LABOUR BRIEFING
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- Anti-imperialist Conferences
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40p

TIME TO CHALLENGE KINNOCK!

The Kinnock-Hattersley leadership has failed the test, balked at every hurdle, squandered every opportunity. It has refused to learn any lessons from Labour's general election disaster.

Every day, its gospel of capitulation and collaboration is proved bogus by events in the real world — from the stock market crash to the nurses' strike.

Only a new leadership, committed to socialist policies and tried and tested in the class struggle, can offer hope to those millions eager for a real alternative to Thatcher.

By the *Labour Briefing* Editorial Board

There is no more time for delay. The left must challenge both Kinnock and Hattersley at the next Party Conference.

The Party in the constituencies and the trade unions must be offered a real choice — an alternative leadership standing on a clear socialist platform.

Shaking the dust off the electoral college should require no apologies. Democratic rights (won by the left in years of hard struggle) are worth nothing if they are not regularly exercised.

Of course all the old shibboleths will be used against us. "Leadership contests are a distraction." "A challenge to Kinnock will cause disunity." These tired cries should carry no weight at all. They are the arguments of every tin-pot dictator trying to escape judgement by the electorate. And self-righteous demands for unity come ill from those who failed to support miners, printworkers, teachers, nurses, local government workers, black people fighting racism, women fighting the Alton Bill, lesbians and gay men fighting for basic civil rights, and countless others in struggle. *That* disunity has cost the labour movement dear. The people responsible for it must be replaced.

Right winger David Warburton sharply criticised the leadership's ineptitude. He was promptly despatched to the GMB's equivalent of Siberia. John Prescott toyed with a challenge to Hattersley. Trade union bureaucrats and Tribune Group MPs were galvanised out of their customary lethargy to head him off at the pass.

What are they afraid of? Why is the leadership so reluctant to defend its record to the Party?

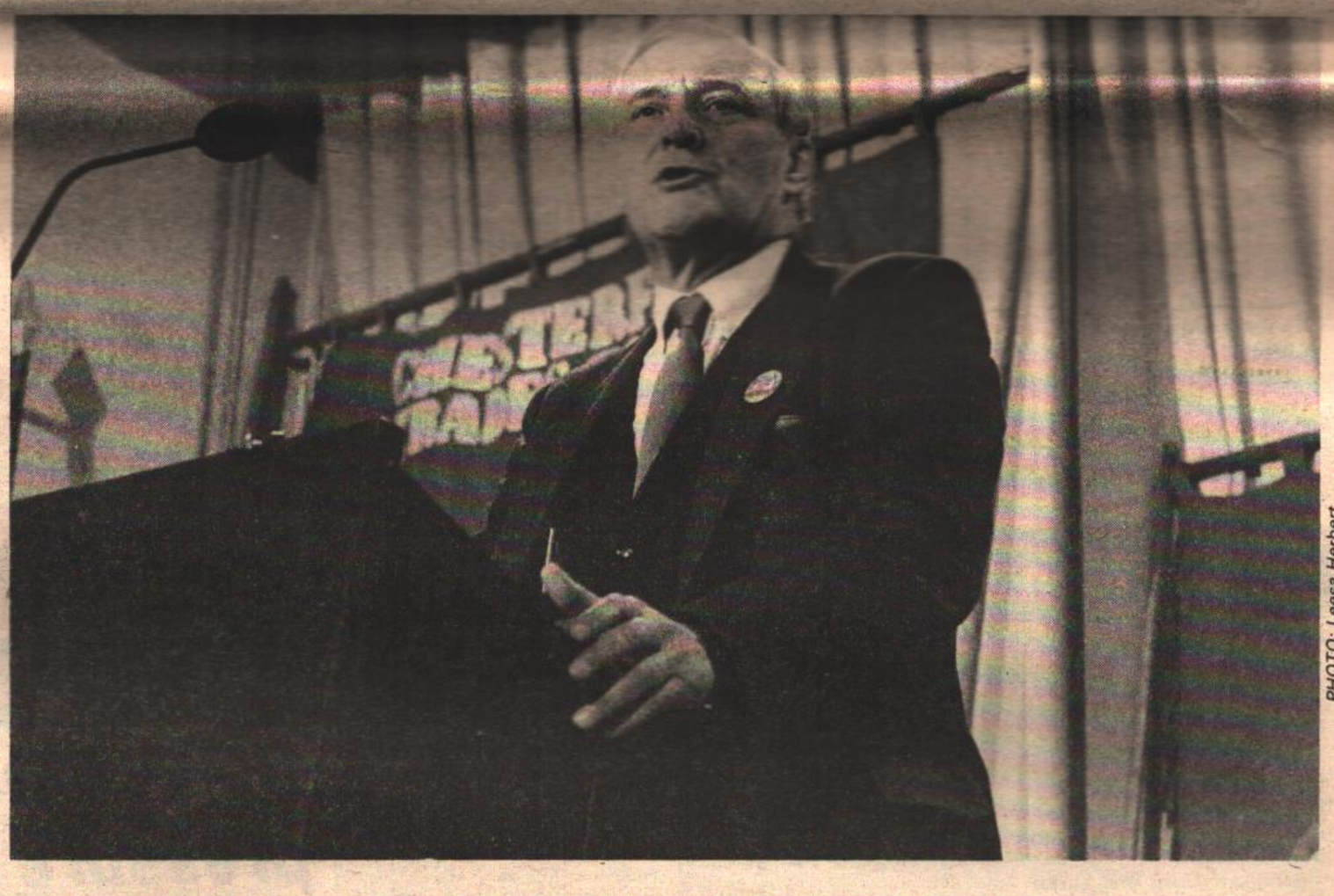


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Tony Benn was the prime mover of the Socialist Conference in Chesterfield which showed the eagerness amongst the rank and file to organise for socialist policies. Recently, Tony Benn described the current Labour Party Leadership as "wretchedly defensive and apologetic". Now is the time to make our challenge.

The fact is they know an open contest will give a focus and a platform to everyone discontented with a regime which Benn himself recently described as "wretchedly defensive and apologetic".

Like Thatcher, Kinnock's strongest suit has been the cry "there is no alternative". It's up to the left to show that there is indeed an alternative, and that it commands substantial support in the Party.

Of course there is little chance of unseating Kinnock and his minions this time around. But, in the long run, failure to grasp the nettle and launch our challenge now will only weaken the left. A vigorous national campaign — uniting under its banners all those on whom Kinnock has turned his back — will inspire and activate the left in the constituencies and the trade unions. It will also provide an incentive for people in struggle currently outside the Party to get inside and join our fight for a socialist leadership.

The Chesterfield Conference showed that many people are eager to join battle with the Tories and to advance socialist ideas. The development of socialist policies, and the campaign to win mass support for them, is inseparable from a challenge to the leadership. The spirit of Chesterfield must be brought into the Party, and into the trade unions, and a direct challenge to the leadership will be one of the most dramatic ways of doing so.

Nothing will be gained by waiting one, two or three years. Daily events reveal Kinnockism for the dangerous folly it is. But it will not go away of its own accord. It must be directly confronted by an unapologetic campaign for socialist policies and a socialist leadership.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Campaign Round-up

Stop Clause 28!

A national co-ordinating committee to Stop Clause 28 is now firmly established. It is meeting weekly and has set up a number of sub-groups — Administration, Finance, Lobbying, Religious Groups, Labour Movement, Press & Publicity. Alternate meetings are open to all: heterosexual supporters are urged to come and find out how they can help. Policy and decision-making committee meetings are open to lesbians and gay men *only* — in order that the campaign is politically led by lesbians and gay men. Organisations and groups opposed to the Clause should send representatives to meetings. NUS London have donated office space and a direct phone line is being put in.

Contact STOP CLAUSE 28 on 01-637-1181 or 01-631-3541 (Rebecca or Maria)

Meetings every Wednesday in London, 6pm: phone above for venue

Press & Publicity: Contact Julie 01-272-8900

Labour Movement: Contact Sam 0272-279091 or Sarah 01-281-4834

***All* the sub-groups need more hands on deck — phone office to volunteer.**

The Lords

The Local Government Bill had its first reading in the Lords on January 11th. Debate on the Clause banning "promotion" of homosexuality (formerly Clause 27, now renumbered Clause 28) was thus lumped together with compulsory competitive tendering and contract compliance.

Opposing the Clause, Baroness Stedman said, *"As I read it, anything done to inform people about who or what homosexuals really are could become an offence and could make any attempt to attempt to counter prejudice and fear illegal."*

Labour Front bench spokesperson Lord Graham of Edmonton argued that *"this government have created a climate of fear and suspicion. There will be many a Council that wishes to provide services and will be advised not to do so..."*

Lord Preston put it more strongly, saying *"this is a nasty and vindictive Clause. I am fearful that the nasty and vindictive people who promote it, and who have misled others, regard it as ... the first step in a general attack on homosexuality. ...our descendants will look at us in amazement and dismay ... and certainly with shock if we allow this clause to pass into law."*

Predictably those supporting the Clause made much of the need to "protect" young children. Lord Boyd-Carpenter referred to the wrong, wicked, and evil practices of Haringey Council's plans to put positive images of lesbians and gays in front of young people. Lord Bellwin introduced the old lie about schools teaching children that heterosexuality is undesirable and the family and marriage are not a proper basis for life.

Even those speaking against the Clause felt obliged to declare their opposition to the "promotion of homosexuality". All implied that some Local Authorities had gone "over the top" — namely Haringey and ILEA.

Lord McIntosh of Haringey claimed falsely that Haringey Council's "positive images" proposals had been rejected by parents and governors and therefore never implemented.

So-called "promotion" is thus increasingly equated with any policy calling for "positive images". In opposing this concept Labour appears to be in agreement with the government, and wishes only to exclude from the proposed ban "respectable" anti-discrimination work.

The Amendments

The Association of London Authorities (ALA) is canvassing the Lords for support for five amendments to the Clause.

While the ALA have prioritised work against Clause 28, including staff resources, it was not possible for them to consult widely within the lesbian and gay movement on the wording of the amendments. This has led to some criticism of the ALA's amendments, from lesbians in particular, which the ALA feels in unjustified.

The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR), in common with the Stop Clause 28 Campaign, has stated that their overwhelming priority is to build outright opposition to the Clause, especially within the labour movement.

Amendment

LCLGR states: *"We do not believe the Clause is effectively amendable. Therefore the only amendment we uncritically support is the ALA's No. 5 — which simply says 'Delete Clause 28'.*

"We do appreciate the ALA's efforts to limit the damage if the Clause is passed. We accept that this is the endeavour of Amendments, 3 and 4, from the Labour front bench, which seek to exclude anti-discriminatory work from the ban on 'promotion'."

However, LCLGR feels that these amendments (as well as Amendment 2) would result in endless test cases in the courts. They point to the experiences of lesbian mothers in custody cases as clear examples of how badly lesbians and gays will fare in court battles.

Amendment 1 has been so controversial that both LCLGR and Stop Clause 28 have asked the ALA to withdraw it. This amendment seeks to define what should constitute "promotion" as "advocating that homosexuality is preferable to heterosexuality or seeking to persuade persons who are not homosexual to become so."

LCLGR feels strongly that it is not for those opposed to the Clause to start defining it for its supporters. Tactically, it may well be better for the campaign to keep the definition of "promotion" as wide and loose as possible; this proposed redefinition would still attack a number of lesbians and gay men, including political lesbians and lesbian separatists.

Finally, LCLGR argue that it is appalling that the amendment seeks to differentiate between "good" homosexuals (those who do not "promote") and "bad" homosexuals (those who do).

Labour and trade union response

The Greater London Labour Party (GLLP) and CLPs all over the country have condemned Clause 28 as a gross attack on lesbian and gay civil liberties and on education rights.

The GLLP's Policy Committee have endorsed the position taken by its Lesbian and Gay Working Party: outright opposition to the Clause and resistance to Amendment 1 and any other amendments which seek only to qualify rather than defeat the Clause as a whole.

The GLLP supports Stop Clause 28, as well as the demonstration in Manchester on February 20th, and is circulating mobilising material.

By Sarah Roelofs

COHSE expressed strong support for the campaign against the Clause at the Policy Comittee meeting and some London branches may help with transport to the demonstration.

LCLGR has asked Campaign and Tribune Group MPs to oppose the Clause in its entirety and to publicise their opposition. A special emergency appeal is being sent to all LCLGR's trade union affiliates.

NALGO has stated its opposition to the Clause and their General Secretary sent a solidarity message to the January 9th demonstration.

No divide & rule!

Like a well of poisoned water in the desert, possible salvation from Clause 28's worst effects is being offered to lesbians and gay men in the form of an insidious, nasty little piece of argument. It is embodied in Amendment 1, but runs through all Labour's front bench amendments and speeches, and has even raised its ugly head within the wider lesbian and gay movement. It is the latest version of a tactic long favoured by reactionaries — divide and rule.

In Amendment 1, and elsewhere, the Labour leadership is trying to divide respectable anti-discrimination work by sensible and decent lesbians and gays from disreputable so-called "promotion" work done by hard left lesbian and gay lunatics who are clearly neither sensible nor decent. Even strong opponents of the Clause have stated their abhorence of "promotion" and by this they clearly refer to "positive images" campaigns.

The argument takes different forms in other circles. There is antagonism to lesbians who are accused of attempting to bring politics into a campaign that should be civil liberties based only (are civil liberties not political?).

There is reluctance by some people to ensure that the campaign of opposition to the Clause is advancing positions that defend *all* lesbians and *all* gay men *irrespective* of our agreement or disagreement with, for example, the politics of lesbian separatism.

In the short term this approach may benefit "respectable" lesbians and gay men (including materially), but it is the united breadth of outraged anger from the lesbian and gay movement that has ensured its success so far, and can sustain it into the future.

MODEL RESOLUTION

This ..... is totally opposed to Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill recognising that not only is it the worst attack on lesbian and gay rights since (male) homosexuality was first criminalised over 100 years ago, but that it also represents a major assault on education.

Clause 28 will not only legitimise an increased wave of homophobic hysteria and drastically curtail all work in support of lesbian and gay rights, but will also legally enforce ignorance. It will become illegal to discuss this subject under any circumstances in the education system.

This ..... therefore resolves to:

1. Send this resolution and an accompanying letter explaining our views to the PLP, NEC and MPs Jeff Rooker & Jack Cunningham demanding that the Labour party issue a public statement of total opposition to the clause and that a three line whip is imposed in the Lords and Commons.
2. Support the Manchester demonstration on February 20th with its banner and requests region and the national party/union do likewise.
3. Send reps to STOP CLAUSE 27/8 Campaign (elected at this meeting).
4. Demand that our MP raise our opposition with PLP and Labour Lords, also that s/he issues a public statement to the press.

Action Checklist

- **Resolutions condemning the Clause in its entirety through CLPs, trade union branches, YSs, Women's Sections, etc. (see model resolution).**
- **Initiate anti-Clause 28 public meetings with broad platforms.**
- **Set up local Stop Clause 28 groups to co-ordinate local activity, always ensuring they are led by lesbians and gay men themselves.**
- **Contact local lesbian and gay groups and ask how best you can support the campaign.**
- **Ask trade unions and Trades Councils to affiliate to the campaign and send representatives to it.**
- **Lobby and write to your MP.**
- **Write personal letters to your local Lord or Lady.**
- **Pull out all the stops to mobilise and build for the February 20th demonstration in Manchester.**
- **Book transport to the demonstration *now*.**
- **Contact local media.**

Future activities

Note dates now!

Saturday February 20th:
National demonstration in Manchester. Assemble All Saints, Oxford Rd, 1pm. Festival & rally at Free Trade Hall, 3pm.

Friday April 8th:
National Day of Action

Saturday April 23rd:
National Civil Liberties Demonstration, London

Mid-June:
Lesbian Strength Demonstration and Festival

Saturday June 25th:
Lesbian & Gay Pride National Demonstration and Festival

Prison Policy

Prisons without walls

In America electronic tagging and house arrest is used as an alternative to imprisonment.

Between 1985 and 1986 10,000 adults in America were under house arrest, many also subject to some form of electronic tagging. Private companies are often used to monitor the offenders.

The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee in April 1987 published a report *State and Use of Prisons*. It suggests that the Home Office consider the American system for use in England and Wales.

By Pauline Purnell Edgbaston CLP

Socialists need to consider their response to the use of such systems which can raise serious questions concerning civil liberties.

Technology is moving fast into the most private corners of our lives. Councils are already considering placing videos in public toilets to stop vandalism!

Videos — also used in house arrest — are being considered by Birmingham City Council for use in its homes for the elderly as a safety monitoring device.

It can easily be seen that use of such controls will not be restricted to people who could have been sent to prison. Modern technology will be used as a form of social control monitor.

Imprisoned

Throughout the world socialists are imprisoned for their beliefs. Electronic tagging and house arrest would isolate people, making their individual causes silent and easy to lose, their plight more easily forgotten, individual ill treatment not reported, mass movements easily silenced — with private companies reaping the profits.

A socialist society would need to consider carefully the need to incarcerate anyone but the most violent or disturbed but the alternatives it uses to prison must not be an infringement of basic human rights.

We must also be aware of modern technology and the implications for its use in the futherance of a capitalist society.

Release the Guildford 4!

Add labour movement pressure to the campaign!

Four innocent people are still wrongfully imprisoned for the Guildford and Woolwich bombings.

Their plight is an indictment of the British legal system. It makes a mockery of the British government's claims that Irish people can expect a fair trial in this country.

The four were the first victims of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which was rushed through Parliament in 1974.

- All signed statements during extended periods of detentions.
- They were denied many basic rights under the PTA and were subject to threats and beatings.
- Their "confessions" contained numerous inconsistencies and were all later retracted.

The "confessions" were the only evidence presented against them in court. They were given some of the longest sentences in legal history.

The IRA bombing campaign continued after their arrest for over a year. It stopped suddenly after the capture of the Balcombe Street IRA unit in December 1975. Three members of this gang immediately confessed to the Guildford and Woolwich bombings, providing detailed, accurate and independent accounts of how they carried them out.

By Conor Foley on behalf of the Guildford 4 Relatives Committee

On the basis of this new evidence, the Guildford 4 applied for a retrial. Instead, their case was referred to the court of appeal, where three judges upheld the convictions.

Last August, in response to growing public concern and international embarrassment, the Home Secretary ordered a police investigation into the case. He is insisting that he needs new evidence before the case can be reopened. This is untrue. Nevertheless, new evidence confirming the alibis of two of the accused has been presented to him.

An all-Party delegation from Ireland were assured that the investigation would have a result by Christmas. Instead it seems to have been used as a cynical delaying tactic, designed to divert attention from the case until after the Irish government ratified its extradition treaty.

But the campaign for the immediate release of the Guildford 4 is gaining momentum. Representatives of the campaign have toured the USA and lobbied the European parliament. Later on this month, we are meeting the influential American Friends of Ireland pressure group.

If the Guildford 4 are released it will be because the British government decides it has become more embarrassing to keep them in prison than to let them go. The labour movement can help act now to increase that pressure.

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Third Force Farce

Behind the sideshow tomfoolery of the Steel-Maclennan policy document — and the increasingly ludicrous spectacle of the SDP and Liberals demonstrating their conciliatory powers, lies a serious lesson for the Labour Party.

It is not an accident that the attempt to chart a middle course in British politics has run aground. These people are hopelessly trapped between the two great social forces which make up the country: the working class and the ruling class. The "third force" is a myth. Like all myths it can mean anything, everything, and nothing. No wonder its adherents so rapidly fall out with one another, and find it impossible to agree on the most elementary policy questions.

What can possibly unite them, apart from a thirst for power? David Owen has a clear strategy: he wants another Thatcherite party which can compete directly with the Tories. The others still claim to speak for some broad national consensus. But in capitalist society there is no such consensus. The pursuit of this chimera may make or break the careers of a few (obnoxious) individuals but it cannot produce a coherent and durable political force.

What it can do, of course, is block the growth of the real and only alternative to Thatcher — Labour. Already it has handed the Tories two election victories on a plate. For the ruling class, the function of the Third Force has always been to keep the left out, and strengthen the right within the workers' movement.

