LABOUR
BRIEFING
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40p



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Towards a national fightback in the NHS!

National meeting
Saturday January 16th
1.30-4.30pm
Camden Town Hall
Euston Road, Kings Cross tube
The meeting is open to all activists to come and discuss how we can defend the NHS
For further details contact London Health Emergency, 335 Grays Inn Road, London WC1, 01-833 3020.

NHS: THATCHER'S ACHILLES HEEL?



Attacks on the National Health Service could yet be the undoing of this vicious Tory government.

By JOHN LISTER

Mass anger at the rundown of our hospitals, and now at the moves to impose charges for dental and eye check-ups, has swept through the working class and helped develop a new surge of campaigning and protest action.

The mass media coverage of Birmingham baby David Barber's six-week wait for an urgent heart operation helped to focus this sense of outrage. David got his operation in the end — though it came too late. But more babies are still waiting for urgent treatment, and emergencies are being turned away from the same hospital, where 34 children's operations were cancelled in the previous 2 months alone.

It turns out that Birmingham's Children's Hospital, serving a catchment area of 5.2 million people, has only four functional intensive care beds, while heart unit beds have been cut by a third this year.

The David Barber case was followed by a similar outcry from other heart surgeons around the country. Before that had come public complaints from Birmingham's cancer specialists, who had joined with patients to denounce a 33% cut in beds which forced cancer victims onto waiting lists.

A similar grim picture applies in London, where at the West Middlesex Hospital the only way cancer patients can be admitted is if they are rushed in by ambulance as emergencies: the waiting list is at a standstill for lack of beds.

The anti-cuts revolt is growing: last month saw protest strikes, demonstrations or angry meetings in Coventry, Crewe, parts of Yorkshire, and several parts of London (Riverside, Tower Hamlets, Paddington, St Thomas's Hospital and more): there have even been mass meetings up to 1,000 strong in sleepy market towns of Shropshire, opposing hospital closures.

There have been some partial victories: Edinburgh nurses won increased staffing levels; Tower Hamlets protests have again saved Mile End hospital casualty unit; other cuts have been delayed or diluted in the face of campaigns.

These victories should encourage rather than head off those fighting for the NHS. The Tories may have jumped the gun in launching the biggest-ever wave of NHS cuts.

Opposition to the cuts runs deep into traditional Tory support; 91% of the population have no private insurance, and remain attached to the NHS. Increasing numbers of Tory backbench MPs are beginning to realise the implications of the continued savaging of the Health Service, and are protesting at cutbacks made in their constituencies — only to be told the funds are not there to protect *all* Tory marginals from cutback.

The new cutbacks are radicalising previously passive and silent layers of nurses and doctors who in many areas have emerged to fill the gap of leadership left vacant by the largely inert trade union bureaucracy.

There has never been a better time to mobilise the 1.2m largely female health workers, or to reach out to the millions more who rely on the NHS:

- Winter weather now threatens to swamp depleted hospital beds with emergency admissions: an epidemic could spell disaster;
- Tory plans involve more cuts next year;
- Nurses' pay is under attack, with even the "professional" Royal College of Nursing organising genteel anti-cuts protests;
- Doctors are increasingly speaking out on the real effects of cuts;
- New, sensitive services, including pathology testing, face the threat of privatisation;
- Tory cash cuts are forcing more hospitals to seek income from private work and charity funding — Great Ormond Street Hospital is just the first to shake the tins in a vast £25m appeal.

Trade union and Labour leaders who miss this opportunity to confront the Tory attacks and build what would be the most popular campaign of all prove they have no courage to seize the moment.

The fight for demonstrations and for **trade union action** (overtime bans, work-to-rule, token or sustained strike action, or occupations of threatened hospitals) against cuts and privatisation, can run alongside a wider campaign for solidarity with health workers — and would revive some of the best spirit of the Miners' Strike.

The local campaigns could forge links and build to a national focus in a demonstration backed by local action. Of course nothing more frightens the TUC than the idea of a national demonstration; but the demands should be raised in the unions at every opportunity.

In 1988, its 40th anniversary year, a mass crusade to defend the NHS could win important local victories — and prove a vital rallying point for the entire workers' movement in halting Thatcher's demolition of the welfare state.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Campaign Round-up

NAC: *How it all began*

The National Abortion Campaign has just recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of the 1967 Act.

Without NAC, women would not have been ready to respond to David Alton's Bill, and all previous attempts to restrict women's abortion rights. Neither, before NAC was established, were abortion rights considered a matter of public concern, or a trade union issue.

LEONORA LLOYD, a long-term abortion rights campaigner and a member of the NAC Steering Committee, talks to VALERIE COULTAS about NAC's early days, and the lessons we can draw from past campaigns.

Valerie: **How did it all start?**
Leonora: Leading up to the introduction of the James White Bill in February 1975, which tried to tighten up the grounds for abortion, the anti-abortionists stepped up their activities, establishing new SPUC groups.

In Harrow there had been a demonstration outside the founding meeeting of SPUC in the summer of 1974.

We discovered they were having a big demonstration at the end of October. We later found out that they had done this every year since the passing of the 1967 Abortion Amendment Act.

A couple of us contacted other women and we set up the ad-hoc committee to organise a counter-demo to SPUC. This was very colourful and attracted 200-300 people.

Also at that time the book *Babies for Burning* came out, and was circulated to all MPs by the anti-abortionists. SPUC started to hold rallies in Central Hall Westminster. We picketed them.

Leading up to the Bill in February there was a whole series of protest activities organised.

In February the Working Women's Charter Campaign organised a public meeting during the second reading of the Bill. It was called at very short notice in a small room for 50. Four hundred people turned up, and we had to get a bigger room! The Bishop of Liverpool addressed this meeting.

The founding meeting of NAC took place on March 10th. The name was agreed and the first NAC demonstration held in June attracted 10,000 people.

Local NAC groups took the issue into Labour Parties, trade unions and both the TUC Women's Advisory and the Labour Party Women's Conference passed resolutions supporting abortion rights in the first year of the campaign.

James White's Bill was defeated. A Select Committee was established, and later the Bill was withdrawn.

Valerie: **So when was the next attack?**
Leonora: In November 1975 NAC held its first conference. It turned out to be its biggest ever — 1,000 people turned up.

Provisions

It was at that stage that we decided to go beyond the provisions of the 1967 Act and adopt a women's right to choose as our aim.

In 1977 the Benyon Bill was drafted and we set up a specific campaign called Campaign Against Benyon. Demonstrations were organised in protest at the new attack.

By this time the issue had been taken into the labour movement on a much wider basis, and several national unions had adopted pro-choice policy, among them NALGO and NUPE. The TUC adopted Abortion Rights into their Charter for Women's Rights.

NAC was a mixed campaign and the left-wing groups were very involved in the campaign. This raised hostility among some feminists. There were objections to men being involved and to the level of involvement of the left groups.

NAC was always careful to ensure that women took the leadership positions in the campaign, however. We also organised women-only events and demonstrations, conferences and schools.

Valerie: **And then came John Corrie's Bill in 1979.**
Leonora: Yes, the TUC had adopted a resolution promising to organise action against any attacks on the '67 Act.

Corrie's Bill was very similar to the previous Bills. Anti-abortion groups and the Tories were better organised than they had been before. But the anti-Corrie campaign was the biggest-ever response of the abortion rights activists.

The two major groups which established the Corrie Campaign were NAC and the TUC. NAC had put pressure on the TUC through picketing the General Purposes Committee to establish this campaign which they agreed to do. The rest, as they say, is history.

The huge demonstration of 60,000 plus took place in October 1979. Before the third reading we had an enormous rally in Central Hall Westminster — David Steele, Tony Benn, the BMA all addressed the meeting.
gest lobby they had seen since *In Place of Strife*. We filled the overflow meeting and the caretaker said he would have to close the hall if one more person came in.

We had people desperately trying to get into the hall and at the same time there were queues of people over Westminster Bridge wanting to get into the lobby.

On the Friday we had 2,000 women in a women-only meeting at Central Hall Westminster with lots of entertainers. Some women went into the House of Commons and got arrested for holding banners over the railings of the visitors gallery. Later when we heard it had been talked out we had a torchlight procession.

Activities

A number of the local Campaign Against Corrie groups turned into NAC groups. But although there were some activities around the Buff form in 1981, basically NAC wound down. People only really gave NAC a lot of support when abortion rights were centrally under attack.

Valerie: **So what general lessons would you draw out of this?**
Leonora: I think the main thing is that women in particular are quite clear about wanting to control their fertility. When that right is under attack they are prepared to organise collectively in a very determined way.

NAC could not have happened without the women's liberation movement being there first, but what NAC did which was new, was to take the issue into the organised labour movement and demand that this feminist issue become a trade union issue.

We succeeded because of the strength of feeling and the way we organised to achieve our demands. Thousands of women stood up in trade union meetings and made abortion a labour movement issue.

Jocelyn Mensah Campaign

Deportation by hook or by crook

Jocelyn Mensah, resident of Haringey in North London, is threatened with deportation.

A campaign in her defence has been set up by the local Labour Parties.

Jocelyn, a 26-year old Ghanaian citizen, lives on Broadwater Farm with her small child. She first came to Britain in 1979, as a student, and "overstayed" in 1981.

In 1984 she married a Commonwealth citizen resident in Britain for some 20 years.

Arrested

In January 1985 she was arrested by immigration officers. She made a claim to the Home Office to remain in this country, as her husband was settled here. Her husband, realising the power his position gave him over her, started to abuse that power, and Jocelyn left him in October 1985.

In November 1986, the Secretary of State decided to issue a deportation order against her. Jocelyn appealed.

In July this year, the adjudicator of the appeal ruled that "the public interest in maintaining effective immigration control" outweighed the other circumstances in the case and that Jocelyn would have to leave.

Although Home Office staff had already interviewed her husband at length, they told the adjudicator there was no evidence of his immigration status.

In October, Jocelyn's case went before an Immigration Appeal Tribunal. She produced evidence of her husband's status which the Home Office were forced to accept. The tribunal was adjourned without reaching a decision.

By MARK SEATON

When the case is reopened in the near future, it is thought that the Tribunal will be bound by a recent Court of Appeal decision to rule that Jocelyn cannot be deported.

Bill

However, the Immigration Bill now before Parliament will abolish Jocelyn's protection from deportation. The Home Office will try to thwart the Tribunal's decision by delaying until the new legislation is passed, and then making a fresh decision to deport her.

Public and political pressure from all sides will be necessary to prevent this deportation.

For more information call Madeleine Kingston 01 348 5824 or write to Hornsey & Wood Green CLP, 28 Middle Lane, London N8

Spanish Women's Movement

A long way from a woman's right to choose

In 1986, 24,667 non-resident women had abortions in Britain. 2,694 of these were performed *after* 18 weeks and would therefore not be allowed if the Alton Bill becomes law. A large proportion of these include women from Spain.

On a recent visit to Madrid GILL LEE, Battersea CLP, talked to Justa Montero, of the Madrid Committee for a Woman's Right to Abortion.

Gill: **How did the movement in support of a woman's right to abortion arise?**
Justa: The women's movement emerged here after 1975 and committees around the issue of abortion were created. Franco had just died and even by 1979 the subject was still taboo.

Contraceptive methods had not been legalised so the struggle around abortion was very important. We had to confront all kinds of prejudices, all the old ideas which had been pushed by the Catholic Church and the right.

Abortion became a principal theme of the feminist movement and a focus for public activity, particularly after 1979 with the case of 11 women from Bilbao who were imprisoned for having had abortions.

Since then, the demand for a woman's right to decide has gained widespread support in the popular organisations, the unions and the political parties of the left.

Gill: **What about the trade unions? How supportive have they been?**
Justa: Commisiones obreras (CCOE — Workers' Commissions) agrees with the right of women to decide. The position of the UGT (the main union confederation) has varied, depending on who is in government.

When the right was in power, there was no problem getting the UGT to place demands which confronted the government. In the run up to and after the general election the PSOE (Socialist Party) proposed the decriminalisation of abortion under three circumstances: if something was wrong with the foetus; in the case of rape; and if the life of the mother was in danger.

Feminist

The feminist movement as a whole argued that this would not do. Abortions under these circumstances would only be of relevance to 3% of the women who needed abortions.

Once the PSOE was in government, the organisations linked to the PSOE, the socialist women and the UGT, dropped support for the demand for women to decide.

Gill: **Hasn't there been any movement within the PSOE itself to challenge these positions?**
Justa: No. The PSOE is a party with complete control exercised from the top, and has never given support for the positions of the feminist movement. Women in the PSOE have very little power. The second wave of the feminist movement followed the election of the PSOE government.

We were confronted with a huge publicity campaign which argued that the PSOE proposal was liberalisation of the law. Under the PSOE law many women continued to go abroad for abortions or had illegal abortions here.

As well as a time limit of twelve weeks and the limiting of abortions to the three criteria, the PSOE allowed medical practitioners to opt out of doing abortions on the grounds of "conscience".

Women who wanted abortions had to go before "evaluation committees" which would decide whether or not they fitted into the right categories. Women who wanted abortions were faced with a mountain of paperwork.

Under the PSOE government there were still cases of women being imprisoned for having illegal abortions. There were trials of people arguing that they had helped women get abortions for reasons of conscience, not money.

So after a year and a half of campaigning by the women's movement to show that the PSOE's laws hadn't solved anything, including public abortions performed by the committees in favour of a woman's right to decide, the government realised they had to take other measures.

They proposed two further changes to the law. The first was to change the "evaluation committees". The second was to recognise officially the private clinics which performed abortions, i.e. they privatised abortion.

Now, abortions which fit into the three categories can be performed in private clinics as well as in the public sector. The difference is that in the private clinics, the provision for abortion in the case of pregnancy threatening the mother's health is interpreted in a broader sense. A private sector abortion costs about 30,000 pesetas (about £150).

Gill: **Is it now possible, if you have the money, to get an abortion on demand up to 12 weeks?**
Justa: With some exceptions. Women under eighteen need parental permission to get an abortion.

Remember, the right to abortion under certain circumstances exists as an *exception* to the status of abortion as a crime. Therefore judges and pro-life groups can argue that individual cases are in fact against the law, and do not properly conform to one of the three exceptions.

Afraid

Many women go abroad because they are afraid someone might accuse them of having had an illegal abortion if they have it here. Even those women who have had legal abortions are under threat of harassment and publicity.

We say that abortion must cease to be a crime, that it must be carried out in the state sector and considered as a medical procedure like any other. It has to be the woman's decision and it must be free.

Fight racist laws!

The government is planning another attack on black people and their families. They want to bring in a new Immigration Bill. They also want to impose a quota on husbands from the Indian subcontinent coming to join their wives.

Since 1971 a million more people have left Britain than have settled here. But numbers are not the issue. Racism is. Once again it is mainly black families that will be kept apart.

- The right of people whose homes are in Britain to bring in their families to join them will be drastically curbed.
- Everyone will have to prove that their children and partners can be supported and have somewhere to live.
- Rights of appeal against deportations and refusal of entry, already almost non-existent for many black people, will be reduced still further.
- "Second and subsequent" wives in polygamous marriages will be prevented from joining their husbands. There are very few families like this who want to come to Britain. This is a classic "racist scare" — intended to stir up hostility and prejudice.

Everyone can play a part in drawing together a powerful movement which can force the government to retreat. Together we can win! Contact the Campaign Against Racist Laws, 56 Edithna Street, London SW9 9JP; 01-733 8508.

Broadwater Farm

The Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign is still alive and kicking. Two years after the uprising, three youths have been jailed for life and 39 others are serving sentences of from 1-8 years.

This is only part of the price the Tottenham community has had to pay for daring to resist police attack.

Public Meeting

The real truth about the Broadwater Farm uprising and the Trials
Speakers: **Broadwater Farm Youth Association, Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign, Defendants and Families, Lawyers, Birmingham Six Campaign, Guildford Four Campaign.**
TUES, DEC 15th, 7.30
Black Women's Centre (formerly Somerset Lower School), Lordship Lane, Tottenham, London N17
(Seven Sisters tube)

Candle-lit vigil

Wormwood Scrubs Prison
Saturday December 19th
6-10pm
In support of Winston Silcott and Engin Raghip (held in Wormwood Scrubs), Mark Braithwaite (held in Aylesbury prison), and all the other BWQF and Tottenham youth.
Come and show your solidarity with the prisoners and stand with them in their fight for justice.

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

INF Treaty: The end of the second cold war?

The agreement reached by the Soviet Union and the United States to eliminate Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) seems to have caught nearly everyone by surprise.

The Treaty signed by Gorbachev and Reagan in Washington is the first pact between the two powers for over eight years.

It will remove all intermediate range nuclear missiles (including Cruise missiles at Greenham) — the first time the US and USSR have agreed to *destroy* any part of their nuclear arsenals. When the treaty is finally implemented it will result in a total reduction in world nuclear weaponry of between 3% and 4%.

Clearly, this will not usher in a golden age of world peace and superpower harmony, and it is certainly not the end of the nuclear threat. Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, and one welcomed by hundreds of millions throughout the world.

The next step, at least according to Gorbachev, will be an attempt to agree a 50% cut in long-range (strategic) nuclear weapons. This much bigger task will be the main agenda item at the Moscow summit planned for next summer.

The INF talks began in 1985, and were preceded by a long period of public shadow boxing and secret conclaves. Repeated attempts to undermine the talks have been made by forces on both sides (the Daniloff affair, the US embassy "bugging" furore, etc.). Often a deal would appear in sight, only to be pushed once again over the horizon.

Then, in a flurry of meetings in Geneva, Shultz and Shevardnadze managed to sweep aside obstacles that had prevented agreement for years.

Why the breakthrough? Was there some sudden change of heart on the part of US capitalists or Soviet bureaucrats?

No. What happens around the negotiating table at Geneva (or anywhere else) is largely determined by what happens in the big world outside the plush hotel rooms and diplomat's suites.

The verification question had been held up by the US for years as a stumbling block to any agreement with the "evil empire". After all, how could you sign a treaty with someone whom, by definition, you couldn't trust?

The "common sense" of the US right since 1946 has been that the Soviets gained strength because of US gullibility and concessions made in negotiations, most notoriously those held at Yalta towards the end of the Second World War. Carter's SALT II treaty was drowned in the US Senate by a renewed wave of this Cold War fundamentalism. Reagan swept to power not least by capitalising on it and presenting himself as someone who'd never be suckered by the wily Russians.

Now the two powers have agreed to give each other the right to on-site inspection of INF missile bases for the next 13 years. The Soviets will have access to all US missile sites, including those in Europe. We anticipate with pleasure the first Soviet visit to Greenham (not to mention whatever reception the Yellowgate group cooks up for them).

But how did the Russians suddenly become trustworthy? And what divine intervention is responsible for the apparent rationality of the Americans? Why has this agreement been reached now and not before?

Of course, the Tory explanation will not wash. CND and the peace movement did not hold up the negotiations by giving the Soviets false hope that the West would "weaken". On the contrary, their actions helped create the political climate which led to the negotiations taking place.

Without the world-wide peace movement, the INF agreement is inconceivable. The Greenham women, in particular, drew world attention to the insanity of intermediate-range missiles. Credit belongs to them and not to those in CND who wavered on this issue.

The fact that under the Treaty the Soviets must destroy 1,500 warheads, the United States only 300, is some indication of the Soviet eagerness to make a deal. The pressures on Gorbachev to come up with arms reductions have been immense, for both economic and political reasons.

After the fall of Yeltsin, this much-needed triumph will undoubtedly boost his standing in the Soviet hierarchy and amongst the Soviet masses. It may even enable him to maintain, for the moment, the course of domestic reforms.

Gorbachev has repeatedly stolen the diplomatic initiative from Reagan, offering concession after concession, constantly redefining the goals and pace of the disarmament process. He has done this under ever-mounting pressure to break the Soviet economy from the grip of appalling stagnation.

