship between class and "choice" in education should tell us that the new hierarchy of schools, from the centrally-funded showpiece to the least "popular" of the LEA schools, will reflect inequalities of class and race.

On top of this, there is Baker's national curriculum. His nationally directed programmes of study, linked to a system of testing at 7, 11, 14 and 16, will rely on the kind of curriculum which most progressive teachers, in their efforts to develop a relevant and a critical education, rejected years ago.

Pressure

Tory pressure groups have been vocal in proclaiming what this curriculum should contain. Baker's own speeches indicate that he is receptive to the nationalist and "vocationalist" themes of their pamphlets. Anti-racism, certainly, finds no place in his pronouncements.

Plans

All this leaves the question: **what should be done?**

The Tories' plans are neither democratic, nor genuinely popular — nor even modernising. They will do nothing to correct the under-qualification of students that virtually every report on education has commented upon.

If the teaching unions are capable of responding with a broad, aggressive, activist campaign, they will tap the reserves of support that exist for well-resourced, genuinely non-selective education.

Campaign

The battle is how to get such a campaign going. Every local branch of the union should be taking some initiative. Labour Parties, instead of conceding vast areas of ideological ground to the Tories' critique of the system, should themselves be getting involved.

The TUC is now committed to a broad-based campaign on this issue — but there must be the most intense pressure and activity to make this effort a dynamic one.

Action

Of course, there are other fronts to fight on too. The fact that teaching unions and the Labour Party have so little to say about educational content and popular control has made the Tories' task much easier. These weaknesses need to be addressed. That can best be done in the context of action.

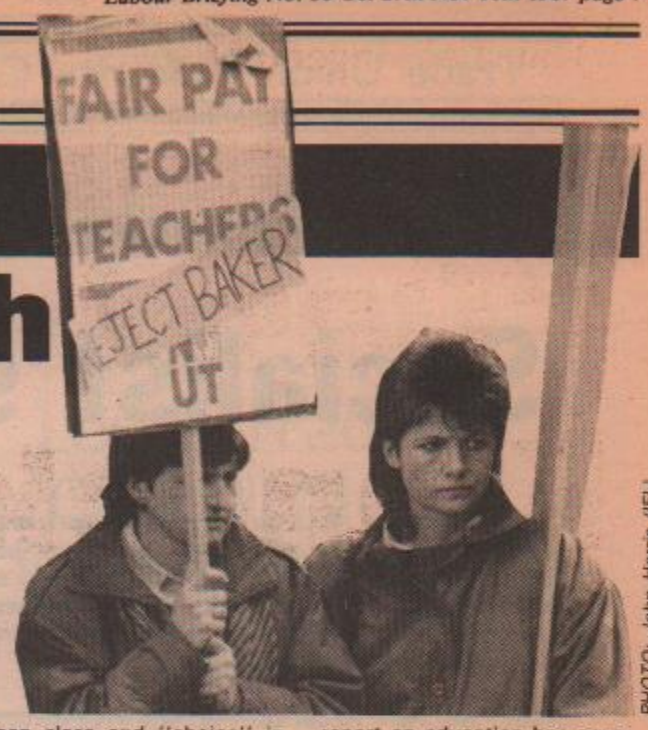


PHOTO: John Harris (IFL)

Tory attacks on the welfare state

The political hurricane blowing against our gains

A political hurricane has been unleashed on Britain's welfare state since the June election votes were counted.

Thatcher's strategy is to step up the pace, aiming to leave a trail of wreckage so extensive by the next Election that Labour leaders will not even contemplate rebuilding what has been destroyed.

Even before June the storm signals were clearly visible in Norman Fowler's package of policies demolishing the social security system up to and including the earnings-related pensions scheme.

Muted

Voters may well not have noticed Labour's pathetically muted campaign on this issue before or during the election: but next April will see new misery for claimants with the scrapping of all special needs single payments.

From then on those in desperate need will have to compete against millions of others for a *loan* from a cash-limited "Social Fund" — with repayments stopped out of future benefit payments.

Already Fowler's penny-pinching attacks on board and lodging payments have condemned thousands of unemployed youth to a near vagrant existence.

By Harry Sloan

Much worse is to come: the scrapping of child benefit, and the Poll Tax, forcing all claimants to stump up 20% of the local charge, are just two of the most obvious threats.

For the homeless, too, there is a barrage of Tory attacks, centring on a new White Paper which aims quite openly to bring all building of council houses to a halt.

Speculators

Not only will new government restrictions seek to cut off all sources of cash to the few housing departments still hoping to build more houses, but alterations to the proposed "right to buy" legislation are designed to ensure that any homes built could be sold for a fraction of their cost to build — almost guaranteeing a massive cash loss for the councils concerned.

Property speculators are already sharpening their knives for a slice of council housing to be offered through the "pick a landlord" scheme, which Tories hope will take even more houses out of the public sector — and further lengthen the queues of homeless.

Perhaps the strongest wind of change is blowing through the crumbling corridors of NHS hospitals. Tory ministers knew before June — even as they lied through their teeth, claiming a bigger and improving NHS — that their policies had set in motion a massive cash crisis for this autumn.

Crisis

The crisis is now upon us, with health authorities all over the country closing beds, wards and whole hospitals. In this Doomsday Scenario, the Tories' hidden agenda of massively expanded private inroads at all levels of health services is beginning to be unveiled.

Health Secretary John Moore at the Tory Conference gave only a glimpse of his "brave new world" of privatised services and ever more operations carried out in private hospitals.

Trailing

By triggering a financial crisis, the Tories have pressed-ganged NHS general managers into studies of "new ways" of financing the health service.

The whole agenda has been completely changed in only a few months: the unthinkable questioning the very survival of the NHS as a comprehensive, tax-funded service free of charge to all at the point of use — has become commonplace. Tory aims are to establish this new "fait accompli" before the next election, and then defy Kinnock's timid "new realists" to undo it.

Meanwhile Labour's feeble and uninterested front bench have been left gob-smacked, trailing far behind the pace of events in the NHS. So too have health union leaders. Having shamefully failed to make defence of the NHS a real focal point of the Election, these same people are now missing a chance to make it a rallying point for a broad fightback against the Thatcher government.

The worst error possible for the left would be to underestimate the scope or tenacity of the Tories' will to reshape the whole of capitalist society for their own ends.

The biggest problem is that while the Tories have emerged as today's radicals, Labour's leaders have become ever more timidly conservative, fighting frantically to resist any serious challenge to the ever-worsening "status quo".



PHOTO: Andrea Campbell

So much for the NHS being safe with the Tories: they and the judges backed up BTR in sacking workers to maximise their profits while patients suffered. The NHS was first the rest of the welfare state is next on the agenda.

Trade Union Solidarity Conference

As crash knocks stuffing out of "new realism":

Socialist solidarity is the answer!

The mid-October crash on the world's stock markets, whatever temporary recoveries there may be, has demonstrated both the depth of the crisis of the capitalist economy world-wide and the weakness and vulnerability of the Tory Party in Britain after their election victory last June.

None of the financial "experts" or media commentators explain what happened. What they do know, however, is that it is now not so easy confidently to advocate the "share owning democracy" line and to urge the yuppies to go out and buy shares in the newly privatised nationalised industries.

The crash also shows the depth of the policy crisis of the Labour Party leadership and the bankruptcy of the ideas of the "new realism", based as it is on the idea that concessions have to be made because of the strength of the Tory government.

Everything which the "new realists" have said over the past four years is now shown to have been wrong. In the same way Brian Gould's crass notion that the real way for workers to have control of their industries is to own shares in the Company is exposed as the joke it always was.

By Alan Thornett
Trade Union Briefing

The development of the "new realism"

The hard right is still making the running in the trade unions. The single union deal just negotiated by the AEU in the new Ford plant in Scotland is probably the sharpest current manifestation of it.

It is the first single union deal negotiated by the AEU after their deal with Nissan and is now the spearhead of Bill Jordan's race after the coat-tails of Eric Hammond's business unionism.

The agreement is in the direct interest of the employers and violates the Ford Combine recognition agreements, creating a serious situation for the other unions in the Corporation.

It was negotiated directly by long time Communist Party member Jimmy Airlie — the only "left wing" member of the AEU executive.

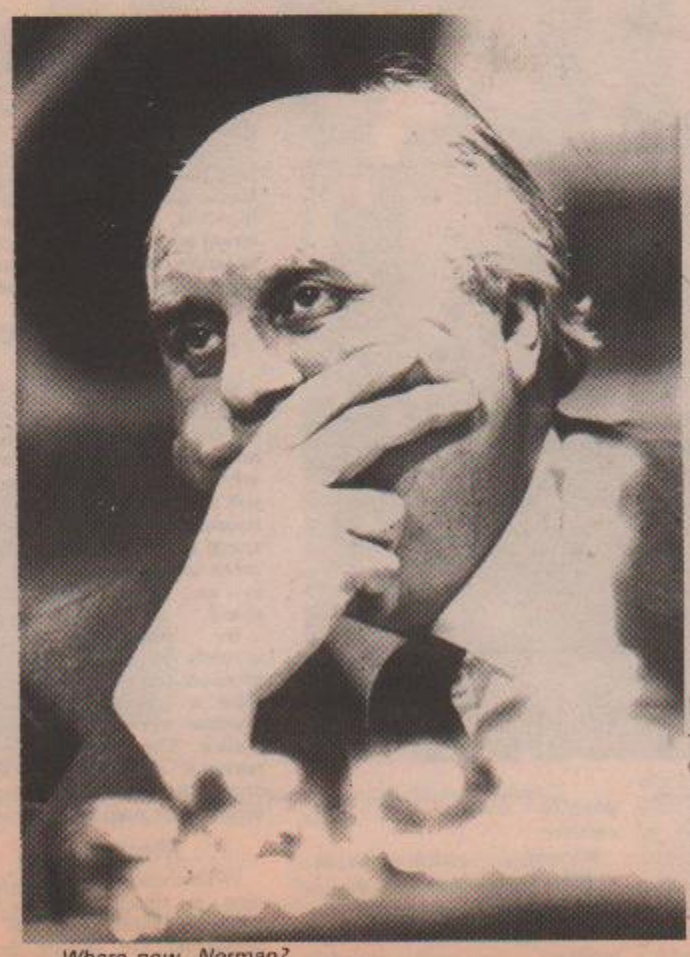


PHOTO: Graham Cookson

Where now, Norman?