Eric Hobsbawm, Stuart Weir and the other coalitionists (covert as well as overt) in the Labour Party must now be scratching their heads. With which of the rapidly multiplying Liberal and SDP factions do they intend to make a pact? And what on earth could the electorate make of it?

Steel will move on to a career in advertising. Maclennan will return to the obscurity from which he was so unjustly wrenched. As for the rest, the dustbins of history will soon be overflowing.

"Labour listens"

Kinnock announced to the world that "Labour is listening" and in Brighton last week it opened its ears to the police, the Chambers of Commerce, the Women's Institute, among others.

Women fighting the Alton Bill? Lesbians and Gays fighting Clause 28? Nurses on strike? Miners fighting a brutal disciplinary code? Council workers and local communities fighting the cuts? Our leaders have proved curiously reluctant to listen to them.

And once we have worked out exactly who it is we are supposed to be listening to, do we listen in silence? Do we answer their questions? If so, how do we answer them? What do we do with whatever it is they tell us?

Despite Kinnock's disclaimer, this exercise will be seen by nearly everyone as the public relations gimmick it is. We are using a product marketing technique, and the clear implication is that we will alter the product to fit the market.

There are clear and gaping divisions in British society, and fundamentally conflicting interests. The Alliance is now paying the price for trying to straddle them. "Labour Listens" will trip over the same cracks, and turn into a solemn farce. It will certainly be of no interest to the working class and the oppressed to whom Labour should be listening and offering leadership and a real programme for socialism.

The theatricals will be heavily stage-managed. The impression will be given that Labour is considering all manner of conflicting views — and doing nothing about any of them. The irony is that because we will appear to stand for nothing in particular, people will not waste their time talking to us.

Scargill — forward ever!

Arthur Scargill's victory over his British Coal-backed rival John Walsh is a tribute both to the man himself and to the tens of thousands of miners who re-elected him.

After the bitter defeat of the Great Strike, and the non-stop attacks on NUM members' jobs, pay, working conditions and union organisation which followed, Scargill's success at the ballot box (despite media and management interference) is a testimony to his political courage and principle.

As large sections of the trade union movement give up the ghost and prostrate themselves before the Tories, Arthur Scargill's undimmed determination shines out — a beacon of hope for the working class.

Upping the stakes in the NHS

The special NHS centrespread in this issue of *Briefing* paints a picture of abject terror and soaring hope — terror felt at the spectacle of a rapidly disintegrating health service, and the human misery accompanying it; hope stirred by the recent upsurge of public protest and industrial action, the beginnings of a grass roots campaign to save the NHS.

The Tories have responded to this crisis by trying, once again, to shift the terms of debate. The purpose of John Moore's "review" is to distract an outraged working class from the main question: the government's failure to make sufficient resources available to the NHS.

As in education and housing, so in the health service. The Tories are trying to turn to advantage a crisis of their own making — by a full frontal ideological attack.

You'd think by now Labour's leaders would have wised up to this trick. You'd think they'd know you can only meet this kind of offensive with an even more determined offensive of your own.

The NHS is the one policy area in which Thatcher has always been opposed by a clear majority of the population. The current upsurge among NHS workers is therefore a tremendous opportunity for Labour. Tragically, it looks like our leaders will spurn it once again.

But that is no excuse for socialists to watch the ever-widening battlefront from a distance.

Wherever and however, local health campaigns should be organised, rooted in the labour movement, but reaching out to the vast numbers of people horrified by Thatcher's homicidal butchery of the NHS.

The national health union leaders will have no trouble finding excuses to isolate or defuse these local initiatives. We have to keep them under constant pressure.

The time for speeches and publicity gimmicks is over. The NHS will be saved on the picket lines and in the streets.

In a bold gambit — intended to turn a glaring political weakness into a strength — the Tories have raised the stakes in the battle over the NHS.

We must respond in kind.

Fight the Alton Bill!

Action days boost future plans

The success of FAB activities held on January 16th and 21st gives us a platform for a huge mobilisation on March 19th.

By Ann Potter
Lambeth Against Alton
and Gill Lee
Labour Briefing Women

Sections of the soft left will soon swing behind the Tory mainstream's aim of a 24-week time limit (with an exemption for foetal abnormality) unless we mobilise *now* against *any* restrictions on our rights.

Women must have the right to control their bodies in order to control their lives.

Now the Alton Bill is through its second reading it, due in part to the anti-abortion votes of Labour MPs, we must demand a 3-line whip against the Bill. Labour MPs must vote in line with Conference policy.

Emergency resolutions should be passed calling again for an end to the conscience clause, abolished at 1985 Conference by 5 million to 600,000. Anti-choice Labour MPs are now claiming the 1987 NEC statement reasserted their right to cry "conscience" when they trample on women's rights.

Local Labour Party delegates should be sent to FAB campaign meetings. Labour Parties should be organising their own local meetings on the issue and helping raise money for local FAB groups. Delegations and transport for March 19th should be organised now.

Twenty-four unions have now affiliated to FAB at a local level. This official support must be used to mobilise trade unionists for March 19th.

Vigorous

Efforts must be made to get individual unions to publicise their support for FAB to their membership through a vigorous publicity campaign: leaflets, newspaper articles, delegations to the FAB steering committee and the organisation of transport, delegations and banners for March 19th.

FAB activists should link up with local anti-cuts committees and show support for the various healthworkers' days of action currently being planned up and down the country.

The link between Alton's attack on abortion rights and the Tories' attack on lesbians and gays through Clause 28 (see page 2) must be manifested in concrete support for the February 20th demonstration in Manchester.

FAB must reach out to the black community: the support is there but so far it has not been mobilised. Black women will be among the first forced into the backstreets if Alton's Bill becomes law; FAB must reach out and gain their support to *stop this Bill*.

MODEL RESOLUTION
We urge all Labour women to move the following resolution in their Labour Party branches, Women's Sections, etc.

This .....:

1. Strongly opposes David Alton's Private Members Bill to reduce the time limit for legal abortions to 18 weeks, and any other proposals to reduce the present time limit for legal abortions.
2. Agrees to sponsor the *Fight the Alton Bill (FAB)* campaign and will promote its initiatives, including the National Demonstration on March 19th. Furthermore we agree to make a donation of £..... to FAB.
3. Notes that the 1985 Annual Party Conference, by 5,305,000 to 611,000, agreed to abandon the idea that there can be conscience clauses or free votes in matters relating "to women's fundamental right to decide whether or not to bear children." We further note that this overwhelming decision has not so far been implemented by the Labour Whips, nor by the NEC. We note the NEC Statement to Conference 1987 which speaks of "the individual right of conscience of our Party members", and says nothing of the need for all women to enjoy the fundamental freedom to decide whether or not to bear children.
4. Therefore calls on the NEC to instruct the Chief Whip to apply a three line whip in line with Party policy for all votes on the Alton Bill and on any other proposals that may come forward, at any stage in the parliamentary process, to limit the present availability of legal abortion."

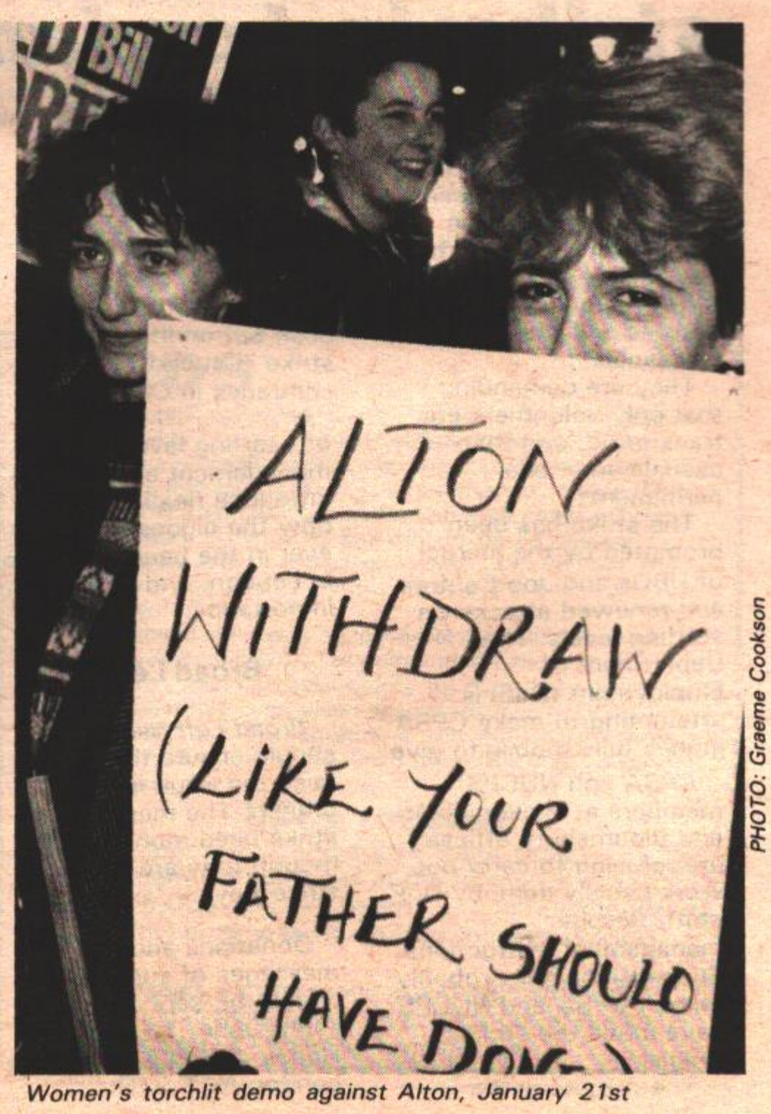


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Women's torchlit demo against Alton, January 21st

Trade Union Briefing

St Alban's

Support grows for victimised trade unionists

On January 18th the Branch Secretary of St Alban's and District COHSE, Jane Barclay-Taylor, was suspended from work by management.

"The psychiatric hospital where I work is closing," Jane told *Briefing*.

"I spoke out to the press about what was happening. I said that under this Health Authority community care would be tantamount to murder.

"A manager came to my house and told me I was suspended from duty. The next day I went into work, to the union office where I had a member to see. The hospital administrator delivered a letter saying I wasn't allowed on the hospital site.

"Doug Landman, the Assistant Branch Secretary, said we'd read it and get back to him and then closed the door. After a few minutes the administrator got angry and started knocking on the door louder and louder until it was shaking."

Three days later Doug Landman was also suspended — for refusing to allow management into the trade union office.

The attempted victimisation met with an immediate response from health workers in the district. Fifteen nurses at Hill End Hospital walked out in protest. Porters, telephonists, catering, linen room and theatre workers at Hemel Hospital joined the action, as did porters at St Alban's Hospital.

The dispute has now been made official by COHSE and is supported by NUPE.



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Jane Barclay-Taylor addresses National Health Emergency launch meeting (see centre pages).

"There's genuine euphoria at the moment," explained Mike Anderton, a student nurse from St Albans. "A lot of staff are 18 or 19 and they're just getting involved in this sort of thing for the first time. If it wasn't for the nurses in Manchester this wouldn't have happened. We owe them a hell of a lot.

"Although this is a local dispute it's not just a local issue. All over the country they've been gagging NUPE and COHSE officials and even doctors. It's all coming to a head now."

"It's looking good," said Jane. "It's the beginning of the battle for the NHS. There's a whole history in St Alban's of them trying to stop us telling the press what's really going on in the NHS. They're trying to gag us. But the action has started. And we're going to teach them they can't tread us down"

NUCPS

UBO staff strike in London

CPSA and NUCPS members at Camden "A" Unemployment Benefit Office (UBO) have been on official strike since December 21st over the compulsory transfer of CPSA members to Job Centres and the sacking of casuals.

They are demanding that only volunteers are transferred, and that casuals are made permanent.

The strike has been prompted by the merger of UBOs and Job Centres, and renewed attacks on staffing levels. The Department of Employment (DoE) is attempting to make CPSA grades fully mobile to give

CPSA and NUCPS members at Westminster and Bloomsbury offices are refusing to carry out work usually done by DoE staff, despite management instructions. Suspensions will probably follow. CPSA and NUCPS have made the strike official.

The dispute is the inevitable result of attacks management maximum flexibility.

Since January 11th CPSA members at Camden "B", St Marylebone, and Westminster UBOs have been out on indefinite strike in support of their comrades in Camden "A".
on staffing levels and management attempts to introduce flexibility. It is now the biggest strike ever in the benefit service in London, and of vital importance.

Broad Left

Broad Left members should ensure that they raise the issue in their branch. The members on strike need money, even though they are receiving strike pay.

Donations and messages of support should be sent to:
Phil John, 7 Fowler House, South Grove, London N15 5JQ.

Inner London Education under attack:

For a national focus on defending education

The Inner London Education Authority is under massive attack.

Secretary of State for Education Kenneth Baker is demanding cuts of 15% over the next year. If they are implemented it will mean an estimated job loss of around 9,000 across the whole service.

The ILEA Labour Group has asked Baker to allow them to set a rate at 86.6p in the £ — a figure that would result in cuts of 6.1% in one

By Bernard Reagan Former NUT Executive Member (currently suspended)

year. The argument between them and Baker is not about *whether* the cuts should be made, but about the time span over which they should be implemented.

Baker will soon make an order in Parliament setting a rate for ILEA. The Labour Group will then have to make fundamental decisions.

Baker is unlikely to change his position. He knows that the Labour leadership at County Hall are on the run and are not willing to fight. If the Labour Group make the cuts then those Tory boroughs which choose to "opt out" won't face the unpleasant task of "shedding" staff. They will inherit a "leaner" workforce with a demoralised union membership.

For employees in ILEA there is no alternative but to fight. Labour Councillors will no doubt say that in the post - Liverpool/Lambeth world of 1988 they cannot be expected to do anything that would lead to surcharge. The debate on how we organise a fightback is necessary — but it cannot be conducted on the basis of the kind of abject capitulation we are witnessing from politicians elected not so long ago on a manifesto that promised to defend Inner London's education.

Those Labour members who are opposed to the present course of the leadership must come out and say so. At a time when thousands of jobs are on the line they have a responsibility to identify and organise with those attempting to build the fightback. Procrastination strengthens Baker's hand and undermines the confidence of ILEA workers.

Dancing

The ILEA leadership seem to believe that dancing to Baker's tune will earn them a respite. If ILEA "puts its own house in order" then Baker will reign back the Tory attack.

Over the past year this approach led ILEA to an even more vicious implementation of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act than Baker himself intended. We have witnessed the ILEA Leader's reactionary education proposals welcomed by Baker in the House of Commons. Measures to privatise the cleaning force are now well underway.

The ILEA officers are so confident of their power that in December they wrote to union general secretaries notifying them that the Authority was contemplating compulsory redundancy. The Labour Group hadn't even discussed it.

Such contempt is merely a reflection of a political leadership which treats the unions with utter disdain. Their only concern about the unions is the possible adverse reaction of affiliated unions at Labour Party General Management Committees.

There has been no attempt to build or even co-operate in the building of a united front with the unions against the Education Bill. This type of campaign has defeated previous proposals to break up the service.

But beyond this grim picture, there are reasons for hope.

Onslaught

Despite the onslaught endured by teachers over the last three years there is still a will to fight amongst the members of the Inner London Teachers' Association (ILTA). They are now being balloted for a one-day strike on February 9th as a prelude to further action against threatened cuts. ILTA has approached the other unions in an attempt to make this a joint demonstration of our commitment to fight back.

ILTA understands there can be no question of defending teachers at the expense of other employees. ILTA has been calling for a joint shop stewards conference to discuss ways of developing work-based resistance to the cuts and has expressed its support for initiatives like the London Bridge March 9th strike.

Support amongst the other unions has varied. One proposal is for a strike on March 8th. If this is a serious suggestion, there must be no counterposing of dates.

ILEA is not the only area facing these cuts. Haringey, Camden, Waltham Forest, and Manchester are all in the firing line. These fights have to be built at a local level; but there must also be a serious attempt to place responsibility for the defence of local government services, including education, and the national agenda of the whole labour movement.

If Labour really is "listening" we must make sure they get the message: defending local government workers and services is the job of the *whole* movement.

AEU ballot at Ford UK

Rank and file prepare for action

32,500 Ford UK workers are balloting on a company pay offer which comes nowhere near meeting their requirements.

The unions are asking for:

- a 10% increase in basic rates
- a doubling of the productivity allowance, with a further 2% for line workers
- a reduction in the working week from 39 hours
- three days extra annual holiday
- paternity leave
- improved pensions
- harmonisation of conditions with white collar staff, including full sick pay and a new technology agreement to provide job guarantees.

This package was put to the company in October. Talks have been held but Ford has not effectively replied to the claim. Instead, it has offered us a three year deal: 6½% this year and rate of inflation increases in the following two, plus marginal changes in pension rights and lay-off pay.

Even this offer is conditional on local plant-levell talks on "flexibility" andl the introduction of group leaders, who would perform most of the tasks of foremen, while being paid 10% above the hourly grade rate. 75% of all foremen would lose their jobs.

By a Ford UK worker

The management is also demanding "full employee involvement" — their aim is to incorporate the company workforce in management's strategy and undercut effective union organisation.

They want the workforce to accept short term contract labour. This would not only undermine all working conditions and union structures but reduce management's offer of 100% lay-off pay in the event of recession to a bad joke!

Despite three months of negotiation the company has failed to reply directly to the union claim. This is an insult to the 32,500 Ford workers in Britain. For the record:

- Productivity has increased by 40% and profits by 50% over the past two years.
- Ford takes a dominant 30% share of the British market. The continued profitability of the British operation throughout the whole of the recession was a major factor in rebuilding the Ford US operation. Worldwide, Ford now has a $9 *billion* cash surplus.

Ford workers are well aware of these facts. That's why, in the weeks before Christmas, there was a rash of one-day stoppages and militant lobbies of the pay talks.

Workers are currently holding mass meetings followed by ballotting on industrial action. There is a mood of quiet determination in the plants. The offer will be rejected.

But workers are well aware that two years ago, when the company's "final" offer was rejected by a 2-1 majority, union officials failed to implement the strike action called for in the ballot, and returned instead to the company to sell us down the river.

The right wing on the union side has advocated a guerrilla strategy of rolling strikes. But this is what was effectively happening before Christmas — with no impact on the company.

It is therefore essential that the next meeting of the trade union side of the Ford national joint negotiating committee sets the date for all-out strike action.

What is the reason for this Union election
To give miners a voice and adequate perfection.
Improve conditions and administer their rights.
So you want a leader with the ability to fight.
In negotiations one thing is a must
A man who is loyal and whom you can trust.
On your behalf the best results he should seek,
He has to be strong and not appear weak.
He is put there by his members to delegate,
Not one whom employers can conquer and dominate.
You don't want a president who is suitable to them,
Because his first priority should be to his men.
©*Barbara Smith*
North Yorkshire Women Against Pit Closures

Recall Conference in June: Chesterfield bandwagon rolls on

Get out your diaries — the weekend of June 11th-12th has been booked in Chesterfield for the recall conference organised by the Campaign Group, Socialist Society, RSE, and others.

A national mailing has recently gone out to almost 4,000 people who attended or expressed interest in last October's Chesterfield Socialist Conference. The mailing reports developments since then:

By Davy Jones
Islington South CLP

● Local conferences are being organised in North and South London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Sheffield, Birmingham, West Midlands, Suffolk, Leicester, Somerset. There may yet be many more. If you want to help organise one, contact the National Steering Group (see box).

● The following Policy Discussion Groups have been set up: Economic Issues, International Issues, the State and Democratisation, Education and Training, the Media and Culture, Women, Black People, Lesbians and Gay Men, People with Disabilities, and Green Issues. If you want to get involved, or set up a new group, just contact the Steering Group.

● A national conference on international policy, focussing on NATO and non-alignment is to be held in Manchester on February 6-7th (see article, p. 11).

● A national conference on Green and Socialist issues is to be held in April.

● The Women for Socialism network established in Chesterfield has received hundreds of letters of support and now has regional contact persons in London, Liverpool, Sheffield, and Birmingham.

● Links with other organisations and campaigns are being discussed.