His economic problems remain huge and intractable. For this agreement to bear fruit for him, further agreements must follow, in particular large-scale reductions not only in long-range nuclear weaponry but also in conventional forces in Europe.

The lame-duck Reagan, hobbled by the Iran-Contra scandal, has found his simplistic anti-communist posture exposed by Gorbachev's suave manoeuvre. **But it was the Stock Market Crash which forced his hand.** Indeed, it is unlikely any agreement would have been reached at this time without the spectacular collapse of the bull market and the consequent clamour for cuts in the US budget deficit.

With a presidential race slowly coming to the boil, and the dollar plunging, disarmament will become a major reference point in US politics. On the Republican right, there will be new outbursts of crude and violent anti-communism. The Senate may yet refuse to approve the Treaty.

There will undoubtedly be attempts by US officials and what has come to be known as the military-industrial complex to get round the terms of the Treaty — and the cuts in the military budget. These people do not believe in "balance" or "parity" between the superpowers. They have one article of faith, US armed superiority, and neither the Treaty nor all Gorbachev's enticements will alter it.

Reagan himself is still committed to Star Wars and is unlikely to concede big cuts in strategic nuclear weapons, which would wreak havoc with a military strategy based on long-range, first-strike capacity — and would undermine the political base created by huge defence expenditure.

At the same time, there will be renewed hope and energy in the US peace movement. There will be a strong sense that you can "do business" with the Soviets. A minority of Democratic presidential candidates may even be tempted to take up the banner of disarmament.

For the peace movement around the world the treaty represents an opportunity not only for justified self-congratulation, but also for sober self-criticism.

Despite some success in the British Labour Party and elsewhere (notably New Zealand), the peace movement has not succeeded in inserting its demands inside the organisations and parties of the working class. It has allowed itself to be swept up by events, and swung wildly between utopian appeals to world eco-consciousness and minimalist acceptance of the most limited reductions in specific types of weaponry.

In Britain, it has failed to sustain the mass movement — a movement involving hundreds of thousands of people in anti-militarist action — that surfaced in the early eighties. It has avoided the key questions which it must take up if its intervention is to be effective in the long run: the question of its relationship to the Labour Party and the labour movement, and the question of Britain's role in NATO, with the concomittant ideology of anti-Sovietism and "Atlanticism".

The forces on the left of the labour movement are now the only real links between that movement and the peace movement. Under attack from the right on a number of fronts, our resources stretched to the limit, we have not been able to mount the kind of internationalist challenge which is needed to stem the Party's retreat from unilateralism and to mobilise the large forces in the country opposed to nuclear weapons.

Now is the time to renew pressure at all levels for our immediate demands — British unilateral nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from NATO. We must use developments like the INF treaty not only to advance those demands, but to show that only by linking them to a comprehensive socialist programme can we ever hope to achieve our aim of a co-operative, nuclear-free world without competition between nation states.

Events in Geneva have only confirmed the logic of unilateralism. After all, it was in effect a series of unilateral steps by the Soviets which made the deal possible. To dilute or shelve this demand now, as proposed by some Labour Party and CND self-styled strategists, would be to abandon any possibility of promoting a coherent alternative foreign policy, not to mention a mass campaign in support of it, and substitute for it a dependence on superpower negotiations — which, as we have seen, can be as easily blown off course as on.

Now is the time to press forward with a campaign for withdrawal from NATO and the closure of all US bases in Britain, which would be a major spur to further multilateral disarmament.

It is also time to table our positive proposals for a united Socialist States of Europe and an entirely new, non-exploitative relationship with the "Third World". Utopian as it may appear at present, this new system of international relations represents, in reality, the *only* hope for permanent world peace and economic development.

What has been called the "second cold war" is far from over. The crises in which both the US capitalists and the Soviet bureaucrats find themselves are profound. No one is fully in control of events on either side. The tremendous hopes raised by the INF agreement could be easily dashed and the starting pistol fired for a new and even more dangerous lap in the arms race.

Only a clear, coherent, principled set of demands — beginning with British unilateral nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from NATO — can face up to the dangers and exploit the opportunities presented by a volatile, rapidly changing world situation.

Replay of Corrie won't be enough: How to *bury* the Alton Bill

Nearly every major town in Britain now has a FAB (Fight the Alton Bill) Group.

In colleges and hospitals students and nurses are starting up their own campaigns. Women Against Pit Closures has sponsored the national campaign.

Letters of help and donations — including £250 from the Transport and General Workers Union — are pouring into the National Abortion Campaign office.

Jo Richardson has established a Parliamentary group to argue the pro-choice case.

Women throughout the country are in no doubt whatsoever about David Alton's Bill to outlaw abortion after 18 weeks. Despite a huge media and postcard campaign by SPUC and LIFE, women are telling Alton to keep his laws off our bodies and insisting that we will not accept this new attempt to criminalise abortion.

By Valerie Coultas
Vauxhall CLP

If FAB uses this enormous potential support, and builds on the model of the 1979 Campaign Against Corrie, there is very likelihood that Alton will also meet defeat. To achieve that victory the labour movement must be mobilised and we must build a broad campaign to defend the '67 Act.

However, socialists cannot be complacent and think that a re-run of Corrie is inevitable. It is necessary to analyse the conditions in which this campaign is being built and the kind of alliances that have to be established to make it successful.

The state of play in the abortion movement is not the same as it was a decade ago. The women's movement, like the labour movement, has been weakened by Thatcher. The response to the Powell and Gillick attacks on fertility rights was not as strong as it would have been in the 70s.

The split in NAC weakened the feminist movement and the demonstrations were, for the most part, far-left dominated.

The TUC, the Labour Party and the major trade unions have become increasingly dominated by a "new realist" ideology according to which it is impossible to defeat Thatcher through class struggle methods and compromises have to be made with prevailing prejudices.

On the abortion issue, Islington Council leader Margaret Hodge has taken this thinking to its logical conclusion. In her CLP, she supported a resolution calling for a reduction in the time limit to 24 weeks.

Standing behind her are Margaret Thatcher and leading medical organisations, all of which have accepted the "viability" argument — that abortion should only be allowed up the moment when the foetus can technically survive alone.

This new anti-abortion tack means that winning support inside the labour movement for no new restrictions on abortion rights will be more difficult than in the past.

Supporters of a woman's right to choose may wish to avoid an open confrontation with 24-week supporters and play down mass mobilisation in favour of a strictly parliamentary campaign.

Building pressure from the bottom up in the unions and the Labour Party will be the key. FAB cannot rely on the current leadership in the labour movement. It has to push for action and push hard.

Another problem is presented by the antics of some far left groups, notably those newly converted to the cause. Pride of place must go to the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), who refuse to affiliate to NAC, refuse to defend the '67 Act, and have no conception at all of how to build a broad-based united front. They issue their own petitions and leaflets wherever possible.

The influence of groups like the RCP is waning fast as the campaign reaches out to the mass of women. But their ultra-left view that the existence of the '67 Act is irrelevant should be challenged at every step. We all want an unconditional woman's right to choose — but returning to back street abortions is no way to get it!

For FAB, the political fight against the 24-week revisionists will be crucial. "No new restrictions" must be our watchword. If the 24-weeks amendment goes through, it will be the first setback for a pro-choice movement that has managed to defend the '67 Act for two decades.

The National Abortion Campaign has made it possible to fight repeated attacks on abortion rights. NAC, working with trade union women, forced the TUC to take action in 1979 against Corrie. It argues for women to have control over their own bodies as a fundamental human right.

Anyone who agrees with this should build FAB and join NAC. Get a speaker to your trade union, Labour Party branch or section, and build the Day of Action and the lobby of Parliament in January.

Trade Union Briefing



PHOTO: Andrea Campbell

Labour and the unions

Sponsored by the Campaign Group of Labour MPs as a discussion document, *Labour and the Unions* addresses the relationship between the trade unions and a future Labour government.

Given the result on June 11th, this is a bit academic; but the arguments are still important.

The pamphlet argues that the last two Labour governments floundered in the face of periods of industrial militancy generated as a backlash against the rightward drift of their own policies. Given this record, it is necessary to get the relationship between a future Labour government and the trade unions on a better footing.

Written from the general political standpoint of the Campaign Group, the pamphlet argues, with some justification, that a Labour government elected last June would have introduced an incomes policy in the shape of a new "social contract". It then suggests a trade union response.

Unfortunately, the response suggested has all the echoes of the old Alternative Economic Strategy of the 1970s. It advocates not opposition to such a policy in principle, but that the policy should be mitigated by:

- tough price controls;
- taxes on "excess" profits above an agreed level;
- measures to protect jobs and avoid redundancies;
- tougher sanctions on firms who refuse to co-operate in "industrial democracy" schemes.

If such demands are not fulfilled, then *"socialists should use the pressure of working class discontent to try to push Labour's policies leftwards."*

By looking at the problem this way the pamphlet falsely counterposes "the trade unions" and "the Labour Party", failing to draw out that the same political lines are drawn in each.

The backlash against the policies of both Harold Wilson and James Callaghan were essentially rank and file backlashes, with the TUC and the majority of trade union leaders holding at best an ambiguous position.

The pamphlet also presents a confused view of "new realism". Kelly argues that the "new realists" base themselves on the argument that the unions have been chronically weakened by the recession; so it is necessary to make concessions to the employers and the government.

In fact it has not just been the recession which has weakened the unions. The central role has been played by the "new realists" themselves, by their betrayal of struggles from Warrington to Wapping.

In reality "new realism" has been based far more on what it has seen as the strength of the Thatcher government than on the weakness of the trade unions. This is why the Stock Market crash has exposed their politics so completely.

Kelly does take up the "new realists", but he does it by denying that the unions have been weakened significantly during the Thatcher period, backing this up by a largely academic argument. He concludes that:

"many workers still retain considerable bargaining power because trade union organisation, membership and finances have survived remarkably well."

By Alan Thornett
Trade Union Briefing

Elsewhere he presents figures to show that the number of trade union representatives remains the same as 1979 and makes the highly controversial assertion that:

"it is a mistake to assume that the break-up of 'restrictive practices' or worker controls based on job demarcations necessarily deminishes workers' power at the point of production."

It is true that the trade unions have not been beaten back as they were in the 1930s, and that the working class remains basically strong and able to fight back. But no amount of figures based on an expansion of organisation in white collar sections of the trade union movement can obscure the serious defeats and setbacks which have been sustained and the effects this has had on organisation.

The industrial policies of the government, and through them the employers, have one ultimate aim — to increase the rate of exploitation at the point of production. It is wrong for John Kelly to minimise this, or its effects on the workers concerned.

It is from this point of view that the Tories have been most successful, even if their successes are inadequate for the requirements of the capitalist system in its present crisis. Round after round of speed-up has been forced onto productive industry, where workers are now working many times harder than they were a few years ago. In the car plants they are reaching Japanese levels of work effort; with working conditions worsening all the time.



PHOTO: Brian James (Public Eye)

Shop floor organisation in most of the previously highly organised sectors of productive industry (sectors which have played a crucial role in the trade union movement) has been very seriously diminished.

The shop stewards movement in those industries is a shadow of the one which existed ten years ago. In some industries it has been almost destroyed, judging against its previous strength.

Contrary to what John Kelly says, the breakdown of so-called restrictive practices, particularly demarcation, *always* has a serious negative effect on trade union organisation. This has played a central role in both the break-up of organisation and the speeding up of the workforce.

To recognise the reality of present conditions on the shop floor is not to be pessimistic about the future — any more than to ignore it resolves the problem of "new realism".

Continue

That the workers themselves remain able to fight back is shown clearly as workers continue to take industrial action. The effects of the past eight years of Tory rule are shown in the gap which now exists between the rank and file and the leaders at the top; a gap which used to be filled by a layer of experienced activists and shop stewards. John Kelly does not address this problem at all.

This is not to argue that the "new realists" have had it all their own way in the trade union movement — far from it. Scargillism — something not taken up by John Kelly — represents the opposite to the class collaboration of "new realism", and it has played a major role not just in the miners' strike, but since.

The fight which Scargill has put up and the class struggle line he represents (shown most clearly in his decision to go to the NUM membership for a new mandate) is a direct challenge to the "new realists" in both the trade unions and the Labour Party. It is this class response which points the way forward in the new period since the Stock Market crash.

Despite all these reservations about the arguments of the pamphlet, its publication must be welcomed. It is important since it represents an all too rare initiative to promote a discussion on the situation in the trade unions. The opportunity to extend this discussion should not be missed.

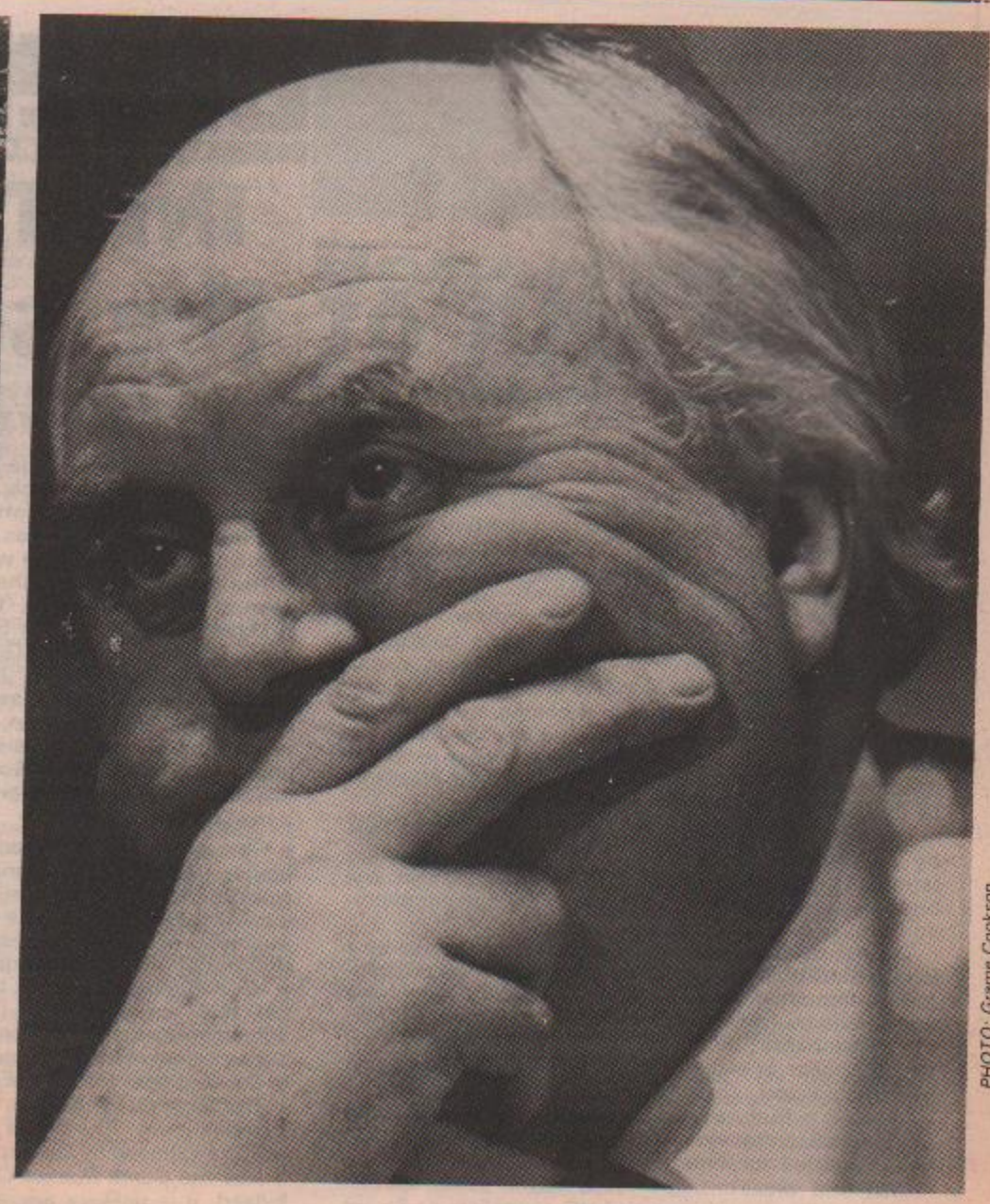


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

An opportunity for union action!

One death every six weeks and over 100 amputations since 1979.

These are the shocking figures highlighted by the London Hazards Centre for accidents and injuries on MSC Youth Training Schemes.

But the government's proposed "Unified Training Scheme" (the failed JTS re-emerging as a much harsher version of the Community Programme) would not even give protection under the Health and Safety at Work Act to the envisaged 600,000 long-term unemployed participants.

Some other worrying features of the scheme are:

- Participants will receive the same amount of benefit as they had on the dole, paid by DHSS giro. Any other earnings, such as employers "top up", will be deducted from the payment.

This is **working for benefit**, the concept behind the American Workfare scheme. It also means that workers doing the same job will receive different payments depending on their personal circumstances.

- With payment by giro, union subs cannot be deducted through the payroll, making union organisation more difficult.
- UTS will be full time, rather than part-time like most community programme placements. It is literally half the money for twice the work.
- Participants have trainee status not employee status. This is why the rate for the job will not be paid and the Health and Safety at Work Act does not apply.
- Trade unions will not have the right to withdraw approval from schemes.

Other changes to MSC activities are outlined in the Employment Bill going through Parliament now:

- YTS will be forced on 16 and 17 year olds by the threat of loss of benefit to those who refuse a place.
- The MSC will be renamed the Training Commission. Many of its functions, such as running job centres, will be handed over to the Department of Employment, thus strengthening the links between government schemes for the unemployed and state benefits.

Trade unions have either reluctantly — or enthusiastically! — collaborated with past MSC schemes. The proposed changes are a blatant attack on the unemployed — and give the unions a golden opportunity to take a stand against the government's unemployment policies.

By Maggie Arkwright
Secretary, Trade Unions Against the MSC

But union leaders will not do anything unless they are forced by their membership.

- John Edmunds, General Secretary of the GMB, under pressure from some excellent work done to organise Community Programme workers, has stated publicly that if compulsion and working for benefit are introduced then the GMB will demand TUC withdrawal from the MSC.
- Ron Todd of the T&G is apparently under pressure from full time officials who sit on Area Manpower Boards, who are now advising that the union should pull out of the MSC and push the TUC to do the same.
- NALGO has debated the question of withdrawal from the MSC at national conferences for a number of years and that argument could be won this year.

Other unions must also address this issue as a matter of urgency, particularly UCATT, NUPE and NATFHE.

We must use the new proposals to condemn MSC schemes as instruments of government policy to restructure the labour market to meet the needs of a low wage economy. We must oppose campaigns which *only* attack the new proposals and by doing so defend the status quo.

The TUC is likely to be thrown out of the MSC in the near future by the government. The need to demand a principled withdrawal immediately is therefore crucial — we won't be able to do it later and without such pressure the TUC will be whining for a seat at the table, and begging the government to let it continue to collaborate with attacks on unemployed workers.

The special TUC Conference early next year on MSC policy will be a key event to push these demands.

TUC withdrawal from the MSC is only the beginning of a fight. The fact that unions will no longer approve schemes does not mean that workers on those schemes should not be vigorously recruited into unions, organised, politicised and defended — on the basis that the unions are opposed to such special measures for the unemployed and that the unions will demand from government job creation and training leading to employment.

Local arrangements at branch level are relatively meaningless: unemployment is a national issue and must be dealt with as such.

The leadership of the unions must be forced to represent the demands of unemployed workers instead of encouraging their marginalisation. Model resolutions on opposition to MSC schemes, full membership rights for unemployed workers and demands for real work and training are available from Trades Union against the MSC. The time to act is now!

The leadership the labour movement needs:

Scargill for president!



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

On the march in the Great Strike: striking miners won't forget Arthur Scargill's leadership!