This type of business unionism is not the only form the slide to the right is taking. The theme of the mainstream new realists who controlled this year's TUC Congress was the creation of a "new" type of trade unionism — the promotion of things which have nothing to do with trade unionism at all, like providing credit cards and holiday brochures for the members rather than defending their jobs.

Their model for this is the US trade union movement — a model which ignores the obvious failure of such ideas there, as shown in the decline of the American unions.

Alongside these ideas go projects such as the T&G and the G&M are running at the present time. They have launched slick advertising campaigns, with videos and paid ads, aimed at the mass of low-paid and part-time workers which has been created by Thatcherite policies. But the purpose of this is not to begin a campaign to defend these workers, but is a cynical attempt to maintain membership figures.

In fact the same unions have stood back and done nothing whilst full-time jobs were destroyed and the low paid part-time and MSC sponsored jobs were created. Having done nothing for women in the trade unions for years they now stress the fact that many of these workers are women with special problems in order to recruit them.

These gimmicks cover over both the slide to the right in the unions which is still proceeding apace, and the success that the government and the employers are having. These successes have happened not because the Tory Party or British capitalism is strong — this is self-evidently not the case — but because of the problem of leadership in the trade union movement itself, taking the form of the repeated selling-out of struggles when they take place.

A good example of this is in the engineering industry, where conditions have been pushed back 25 years, shop floor organisation seriously damaged and far-reaching new agreements forced through.

The agreement currently being pushed through, covering the whole workforce of 600,000, plus 1.4 million other workers, provides for the annualisation of working hours, the right of the employers to determine shift arrangements and total flexibility between all grades of workers in an establishment. It is being supported by the key union, the AEU, and pushed by Bill Jordan.

A similar deal has just been accepted by a 2 to 1 majority by one million Local Authority workers. This involves changes in the pay structure, flexible work time and flexibility between grades in return for a 10.6% wage increase over 14 months.

The deal was recommended for acceptance by all three unions involved, the T&G, NUPE and the G&M, as a "means" of fighting off the competitive tendering provisions of the Local Government Bill. Jack Dromey, the T&G negotiator, said it was a decisive step towards the abolition of low pay.

The left in the trade unions has a responsibility to challenge this process, but up to now there has been little success in this. Even the pace of this process has not been tackled seriously by the left. A discussion is urgently needed on these issues.

- How can the domination of the trade union leaders be challenged, particularly in the new situation of the economic crisis?
- How can a current be developed in the unions which bases itself on the class struggle and seeks to give leadership on a day to day basis.
- How can such a current be reflected throughout the labour movement as a whole?

Solidarity

An important aspect of such a discussion is how to promote strike solidarity. This has been at the centre of the problems faced by the movement since the frontal assault by the Tories and the employers began four years ago. It is one of the issues which will be addressed by the Conference in Leeds.

The need for solidarity is obvious. The abandonment of the NGA at Warrington; the isolation of the NUM by the TUC in 1984/5; the isolation of the printers at Wapping; and the abandonment of the Silentnight workers, the Hangers workers and many others are the clearest examples.

If direct solidarity action in support of these workers was not possible, other unions could have joined battle alongside them, fighting their own battles and breaking the isolation that way. To force trade union leaders into such action, however, is a major political problem.

One important aspect of solidarity in the trade union movement is the growth of strike support groups over recent years. The support groups developed during the Miners' Strike are the most important example.

In fact both the Women's Support Groups and the general support groups were an historic development for the trade union movement in Britain. They reflected the mass feeling of support for the strike which was felt throughout the country.

They continued, to a lesser degree, through the Wapping dispute and beyond, and many of them continue today. Their full potential, however, was not maintained.

As a result of this development it is almost inconceivable today that a major strike could take place without the development of support groups.

One of the problems in maintaining this movement, however, has been the attitude of much of the left — which abandoned the support groups soon after the Miners' Strike was over — some of them before it was over.

The exception to this has been Women Against Pit Closures goups. Most of those have continued doggedly on, despite the attitudes of the left. In some forums they have continued to represent the strengths and traditions of the strike more clearly than even the miners themselves. This has been the case in the Justice for Mineworkers campaign, for example.

It is a problem that the support movement has been allowed to run down at a time when the shop floor movement, particularly in manufacturing, had come under the hammer, when anti-union laws had made it more difficult to organise, and when victimisations had isolated many of the militants from the workplaces and where the right wing bureaucracy had tightened its grip. It is obvious that such groups have a role to play.

They have been needed not just to organise support for the new strikes which have been breaking out — involving a range of unions from print to teaching — but to support workers who had been victimised first in the Miners' Strike and then Wapping, Silentnight, Hangers and elsewhere.

If those workers, who had fought huge battles had stood in the forefront of the defence of the working class as a whole and been victimised as a result, could not be supported then there is little chance of winning the new struggles.

Nor was it, nor is it, just a matter of the principle of defending victimised individuals. They need the support of the movement but the movement needs them as well. They have

The following statement has been adopted as the basis for the Conference:

Because of the defeat of the miners' strike, Wapping, Silentnight, Caterpillar, Hangers and now Traders, amongst others, we have decided to call a conference for November 7th and 8th.

As strikers, ex-strikers and their supporters we feel that it is necessary to fully discuss the lessons of those disputes in order that those lessons can be taken into disputes which may occur in the future. It is also necessary to continue support for disputes going on at the present time, and continue to support the victimised miners and other victimised workers.

With the re-election of the Tories there is no doubt that attacks on the working class are being intensified. New laws against the trade unions are being planned and the present ones being increasingly used. The employers are already stepping up their attacks on the shop floor, for example at General Motors in Luton, on the docks, in the pits, in engineering, and with a renewed round of closures and privatisations.

The attacks on the public sector workers' wages and conditions and jobs is continuing as well. The removal of trade union rights at GCHQ and negotiating rights from teachers poses a threat to trade union rights nationally. We must organise support for the teachers and the civil servants who continue in dispute. There are many more disputes going on as well, such as HFW, Gateshead and Senior Coleman in Manchester. These disputes must not be allowed to be defeated.

Most disputes have been defeated because of the lack of support from the leadership of the official movement. To try to change this we need to discuss the lessons of these disputes and take them into future disputes.

The purpose of this conference is to try to change the situation of repeated defeats for workers in dispute. It will also put us in a better situation to organise practical support, both in terms of the political problems and financial.



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Pickets stand firm at Wapping; while print union leaders buckle

gained important experiences which are crucial if we are to halt the damaging run of defeats of the past four years.

We cannot abandon the victims of recent struggles, ignore their experiences, and at the same time prepare adequately for the new struggles of today. We need to bring the experiences of their struggles into the new struggles of today.

Scargill and the NUM

The situation for the left in the trade unions is difficult — but there are very important gains which can be built on. The most important of these is Scargill and the rank and file of the NUM.

Although Scargill faces a right wing majority on the NUM Executive, a campaign to remove him both by the Kinnockites and the Communist Party, and opposition from Scotland and South Wales over six day working, his role at both the TUC Congress and the Labour Party Conference was excellent.

His stand at TUC Congress was strengthened by the remarkable 77% vote of the miners for action against British Coal's new disciplinary code. That in turn was partly a result of his "stand and fight" speech at the NUM Conference a few weeks before.

As a result of Scargill's fight at TUC Congress alongside McCreadie from the CPSA, the right wing advance was slowed down to some extent (the General Council's record on Wapping was referred back) and a clear lead given on class struggle lines.

In the pits the right wing have been able to hold the line. The overtime ban was reduced to a farce and now the Yorkshire move to ballot their membership on a proper overtime ban has been dropped on the argument that it would open the door to South Wales to act on an area basis over Margam. Yet Yorkshire were only proposing to fight for the implementation of *national* policy of the union.

A New Structure

Since their election victory the Tories have moved rapidly to put the boot in as deep as possible. Everyone is all too a familiar with the huge attacks on local government, education, more anti-union laws, the poll tax and rapid moves towards further privatisation — from BP to water, electricity and the coal industry.

If the Tory project is allowed to run its course there will be no NHS by the time of the next election. The principle is now being openly stated that just to be ill, or even dying, does not entitle you to treatment — there are other considerations!

Since the election the Tories have acted like a conquering army marching across the country. But it has been a "strength" based on a massive electoral "majority" based on 42% of the vote, and a media which has created the illusion that the economy is strong and unemployment going down.

Crash

The importance of the stock exchange crash is that it explodes that myth of the strength of the government and will create conditions for renewed mass struggle.

The point about the stock exchange events is not that big business loses millions of pounds (the top US stockholder lost $1.4 million in two days), or that small investors tempted into share ownership by the Tory Party or Brian Gould have lost out, but that it translates quickly into recession and even higher levels of unemployment.

In this way it can radically change the political situation as we have experienced it in recent years. It vindicates Marxism, calls capitalism into question among many people who have not thought about it before, and creates an anti-capitalist mood.

All this means that the discussions on the way forward for socialists, on the work of the left in the unions and the development of solidarity work takes on a new urgency at this time. Developments made now could become the framework for a much bigger movement in the near future.