● Work has begun on a Socialist Directory, detailing campaigns in all parts of the country, to be published in the autumn.

● A consultation paper on the aims and objectives of socialism has been prepared for local distribution and discussion.

This range of activities shows how serious the organisers are in meeting the expectations of the 2,000 people who attended the Chesterfield Conference. There is a crying need to organise the left inside the Labour Party, the unions, the campaigns and social movements, along with left intellectuals, into a cohesive and democratic movement to challenge Thatcher and the bankrupt leaders of our Party and unions.

The regional and issue-based conferences, the Policy Groups, Women for Socialism and the national summer conference should provide the impetus and the framework for a real movement. *Briefing* supporters are urged to:

● Get involved in or initiate local Socialist Conferences and help them to develop into local networks of activists co-operating in solidarity work and debate.

● Get involved in the Policy Discussion Groups.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

2,000 socialists attended the Socialist Conference in Chesterfield last October

● Support and build Women for Socialism nationally and locally.

● Support and attend the issue-based conferences on NATO on February 6th and the Green Issues Conference in April.

● Join as an individual and affiliate your organisation to the national movement.

Contact the Socialist Conference at: Socialist Conference, c/o Socialist Society, 9 Poland St, London W1V 3DG

Are *you* listening, Neil?

Labour listens

From the people who brought you the red rose, from the people who dreamed up *Labour Party News*, from the people who brought you the general election disaster... we now have *Labour Listens!*

The Labour Party is now suffering from a major credibility problem. Too afraid to advance any idea or plan as Party policy in case it proves unpopular, the Party leadership have decided that the best course is just "listening".

All this is very well if you are only in the Labour Party to fight a general election once every four or five years. It's not much fun for the local Council candidate who complained he had no idea what policies he was standing on as they were *all* still "under review".

If the national Labour Party is listening to the same people as the London Party, seeking scapegoats for the Battersea & Fulham general election defeats and the Wandsworth by-election "model campaign" disaster, we'll be asking white, manual working class, ex-Labour, ex-Council tenant voters why they're not voting Labour any more.

The answers are no surprise. After all, you get the answers you choose to put to the people you choose to put them to. The problem is that it is so negative.

By DAN CARTER

The Party's smart-arse polsters don't ask "Would you vote Labour if the Party Leader got up off his arse and did something?" or "Would you support your Labour Council if it stopped putting your rent up?"

The fact is, there's a power struggle going on at Walworth Road between the more progressive of the old guard who realise people join unions in the first instance for self-defence rather than ideological commitment and the Peter Mandelson/Shadow Communications/Kinnock private office, yuppie-inspired, middle class, university-educated elite who think it's more important not to make mistakes than to ever take the initiative.

David Warburton, who was summarily sacked from his position in the GMB, was right when he said "the distance between the leadership and the rest of the movement is, at best, rather sad, even surprising. At worst it is demoralising."

Did anyone actually *listen* to what Warburton said? Warburton may be a right winger, but his views have been repeated to me by large numbers of Party members on the left. The GMB's contribution to *Labour Listens* is to demote someone for telling the truth. It doesn't bode well.

I spent some time on the doorstep in my ward recently talking to an SDP voter. I had called on Party members who turned out to have moved and this ex-Labour, white-collar, target group member had moved in. After listening to ten minutes of why he wouldn't vote Labour, he asked me what I had to say.

"Ah," I said, "Labour is into listening at the moment, rather than lecturing." He was impressed. He said so.

But would it alter the way he voted? Would it convince him that government-imposed cash cuts were decimating local services? Would it convince him the working class could bring about progressive change in our society? I doubt it.

So Labour will listen. But it won't listen to you or me. And when it hears what it doesn't like, then rather than try to change the views of the disenchanted it'll change its policies to fit the lowest common denominator.

This is hardly an inspiration to the Party faithful, let alone the unemployed, the victimised union actiivsts, or lesbians and gay men whose lives are outlawed by the Local Government Bill.

John Prescott's demand for an active Deputy Leader has been ditched by union power-brokers and Tribune Group ex-radicals. Now is not the time, they say. Nor will next year be; nor the year after that. By then we'll be in the long run-up to the General Election.

Perhaps I'll sit out *Labour Listens* and wait until *we've* got something to say.

Witch-hunt

The battle of Bermondsey — Part II

The decision by the Organisation Sub-committee of Labour's NEC to recommend suspension of the Bermondsey Party in order to investigate *Militant* "infiltration" has been met with horror and derision from rank and file members of the Party.

By Piers Corbyn
Councillor, Burgess Ward, Bermondsey

The fact that Labour in Bermondsey increased its vote by 23% at the general election — against the London tide — has been ignored by the spineless hamheaded bats in the regional office who started this witch-hunt.

They listen only to themselves and do not even have sufficient confidence in their own claims to show a copy of their "report" to those against whom they make accusations.

The coincidence of this attack on Party democracy with the launching of the *Labour Listens* campaign suggests that in comparison with the latter an exchange between an exhumed corpse and a living tortoise would be the height of meaningful dialogue.

Rumours that the bats are also after Norwood and Haringey Parties — where there are *no Militant* influences — makes it clear the witch-hunt is part of a generalised attack on the left — both people and policies.

It is important for the whole Party that despite suspensions, Party activists carry on, for example through meetings called by Councillors (as is currently happening). Of course, Bermondsey must get massive support from the whole movement.

Exeter

On Friday January 8th Exeter CLP launched its third expulsion attempt in three years against a *Briefing* supporter, Peter Bowing.

The charge which the EC is investigating is that Bowing brought the Party into disrepute by criticising the lack of democracy in the Party, by opposing the ruling Lib/Lab pact on the City Council and by criticising the failure of the Party to campaign against the Tory assault on working people.

The GC, which had to endorse the decision, was given no reasons for the investigation. A similar groundless expulsion attempt last year ended up in Court, and cost the Labour Party several thousand pounds in legal costs.

□□□□□□□□□□□□□

LEEDS

Labour Councillor George Mudie's bizarre role in bringing a UDC to Leeds should be more widely known.

Cllr Mudie originally denounced the plans to introduce three UDCs into Leeds District. In an attempt to stop them, he set up *his own UDC* and invited an arch-enemy of the Leeds working class, Lord Bellusin, to be an advisor.

Immediately after the discussion with Lord Bellusin, the government was able to identify three prime sites for development in the city.

One of these sites was supposed to be a science park, which it was hoped would provide much-needed jobs for the Seacroft area, but has been empty for over three years. David Trippier has been given special responsibility by Thatcher for the implementation of the anti-socialist drive in Leeds. He must be stopped. Own goals like Mudie's will not help anyone.

UDCs revisited

An error appeared in the article about Urban Development Corporations in the last issue of *Briefing*. 5,000 jobs will be lost — and not 55,000 as stated. This error was no fault of the author, John Turkie.

NB: Appeals can be made against government decisions to impose UDCs. Has your Local Authority lodged its appeal? Time is running out.

Local Government

The Left in Power: Haringey April 85-September 1987

Between April 22nd 1985 and September 15th 1987 the left in Haringey maintained a clear majority in the Labour Group and the local Party and, despite inevitable disagreements, united in defence of socialist commitment to the people of Haringey.

The left took over in the aftermath of the ratecapping struggle, when Bernie Grant and I were elected unopposed as Leader and Deputy Leader. The trauma of the ratecapping defeat, coupled with our principled stand, had at least temporarily stunned into immobility the Labour Group's centre-leaning tendency.

The early days were definitely heady, as we celebrated Bernie's election as the first black Council Leader in Britain. Despite the continuing economic pressures, we were determined to maintain the highest profile for the dispossessed.

We said at the time, and subsequently never said otherwise, that the financial wheezes used to avoid the swingeing cuts forecast during the ratecapping campaign, and which would enable us to expand jobs and services in the following two years were simply postponing inevitable confrontation with the government.

Initiatives

A number of initiatives were taken to build on the successful side of the ratecapping campaign.

- The country's first Local Authority Environment Co-ordinating Committee was set up with a wide brief on nuclear issues, peace, animal rights, and ecology.
- The Council's publicity section was strengthened and given a clear political brief.
- A Publicity Co-ordinating Committee was set up consisting, uniquely, of Councillors, Labour Party representatives, trade unions and the voluntary sector.
- Bi-partite committees of Councillors and trade union representatives were also set up, following a major conference, to plan resistance to Tory privatisation.
- One of our empty school buildings was allocated for use as an Irish Centre. Another became a Teachers' Centre.
- Much greater emphasis was put on provision for travellers, where Haringey led the way with a non-eviction policy and site provision. I was proud to be present at the opening of our first permanent site.

Through luck and determination we had survived a skirmish with the government, but we knew from the start that the war was a long one and we would have to spend every penny we could lay our hands on to continue that war.

Then came the uprising at Broadwater Farm in October 1985. No one who was not there can appreciate what this meant to the Council. Bernie became a national hate-figure overnight. Haringey (whose peculiar name had for years given it a certain anonymity) became national news.

Space does not permit a complete review of what we did in the months after October 1985. Suffice it to say that an enormous amount of good will was built up — thanks largely to Bernie's stand. Behind him — and out of the limelight — were dozens of Councillors, Party members and supporters in the community.

During this time an enormous amount of racist resentment was also built up, fuelled by local Tories, invoked by the media, and fanned by Labour renegades. We stuck together, however, and no one can ever take away from Bernie Grant the courage he displayed throughout the crisis.

When the government refused to hold an enquiry into the Broadwater Farm events, we set up our own, headed by Lord Gifford. He and his panel produced a comprehensive report which pointed the finger of blame quite clearly at the police.

By Steve King
Former Leader, Haringey Council

Despite a Council-funded electoral registration drive, and the most comprehensive register in years, we entered the May 1986 Borough elections with trepidation. The press was into its "loony left" campaign. There were defections and rumours of splits in the local Labour Parties.

The Tories ran a racist, sexist, homophobic campaign, abetted by the local *Hornsey Journal*. The Party, in response, had prepared an expansionist manifesto, predicated on equal opportunities and with an unequivocal commitment to no cuts in jobs or services. A magnificent campaign was run and our just reward delivered: a majority of 25, the best ever.

However, there were causes for concern. In the selection process, Councillors who had broken with us over ratecapping were reselected and candidates were chosen who would not commit themselves to confrontation with the government, although all agreed to abide by the Manifesto.

There was a major swing against us in Tottenham, with a previously solid Labour ward lost to the most rabid of the Tories. Our support in the Hornsey and Wood Green wards dominated by white Council tenants also suffered. However, in wards with large and active branch memberships, fighting solidly socialist campaigns, Labour benefitted.

Post-victory euphoria (celebrated with the election of the country's first Cypriot mayor) did not last long. A bitter argument broke out over accusations of racism made by black comrades against women comrades. This was partly the continuation of earlier arguments over the drawing up of the Women's Manifesto and partly a response to accusations of sexism against certain male Councillors, all Black or Irish.

The row was dominated by Bernie Grant; a number of women felt intimidated; much goodwill was dissipated and a lot of time wasted.

Before we knew it, we were soon absorbed in the defence of our Manifesto policies for lesbians and gay men. The Tories seized upon the issue, gained the initiative, and forced us on the defensive.

Again, with the lead of Party members and the local "Positive Images" campaign (and no help at all from our national leaders) we won through and maintained our policies, but only at the cost of further bitter internal argument, again dominated by Bernie. The "New Realism" was beginning to take hold.

During this period we also withstood a strike by dustmen and street cleaners over the disciplining of the Chair of the local TGWU branch.

By sticking firmly to recognised procedures, meeting regularly with the other trade unions, and keeping Party and public informed, we sat out the strike and saw the miscreant fired from the Council. This action improved relationships with and the performance of the cleansing service.

Meanwhile, the work of the Council continued and our socialist approach, as laid down after our accession to power, was maintained. Despite severe government restrictions, expansionary budgets were approved for 1986/87 and 1987/88. New equal opportunities initiatives were started and existing ones further developed, culminating (just before our demise) in the attainment of our 40% target for ethnic minority employment in the Building Design Service.

The 1987/88 budget did, however, contain one danger signal. A 6% rent rise was proposed by the Treasurer and in response to heavy legal advice the Labour Group agreed to ignore Party policy and include it in the budget.

Shortly after this budget was approved, the District Auditor queried one of its creative accountancy elements: the interest rate swap that raised some £18 million. The DA said we must use the premium produced by this now common piece of jiggery-pokery over a number of years, instead of in one go, as we had planned. Then the general election was called and the issue went onto the back burner.

Crushing

Now, there are many comrades who have come to regard our crushing defeat in June as the biggest upset in political history since October 1917. Everything has changed, we are told; we must forget defiance and confrontation, get our heads down, and "listen".

The fact is that the election result only made the necessity of defiance and confrontations more urgent. The Tories stall was set out clearly: privatise services, strip away education powers and duties; destroy public housing, and kill off any lingering hint of local autonomy with the poll tax.

A platform to opppose these actions, gain public support, unite with the growing concern over the NHS, and build towards seeing off the Tories next time was clearly offered by a high profile struggle over local government jobs and services. The struggle would be high risk, with not a few casualties. But had we not said, on selection, that we would be prepared to be surcharged?

It was not to be. Like snakes before a mongoose, Councillors and Party members were transfixed by the mesmeric effect of June 11th and rapidly succumbed to the New Realism.

First to go was the London Strategic Policy Unit, the "GLC-in-exile", hamstrung from the first by managerial problems, which was deemed expendable by a majority of Labour Council Leaders.

In Haringey, the DA returned to the attack and we went to the Party. Should we hang on and fight it out or should we start down the cuts road already adopted by Camden?

I had taken over from Bernie Grant as Leader in May and at the first LGC following the election I asked for guidance in our dealings with the DA, etc., and for a reaffirmation of the 1986 Manifesto and, specifically, our pledge of no cuts in jobs and services.

Ward meetings were held and special GCs called. Two groups organised: those around *Briefing*, who called for adherence to principle and a campaign of defiance; and those around the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, who had already started issuing a series of scurrilous papers, short on facts, long on rhetoric and full of insult, aimed especially at Bernie, myself, and Narendra Makanji, our Chair of Finance.

Tottenham

At the two GCs, Tottenham adopted the LCC line of cuts now, more cuts in future, and staying in what they fondly call "power" at all costs. Hornsey & Wood Green took the no cuts road with a mere handful of votes in opposition — a mere handful because the LCC boycotted the meeting in an attempt to make it inquorate — a stunt that only just failed.

This boycott was actually led by the Vice Chair of the Party, who stood outside the meeting urging LCC supporters not to enter — one for the Regional Office, if ever there was!

At the LGC, the no cuts motion was passed with considerable cross-voting by delegates from both GCs. I then took the Party's response to the Group meeting, where again the no cuts position was narrowly maintained.

At the July Council meeting, where I moved the Party and Group position, an amendment calling for 3% cuts was moved by Toby Harris. The Tories abstained and we only won on the casting vote of the Mayor.

A Tory amendment, calling for the abandonment of all creative accountancy measures, was defeated by a united Labour side; interestingly, this would have entailed about £50 million worth of cuts — exactly what the new Labour Group leadership side are now implementing!

We spent the summer recess looking for more money, came up with some, and returned to the Group with our proposals for no cuts and a united fightback. By this time the mood of fear and defeat had taken hold.

Both the Party and the Group voted for cuts, but the Group called on us, the leadership, to implement them. This we refused to do. The following week we lost a vote of confidence. September 15th 1987: Haringey's left leadership RIP.

The Left were "out". But were we ever "in"? I've tried to show some of our achievements. What about the failures?

Atmosphere

The atmosphere in which we took over in 1985 was against us. Under increasing attack since 1979, all our energies went into defence — of the very principle of local government, of Labour being in it, and of our own local record. What the left needed, having attained power in 1985, and strengthened its grip in 1986, was a clear run for a number of years to tackle the biggest problem of all — the bureaucracy.

What we did, in fact, was add to that bureaucracy, thinking naively that if we appointed enough supportive bureaucrats we could overhaul the system. This is simplistic, I recognise, but how could we launch an all-out attack on our own operation, on our own workers, without being seen to support Tory attacks on local government?

A good example here is the Housing Department. Stuffed to the gunwhales with Party members, and sympathetic workers, it has proved incapable of tackling the basic problems of our thousands of tenants. Of course, homelessness is a problem not of our own making; the drying-up of government funding is not our fault; and people in the Department do understand and care about tenants' problems.

But none of these excuses provides a real answer to those grown grey waiting for a transfer or to those with leaky roofs and rising damp; nor can it all be blamed on the Public Works Service or the Building Design Service.

I don't know the answers, although I do know that a crash programme of prefabs that we proposed in 1985, which was blocked and eventually rejected by the Labour group would have saved a few people from bed and breakfast, enabled a few people to get their longed-for transfers and alleviated a bit of the mounting misery.

Bureaucrats

Bureaucrats are a necessity to run any organisation; many of ours are both sympathetic and capable. None of them should be fired simply because the system has failed us — and certainly not because of financial constraints and broken promises. However, until the left can come up with a way of running things without things running them, then problems will continue.

We often failed to establish firm political control over our own initiatives. The Press Unit, for example, strengthened and with a clear brief, took industrial action for more posts at a critical time, when the Council should have been mounting a propaganda offensive around our lesbian and gay rights policies.

Significantly, a prime mover in this action, which cost us dear, was the same Vice Chair of Hornsey & Wood Green Labour Party and LCC stalwart referred to above! Even more significantly, this same militant Press Unit has shown no signs of taking industrial action in response to the present cuts.

Another crucial area in which we failed to make any impact was the terms and conditions of the manual and low-paid staff. We had introduced a low-pay supplement before 1985 but failed to follow up this major innovation.

I really came to appreciate this whole problem, and particulary the enormous blue/white collar gap when I spent 1986/87 as Chair of Personnel. The Group and the Party have never managed to address this problem.

Enhanced

Manual workers' pay, for example, is enhanced by hosts of bonus payments, short-time, long-time, wet weather and clothing allowances, etc. Their working conditions and non-pay terms of employment are clearly inferior. The conditions of part-time workers — mainly women — whether blue or white collar are also poor.

On top of this we discovered that the cuts implemented in the 70s and early 80s had hit these groups of workers particularly hard.

We attempted to rectify a few glaring anomalies, but with little success. Many of these same workers are located in prime target areas for privatisation.

The left's clear two-and-a-half years in power, then, was in many ways exhilarating, with substantial gains made in a number of areas. More jobs were provided, particularly for women in manual trades and black people generally.

There were improvements in the employment profile of women and black people in better paid, higher status jobs, e.g. one woman and two black chief officers. There were serious attempts at race and women's equality throughout service employment and provision and starts upon similar programmes for the people with disabilities and lesbians and gay men.

Wide-ranging capital improvements were made in housing and schools and considerable community provision through new and converted buildings. And steps were taken to construct political mechanisms in publicity, anti-privatisation, policy formation and decentralisation.

Failures

Against these achievements must be set our failures to tackle the bureaucracy, to establish political control at key points, to make any real improvement in the working conditions of the Council's employees, and to establish a firm political base to defend our gains.

In the overall context of Tory attrition, our opponents' complete monopoly of public opinion through their media, and the lack of a unified Labour movement, perhaps we should be pleased that we achieved anything at all.