***"Arthur Scargill, Arthur Scargill, we'll support you ever more,"* was the cry from many of our rank and file miners during the Strike of 1984/5.**

And for many in the Durham coalfield it still holds true, despite what you might read in the establishment media.

By Albert Nugent
Vane Tempest Colliery
Lodge Secretary
(personal capacity)

Conditions have changed in the mines since the strike. Management wasted no time in trying to press home their advantage by introducing the infamous disciplinary code and squeezing the last drops of production out of the workforce.

The atmosphere here is one of discontent with *management*, not our union or our leadership.

British Coal has refused to negotiate with the NUM on wages, redundancy, pit closures and a number of other issues. They have effectively tried to short-circuit formal union negotiating procedures at both area and national level in an attempt to play off one set of workers against another.

We need strong national leadership to keep British miners together.

That is why I will be supporting Arthur Scargill in his presidential campaign. He has consistently refused to bow to British Coal.

Robert Haslam's statement that he could not negotiate with Scargill is testimony enough. For many of us, indeed, there is little to be negotiated with the board.

Arthur Scargill refuses to give way on extending the working week — an issue which is likely to affect us in Durham before many others.

The Board has already tried to introduce six-day working in the coastal collieries of Durham, with little success. We are well aware that extended working hours will mean a massive increase in production and more pit closures as a result.

Scargill envisages a 25% reduction in the number of pits if six-day working is introduced.

His record on such predictions has been faultless. On the day he anounced he was to stand for re-election both the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian* acknowledged he had been right in his forecast of 70 pit closures and over 80,000 job losses.

Followed

The young men who followed him during the strike still have faith in his accuracy of prediction. They know that they will have to fight again if they want to preserve their industry.

Many of those who would have opposed Arthur Scargill have now gone. In their place is a younger, more determined union membership who have been politicised and radicalised by the strike and its aftermath.

There is a feeling in the pits of Durham that we have had enough of the Board's iron heel tactics. All of our collieries are threatened, as are those in Scotland, South Wales and many in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire.

Cut

British Coal have made it plain that they want to cut the workforce further in their drive for "profitability" and privatisation. We must ask ourselves what sort of union we want when BC has finished its savagery.

Do we want a leadership prepared to bargain away our hard won conditions on safety, hours of work and other assets? Do we want a leadership which will bow to the demands of an increasingly authoritarian management? Or do we want someone who is prepared to stand up to those who would treat us like serfs?

Support

I suspect most miners would want the latter.

If they do they must support Arthur Scargill because he represents the courageous, organised trade union politics this government wants rid of. I would also suggest that the questions raised above have a bearing on the Labour Party and those who wish to follow the "New Realist" line.

Socialist

If Labour is to take a socialist path we must be prepared to fight. Because the ruling class in this country will not freely give us socialism.

NUM round-up

On Euros

By William Head
Yorks miner

Once Scargill had announced his resignation at the NUM NEC, panic swept the length of the British coalfields.

Euro-Stalinists in Scotland, Bolton and Clarke, were phoned from South Wales by other Euros, Rees and Dutfield — each asking the others to take on Scargill.

All of them declined — why?

One theory is based on a resolution taken at the same NEC, but earlier on the agenda — any full time official standing for election for another full-time post *should* resign their existing post (my emphasis).

The word "should", not "will" or "must", is very significant. The Euros felt they would have been morally obliged to resign their "jobs for life". As a direct consequence of that resolution their existing posts suddenly looked much more attractive to them!

Dutfield said how nice it was in the valleys.

Euro-miners meetings were held, the *Morning Star* reported, where Carter, Industrial Organiser for the Euros, tried to browbeat Bolton into running.

Rank and file Euros rightly argued that to support Bolton would ease the road for the right wing candidate from Yorkshire, Johnny Walsh. Their good sense won the day, and the consensus was that they couldn't be seen to be *openly* supporting a right wing candidate.

On Yorks

Yorkshire miners delegates meeting in Barnsley on Monday November 23rd voted by 48-2 to support Arthur Scargill.

The two against Scargill didn't nominate anyone else; even though Walsh was present and had motivated himself in the guise of an NEC report.

Branch meetings were held in the following weeks. At one of these, Wheldale Colliery in Castleford voted on November 28th to nominate Walsh by 9 votes to 3.

The rank and file at Wheldale were disgusted. The item hadn't been on the agenda, and it is felt that the vote was stage-managed.

The nomination for Walsh was put as an amendment to the local branch committee recommendation supporting Scargill. It was motivated by someone contemplating redundancy, supported by others in the same position.

The good news for Walsh is that on January 22nd when the ballot is held Wheldale could be closed, and the men who nominated him disenfranchised by no longer being members of the NUM.

Therefore remember, media headlines don't always mean what they say. Miners in Areas other than Yorkshire should take heart at the Wheldale vote, and not become demoralised by misleading, misinformed headlines.

Giving a lead on health fight

At the end of the week in which the Tories published their new proposals for the NHS, and in response to the high profile the press is giving to attacks on the NHS, over 100 members of ASTMS gathered in the Union's Head Office on Saturday November 28th for their first National Health Service Sectional Conference.

After a speaker from the Radical Statistics Health Group on the information contained in their book *Facing the Figures*, came Robin Cook MP (Labour Shadow Health Secretary) who went into detail about the implications of the Tory proposals.

Conference Chair, Bryn Glover (ASTMS NEC member anda Medical Physics Technician from Leeds), told Cook before he spoke that he would do well to listen to the delegates present, because the knowledge of the NHS contained within that Conference was second to none. But Cook left at the lunch break after only a few of the delegates had spoken.

The afternoon session was introduced by John Chowcat, the newly-appointed ASTMS National Officer for the Health Service. Brother Chowcat is one of that strange (and very rare) breed of Trade Union Official who wants to listen to the membership and organise campaigns.

When the Conference was opened up for discussion the initial response from the delegates sounded like a "John Chowcat Mutual Admiration Society"!

However they did seriously discuss the implications of the cuts, as well as the horrors of privatisation. This is now a real threat to ASTMS NHS members who work in the Blood Transfusion Service, the various Pathology Laboratories, X-ray Departments, Speech Therapy and workshops.

It was agreed thaat there is a need for a national campaign, of trade unions, anti-cuts and health groups, Labour Party Sections, Community Groups, Women's Groups to be organised, and that ASTMS is willing to be in the forefront.

By MARY LEWIS

John Chowcat spoke about the openly political nature of any campaign to defend the NHS; the need to "give the Tories a bloody nose" and turn the tide of their attacks on the working class.

The last speaker at the Conference was Sue Lister, ASTMS National NEC member and a Radiographer from Oxford. Most people had talked about the urgent need for a national campaign; but Sue Lister was the only speaker who mentioned the need to take action.

She pointed out that while the Labour Party was much better than the present government, it would be difficult not to be! Most of the delegates present remembered that the last Labour government wasn't exactly good for the NHS. They must demand some firm assurances from the Labour Party.

The labour movement could not wait for the "next election and the re-election of a Labour government". If they did there would be no National Health Service left. The fight had to begin *now!*

The Conference ended by agreeing a press statement which reaffirmed:

- *determined opposition to the privatisation of NHS functions and the "Americanisation" of the service;*
- *continued commitment to the maintenance of free collective bargaining and full trade union rights for all NHS professional and technical staffs;*
- *belief in a properly-funded NHS, financed from general taxation, free and available at time of need*

and called for:

- *the building of a national ASTMS campaign against the current direction of government policies on the health service, reaching out to NHS employees and consumers alike, in order to protect the basic interests of our health care membership and the quality of patient care in the UK.*

It was a strong and an optimistic Conference.

It was agreed that there should be an annual NHS Conference. By the time they return next year, delegates want to have achieved their goal of protecting their sections and to have started the fight back for the defence of the NHS.

U.C.W.

A disgraceful agreement

The settlement to the Post Office dispute negotiated between management and the UCW leadership is unacceptable.

The uniformed grades and cleaners are being offered a one and a half hour reduction in their working week and catering staff a one hour reduction.

Counter and clerical staff are not included in the proposed agreement.

Every single aspect of the proposed agreement breaks some part of the Conference resolution which began this dispute. Tuffin and Clarke had been instructed to obtain a three hour reduction in the working week for all grades at no cost to the membership.

Instead, they agreed to reductions in the bonuses and overtime of postmen in London, purportedly to redistribute earnings more evenly throughout the country, and overtime will now be paid at a flat rate of 1.45 rather than the present scale of 1.3, 1.5 and double time.

This agreement must be rejected when it is put to the vote. Tuffin has succeeded in his aim of avoiding any large scale action over Christmas, heartened by the whispers about loss of the letter monopoly from government circles.

But the Post Office is crucial to the running of the country all through the year, even though we have lost the enormous tactical advantage given to the union by the Christmas deluge. The immediate task for the left in the UCW is to campaign for rejection of this agreement.

Labour Party

Privatising local services

New Tory Bill threatens 500,000 jobs

Since 1979 Local Authorities have had to cope with over forty new pieces of hostile legislation. The government is now committed to introducing the poll tax and major inroads on local government involvement in housing and education.

In this article BEN JONES looks at the compulsory competitive tendering legislation contained in the new Local Government Bill and examines the Tory thinking behind it.

In recent weeks local government has been receiving sympathy from unexpected quarters.

In the *Economist*, Howard Davies of the Audit Commission suggested that if you kick people often enough, tell them that they're useless, and threaten to take their work from them you'll find they behave accordingly.

In the *Guardian*, John Banham, the new Director General of the CBI, argued that local government has a constructive role to play in the inner cities,

"... but we are not going to get there by depriving councils of resources, penalising them for spending money they ought to be spending, by restricting their access to their own capital receipts or by holding them to public ridicule."

Frail

What Banham and Davies fail to recognise is that it is deliberate government policy to undermine the morale and confidence of local government workers and destroy the community's faith in local government as a provider of services.

Where Banham and Davies see a role for local government in the inner cities, Ridley sees only a labour movement stronghold that must be destroyed. Ridley wants to by-pass local government with Whitehall-controlled agencies and impose marketplace discipline on the remaining service through compulsory tendering.

Right

The Tory right spelt out its view in a recent issue of *Public Service Review*, a journal produced by PULSE (a privatisation campaign backed by the likes of Shirley Porter, Teddy Taylor, and Theresa Goreman).

The editorial argued:

"The cosy but damaging consensus which governed in Britain since the war broke out in national government broke down in 1979 but in local government it persists. The combination of competitive tendering and the community charge should be the final breach."

These people view the Local Government Bill as a full frontal attack on Labour's inner city strongholds — and so should we.

"There are local authorities in America who contract every activity out — even police and fire services. Folk memory has it that there is even one authority which meets once a year to award the contract, has lunch and goes away for another year. ... I cannot see why some in local government resist what is obviously right."
***Nicholas Ridley*, October 1986**

The Bill is an immediate threat to well over half a million jobs, including:

- refuse collections, 30,000 jobs;
- building cleaning, 200,000 jobs;
- street cleaning, 12,000 jobs;
- school meals and catering, 30,000 jobs;
- ground maintenance, 40,000 jobs;
- vehicle maintenance, 10,000 jobs.

This list is only a foretaste. Ridley has given himself an enabling clause that allows him to extend it without further legislation.

He has already exercised this right and decreed that sports and leisure management must also go to tender. In Select Committee he has promised that he will make further extensions.

The first tenders, due to go out on April 1st 1989, will strike hard at low-paid workers. Of those initially threatened, 90% are manual workers, and of those some 70% are women.

The figures for job losses do not take into account the "domino effect", through which the private sector loses approximately one job for every four lost in local government. In local government itself white-collar job losses would follow as a reduced manual workforce requires fewer support services.

Bill

The Local Government (no. 2) Bill extends the Planning and Land Act 1981. This act forced Local Authorities to put services such as construction and maintenance out to tender. Some Labour Authorities used contract compliance to undermine this legislation.

Local Authorities used their financial power to influence the employment and purchasing policies of private contractors, and thereby prevent many of them from competing for local government contracts.

Incensed

The use of contract compliance incensed the contractors and undermined the government's attempt to drive down wages and reduce local state expenditure. The Local Government (no. 2) Bill 1987 severely restricts contract compliance, forcing Local Authorities to employ nothing but strictly "commercial criteria" in awarding contracts.

The government is attempting to focus the debate on the so-called "political clauses" — attempts to exclude contractors with heavy involvement in South Africa, anti-union practices, masonic connections, etc. Whilst it is essential to defend such "political" clauses it must be remembered that the Bill's attack on contract compliances goes far beyond that.

It will stop Local Authorities imposing clauses to promote health and safety, minimum wages, decent training and equal rights for women, Blacks, and the disabled, and actually seeks to prevent Local Authorities from ensuring contractors comply even with existing legislation in these areas.

Ridley's Bill effectively bans much of the approach to inner-city decay advocated by the Scarman Report. After all, contract compliance was pioneered in the US cities such as New York, and was never the brain-child of Britain's Labour left.

Fracas

A minor public fracas between Ridley and Kenneth Clarke, the Trade and Industry Minister, has broken out over this aspect of this Bill. Clarke is on record as supporting "local labour clauses", which Ridley is endeavouring to ban.

The Bill's aims are clear:

- to undermine Labour's base in the inner cities;
- to attack the relatively strong local government trade unions;
- to cut wage levels;
- to reduce state expenditure still further on local services.

The government's attitude leaves little room for negotiations harkening back to the post-war consensus. In a future article, I will look at how the Labour and trade union leaders have measured up to the privatisation battle and propose some strategies for the left to adopt in response.



PHOTO: Stefano Cagnoni/Report

Marching to defend local services

How *Briefing* can help Neil Kinnock!

***Labour Briefing*, ever willing to offer a helping hand to the Party Leader, should do all it can to assist his new policy review exercise.**

Indeed, *Briefing* should run its own policy review, giving over a page or two to articles and replies around each policy area over a three month period.

In this way a policy debate could be conducted in the pages of *Briefing* with a final round-up of policy conclusions and a detailed submission which Neil could study at his leisure.

By John Wilton
Birmingham Edgbaston CLP

I am sure he would find it most enlightening.

The document *Moving Ahead* which forms the basis of Kinnock's policy review states:

"...we can learn an important lesson from the Tories. They present their policies in terms of the benefits accruing to them as individuals. We must learn to do the same. We should not shy away, therefore, from arguing for our own policies in the language of individual self-interest and prosperity."

This is the tone and framework within which the Party leadership wants the review conducted. Some comrades may not have noticed that it has already started. Invited audiences, including such socialist bodies as the Building Societies Assocation, are busily discussing the future shape of Labour policy.

Members

No doubt Party members will be asked for their views, eventually, after the agenda has been set. And members of the YS already know how much notice the Party leadership takes of consultations!

We should not wait to be asked. We should set the agenda for this policy review, not Kinnock and his media yuppies at Walworth Road. Let them have their unreal plastic rose policy review; by the time it is completed their policies will be shown to be the dinosaurs they are.

The Stock Market crash and the recession that will follow, as well as Gorbachev's initiatives (limited though they are) in the USSR will show the "new realist" policies of Kinnock and Gould to be totally bankrupt.

Organisations

Party branches, CLPs and affiliated organisations should inundate Walworth Road with resolutions and submissions for the policy review, and not wait to be asked. Any review must offer a credible, closely worked out alternative to Thatcher, especially in economic policy, if we are to take advantage of the changed world situation and the discrediting of Thatcherism.

The policy review must include a fundamental restatement of our principles as outlined in Clause IV(4) of the Party constitution. Our economic policy, based on those principles, should include:

- the taking into public ownership of the major monopolies, under democratic management and control;
- the bringing of the major financial institutions into public ownership and control, in order to underpin economic restructuring and expansion;
- the taking back into public ownership of those industries which have been privatised.

This economic policy has to be linked to a socialist, non-aligned foreign policy, and a massive switch of expenditure from all forms of defence to social needs.

These principles provide a basic framework within which the Party could conduct a real policy review and from which a socialist programme could be produced to enable us to win the next General Election.

Neil might find this a bit too much to swallow in one go but *Briefing* could perform a real service to the Party by organising such a policy debate in its pages.

S. Humberside Witch-hunt

Expelling faces that don't fit

Recent events in Brigg & Cleethorpes CLP fulfill the stark predictions made by many about the ever-widening witch-hunt against the left in the Party.

The catch-all phrase "bringing the Party into disrepute" is being used to justify an increasing array of attacks.

Momentum has been growing for a major purge in the Constituency.

In December 1986, the CLP voted to disband its YS branch. The ostensible reason for this was "malpractices" relating to a concert organised by the YS. The real reason was hostility to *Militant* supporters.

This move provoked a great deal of opposition, including the establishment of an "unofficial" group called Cleethorpes Youth for Labour, which carried on the functions of the YS and campaigned for the reconstitution of an official YS.

The politics of the majority of the constituency officers and the GC is staunch Kinockism. Any serious socialist ideas are seen as a threat.

Success

However, *Militant* supporters have had some success on occasion in winning votes in one ward — Cleethorpes. As this is by far the biggest ward in the constituency and the base of all the key right wing constituency officers, the right was determined to reverse these gains.

Things came to a head over the summer. Geoff Lowis, the acting Constituency Secretary, and a delegate from Cleethorpes branch, was removed as a GC delegate for stating that he would not carry out branch policy and was replaced by Dave Mitchell, a *Militant* supporter.

The right was determined both to reverse this situation and ensure it could not happen again.

By Tim Gregory
Brigg & Cleethorpes CLP

Consequently at the September EC meeting a letter was read out from Geoff Lowis (whose removal as GC delegate the right refused to recognise) requesting disciplinary action against five Party members: Ken McEwan, Pat McSwan (1986 CLP Conference delegate), Dave Mitchell, Alan Homby (former YS secretary) and Gary Morgan.

The grounds put forward were "conduct prejudicial to the Labour Party", with specific accusations such as membership of and selling of *Militant*, disruptive behaviour in meetings, and support for Cleethorpes Youth for Labour. All these charges are spurious.

At one GC meeting the "impartial" chair referred to one of the accused, Ian McEwan, as a "liar". At another, he described Ian's face as "contorted with hatred".

The "disruption" referred to is in reality nothing more than legitimate objection to this sort of flagrant bias. However, the EC decided that the letter made a case which had to be answered and recommended to the GC an investigation into the five members. The GC agreed.

The composition of the investigation team, with all its members avowedly anti-*Militant*, left little hope that the facts would be considered objectively. One member of the investigation team had previously attended no EC meetings and only a handful of GCs.

The investigation team planned only to accept written submissions; allowing the five no chance directly to defend themselves; giving none of them the list of charges made by Geoff Lowis.

Predictably, it reported that it found the charges proven (without restating the "proof"), and recommended referral to the NCC. There was no discussion; the recommendation was just voted through.

Whilst many GC members would feel privately critical of some aspects of Labour's current orientation, most seem to feel that knuckling down and accepting things is the only way to get Labour elected — so witch-hunts against the left are seen as an unfortunate necessity.

Hard-line

There are also, of course, the hard-line right wingers who revel in any opportunity to purge people whose face doesn't fit.

The majority of Party members want to see "socialism"; the left must hammer home time and time again the contradiction between these aspirations and Kinnock's "caring" capitalism.

Unfortunately *Militant* supporters in Brigg & Cleethorpes have adopted a rather low-key approach to the witch-hunt. They have launched a quite successful petition in the Cleethorpes area; but have been reluctant to take the campaign into the rest of the constituency where they have less influence.

They have stressed organisational issues and the "constitutionality" of particular actions rather mounting a political challenge.

This is the biggest witch-hunt in Humberside for many years; and successful expulsions would almost certainly lead to actions against the left in neighbouring right-dominated constituencies such as Grimsby.

The scandal of the Atkin case:
The Labour Party on trial

The right wing dominated National Constitutional Committee (NCC) paved the way for a full hearing of the Sharon Atkin case in February or March, when it voted on December 3rd to ignore representations from her legal advisers that the case should be dismissed.