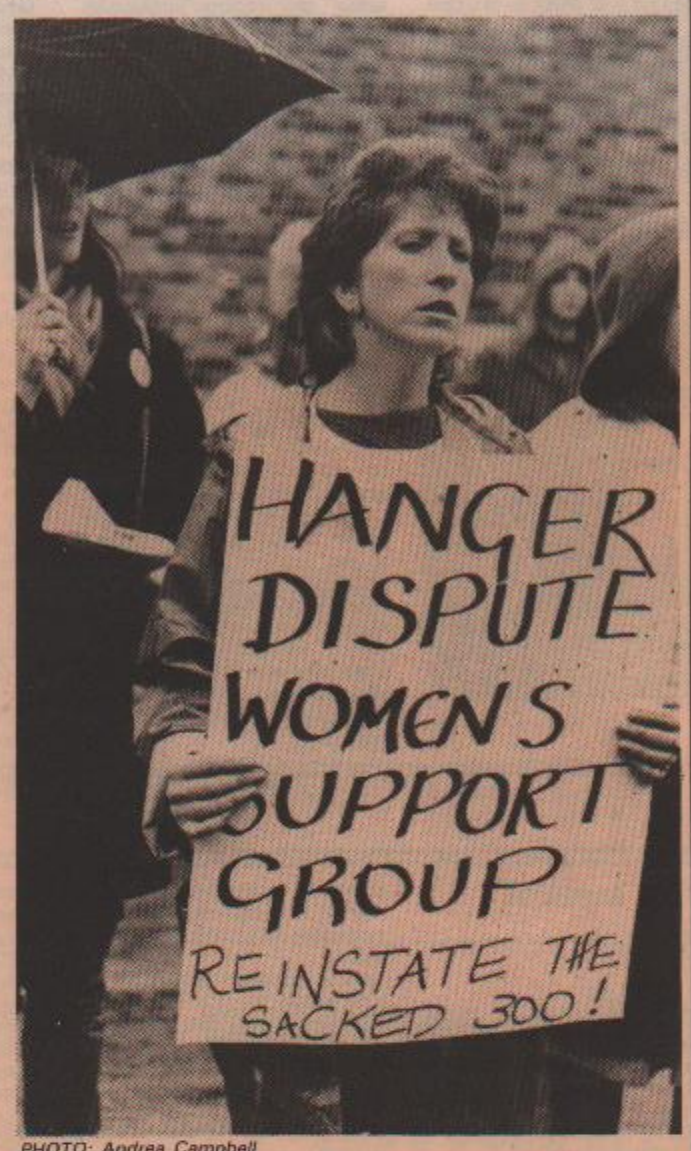


PHOTO: Andrea Campbell

SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE

Leeds Trades Council Club (Saville Mount, Leeds)

November 7th, 11.00-6.00
November 8th, 9.30-4.30

Conference fee: £3.00 waged, £2.00 unwaged
Creche available

Two days of organising support and discussion on: the current situation in the trade unions; the implications of the defeat of the miners, Wapping, Silentnight, Hangers and others; current struggles and confrontation of the teachers, civil servants, mining industry, docks, engineering, local government, etc.

The Conference is open both to delegates from Labour Movement bodies and visitors.

WORKSHOPS:

Linking up support groups (international link-ups)
Strike solidarity and spreading action
Black workers in the unions
Anti-racist campaigns (Anti-deportations, Broadwater Farm, anti-fascist action)
Women in the unions
Victimised and jailed workers
Victimised miners
Privatisation
Labour Party Support
What to do now in the unions
Democracy in the unions
The law, the state and the unions
Building support amongst the unemployed
How to respond to sackings (closures, occupations, etc.)
International solidarity
Fighting Local Government cuts
Anti-Apartheid work in the unions
Fighting low pay and worsening working conditions

Application for credentials:

Please send credentials for .....
I have enclosed £ .....
I/we will require accommodation .....
and creche places for ..... children
Preference for workshops .....

Credentials and correspondence to: Janet Seymour, 3 Hill St, Barnoldswick, Coln, Lancs. Tel. 0282 812864.

Reasonable accommodation at private houses will be found for those making application *in advance*.

Features: Child Abuse debate

A class issue? Yes and no!

Child abuse is a difficult and contradictory problem: it both is and is not a class issue at the same time. It can therefore be understood in two different ways.

Child abuse can be viewed as a class issue in the following ways:

● Only a government ruling in the interest of the working class and the oppressed would be able to eradicate child abuse as an *everyday* occurrence.

Its *disappearance* would be an historically lengthy process, because any meaningful attack on the problem would have to include measures to eradicate patriarchal ideology and the nuclear family, both of which are central to the way that the ruling class rules.

● The family is central for the reproduction of labour for capital. This reproduction, plus the lower value attached to female labour by capital, is sustained and justified by the very patriarchal ideology which, in part, is the root of child abuse. Thus, institutions and ideologies which are central to the continued existence of a class-based capitalist society are also a central cause of abuse.

● The activity of the state and the social services themselves make child abuse a class issue.

The actions of individual social workers are irrelevant to this argument; but social service *practice* is often aimed towards those in society who are assumed to be "deviant" or a "social problem".

By Preston Labour Briefing supporters

It should not surprise socialists that the vast majority of the "deviants" are usually working class and/or specially oppressed. Thus the habit is not to think of child abuse as part of life in the leafy lanes of suburbia, but to see it as a feature of life in working class areas and estates.

Within this overall pespective it is therefore easier to see child abuse as a working class problem, despite evidence to the contrary.

A similar process can be seen at work when the metropolitan police release crime figures by racial origin. The aim is clearly to make this or that problem a problem of race of class origin (rather than of the social order in general).

Obviously, if the police devoted as much time to uncovering middle class tax fraud, for example, we would find ourselves in the midst of a massive upsurge in white middle class crime.

Finance

It is therefore wrong to argue, as did Sue Arnall in *Briefing* no. 46, that economic deprivation increases the possibility of child abuse, since that reinforces the idea that it is a working class problem.

If the number of children being taken into care follows an increase in economic distress, it doesn't follow that this indicates an increase in the physical or sexual abuse of children.

The fact that child abuse may be uncovered in such circumstances (i.e. family breakdown for any one of a number of reasons) does not indicate that it is likely to increase in periods of economic distress but only that such conditions may lead to its discovery.

In this sense the real problem classes are the middle and upper classes, where such a collapse of family life is less likely and abuse can remain completely undiscovered.

In all these senses then, child abuse is clearly a class issue. In no way, however, does this imply it is a problem *of the working class alone* or *more likely to be a problem of the working class* because of economic distress.



Fighting to defend the provision of facilities for children: we need to go further and look at what kind of services we're providing.

Youth

It is precisely because child abuse is not related *in origin* to the economy that it is not *itself* a class issue. The source of abuse is rooted in the power of adults over children and the ideology of patriarchy which result in children — particularly females, of whatever age — being transformed into objects for the sexual gratification of men.

Neither of these forms of power or ideology is restricted to the working class and both are repressive forms which exist in pre-and post-capitalist society. Moreover, as is generally accepted, within capitalist society child abuse is a cross class phenomenon. In these senses, then, child abuse is clearly not a class issue.

What attitude should the labour movement take towards child abuse? Here are a few initial ideas which need to be discussed further.

● Socialists need to develop a system of demands for the labour movement to take up, which will defend children as equal human beings in capitalist society now, and include the kind of positive steps necessary for full liberation.

There are obvious difficulties here, as organising children as an oppressed layer of society is a very complex problem which needs a lot of discussion. There are, however, four areas where the labour movement could have an immediate impact, if only in a propaganda sense initially.

● We need to demand a complete reform of the state children's home system.

Most of these homes are completely inadequate; many are just as repressive as the family and can be just as dangerous. We need to think seriously about replacing such a system with one that does more than keep children marshalled until they are young adults.

The vast majority of young people are in children's homes through no fault of their own, yet they are often "criminalised" by the bureaucratic structures of these institutions which turn the victims of the nuclear family into the problem.

● We need a system of care which is based around the needs of children rather than those of the social services. At the moment there are but two options: fostering or children's homes. Neither is ideal or relevant in most cases.

A system of safe homes is needed, where children are not branded as abnormal in any way, and can enjoy a good quality of life. Such a system would require independent social workers responsible only for meeting the children's needs.

● A comprehensive educational programme needs to be launched in schools around the question of child abuse, alongside an anti-sexist approach generally.

Action

● The above demands would need to be fought for inside the relevant unions and then throughout the labour movement as a whole, since only then would there be any real hope of the initial stages being realised.

The central aim would be to end children's dependence on their family and any authority figures who have power over them, whatever class they come from.



PHOTO: Andrew Ward (Report)

Do we need more drop-in centres for children and young people?

Letters

WRITEBACK

We welcome your letters! Write to Labour Briefing, PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ

Why COHSE members rely on public transport

Dear Comrade,

I read with amazement the comments of *Periscope* (*Labour Briefing* no. 48) concerning COHSE Officer Bryan Lynch's call for special transport for health workers affected by the recent bus strike.

Mr Lynch, a Labour Party member, is described as a supporter of the Irish "workers party" and is accused of calling for scab buses. The writer goes on to compare Mr Lynch's actions to those of fascists in the 1926 general strike.

I do not know who this Greg Bassett thinks he is, but he should check his facts before accusing a good socialist such as Mr Lynch of such crimes. Firstly nurses who failed to turn up for duty on the days of strike action faced disciplinary action. It is surely COHSE's job to ensure that our members are protected from this threat.

Secondly, many health workers already have special transport laid on for them due to the lack of public transport at the time they require (weekends, bank holidays, etc.). The people who drive these vehicles are not scabs, they are good trade union members, and to describe them as such is a gross insult.

The issue of health workers getting to work is not just a case of people being "inconvenienced" as Mr Bassett says. People die if health workers can't care for them.

COHSE fully support London tranport workers fight and any action which they take. Our members rely on public transport and Londoners lives rely on our members.

I am afraid that Mr Bassett's attack is misinformed and pathetic in its stupidity.

Back in the Liquorice allsorts box Bassett.

Yours sincerely,
Pete Marshall,
Regional Officer, COHSE

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PR: a tactical "yes"

Dear *Briefing*,

Chris Knight (*Labour Briefing*, no. 47) is right to state that support for or rejection of PR cannot be reduced to a matter of abstract principle about democracy, but must be subordinate to class interest.