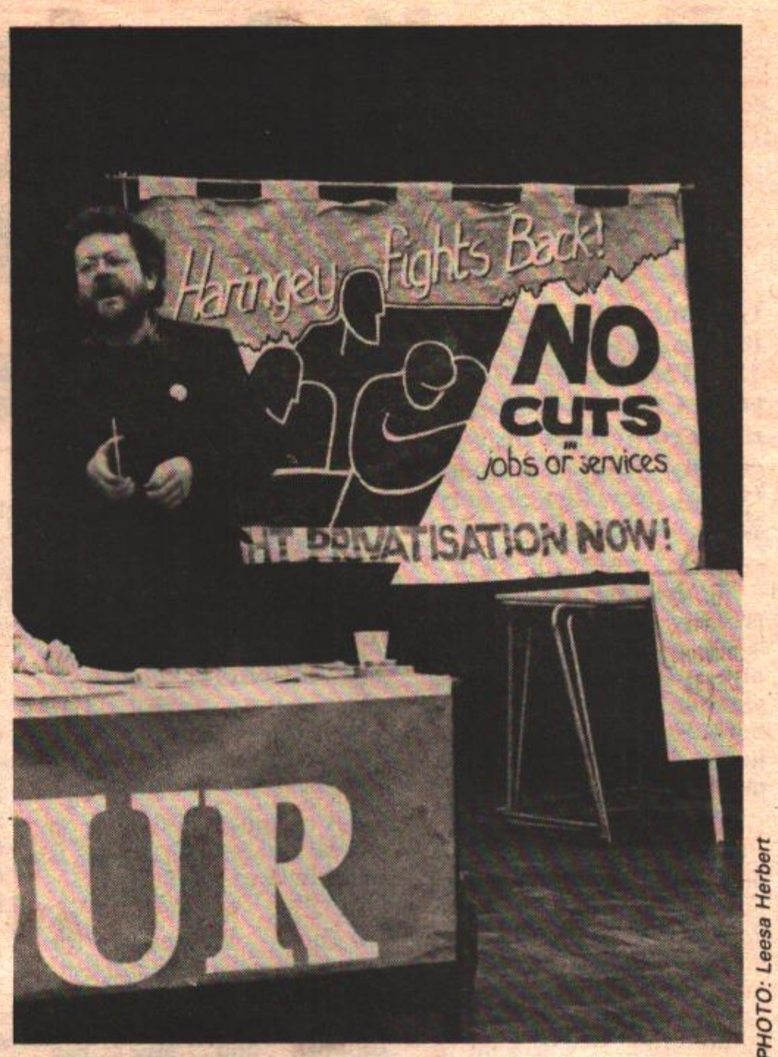


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Steve King addresses a recent public meeting against the cuts called by Hornsey Vale Branch Labour Party.

Local Government

As privatisation looms:

Beating the Tory tender trap!

BEN JONES takes a critical look at the tactics adopted by trade unions and Council Leaders in response to compulsory competitive tendering. He argues that only a strategy of trade union resistance, linked with non-compliance with cuts in jobs and services can hope to defeat the looming tender trap.

By refusing to organise resistance to compulsory tendering, the TUC has shown that it still fails to understand that the Tory government has firmly broken with the traditional local government consensus of providing a decent standard of publicly-funded local services.

In November the TUC organised a conference on *Improving Local Services* as part of their response to the Local Government Bill. The Conference proved to be a New Realist jamboree.

The TUC publicity described the gathering as the "...widest forum yet to assess this major piece of legislation." It was held at the Olympia Conference Centre with a fee of £60 per delegate.

Speakers included Donald Macintyre, political editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, David Heath, Alliance Leader of Somerset Council, and the Bishop of Willesden. A wide spectrum, you might say — but not wide enough to include Council workers!

The broad coalition in opposition to the Tories' Local Government Bill, which the TUC conference intended to construct, was flawed from the beginning. David Heath, for example, only opposed the *compulsory* element of tendering; he doesn't support municipal ownership in principle. Fundamentally, the TUC's strategy rests on a complete misunderstanding of the Tories' political aims.

Environment Minister Nicholas Ridley is already faced with opposition fom sections of the CBI, the Audit Commission and his own Party — their "reasonable" arguments have made no impact.

Ridley's attitude was summed up when Islington Council Leader Margaret Hodge asked him for a meeting. "I and my ministers," he said, "are too busy trying to solve problems to spare time for arid political debates."

Most Labour Groups have now deided to compete on the basis of a quality service, whilst trying to exploit any loopholes that exist in the legislation. The Tories are well aware of this approach. PULSE, the pro-privatisation pressure group, warned:

"On the day of (the Bill's) publication teams of officers from Local Authorities were setting to work, under guidance and connivance of their Councillors, in search of loopholes. Despite the thoroughness of the Bill, they will certainly find plenty."

Of course, the left should support every attempt to improve the quality of Council services and welcome attempts to find loopholes in legislation. But it would be ridiculous to call this a strategy to defeat compulsory tendering.

★ Non-compliance with Tory cuts in jobs and services and campaigns for needs budgets drawn up by workers and consumers.
★ Support for trade union action against privatisation.
★ International unity against multinational contractors.
★ Promoting municipal ownership as part of a socialist economic strategy based on a massive extension of public ownership.

Its most obvious weakness is that the Labour boroughs' current compliance with Tory cuts in jobs and services will undercut any attempt to improve service quality. Councillors are already cutting back the front-line services threatened by tendering, and undermining support services such as personnel, computers, administration, etc.

Borough leaders have been busy trying to sell this "strategy" to their workforces. At best this approach will only spread complacency amongst Council workers. At worst, it implicates union shop stewards in negotiating in-house contracts, often on a confidential basis with officers.



Privatisation in Wandsworth brought a loss of jobs

In Leeds, stewards' involvement has compromised them in the eyes of their own members. Malcom Reid, a NUPE Area Officer, described how these "unsung heroes ... take a lot of flack from members and they are not always able to directly answer the member."

Labour has failed to campaign in favour of the principle of municipal and public ownership. In Wandsworth, the Labour Group ducked any attempt to campaign against privatisation because of the popularity of low rates. The result of this policy was the loss of the recent crucial Council by-election, despite strong opposition to ILEA abolition.

PULSE commented:

"The opposition has been distinctly muted... Labour opposition has been limited to disputing the government's authority to introduce competition, and highlighting recalcitrant Conservative Councils."

A campaign in favour of municipal ownership, based on the development of needs budgets, and drawn up with workers and consumers is urgently needed. Whilst it is disastrous for unions to get involved in the contract process itself, they should get involved in drawing up detailed service specifications with Labour Councillors and consumers.

We should define and demand decent services that meet community requirements, not Tory financial and legal constraints.

Nationally, we need the Labour leadership to advocate *municipal expansion*, as part of a socialist economic strategy based on an extension of public ownership.

As part of this strategy the unions must be prepared to take action against the contractors and those Councils, including those under Labour control, that use compulsory tendering to undermine terms and conditions and drive down wages. We must also guard against attempts to abandon equal opportunities policies as too costly and "uncompetitive".

To prepare for industrial action we should organise education and publicity initiatives among workers and consumers and link up with those in the health services who have already experienced the effects of tendering.

We must also organise against the contractors on an international basis. Last autumn, the Transnationals Information Centre (London) organised an international cleaning workers' conference that brought together shop stewards opposing cleaning contractors around the globe.

Only a strategy based on resistance can hope to escape the Tory tender trap. Placing all our hopes in in-house contracts will cost workers dearly. Jobs and conditions will go as contractors win some contracts and Councils attack their own workforces in an attempt to make them competitive.

Black People Against the Cuts

Has Labour unleashed a monster?

With a third of Britain's Black population living in London, cuts in the capital's Local Authority jobs and services will have major implications for Black politics nationally.

Furthermore, the cuts, with their simultaneous attack at the levels of class and race, will undermine and disorganise the base of Labour support, which will become vulnerable to right wing and racist ideas.

A case in point is Haringey Council's cuts package of £46 million. Black people will bear the brunt of these cuts.

After years of struggling for equal access to Local Authority jobs and services, black people will find their economic position and their rights to much-needed welfare provision severely set back.

Redundancies will hit black people hard. Many will occur in areas with large concentrations of local black labour — especially women in temporary and casual posts such as supply teaching, catering, cleaning, etc.

A large proportion of the Council's black employees have only recently been hired and in time-honoured fashion will be the first to be fired.

Black people in Haringey already suffer high unemployment, low pay, bad housing, and homelessness. An adequate level of local social and welfare provision is therefore an absolute necessity.

Cuts in services such as nurseries and education, free milk for young children, reduction of support for the homeless, closure of community advice centres and day care for the elderly and the disabled, rent rises, all add up to a menacing attack on the most vulnerable sections of Haringey's black community.

By Shahid Tilley
Black Campaign Against the Cuts
(personal capacity)

The current round of rate-capping induced cutbacks brings to a head many of the contradictions in black radicalism that have multiplied over the past decade, particularly its alliance with professionalism and local government bureaucracy.

This will also have repercussions in Labour Party Black Sections, some of whose prominent members are in the forefront of the Council cutters, while others have maintained a principled opposition to the cuts.

There is also a growing distance between those black managers who have attained high executive positions in Local Authorities, and who will be responsible for managing cuts, and those black workers in blue collar or lower and white collar posts who will feel the razor of redeployment or redundancy.

It is not surprising to find that in Haringey many black building workers (both women and men) have been in the forefront of the campaign to save the Public Works Service. It is also not surprising that while demonstrating on Council premises they were singled out and arrested by police.

The response of workers in "equal op" units (race, women's, lesbian/gay) has been more muted. Ironically they are vulnerable to redeployment, given the London Labour Party's new sensitivity to these issues. Black Campaign Against the Cuts has tried to make links with workers in these units but we have met with considerable apathy and demoralisation.

In contrast, those black community organisations providing a service to black users at a grassroots level, operating in the voluntary sector, and immediately threatened with losing their funding/jobs, are providing fierce opposition to the cuts.

Many have correctly gauged their dangerous implications. They are also aware that they are likely to be penalised (by loss of grants) for any involvement in campaigns against Council policy.

Racist

The Labour cuts strategy in London will play into the hands of a virulent racist current within Local Authority unions. The price of Labour's self-immolation will not be paid by Councillors trying belatedly to hop onto the Thatcherite bandwagon but by black Londoners who will be the objects of a vicious backlash.

The rightwing strategy of pitting one group of people against another and promoting a politics of self-interest will be strengthened by Labour's cuts.

Bureaucrats

In local papers throughout London editorials and letters pages angrily ask why cuts are being made on essential services for the elderly, disabled, and the young while a "host of anonymous high paid bureaucrats" sit around in posh offices doing nothing.

The whole notion of "equal opportunities" in cuts is a dangerous red herring which will fuel racist hysteria in front page headlines such as "Whites to Lose Jobs". A small section of the black nationalist **comprador class** will support this demand. But socialists know that black working class Londoners will gain nothing from a tactic which aids the divide-and-rule methods already adopted by sections of Local Authority management.

"Equal opportunities" cuts will foster a fusion of poor and middle-class activism with a populist inflection under the auspices of the more racist elements within the Conservative Party. The cuts package is increasingly strengthening white resentment against what many see as Labour Authorities working largely in the interests of black people (and, in places, lesbians and gays) and against those of the white community.

White middle-class neighbourhoods will fight tooth and nail in defence of local services (especially leisure facilities like libraries and swimming pools). This opposition is likely to be formidable, as middle class people use their access to resources and contacts.

The other side of the coin will be even bigger cuts in communities where mobilisation is more difficult (not least in areas with rotten right wing CLPs).

This fragmentation of civic politics will clear the path for the emergence of a localised siege neighbourhood mentality — something similar to that which has been historically associated with parts of inner-east London, such as Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, and Hoxton. It was exactly these areas that fell prey to the racist politics of the Liberal Focus teams.

self-interest will inevitably be hostile to black people, the poor, travellers, and others deemed to be "outsiders".

Black people should not have any illusion about these cuts. The stakes are high — whether you are a Councillor making a career move towards parliament or a worker under threat of redundancy.

This is not a replay of 1985. There is no middle ground upon which the traditional British smudged compromise can be worked out. For blacks, the poor, the old, the temporary casual workers, and the unskilled, the cuts will start hurting soon — and the pain will be severe.

For Thatcher, the attack on Local Authorities has far greater signficance than mere reduction in expenditure levels. She is set to develop a minimal *nightwatchman* state with only skeletal welfare provision. At this stage it looks unlikely that the Tories will encounter the levels of opposition to their local government attacks as they have over the NHS.

As the well-off, the skilled working class, traditional middle class, and yuppie enclaves in London increasingly encounter falling standards in education or under-fives or residential care for the elderly they will increasingly turn to private facilities as they have in the United States.

This defection will leave a depleted and overburdened state sector which will bolster the attractions of Thatcherite market ideas such as education vouchers and tax concessions. Labour support could crumble away entirely.

The strategy adopted by London Labour boroughs will have severe repercussions for the largest black community in Britain, which will bear the brunt of the cuts.

These Authorities are dangerously naive in not recognising the long term political consequences for black Londoners, who will face a populist backlash. The long term beneficiaries will be right wing Conservatives or local Liberals who might suddenly find that neighbourhood politics coated with aggressive racism has an instant appeal.

Amongst its victims will no doubt be those Labour Councils which have unleashed this monster, and will find themselves unable to oppose it — since they would have mortgaged their political constituencies in order to implement Thatcher's policies.

National Health Service

Labour & Union Leaders:

Back health workers' action!

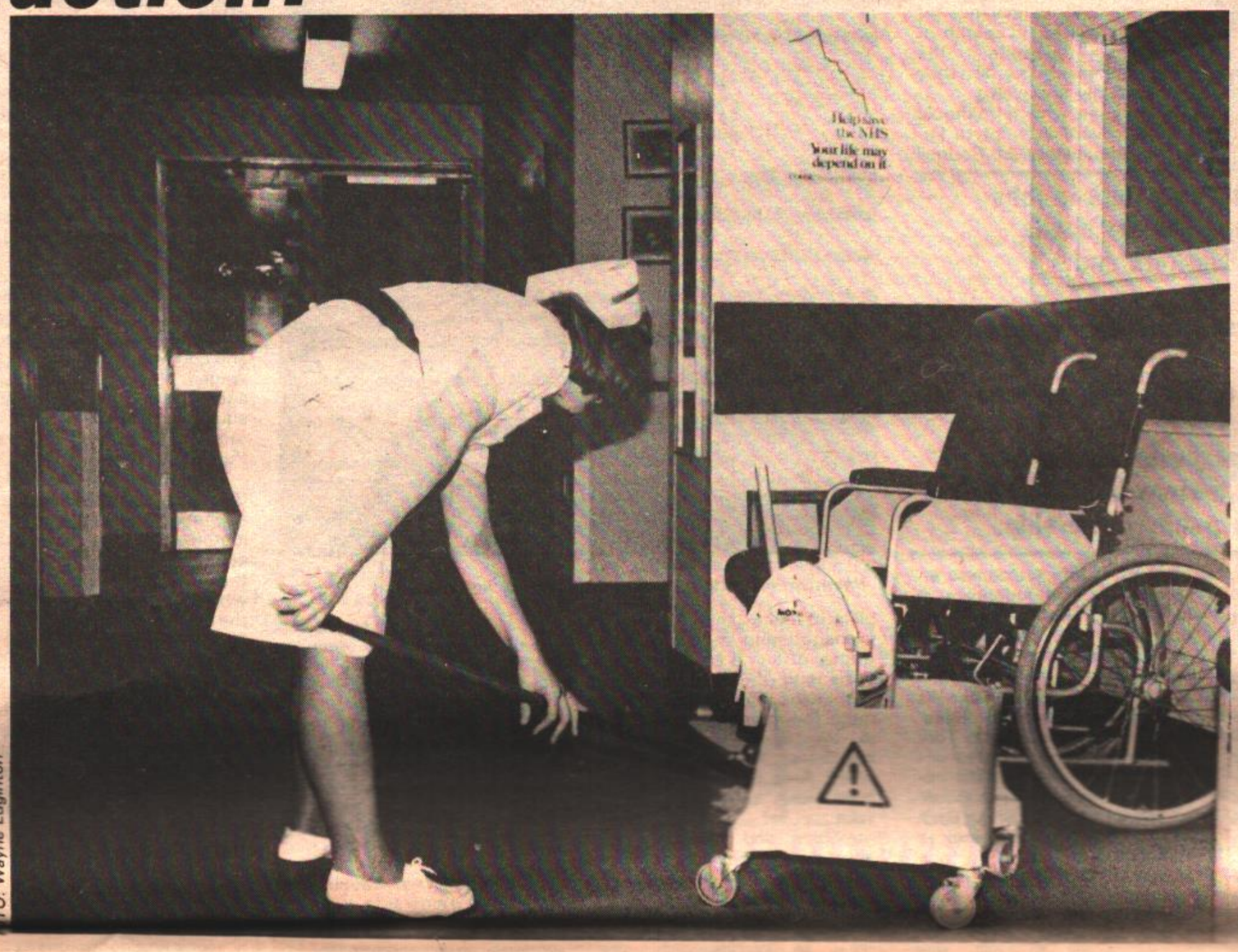


PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Nurses in some hospitals are having to make up for inadequate private cleaning; the strain is forcing many into contemplating industrial action.

The new mood among health workers was marked by two new developments in the past month.

For the first time, British nurses took strike action over pay. And for the first time in Thatcher's reign, health workers have won concessions from the government — over both nurses' pay and blood transfusion workers' meals.

Increasing anger over health service cuts has seen the quick spread of strike action through Scotland and England, parents taking Health Authorities to court, and a recent walkout in St Albans over trade union victimisation.

Even the managers of the health service — usually our enemies — have been forced to defend their own interests. Consultants at one hospital voluntarily took pay cuts to save hospital beds. One Manchester Health Authority publicly criticised management for "blackmail" over funding. Even the BMA is demanding more cash for the NHS with no increase in privatisation.

By Naomi Hillman
NUPE, Charing Cross

Thatcher's government has been thrown into crisis. It has responded with concessions to strikers, putting children to the top of waiting lists and giving in within one day to the BMA's demand that only the BMA should be allowed to negotiate for doctors, rather than the leaders of the Royal Colleges.

But the government is still slashing away at the NHS. Tory MP John Biffen has warned Thatcher that the public simply doesn't believe her assertions about more funding when it sees hospitals closing.

The official lies have had to change from blaming "waste in the NHS", to blaming consultants and then to Jill Knight's waffle about "expanding demand for expensive operations".

This last lie has been followed swiftly by the resignation of a consultant at Charing Cross Hospital, who publicly blamed "gender benders" for taking up urology beds!

But the facts are that parents are having to take court action to get those "expensive" operations, and that the crisis in Intensive Care is prompting theatre closures and open letters from consultants.

Neil Kinnock said he was "sad" the nurses had to strike — and offered no support (far less encouragement) for further action. Otherwise we have heard nothing from the Labour leadership beyond the face-saving "bed-watch" scheme, even though the NHS upsurge provides the best opportunity since the miners' strike to push back Thatcher. Kinnock has called for more NHS cash — the figure he named was *less* than Biffen's!

Trade union leaders have been criminally silent. The NUPE leadership is experienced at isolating strikes. Its answer to the Scottish anti-privatisation battles is the same as it offered to the English strikes in 1983: letting them run their course at local level and refusing to organise nationally. Bickerstaffe's executive will face a rough ride come Conference time.

These leaders must use their positions to organise solidarity action. Recent sectional victories should not lead to complacency, but should be used to promote wider militancy.

While Thatcher might concede to the nurses, she will not do so to other public sector workers. We need joint conferences and action with local government, water, education, and civil service workers.

The leaders must publicly proclaim their support for the health workers — and what they intend to *do* about it to make this support a reality. At Charing Cross, for example, plans are afoot to lead a trade union delegation to the Labour leadership to force them to go on record against the Alton Bill, and get them explaining how they intend to support recent actions and to improve the NHS in the long run.

LEEDS

Services face the chop

Privatisation plans at Western Europe's largest hospital, St James in Leeds (with over 1,400 beds), will affect some 600 jobs.

But this is only one part of a wholesale assault on the NHS in the Leeds area.

The geriatric hospital at Rottwell is being closed after a long run down.

The majority of the nursing staff there are now hired from agencies, which has weakened resistance. Leeds Council denounced the closure but a lobby of the Eastern Area Health Authority which was voting on the closure was small.

Chapel Allerton Hospital is also facing closure. Rumours are constantly being spread that the closure is being brought forward. This has stopped essential repairs on the boiler from being carried out.

The local COHSE branch, along with other unions, is determined to oppose the closure, as are local Labour Councillors and the local Labour Party. The Health Authority says the closure will *save* £94,000 — but the actual *costs* of closure will be in the region of £1 million. Many activists suspect that plans are afoot to set up a prime site private hospital in the area.

Fighting t the NHS

Why is there no mass national campaign by the labour movement in defence of the NHS?