The legal moves were based on a letter to the NCC from Lord Gifford QC and Lincoln Crawford. They argued that the case against Sharon was frivolous and vexatious.

The letter, addressed to David Hughes, the Party's Senior National Officer, states:

"We have to express utter astonishment that they (the charges) are being seriously put forward. Each one is fundamentally misconceived."

Briefing readers and many others in the Party will be deeply shocked at the nature of the four charges made against Sharon Atkin and at the implications of such charges being levelled against a leading black activist. This case, if pursued by the NEC, could mean deep trouble for Labour.

● The NEC are charging her with breach of Clause X(5) of the Party Constitution, which states:

"At any parliamentary general election (candidates) shall include in their election addresses and give prominence in their campaigns to the issues for that election as defined by the NEC in its manifesto."

This offence was not committed, and by definition could not have been committed, because, as the Gifford/Crawford letter states:

"She was removed as candidate by the NEC before any manifesto was published. She would, if permitted, have campaigned wholeheartedly on the basis of Labour's manifesto. But she can hardly be convicted after the NEC's action precluded the very possibility of her committing the offence."

● The Party has charged her with a breach of Clause X(7) of the constitution, which states that no one may be selected as a parliamentary candidate or endorsed as such by the NEC unless that person agrees to act in harmony with the standing orders of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP).

By ALAN BROADLEY

The fact is that comrade Atkin *was* properly selected, and had undertaken in writing to abide by the standing orders of the PLP, and was endorsed as candidate by the NEC. "The charge is manifestly absurd," states the lawyers' letter.

● She is also charged with breaching Clause III(3)(a) of the constitution which states that each individual member must accept and conform to the constitution, programme, principles, and policy of the Party.

Sharon Atkin is said to be in breach of this section of the constitution by virtue of "participation at the meeting in Nottingham", i.e. the Black Sections Conference in March 1987.

The implications there are quite staggering. Attendance at a Black Sections meeting, it is argued, places an individual in contravention of the Party constitution, *and liable* for expulsion. Her lawyers make the position plain:

"...how can Sharon Atkin be in breach of Party policy by attending such a meeting? Labour Party Black Section (is not) a proscribed organisation. If Sharon Atkin was breaking this clause by attending a Black Section Conference, then so are hundreds of Labour Party members, including MPs."

● Finally, she is charged with a breach of Clause III(4) of the constitution, which provides that no member of the Party shall engage in a sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the Party.

The evidence adduced by the NEC consists of one speech given by Sharon Atkin in Birmingham. As her legal advisers point out, Sharon will, if necessary, justify the thrust of her remarks about the need to fight racism wherever it may be embedded. "But," they say, "one speech cannot by any fair reading of language be described as a 'sustained course of conduct'."

These charges are not only absurd in themselves; they will damage the Party in the eyes of many thinking members, and with large sections of the public. They have been cobbled together in a slovenly way, and would not be sustainable in any court in the land.

The only reason that the right wing NEC feels confident enough to bring forward such manifestly stupid accusations is that it sees the NCC as a poodle that will do its bidding, no matter what the evidence.

The NCC is a committee that is presently spending *over £100,000 a year* on expelling newspaper sellers. Now it is turning its attention to black activists.

We must stop this expulsion. Raise the matter urgently in your Party branch and constituency, and in your trade union.

Send resolutions to the NEC, *and copy them to Dawn Primarolo MP*, who is acting as secretary of the defence campaign, *at the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.*

● Birmingham Black Sections activist under threat of expulsion: see back page

Hilary Wainwright replies to Bryn Griffiths

A Measure of Independence

"Much to agree with but an overall difference," was the resounding headline to Bryn Griffiths' review of my book *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties*.

The overall difference, if I've got it right, is over the importance of struggle within the Labour Party.

Bryn argues that I "downplay the importance of inner Party struggle."

I welcome the opportunity to probe this a little deeper, not so much in defence of my book (though I won't miss the opportunity for a plug: £5.95, Hogarth Press) but because it is a crucial issue facing the movement of socialists inside and outside the Party, currently given a focus by Chesterfield.

In a long-term historic sense, the outcome of the struggle for power in the Labour Party is crucial for all socialists. The Party's relationship with the unions and its position in providing Labour's only political representation, make it so.

But this does not mean either that the immediate needs of the inner-Party struggle should always be top of the left's agenda, nor that the best outcome is achieved solely or even primarily by activity within the Party.

Clearly, in the aftermath of the Wilson-Callaghan governments and the industrial militancy of the 70s, the struggle for power within the Labour Party was of tremendous significance.

Its significance was then greater than at any other post-war period, because the left and the unions, by pressing for the accountability of MPs and the Party leader, were for the first time challenging the Parliamentary Labour Party's acquiescence — often active complicity — in the undemocratic character of the British state.

By Hilary Wainwright

In this sense one could argue that the movement for constitutional reforms was more than an inner-Party struggle. The right often recognised this more readily than many on the left. Witness the establishment's uproar at reselection: the left sometimes wondered what had hit them.

The importance of inner-Party struggle has now changed. There is an unavoidable defensive job to be done. But I would argue that the priority for the left must be to establish a strong political base independent of inner-Party battles.

This is one of the lessons of defeat inside the Party. This defeat revealed the weakness of the left's real, lasting roots in the unions and in working class communities. Strengthening these roots must be a prime purpose of an independent base.

Defeat also revealed how undeveloped were the left's ideas since the Party Programme of 1973. The insights, research, and ideas of many scattered networks of socialists must be developed into a coherent vision.

Finally, defeat revealed how easily the left can become ghettoised when its public image is always refracted through the prism of an inner-Party conflict in which it is subordinate.

One of the advantages of an independent base is that the left has the chance to present its arguments in its own terms. Of course the press will distort and pillory. But the media response to Chesterfield illustrates that at least it has to recognise that the left has a positive set of policies and an identity of its own.

Why does any of this require any significant degree of independence from inner-Party struggle? I will give two reasons, though I could go on!

First, the terrain of inner-Party conflict, beyond the level of branches, women's and black sections, and many constituencies, is an inherently *unfavourable* terrain for the radical, participatory left.

Momentum

While this radical left gains its momentum from the popular politics of workers and communities in action, movements and campaigns on the move, the Party machine is motored by the one-horse engine of parliamentary politics.

When the left becomes more engrossed in trying to rev-up the latter at the expense of participating in the former, it is in danger of expending a lot of energy going round in ever-diminishing circles.

Second, there is a vast gap between popular struggles — however small and localised — and the Labour Party. There are some exceptions.

The action of local Labour Parties during the miners' strike did something to close that gap. However, we should not underestimate the depth of disillusion amongst large numbers of progressive, independent-minded people in several generations and many different social circumstances.

I am thinking here not of people whose heads are full of complicated strategies: to take over this or enter that. But people who want to take action to improve their communities: housing or childcare, to fight for jobs, to campaign for peace, or to protect their environment.

These people cannot be reached — or only rarely — through the Labour Party as it is. They can only be reached if the left is prepared to work with them, to respect the autonomy and the values of their organisations, to create, together, a movement for socialism.

Bryn is correct to imply that I do not see inner-Party struggle as the priority of the moment for the left. But I do not downgrade its eventual importance.

I an convinced that the left, inside the Party and outside, can work together to create a socialist movement which has the effect of strengthening *both* the struggle within the Labour Party and the extra-Parliamentary movements and campaigns without which the left is nothing.

Euro-election selection reflections

Did you know that the plummiest jobs in the British labour movement were up for grabs?

Probably not, as *Labour Weekly's* demise has meant no one knows the timetables for selection and reselection of MEPs.

And sitting MEP's are trying to rush through reselection faster than they cash their expense account cheques in Luxembourg (or Strasbourg, or Brussels...).

Watch out for members' sudden interests in the agricultural CAP rather than the cloth one, for a denial of anything but an avid pro-Market line as "unrealistic", and frantic London careerists rushing around the country claiming roots in Yorkshire, Wales or Merseyside.*

Whilst not wishing the horrors of the European Capitalist Club on anyone, we would wish the thousands of pounds a year office and publicity money on a few hard up constituency parties.

So make sure your Party takes up its delegates to the Euro-Constituencies, that General Committees take up rights to nominate and invite all candidates, not just sitting MEPs, however good they may seem. In the end, it is the Euro-Constituencies that make the selection.

By IVOR WINELAKE
Our correspondent in Brussels

All 9 or 10 Westminster constituencies that make up a Euro-one could opt for one candidate, but the Euro-Constituency Committee (where a sitting MEP can build up a team of supporters) could vote another way.

If you want to find out more, write to Labour Party Head Office, demanding a list of timetables, or look in *Briefing* (if readers send in details we will print them), or — dare we say it? — read *Tribune* for latest details.

The Campaign Group in the European Parliament make up about 30% of the Labour Delegation and could do with strengthening.

**Any reference to persons living or dead is purely coincidental and should not be seen as disparaging to Frances Morrell.*

Feature: Disability and the left

Left alone!

ABLEISM. How I hate that word, especially when able-bodied comrades only use it to boost their own political credibility. They use disability to prove *themselves* without thinking of us who *have* a disability.

By Linda Haringey Labour Briefing

Recently I've been through a major trauma. My partner of five years moved out, leaving me on my own.

Now this would be traumatic for anyone, but I've got multiple sclerosis and I was terrified. I'm housebound and find many things extremely hard or impossible to do.

When we split up we both felt I would get a lot of support from local Labour Party members — I've been active in the local Party for eight years (Branch Secretary for five years and candidate in a recent local by-election).

Despite my disability, my fight for socialism has pushed me forward. Luckily my own inner toughness has seen me through before, and will have to do so again — because most of the comrades are nowhere to be seen.

No phone calls, no offers of help, no friendly visits, not even a lift to a Party meeting. The few who *have* given support know who they are.

Are able-bodied people so terrified of us that when we have a trauma on top of the trauma of disability the poor dears can't cope? Is it because I was seen as part of a couple and my partner was more visible, being able-bodied and a bloke?

But the left aren't giving *him* any support by not supporting *me* (he still gives me support).

Is it a class thing? Maybe all that grappling for the right-on words and positions has left them short of a few kind instincts.

When I worked at the Post Office I was made housebound during two weeks of heavy snow. Without even having to ask, two of the women I worked with came to see me, laden with provisions. One lived in Hackney and the other drove from Middlesex.

That's real solidarity (and they didn't see themselves as political people).

Could it be that people's sympathies lie with the man, and I'm being shunned as a deserted woman living alone? It seems to me that I am stronger than a lot of able-bodied comrades, which is just as well, isn't it?

Anyway, I suppose it all proves that you shouldn't be dependent on one person. Giving me support can only be good for me, good for those giving support, and good for my ex-partner.

At least if I don't see anyone else I'll see Woody Allen on Monday!



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Linda Clarke (left) on the Haringey Briefing stall

Attitudes on th

Ignoranc indiffere

By Vince Gillespie Haringey Councillor

As socialists, we make the fight against all kinds of oppression one of our main responsibilities.

The campaigns and discussion on racism, sexism, and heterosexism need constant reviewing and development. This is at last being recognised.

However, the oppression of people with disabilities — "ableism" — is still too little understood on the left.

Too often, disability is viewed as a welfare issue, not a political issue, not a question of the denial of people's basic civil rights.

Society sees people with disabilities as charity cases with very little to contribute to a capitalist system. In all areas of basic needs — education, employment, housing — people with disabilities suffer appalling inequalities. Able-bodied people decide and control the needs of people with disabilities without consulting the real experts — the disabled themselves.

People with disabilities come from all parts of society and suffer multiple oppressions. They are from the Black and ethnic minority communities; they are women; they are lesbians and gay men. But they are not allowed to play their part in the struggles against the oppressions they experience.

Their biggest disability is the society they live in; and the left are as culpable as the rest of that society.

There are many socialists and militants with disabilities who *demand* the right to contribute to the fight against capitalism. **Access** is one of the main barriers. How many meetings are fully accessible? How often does the left rally make the efforts necessary to make meetings accessible?

Access is not just a ramp or a wide doorway. There are as many needs for access as there are disabilities: signers, transport and toilet facilities, brail, to name only a few.

Only recently have some men taken the need for childcare seriously and after campaigning for so long women in the movement still find there is a long way to go in this regard. But if the left's record on meeting these needs is poor, its record in regard to the needs of disabled comrades is a disgrace. Many people still don't even recognise these needs.

The contribution made by Hearing Disabled comrades at the Chesterfield Conference, in which they explained their oppression and insisted on their right to participate in the Conference, was welcome.

Unfortunately, the organisers did not arrange for the signers who worked so hard at Chesterfield. This was done by the hearing disabled comrades themselves and paid for by Greenwich Council. (The Conference organisers later promised to pay the bill.)

The Greater London Labour Party Regional Conference this year was *not* accessible to people with disabilities. Now Labour Councils and Labour Parties are voting for massive cuts in local government. Many of these cuts are direct attacks on the inadequate services that people with disabilities already have to put up with.

In Haringey the Council are closing a Day Centre for the disabled, a sheltered workshop, increasing meals-on-wheels charges and charges for holidays for people with disabilities, and reducing the availability of holidays.

Last year Haringey Council set up a Disability Committee to develop and improve services for people with disabilities. I became Chair of that committee and worked closely with the various groups of people with disabilities in the community.

I resigned when the cuts were agreed, and since then I have worked with the same groups and many others to fight against the cuts. One person with a disability asked: why are they attacking us? Is it because we have no political clout? Is it because they think we are weak? If so, we will prove them wrong!

National Disability Organisations

Access Committee for England
35, Great Smith St, London SW1P 3BJ
01 222 7980
National focal point on access to the built environment

Action for the Victims of Medical Accidents
The Hop Exchange, 24 Southwark St, London SE1 1TY
01 403 4744

British Council for Organisations of Disabled People
St Mary's Church, Greenlaw St, London SE18 5AR

Disability Alliance
25 Denmark St, London WC2 8NJ
01 240 0806
National campaigning organisation on income and disability

Disabled Drivers Association
18 Creekside, London SE8 3DZ
01 692 7141

Disabled Living Foundation
380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU
01 289 6111
Has information service on aids and adaptations

DIAL UK
117 High Street, Clay Cross, Derbyshire
0246 864498
DIAL have 75 local information services for people with disabilities

MIND (National Association for Mental Health)
22 Harley St, London W1N 2ED
01 637 0741

Association of Carers
21 New Road, Chatham, Kent
0634 813981

Contact a Family
16 Strutton Ground, London SW1
01 222 2695
Link families with handicapped children into support groups

The politics of dis

"We should be searching and seeking for full participation and equality for disabled people and giving these words genuine and true meaning... Disabled people have rights as well as needs... disabled people represent an untapped resource for society, offering great potential, not just for their own individual achievement but for the enrichment of society as a whole."
Tom Clarke, **Labour MP**

By Karen Newbury Camden Councillor

Tom Clarke made this statement in support of his Private Members Bill, The Right to Representation (Disabled Persons) Act 1986.

These ideas are the keystone of the work undertaken by the London Boroughs Disability Resource Team, a unit set up by 11 Labour-controlled London Boroughs to continue the work begun by the GLC on disability issues.

As Chair of the London Boroughs Disability Committee (which oversees the work of the Team) I have been in the unenviable position of receiving a steady flow of information from various boroughs on what impact Labour's "New Realist" policies (making cuts) will have on people with disabilities.

London is reputed to have 450,000 people who have a disability or a long-term illness which has a debilitating effect on their lives and restricts their participation in the community. Camden has discovered after a two year survey that 16.5% of its population come under this category.

The cuts packages now being devised by most boroughs are inevitably going to have a detrimental effect on the lives of disabled people, which in turn will mean we shall have less energy available to be actively involved in community life.

Some of the cuts being mooted at this moment (and it's with regret that it has to be reported that some Councillors with disabilities are complying with these cuts) will mean that people with disabilities will no longer have community care support, thereby forcing them to return to institutions they have fought to get out of.

Institutionalised care can cost anything up to £400 per week, so cuts in community care do not necessarily mean saving money. They do mean removing from people control over their own lives — a fundamental human right.

Let's look at some of the cuts being proposed:

- closure of day centres;
- closure of sheltered employment units;
- removal of employee resource banks;
- making charges for home help services;
- charging for Piper Alarm systems;
- increasing the daily charge for meals-on-wheels by 600%;
- increasing nursery and childcare charges;
- limiting the number of people able to have taxi passes;
- reducing the rate precept to London Regional Transport for Dial-a-Ride provision;
- reducing the number of home helps required;
- freezing social work vacancies;
- freezing driver vacancies in transport pools;
- cutting back on emergency call-outs, i.e. lift breakdowns on evenings and weekends;
- reducing the areas of services provided by home helps.

At this moment it is unclear just how many of these proposals will be implemented, but it has to be recognised that *any* cut back or reduction in these services will have a damaging impact on a group in our society who are potentially vulnerable (particularly those who are elderly), are not protected by anti-discrimination legislation, and who are already the most socially and economically deprived minority group.

Many are isolated, unable to fight for themselves, and, because of segregated education, will often not have the basics in "political" education necessary to organise and defend themselves.

Many will have been in the poverty trap for most of their lives, and will be forced deeper into this trap by these cuts.

We need to recognise that not all the blame can be placed at the doors of Labour-controlled boroughs. The vicious government we are ruled by and all its current legislation — Social Security, Housing, Education — have taken little account of the needs of people with disabilities.

Housing

The Housing Bill, in particular, has nothing in it to protect people living in sheltered or special housing from having the roofs over their heads sold to developers.

Local Authorities will be forced to sell off housing. People will be evicted from their homes.

If Local Authorities are not allowed to build public housing, what alternative will there be for many people but to be forced to live in institutions?

Even if Council housing is bought by Housing Associations or Co-ops, what guaranteed protection will these tenants have? Most people with disabilities will not be able to afford to buy their own homes, especially with the high prices in London and the extra expense required to make them accessible.

There has been a lot of publicity about the Social Security Bill, and its effect on

e left

e or nce?

The disabled community are now getting organised. They have lobbied Council meetings many times and disrupted the Disabilities Committee, preventing the meeting from proceeding until the cuts were discussed.

The Haringey Disabilities Committee and Unit was part of the Council's Equal Opportunities policy. Its purpose was to involve people with disabilities and the Council itself in the defence of their rights.

As chair of the Lesbian and Gay Sub-Committee I was inundated with requests to speak on the issue of Lesbian and Gay Rights — but only one Labour Party ward ever asked me to speak on the rights of people with disabilities. A major initiative on equal rights was virtually ignored.

I think this shows a failure by people in the Labour Party to understand that disability is a *political* issue.

Segregation of people with disabilities is a major problem. What is needed is integration, particularly in education, where children with disabilities can enjoy the same opportunities as able-bodied children.

Only when we are learning together, working together, and meeting and socialising together can we develop a social understanding of the nature of disabilities.

A high proportion of people wth disabilities rely on benefits. A high proportion are also unemployed. The government's cutbacks on welfare thus hit people with disabilities harder than the rest.

The exploitation of part-time and casual labour also effects them disproportionately, not to mention NHS cuts. And Community Care without the necessary resources is nothing but a sham.

The labour movement must see ableism as being as pernicious as racism and sexism. It must work to involve people with disabilities at all levels of activity and policy-making.

All meetings should be fully accessible to *all* members of the movement. We must discuss ableism with the only real experts: people with disabilities themselves.

- Disabled Black and ethnic minority people *want* to fight racism.
- Disabled women *want* to fight sexism.
- Disabled Lesbians and Gays *want* to fight heterosexism.
- Working class disabled people *want* to fight Thatcher and the class she represents.