In other words PR is a tactical and strategic question for Marxists. Yet I believe that Chris has come to the wrong conclusions.

Chris's logic is essentially that PR will prevent ever again the election of a majority Labour government. Instead, Britain would be administered by coalition governments, where bourgeois parties could prevent any initiative which threatened the power of capital.

Whatever the reactionary nature of past Labour governments — and indeed any elected in the immediate future — the seizure of governmental office is a precondition for socialist transformation.

Several points should be set aside this analysis.

● The bourgeois parties have never been faced in an election with a socialist opposition, let alone one which looks like winning. With PR supported by the Alliance and with some backing in the Conservative Party, it would be an easy step for a government to introduce PR to frustrate the left. Thus the left's tactically opportunistic retention of first-past-the-post could evaporate on the eve of electoral victory.

● The adoption of PR by the left would be an ideological weapon to deny the legitimacy of the Thatcher government. With only 42% of the popular vote, under a system of PR, the present government of Britain would be impossible and so would some of its more revolting policies which offend the interests and the supporters of the other bourgeois parties.

● However much we as Marxists ignore abstract features of democracy in favour of a class evaluation, it cannot be denied that the abstract principle of democracy has support amongst the working class. It is foolish, therefore, for the left to campaign against PR and in favour of an electoral system which is manifestly undemocratic (in the abstract) and thus leave the "democratisation" issue for the Alliance.

● PR would play a role in weakening Labourism. Labour would have to reach out to those radical constituencies in areas where Labour at present stands little chance of electoral success. Equally, Labour would have to win increased support by meeting the needs of those working class communities in "safe" Labour seats; thus undermining right wing Labour barons. PR would shift the electoral stress from the middle ground in the marginal constituencies, which is always an excuse by the Labour leadership for socialist abandonment.

Chris argues that PR will "strengthen the coalitionist forces inside the labour movement". Yet, the present electoral system can also produce a hung parliament; and in such circumstances it would not be ten minutes before Kinnock had worked something out with the new merged party.

● Chris is right to point out that under PR there would never have been a majority Labour government, but it cannot be right to cling to the procedure of the archaic British state in the hope that 40% of the vote plus a split bourgeois opposition will provide us with government but no power. What is much more important is to build a socialist opposition through the Labour Party and challenge the archaic British state. Practical strength based on class politics is much more important than possible electoral over-representation.

To talk about past Labour governments in this context — each one dominated by the right — is to relish in "what might have been" had there been a correct leadership and a socialist programme. Such nostalgic sentiments should not cloud our present strategy. Support for PR is potentially positive for the socialist left and should be integrated into our strategy.

Peter Bowing,
Devon Labour Briefing

Add in the material context!

Dear *Briefing*,

Whilst welcoming Chris Knight's recent article "Child Abuse: 'the family' is the problem", I was disappointed to find kinship relationships (undoubtedly a very important factor in the incidence of child abuse) discussed without reference to the material, economic or political context.

Whilst it is true that, in the West, abusive parents tend to have limited social networks, it is also true that physical abuse and neglect are closely correlated with material stresses — poverty, poor housing, homelessness, etc. The same does not appear to be true of sexual abuse, which is linked mainly with the abuse of male power under patriarchy.

Chris Knight's article appeared to have lost sight of the ways in which material and economic circumstances affect the ways in which we relate to one another. The functioning of families or kinship networks can only be more or less constructive within the context of the economic and material world.

Maureen White
Hackney North &
Stoke Newington CLP

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Features

East German Gays remember the homosexual victims of Nazism

PETER TATCHELL met leaders of the lesbian and gay movement in East Berlin late last year. This article is based on that meeting and subsequent correspondence, plus interviews with exiled GDR gay activists now living in the West.

For nearly 20 years, the West European gay movement has struggled to secure official recognition of the particular persecution of homosexuals under the Nazis.

Less well known is that lesbians and gay men in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) have been campaigning for the same end.

Organised in the Working Groups for Homosexual Self-Help which are scattered throughout the country's major cities, the GDR gay and lesbian movement shelters under the protection of the Protestant evangelical churches which provide it with meeting places and printing facilities for its publications.

The political orientation of these groups is staunchly pro-GDR and pro-socialist. In the words of one group member:

"We want to work with our government — not against it — in order to advance the cause of gay people."

Another member stressed:

"We are not dissidents. We are loyal citizens of the GDR. Our belief is that we must work within the socialist system for change."

Beginning in 1982, the Working Groups based in Berlin contacted various government departments to raise the issue of official acknowledgement of the tens of thousands of homosexuals who died in the death camps.

The government reaction was that the gay victims of fascism should not be singled out for special attention (a response which I also encountered 14 years ago in 1973 when, as a delegate to the World Youth Festival in East Berlin, I attempted to lay a pink triangle wreath at the site of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp).

"In contrast to the western view that our government is totally repressive and unresponsive, we have shown that change is possible. Our government deserves praise for its willingness to listen and adapt. We are optimistic for the future of lesbian and gay rights in the GDR."
Statement by a member of the lesbian and gay movement in the German Democratic Republic.

In response to this official indifference, the Working Groups decided to take direct action in May 1983 to coincide with the 38th anniversary of the final overthrow of the Nazi regime. A delegation of 13 lesbians and gay men went to Sachsenhausen with the objective of laying a wreath in memory of the homosexual victims of fascism.

On alighting at the local railway station, they found their path blocked by a cordon of police. All 13 were immediately arrested.

According to a friend of one of those who was arrested:

"They were only held for a short period of time and then, following the confiscation of their wreath, allowed to go ahead with their visit to the camp. After completing the visit, members of the delegation wrote comments in the visitors' book to the effect that there was not enough information in the official records about the Nazi extermination of gay people. Subsequently, they discovered, all these comments were erased from the visitors' book."

The following year, on International Women's Day in 1984, a lesbian delegation from Berlin went to the site of Ravensbruck concentration camp and succeeded in laying a wreath inscribed with the words:

"In memory of all women murdered in this concentration camp. Signed: Working Group for Homosexual Self-Help (Lesbian Section)."

After three days, however, the wreath disappeared. All inquiries about why it had been removed were ignored by the curator of the camp memorial and the government authorities in Berlin.

In April 1985, the police foiled a second wreath-laying attempt at Ravensbruck on the anniversary of the liberation of the camp. An eye-witness to these events recalls:

"Twelve lesbians were arrested as they got off the train. After a harsh interrogation, which included some physical maltreatment, they were escorted back to Berlin."



Berlin wall

Undeterred, the Working Group members sent a protest petition to the Ravensbruck Memorial Committee. The Committee advised the group to redirect its protest to the Ministry of Culture. According to one of the lesbians involved:

"Much to our surprise, a delegation was invited to meet high-ranking officials at the Ministry and soon afterwards the group received an apology for the way our members had been denied access to Ravensbruck. Simultaneously, a second apology — this time for police maltreatment — arrived from the Ministry of Home Affairs."

Later that same month, a lesbian delegation had discussions with the curator of the Ravensbruck Memorial which resulted in its members being given a guided tour of the camp site and official sanction for the laying of a wreath bearing the message:

"In memory of all the women, especially homosexual women, who died in this camp"

(though the delegation was refused permission to specify that the wreath had been laid by a lesbian organisation).

This hint of a change in government policy was reinforced last October when, for the first time, the Ministry of Home Affairs confirmed that it would allow a delegation of lesbians and gay men to lay a wreath in the name of the Working Group for Homosexual Self-Help at the site of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

The decision was a milestone for the East German gay movement. Not only was it tantamount to an official acknowledgement of the Nazis' particular persecution of homosexuals, but — perhaps even more importantly — it was an implicit official recognition of the self-organised lesbian and gay movement.

In a country where the government has traditionally suppressed all social movements independent of the State and the Communist Party, this is quite a remarkable achievement.

Reviews

Much to agree with — but an overall difference

***Labour, A Tale of Two Parties*, by Hilary Wainwright, Hogarth Press, £5.95.**

In her new book, Hilary Wainwright argues that in a sense Labour consists of two parties.

One is the traditional Labourist Party of Callaghan and Wilson; the other is the beginnings of a radical socialist party based upon the local government left, many CLPs, women's sections and Black self-organisation.

Hilary's book is written from the position of an outsider. Brought up a radical liberal, she later joined the International Marxist Group — attracted by their paper *Black Dwarf*, which said of the Labour Party "Let it Bleed!".

She left the IMG and co-authored the book *Beyond the Fragments* that sought "new ways of organising, independent of the Labour Party and suspicious of self-defined vanguards."

Hilary's commitment to allow social movements to speak for themselves has been a great advantage in writing much of this book. In surveying the Labour left she builds up a picture of a diverse movement active in all aspects of the Party and trade unions.

As Hilary develops her theme of a "party in waiting", it becomes clear that she would like this party to be able to leave Labour and express itself in its own right.

In presenting the Socialist Society case for proportional representation, she suggests that a split in the Labour Party would be an "attractive option". This point was well answered by Tony Benn in a local Socialist Society publication:

"I can understand the argument, but I'm not in favour of the Party splitting. Every five years the Labour Party loses another layer of its leaders into the right... The right can never really expell the left, if the left stands firm the right will leave. I can see people who've already packed their bags to catch the next train."

The left should not even be considering handing the Labour Party and its structures to the right wing.

To be fair Hilary admits that her "attractive option" is not on the agenda. She says this for two reasons. One is that we have a strong base in the CLPs, and the other is the Party's "institutional bond with workers organisations."

By Bryn Griffiths
Hackney South CLP

Unfortunately Hilary undermines the watertight case she makes for joining the Labour Party. She describes the nature of our "institutional bond" with the Unions, the block vote, as an "... inbuilt source of conservatism and political corruption". She proposes "a block vote based on individual Party members organised through the union."

This approach runs the danger of accepting the pernicious argument that the unions are inately right wing. The solutions to the recent drift to the right in the trade unions is not to reduce their voting power, but to challenge their leadership from within. We should develop Broad Lefts in every union to empower the membership and bring democratic life to the unions' vote at Conference.