Strangely enough, the health unions were more actively involved in anti-cuts campaigns against the *Labour* government of the late 1970s than they have been in fighting Thatcher's cuts in the 1980s. Now the defeatist rot of the "new realism" has eaten deep into the TUC, leaving it reluctant to defend even the most popular service of all.



Politically, the NHS is Thatcher's weakest point. On this issue alone she has consistently been opposed by a large majority of the general population.

Yet few local Labour Parties campaign with any vigour on health issues. And the national leadership, having downplayed the issue for years, has now allocated it to two of its most colourless performers — Robin Cook and Harriet Harman.

Surely the hard left should respond eagerly to opportunities arising from the vacuum of leadership in the health unions, with their large, mainly female membership, huge percentage of black workers, and long record of militancy.

However, none of the left groups has seen the NHS as an easy recruitment ground. Almost all have preferred work with the more traditional (white male) battalions of carworkers, miners, engineers, and printworkers, or white collar unions with more middle class membership.

All these factors colour the present line up of forces in the fight for the NHS. Local campaigns have sprung up in response to the latest wave of brutal cuts and closures, and have in some cases been able to link up with a new radicalisation of nurses and even doctors.

The campaigns have been of all shapes and sizes. Angry petitions, lobbies, and protests have been

National Health Emergency

The launch meeting of National Health Emergency established an ad hoc Steering Committee. Get in touch with your nearest contact listed below. If there is no contact near you, contact National Health Emergency c/o 335 Grays Inn Road, London WC1 and offer your services as a contact!

The first meeting of the NHE Steering Committee will be on Saturday February 6th, at 1pm, Manchester Town Hall. For details phone 01-833 3020.

Edinburgh Health Service Campaign
Kathy Jenkin, c/o 21 Torpichen Street, Edinburgh
031 229 6605

Birmingham NHS Defence Campaign
Tony Kennedy, 101 Sutton New Road, Erdington, Birmingham B23 6RE
021 350 0777

Cheshire
Chris Price (COHSE), 3 Townshend Road, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 7QG
0606 6702

Dave Highland, 33 Woodside Ave, Wistaston Grove, Cheshire CW2 8AL.
0270 668016

Manchester
Jane Morris, Manchester City Council, Room 6007, Environmental Health Department, Manchester Town Hall Extension, Manchester M60 2JB.
Glyn Humphreys, Flat 1, 20 Salisbury Road, Chorlton, Manchester

Oxfordshire
Mike Dulieu, Oxon Health Emergency, 293 Goldington Road, Bedford MK41 9PD. 0234 60584

Yorkshire
Wayne Edginton, Pontefract Health Emergency, 128 Church Road, Altofts, Normanton, W Yorks WF6 2QS.
0924 891755

Brighton
Julie Lawrence, SE District NALGO, 179 Preston Road, Brighton BN1 GAG
0273 542244

Warwick
Bryony Elliott, 95 Hill Street, Warwick CV34 5PA
0926 495832

London
Rosie Cooper, Islington Health Emergency, 18 Elfort Road, Highbury, London N5 1AZ
Camilla Crivello, 109 Pasteur Gardens, London N18.
01 803 5362
Paul Martin, 24 Riga House, Shanoz Street, London E1 3LY.
01 720 9811
Rosie Newbigging, c/o 335 Grays Inn Road, London WC1
01 833 3020

Nottingham
Nigel Lee, 51 Braidwood Court, Hyson Green, Nottingham NG7 6EW.

★ Support strike action now! ★ Nationalise the drug

to save

organised by patients or local groups of various kinds. More formal Trades Council campaigns and more substantial and long-running campaigns, some even enjoying Local Authority funding, have also been active. Some campaigns have been led by doctors, some by community groups, some by health workers, some by other trade unionists or individual activists.

Few campaigns have developed links ouside their own health district. Today's picture is one of myriad events and activities increasing in scale and frequency in all parts of the country, but with little national focus.

By HARRY SLOAN

This rise in local activity has not produced any enlightenment at the top levels of the labour movement. It was left to London Health Emergency to take the initiative in calling an open meeting on January 16th: *Towards a national fightback for the NHS.*

Almost 150 people turned up from Scotland, Yorkshire, the North West, the Midlands, and South Coast, as well as London. Between them, they represented a wide range of health service workers — doctors, nurses, ancillaries, porters — and campaign activists.

But for all the meeting's genuine enthusiasm, when it came to deciding the next steps on the road towards a national campaign, it had to face the most glaring problem — lack of material resources and the utter inertia of the official machinery of the unions and Labour Party.

A collection raised £115, and it was decided to seek affiliations at £10 a time to a **National Health Emergency** - but this is painfully inadequate to the tasks.

It was decided to move resolutions through union bodies and Labour Parties calling for a TUC Day of action against health cuts and for a national demonstration in July to mark the 40th Anniversary of the NHS. *But why have these basic, immensely popular things not already been done by the existing leadership or demanded by the left as a whole?*

In the absence of a properly-resourced, national-level campaign, enjoying official support from trade unions and the Labour Party and able to mobilise mass action in defence of the NHS, we must work with what we can get. The fight must go on.

This means there can be no stock blueprint for a "model" health campaign. In some districts, health unions will be active and supportive; elsewhere they will be bureaucratised and passive. While we must avoid letting full-time bureaucrats dominate or impede the work of local campaigns, we should do what we can to work with them and get access to the official resources they control.

Some campaigns can immediately mobilise angry groups of pensioners or other community organisations; others have to start from a more narrow trade union or Labour Party base and fight to win wider layers. The object should be to build a broad base of affiliated labour movement organisations around a democratically elected action committee.

A labour movement base is vital if a local campaign is to have any long term stability. After all, we are involved in a long-running war against Thatcher's moves to dismantle the NHS. To look too narrowly, to demand too high a level of political agreement, or to ignore the way in which the issue cuts deep into sections of the middle class and other political parties can paralyse a health campaign.

There is no point in us attempting to impose a perfect programme on such diverse forces — or artificially reducing ourselves to a small, pure minority. We must learn to argue our politics and develop campaigns so that people learn by experience that what we say is right.

This is particularly the case with industrial action. The Manchester nurses' strike has done more to put strike action back on the NHS agenda than any amount of lecturing from left activists.

We must be confident enough and non-sectarian enough to draw in and work with a wide variety of supporters, sometimes including consultants and other professionals, and nursing staff who as individuals can often be radical on the NHS issue but far from left wing.

It is necessary to build a wide-ranging *united front* with *anyone* prepared to fight to oppose NHS cuts and defend the principle of a fully-funded, tax-based health service free to all.

We need to build health campaigns which seek maximum publicity for the issue — demanding press coverage, and courting the radio and TV.

We need campaigns which go way beyond the narrow circles of CLP and ward activists, which look much wider than our own union branches and beyond the Trades Councils, to involve women's groups, tenants' associations, pensioners — anyone willing to challenge the cuts.

The work of building health campaigns follows no dogmatic formula, no fixed slogans, no well-worn paths. It needs attention to detail and the confidence to fight in a flexible way. Perhaps this, too, is why most of the left up to now has seemed neither very keen nor very good at doing it.

It's not too late to change!



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

St Benedict's hospital was kept open by a workers' occupation. Occupations don't always win, but many have been successful in keeping facilities open in the face of Health Authority attacks.

How socialists can campaign for a better NHS

***Briefing's* Jenny Fisher talked to victimised health service worker Andrea Campbell, now ILEA rep on Tower Hamlets District Health Authority, about the arguments we need to raise in a socialist defence of the NHS.**

***Jenny:* Across the country, DHA budgets are "overspent". How has that come about?**

Andrea: In our district one of the major reasons for overspending is the massive rise in the costs of medical and surgical appliances and drugs — all supplied to the NHS by private companies at high profits.

For years the left has raised the demand to nationalise the drug companies but it hasn't been taken up seriously by most of the unions and certainly not by the Labour Party. Nationalising these companies would immediately free massive resources for the NHS.

Low rates of pay are also a major problem. In Bethnal Green we have a geriatric ward which lost 15 beds this year because of overspend entirely due to the use of agency nurses, which in turn is due to low pay.

Geriatric and psychiatric care and agency nursing are precisely the areas in which John Moore said we should reduce the special payments. These were first offered in the 70s because they couldn't get enough geriatric and psychiatric nurses to work in the NHS. Statistics show those are the areas which still find it hard to attract nurses.

***Jenny:* Are resources the only issue?**

Andrea: We have to couple the demand for resources with the demand for workers' control of the health service. The labour movement need to come up with a workable formula for democratising Health Authorities.

***Jenny:* Is the NHS worth defending? For the Tories, the run-down in state health services is an opportunity to say that in the 1990s we need an alternative to a vast, overbureaucratised, inefficient health service.**

Andrea: The majority of people in the country believe the NHS is worth defending. There's a lot that's not right in it but if people think it can't get a lot worse they're wrong.

The reason it's not perfect is that the resources haven't been made available. If the resources were there, then we as socialists have to say that we are confident we could run an excellent health service.

***Jenny:* Are there other ways of making extra resources available, apart from nationalising drug and supply companies and higher wage rates reducing spending on agency staff?**

Andrea: People say resources should be released from NHS administration, but I think that's wrong. Britain spends very little on its administrative structure. Whether it's got the right people in this structure is another question.

I don't think the money should come from any other area of the NHS. The old argument that money spent on weapons could be better utilised in the NHS is on the right track.

***Jenny:* Are you finding that the way the poorest working class people are suffering under the Tories — in housing, employment, social services, etc. — is increasing demand on the health service?**

Andrea: Tower Hamlets is an area with one of the highest rates of social deprivation in the country. Many of the health problems are stress related and many of them directly linked to housing: chest complaints, infectious diseases.

In a survey taken in a local ward five years ago, people were asked what their major health problems were and the top two were housing, particularly overcrowding, and rubbish.

That's how people perceive their health problems. Our health campaign can't therefore address itself to problems in existing health services.

***Jenny:* Are you surprised that nurses are suddenly taking action?**

Andrea: No. People who put nurses on a pedestal seem to think they simply won't go on strike. But nurses are basically workers, who have to earn a wage to live on. And that wage has never been comparable to the job they have to do.

In the past, they were compensated by the sense of offering people a service they needed. Now they can't provide that service because of the cuts. So the government have actually taken away the very conditions which stopped a number of nurses from taking action in the past.

***Jenny:* What effect is privatisation having at the moment?**

Andrea: It's not the highest thing on the NHS agenda but you can't divorce it from the question of morale.

Privatisation divides the staff because you have people working together in the same building for different employers. Cleaning staff will be employed by a private company and nurses by the Health Authority. When it comes to nurses taking strike action there may well be problems there.

Privatisation also undermines the staff's confidence in the hospitals they work in. No one likes to work in a dirty hospital.

In the past, the NHS has been extremely popular. To smash it, the Tories have to run it down and make it unattractive. Privatisation is part of that.

***Jenny:* In the past, the big debate about private medicine has been paybeds in NHS hospitals. Now private hospitals are taking off in a big way. Should health activists be demanding an end to private hospitals?**

Andrea: The Labour Party campaigned against paybeds in NHS hospitals but not against private medicine as a whole. It still won't say openly that there shouldn't be two tiers of health, that we must nationalise private hospitals and put them to public use.

In retrospect, Barbara Castle's attack on paybeds was a goof. The private companies just went away and built their own hospitals. You can't deal with only part of the problem. You can't deal with it only in terms of managing a nationalised industry.

***Jenny:* The nurses' action got a lukewarm reception from the Labour Party and trade union leaderships — even the health unions.**

Andrea: Robin Cook and Harriet Harman have reacted slowly to developments. If they had listened to what activists have been saying for the last two years, they would have been in a better position to respond to recent events.

In my experience, the health unions have always been keen to defuse any action to defend the NHS. They refused in the early 80s to defend people occupying hospitals to keep them open. In '82 they undermined the pay strike which would have made a major difference to the situation in the NHS now.

You see the COHSE and NUPE officials taking credit for the nurses' action, but you know that behind the scenes they're fighting like mad to make sure that action doesn't spread.

The best way to defend the NHS at the moment is for everyone to get out on the streets — to take strike action. For other workers and people in local communities to get on the picket lines.

and supply companies! ★ Restore the cuts!

Features: Thatcher's Secret State

Challenging the Secrets Act

In one of the more sensational spin-offs from the *Spycatcher* affair, up to 100 Tory MPs on January 15th defied a three line whip to either vote for or abstain on a Private Members Bill to reform the notorious Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act.

This makes it illegal to reveal virtually anything in any government service. Even the menu at the local DHSS canteen is protected by the Official Secrets Act!

The Private Members Bill (moved by Tory MP Richard Shepherd) would have allowed disclosure of information if it were shown to be in the public interest — for example if it revealed crime, fraud, abuse of authority, etc.

The government, of course, opposed it.

By Phil Hearse
Islington North CLP

The Tory revolt over the Bill shows the growing dissatisfaction with the authoritarian style of the Thatcher regime, and indeed the militant posture on security matters by some Tory "wets" rather exposes the timidity of the Labour front bench.

The issue put before the Commons was simple: if government agencies, like MI5 and MI6, abuse their authority and act in a criminal way, should this be revealed? Or should all matters of government service be forever secret?

Thatcher and the 270 Tory MPs who supported her answered in the negative: it is for the state itself, especially in matters of "defence" and security, to determine what shall be revealed.

The Official Secrets Act is one of the most notoriously repressive pieces of secrets legislation anywhere in the world. Even in the United States there are extensive public rights to obtain information about action by government agencies, past and present.

There the courts can and do enforce the right of citizens to see restricted government information. But successive governments in Britain, both Labour and Tory, have resisted changes to Britain's uniquely secretive approach.

The debate has of course been intensified by the *Spycatcher* affair. Its author, Peter Wright, in between ramblings about everyone being Soviet agents, revealed something quite devastating — the attempts of MI5 officers to destabilise the Wilson Labour government during the 1970s.

Intensified

Here we have an example of a government agency doing something quite obviously illegal, criminal and against the public interest, even defined in the narrowest ruling class fashion! But the response of the Labour leadership to this whole affair has been curiously down-beat.

For example, former Home Secretary and Northern Ireland Minister Merlyn Rees has been at pains throughout the *Spycatcher* affair to attack Peter Wright as a deranged reactionary, and to defend the government's right to keep its security services secret.

The same approach has been true of a bevy of Labour ex-ministers, including Peter Shore and Harold Wilson himself. **None of these Labour former ministers have shown any interest in whether or not MI5 did actually try to bring down the government of which they were a part.**

Needless to say, Kinnock and his front bench have hardly leapt to the breach. But it would be a great mistake for socialists to see reform of the Official Secrets Act, and control of the security services, as a secondary matter. On the contrary, even when raised by Tory "wets" it touches a central political concern: a question of the ability of the state to organise secretly against what it regards as its main enemy — the labour movement.

One of the main platforms of the Thatcherite credo is 'rolling back the frontiers of the state", particularly the "welfare state". But Thatcher has also dramatically strengthened the repressive apparatus and functions of the state. Traditional bourgeois democatic freedoms — the rights of assembly, publication, and free speech — are under more strenuous pressure here than in any other advanced capitalist country.

Crucial

The security services, MI5 and MI6, are crucial arms of the state. Peter Wright reveals in his book the decision in the 1970s to switch the focus of MI5 from counter-espionage to keeping tabs on political "subversives". More and more MI5 is a political secret police, but with a lot more resources, a lot more expertise, and a lot more secrecy than their counterparts in the Special Branch. Peter Wright, as an obsessive anti-Soviet type of the old school, thought this change of emphasis was far-fetched and unnecessary.

An interesting feature of the armoury of the security services has come to light during the post-*Spycatcher* furore. It appears that MI5 agents who have questioned orders to carry out illegal acts have been reminded of their right to do anything illegal because of "Royal prerogative".

Arcane

This arcane conception is something which would be quite unacceptable in any other bourgeois democracy. It amounts to the fact that the sovereign, the Queen, has the right to override any law. In practice, this right is exercised by the government, on behalf of the Crown.

In other words, **the unique character of the British constitution gives the "Crown" — i.e. the government — *de facto* exemption from any legal constraint whatsoever.**

Of course, outside of real emergencies, powers like the "Royal prerogative" are hardly ever used — except by the security services. But the notion of the Royal Prerogative highlights the fact that in Britain the division of powers, between Parliament, the judiciary, and the monarchy, with the Crown formally dominant among the three, puts the executive arm of the state, especially the security services, defence agencies and other repressive groups well out of the control of parliament, or any other kind of democratic control.

To put it in practical terms, if the Special Branch tap your phone and don't get permission from the Home Secretary, they are acting improperly. If MI5 does the same thing, they simply cite the Royal Prerogative — and walk away without a scratch.



PHOTO Graeme Cookson

Margaret Thatcher addresses Tory Party Conference 1978: just before the Tories took over from the Labour government allegedly "destabilised" by MI5.

Since the 1970s it has become clear that the amount of surveillance by the state on the labour movement in general and the left in particular is enormous. Such information is vital to monitoring, destabilising, and eventually crushing enemies of the existing state — and in Britain the labour movement is far and away the main perceived enemy.

Obsessed

For the left to become obsessed by this surveillance would be self-defeating. But we should be aware of it, and know what it is used for.

It is used today especially in employment, to block the promotion of progressive and left wing people in important national institutions like the BBC, to inform on trade union militants, especially but not exclusively in the nationalised industries, and in various other ways to destabilise and discredit far left organisations, and other progressive movements like black and women's organisations.

MI5 and the other organisations of the secret state are watchdogs of bourgeois rule. They are there above all to prepare for the future — for future "states of emergency" which the British ruling class fully expects will develop as the economic and social crisis worsens. It is in the interests of everyone on the left that these secret activities are revealed and brought into the open. Even the mildest reform of the Official Secrets Act should be supported.

Look at it this way. If you ever wondered just how you would spend the last couple of days before the outbreak of nuclear war, don't worry about it too much! If you are reading *Briefing* and are at all active in left wing politics, you will be interned by the government, who will make all the arrangements for you.

You will be interned if you are on the "Emergency Arrest List", which has tens of thousands of key "subversives" on it. Never heard of it? That's because it's an official secret. Want to know if you are on it? That's a secret too.

The Un-alliance

Is the third force still with us?

It's impossible not to gloat over the Liberal/Social Democrats fusion fiasco.

But funeral rites for the Third Force in British politics may yet be premature.

By Davy Jones
Islington South CLP

The birth of the SDP was not the result of Labour's "leftward drift" or any of the other familiar media explanations. It arose from a deep-seated crisis of British imperialism which led the ruling class to back the onward march of Thatcher, as she rolls back the post-war consensus and inflicts major defeats on the working class movement.

This shift in ruling class policy caused a big crisis in the anti-Tory camp. The labour bureaucracy was and remains unprepared to oppose the Tories with an equally radical perspective, but has been caught between its base in a still strong labour movement and the rightward political shift.

Extreme

The most extreme right wing tip of the labour bureaucracy split from Labour and the unions to create the SDP "Third Force". The building of the SDP/Liberal Alliance effectively prevented Labour from harnessing the anti-Tory majority to form a government. It still plays that role today both in local and central government.

Clearly the merger farce has dented the Third Force's credibility, fatally in the case of TweedleSteel and McLennan-Dum. But the causes underlying the creation of the Alliance still exist, and the Third Force will remain a major issue, even if its form changes.

The essential difference between the Liberals and SDP was revealed at the General Election, not over defence policy (that was a symptom) but in their preferred coalition partners. Owen made clear his leaning to the Tories, and his subsequent evolution has only confirmed this preference.

Trouble

As the Tories run into increasing trouble over the NHS, poll tax, official secrets, etc., and their support slips below 40%, Owen must fancy his chances of providing that crucial extra 10% needed to form a government. His SDP has clearly gained from the merger farce, and his media standing as a "statesman" should enable him to retain a sufficiently high profile to keep his version of the SDP on the electoral road.

A post-Thatcher Tory Party, with resurrected "wets" in key places will find Owen an attractive business partner. And as a defender of ruling class interests, his credentials are impeccable.

And what of the new Social and Liberal Democrats (*not* the LSD Party)? For the merger to collapse now would be a catastrophe for the Liberals. Disintegration would be a distinct possibility.