The labour movement must not participate in the oppression of its own members. It cannot afford to exclude people with disabilities and it cannot afford to lose the contribution they want to make.

ability

eople with disabilities, but it ay be worth pointing out gain that people with isabilities will be losing a inimum of *£15 per week* in yments, and that their standard of living is already below e recognised poverty level.

Poll Tax

People who are on Supplementary Benefit will also be pected to pay 20% of their ll Tax, and it seems that the abled Persons Rate Relief is go.

This is a reduction in rates for meone living in a property apted for his or her disability. e rebate can be quite substanl, depending on the area in ich you live and the level of aptations that have been de. In Camden, for example, rebate is about £112 per ar.

The Education Bill will probly mean that boroughs will be able to implement the 81 Education Act provisions integrated education, as they n't have the resources ilable to enable children to educated in the mainstream, spite the fact that it costs ,000 per year to educate a d with a disability in a cial school, as against £1,000 ar for an able-bodied child mainstream education.

Politicians and Councillors — majority of whom are able-ied — are showing their rtcomings. They seem to me that people with abilities are a small minority, n't vote Labour, don't really care what happens, and will support Tory policies.

They are not, as has been mentioned earlier, a small minority. They will, however, cease to have any real commitment to the Labour Party who appear to be selling them out.

They won't necessarily vote Tory or SDP; they just simply will not vote at all. Something like 250,000 Londoners with disabilities are of voting age; the loss of these votes could have a considerable impact on the politics of London.

Able-bodied politicians also seem to believe that these policies *will have no direct effect on their own lives*, which is misguided. It is estimated that virtually everyone in Britain has someone with a disability in the family, no matter how distant a relation.

Disability

Disability can also come to anyone, at any time, either by an accident, developing a degenerative disease, or by ageing.

In fact, it can be assumed that almost every reader of this article will probably develop some sort of disability as they increase in age, so it could be *your* future services currently being chopped.

As socialists we have a moral obligation to support and protect *all* members of the community and *all* services. We have a responsibility to plan for services which will enhance the quality of life, not diminish it.

Championing the rights of women with disabilities: It's all a question of power



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Kath Gillespie leading the Haringey contingent on the 1987 Lesbian and Gay Pride demo

For several years now I have been championing the rights of women with disabilities; demanding a platform at Conferences and highlighting the discriminatory practices of a women's movement which had been only partially accessible to me.

At last disability is on the agenda, not just in the women's movement but in the labour and socialist movements.

Disability rights, along with black, ethnic minority and lesbian and gay issues, has eventually been recognised as a political issue — not a social/welfare rights issue!

As a woman with a disability I have particular needs; but my exclusion from mainstream activities is a consequence of an environment built by those who don't consider it necessary or even desirable to accommodate my needs.

Then there are the prevailing attitudes and prejudices of British society based on false myths and stereotypes which result in overt discrimination.

How many minority groups would accept exclusion from political and social events, or be content with limited numbers or admission to only a specified area within a venue? Yet this segregation is part of the everyday experience of a person with a disability.

The old chestnut "you constitute a fire hazard" is known to us all. After all, everyone knows that people with disabilities are prone to spontaneously igniting!

As Anne Finger puts it in *With the Power of Each Breath*:

"From the time I was a very young child, I understood that I was more 'handicapped' by people's perceptions and attitudes towards me than I was by my disability."

By KATH GILLESPIE

The term "equal opportunities" has almost become a catch-phrase without meaning — certainly in the light of recent government cuts. People with disabilities are now fighting for basic services like home helps and day centres.

Given equal opportunities I could and would compete alongside my able-bodied sisters for employment for that job that I am well qualified to do.

Do I hear outraged employers saying "We welcome people with disabilities but they just don't apply?" Have these egalitarian employers stopped to think why?

Do they advertise in journals that people with disablities read? Are their ads in other media such as tape, or braille? Are their premises accessible?

Do they insist on formal qualifications which many people with disabilities don't possess, due to their segregated and often second class schooling system?

Even if I get as far as interview, a white, middle class male with a disability is going to be preferred to an Irish, working class, single mother with a disability. It's even harder for my black sisters to succeed.

Women with disabilities are not expected to compete in this society. It's supposed to be every woman's desire to "trap" a man, build a home and produce children. Women with disabilities aren't even considered in the contest!

I don't know any women who fit the stereotyped image of what they tell us a real woman in British society should be like! But a woman with a disability is told in many subtle (and many not so subtle) ways that she should not even try!

We are the assexual ones, the unloveable — even disgusting — ones who are patronised and offered "friendships". When we assert our sexuality we are often rejected, informed we are not natural and should keep ourselves to ourselves.

Just like any other women we may be heterosexual or lesbian, yet unlike other women we may not have the freedom to express our sexuality for fear of losing the vital support of carers or friends. We are forced to conceal our true feelings for fear of repercussions.

If we decide to take risks and express our sexuality we will undoutedly be faced with barriers unencountered by able-bodied women. On reaching the family planning clinic (if we can get in, that is) we may well be told — as a friend of mine was — that "we are not used to dealing with the likes of you"! Embarrassment reigns.

Those of us who choose to be lesbians may ring a lesbian line of a gay switchboard only to be given a long list of venues where we could, if we were able to get in, meet other lesbians. Only since lesbians with disablities have joined these organisations has this practice begun to alter.

We are generally counselled against pregnancy. Yes, you've guessed it, we may produce ***"another one of us"***!

A child with a disability will indeed be seen as a tragedy! A tragedy to whom? Certainly not to the mother who loves her child to bits!

No, it's the medical profession being judge and jury; plus this society condemning what it doesn't wish to understand.

Then there is the quality of life argument. I know some pretty miserable able-bodied kids — who is to decide? As one woman with a disability has stated:

"For my daughter I have one big ambition: that she will grow up knowing that everything the world has to offer is hers. It belongs to all the other babies too, of course, but not less, and no more to her.

"I think I can do it, despite the odds, because now I know that which was hidden from me until very recently: that everything the world has to offer is mine as much as everyone else's.

"I belong here, and for the job I have to do here, my physical condition is perfect. Therefore it does not pain me to look down at my daughter and to see her looking like me, di ability included, becau e I know that she is perfect too."

My lover is currently pregnant after two years of planning. We are delighted and look forward to sharing this treasure!

Yet is has been suggested to us that well, Kath already has two children of her own, and of course there is her disability...

We will cope, should we try! This inuendo infuriates me as it denies my motherhood and my child-rearing capabilities as a woman with a disability.

Only my partner and I can decide what we should do and we will do just fine! With two kiddies under our belt, the third will be a breeze!

British society is organised by those groups who have the most power. Women with disabilities have less power than men with disabilities and black women with diabilities even less power.

Real change toward equality of opportunity requires relinquishing power and enabling women with disabilities to compete on equal terms.

Setting up disability committees and building ramps (usualy at the back by the dustbins), is in my opinion tokenism if people with disabilities are not in a position of power to bring about effective change and an end to discriminatory practices.

Features: Racism and Education

Secular education yes; multiculturalism *no*!

The right's deviousness on the question of race is shown by its attacks on those of us on the left willing to challenge the ideas of "multiculturalism" which have become current in many local authorities.

By Shahid Tilley
Haringey Labour Briefing

In the *Times Educational Supplement* (October 23rd) Fred Naylor (Secretary of Parental Choice in Education and advisor to the racist rebel parents in Dewsbury) grossly misrepresented my article in *Briefing* no. 48.

Naylor was eager enough to concur with the view that large sections of the left are in disarray over Dewsbury, but he neatly left out the article's main point — an attack on multiculturalism and the way it is reproduced in both its left and right proponents.

In a similar manner, Channel Four's Diverse Reports presented a very brief extract, out of context, of a scathing attack by the Institute of Race Relations on certain aspects of multiculturalism and Racial Awareness Training.

What the programme failed to add was that many voices on the left have castigated Labour-led authorities for degrading black struggle by subsuming the political and structural underpinnings of racism within capitalist society under the banner of cultural and psychological "difference".

The interaction between class inequalities and race was no longer a central concern. Instead, vague notions such as culture, civilisation, racial identity, and national heritage become key terms through which we were asked to understand the world.

Fred Naylor and others on the radical right argue that Asian parents have a right to seek an education founded on "Asian cultural" values just as British parents have a similar right to "British cultural" values.

To pursue this to its logical conclusion (and on which there is a strategic silence) they should also support Glaswegian parents who wish for "Glaswegian culture", Cornish parents who wish for "Cornish culture", *ad infinitum*, into the deconstruction of the state educational system.

Farcical

This farcical logic — to which the left has given credibility with its often uncritical support for anybody sounding off about multi-ethnic teaching — hides the tragic and inevitable conclusions of Baker's Educational Bill.

Much of the public debate may focus upon white parents' choice or black parents' choice but the reality will be otherwise: those who have the money to opt out of state education will do so, while the vast majority of the population suffers the consequences of this drain and ever-deepening cuts in resources.

A flood of recent publications has heralded the right's education proposals. One of their key components is, of course, the issue of race: for example, *Anti-racism: an assault on education* by F. Palmer, and *The Reform of British Education* by the Hillgate Group.

These right wing challenges are meeting little resistance from the army of race relations advisors and inspectors recently hired by local government and education authorities. Their silence stems not from their bureaucratic nature (which hasn't hindered them from publishing documents, books, and reports praising the joys of multicultural education) but from the fact that their basic ideology (the divorce of culture from class and politics) has been borrowed by the right and turned against them.

These rather well-paid public servants are resorting to the tactic which bureaucrats have always adopted when faced with a crisis: keep your head down and hope the problem goes away!

As socialists we cannot rely on these forces to fight the racist attacks on state education. They have been left shellshocked and reeling from the assaults by right wing theoreticians of the Ray Honeyford ilk, and are incapable of mustering a coherent counterattack on those who have stolen their thunder.

On the left, we need to reassess the state's relationship to religion, culture, and ethnicity. Part of this must include a reiteration of our longstanding commitment to a *secular state* in which there is a clearer demarcation between public education and the cultural diversity which exists within society as a whole.

Trapped

The left also needs to break free from the tactical corner in which the right has trapped it. We are seen defending an educational system which is hopelessly under-resourced and whose aim in many working class constituencies is containment, rather than the provision of a high standard of critical education.

It may be difficult to teach mathematics, English, physics, or biology to working class pupils, who like their teachers face many demanding pressures. But to abandon this commitment concretely reduces the life chances of a community which relies on education to give it the tools to fight racism or the exploitation of class.

Many black communities in the 1970s were involved in educational struggles. There were protests against the "containment" teaching methods adopted in many schools, either through the placing of black children in "educationally subnormal classes" or through the provision of teaching which was designed to alleviate boredom rather than develop analytical thinking or the rudiments of literacy or numeracy.

Generalise

We have to learn from these struggles and generalise them throughout working class communities. We should be demanding more resources, smaller schools, and a critical secular education.

Many working class parents, black as well as white, especially in large urban centers, feel that schools are letting down their children. Any socialist response to Baker must include a commitment to higher academic standards of education.

Only around demands of this kind can there be a mobilisation of working class parents and pupils against the Tories' proposals to dismantle the educational system into separate sectors for black and white, rich and poor.

We have little choice but to call for a rational, critical and secular education which aims to produce highly-skilled, socially conscious human beings living in a modern world.

Terror

This prospect fills Fred Naylor with terror. It will lead, he rants, to "equality" and "nihilism". For us this is immensely preferable to Thatcher's project of providing elitist education for the few and leaving the dregs for the rest of us.

What to do about GERBIL

Kenneth Baker's Great Education Reform Bill (GERBIL) has begun its passage through the Houses of Parliament.

By PAUL FOLEY
Socialist Teachers Association

The Bill seeks to strengthen privilege, increase inequality, stimulate racism and take state education further away than ever from a curriculum that's in the interests of school students.

The question is — how do we campaign against it?

We can start with the great reserves of support which exist for a free, well-resourced, non-selective, locally-controlled state education system.

Unfortunately, the opponents of GERBIL have already missed an opportunity. Baker's proposals have been known since the summer. The labour movement should have used this time to set up a broad, active national campaign with strong local roots.

Instead, Labour Party spokespersons, with Jack Straw and Neil Fletcher the most prominent, have been busy confusing the movement in their haste to endorse and go beyond many of Baker's proposals.

Indeed, Fletcher is now proposing mass redundancies in an attempt to appease the government.

The NUT National Executive has prevaricated. In July, it agreed to set up a national campaign, only to change its mind later.

All we have now are a series of bureaucratic, non-campaigning bodies like the employer-led "Standing Conference" on the Baker Bill, the committee which the TUC will set up, and the Education Alliance.

This has to be changed. Campaigns already established in some localities seek to involve teachers, parents, school students, Labour Party wards and local trade union branches. More local campaigns like this must be set up.

Nationally, the NUT should call a conference of all organisations committed to fighting the Baker Bill which can build for a national demonstration and day of action against it.

We need a campaign which can go further than trying to secure a few amendments in the House of Lords. We need to create a climate of large-scale opposition to Baker's proposals outside Parliament, to make the Bill unworkable. Popular local campaigns can organise against opting out and Dewsbury-style racial segregation. Alliances of parents, teachers, governors and school students can refuse to participate in the Baker tests.

The battle is to create a committed, popular, long-term opposition to Baker and the new right ideology in education. This will involve more than simply campaigning against GERBIL. It also means putting forward alternatives: about the kind of curriculum the labour movement wants; the kinds of relationships between teachers, parents, and local communities that we would like to see.

It is important that the labour movement has this discussion. Without it, the Tories will dominate the debate about what should be taught and how it should be done.

Central to the campaign must be support for the continuing opposition to Baker's imposed working conditions on teachers.

In order to realise his objectives, Baker must have a compliant and docile teaching force. Active teacher opposition will simply wreck his proposals. If the labour movement wishes teachers to lead the campaign against Baker, it must recognise the importance of the teachers' fight to control their own working conditions.

Teachers in Haringey and ILEA are being fined heavily for refusing to cover for absent colleagues and refusing to attend Baker-directed meetings.

It is to the shame of these two Labour-controlled Authorities that they are prepared to side with Baker in his attacks on teachers rather than support their struggle against the loss of trade union negotiating rights.

The campaign against GERBIL must be broadly based, popular and long-term. It must take up all the aspects of the Tory attack: both the ideological attack on our education system, and the attack on the education workforce. We *can* force back the Tory attacks; we do not have to lie back and let the GERBIL run all over us!

Economic Debate

The crash hits pension funds

Since October 17th the *Financial Times* all-share index has shown a drop in share values totalling 35%.

There have been similar or even greater drops in the stock markets of Japan, West Germany and the USA.

Most pension funds invest heavily in shares, especially over the last few years, when, on average, share prices have doubled or trebled in value.

The Crash (or "adjustment" as some City commentators prefer to call it) is thus bound to affect the value of money in pension funds. It will particularly hit funds investing in US dollars, as the exchange-rate value of the dollar has taken such a pasting.

Actuaries, who advise the managers or trustees of pension funds, aim roughly to balance the money paid into a scheme with the money laid out. This of course is based on what they expect share prices to do and what value they expect their holdings to be worth.

By FRANK SCOTT

Therefore pension fund monies are invested in a variety of shares, switched often on a daily basis to try and gain money from "buying cheap, and selling dear". In the Bull Market of the last few years it hasn't been difficult to keep making money on share transactions.

What the actuaries have got used to has now changed dramatically. The average rate of return from what's called portfolio management was high. Now it has suddenly taken a hammering. What might this mean in practice?

Let's assume that the Tin Box pension scheme requires employees to pay in 5% of their wages, with employers contributing 8%.

If they're on a wage of £175 a week, employees pay in £8.75 a week. The employer pays in £14.00, giving a total income to the scheme of £22.75 a week, or £1,183 a year.

The amount contributed will go up roughly in line with wage increases, so over a five year period, say, that £1,183 a year will increase by a few per cent every year.

Then assume that the pension scheme investments yield around 8% to 9%, a conservative estimate, but not unrealistic.

Invested

That means that over five years the money invested, and therefore the value of the scheme for each person, amount to some £7,950.

But the recent stock market crash *reduces* that value from £7,950 to £5,165, a loss of £2,785 — the equivalent of at least two years' worth of contributions.

If the company and the employees wanted to get back to the original value of the pension fund investment, each employee would immediately have to pay nearly £21 a week contributions instead of £8.75 — something like an *extra* 7% tax!

In reality, our fictitious Tin Box company will have to increase its own contribution a bit, and try to persuade employees to pay more — probably through a heavily-pushed "additional contribution" scheme (which will be sold on the basis that it's just a wise form of extra savings!).

But the Tin Box company will also try very hard to find other ways of making up for this sudden 35% drop in the value of its pension scheme.

Early leavers usually get a raw deal out of pension schemes. They get much less, compared with what they've paid in, than long service employees. So the company might be tempted to find ways of getting rid of long service workers, and maybe replacing them with casual or subcontract workers who aren't entitled to be in the scheme.

In addition, the company will obviously try to cut back on its pension commitments; in other words, being meaner about paying out benefits.

They may even try to find ways of altering the scheme's provisions for things like death in service, payments to spouses, and the like. They'll almost certainly try to do this in the longer term.

"Holidays"

They'll certainly find it hard to take any more pension "holidays" — unless they're allowed to get away with it. Many companies have swollen their coffers through the years of the bull market, and they'll be tempted to let things run for a while before they decide to spend more of *their* money on a pension scheme.

The City and its friends will try to let things rest for the time being. For a while, money will be running towards things other than shares, like gold or fixed-interest stocks. The actuaries will make soothing noises and say that it's all planned on yields or income calcuated over a number of years.

But the fact remains that at least 35% of the value of funds to finance pension schemes has gone up in smoke, and all the indications are that it might take a very long time indeed for that 35% to be recovered.

Companies (like our Tin Box plc) will certainly be looking for ways of *making someone else pay for this stock market crash*. There's at least £100 billions of pension fund money in this country. It's very big business.

It'll be protected by any number of highly-paid City types, and, as usual, workers will be expected to take a major responsibility for sorting out "their" mess. Pension schemes will come under pressure.

The argument for strong, properly elected trade union trustees on pension schemes has never been stronger. Act now — or the consequences for jobs, benefits, deferred wages, etc., could be disastrous.

FORTY YEARS AFTER MOSCOW TRIALS

Rehabilitate all Stalin's victims

From 1936 to 1938 — 20 years after the Russian Revolution — the ruling bureaucracy in Moscow staged a series of show trials in which the revolution's most prominent leaders were accused of a series of crimes ranging from terrorism and treason to mass poisoning and economic sabotage.

The accused were convicted on the basis of "confessions" extracted under torture, and most were executed.

By Sue Owen
Leeds North East CLP

But the highly-publicised show trials were merely the tip of an enormous iceberg; it is still not known just how many met their death in the mass purges of those years.

Similarly, the flagrant lies of the show trials were only a small part of the mountain of slander and falsification heaped on Stalin's opponents by the CPSU and the international Communist movement.

The great show trials, the purges, and the massive falsification of Soviet history were not just the products of Stalin's diseased mind. They were *political* events.

Gradually, since the early 1920s, the bureaucratic functionaries of the CPSU and the Soviet regime had been acquiring political power over the party and over the working class. Stalin, the party's general secretary, was merely the head bureaucrat.

This power had first begun to fall into their hands through the exhaustion and weakness of the Russian working class following the civil war. It then became necessary, if the bureaucracy was to hold on to power, to stamp out, as far as possible, the working class's revolutionary traditions.

Stalinism was not the natural successor of Leninism; it was irreconcilably opposed to it. It was necessary physically to destroy the party of Lenin, in the shape of its old leadership and cadre, and to try to wipe out the very memory of its existence. By 1940 Stalin was the sole survivor of the 1917 Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party.

By 1940 the purges had even reached into the original Stalinist faction of the Bolshevik Old Guard; by the time of Stalin's death, 1,100 delegates to the 1934 Party Congress — called and dominated by Stalin's own people — and 70% of the Central Committee elected by that Congress, had been killed.