Paradoxically, despite ultra-left leanings in her attitude to the Labour Party as a whole, Hilary adopts a somewhat uncritical approach to the left political forces and currents within it.

- She suggests that the left in Scotland has "regrouped under the banner of the Scottish Labour Co-ordinating Committee" — despite that organisation's witch-hunting activities.
- She describes the NUPE leadership as a leadership that provides an alternative to business unionism based upon "... social unionism encouraging in many areas a new kind of working class politics."
- On local government, she does not address the problems of municipal socialism that we are all so familiar with.

Hilary's suspicion of "self-defined vanguards" makes it difficult for her to criticise the strategies of others on the "left". But a critical appraisal of how different currents perform in struggle is essential if we are to begin the task of rebuilding the left.

Her attitude towards the Labour Party leads her to to downplay the importance of the internal struggle for power. Whilst she is right to point to the inward looking nature of much of the left, it is a real mistake to divide the neessity of a struggle for leadership from the need to turn to the struggles outside the Party.

The book ends by sketching an electoral strategy for the Labour Party. She rejects "... a leap from Labourism to the right, breaking formal trade union links, making an explicit commitment to the market, dropping unilateralism." But she also rejects a "..turn from Labourism to the left (as) ... unrealistic as an effective *electoral* proposal."

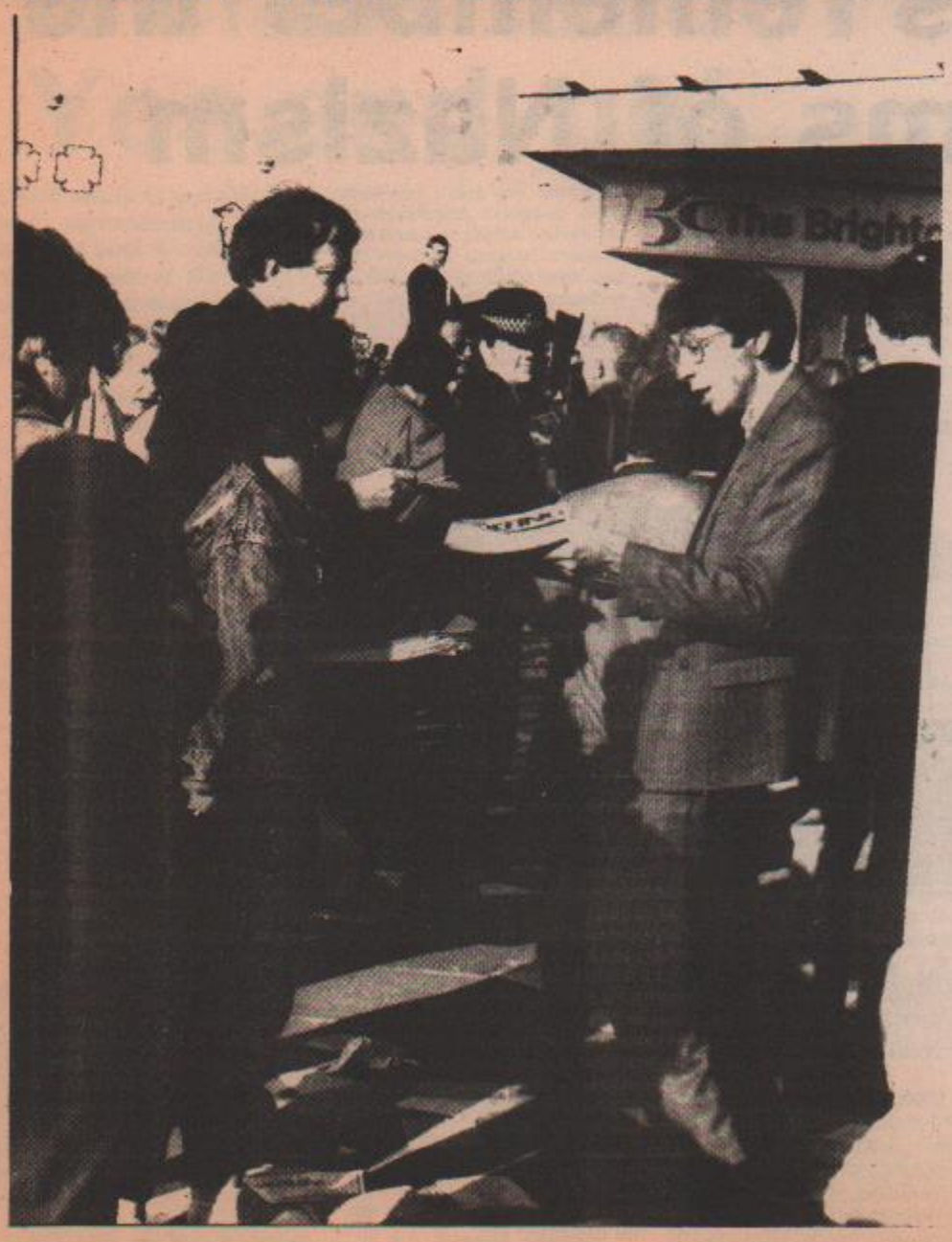
Instead she argues for a programme of democratic reform of constitution and state, apparently based on the confused conception of an "empowering state". Whilst Hilary quite rightly criticises Labourist attitudes to the existing state, she appears to believe they can be reformed.

Whilst many of the listed demands deserve support as measures that will weaken the state and exploit contradictions witin it, we should not labour under the illusion that we can reform it.

Labour, A Tale of Two Parties is a more interesting and thought-provoking book than many of its type. *Labour Briefing* supporters will find much in it that they agree with; but not many supporters will share her overall attitude towards the Labour Party.

Building Briefing

LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE RETROSPECTIVE



Book your holidays for next year! Part of *Briefing's* presence at 1987 Annual Conference was handing out our daily bulletin. Here, Kate Adams distributes the bulletin to delegates on their way into Conference.

What they say about us

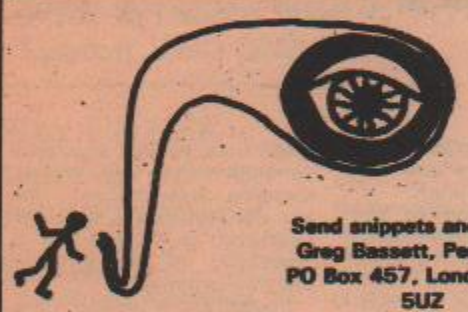
"On the train (to the Socialist Conference in Chesterfield), a man sold me a copy of a newspaper, *London Labour Briefing*. Before opening it, I read the official instroduction to the conference. It says that the "theory of personal betrayal will not do" to explain "the loss of socialist influence". *London Labour Briefing*, however, still has time for the theory of personal betrayal. On page three, it carries a picture of a Labour MP who made her name as a campaigner for nuclear disaramament. The caption reads: "JOAN RUDDOCK stands waiting to confuse and compromise the unilateralist vote at Labour Party Conference."

The Independent

Even the working class' self-declared loyalists deployed humour to good effect at their dwindling and divided (Labour Party Conference) fringe meetings. Unlike most of the "hard" left's speakers, *Labour Briefing's* Keith Veness was intentionally funny. He is Jeremy Corbyn MP's agent, NUPE shop steward in Hackney and an undiscovered stand-up comic. He poked fun wickedly at Margaret Hodge, newly pragmatist leader of Islington council, for her injunction to Labour councils not to promise what they can't deliver. This meant Labour canvassers telling council tenants: "Yes, your roof is leaking. We can't do anything about it, but have you considered voting for us?"

New Statesman

Periscope



Send snippets and info to Greg Bassett, Periscope, PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ

We thought Brian "popular capitalism" Gould's timing was bad. But it wasn't a patch on Chinese premier Zhao Zinyang's, who was busy proclaiming the virtues of private enterprise and equity finance just as the official *China Daily* splashed its front pages with "stocks fall again despite Reagan row" and "Hong Kong in panic selling crisis".

Then there was *Marxism Today*, whose comrades chose the greatest crash ever as the perfect moment to get a share of the lucrative financial advertising that has been floating around the City. The current issue promotes its *Personal Finance Supplement* on the cover; inside you can find pages of share-investment advice and a comradely interview with Lord Bernard Donoghue of Kleinwort Grieveson.

Finally, let's not forget our Soviet comrades themselves. As the greatest crash in capitalism's history rocked stock markets throughout the world, Gorbachev's top economic adviser, Dr Abel Aganbegyan, announced the possibility of opening a Soviet Stock Exchange.

But there might be a delay. "We are not against the idea in principle," he explained, "but we cannot do everything at once."

Learning from the Romans?

Those who ignore history are condemned to repeat it.

Back in 1983, US executives at American Airlines came up with what they thought was a hot new idea. Why not set up a separate lower wage scale for newly hired workers?

Management could then reduce labour costs while avoiding prolonged confrontations over wage concessions with existing employees. American slashed pay scales for new workers by up to 40%, and soon dozens of other corporations followed suit and hundreds of thousands of workers were affected.

What management didn't want to think about at the time was that two-tier wage scales inevitably breed resentment among workers who are paid less to do the same work. This leads to higher turnover.

Now these problems are surfacing to such an extent that American and other corporations are modifying or eliminating two-tier systems.

Last year, the number of new labour contracts with two-tier scales dropped by 10%.

All this indicates that managers had better become students of history before it's too late. As the *Wall Street Journal* noted (citing historian Edward Gibbon), a Roman emperor's use of a two-tier pay structure for his army in 217 AD eventually resulted in his assassination.

Dollars & Sense

NHS Limited?

Caught with his political trousers down at the recent cuts-making meeting of Bloomsbury Health Authority (see *Briefing* no. 49) was Camden Labour Councilor Ben Griffith.

Working with Frank Dobson MP, Griffith has been well-known as a researcher for the anti-private medicine campaign NHS Unlimited.