Strains

Already the strains are there. Simon Hughes talks of forming a Liberal/Green Alliance. Others are contemplating links with the nationalists in Wales and Scotland.



Cath Tate's photomontage (10 postcards for £1.50 from Cath Tate (LLB), PO Box 647, London SW2 4JX) captures the brief unity of the old-style alliance.

If the merger goes through, the Liberals may well suffer a haemorrhage of their left in these directions. The tragedy is that Labour is unlikely to be a beneficiary. Its respectable, pro-establishment, conservative image is just the opposite of what attracts radical Liberals.

For the pro-merger wing of the SDP the fusion is also crucial. Otherwise Owen will recoup the bulk of the Party and those leaders who opted for merger will find their careers in ruins. Fusion therefore seems likely, though a shakier start to life is hard to imagine.

The SLD will follow the political wind. Under Thatcher it will be drawn continually to the right. If the political tide changes, so could the SLD. Its sights are probably set on a deal with a right wing Labour Party.

Given Labour's failure to establish a clear political alternative to Thatcher, and its weak electoral showing, some Labour and trade union leaders will also be attracted to possible deals. Future coalitionism, in both Labour and Tory ranks, seems the main beneficiary of the recent Third Force Farce.

Linking up to fight the empire

The next three months will see two major conferences challenging NATO and US imperialism, as activists and academics join hands in confronting the dominant international political culture of our day.

By BEN LOWE

● The recently formed Campaign for Non-Alignment is holding its first annual conference on February 6-7th to help boost anti-NATO activity to a new level in Britain.

● An ad hoc committee in Sheffield is organising a still larger conference on April 22nd-24th to restore US imperialism to its rightful place on the Left's political agenda.

Until last year, there never had been a campaign against NATO membership in Britain. The Campaign for Non-Alignment was established last January to change this.

Inspired

Inspired in part by the pamphlet *Peace Through Non-Alignment: the case for British withdrawal from NATO* (Verso Books), and supported from the outset by MPs Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn, the campaign has spent a year pressing the anti-NATO case at every opportunity.

The basic aims of the campaign are:

● To secure the withdrawal of Britain from NATO.

● To work for a genuinely independent British foreign policy based on the pursuit of peace and disarmament, outside any military power bloc.

● To end British reliance on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and bases, and cut Britain's arms expenditure and involvement in the arms trade, and redirect resources for peaceful social purposes in Britain and other parts of the world.

● To work to change Britain's foreign policy to one based on respect for the rights of other nations; to oppose all British interference in, and exploitation of, the resources of other countries and to support the demand for a new international economic order.

Platform

With this as its platform, the campaign is now ready for a new phase of growth and development, initiating actions for itself, and intervening inside the peace, solidarity and labour movements.

The conference will be concerned with deepening the campaign's understanding of the world today, including such key issues as Third World debt, and changes in the East-West conflict following Glasnost, the INF deal, etc.

Other sessions will cover the history of NATO, and developments in such key parts of the world as Southern Africa, the Pacific, Central America and the Indian Ocean. Keynote speakers will include Rebecca Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn, along with speakers form the Spanish and Irish anti-NATO movements.

In order to boost the campaign to a new level over the coming year, special attention will be paid to membership and to campaigning work. A formalised membership is likely to be adopted, albeit without eroding the openness and accessibility of the campaign.

Two sessions will concentrate on pinpointing campaigning opportunities and devising an appropriate strategy. The campaign is already linked informally to the cruisewatch/cruise resistance network and related anti-base activity, and much attention will be paid to the INF treaty and its implementation — any delays adding to campaigning possibilities. The campaign cannot ignore the fact that no cruise warheads will be destroyed as part of INF.

CNA will also link up with the Fylingdales peace camp in supporting anti-Star Wars campaigning at Britain's main Star Wars site on US Independence Day.

Both these activities highlight where the CNA slots into the peace movement scene in relation to CND. It was the latter's consistent refusal to take up anti-NATO work that led to the setting up of CNA — especially after America's attack on Libya from British bases showed to all the risks attached to NATO membership.

Abandonment

It was CND's effective abandonment of anti-cruise work that created a semi-autonomous peace movement, to which CNA is now closely linked. The same is true of anti-base activity.

It was the bombing of Libya that finally prompted the other major international conference *Of Presidents and Present Dangers*. This will be an historic conference, designed to unite radical activity against US imperialism, ensure a more co-ordinated movement against the US empire, and assess the potentially enormous risks to the world in the context of a declining empire that is losing its grip.

Up to 500 people are expected to attend the conference at Sheffield Univeristy, and there is quite a galaxy of speakers. Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff, the noted US Marxists, are making a rare visit to Britain to attend. Trevor Munro from the Jamaican Workers Party will be there; as will Clive Thomas from Guyana.

Noted authors such as Susan George, Teresa Hayter, Duncan Campbell, A Sivanandan, Tariq Ali, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Richard Hart are speaking. And there will be represenatives from a number of Third World liberation movements and support groups for sessions on resistance to the empire.

There will be a bazaar over the weekend, and solidarity groups are encouraged both to set up stalls at this, and submit material for the anti-imperialist exhibition. TV coverage is ensured via the Bandung File.



Conferences against NATO and Imperialism:

Out of NATO — Into the World

A Weekend Conference organised by the Campaign for Non-Alignment
Saturday February 6th, 11am - Sunday February 7th
Manchester Town Hall
Details from Campaign for Non-Alignment, 129a Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG
£5 (waged), £2 (unwaged)
Free accommodation offered
Children: creche facilities available
Access: no details provided on conference leaflet

Of Presidents & Present Dangers

US Imperialism in the 1990s
Friday April 22nd, 7pm - Saturday April 24th, 4pm
Sheffield
Details: Ankie Hoogvelt, Conference Organising Committee, 302 Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN. 0742 664542
Full registration for weekend: £58
Low waged/unwaged subsidised registration for weekend: £18
Registration includes tea & coffee and lunch
Accommodation bookable from £11.85 per night B&B
Children: Creche facilities available
Access: conference leaflet asks you to state if you are "handicapped"

Briefing supporters: going to one of these conferences? Phone 01 733 7016 and let us know

Women's Health

Are germs sexist?

Are germs sexist?

The short answer is "yes".

(It would undoubtedly please the *Briefing* Editorial Board if I answered the question so briefly — but you're not getting away with it that easily!)

Why did I choose to write about germs — or bacteria and viruses, to be accurate? Well, a woman suggested that this column be called "Discharge".

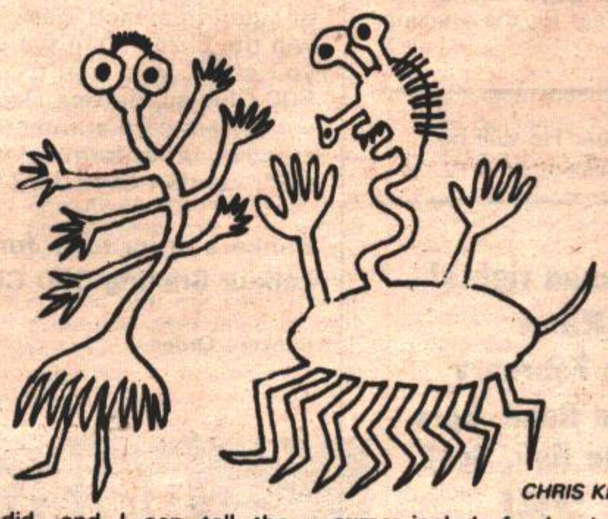
It sounded pretty foul to me, too, sisters — but then, by association of ideas, I began to think of vaginal discharge.

By TESS KEWLEY, SRN

One of the first things I noticed in studying this subject is that germs are either male or female when described by their Latin or Greek names. Reading through *Microbiology for Nurses* during bingo I found out — to my great surprise (heavy sarcasm) — that germs were discovered and named *by men*.

(I only wanted one number for £180, so I'm feeling rather embittered. I'm sick of losing, so in depth discussion of bingo will have to wait until I have another big win.)

I expect the majority of you have had thrush and other vaginal infections. Did you know that the name the medical profession use for thrush is *Candida*? And did you learn Latin at school?



CHRIS KNIGHT

I did, and I can tell the unenlightened amongst you that words which end in "a" are female, and words that end in "us" are male. So *Candida* is female — pretty appropriate, eh?

Now, have a think about sexually transmitted diseases. Gonorrhoea is caused by the germ *Neisseria*; the bug which causes syphilis is *Treponema*. Both female germs — despite the fact that men catch the disease too.

"Is this strictly relevant?" I hear you ask. Well, I don't see why women should get the blame for *all* the sexually transmitted diseases, do you?

Male germs tend to cause worse diseases. That, at least, is appropriate. *Staphylococcus*, *Streptococcus* and *Haemophylus* all cause life-threatening infections if you happen to get an operation wound infected.

Some of the other nasty diseases available to the consumer include food poisoning — nearly always caused by *salmonella* — another female germ.

I could go on forever about germs, but the point I'm making is that I bet those men who discovered the germs in the first place thought long and hard before naming them — and it is no accident that some germs are female and some are male.

Tips

By the way, a few tips on avoiding thrush:

● If you are given antibiotics, eat a large tablespoonful of natural yoghurt every day whilst you finish the course.

● Use the natural yoghurt to soothe your vagina and vulva if you do succumb. Wash your hands well, then shove as much yoghurt into your vagina as possible. Also, apply externally — very cooling and soothing.

● Give up using tampons. Pads may be messier, but they don't allow the vagina to get clogged up with blood and germs!

● If you are on the pill, you are more likely to get thrush. Consider another method of contraception.

● If you use spermicides check the ingredients. There are two main chemicals used in contraceptive pessaries and creams, and many women are allergic to them. Nonoxynol 9 is less likely to cause problems. Check the label before you buy (or receive them from the FPA). Remember that some condoms have spermicides on them, too, which can cause thrush and horrible irritation and itching.

● Your partner can catch thrush from you, so she/he needs to be treated as well, or you'll end up reinfecting one another.

Babies

● As a matter of interest, babies often get thrush in their mouths, and also around the buttock area. Kamillosan ointment will cure the nappy rash. Oral thrush can be dealt with allopathically by Nystatin drops (presciption only), or you can consult a homoeopath.

Next Edition: Definitely more about women's health and bingo, and a special for the future: getting your child's sleep problems solved. If you're up three quarters of the night, you can't function during the day, so this is a major women's health problem!

Letters

WRITEBACK!

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

Another "ism" which really hurts

Dear *Briefing*,

I am writing to you to express my anger about the number of "childist" remarks I've heard over the last few months!

I know it's usually the Tories who accuse us of making everything into an "ism", but I do feel that a lot of comrades are guilty of making remarks about children (to parents) which are uncalled-for, hurtful, and intolerable.

If I was sitting at a meeting and suddenly announced that I "hated" black people, or lesbians, or people claiming supplementary benefit, I would be challenged and possibly ejected from the meeting.

So why should I have to endure remarks about children from left comrades? I'd be the first to admit that my children are hard to care for, demanding, and normal in their behaviour; I'm not asking you to love them — after all, I don't love other people's children!

But I certainly don't *hate* them. Hate is a very strong word. I run a toddler group once a week and derive a great deal of pleasure from the company of the tots who attend. I *like* children — and I liked them before I had any of my own!

I'm no saint — I have my moments when my own and other people's children drive me to distraction. But I don't hate them, neither would I presume to say point blank to another parent "I hate other people's kids".

When people say it to me I feel sad, threatened, and a failure as a parent. I also feel sorry for my children.

Most of the people who make childist remarks are childless. Please can you think before you tell a parent that you "hate" kids? It's unkind and when it happens to me I feel immediately defensive, thinking "where have I gone wrong?"

Motherhood is hard enough without someone telling you that they hate your kids. I cried (alone) the last time someone told me blithely that she hated children. Lesbians must also cry when confronted with homophobia, and black people when they are the victims of racism.

Without children there would be no propagation of the species. OK, they can be little sods. But mothers (and fathers) need support, not criticism, from childless comrades.

I thought long and hard before I wrote this letter, but decided in the end that, having spent a sleepless, sad night considering the issue, that I should tell you how I feel.

You make me angry, sad, and guilty. It isn't good enough, and I don't want to hear any more childist remarks from left comrades who will support other oppressed groups.

Tess Kewley
Haringey

Useful Pamphlets

Questions You Ask About Abortion: Ideal for those wanting to speak/debate about abortion, based on 12 years experience. 30p; 13p postage for 3, 20p postage for 5.
Why Late Abortions: Produced by the Birth Control Trust. 15p; postage as above.
Running out of Time — Late Abortions & Time Limits; new edition in urgent preparation. When ready, will cost £1.00.

Contact: Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU; 01-490 0042/405 4801.

Opinion

Rape judgements

A Male Judge presumes

According to a recent court judgement a 12-year-old girl who visits a man in his flat is "asking for it" when she is raped.

She should have known that rape would be the inevitable outcome of such a risky venture.

It's bad enough when an adult woman of any age is presumed to have consented or "asked for" rape. But as her mother pointed out, a 12 year old is still a child, and even more powerless than a grown woman.

Any judgement which blames the female victim and gives the guilty man a light sentence reflects and reinforces traditional male stereotypes of sexual relations. The belief that male sexuality is uncontrollable, that men, once aroused, cannot contain their "passion", that women should take responsibility for this and should not "lead men on" are all backed up by bogus biological arguments.

These state that male sexuality is determined by hormones, in particular testosterone, which causes sexual aggression. Such aggression is therefore natural and men cannot do anything about it, even if they want to.

By Jane Kelly
Peckham CLP

It may be true that in a society like ours — where men have the power — all men are capable of rape. But this certainly doesn't make it "natural". Far from being natural, rape is the outcome of social, political and economic inequality between the sexes.

Nor is it a question of sexual inequality alone. The division between the sexes, along with racial and other divisions, is used by the capitalist class to divide the working class and maintain control. And a white male judge, pronouncing on a young girl's culpability in her own rape is part of that system.

Local Government News

MANCHESTER

3,750 jobs are shed

The December Council meeting in Manchester was supposed to start at 10am. But a mass lobby kept Councillors out of the Council Chamber and the meeting did not begin until late afternoon, after the Labour Group had asked the police and their dogs to remove the 300-strong lobby.

The Council voted to make £110 million cuts, about 25% of the budget. 3,750 jobs will go and services will decline drastically. Rents and other charges will rise; the capital budget will be cut.

This administration took office in 1984 with the promise to improve jobs and services. Until June 1987, many new Council jobs were created — about the same number that will now disappear.

Because the Tory government had stolen over £500 million in grants from Manchester since 1979, the Council paid for expansion through creative accountancy. This could only go on for a limited period.

Victory

But the Council put all its hope in a Labour victory. When this hope expired on June 11th Leader Graham Stringer saw no alternative but to make massive cuts.

Stringer was able to win support for the cuts in Manchester City Labour Party and in the Council unions. (Only UCATT and NATFHE are opposed to all cuts).

Stringer won support because no alternative seemed possible to most City Labour Party delegates. No one had prepared them for a third Thatcher term. And with other Labour Councils across the country giving up the fight how could Manchester have a chance on its own?

Labour Party members felt trapped. On the one hand the chances of winning a head-on confrontation with the government look bleak. On the other hand, Labour Party supporters will blame the Council for the cuts. Not surprisingly, many Labour activists feel demoralised, especially as more cuts will be implemented in coming years.

The Stringer leadership is not even willing to organise any major campaigns against the Tory attacks: education, privatisation, poll tax, etc. The cuts will make it more difficult to mobilise any Labour activist in any campaign, even in next May's local election.

Resistance to the cuts began to develop when their severity became clear. In education over 1,000 teaching jobs, over 500 manual jobs, and another 260 administrative and clerical jobs are to go.

Fightback

Manchester Fightback was organised to co-ordinate opposition. It called the lobby of the December Council meeting and will produce a regular news bulletin.

Trade union activists, Labour Party members, members of other parties, and others participate on equal terms in Manchester Fightback. Labour movement organisations are asked to affiliate and to support the campaign financially.

Its aims are to get the City Labour Party and the Council to reverse the cuts policies and to support all groups that fight against the cuts.

In order to achieve these aims Manchester Fightback will have to present a political alternative to the cuts policies. It has to show that it is possible to mobilise the working class in Manchester for more grants from the government. If the labour movement in Manchester takes the lead other inner cities with similar financial problems will follow.

Such a campaign will place the labour movement in a much better position to fight the poll tax, privatisation, and other attacks from the government. There is of course no guarantee that the labour movement will win in the end — although it is not impossible. But not to take up the fight will guarantee a far worse defeat for the working class.

Greg Bassett is on holiday this issue. He will be back from the kennels next issue.

Lesbian & Gay Rights are human rights!
National Festival & Rally
Manchester, Saturday 20th February
March from All Saints, Oxford Road, 1pm
Festival & Rally at Free Trade Hall, 3pm

STOP CLAUSE 28!

Afternoon of speakers & entertainment at the Free Trade Hall:
Invited Speakers include:
Communards, Claire Rayner, Victoria Wood, David Steel MP, Neil Kinnock MP, Edward Heath MP, Ken Livingstone MP, Chris Smith MP, Julia Neuberger, Pattie Caldwell, Billy Bragg, Julie Goodyear, US Presidential Candidate Jesse Jackson
and many more!
For more information, contact: North West Campaign for Lesbian & Gay Equality, c/o Gay Centre, PO Box 153, Manchester M60 1LP, 061 228 3554

Briefing goes to Cuba!

Anyone interested in sun, sea and collective farms 26.3.88-15.4.88 contact Jane (01)-703 9456 or Pete (01)-228 7000.

Building Briefing

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The *Briefing* Editorial Board, and the following Commissions, can be contacted at PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ, 01 733 7016:
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This week's winner

The winner this week is number 124 — again a *Briefing* supporter from London — Ai Meun Lim, from Peckham.

BOOK REVIEW

Going nowhere fast on race and class

***There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, by Paul Gilroy, Hutchinson, 1987, £7.95**

Paul Gilroy's book, subtitled *The cultural politics of race and nation*, aims to challenge many of the left's accepted ideas.

Building on his previous work on black "criminality", Gilroy analyses the way in which blacks are made into a "problem" by the establishment and is severe with those on the left who regard blacks simply as passive victims of capital or the state.

He argues for a "reintroduction of history" and for black struggle to be seen as a type of new "urban social movement". He calls for a "new anti-racism" distinct from both "fundamentalist" and "eurocommunist" versions.

But does Gilroy offer a truly "radical" alternative? Despite his book's many strengths — not least his thoughts on why the left has failed to meet the New Right's assault on multiculturalism — the answer on the whole is no.

By ANDREW COATES

But *There ain't...* is not another abstract exercise in "cultural studies"; it is clearly addressed to an activist audience. It cannot be ignored.

For Gilroy, one prime problem for historical materialism is "the manner in which racial meanings, solidarity and identities, provide the basis for action". This, he argues, is precisely what sociological and existing Marxist theories have failed to understand.

The concept of a black "underclass" in neo-Weberian sociology, and Sivanandan's views on the role of capital in consolidating racial divisions, make blacks into the *objects* of economic forces, as do Gramscian concepts of race as an ideological product.

The most interesting part of the book is Gilroy's attempt to construct a picture of "race formation" and its interaction with "class formation". Here he draws upon the philosophical theories — broadly favourable to Marxism — of Roy Bhaskar, whose realist concepts are used to link objective social structures and individual agency.

For Gilroy, "action" arises where contingently-created class and racial groupings come together to shape the political landscape. Here, he would appear to have begun his work in the spirit of the non-dogmatic Marxism of CLR James. Would that he had remained within it!

"Narrowly based class politics" have, Gilroy claims (on the authority of the anti-Marxist writer, Andre Gorz) a declining appeal. Class is more and more (in Gorz's words) a "contingent and meaningless fact".

Gilroy relies on the ideas of the French sociologist Alian Touraine, who believes that socialism is a completely moribund idea and that skilled workers now have a stake in capitalism. Only "new social movements" (ecology, feminism, immigrant associations), which radically refuse even to negotiate with the system and do not limit their demands to the economic sphere offer any hope.