Today, the CPSU leadership round Mikhail Gorbachev is trying to use the ideas of "openness", democracy and truthfulness as a lever to unlock the hold of the central bureaucracy over the Soviet economy. These moves have inevitably raised the question of the falsification of Soviet history, and the revolutionary record of the Bolshevik leaders exterminated in the 1930s.

These matters are as delicate for the "reform" wing of the Moscow bureaucracy as for the "conservatives". The full historical truth remains revolutionary in every sense of the word. The current CPSU leaders are not the heirs of the Bolsheviks, but usurpers who have trampled on the Party's real historical legacy.

The traditions and ideas of the Bolshevik Party, massacred and obliterated by Stalinism, were revolutionary. If the truth about Soviet history, and the real ideas of the original Bolshevik leadership, become available to Soviet workers, the bureaucrats would fear for their skins as well as their power.

What is on offer in Moscow today is a limited and selective rehabilitation of some of the victims of the great purges, and a shift from the crude lies of the past to more subtle forms of distortion.

The workers' movement internationally has a vital interest in these questions. The history of the Soviet Union is a part of the history of our movement.



In our own countries we face labour bureaucrats who are afraid of the truth and seek to silence their opponents — though they lack the armoury Stalin had at his disposal. Today, we can help to influence the outcome of the present upheavals in the Soviet Union by fighting in our own labour movement for the clear demand for full rehabilitation for *all* the victims of the Moscow trials, and the republication of the works of *all* the leaders of the Bolshevik Party.

Seventy years on from October 1917:

"All power to the Soviets!"

In essence, Trotskyism is the distillation of the experience of October 1917.

Trotsky's *Transitional Programme* translates this particular "Russian" experience into terms of general relevance to twentieth century humanity as a whole.

In the months leading up to October 1917, the Bolsheviks conquered the support of the masses above all through two "transitional" demands:

- *Land! Peace! Bread!;*
- *All Power to the Soviets!*

These two slogans gave conscious expression to the revolutionary potential of the masses, binding their immediate demands to a concrete organisational means of securing them.

Whereas "Land! Peace! Bread!" was simple and unambiguous, "All Power to the Soviets!" was full of paradoxes and ambiguities.

Initially, the Soviets were in political terms quite reactionary organisations. "All Power" to them meant all power to the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries — the Bolsheviks' immediate political opponents.

This will surprise those whose knowledge of the history of the Russian Revolution is confined to the mythologised version peddled by Stalinists and certain semi-Stalinised sections of the Trotskyist movement. To them, the Soviets were from the outset "pure" organs of workers' democracy and power. Many even imagine that they were invented by the Bolsheviks and established for the purpose of organising an insurrection!

By Chris Knight
Lewisham East CLP

The danger of this nonsense is that it places the concept of Soviets, and the need to create Soviets, outside the bounds of anything remotely imaginable for ourselves in our own class struggle experiences in Britain or other industrialised Western countries.

We look around ourselves and we see no Soviets. We look at history — at periods of upheaval such as 1918-19, or 1926 — and still see no Soviets. We see only reactionary organisations, like the British trade unions and the Labour Party. These are as far removed from Soviets as one could possibly imagine.

We quickly give up the attempt to apply the concrete tactical lessons of the Bolshevik revolution to our own national situation. "Everything is different!" we say, excusing ourselves. This is dangerous, because it allows us to drift from our only reliable anchorage as revolutionaries, the experience of victory in October 1917.

The reactionary Social Democrats and reformists in Western Europe set up bureaucratised trade unions and reformist parliamentary parties, but in Russia (and later in Germany and Austria) they set up not only these but also, briefly, acting under pressure from the masses, the workers' councils known as Soviets.

Soviets

The Bolsheviks played virtually no part in setting up the Russian Soviets in 1917; in 1905, they were late in agreeing to participate and played a relatively minor role in them.

In those years, the Soviets were regarded by their organisers as temporary workers' forums, "advisory" bodies destined either to disappear once bourgeois parliamentarism could be properly established, or (at best) to serve as adjuncts to the bourgeois institutions of state.

Lenin's genius was to realise, in April 1917, that these organisations, despite their bourgeois politics and their leaderships, had a revolutionary potential. It was an insight of genius because it was not obvious. In fact it was a difficult task to raise the slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" — at first, everyone thought Lenin had gone mad.

Power

The Soviets did not *want* "All Power". Their leaderships indignantly rejected the very notion of "taking the power". That was not supposed to be the function of Soviets. "Everyone knew" that the Soviets were merely advisory bodies, not potential organs of a future workers' state.

Naturally, it was difficult to say "All power" to bodies which did not want power. Even more difficult to say "All power" to bodies which were shooting at you in the service of the ruling class. This was the ultimate paradox of the "July Days", when the Soviet EC turned gunfire upon a mass demonstration of Bolshevik-influenced workers calling on this same EC to "take the power".

So difficult did it then become to maintain the slogan that Lenin said it should be withdrawn, arguing that the Soviets were now so reactionary that it was only "sowing illusions" to call for "All Power to the Soviets". He added that armed insurrection would now have to be organised openly in the name of the Bolshevik Party.

Luckily, Lenin's advice was rapidly superseded by events. Instead of being withdrawn, the slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" was now thrust forward with renewed vigour and with subtly changed political significance.

Disgraced

The leadership of the Soviets had so disgraced themselves in the eyes of the masses that the Bolsheviks were quickly becoming a majority in them. "Why support these Mensheviks, if they don't even want power when you give it to them?" was the growing verdict of the masses on their former Soviet leaders.

As the Bolsheviks became dominant in the Soviets, "All Power to the Soviets!" now for the first time began to imply a Boshevik-led insurrection. But still this meaning was partly concealed.

Now, instead of being compelled to organise an insurrection nakedly in the name of the Bolshevik Party, Trotsky was able to synchronise the armed rising precisely with the convening of the Second Congress of Soviets.

Measures

The necessary pre-insurrectionary measures (such as the setting up of the Military Revolutionary Committee) were carried out — Trotsky was able to explain to hostile journalists — simply in order to "protect" and "defend" the proceedings of this "United Front" organ of the masses.

The actual insurrection took the form, initially, or providing a military guard around the building in which the Congress was taking place, extending this military action outwards "in order to defend the Congress of Soviets".

Such was the final paradox: the most audacious offensive onslaught in the history of the working class movement was carried out under the guise of defending the previously "reactionary" Soviets to which the masses owed traditional allegiance.

All revolutionary socialists should study this "secret of October" with care.

Letters

WRITEBACK!

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

Restore the balance on Livingstone

Dear *Briefing*,

Paula Watson in *Briefing* no. 51 bitterly attacks Ken Livingstone's "appalling record", "cynical opportunism", and "phony charm".

For my part, I fervently wish that there were hundreds of Labour MPs with a similarly appalling record on, for example, Ireland, gay rights, or the central importance of campaigning on issues relevant to women and black people for the future of the labour movement.

It was particularly unfortunate that such unbalanced charges should be aired in *Briefing* in a week in which Ken Livingstone has been courageously fighting for his political life, without making any concessions on his principled support for British withdrawal from Ireland.

I am glad to say that I was one of the 300 people at the November 17th meeting in opposition to the Irish Extradition Treaty, who gave Ken Livingstone a spontaneous standing ovation for his refusal to be intimidated on the Irish issue. I was particularly glad to see John McDonnell express his solidarity with Livingstone, rightly putting past differences aside.

More generally, I did not think the *Briefing* interview with Ken Livingstone was uncritical in tone. I think I would myself have difficulty maintaining a tone of polite friendliness to an interviewer who made statements such as: "Nothing you have said so far would necessarily lead to the conclusion that you understand the nature of the state," as Chris Knight did.

I would endorse *Briefing's* judgement that Ken Livingstone can speak to an audience much wider than Labour's committed left wing constituency. It is true that like most human beings, perhaps even Paula Watson, he has some weaknesses, both political and personal. So do Heffer, Scargill, Benn and Skinner, whom Paula Watson cites approvingly.

- Scargill for instance has repeatedly made it clear that he regards the democratic opposition in Eastern Europe much as most of us regard the Nicaraguan Contras.
- I do not know Eric Heffer's position on the Alton Bill, but seem to remember that he has a dubious record on a woman's right to chose.
- Tony Benn would probably be the first to admit that he made mistakes whilst in office, on nuclear power and Namibian uranium for example.

But such criticisms should not of course obscure the overwhelmingly positive contribution of these comrades.

The point is that politics is a messy business. Our allies today may not be our allies tomorrow. No politician worth anything will ever be entirely free of the taint of error or compromise. It is infantile leftism to expect otherwise.

Yours for socialism,
Dave Holland
London W11

Every success to *Briefing*!

Dear *Briefing*,

Enclosed is my subscription for *Labour Briefing* and a banker's order for the 500 Club.

Your paper is an indispensable read for genuine socialists. It is uncompromising on basic principles but at the same time adopts a non-sectarian approach.

This is a refreshing change from so many other left groupings which seem to be obsessed with sectarian in-fighting (e.g. the RCP). Others, like *Socialist Organiser* have capitulated to imperialist ideas and right wing Labourism.

At times I have become demoralised and wondered whether socialism is on the agenda. However, the recent Stock Market crash and the panic shown by leading circles of the ruling class has graphically exposed the myths of Thatcherism echoed by the faint-hearts within the labour movement.

I wish your paper every success,

Yours in solidarity,
Tony Traub,
Leigh-on-Sea

Support Bis Weaver's appeal!

Dear *Briefing*,

Thank you for the coverage of Bis Weaver's industrial tribunal appeal in *Briefing* no. 52 — it is greatly appreciated.

May I take this opportunity to inform your readers that the appeal hearing will be at the Employers' Appeal Tribunal, 4 St James Square, London SW1, on December 11th 1987?

I am sure that it would be useful if *Labour Briefing* supporters could attend the public hearing, if only for a brief period during the proceedings.

Comradely greetings,
Gordon Weaver,
Birmingham

Building Briefing

CONTACT BRIEFING

The *Briefing* Editorial Board, and the following Commissions, can be contacted at 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 meetings: Monday December 14th (editorial); Tuesday December 22nd (finance).

Deadline for articles:
Issue no. 54 (out January 12th): notify EB as soon as possible, all articles in by Tuesday January 5th.
Issue no. 55 (out January 26th): notify EB as soon as possible, all articles in by Tuesday January 19th.

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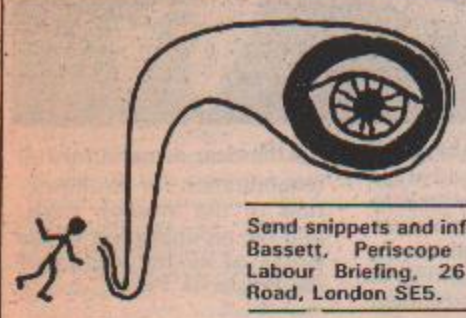
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This week's winner

Joint winners this week — and for the second issue running, winners out of London!
This week's winning share is no. 221; John Wilton and Pauline Purnell from Birmingham.

Periscope



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

All relationships have their tiffs...

"America the wrecker" screached the front page headlines of the *Daily Mail* (December 1st).

The ardent Thatcherites — and erstwhile champions of the "special relationship" — were livid because the US decision to let the dollar drop — and drop — was damaging the British economy.

Of course, we all know that if it weren't for those irresponsible Yanks Britain would be booming away as if the Stock Market crash had never happened. After all, the economy is "basically sound"...

Hoist by his own policies...

The following letter from Labour Party General Secretary Larry Whitty to all London Labour Groups and Labour-controlled Councils speaks volumes.

Is Comrade Whitty not aware of the frozen vacancies, deleted posts and redundancies now being made by Labour Groups across the capital?

Or is the Walworth Road fortress simply impervious to the cold winds blowing outside?

Dear Colleague,
Job Vacancies
You will be aware that unfortunately a number of redundancies are arising amongst Labour Party staff.
It would be extremely helpful if you could arrange for your personnel department to notify us of any vacancies arising in the clerical, secretarial or administrative field.

Sounds familiar?

The Labour Party Conference has ended with a split between the government and Party members.

A desperate plea for unity (on his terms) by the Deputy Leader failed. Party members and trade unionists stressed the government's failure to redistribute wealth and attacked its economic policies.

Despite protests from the membership, the government made it clear it would not change course...

No, that's the *New Zealand Labour Party*, not a replay of '70s Britain.

'nuff said...

The first Saturday in December saw the seventieth anniversary of the Co-op's Branches Annual Conference.

Readers might be accustomed to regarding the Co-op as a forum for general debate in the Party. You might also have guessed that the Co-op would be that kind of meeting which would consider prohibiting smoking in its meetings — after a democratic vote, of course.

First on the agenda (after Coffee, Check-in and Greetings that is) comes the warning about conduct for the rest of the Conference:

1. Motion: that speaking be prohibited inside this room.

In Memoriam: James Baldwin

On a rare serious note, Periscope mourns the passing of American writer James Baldwin, whose novels and essays breathed the fires of anger and hope.

Baldwin reached a wide audience in the 60s, when his accounts of black American life spoke to many whose consciousness had been raised by the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement, in which he played an active part.

Baldwin was also one of the first American writers to deal explicitly with gay sexuality and its repression in what he always portrayed as a venal, inhuman, divided society.

Indeed, the tributes to Baldwin — both here and in America — have been somewhat muted precisely because he refused to hoist anchor and sail on when the tide of protest ebbed in the 70s.

If anything, his rage at the oppressors burned with even greater ferocity in the last ten years. That is cause for celebration. And a hint for *Briefing* readers: you could do worse than give someone a Baldwin book for Christmas.

Chutzpah

Attempts by Kinnock and friends to blame Livingstone and the left for their own failure in the Wandsworth by-election brings to mind the classic definition of that wonderful Yiddish word *chutzpah*.

According to the old story, a boy kills both his parents in cold blood, then falls on the mercy of the court — on the grounds that he is an orphan!

That's *chutzpah*. Floundering Labour right wingers are increasingly turning it into a fine art.

Glasnost revisited

A *samizdat* journal called *Glasnost* has recently published an open letter to the Editor of the official trade union journal *Trud* from shopfloor workers in the Voykov Steel Plant.

"At long last *perestroika* applies to us too," write the steel workers, "we have now started to work in three shifts and immediately a whole host of questions have arisen... We are being compelled to begin work in the night from Sunday to Monday and to finish work in the night from Friday to Saturday, i.e. a six day working week...

"Comrade Gorbachev has said that a decision has been taken to raise the wages for working the night shift by 40%. We would like to know when the present recalculation will come into operation because this affects us. We are asking for concrete examples to explain how the calculations are made... Previously when working overtime wages were doubled, plus 40%

"The administration (of the plant) regards a wage of 230-250 roubles a month as a lot and suggests that from May 1st we should work for lower rates... We believe that the reconsideration of wage rates... is not substantiated by anything and is aimed at the infringement and the material well-being of honest workers."

BOOK REVIEW

Enigmatic assassination of a revolutionary

A Man Apart: The Life of Henri Curiel, by Gilles Perrault, Zed Books, £7.95

This book begins at the end — with the assassination of Henri Curiel, leading Egyptian communist, in a Parisian apartment in 1978.

Here the author begins his search for the identity of Curiel's assassins.

For there were many candidates, and many reasons, to "remove" Curiel. Newspapers had speculated that he was the boss of an international terrorist network. It was rumoured that he was a French secret agent, an Israeli spy, and an agent for the Russians.

A leading figure in both the Egyptian and Sudanese Communist movements, Curiel became the spokesperson for liberation struggles around the world; for the Palestinians, the Algerians, and the Jews.

Gilles Perault weaves a huge amount of material into a book which never fails to excite. He views historical data from a radically new perspective.

By turning historical "facts" into artistic "fictions", Perrault poses a fundamental question: is what we take as fact merely one of many fictions? And, if so, who produces these fictions, and for what purpose?

Curiel's recognition of the centrality of this question, and his rejection of Marx's theory of "false consciousness", led him to wage continuous struggles for the control of *meanings*.

The first thing he did upon setting up a political organisation was always to produce a newspaper. This not only created a political identity, but also counteracted the versions of history disseminated by other political groups.

Perrault's style captures the chaotic and unreal spirit in which the first generation of Middle Eastern radicals began to organise in the 1920s and 30s.

The son of a millionaire Jew, Curiel had the resources at hand to educate and mobilise the dispossessed masses of Egypt. He managed to harness and control the otherwise dissipated liberation struggles against British colonialism. He gave direction to these struggles and turned them into a potent socialist movement which had a far-reaching impact both nationally and internationally.

By Charles Helsea

Curiel set up training camps (or "cadres") where many of the socialist militants in Nasser's Free Officer Movement were politicised and armed.

Given the widespread support enjoyed by the Egyptian Communist movement, you have to wonder where they went wrong. In a sense, though, *they* didn't. They were primarily defeated by their Western "allies": the French Communist Party.

The PCF first refused to give any type of support to the Egyptian Communists' struggle against neo-Colonialism, and then waged a propaganda camapign to discredit Curiel and his movement.

This campaign undoubtedly won Curiel many more enemies — and many more potential assassins.

Which leads us back to the beginning: Curiel's death. Perrault does not reveal the identity of the murders, but allows the reader to piece the evidence together on her or his own. He leaves it to us to decide.

It is our fiction, Perrault seems to be saying. And we must fight for the right to use it.

Film review

Cry Freedom!

Cry Freedom, a film by Richard Attenborough

By STEVE POTTER

***Cry Freedom* is not a film about Steve Biko.**

It is the story of Donald Woods' relationship with Biko, seen through the eyes of the courageous white journalist. Yet still Biko dominates the film.

When Biko (Denzil Washington) is on screen, the film races along, inspiring and exciting us. When the film records his death it is also the end of all drama, and *Cry Freedom* limps (with two stunning exceptions) to a sentimental close.

Bantu Steve Biko was born in King Williamstown, Cape Province in 1947. The death of his father gave the 17 year old African his chance of education through a mission school.

He excelled at his studies and in 1966 entered university to study medicine. From then on his life was that of a political organiser and activist.

He joined the student movement, becoming active in the National Union of South African Students. But the subordinate role of black students in NUSAS and the domination of white liberalism convinced him that black student should form their own organisation, the South African Students Organisation, of which he became the first president.

Biko's advocacy of separate black organisations was attacked by many on the left, and actually welcomed by some in the regime who saw it as a step towards acceptance of apartheid's creed of separate development.

But Biko saw separate organisation as necessary to break down what he called black people's "inferiority complex", and as a precondition of "True integration" — black majority rule:

"What is necessary as a prelude to anything else is a very strong grass roots build up of black consciousness such that blacks can learn to assert themselves and stake their rightful claim."

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) assailed collaborationist forces, Biko calling the Bantustans "the single greatest fraud ever invented by white politicians".

SASO and the organisation it gave birth to, the Black People's Convention, expressed the revival of a layer of black youth which had not known the repression and defeats of the 1960s that had followed Sharpeville.

The South African Students Movement (SASM) provided the bulk of the leadership for the mighty explosion of black anger that was Soweto in 1976. The name of Biko was placed alongside that of Nelson Mandela of the ANC and Robert Sobukwe of the Pan African Congress as those the Soweto students wanted to negotiate on their behalf with the regime.

Internationally

Yet today in the anti-apartheid movement internationally the name of Biko, and Sobukwe too, are semi-forgotten, buried under the new hegemony of the ANC. *Cry Freedom* allows a fresh and critical examination of the liberation movement since Sharpeville.

It is an exciting and stirring film. If one can accept its convention of seeing black South Africa through the white eyes of Donald Woods (Kevin Kline) — the same technique employed in *Missing* with Jack Lemon, and Nick Nolte in *Under Fire* — the film is a damning indictment of apartheid which inspired and angered the audience of black and white teenagers that I saw the film with.