No doubt swept along by the euphoric mood of the meeting — headed up by Camden's arch right wing Councillor Bob Latham leaping to his feet to congratulate management — Griffith voted *for* the plan to reduce acute beds from the present 1,600 to 900.

Worse, the same plan seems certain to be tied in to private funding, and to the establishment of a new private wing to replace the present 40-bed private wing at University College Hospital. Maybe Griffith's NHS will be a bit limited after all?

Contact Briefing:

The Briefing Editorial Board, and the following Commissions can be contacted c/o PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ, 01 733 7016:
Trade Union Briefing: Youth Briefing: Student Briefing: Lesbian & Gay Briefing: Briefing Women and International Briefing.
Briefing Editorial Board:
Next meeting: Friday Oct 31st.
Briefing Steering Committee: next meeting Sunday December 6th.
Deadline for articles for issue no. 51: notify EB as soon as possible; all articles in by Tuesday November 3rd. Deadline for issue no. 52: notify EB as soon as possible: all articles in by Tuesday November 17th.

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Trade Union Briefing

Support Ken Jones!

Ken Jones, *Briefing* supporter and NUT Executive member for Outer London, is a candidate in the NUT vice president elections.

Ken has been on the NUT National Executive since 1982; before that he was secretary of Barking and Dagenham Association.

Unusually for an NUT Executive member, Ken has led a successful all-out strike. This was in 1980 when Barking education authority proposed a massive teacher job loss.

The organisation of the strike was a model of campaigning. All decisions were taken by mass meetings of striking teachers, and the mass involvement of parents on the teachers' side was an important feature.

The Barking Association managed to persuade the NUT National Executive to support them. The outcome was successful — Barking Education Authority withdrew its proposals.

Ken wrote about these experiences in his first book *Beyond Progressive Education*, which also deals with responses of socialist teachers to the failures of state education provision.

More recently, Ken's contributions have included acting as advocate for ILTA at NUT disciplinary hearings. Ken convinced the hearing that ILTA should not be punished for organising strike action against the Baker Bill. It was his skill as an advocate that forced the National Executive into all kinds of devious manoeuvres to suspend and expel the officers of ILTA.

Ken is the author of a forthcoming work on Tory education policy, and a leading member of the Socialist Teachers Alliance.

BLOC takes step closer

350 people attended a London BLOC Conference on Saturday 24th on the theme of "crisis in local authorities and the fight against privatisation'.

Tony Mulhearne, surcharged Liverpool councillor, opened the Conference by explaining the road that Liverpool Council had taken and which had resulted in increased support at the elections.

John MacCreadie talked about building a leadership in the CPSA and in the TUC that was prepared to fight back.

An appeal for Liverpool and Lambeth surcharged councillors was made by a Hackney councillor.

The Conference voted to support and affiliate to London Fight Back and

By Fred Leplat
Camden Labour Briefing

London Bridge. But it also voted to set up Broad Lefts in the Boroughs which would unite Labour Parties, unions and tenants against the cuts and privatisation.

Whether this means separate campaign committees in the boroughs and across London was not clarified by the platform. Although organising the left in the unions is necessary Broad Lefts are not the single issue campaigns which would unite all those who oppose the cuts regardless of their attitude to BLOC.

However, by voting to support London Fight Back BLOC has come one step closer to united action with other forces on the left.

Deason victimisation highlights BT's political surveillance policy

John Deason, a member of the City NCU branch, has won an Industrial Tribunal decision ordering his reinstatement by British Telecom.

The Tribunal found that Deason was unfairly dismissed because of his trade union activities.

BT decided to offer no defence when it became clear that they would have to produce documentation which would reveal the extent of surveillance of BT employees' trade union and political activities.

They have offered Deason £41,000 compensation to deter any threat of industrial action in his support.

Unfortunately the prospects for any such action are slight. The union's City branch has been weakened by management's compulsory transfer of branch officials and activists out of the branch area.

Branch chair Fred Clark has been transferred to Bromley and refused access to BT buildings in the City, including the Branch office.

Resistance to management's offensive was weakened by the failure of the branch officers to take a stand in the crucial aftermath of the strike, against the sackings of Deason and John Treadaway.

NCU Annual Conference voted to support the two victimised workers; but the support, even from the Broad Left, has been nothing more than routine.

A more vigorous national campaign is required to back up the City branch. Resources should be given to this key branch to help rebuild itself for the confrontations to come.

Pete Cooper, *NCU London West*

Who says resolutions aren't worth the paper they're written on?

***Labour Briefing* is pleased to share with our readers a letter from Brendan Barber, Secretary of the TUC Local Government Committee, to Edmund Hall, from the London-wide local government stewards organisation London Bridge, which expresses current TUC thinking on the local government situation.**

Dear Mr Hall,

Thank you for your letter about the London Bridge organisation.

The TUC's Local Government Committee is, of course, most concerned about the adverse effects of Government proposals on local authorities. For your information I am enclosing copies of resolutions of the 1987 Congress on privatisation, poll tax and housing. These resolutions set out the TUC position on these issues and suggest possible responses which will now be considered by the General Council.

The Local Government Committee noted that the demands contained in London Bridge's resolution do not accord with TUC policies, nor indeed with the strategy adopted by the Association of London Authorities. The Committee feared that calls for industrial action could be counter-productive at a time when it is important to win support from service users in the campaign against the Government's proposals.

For these reasons, the Committee did not feel that a lobby of the TUC or a meeting would serve any useful purpose. The other point I would make is that it would not be appropriate for the Committee to enter into discussions with local union representatives. The TUC has contacts with the local authority associations, but we cannot be expected to be in a position to comment on the problems of some 450 individual councils.

I hope this answers the points raised in your letter.

Yours sincerely,
Brendan Barber,
Secretary, TUC Local Government Committee

Birmingham Housing Clerks

We want solidarity — not filofaxes!

Two hundred low paid NALGO members employed by Birmingham City Council have been taking strike action since August 24th.

The history of the dispute can be traced back to August 1986, when management in the Housing Department promised to review the grading of Scale 1 and 2 clerks, the lowest paid workers in the Department.

The review was never carried out and in February 1987 NALGO submitted a claim. The response to this eventually arrived in June — and was derisory.

By Nick Hay
Secretary, Birmingham Branch of NALGO

Over July and August no progress was forthcoming, and in a ballot the workers concerned voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action.

The action planned was two day action for four weeks followed by all-out strike from September 21st. This programme was followed as no improvement was made to the offer.

Progress has been blocked on the direct orders of the leaders of Birmingham's Labour Councillors — Councillors Knowles and Gray. The strike has been a bitter one with heavy intimidation from management and considerable financial hardship to the low paid strikers.

The spirit and determination of the strikers has been magnificent. The vast majority of them are young people and/or women — exactly the people TUC bureaucrats say cannot be unionised or need filofaxes and private health care deals to get them involved in unions.

The main lessons we have learned in the dispute are:

- Right wing Labour Councils can behave in the most vicious manner to their own employees, especially low paid employees, when they fight for better pay. Birmingham Council is spending millions on road races, convention centres and luxury hotels while attempting to starve out low paid strikers.
- Young people and women are prepared to fight courageously and *give a lead* to other groups of workers. The answer to the union's recruitment problems are not personal services and glossy videos but fighting for and with workers over the problems that really concern them.

The future of the dispute is unclear. The Birmingham Branch of NALGO is attempting to escalate the dispute by involving other groups of members, and indeed the whole 7,000+ membership, in a one-day stoppage. Support action has already been taken by workers in Housing, Chief Executive's and Treasurer's Departments.

If a serious fight is to be made to Tory legislation and right wing Labour cuts it is essential that the *fullest possible support is given to this dispute.*

Donations and messages of support to: Birmingham Branch of NALGO, 3rd Floor, Herbert House, 71 Cornwall Street, Birmingham B3 2EE.

Trade Union Solidarity Conference
Leeds Trades Council Club Saville Mount, Leeds November 7th, 11-6 November 8th, 9.30-4.30 £3 (waged), £2 (unwaged; creche available Credentials and correspondence to: Janet Seymour, 3 Hill Street, Barnoldswick, Coln, Lancs. (0282 812864)

Youth Briefing

TUC has identity crisis

One of the more positive things to come out of the TUC this year was its decision to initiate a youth structure.

By Louise Whittle
Chair, Sandwell College (personal capacity)

But is the TUC serious about tackling the problem of unionising youth? Or is this just an opportunity for more jobs for bureaucrats?

The first test will be how much resources they give this new project.

Finance

Will they be prepared to finance the massive job of unionising the MSC schemes, with all the campaigning work this would involve? Will they be prepared to allow the youth to decide their own policies in a democratic fashion? Only time will answer this question.

This year's TUC went some way to answering the first question though. Today most youth work on MSC slave labour schemes with appalling pay and conditions. The TUC sit on the management boards of the MSC.

Thus, for many of the people that would have to be drawn into TUC youth section, the TUC appear as their bosses. A ruthless boss as well — £28.50 for 40 hours on YTS, and 13 weeks without dole if you tell them what they can do with it!

Election

If this wasn't bad enough, the election of the Tories for a third term means an even worse prospect for youth from the MSC:

- YTS (16-18) is going to become compulsory in that if you refuse to take a YTS scheme, your dole will be cut.

Introduction

- The introduction of JTS (18-24) means that this section of youth are offered the prospect of working for their Supp Ben, which can be cut if you don't turn up. Your off-the-job training doesn't need to be at a college, and thus not necessarily off-the-job. This scheme is also likely to become compulsory in the near future; and once again, the MSC is the boss.

With the likely introduction of student loans, the last possible escape route for working class youth to avoid the dreaded MSC will be closed. The Tories' aim of educating us into a compliant, 'ununionised' and low paid labour force will be complete.

And all this takes place with the TUC lined up with the bosses in the MSC!

The argument that the unions can influence the MSC and make it a fair employer no longer holds any credibility. But this is still the TUC position.