In Gilroy's opinion, racial movements in Britain present this kind of radical alternative. The black urban population is thus a historical agent which can shatter today's political set-up.

Though Gilroy qualifies his statements, he does adopt the main outline of a highly dubious theory. There is something intensely suspicious about people like Gorz and Touraine, not to mention his other sources, Bahro and Melucci, who start from the axiom that Marxism is theoretically false ("essentialist", "Hegelian") and then discover by "chance" that the working class, agent of its own liberation, is either integrated into capitalism or disappearing.

In fact the "new social movements" have already displayed a pronounced tendency to melt away. Since these ideas first emerged in the wake of May '68, such groupings have practically ceased to exist in France. They were caught in a vicious cycle of purity and compromise.

Their history shows that Gilroy's disdain for "formal" political organisation is misconceived. He seems unaware that disillusion with the results of autonomist strategy has recently led actively engaged intellectuals, like Tony Negri and Felix Guattari, to grope their way back to the idea of "fronts of united struggle".



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

A landmark in the anti-racist struggle in Britain: Blair Peach memorial march passes the spot where he had died some days earlier. Southall, April 1979.

There ain't... is scathing about the way the black presence in Britain is denied by British racialism. It dissects the right wing populist movements which have dominated political discourse with a rhetoric of bogus "Britishness".

But Gilroy also shows how the New Right's insistence on "allegiance" (to nation, race, family) can be used against the left and the black movement. By hijacking the multi-culturalists' "right to be different" argument the New Right can claim that cultural separation is natural and legitimate.

Immigrants and people of different cultures should be kept apart, consigned to their own schools, under the authority of their traditional leaderships. Against this view, Gilroy points out that cultures are not "fixed, mutually impermeable expressions of racial and national identity".

Rabbits

In the same vein Gilroy has no sympathy for those "radical rabbits" mesmerised by the power of racialist populism. Members of the Communist Party, like Eric Hobsbawm, attracted to a "socialist" patriotism, deal in a language "stained with the memory of imperialist greatness". Black people cannot be represented inside such identities.

The anti-fascist campaign of the Anti-Nazi League was thus mistaken in branding the National Front as a bunch of "Nazis" and consequently "un-British". By trying to appeal to some people's sense of a national past, the ANL cut itself off from black constituencies.

Gilroy argues that municipal anti-racism narrows the question to a difficulty to be solved by administrative measures, whch are often resented as "alien" by the broad population. In place of this approach, Gilroy recommends a link up with his "new social movements".

Two points must be made in response to Gilroy's analysis. First, however questionable the rhetoric it used, the ANL had a clear strategy directed against a precise threat: the possibility in the late 70s that the National Front would make a breakthrough in British politics. (Voting figures from the time show this was a real threat).

The ANL, aided by other factors (not least Thatcher's own bid for the racist vote), destroyed the National Front as a credible force. In contrast, the French Left, which mounted no comparable campaign before the 1984 European elections, failed to arrest the advance of Le Pen's Front National.

The dangers posed by the presence in political life of a well organised party of the extreme right can be seen in France today. Was the ANL's strategy of anti-fascism so wrong? I think not.

Secondly, can the black "urban social movement" challenge a phenomenon as deeply rooted as British racism? Gilroy quotes one of CLR James' least helpful maxims: "There is nothing more to organise".

In which case, how can such groups actually undercut the organised forms of British nationalism? How can they transform political parties, including the Labour Party? By some spontaneous process of osmosis?

In reality a long period of practical work is needed to adapt anti-racist politics to the realities of the black movement. The left must learn from its honestly committed mistakes. In particular, it must understand how its own multiculturalism has aided the New Right. Contrary to Gilroy, there is *much* to organise.

Gilroy makes too many concessions to a currently fashionable anti-Marxism. He is so infected with this mood that he wonders if overhauling class analysis is "either a possible or a desirable task". Yet his own alternative concepts rest on flimsy foundations.

The universalism of the workers' movement has always rested on the international nature of wage labour, which continues to be a dominant feature of western societies.

To articulate the interests of diverse oppressed groups has *always* been a problem for socialists. British racialism has only exacerbated it and posed additional difficulties.

In Britain, rather than celebrating autonomy, a concept and movement being abandoned in the rest of Europe, we should be *organising* to defeat the New Right's offensive. An anti-racist strategy must be based on the creation of a truly secular state and education system.

This is the only way foward from the bureaucratic multiculturalism Gilroy rightly criticises, and the only way to beat the currently rampant New Right.

RADIO

Hurd's "community" proposals

Douglas Hurd, the Home Secretary, has just announced government plans to license three national and up to 500 local radio stations.

The rapid growth of pirate radio makes it necessary to fill up all the vacant frequencies.

By Richard Barbrook Hampstead & Highgate CLP

Despite the Tories' rhetoric over broadcasting deregulation, the government has been noticeably reluctant to open up the airwaves. In the rest of Europe, there are many left wing stations. The Tories' problem is how to loosen government control over broadcasting without letting their opponents on-air.

They have found one solution in the proposed national channels. These will be expensive to set up, not least because the Home Office proposes auctioning off the frequencies. Not even the Americans do this!

The national stations have another advantage. They eat up lots of frequency space, thus restricting the number of local stations which can be licensed.

Some local stations will be licensed. Hurd's proposed Radio Authority may not enforce "public service" obligations on the new stations, but it can ensure that government opponents don't get many (or any) licenses.

The Tories wish to prevent any station being supported by Local Authority funding. However, most stations will find it difficult to raise enough money from advertising alone. The scramble for advertising will threaten jobs and conditions in the existing radio stations.

Determined

The Tories are determined to combine all the worst parts of government control with all those of commercialism.

However, the Labour Party cannot simply oppose the expansion of radio broadcasting. Many different people, especially in the ethnic communities, want stations to produce programmes for and by them. The pirates have shown that new stations are possible and popular. Abroad there are many stations run as co-operatives which provide both employment and service their communities.

By learning from these examples, the left can offer an attractive alternative to both the paternalism of the BBC and the commercialism of Hurd.

Television

Keep your eyes on the prize

***Eyes on the Prize* is a 13-part US-produced documentary history of the American civil rights movement, currently showing every Sunday, 7.15pm, BBC2.**

By JOHN BROWN

The British left (never mind the working class) is still woefully ignorant of the whys and wherefores of this complex mass movement, which in the space of little more than a decade mobilised millions of working class black people, smashed American apartheid, and inspired a host of liberation movements and solidarity struggles around the globe.

Eyes on the Prize concentrates on the grass roots activists, effectively combining fascinating archive footage with present day interviews.

It is consciously the history of a *mass movement* — not of a few charismatic leaders. Don't miss it!

War on Race Chants

A campaign against racist chants at Leeds United football ground has won the backing of the Leeds Trades Council and other labour movement bodies. Its leaflets have been welcomed by the vast majority of fans. Leeds United Board of Directors has made *no* attempts to root out racist chants. Not a single game has been stopped because of them, nor a single leaflet attacking them issued by the Club. One noticeable absentee from the leafletters was former socialist, now a Councillor and member of the Leeds United FC Board, John Trickett. The campaign has been attacked in the editorial columns of the local *Evening Post* — but support among fans is steadily growing.

POETRY

Byron — 200 years on

January 22nd 1988 was the 200th anniversary of the birth of George Gordon — otherwise known as Lord Byron.

His poetry enjoyed unprecedented European-wide popularity in his own lifetime. His personal life was dogged by scandal and the bitter resentment of an entrenched Tory elite who disliked his iconoclastic opinions, his sexual behaviour and his lofty contempt for Kings, bishops, ministers, poet laureates and journalistic pundits.

Byron's politics veered wildly between revolutionary Bonapartism and weary aristocratic disdain for the "mob".

In the 1820s, the Greek masses rebelled against Ottoman Turkish imperialism. Byron, disgusted with the reactionary social order in England, traumatised by a disastrous love affair in Italy, decided to throw himself into the uprising. He died (not of war injuries but of disease) in 1824, only months after arriving in Greece.

Mark Seaton

When a man hath no freedom to fight for at home,
Let him combat for that of his neighbours.
Let him think of the glories of Greece and of Rome,
And get knock'd on the head for his labours.
To do good to mankind is the chivalrous plan,
And is always as nobly requited;
Then battle for freedom whenever you can —
And, if not shot or hanged, you'll get knighted.

***Byron*, November 1820**

Action Directe

The end of "Euro-terrorism"?

Europe's biggest "terrorist" trial in years is now taking place in France.

Twenty-four presumed members of the "combat communist group", Action Directe, are in the dock.

Some are said to have assassinated Georges Besse, once the head director of Renault; all are accused of scores of bombings, some fatal.

British newspapers have described them as a handful of militants disappointed with the aftermath of '68. But why did such a body come into being in France? And why has it taken nearly *twenty years* to end up in a mass trial?

The roots of Action Directe go back to the dissolution of the Gauche Proletarienne (Proletarian Left) in 1974. Formed after 1968, this semi-maoist organisation placed great faith in the spontaneity of the French "masses". Its leaders saw themselves as the New Resistance, and set up a clandestine branch, the Nouvelle Resistance Populaire.

When they grew tired of this posture they decided that the GP no longer needed to exist. Many of them moved sharply to the anti-communist right. Others drifted towards fringes of the Parti Socialiste.

The leadership's decision was not accepted by all of the "new maos" recruited after the May events. Some worked in the Brigades Internationales and the Nouveaux Armes Populaires pour l'Autonomie du Proletariat.

The military-minded decided to continue their "people's war". They killed the factory guard who had murdered Maoist worker Pierre Overney in 1977.

Repression effectively broke up this neblous collection of irreducibles. By 1980 many were in prison.

By ANDREW COATES

After Mitterrand's election in 1981 these activists were pardoned in an amnesty. Some involved themselves in Parisian squatters' groups. Others contacted the embryonic Action Directe, formed in 1979. Amongst these were people with links with radical Palestinians.

Mitterrand's victory was followed by a massive *downturn* in the public activity of the left. With the weakening of the Communist Party, and the Socialists's success, it was felt that France had become a more consensual democracy.

Many ex-members of the GP congratulated themselves on having prevented an "Italian" or "German" terrorist movement. The Editor of *Liberation*, Serge July, once a maoist of sorts, proposed breaking all of the left's "taboos" in order to line up behind a responsible social democratic administration. Many followed.

Action Directe ignored this emerging consensus. In *Internationale* they set forth a strategy involving a European alliance of "combat communist groups" to defeat imperialism.

They worked closely with the Belgian Cellules Communistes and the German Red Army Fraction. They publicised debates with the Italian Red Brigades. The "international" branch went for arms dealers. A "national" branch finished off Georges Bresse. Their fanatical "anti-zionism" appeared to spill over into anti-Jewish attitudes.

At no time did Action Directe break out of its tiny circle and make contact with the French far left. Attempts to stir the anti-racist movement (such as their bombing of the National Immigration Office in 1986) met no response. A purer example of armed struggle carried out in isolation would be hard to find.

Buries

The roots of Action Directe are buried in the crisis of present day France. The last twenty years have seen not just the death of the ideals of '68; the French Communist Party has also withered and the socialists have shifted to the centre.

Those who imagined tha the decline of the Communists would open up new possibilities for the left failed to recognise the nature of these developments. What is at stake is the marginalisation of the *entire* revolutionary tradition in French politics.

Action Directe represented a voluntarist assertion of that tradition — a deeply misguided one founded in the fond belief that imperialism and the state could be met head on by a few determined individuals. It compromised itself with what Fred Halliday has called the "anti-imperialism of fools". And at times Action Directe militants skirted perilously close to that old "socialism of fools": anti-semitism.

The Action Directe trial will end in long prison sentences. Will it also spell the end of Action Directe's "Euro-Terrorism"?

Terrorist

The log-jam on the French left that gave birth to terrorist rumps is now breaking up. The Presidential campaign around the expelled Communist, Pierre Juquin, is gathering strength. Trotskyists, independent Marxists, "alternatives", Feminists, and ex-communists are supporting him. Work is being done to create a new vehicle for French socialists.

Yet it seems probable that Action Directe, despite having proved and achieved little, will flicker for a while. If we have learnt anything about European terrorism, it is that it has causes far more profound than a feeling of deception after an increasingly remote 1968.

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE



PHOTO: Themis Michaelidou

Ruth Mompati, ANC representative, during a recent speaking tour of Britain

Anti-Apartheid and gay rights

The African National Congress of South Africa had made it clear that anti-gay remarks by two of its leading representatives were personal opinions which did not reflect the liberation movement's official position.

In *Labour Briefing* no. 49 (13-27.10.87), Peter Tatchell reported that ANC spokesperson Solly Smith had declined to give a commitment on whether the Botha regime's anti-gay laws would be repealed by an ANC-led government.

In the same article, he also reported that ANC executive member, Ruth Mompati, had dismissed lesbian and gay rights as "red herrings" and described lesbians and gays as "not normal".

Though both Smith and Mompati have since expressed more sympathetic views, the Lusaka-based headquarters of the ANC recently went out of its way publicly to affirm its unequivocal support for lesbian and gay rights. It offered Peter Tatchell the following exclusive interview with ANC spokesperson Frene Ginwala.

"The ANC is a broad church," says Ginwala, "and we have within it people not just of all racial groups, but also of a lot of different political ideologies and religions united by a commitment to destroy apartheid and to establish a non-racial democratic South Africa.

"Our membership reflects South African society and overwhelmingly the oppressed majority within which there are gays and lesbians, but also within which there are people who do not have, as yet, a developed understanding of the need to eradicate all forms of discrimination against gays and lesbians in society.

"In addition, since we are a reflection of South African society, we would inevitably have within the ANC people who are gay and people who are not gay and we welcome them all without distinction."

Responding to the criticism that until the recent controversies the ANC had failed to make any positive statements on lesbian and gay rights, Ginwala replied:

"Historically, the question of gay and lesbian rights was not in the forefront of discussion, either amongst the public in South Africa or within the ANC.

"Indeed, if you look back at Britain ten to 15 years ago, it wasn't discussed much here either. It takes specific events to bring these issues to the forefront.

"The absence of a policy statement by the ANC on such issues is not indicative of a lack of concern or consideration. It doesn't mean we are against gay and lesbian rights. It just means that the issue hasn't formally been considered.

"There has been a long-standing ANC policy against all forms of discrimination (the Freedom Charter) and we apply this policy to specific issues as they arise. Previously, the gay and lesbian issue had not arisen within the ANC, but now that it has, we have responded to it with Thabo Mbeki's statement." (See *Briefing* no. 53)

"ANC policy towards gays and lesbians, and towards other groups in South Africa which are discriminated against, has to be the same because it is an issue of principle enshrined in our Freedom Charter. The raison d'être of the ANC is to fight discrimination and deprivations and gays and lesbians cannot be excluded from that process."

Ginwala says that the imprisonment of gay anti-apartheid activist Tseko Simon Nkoli has had a major effect in making the anti-apartheid movement more aware and committed to the gay cause.

"The detention of Tseko Nkoli, a known gay person, focussed attention on the gay and lesbian issue in a way that has never happened before. It also showed that even within the gay community there is discrimination as indicated by the attitude of the Gay Association of South Africa towards Nkoli's imprisonment.

GASA has failed to understand that if they wish to oppose discrimination against gays and lesbians, they cannot effectively do so if their opposition does not encompass *all* the gays and other oppressed groups in South Africa who suffer discrimination. It was that recognition which led to the formation of progressive gay and lesbian organisations such as the Rand Gay Organisation which are a welcome addition to the anti-apartheid movement inside South Africa."

Ginwala sees black and gay South Africans as having a common interest in ending apartheid.

"The apartheid system is based on distinctions, discrimination, and divisions and amongst these are vicious laws discriminating against gays and lesbians which we deplore.

"It is in the interests of gays and lesbians, as much as all the other oppressed groups that the apartheid system is eradicated.

"The ANC has always welcomed the support and solidarity that has been extended to our struggle by gays and lesbians in many countries, especially Britain, and we shall continue to do so."

Socialist Travellogue

Widow-burning in Jaipur

We went to Jaipur, the capital of Rajastan, primarily to see the tourist spots and to watch the England v. West Indies World Cup cricket match.

The fact that we would also be there for Diwali, the annual Hindu festival, was really just a lucky coincidence.

By Craig Brewin
Haringey Councillor

Such is the hectic way of life in India that it was not until after the event that we discovered that Diwali in Jaipur had been subject to an organised boycott.

Diwali is celebrated through a number of traditional practices. Traders appear to drown their shops in a sea of lights and decorations, and fireworks and firecrackers make the town appear to be the target of a military offensive.

Evening

We spent the evening of Diwali watching and dodging the fireworks in the street before returning to our hotel, where we were encouraged to share in the small ceremony that our hotelier's family were carrying out in the hotel foyer. Later on they sent two home-made sweets to our room, another traditional custom.

The boycott of Diwali by the Jaipur traders was a protest against the government's ordinance prohibiting the glorification of **sati**, the practice of burning a widow alive on the funeral pyre of her husband. Only a few weeks earlier, Jaipur had witnessed a 70,000 strong demonstration in opposition to the government's decree.

After the coverage of World Cup Cricket (a long way after, in fact) coverage of the **Sati** issue was the main ongoing story in the excellent Indian press. (Murdoch has yet to break into the Indian market).

We were therefore able to follow in detail the latest **sati** incident, which had led to the government's ordinance and subsequent events.

Supposedly

Sati (pronounced suttee) is supposedly a traditional spiritual practice which has been periodically revived during the past 40 years. It was forced into public prominance when, on September 4th 1987, a young woman called Roop Kanwar committed **sati**, or became **sati**, in a village called Deorala in Rajastan.

Following pressure from women's organisations, the government ordinance was brought into effect from October 1st 1987. This led to a large number of people being arrested in the Deorala area, where a large amount of money had already been raised for a temple commemorating the **sati**.

The issue became entangled in arguments about civil liberties, Rajput customs and traditions, and the role of women in Indian society. There is strong evidence that the **sati** of Roop Kanwar was not voluntary, as was claimed at first.

Women's groups in India are using the incident to highlight the appalling plight of widows whose lives were so dependent on their husbands that life without them is virtually untenable. As well as lack of material support there is an enormous social stigma attached to widowhood in India which probably cannot be fully understood without a considerable familiarity with Indian culture.

Roop Kanwar's **sati** is the 38th in the past 40 years. These have mainly been in the Skekhawali region of Rajastan, a poor, non-industrialised area where the status of women in particularly low.

Even in the city of Jaipur itself, women are often not allowed to support themselves. Our auto-rickshaw driver who earned 50 rupees a day, if he was lucky, and was struggling to pay his sons' school fees, told us that his wife could never work. "Too many eyes," he said.

Division

The division in India over the **sati** incident can be demonstrated by the fact that the Jaipur edition of the *Times of India* carried coverage far more sympathetic to the **sati** than editions published in other parts of the country. One of our tour guides in another part of India told us that **sati** had been completely abolished in India 150 years ago.

One national newspaper decided to reproduce the views of Mahatma Gandhi on the subject. Gandhi claimed that the practice was based on "superstitious ignorance and the blind egotism of man" which began as a means of discouraging women from poisoning their husbands!

The Rajputs see the government's ordinance as a deliberate attack on Rajput culture. They say that the glorification of **sati** has gone unchallenged for decades. **Sati** temples have been built in New Delhi and there are a large number of **sati** festivals held throughout India each year.

Defiant

The Rajputs appear defiant, as Bhagirath Singh Shekhawat, an advocate in the High Court said:

"In every village there should be a sati and a temple to commemorate it. The government cannot afford to antagonise the Rajputs. If they do, they will be turning 80% of the Country's armed forces against them. As it is, the Sikhs have revolted. We will create a Punjab situation in Rajastan."

Our few days in Jaipur, like our stay in India as a whole, only gave time to get a flavour of the place, and to scratch the surface of its culture and the political situation there. However, if you can find the right auto-rickshaw driver, the city is well worth investigating, and would provide one of the highlights of any westerner's tour of India.