The same audience, however, was frankly bored by the last half of the film — the story of the Woods family's escape abroad, where Donald can publish his story revealing the truth of Biko's death at the hands of the South African police.

Why did Attenborough make the film about Woods rather than Biko? The director is a wily politician. In answer to that very question from a black youth, he replied that he was just a white liberal like Woods. The definitive film about Biko's life would be made by a black film-maker after the liberation of South Africa!

More prosaically he has also explained that the film would not sell in the American market without a white as the chief protagonist.

This is why the film cannot decide how to end after Biko is dead. The escape story relies on little ironies for interest, such as South African police giving Woods a lift during his escape rather than any fear that Woods himself would share Biko's fate.

It is rescued by two stunning closing scenes. The first is a recreation of the Soweto events; the second the closing credits of the film, where all those who died in police custody are recorded as a seemingly never-ending list on the screen, along with causes of death like "slipped in the shower", "shot while trying to escape".

Cry Freedom has already excited political controversy. Thatcher eventually attended the premier, telling Attenborough he should stick to film-making and leave politics to her.

The South African government, attempting to defuse the film's anti-apartheid message, has provisionally accepted to show it in South Africa. Attenborough insists that it should be shown without cuts, in front of multi-racial audiences and at a price that makes it realistic for black people to attend.

The likelihood of these conditions being met seems slim. Nevertheless if the film was shown in the RSA it would, despite its weaknesses, be a powerful message for revolutionary change in the country. It is here too.

RECORD REVIEW

New sounds from Nicaragua

Bluefields Express, Zinica, £6 + 90p p&p from NSC, 23 Bevenden St, London N1; distributed by Rough Trade.

By Jackie Black

Zinica is an 8-piece band from Bluefields, on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast.

Their music is exclusive to this part of Central America and is know as "Palo de Mayo", a combination of calypso, salsa, reggae, and Latin folk, skilfully blended and pleasing to the ear.

The tempo and the mood varies from track to track. The presence of a banjo gives a jolly, folk-like quality to the livelier songs.

Other songs, emphasising political struggles, feature a heavier bass line, chanting, greater use of vocal harmonies, and a stronger Latin influence.

The humourous "Rum and Coke" starts with a somewhat distorted trumpet sound, giving an intoxicated effect in keeping with the theme, which I found rather familiar — very Calypso-influenced, but with a slower tempo.

"No Pasaran" stresses the plight of the Nicaragauan people. It is a sad song, with its chorus "No Pasaran, No Pasaran, tell dem don't pass, if dem pass they will die" sung in heartfelt harmonies.

This is a fine album that seduces you with a mixture of emotion and old-fashioned fun. It reflects the lives of the Nicaraguan people in their happier moments — and also in their struggles.

BOOK REVIEW

Who's afraid of the Labour left?

The rise and fall of the Labour Left, Patrick Seyd, MacMillan, £6.95

Patrick Seyd's detailed study and analysis of the left in the Labour Party is often interesting.

In under 200 pages the book ranges from the left's re-emergence in the "rank and file" in the 1970s, through the development of national organisation and leadership, and arrives finally at a chapter titled *Left Disintegration and Decline*.

The account of the "rise" of the left focusses on what Seyd sees as its main triumphs — reselection and the electoral college system for the election of Leader and Deputy Leader. Syed argues that the left's concentration on internal structural reforms has been "at the expense of the development of a radical programme which combined intellectual credibility, practical application, and popular support."

Seyd may or may not have a point here, but it is his implication that the two processes are unconnected I find most difficult to accept. He fails to recognise that the gains of the Labour left are not gains at all if they are not used to full effect both inside and outside the Party.

Reselection has not had a great effect because of the Left's failure to provide alternative candidates, and because of its failure to highlight fully sitting MPs' voting records and policy positions.

By John Wilton
Birmingham Edgbaston CLP

The electoral college has been ineffectual simply because of the left's reluctance to use it.

Policy development and reselection and the Leadership electoral college are not mutually exclusive: they should be linked.

The book suffers throughout from a failure to recognise just what the Labour left consists of, and to distinguish it at some points from the centre/right politics of Kinnock and his supporters.

Because of this, the author gives the impression of clinging to the possibility of an alliance between what he describes as the "socialist left" (hard left?) and the "Tribune left".

Seyd believes "... the Labour left can be optimistic about the fact that the Party Leader, the Chair of the PLP and a majority of the Shadow Cabinet are drawn from the Tribune Group's ranks. This left wing domination of the Parliamentary Party is an entirely new phenomenon."

With such optimism, who needs policies? If you want a light read over Christmas you could do worse than this book, even if it only mentions *Labour Briefing* four times.

BOOK REVIEW

Farewell to Socialism?

Farewell to Reason, Paul Feyerabend, Verso, £9.95 (paperback)

Paul Feyerabend is a Dadaist long opposed to the uniformity of the science industry. And Sir Karl Popper.

And now, Reason itself.

The Russian anarchist, Bakunin, once warned of the dangers of a Marxist scientific dictatorship. Feyerabend is worried about Marx too, and all claims that objective truth exists.

Farewell to Reason echoes many ideas circulating amongst the "new pluralists", ecologists, and post-modernists. It takes a decisive stand. It is clear. What does it propose?

Relativism is Feyerabend's hobby-horse. This means that different pictures of reality, and the cultures that produce them, should have equal rights. Knowledge is a local and social creation.

In Western countries "democratic relativism" ought to break up the power of scientists to decide questions of ultimate truth.

By ANDREW COATES

The world is not a constant entity explored by "thinking ants" crawling over its crevices. It "affects and reflects the activity of its explorers".

Rationalist attempts to freeze its dynamic nature should be restrained by those with other values. A pluralism of theory should be institutionalised. Minorities and other societies should be free of the tyranny of Western Science.

Is this radical anti-imperialism? Does Feyerabend call for the self-management of truth?

Relativism may lead in many directions. The racialist genetics of the New Right is also accompanied by a twisted "third worldism". To "right wing Gramscians" like Alain de Benoist, each culture has the right to order and define reality as it likes.

Universally to define such concepts as oppression and exploitation is impossible. Socialism, another concept with pretensions to the universal, is an imposition.

Feyerabend may reject Benoist's race theory. But relativism, "democratic" or not, does tend to take reactionary *cultural* forms when all objective standards are washed away.

Feyerabend's conclusions are difficult to sustain. He exudes loathing for researchers, educationalists, and doctors, who present large bills.

He writes "... there exists no difference whatsoever between the henchmen of Auschwitz and these 'benefactors of mankind' ".

He cannot "objectively" condemn fascism. He has only an "inclination" against it. The real problems of our time lie in crude materialism and the "growing disregard for spiritual values".

Many socialists, however resistant to Feyerabend's romantic life philosophy, respected his *Against Method* (1975). Perhaps they may still hope to learn something about the social relations of science from *Farewell to Reason*. But Feyerabend is no longer an invigorating critic. He has become tired, emotional, and repetitive. He should be gently, yet firmly, shown the door.

Anti-apartheid AGM



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Anti-apartheid demo 1987

Changes in the wind

The problem for any militant wanting to carry out Anti-Apartheid work in Britain is that this work has to be carried out in a movement which has become the last bastion of British Stalinism.

The Anti-Apartheid Movement (A-AM) AGM in Sheffield on November 28-9th confirmed this political fact of life.

Luckily, two mitigating factors did emerge:

- the impact of developments in South Africa itself, particularly the growth of the independent unions;
- The AGM's reluctance to prioritise particular areas of work leaves the way open for local groups to determine their own activities.

The AGM debate over the campaign to free Moses Mayekiso and his comrades promised to be crucial. Moses is on trial as a leader of Alexandra Township and of the metalworkers union NUMSA, in a case that the South African state sees as key to rolling back the growth of community and trade union organisation.

The campaign to free him has the support of NUMSA, COSATU, and the International Metalworkers Federation.

At the AGM, a number of resolutions on Moses had been composited into one general resolution on trade union repression. A series of amendments threatened to delete all

By Tim Riley
Huddersfield

reference to Moses and commit the A-AM to *oppose* campaigns to free "non-approved" individuals.

In the end, under pressure from NUMSA, a watered-down set of amendments was passed, leaving in some references to Moses, as one of several named individuals under threat.

The A-AM Executive specifically endorsed an amendment saying that Moses' imprisonment would be a huge blow to the whole trade union movement; and the amendment opposing campaigns around individuals was remitted.

Francis Mele, addressing the AGM on behalf of the ANC, signalled two important clarifications in their positions. On the cultural boycott, he explained that its purpose was not to boycott items of "people's culture" such as books or plays against apartheid. The ANC and A-AM are now discussing appropriate guidelines as to what constitutes "people's culture".

On lesbian and gay liberation, he quoted extensively from a letter from the ANC to Peter Tatchell (reprinted on this page) which outlined the ANC's opposition to *all* forms of oppression, and its consequent support for lesbian and gay liberation.

The Report of the Working Party on the Black and Ethnic Minority Communities raised some self-criticism of the A-AM's work, in particular its failure to develop an anti-racist character, and its image as a white organisation that only supported a particular section of the liberation movement.

Unfortunately, the discussion of this Report was used by the Executive to stress that A-AM should not involve itself in anti-racist campaigns. They also stressed later in the conference that A-AM should not be making links with organisations such as AZAPO or the union organisation NACTU, which are part of the black consciousness movement.

They even promised to lobby the TUC to change its current support for *both* COSATU and NACTU on the sensible grounds that they *both* oppose apartheid.

The last resolution to be discussed was to make the AGM the Movement's sovereign body. The Executive opposed, and for the first time a card vote was taken, and won by the Executive.

Given the composition of this AGM, it's hard to see why the Executive was so afraid of making it sovereign; but perhaps they see and fear the changes ahead.

ANC says yes to Gay Rights

In October, Peter Tatchell reported in *Labour Briefing* that two leading members of the African National Congress, Solly Smith and Ruth Mompati, had expressed views hostile to lesbian and gay rights.

Tatchell followed up his article by writing personally to the ANC's Director of Information and National Executive Committee Member, Thabo Mbeki, at the liberation movement's headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia.

Thabo Mbeki replied as follows:

Dear Peter,

The ANC is indeed very firmly committed to removing all forms of discrimination and oppression in a liberated South Africa. You are correct to point this out. That commitment must surely extend to the protection of gay rights. I would like to believe that my colleagues, Solly Smith and Ruth Mompati, did not want to suggest in any way that a free South Africa would want to see gays discriminated against or subjected to any form of repression.

As a movement, we are of the view that sexual preferences of an individual are a private matter. We would not wish to compromise anybody's right to privacy both now and in the future, and would therefore not wish to legislate or decree how people should conduct their private lives. We have, consequently, never been opposed to gay rights. That position remains unchanged.

As you know, we are always interested to see as many people as possible involved in the struggle against apartheid. We therefore appreciate the initiatives undertaken by gays to involve themselves and other people in this struggle. About this there can be no question.

Yours in the common struggle,
Thabo Mbeki, Lusaka, November 24th 1987

After our Christmas break, *Briefing* will be back with Tatchell's exclusive interview with ANC spokesperson Frene Ginwala on lesbian and gay rights.

Grass roots struggle in Peru

I've been living and working in Huaraz — the "Peruvian Switzerland" — since April.

It's a beautiful place surrounded by snow-capped mountains, and one of the best mountaineering centres in the whole of South America, near Peru's highest mountain, Huascaran, at 6,800m.

It's mostly a tourist town, with lots of cafes and trekking agencies, but in the countryside all around there are thousands of peasant communities.

When I first arrirved, I got a job in a bar/restaurant while I was waiting for my sister to send my degree certificate so that I culd teach in a school or college.

Before long, people were stopping me in the street and asking me to teach them English! (It's a tourist town and people want to learn English — hardly a *sendero luminoso* recruiting ground!).

I jacked in the bar job, which was very low paid even by Peruvian standards ($50 a month) and started teaching privately. I was still planning to teach in a school, even though the pay is also low ($80 a month, a semi-skilled manual wage).

SUTEP, the teachers union, has strong revolutionary elements; it's no coincidence that the Garcia government wishes to keep their pay at poverty level.

A numberof feminists in Huaraz have decided to start a Women's Project here. There is nothing here for women, unlike Lima and other large towns, and we have the support of all the women's groups in Lima to initiate something.

We're thinking of a series of workshops in Huaraz, and especially in the peasant communities, on "Women and Health" (there is *no* health service in the remote villages; people die frequently through lack of simple treatment).

It would be a consciousness-raising action, helping women develop a sense of autonomy, control over their own bodies, reproductive rights and contraception, as well as raising discussion about violence against women.

By Colette O'Hare

All the women involved are socialists, but we need to be careful how we talk about politics. The whole project is "subversive", really, because it means women taking control of their own lives, organising together to improve the lives of everyone in their community, and not accepting authoritarian control or domination at any level.

We're also going to try to open a Women's Refuge here. There is only one in Peru so far, in Lima, but the woman who was its main instigator is going to move back to Huaraz (her home town), and will soon be joining us.

I've decided to stick with private teaching, since this gives me time and money to work with women.

The Garcia government has got progressively worse: pro-military, corporatist, anti-union, anti-student and basically anti-democratic. And yet he remains a "good, sensible, democratic, socialist lad" in the eyes of the rest of the world.

His demagoguery has been compared to Mussolini — there is no doubt he is very popular — but beind the socialist rhetoric is a very nasty, reactionary ideology and practice — not fascist, but more than half way there.

In the military raid on the universities last February more than 1,600 students were imprisoned, manhandled, and interrogated on the grounds of "subversion". The raids discovered nothing but the usual Marxist books which are essential to any Arts or Philosophy course. The majority were gradually released, but some have been detained indefinitely, and twelve have "disappeared".

Trade Union leaders are also having a hard time, and there are a lot of militants held in prison, accused of terrorism. The Peruvian equivalent of the Prevention of Terrorism Act is just a blatant weapon with which to disrupt, harass and terrorise the left — and is used especially against the peasants.

When I was in Lima, I went to visit the miners' encampment at the San Luis stadium and spent some time with the leaders of the "Committe de Armas de Casa", the miners' "wives" organisation. I'm afraid to say it was very depressing.

After more than two years on strike, with the everyday struggle of living in what is really a refugee camp, they now get practically no aid, and feel forgotten. Other trade unions in Peru are also under attack and are not in a position to help financially.

There has been no financial support from international trade unions for nearly one year and the *only* continued support has been from Oxfam, which has donated food for the communal kitchen; but not enough to feed all the children of the 300 families and not enough to provide an adequate nutritious diet.

The neglect of the striking miners families is all the more appalling when you realise that both "Las Canarias" and "Posco" mines have over 50 years worth of gold, lead and zine in them, and that the two mining communities have viable plans for running the mines themselves as workers co-operatives.

A major obstacle they face is Garcia's anti-union stance, his opposition to all workers' initiatives and his programme of increasing militarisation and anti-democratic attacks on students, leftists, and women's groups ("Club de Madres") which are not dominated by his ruling APRA party.

In Lima I also visited Villa el Salvador. It's a "pueblo joven" or "young (shanty) town" of 300,000 inhabitants and for the last four years has had its own local government (united left).

It's a wonderful place — like a little China in the middle of chaotic Peru. They have street, block and area elections and each area manages its own helath centre, communal kitchen, and nursery.

The most dynamic participants have been the women — formed into the Women's Federation of Villa El Salvador. They have also organised workers' collectives in shoe-making, clothes-making and craft work.

The area is now also working to develop an Industrial Centre and an Agricultural Centre.

BTR means Blood, Tears, Repression

The BTR Sarmcol workers recently concluded a highly successful two months on the road in Britain with their play *The Long March*.

Now the tour organisers have launched an ongoing international campaign against BTR, the multinational company whose anti-union activities at their South African Sarmcol subsidiary sparked off the strike around which the play is based.

By Steve Potter
Norwood CLP

The story is shocking. In May 1985 the workers were sacked after striking for recognition of their union MAWU (now the National Union of Metal workers of South Africa — NUMSA).

The 950 surviving strikers still meet regularly each week to press their main demand on BTR: "Negotiate with our union or get out of South Africa!"

Throughout the two and a half year dispute BTR has refused to speak to the strikers or their union. In those years the South African police have violently attacked the strikers' picket lines and Inkatha-linked vigilantes have kidnapped and murdered strike leaders, including Simon Ngubane, author of *The Long March*.

The British tour was the first step in a renewed effort to bring pressure on BTR. Financial analysts reckon that BTR plan to spend some £3 billion in the next three years buying up other companies.

The strike at Hangers, the Putney artificial limb-fitting factory, showed that being bought up by BTR means attacks on jobs, working conditions and union organisation.

NUMSA has called on British supporters of the Sarmcol strike to take action:

- Condemn BTR's refusal to negotiate with the strikers via their union and inform BTR headquarters at Slivertown House, Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PL (01 834 3848) of this condemnation.
- Support the demonstration called by NUMSA for the next BTR shareholders meeting in May 1988 in London.
- Organise support for NUMSA's campaign to target BTR products and financial interests in the UK for protest actions.
- Contribute financially to NUMSA's campaign against BTR and to strikers' families (the immediate target is to raise £10,000 by Christmas).

The Sarmcol Workers Co-operative is now issuing a bulletin to keep British supporters informed of future developments.

The first issue declares one of the campaign's main aims: to spread the word that BTR means *blood, tears and repression*.

In the future the campaign aims to take action against BTR products. Already workers in the car industry and health service have offered to take such action. Regional and area meetings are scheduled to map out future campaigning.

Let's make sure that 1988 sees defeat for BTR and victory for the strikers — and the end of their long march!

If you want yourself or your organisation to be put on *The Long March* mailing list or if you would like to make a contribution to the fighting fund write to:

SAWCO
12 Manor Road Extension
Leicester LE2 4FF
Tel.: (0533) 712041

US/Britain Special Relationship:

An unholy alliance

The INF agreement between the USA and the USSR is to be welcomed as a step in the right direction, however inadvertant.

It is a victory for the peace movements of the west, who succeeded in making intermediate range nuclear weapons highly unpopular.

By Dani Ahrens

Unfortunately, the agreement does not signal the beginning of the end of the arms race, nor is it the last we will hear of the discredited concept of "deterrence".

Whatever the USA does is carefully designed to maintain its sphere of influence in the world. Playing about with the numbers of intermediate range weapons (and probably placing more short range missiles in Germany in the next few years!) has little effect on its overall strategy, which is to pull the European states firmly into line behind NATO, and make sure that even a Gorbachev-led Soviet Union remains cast as the implacable enemy.

NATO's role, since it was set up in 1948, has always been to keep Europe under control. By a variety of means, including the continuous presence of US troops, and the Marshall Plan (which was also handy for getting rid of US food surpluses), the European market for US exports was painstakingly rebuilt after the war.

A large US military presence not only serves to remind the Europeans constantly of their dependence on the US for "security". It also provides a forward base against the Soviet Union, and forms an instant market for American goods.

It is also, of course, well placed to deal with political crisis, such as the election of a left wing Labour government in Britain or the growth of a big movement for reunification in Germany.

The role of the British government, particularly over the last eight years, under the Thatcher-Reagan axis, has been to act as America's most devoted and loyal European.

Splits

Thatcher has consistently stood by Reagan against the European states, even to the extent of causing splits in her own cabinet. While other European nations refused to let the US bombers on course for Libya fly through their airspace, Britain was only too happy to accommodate.

In the last few weeks, this loyalty has been severely tested by the Crash, which, at the same time, provided further evidence of the deep dependence of Britain on the USA in the economic as well as the military sphere.

The concrete links behind the Special Relationship are many and complex. As long as they last, a capitalist Britain would find it very difficult to withdraw from NATO, even if it wanted to.