Action

The TUC must now put its words into action by building a youth section with the resources to unionise the schemes, and by building a campaign to force the government to back down. This can only be done if the TUC stops lining up with the bosses and gets out of the MSC.

Trades Unions Against the MSC Conference
November 7th
Dr Johnson House, 40 Bull Street, Birmingham B4
Registration (£5) from
M. Arkwright, 30 Pembroke Road, London E17
(01 521 4130)

Don't let Klebanov die!

November 25th marks ten years since Vladimir Klebanov, a victimised Ukrainian miner, and a group of Soviet workers announced their intention to form an independent trade union.

They declared that for the Soviet working class "there is no organ which objectively defends the workers' interests. Soviet trade unions do not defend our rights and do not have the necessary authority."

It was in order to remedy this situation that the "Free Trade Union Association of the Soviet Working People" was formed.

It declared its intention to "win the official and legal right to defend our interests — a right guaranteed by the Soviet constitution."

At its foundation the Free Trade Union Association claimed a membership of over 200 people.

Many of the 200 had suffered at the hands of management for protesting against working conditions and corruption. They found that on most occasions the official "unions" sided with the management.

Despite the fact that the Soviet workers had every right to form a trade union they were subjected from the very beginning to a deliberate campaign of harassment and persecution. The authorities supplied every police station in Moscow with the names of members who were then questioned and threatened.

The worst treatment was reserved for Klebanov, the union's founder and leader. For forming a trade union he was found to be "suffering from a psychiatric illness" and for nearly ten years he has been imprisoned in one mental hospital after another.

Klebanov has been forced to suffer solitary confinement and the forced injection of "behaviour modification" drugs.

Under Gorbachev there has been the release of a significant number of political prisoners. It was hoped that Klebanov's situation would also have improved. This has not been the case.

Nikolai Kruchkov, a worker oppositionist, has appealed to the "Sovet Trade Union Congress" for Klebanov to be released. This appeal, and the State Procurator's repy, are printed below.

When reading the appeal and reply, you can draw only one conclusion: the new "liberal" Soviet leadership is prepared to keep Klebanov imprisoned, even if it results in his death.

If past examples are anything to go by then this is very much the case. Aleksei Nikitin, another Ukrainian miner who led workers' protests, died in imprisonment in 1984.

The Ukrainian Peace Committee is determined not to allow Valdimir Klebanov to become another martyr to the cause of workers' struggles for democratic rights in the USSR. The cause of Klebanov is no different from the Polish workers who formed "Solidarnosc" or the South African workers who formed COSATU. We therefore appeal to those members of the British Trade Union and labour movement who have backed COSATU and Solidarnosc to help free Klebanov.

On November 25th we have called a demonstration at the Soviet Embasy in London for his release. Supporters of the Ukrainian Peace Committee campaign include a number of Polish Opposition Groups, Solidarnosc members, Czech and Soviet Oppositionists. But we need the support of as many people in Britain as possible.

DEMONSTRATE!
Wed 25th November
Soviet Embassy,
18 Kensington Palace Gardens
1.30-3.00

We appeal to you to publicise the plight of Klebanov in your organisations, and to ask them to sponsor our demonstration, and send a delegation with banners and a letter of protest to Gorbachev to be handed in at the Embassy. Write to Klebanov's wife c/o The Ukrainian Peace Committee, 168-10 King Street, London W6 0QU.

This article is taken from an appeal issued by the Ukrainian Peace Committee

Labour Movement Conference:
SOLIDARITY
with workers in the Eastern Bloc
Saturday Nov 7th, 11-5
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

Appeal to the 28th Soviet Trade Union Congress for the release of Vladimir Klebanov

Vladimir Klebanov, the miner from the Donbas, and organiser of the (Association) "Free Trades Unions", has spent several years in a special psychiatric "hospital" in Tashkent. He is being detained absolutely illegally: he has not been indicted and no proceedings have been instituted against him.

It must be emphasised that any persecutions for trade union activity are illegal, as the right to establish a trade union is contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is guaranteed by international treaties on human rights which have been ratified by the USSR.

I call on the (Soviet) Trades Union Congress to secure the release of Vladimir Klebanov. Social and human justice deem this to be imperative.

Nikolai Kruchkov

Reply to Nikolai Kruchkov's appeal from the Soviet State Procurator

Your appeal concerning Vladimir Klebanov has been noted and has been found to be unjustified.

It has been established that from 1968 Klebanov systematically distributed in oral and written form deliberately false information discrediting the Soviet government and Social System. By doing this he committed socially dangerous acts. It has been fully proven that he committed those acts.

In view of the fact that, according to the established order of the law, he was declared not to be answerable for his actions because he was suffering from a psychiatric illness, the court lawfully committed him to a psychiatric hospital for obligatory treatment. He can only be freed from this on the basis of medical evidence.

There is no basis for disputing the decisions of the court regarding this case.

N.P. Mykhailov

Women in Chile

A people's and feminist organisation:

Against the dictatorship!

ANGELA BERRIOS, from the Chilean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights (CODEM) spoke to Graham Bash of *Labour Briefing*.

***Graham:* How did CODEM begin and how has it developed?**

Angela: In 1979 there started lots of occupations of dwelling sites by homeless people. And so it was necessary for people to organise themselves. Women began to organise and about a year later, CODEM was born.

At first, the main focus was on organising communal kitchens. This was not surprising in view of women's traditional role in cooking. But it began to develop in a broader way.

The majority of men were unemployed; more women started going out to work. That meant going out into the streets, meeting other people and widening our world.

It became clear that the struggle not only affected women, but everybody. The fight was one for human rights, and we found other women fighting for the same aims.

We started periodically visiting the prisons and from 1980 we became the voice of the women political prisoners. We became more aware of the hardship of women in prison by seeing them twice a week.



Broader perspectives developed. We organised workshops — craft workshops, including doing patchworks, knitting.

We were also forced to face the problem of health. We had midwives and doctors; and we had to deal with skin diseases and epidemics in the shanty towns.

All these doctors were volunteers. We organised stocks of medicines and visits to women by gynaecologists. Doctors did not just give consultations, but also gave talks on hygiene, feeding, etc.

So we developed by recognising our needs as women not only as women but as part of the people.

***Graham:* What is the current strength of CODEM?**

Angela: It's difficult to assess as a percentage or as a number of members. The people in our group are key to the organisation of the shanty town, so it's not just numbers, but the importance of even a small group. In Santiago, the capital of Chile, there are 9 groups which vary from 15 to about 30. Then in the rest of the country, there are about 8 other groups.

There used to be an organisation called the MDP which used to unite some of the left political parties. We used to be pro-MDP. That is no more. Now there is what is called the United Left, and we generally support it.

***Graham:* You refer to your roots in the shanty towns. Are you a working class based organisation?**

Angela: Till now, it has been typical of the women's movements that there has been a major involvement of middle class women. In Chile, this has also been the case.

But now, the voice of working class women is being heard more in different organisations, not only in CODEM.

This is the result of years of repression. The pain has gone beyond the personal, into a communal pain. We have been pushed into organising ourselves, to feel that we are together, to give each other strength.

This development has been increased because many women are members of political parties. Some were relatives of political prisoners and of people who have been tortured or disappeared.

Also, women have suffered at the hands of the macho police force who have picked on us.

The hunger, misery, unemployment, lack of health service and housing made us think and act.

***Graham:* How does CODEM define itself politically?**

Angela: As a feminist organisation; as a people's and feminist organisation — and of course, against the dictatorship. We believe and trust in the strength of women and we want women to stop being an auxiliary force and to be a real force for change.

We fight for democracy. But we cannot have democracy without women's rights and without an improvement of our conditions, without a transformation of our situation.

***Graham:* What are the prospects ahead in the struggle against the dictatorship?**

Angela: It is difficult to speculate. Our struggle remains what is was on 11th September 1973 — to overthrow the dictatorship, to achieve popular democracy.

Today, the situation is complicated by the plebiscite called by the government — an attempt to "legalise", to legitimise, the rule of the dictatorship; an election in which Pinochet is the only candidate.

The struggle of the left is to overthrow not only the regime, the government, but the whole structure of society that sustains it. First, we must fight the plebiscite, and through this develop the struggle.

***Graham:* What can the British labour movement do to assist your struggle?**

Angela: First, expose the electoral fraud of the plebiscite; secondly, denounce the military help that the British government gives to the Chilean dictatorship.

We suffer repression from weapons sold by the British government. Make the British people aware of this!



Photos: CODEM Organising health care in Chile

Reagan's adventures in the Gulf

The attack by the United States on two Iranian oil platforms in the Gulf is the outcome of a wildly adventurist policy by Reagan which is drawing the US closer and closer to open intervention in the Gulf war.

Such a policy lacks any rationality even from the viewpoint of the interests of US capitalism itself; it is based on quite grotesque and ridiculous arguments, which of course the Thatcher government has tamely gone along with.

The formal reason for the huge Western naval presence in the Gulf is to defend shipping from air and sea attacks. But of course the US is concerned exclusively with defending reflagged shipping against *Iranian* attacks. Iraqi attacks on tankers going to Iranian ports continue unabated — and unchallenged by the US and other Western navies.



Anti-war poster in Teheran

Only two weeks ago an Australian ship was attacked by the Iraqis, its captain and other crew members killed, while the US maintained a total silence. Indeed, over the past three years, the Iraqis have attacked far more ships than have the Iranians.

By Phil Hearse
Islington North CLP



Military forces "guarding" the Gulf

Even more bizarre, the main event which really provoked large-scale US intervention in the Gulf was the air attack on the US Stark, which killed more than 30 sailors, carried out by an *Iraqi* fighter plane. Naturally, the Iranians were blamed by the United States.

Not much more than a year ago, the United States were secretly opening up political talks with Iran, selling them arms, and even sending bizarre gifts of cakes and revolvers to the ayatollahs. Now they are on the edge of war with the same people.