Ireland

Internment threat on Tory agenda

In the year marking the twentieth anniversary of the start of the civil rights campaign in the North of Ireland, the Thatcher government is actively considering the reintroduction of internment without trial.

Apparently the British administration started feeding selected journalists information about the imminent introduction of internment at the turn of the year.

By Geoff Bell
Hackney North CLP

The aim was to gauge the reaction of both the public and politicians to the possibility of once again locking up political opponents without trial.

One of the first to respond to these suggestions was the *Irish Times*, a right wing pro-Thatcher Irish daily. In an editorial at the end of December, it said internment would be necessary if *"conventional security measures"* failed to *"get on top of the current upsurge in violence"*.

It continued:

"Internment could be the lesser of two evils. If a stage is reached at which it is absolutely necessary, then the authorities may take the view that it is also unavoidable, not just in the north, but in this state (the south of Ireland)."

Police

The police in the North of Ireland have also called for internment. *"Selective deterrents should be moved up the agenda for discussion as a protective measure,"* the official journal of the RUC Federation said recently.

Democratic Unionist leader Ian Paisley — who has many friends among the police and top civil servants in the North — predicted at the start of the year:

"If my information is correct, and I have no reason to think it is not correct, there could be internment on the boards through the Anglo-Irish Agreement both in the North and in the South."

Apparently, the British military authorities have already drawn up a list of probable internees. It is composed exclusively of Republicans and contains two hundred names.

Recently

It has emerged more recently that, as a sop to middle class nationalists in the North, the internment of republicans could be coupled with a banning of the Ulster Defence Association.

Despite countless murders to its name the UDA remains perfectly legal. Recently the UDA, heavily infiltrated by the RUC, has been undergoing a bout of in-fighting. The possible blood-letting which may follow will give the government the best possible excuse to ban the organisation and "balance" such moves with the imprisonment without trial of republicans.

It is, of course, impossible to say how seriously the Thatcher regime in the North of Ireland is considering internment, but there is no doubt that it is being considered. Accordingly, the left in Britain also needs to consider how it would respond if the internment camps were opened up once more in Ireland.

Thatcher visits Kenya

Why the British government stands alone in backing Moi

Almost a year ago Peter Njenga Karanja was arrested at his home in Nakuru, Kenya.

His family were not told where he had been taken and the next they learned of him he was dead in police custody in Nairobi.

An independent post mortem report found that Peter Karanja was dehydrated, with wounds and bruises on his arms and legs, and with laceration of the membrane supporting the small intestine.

The report described the body as "emaciated", with skin "peeling off in most of the surface". He had been in good health at the time of his arrest.

Peter Karanja's alleged crime was to belong to an underground socialist organisation known as Mwakenya — all political opposition in Kenya is illegal.

Over the past year or so dozens of alleged Mwakenya members have been arrested and tortured. They have been held naked for days in waterlogged underground cells, starved and beaten with truncheons and rubber hose. Then, in a succession of bizarre show trials, they have publicly confessed to their "crimes".

This was the cruel regime that Margaret Thatcher praised so fulsomely on her recent visit. Asked to comment on a recent Amnesty International report documenting the arrest, torture and death in detention of Mwakenya supporters, Thatcher replied that President Daniel arap Moi "is just as concerned at any abuses of human rights as anyone else would be."

By CHRIS O'BRIEN

It was only a few days later that Moi had a chance to demonstrate just how concerned he was. When the inquest into Peter Karanja's death began in Nairobi, police arrested two US human rights observers for "unauthorised note-taking".

Kenya has faced an international storm recently over its sordid human rights record. Moi recently called off a state visit to Norway and Sweden after unfavourable press coverage there and even the US administration has felt obliged to voice some criticism.

Almost alone in the international community the British government has stuck by Moi. Although the British press presented the Thatcher visit as being about South Africa, for Moi it was important as an endorsement of his repressive domestic policies. Indeed, Kenya has long been a stopover on flights to South Africa and the government's interest in the sanctions issue is purely rhetorical.

Kenya's major significance to Britain and the US is a strategic one: it has a deep water Indian Ocean port and command of the access to the Red Sea. There are massive US bases in Kenya, and a permanent British military presence has been maintained since independence nearly a quarter of a century ago.

Indeed, the only thing to have upset the cosy Thatcher-Moi relationship has been Ministry of Defence concern that British squaddies might catch AIDS from Kenyan prostitutes. Kenya denies that it has an AIDS problem.

During her visit Thatcher favourably contrasted Kenya's economic performance with that of "some countries bordering on Kenya". In fact the country's economy is shamelessly plundered by multinational companies, including many which are household names in Britain. Britain.

Measured by the number of Mercedes Benz cars on the road, Kenya's performance certainly outstrips her neighbours'. But even poor Uganda, only recently emerging from two decades of horrendous strife, has a smaller food import bill than Kenya. Perhaps this is not surprising, considering that a few years ago it was discoverd that Kenyan Ministers were privately exporting the country's strategic grain reserve.

Relations with the new, radical government in Uganda exemplify the Kenyan regime's particular blend of the repressive and the corrupt. Only days before Thatcher's visit, the two countries were virtually at war along the border. The immediate reason for the conflict is obscure but the underlying cause is quite clear.

The Ugandan government decided to save scarce foreign exchange by sending its exports through the Kenyan port of Mombasa by rail rather than road. The Kenyan road haulage companies which stand to lose from the new arrangement just happen to be owned by senior government Ministers.

This is presumably what Thatcher meant when she praised Kenya for its belief in "personal responsibility and self-help".

SPAIN

Unions break from "socialist" government

It will be six years this October since Felipe Gonzalez, fresh-faced, hair down to the collar of his leather bomber jacket, ecstatically received news of the overwhelming electoral victory of the Spanish state's Socialist Party (PSOE).

Standing close by him that day was the equally jubilant — if less sexy — figure of Nicolas Redondo, General Secretary of UGT, the largest trade union in the Spanish state, which had been hijacked by the Socialists after a long period of domination by the Communist Party.

By ANDY ROBINSON
Barcelona

PSOE's election programme was, to all but the most cynical eye, unequivocal. "No to entry into NATO" and "Yes to 600,000 more jobs!" were the slogans.

The idea was that the transition to democratic socialism could now follow the transition to "democracy", consummated with the pathetic failure of Tejero's Keystone Cop coup in 1981.

What actually did follow was a spineless capitulation to the patently undemocratic pressures exerted by US military and multinational interests. During the years up to 1985, the Spanish state became the back-door mat on which Japanese and American multinationals wiped their feet on their way to the EEC market.

Wages were kept attractively low by agreements between the government and UGT, under the pretext that competitive labour costs meant more investment and jobs. Unemployment rose to 21.2%.

The malleability of the Castilian word "entrada" allowed the reinterpretation of the 1982 anti-NATO slogan as "No to NATO *at the beginning*" (but Yes later).

In March 1985, thanks to a swindler's campaign, Gonzalez won the approval of the majority of voters in a referendum for the Spanish state's continued membership of the alliance. Meanwhile the euphemistically-named "reconversion" programme tore into employment in the north of the country where steel, coal and ship-building are concentrated.

Reconciling UGT's political affiliation to PSOE became increasingly difficult for militants within the union. As long as the leadership offered tacit support for the government's austerity policies, disaffection spread.

In Reinosa, where the struggle to save 500 jobs in a foundry culminated in a police riot of appalling brutality, the local UGT offices were stoned by workers, many of whom were themselves members of the union. Such a rift between rank and file and leadership in UGT was exploited by Comisiones Obreras, the PCE union which gained ground in the vast syndical elections held last Christmas.

Announcement

With the announcement in the autumn by the government of a 4% wage norm in the public sector, the UGT leadership decided to abandon their deeply compromised position. Redondo gave up his seat in parliament and in a typically anarchic TV debate shouted, "You're a bosses' man!" across the studio to the Minister for the Economy, Carlos Solchaga. He added that there would be extensive industrial action in the coming months if the government norm was not raised.

Gonzalez protested that trade union indiscipline had sunk the British Labour government in 1979 and warned that an "invierno de descontento" (winter of discontent) could have even more chilling consequences in the Spanish state's political climate.

Pointed

Redondo coolly pointed out that the Labour government had fallen in 1979 because of the anti-working class policies it had pursued in the preceding years. Gonzalez's alarmist remarks would find little resonance, anyway, among the handful of parties represented in parliament, least of all those on the right whose disarray since the retirement of their polished Franquist leader, Manuel Fraga, has been absolute.

In the local elections of June last year, the fall in the socialist vote was accompanied not by growth in support for the Madrid-based right, but by increased popularity for the nationalist parties in the Autonomies, and especially in Catalonia.

So the battle lines are drawn. Confrontation of the kind that halted almost all public transport for three days last Easter (the smug smiles of car owners vanished when petrol pump attendants joined the strike) seems likely to gain the UGT leadership's support this time round.

With the real possibility of joint Comisiones Obreras/UGT action, 1988 could complete Gonzalez's rapid transition from youth to old age.

Sunday, Bloody Sunday

Demonstrate for British Withdrawal

LONDON

Saturday, Jan. 30th

Meet 12.30pm, Whittington Park, near Archway tube

Rally in Islington Town Hall

On January 30th 1972 British paratroopers opened fire without warning on unarmed civil rights demonstrators in Derry. Fourteen people were killed. This date is remembered as Bloody Sunday.

Sixteen years on many of the demands of the civil rights movement are still not met.

- Discrimination in housing and work continues. Catholics still suffer a level of unemployment more than double that of protestants.
- An "emergency" system is still in force, including repressive legislation, trial without jury, internment by remand, and a "shoot-to-kill" policy. This year's Amnesty International report highlights six areas where human rights are being infringed.

The toll of injury and death, the denial of civil liberties, the appalling social conditions in the north of Ireland are an indictment of British policy. To achieve peace in Ireland the fundamental problem of partition and the British presence must be resolved.

We therefore call on the government to implement a policy of political and military withdrawal from Ireland.

Labour Committee on Ireland, Troops Out Movement, Irish in Britain Representation Group

NICARAGUA

Contra aid protests planned

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign is co-ordinating a major lobbying campaign against renewed contra funding by the United States government.

The US Congress will consider a request from Reagan for yet more money for the Contras on February 3rd. The exact amount has not yet been determined but *any* aid would directly violate the Central America Peace Accord signed by the Central American presidents last August.

NSC is co-ordinating the sending of letters from MPs, MEPs, trade unions, celebrities, and concerned people from all over the country to Speaker of the House of Representatives Jim Wright calling for no contra aid and support for the Peace Accord.

On February 3rd NSC will be holding a torchlight picket outside the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square demanding no contra aid.

For more information contact David Kitson or Chris Taylor at the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, tel: 01 253 2464.

LABOUR BRIEFING

January 21st

Thousands say NO to Alton



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Women on the torchlit procession

Five hundred students assembled at the University of London Union on the morning of January 21st to show their anger at the Alton Bill.

Within hours, the demonstration had grown to over 3,000 strong, including delegations from as far afield as Strathclyde University, Sunderland Poly, Edinburgh College of Art, Leeds, Essex and Aberystwyth Guild of Students.

By Gill Lee
Labour Briefing Women

Police reaction to the students was thuggish: there were several arrests, banners were seized, and at one point horses were deployed.

Despite this provocation, the march was a huge success, showing that young women will not accept Alton telling them what to do with their bodies.

While students demonstrated and lobbyists lobbied, thousands of people streamed into Central Hall, Westminster, to listen to a range of speakers and entertainers explaining their opposition to Alton.

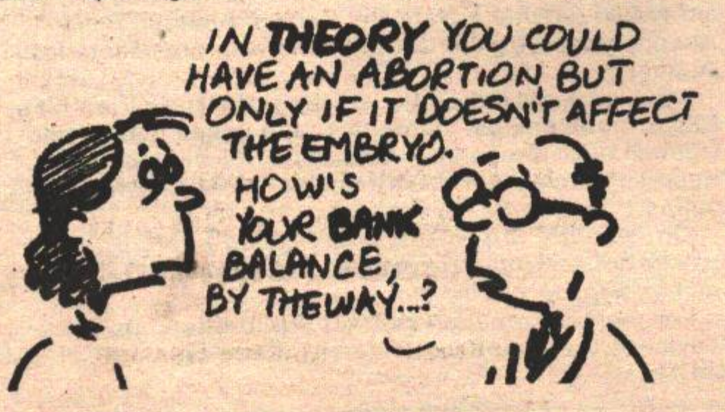
The hall was lined with banners from local FAB groups, NATFHE, Islington NUPE, Haggerston School NUT, WRRC, NAC and Well Woman Clinics. Throughout the day greetings were sent by over forty different delegations, including striking health workers and London Health Emergency.

Ada Maddox from the TUC brought greetings — and explained that Norman Willis could not be present as he was meeting Ronald Reagan!

Sharon Atkin explained how, after speaking for FAB up and down the country, she knew the breadth of support for the campaign. Speakers from Ireland and the Spanish state explained how the present restrictions on abortion rights in those countries lead thousands of women a year to come to Britain for abortions.

Six thousand women joined the torchlit procession from Lincoln's Inn Fields to the Embankment to, finish the day's events with a demonstration of women's unity and strength.

Singing "David Alton on yer bike! We will fight for women's rights!" the procession arrived in front of St Thomas's Hospital, facing the Houses of Parliament, to demand that MPs respect women's right to make decisions about their own bodies.



The Labour MPs who voted *for* Alton are:

John Battle *Leeds W*, Stuart Bell *Middlesborough*, Dr Jeremy Bray *Motherwell S*, Ronald Campbell *Blyth Valley*, Dale Campbell-Savours *Workington*, Dennis Canavan *Falkirk W*, Tom Clarke *Monklands W*, Frank Cook *Stockton N*, Stan Crowther *Rotherham*, John Cummings *Easington*, Lawrence Cunliffe *Leigh*, Don Dixon *Jarrow*, Frank Field *Birkenhead*, Bruce Grocott *The Wrekin*, Peter Hardy *Wentworth*, Sean Hughes *Knowsley S*, David Lamble *Cunninghame S*, James Lamond *Oldham Central & Royton*, Geoffrey Lofthouse *Pontefract & Castleford*, Thomas McAvoy *Glasgow Rutherglen*, Calum Macdonald *Western Isles*, John McFall *Dumbarton*, Michael Martin *Glasgow Springburn*, Bruce Millan *Glasgow Govan*, Alfred Morris *Manchester Wythenshawe*, Gordon Oakes *Halton*, William O'Brien *Normanton*, Robert Parry *Riverside*, Tom Pendry *Stalybridge & Hyde*, Dr John Reid *Motherwell N*, George Robertson *Hamilton*, Ted Rowlands *Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney*, John Smith *Monklands E*, Jack Thompson *Wansbeck*, Tony Worthington *Clydebank & Milngavie*.

"Why I'm fighting Alton..."

"I get confused about why people make such a fuss about a piece of jelly when they spend so much money on killing people in wars around the world."
Lord Soper

"All evidence from abroad points to abortion on demand up to 12 weeks (in addition to the provisions of the '67 Act) being the best way of achieving fewer late abortions."
Harriet Harman

"As the campaign has developed one big truth has come out — the anti-abortionists see this Bill as the first step to abolishing the '67 Act. We will not support 18 *or* 24 weeks. We do not want any reduction because we do not want any criminalisation."
Leonora Lloyd

"From youth to old age women have to fight for their rights. The Alton Bill makes worse all the problems we face with the lack of NHS facilities. We are the owners of our bodies — not David Alton."
Betty Heathfield

"This Bill is in particular an attack on black women and poor women. Black women have a particular concern about forced sterilisation. But black women will also be the first to be forced onto the back streets."
Diane Abbot

Fight the Alton Bill

January 16th

Angry women take to the streets

Fifteen thousand people throughout Britain marched, picketed, and leafletted on January 16th against David Alton's attempts to reduce the time limit for abortions from 28 to 18 weeks.

The message from all over Britain was clear: Alton has got it wrong.

By Gill Lee
Labour Briefing Women

Women want to retain the right to choose if and when to have an abortion. They are not prepared to accept any restrictions on the '67 Act.

In **Glasgow** 3,000 people marched against Alton in a demonstration organised jointly by the STUC and Scottish Fight Alton's Bill. There were large contingents from the TGWU, TASS, ASTMS and the Scottish teachers' union EIS.

Thirty out of the 72 Scottish Labour MPs are committed to opposing Alton — an improvement on the seven who voted against the Powell Bill! Despite this success, the campaign in Scotland must now go on to force the other 42 Labour MPs into line with Labour Party policy. No MP should have a conscience vote on women's rights.

In **South London** a militant demonstration of 600 angry pro-choicers marched from Clapham Common to Brixton for a rally. Joan Twelves, Lambeth anti-cuts Councillor, spoke for the local FAB. She explained that Alton's Bill is an attack on women's rights in general.

Skippy, from the lesbian community, linked the Alton Bill with Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, as attacks on democratic rights. She said the kind of alliances forged in the Miners' Strike had to be rebuilt to resist these attacks.

A campaigner from the local Health Emergency explained how the cuts in the NHS were affecting women's limited abortion rights under the '67 Act. Greetings to the march were brought from representatives of Women Against Pit Closures and the South East Region of the TUC.

Leeds held a militant demonstration of 500, which included delegations from the NUT, NALGO, Leeds Trades Council, and several Labour Parties.

They marched through the city to a rally in the Town Hall. This followed much public activity in Leeds, including a recent meeting attended by 100 people and a 500-strong lobby against Alton's visit to the city earlier in the month.

In **Birmingham** 800 demonstrated. At a rally afterwards Sid Platt from West Midlands TUC pledged support for the fight against Alton.

There was a demonstration of 1,500 in **Sheffield**, 1,500 in **Nottingham**, 2,000 in **Manchester** and smaller demonstrations in **Bristol**, **Newcastle**, **Cardiff** and **Hackney**.

In **Oxford** 400 people, including delegations from the TGWU 560 branch (Cowley Body Plant), NALGO, and the NUT demonstrated. In Alton's home ground of **Liverpool** over 600 people marched to show that Alton does not represent their views on abortion.

The thousands who demonstrated on January 16th show the breadth of feeling against any restrictions on the '67 act. Women and the labour movement can defeat Alton!

HARINGEY

Haringey FAB was set up in November and has won support from local trade union branches, women's group, student unions, and political organisations.

We have organised regular mass petitioning, a lively public meeting with over 80 people (addressed by Bernie Grant and others) and a social at Middlesex Polytechnic, which raised £100s for FAB.

On the streets, for the local day of action FAB supporters far outnumbered the four SPUCers who were handing out emotive "pro-life" propaganda. Women chained to ironing boards (to dramatise how the Alton Bill will drive women back into the home) attracted a lot of attention.

Unfortunately, members of the SWP have put some women off with their negative response to ideas for action. They are now trying to wind the group down — "because of the downturn" — at a time when we should be fighting even harder to kill off the Bill.

But local women are committed to stepping up the campaign and using the meetings to discuss a longer-term strategy for fighting for abortion rights and women's liberation.

Jane Connor

GLASGOW

The Day of Action against Alton's Bill was highlighted in Scotland by a demonstration and rally in Glasgow.

Police estimated the turnout at only 800 and the BBC news dutifully reported the figure.

But independent tellers agreed the number was closer to 3,000.

After receiving several complaints abut this gross distortion of the facts broadcast in the lunchtime news, the evening news deleted all reference to the size of the Glasgow demo.

STUC support ensured many trade union delegations and banners were present. The STUC also hired a train for the lobby against the second reading of the Bill on January 21st.

Speakers at a packed rally in the City Hall included MPs Maria Fyfe and Jo Richardson. Jo described how the campaign was shaping up in Parliament. Thirty Scottish Labour MPs would definitely be voting against Alton's Bill, but this still leaves 20 Labour MPs (all men) sitting on the fence, or using their "own moral judgement" to condemn thousands of women to the back street abortionists.

As Jo pointed out, Alton's Bill would not end abortions after 18 weeks (more likely, in practice, 15 weeks). It would simply lay the basis for a new form of privatisation — the mushrooming of seedy, unqualified backstreeters.

To square their "morality" with the facts, moralists ignore the dangers Alton's Bill imposes on thousands of women.

Jim Niblock