NICARAGUA

Battle on the coffee front

While Reagan and his Central American supporters continue their byzantine haggling over the Arias Peace Plan in air-conditioned Washington corridors, the campesinos of Nicaragua are gearing up for the annual battle on which their survival depends — *the battle of the coffee harvest*.

With peace supposedly breaking out all over the region, the struggle on the economic front line — the mountainous coffee fields of Matagalpa and Jinotega — is now being waged with increased ferocity.

By Nick Ronan
Margaret Roff Coffee Brigade
Deptford CLP

The seasons's coffee harvest will provide an estimated 85% of Nicaragua's foreign exchange earnings, resources vital to the continuation of the Sandinista's revolutionary programme.

Since the expulsion of the Contras from the main coffee zones, production has more than doubled, but the "low intensity warfare" waged by the CIA and US economic sanctions have drained the economy and created a critical labour shortage in the coffee fields.

Behind Ortega's unilateral concessions to the Peace Accord — reopening the opposition paper *La Prensa*, the declaration of Contra amnesty zones, the freeing of political prisoners, and the appointment of Cardinal Obando y Bravo as mediator — lies an economic crisis which threatens to pre-empt any ceasefire or regional settlement.

The "economy of survival", whereby resources are directed to the countryside to ensure food security, is coming under intense pressure and many rural initiatives in health and education are under threat. The survival of Nicaragua has never before been so dependent as now on the success of the annual coffee harvest.

In the spirit of the Sandinista slogan "emulation is the motor of productivity", 120 British volunteers will join a force of 30,000 international *brigadistas* to work in the coffee fields this season.

On January 17th the last of four brigades organised by the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign will set off for six weeks of hard labour in the cause of the Sandinista Victory of 1979.

The brigade is named after Margaret Roff, Manchester Labour Council and socialist activist who died tragically in a hotel fire while on a tour of Nicaraguan women's health projects last summer.

In February, *Briefing* will carry an on-the-spot account of the work of the Margaret Roff Coffee Brigade and a report of the current situation in Nicaragua.

Donations to the Brigade payable to:
Lewisham Nicaragua Support Group
Co-op Bank, Lewisham High St, 08-90-29
A/c no. 50460865

CND Annual Conference

Make way for the fight against NATO!

In the midst of rapidly changing superpower relations, this year's CND Conference on November 21st-22nd was in danger of being at best an irrelevance and at worst the funeral rite of a declining mass movement.

In the event, it provided pleasant surprises, and showed there is life yet in the old beast.

An amendment was passed committing the CND Executive to a campaign for the removal of US bases and withdrawal from NATO as a matter of priority. There was also Conference's first ever Soviet speaker, who was a star performer at no less than three consecutive workshops.

The NATO and bases issue arose during the decisive debate on strategy.

By BEN LOWE

The CND "wets" who dominated the Executive Committee until this Conference worked a neat trick in organising the debate. A number of resolutions submitted by local groups were blocked, and a number of elements from them were integrated into one wide-ranging resolution on the peace movement's "strategy" for the next year.

The motion consisted of a list of issues that the movement would prioritise, with others on which it would place less emphasis. There was no explanation of how this would fit into the fast-unravelling international situation, nor any recognition of its effects on the political situation in Britain.

Many wondered if there was any "strategy" here at all. Then, in rapid succession, two of the main authors of the resolution, Dan Smith and James Hinton, addressed the Conference.

The duo spelt out the new thinking. New Zealand has seen an anti-nuclear social democratic party get into power, introduce its policy, and allow the US to screw up ANZUS — the NATO equivalent down under.

Britain could do the same. (No mention of the fate of Gough Whitlam's neutrally-inclined Australian government at the hands of the CIA).

We heard further of the US right's desire to quit Europe, and the moves to form a Western European defence union. Here was an opportunity to dump NATO without campaigning against it. (No mention of US pressure to Americanise western Europe before any withdrawal, or the nuclearisation of western Europe via France and Britain).



PHOTO: Bob Naylor

Cruise missiles convoy is surprised by peace demonstrators, 1985.

Smith and Hinton made it clear that US bases and NATO were off their agenda for the peace movement. Such issues could not reach the middle ground of British politics, where apathetic millions sit tight with their nuclear confusions.

Their intention was almost certainly to abandon anti-base work because of the people it attracts, the "Greenham lesbians", the hippies, the caravan and teepee dwellers. The CND press office has been working on a "corporate image" for CND and does not want it spoiled.

Rejected

But the Smith-Hinton strategy was rejected. Conference voted to make anti-base and anti-NATO work a priority. The Greenham women (though less so the sectarian Yellow Gate grouplet) and the hard-working Cruisewatchers were welcomed back on the CND agenda.

The Soviet speaker, a member of the prestigious Institute for US-Canadian affairs, made the startling point that the breakthrough in the arms talks, which had come because of a new Soviet unilateral disarmament measures, had been influenced in no small part by CND and other western European peace movements.

He himself was an ardent supporter of unilateralism, which he saw as a sure route to global disarmament, and was determined to press for further Soviet unilateral measures.

Dilemma

He could not answer the dilemma posed by half-way disarmament: if half the strategic nuclear weapons are destroyed and the US goes ahead with Star Wars, it will then have complete nuclear superiority. What does Moscow do then? How will it get the US back to the negotiating table?

Most of the Conference had little sparkle and gave little grounds for believing that CND will be a major force in the near future. Much of this has to do with the cyclical nature of mass campaigns, but it also owes something to the failure of the movement to devote resources to the issues that motivate so many of its activists.

Demands

Like many others, I have long given up any hope that CND will respond to Conference demands to campaign against US bases and NATO. This is why I joined with others to form the Campaign for Non-Alignment (CNA).

Together with the Cruise resistance network, CNA will be drawing the most important lesson of Glasnost and the INF talks: that the US presence in Britain and Europe must end. There will be a series of major actions next year and a strategy debate at our first annual conference on February 6-7th.

For details about the Campaign for Non-Alignment, contact:
CNA, c/o Jeremy Corbyn MP, Red Rose Centre, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG.
Tel.: (01) 263 7265

POLES APART!

Would *you* buy a package of price increases off these men?

One look at the hard-faced, incompetent bureaucrats surrounding General Jaruzelski should be enough to answer the question.

By HARRY SLOAN

In a classically bureaucratic effort at populism, Jaruzelski had attempted to win an overall majority of the electorate to support his policy of "solving" the accumulated crisis from 40 years of Stalinist bungling at the expense of the working class.

This grotesque miscalculation ran into the residual strength of the proscribed underground Solidarnosc movement (which advocated a boycott of the referendum), more subtle opposition from the Church (which ignored it) and the inherent scepticism of the Polish people.

The rejection of Jaruzelski's unattractive package by a majority of those voting, while a third of the electorate stayed away, delivered a double blow to the nose of the regime. It has set back Jaruzelski's efforts to secure new loans from the IMF and World Bank to bail out the floundering, mismanaged economy.

Any other result would have been astounding. Offered the chance to vote themselves into a 300% increase in their rents and heating costs, a doubling of some food prices and an overall 40% price hike next year, who could blame Poles for staying away from the polls?

Jaruzelski's rather emaciated "carrot" designed to lure more voters to the booths was an offer to increase citizens' "participation in running the country". Everyone knew that the bureaucracy would remain firmly in charge.

Jaruzelski asked if people favoured "the Polish model for the deep democratisation of political life." A new leader might have carried more conviction on this than the same General whose own "Polish model" six years ago involved rolling the tanks onto the streets to repress what was perhaps the most democratic trade union in the world and crush any organised dissent.

The rebuff in the referendum denies the regime the mandate to push through the traumatic policies they had hoped to impose next year. But it will not alter the basic direction in which they are looking to solve the economic problems — through lifting restrictions on private enterprise, doing deals with capitalist banks and institutions, and raising prices while 'olding down wages.

Solidarnosc however has received a bonus boost from the result, at the very point where new sections of Polish workers will be forced into conflict with the regime's policies.

Jaruzelski will have to move carefully if he is not to trigger a revival of mass resistance while his own authority remains so transparently weak.

With Gorbachev's ability to intervene restricted by the processes of Glasnost and Perestroika at home, and with simultaneous crisis and upheavals in Rumania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the objective prospects for Polish workers successfully challenging their Stalinist rulers is if anything more favourable than in 1981.

Local Round-up

FAB EVENTS

January 16th
DAY OF ACTION
January 21st
Sponsored by the TUC:
Assemble:
1.30, Central Hall, Westminster
2.30
Lobby Houses of Parliament
followed by Women-only Torchlight Procession
March 19th
Assemble:
12 noon, Hyde Park

Action round-up

Send us short reports of what your FAB group is doing; so we can print them and help everyone keep in touch.
Copy deadline for next issue: Tues Jan 5th, urgent info phone 01 733 7016 Weds 6th, Thurs 7th.

BRIGHTON

Brighton FAB organised a 350-strong march and rally on Saturday November 28th. The demo was loud and angry, and has made Brighton people aware of FAB's existence.

We intend to build on this success, and that of the 150-strong picket of Tory MP Andrew Bowden's surgery in early November, by organising benefit gigs, a torchlight procession on January 16th, continuing our weekly meetings and Saturday morning petitioning, and mobilising for the national FAB lobby of Parliament on January 21st.

One of the weaknesses of the group has been that very few people outside the revolutionary left have been involved. Although it is good (and something of an achievement in itself) that the SWP, the RCP, the Communist Party, *Briefing* supporters, and other left Labour Party activists have been able to work together in one group, we will only defeat the Alton Bill if we can draw in a wider circle of people, including trade unionists and Labour Party members.

The key to success is to build as broad a campaign as possible, and specifically to involve the labour movement and women's organisations. If we make a concerted effort to do that between now and January, we will build a strong and effective group, which will contribute to defeating the Alton Bill and going on to fight for the extension of the limited rights we now have, and give women real control over our own fertility.

Dani Ahrens

Sheffield

Some 150 people attended the first Sheffield FAB Campaign meeting, organised by the Women's Unit of Sheffield Council on November 11th. The slogans agreed at this meeting are:

- Fight the Alton Bill;
- As Early as Possible, as Late as Necessary;
- A Woman's Right to Choose.

Meetings of FAB take place every Wednesday at 7.30pm in the Town Hall. Alternate meetings will have an educational element to stimulate political discussion and assist people in campaigning.

We have agreed the following proposals for action:

- Street petitioning and leafletting every Saturday;
- Public meeting on December 10th, Memorial Hall, 7.30pm;
- Demonstration in Sheffield on January 16th;
- Set up sub-groups to organise active support in local trade unions, Labour Party, students, community groups, etc.

Publicity and fundraising sub-groups have also been set up and the work of the campaign is co-ordinated by a committee which meets weekly.

Men are involved in the campaign but the co-ordinating committee is all women. This is by chance rather than on principle. No vote was taken on this question, despite disagreement at the initial meeting.

The local Trades Council has affiliated to FAB and the Women's Council is co-ordinating the Labour Party work. So far there has been a good response from wards and constituencies.

Labour MPs David Blunkett, Bill Michie, Martin Flannery and Richard Caborn are opposing the Alton Bill, but Pat Duffy is said to be one of its sponsors. The Tory MP, Irvin Patrick, is so far non-committed.

Contact: Emma Tipping, 420 003

South Wales

FAB Groups have now been established in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea, and are being co-ordinated through regular South Wales meetings.

The Cardiff group has produced its own leaflet and has been petitioning in Cardiff's shopping centres every Saturday.

We are lobbying local MPs and held a fundraising event on December 6th.

We are actively seeking trade union branch affiliations to the local campaign as well as to FAB nationally; and some of these are beginning to come in.

Participation in the campaign is roughly evenly split between Labour Party members and others. Students have been active, with Students Unions putting resources and organisation into the campaign.

We are planning a public meeting and demonstration on January 16th.

Stevi Jackson

Birmingham witch-hunt

Disciplined for my ideas!

I was suspended from the Birmingham District Council Labour Group on April 7th 1987.

That was the night of the well-publicised Black Sections rally which was used as a pretext by the NEC to remove Sharon Atikin as a PPC for Nottingham East Constituency.

The resolution "suspending" me from the Group also suggested that moves should be made for the whip to be withdrawn, and the National Constitutional Committee (NCC) should be requested to take steps to expel me from the Labour Party.

No reasons were given in the resolution for these moves. The officers of the ward and constituency I represent as a Councillor have attempted to obtain clarification of the charges being levelled against me for the last eight months; but the leadership of the Labour Group have refused to explain.

Because of the Group's failure to specify any charges against me, I have formally appealed to the NCC against my "suspension" from the Group.

At last, in late November, I received a letter informing me that a joint meeting of the Labour Group and the Birmingham District Labour Party (DLP) had been convened to level disciplinary charges against me; and the Group officers would be recommending that the whip should be withdrawn.

The letter stated that I was charged with:

- Leaving a full Council meeting early without permission of the Whip;
- Attending a Black Sections rally April 7th;
- General problems over the past 2 years.

By Cllr Phil Murphy Birmingham

The joint meeting was held on November 30th. It took the form of the Chief Whip, Cllr Bill Gray, enumerating a number of "problems" he claims the Group has had with me. They were of the most frivolous nature: e.g. that he and I had an exchange of letters whilst I was Vice Chair of the Race Relations Committee and he was Chair!

Gray also emphasised the fact that I had left a full Council meeting early and attended the Black Sections rally on April 7th.

I was given a chance to defend myself. My defence simply amounted to the fact that I had not infringed the constitution of the Labour Party, or the standing orders of Birmingham Labour Group.

The charges against me at no point attempted to stipulate any infringement of the Party's constitution or the Group's standing orders.

Members of the Group and the DLP Executive were allowed to express their views. Unfortunately the discussion was curtailed.

Several Group members pointed out that the Group officers had not indicated which of the standing orders of the Group I'd infringed, and that supporting Black Sections was not against the Labour Party constitution.

One Group member pointed out that he, and others, had not attended the Council meeting on April 7th, nor given any apologies for their absence. Yet no disciplinary action had been taken against them.

Group Secretary Cllr John Charlton (regarded as the leader of the right wing on the Group) suggested that the Black Sections rally on April 7th had damaged the Labour Party both nationally and locally.

He insisted on this, even when it was pointed out that it was *the letter* to the invited guests which had generated the national publicity for the meeting.

Whip

A resolution for the whip to be withdrawn from me was then put to the Group. Group Chair, Cllr Ken Barton, refused a call from Group members that I should be asked whether or not I accepted the Labour Group's whip.

Council Leader Cllr Dick Knowles said it was an irrelevant question!

By 35 votes to 19 the joint meeting decicded that the whip should be withdrawn.

It was an extraordinary "joint" meeting. DLP Executive members had not been informed of this "joint" meeting. No member of the Group DLP Executive had been given a copy of the charges against me beforehand.

When it came to the vote, there was no resolution before the meeting, and the Group Chair had to formulate one verbally.

The Chief Whip actually referred to matters which he was personally involved in, acting as prosecutor and judge at the same time.

Because of these anomolies and many more I will be appealing to the NCC against the decision for the whip to be withdrawn. It is difficult to see how the NCC can uphold the decision in these extraordinary circumstances.

One important consequence of this affair is the attempt by the Birmingham Labour Group to establish that mere support of Black Sections is a matter for suspension and expulsion from a Labour Group — and indeed from the Labour Party.

However, there is a rationale behind all these seemingly inexplicable developments. Over the three and a half years during which I've been a Councillor I have attempted to change the traditional "master-servant" relationship between black Councillors and the Leadership of the Labour Group.

The Leadership here in Birmingham has achieved an unprecedented level of servility from black Councillors; and no doubt see my challenge as threatening their interests.

I am up currently up for reselection as a candidate for the next election. The moves against me are no doubt intended to help secure my deselection; or, if I am reselected, to undermine my position with the electorate.

However, all Labour Party members should be concerned about this affair. The right wing here in Birmingham are attempting to have Party members disciplined and expelled merely for their "ideas."

We always warned that the expulsions would turn into an authoritarian attempt by those in the leadership to get rid of views they don't agree with: now we see the proof.

Democratise football!

The Football League Management Committee is a "cartel" run by "incompetent, selfish, bungling amateurs".

This is a view many football supporters have held for a long time.

However, when the words come from a person who not only chairs a first division football club but also owns a national newspaper, they suddenly become news.

Robert Maxwell, who already owned(directly or indirectly) Oxford United and Derby County, now wanted to own a third First Division football club (Watford), and his words showed his frustration at the League's refusal to support this ambition.

Despite the stitch up subsequently agreed between Maxwell and the League, the issues remain important.

Maxwell has a point. After all, when it comes to football, he should know an "incompetent, selfish, bungling amateur" when he sees one.

When he purchased Oxford United a few years ago nobody was able to find any previous trace of involvement or interest in professional football in his career. His role on the Football League Television Negotiating Committee was not much of a success, its main achievement being blank screens for half a season.

Why this sudden interest? Why the opposition from the League? Who is the biggest humbug?

Rich people buy football clubs for a number of reasons — money, status, power or a genuine wish to do some good for the game.

The fourth reason is rarely apparent. Football attracts a great deal of media coverage and the ability to bask in reflected glory is often a prime attraction.

By Cllr Craig Brewin Haringey

There is also money to be made. The role of property developers in football has been highlighted by the role of David Bulstrode at Fulham.

But the buying and selling of football clubs in itself is big-money business. Ernie Clay made millions selling Fulham and Elton John is asking for £2 million for his shares in Watford.

Clubs are also passed on from father to son; for example Glickstein at Charlton Athletic, Edwards at Manchester United, and, of course, Kevin Maxwell at Oxford United.

Robert Maxwell's motivation appears to be power and publicity. When Maxwell owns a club it is never easy to forget the fact. He also now had a potential involvement in 15% of the First Division — which would have made him one of the most powerful forces in football.

It is this 15% figure which was at the heart of the League's objections. The League has never before shown much concern over people having an interest in more than one club.

When it became known that Ken Wheldon had shares in both Walsall and Birmingham City no action was taken. Anton Johnson was able to buy his way into both Rotherham and Southend United and the Moores (owners of Littlewoods) are allowed to hold 40% of Everton and 25% of Liverpool.

However, unlike Maxwell, these people have never tried to threaten the power of the League's rulers.

The League Management Committee says it is concerned about the image of the game, particularly if transfers between Maxwell's clubs take place or convenient results occur towards the end of the season.

The League President Phil Carter should know a lot about *suspect transfer dealings. It was his club Everton that was responsible for one of the most shoddy deals in recent years.*

In 1986 Everton paid Birmingham City £300,000 for Wayne Clarke and reserve player Stuart Storer. By valuing Storer at a ridiculous £120,000 Birmingham were able to claim that Clarke had been sold for £180,000.

Birmingham had agreed to pay Wolverhampton Wanderers, Clarke's previous club, a percentage of any future transfer fees. Thus the effect of the action agreed together by Everton and Birmingham was money being withheld from Wolves.

The main problem for the League is that Maxwell is merely playing the system that got the Management Committee into its present position. Wealth buys power in football — and also to some extent success. To stop the likes of Maxwell it is necessary to challenge the system itself, not perpetuate the cartel.

The best the League can come up with is to threaten to amend Regulation 80 of its rules, which was designed to prevent influence in more than one club, but has so far proved as easy to get around as the Huddersfield Town defence.

Real democracy in football is possible and ironically it is the measures brought in to control fans that could provide a mechanism for this.

So-called membership schemes are in fact nothing more than supporter registration schemes. If they could be converted into *real, independent, democratic bodies, they could form a means by which supporters could have a real* involvement in individual clubs and the management of the League itself.

At present the Management Committee is elected by the club owners. Why should it not be elected by the supporters?

With Calderdale Council and Hammersmith and Fulham Council both using their influence to try to get supporters on the boards of local clubs, and with the Football Supporters Association growing daily, the idea of supporters' involvement in club management might not be as far fetched as it may at first sound.