The key to this turnaround is of course the public exposure of the secret arms sales, and the whole Iran-Contragate scandal. This scandal put the Reagan administration on the defensive; they appeared to have gone soft on the "terrorism" of the "mad ayatollahs".

In the aftermath of the Irangate scandal, the tentative opening of relations between the Reagan administration and the Iranian regime were quickly terminated. Very quickly the Soviet Union, whose relations with Tehran have been very bad in recent years, has moved to fill the diplomatic vacuum and shift its political "tilt" in favour of Iran.

There is now talk of an oil pipeline from Iran to the Soviet Union being constructed, and of a new rail link between the two countries.

The new thaw between Moscow and Tehran should not be taken as implying that the USSR is abandoning its diplomatic investment with Iraq. The USSR remains, like France, a substantial supplier of arms and other logistical support to Iraq.

But the Soviet Union is quite prepared to make opportunistic diplomatic manoeuvres at Reagan's expense, without definitively choosing one or other side in the war.

Strategists

Before the recent events in the Gulf, rational strategists of US foreign policy have been reluctant to see either Iran or Iraq win the Gulf war; a clear victory of either side would create a strong Gulf power, which could challenge the reactionary Arab sheikdoms, especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which are close allies of the US.

But now the US seems to be charging headlong towards an all-out confrontation with Iran, and by default taking Iraq's side.

Backlash

If this whole business started as a backlash to Irangate, it now appears to be generating a logic of its own. The experience of the last twenty years should show us that imperialism does not always act rationally, even in its own interests. The conflict with Iran has acquired its own deadly logic, and maybe outside rational political control. On-the-spot decisions by gung-ho naval commanders could determine whether a much wider conflict between Iran and the US takes place.

The shipping war in the Gulf was started by the Iraqis as a desperate tactic to counter Iranian successes on the battlefield. While the Iraqis have an overland pipeline to export their oil, the Iranians have no pipeline and depend on oil tankers. If the Iranians have joined in the shipping war, it has only been primarily to retaliate for Iraqi attacks.

Both Iran and Iraq are reactionary anti-working class dictatorships. In Iran there is the bloody dictatorship of the ayatollahs and mullahs; in Iraq the military-Ba'athist dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

Socialists

Socialists and the labour movement have no business taking sides or inventing weird and wonderful theories to show that one side is more "progressive" than the other. But we do defend the national self-determination of these countries from attack by US imperialism.

So far over 30 Iranians have been killed in US military attacks for no justifiable reason whatever. Socialists must now raise the demand for the US to get out of the Gulf; for the British and French navies to get out as well; and for the defence of Iran in the event of future US attacks.

Ireland

Thatcher turns a deeper shade of Orange

At times it seems that the British regime in Ireland is so ham-fisted, so obviously hypocritical, so downright silly that it is difficult to understand how it has survived so long.

At first glance, the Thatcher government's new proposals to change the electoral goal posts in the North of Ireland seem a case in point.

These centre on introducing a new law which would require local government election candidates to deplore the use of violence and to "declare and undertake that if elected they will neither support nor assist the activities of any organisation proscribed in Northern Ireland."

The proposals are aimed at one party — Sinn Fein — as indeed Thatcher's minister in the North of Ireland, Tom King, has admitted. As such they are a less than subtle intervention into the North's electoral process by a blatantly partisan government.

The Tories are worried about the continued support in the North for Sinn Fein — votes of between 80,000 and 100,000 in the last couple of years. They have decided that the best way to stop people voting for Irish Republicanism is to erase it from the ballot paper.

This is not the first British government attempt to change the electoral rules in a bid to oust Sinn Fein. Proportional representation was introduced several years ago in the hope that a large middle ground would deprive the "extremists" of enough votes to win elections. It didn't.

In 1982, after Bobby Sands had been elected as MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Thatcher amended the Representation of the People Act to disqualify people convicted of political offences from standing for election for five years. Two years later new identification laws were introduced to allow greater "security" to be exercised on those who voted.

Neither of these measures blocked the electoral popularity of Sinn Fein, especially among working class Catholics; hence the new move — in effect to ban Sinn Fein altogether.

There are a number of problems about the proposed changes.

Although it is unlikely to discourage Thatcher, the new rules would actually be illegal. A 1973 North of Ireland Local Government Act states:

"it shall be unlawful for an authority or body ... to require any person to take an oath, make an undertaking in lieu of an oath or make a declaration, as a condition of his being appointed to or serving as a member of that authority or body."

By Geoff Bell
National Council, Labour Committee on Ireland

So the Tories could face the process of amending legislation which could mean some embarrassing moments for them as the "Mother of Parliaments" makes a further series of anti-democratic restrictions on the troublesome Irish.

More worrying for the Tories, the early indications are that a rule change will have little effect.

"We will not allow the British government to disenfranchise the large section of the nationalist community which votes for Sinn Fein," said *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, the voice of Sinn Fein, in response to the government's moves.

Developing this, Martin O'Muilleoir, a Sinn Fein candidate in a forthcoming council by-election in Belfast, said that he would be prepared to sign the proposed declaration.

He explained he would have "less difficulty in signing an anti-violence declaration than either the Northern Ireland Secretary Tom King or his local government minister Richard Needham who are in charge of 30,000 police and soldiers."

So why are the Tories proposing these measures? It could be that they are a way of preparing the ground for something even more vindictive.

They could announce in a couple of weeks that as Sinn Fein had refused to be bound by any new legislation, the only option left was to ban Sinn Fein completely.

Already there are those calling for the government to do this. The *Times* commented, "the broad arguments for the declaration are also arguments for proscribing Sinn Fein altogether. The government's decision document does not rule this out."

Whether or not this is the plan, the new measures do indicate an increasing movement towards the Orange camp by Thatcher. The proposals were first suggested by Official Unionists two years ago, and the British government is now trying to involve some significant sections of Unionist opinion in helping to shape government policy.

Unionists

Thatcher, in effect, is saying to the Unionists "the Anglo-Irish Agreement never was what you said it was. Behave yourselves and you will get more or less what you want." Because the divisions within Unionism are increasing, now is the time for Thatcher and King to appeal to what they consider to be the more "realistic" Orange faction.

Thatcher's continued opposition to even mild reform of the one-judge/no-jury court system in the North, despite threats from the Irish government, is an attempt further to reassure Unionism that Maggie has always been on their side.

It is now nearly two years since the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed. Those who, at the time, suggested it was a start of a political process which would end up with the death of Unionism have increasingly little to sustain such a view.

Ireland: the cause of Labour?
CONFERENCE
28th November
Camden Centre
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Trade Union Briefing

Hurricane blots out news of pit closures

Mid October brought hurricanes sweeping through the North/South divide with countless thousands of homes being damaged and cut off, and people dying across the breadth of Wales and the South East.

Flash flooding further exasperated the emergency services' attempts to restore electrical supplies to almost a quarter of a million people. It appeared as though no one escaped the effects of the weather.

The media was dominated for days by the "British disease" — an overdose of bad weather. "It's enough to make you emigrate," one of my neighbours said, mentioning the "Nuclear Winter", in passing — and he'd only seen the Northern version of the TV News.

As a direct result of The Weather (and I blame the miners for that, as they seem to get the blame for everything else) many other important issues were not focused upon or even received a mention in passing — being deemed unnewsworthy by the media.

The latest round of **pit closures** slipped in by British Coal escaped any coverage or comment. The timing was perfect — one wonders if Sir Robert Haslam, BC's chair, is in cahoost with the Met Office?

Six mines closed in the week commencing October 12th. Nottinghamshire, the UDM stronghold, saw the closure of two mines, Hucknell and Lindby, whilst in Yorkshire BC closed four: Wheldale, Nostell, Woolley and Redbrook.

Wolley colliery near Barnsley was the launching pad for Scargill's career within the NUM.

Only Woolley and Redbrook of the six closing collieries have voiced any kind of opposition to BC's plans and intend to refer the closures to the Independent Review Body. No one has any illusions in the review body and we know all too well that BC would ignore a favourable report and close the mines anyway, but it is widely felt that to delay implementing the closures is a partial victory.

Hollow as it is the miners feel they will be able to hold their heads up and say "at least we tried". The total job losses announced that week was almost two thousand.

By William Head
Yorks rank and file miner

Briefing readers will recall the report that said Mr Ted Scott, the Stillingfleet sacked NUM Branch Secretary, was offered Wheldale as a conciliatory gesture by Haslam. With the closure of Wheldale only two weeks after the "gesture" was made it should be clear to all that the guesture made to Scott was the big "V".

What's on offer now to Scott (he maintains he will only go back to Stillingfleet) should be on every miner's lips. But instead of building mass support and a broad campaign for reinstatement around Scott and the rest of the sacked and victimised miners, the gesticulations from the Yorks NUM leadership are becoming familiar and repetitive.

The message to the sacked miners from the Yorkshire bureaucracy is crude and banal: "Go away, you're embarrassing us." This message was hammered home on the same day that BC closed Wheldale by the Yorkshire Council of NUM delegates, unilaterally voting **not** to have a ballot on October 21st. The ballot was to have called for a stepping up of the ban into a more effective stance than the "joke" of a ban set by the right wing dominated NEC of the NUM.

The call, passed in hushed whispers inside the Barnsley headquarters could still easily be heard in Haslem's office — "unity" at any cost.

The price levied for this "principled" stace would be paid yet again by those least able to afford it, namely the sacked and victimised mineworkers. Once again the only cost to the bureaucracy was a bit of face.

Stand Up

I'm a working class man who's been victimised,
Because I won't let them over me stride,
Im hounded and persecuted time and again,
Because I've had the courage to break free from my restrain,
I won't conform and let them me shackle
I'm prepared to stand up and with them do battle
They don't give a damn, the distress they inflict,
To a man and his family on whom they have picked
They might take my job but they can't take my spirit,
Because I will persevere and work to the limit
They only thing I'm guilty of — my being here is the proof —
I'm standing up for my rights and speaking the truth.

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North Yorkshire Women Against Pit Closures

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