LABOUR
BRIEFING
40p FORTNIGHTLY
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40p

Healthworkers take the lead:

WE CAN TAKE ON THE TORIES!



PHOTO: Martine Stead

NUPE picket line at University College Hospital on the Day of Action in London, February 3rd

"Only 2% of nurses were involved," claimed the right wing press, clearly seeking to belittle the February 3rd nurses' Day of Action against NHS cuts.

But with 500,000 nurses employed, 2% is *10,000 nurses taking action* (mainly in London, the Midlands and Yorkshire): this is a far *higher* figure than claimed by the unions! The action by nurses was as big as at any time in the 1982 pay fight.

The thousands who took action did so without any national call from their unions — and often despite the opposition or incompetence of local union officials.

In addition to those on strike, thousands more nurses who supported the dispute were only "working" to provide union levels of emergency cover (which in some wards is *more* than that usually available).

By HARRY SLOAN

Numbers were also reduced because the North West and Wales held fire for their own days of action, while Scotland is lining up for a much more ambitious 24-hour STUC-organised stoppage on February 24 involving not only health but also industrial unions.

Alongside the nurses on the picket lines came at least 1,500 ASTMS technicians, thousands of low-paid NALGO admin and clerical staff, thousands of ancillary workers, and many junior doctors.

Such action on this scale is unprecedented. The February 3rd strikes, like the Ford struggle and the Seamen's dispute is a genuine movement of the rank and file. Building on the Manchester nurses' strike in January, it has changed the face of NHS trade unionism, confirmed the huge groundswell of public support, and created new conditions to wage the war in defence of the NHS.

Creaking union machinery in many previously forgotten COHSE and NUPE branches was dragged into action by new militant groups of nurses determined to hit back at NHS cuts, and defend the service against Thatcher's menacing plans for its destruction.

While the rank and file have begun demanding more action, union chiefs and Labour leaders have been divided on how to proceed.

COHSE leader Hector McKenzie stood on picket lines and roundly denounced the scab role played by leaders of the Royal College of Nursing: but NUPE leader Bickerstaffe trudged lamely around a hospital with a bunch of flowers.

Shadow spokesperson Robin Cook joined London picket lines and visited a packed London Health Emergency evening rally, while Neil Kinnock denounced left MPs for picketing, claiming it gave Labour "a bad name".

There are similar divisions on where to go from here. With pressure building from the rank and file for further, official strike action on Budget Day, March 15th, union leaders are torn between attempting to put a lid on the action, or appearing to *lead* what promises to be a growing grass-roots movement.

Rivalry between NUPE and COHSE (with COHSE clearly the most radical so far) is also a dynamic factor, improving the chances that further action will be called.

In this situation the TUC's agonised decision (after a 5-hour marathon haggling session) to call a national Demonstration on Saturday March 5th can be seen as an uneasy compromise. It falls far short of the strong lead given by the Scottish TUC for a one day strike, but it still gives the labour movement a real opportunity to build a mass movement on the NHS.

A huge demo on March 5th will pile pressure back onto the health unions to call more action (whether or not March 15th becomes the target date): and renewed action by healthworkers is vital in the fight to force the TUC to call a day of strike action.

Immediate action is vital from every trade union body, Labour Party, community organisation and health campaign — to fill coaches and trains to London for the March 5th demo, which begins at 11am at Victoria Embankment.

The mood is developing strongly for action on the NHS right across the trade union movement, overlapping with other struggles and disputes involving local government, teachers, Ford workers, seamen, fire fighters and many others.

As Thatcher sharpens the knife for major surgery on the NHS, the fightback against these attacks could yet be the catalyst that unites the workers' movement in mass general strike action to confront the hated, dictatorial government.

Build for March 5th!

TUC DEMO:
Assemble
11am, Victoria Embankment
March
12 noon, via Parliament Square, Victoria St, Grosvenor Place
Rally
2pm, Hyde Park (South Side)

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Stop the Clause! Lords amend the Clause — the campaign moves on

Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, which seeks to ban the "promotion" of homosexuality by Local Authorities, is continuing to trundle its way through the House of Lords — lesbian abseilers notwithstanding.

The Clause survived a heavy onslaught of opposition during its Committee stage by means of what *The Guardian* called "the charabanc vote".

The Tory Chief Whip ordered in Lords and Ladies from the shires who hardly see the chamber from one session to another.

The infamous Clause next resurfaces for its Lords Report stage expected to take place on Thursday, February 18th.

The mass, broad campaign against the Clause, which has already taken the country by storm, was clearly evident during seven and a half hour Lords debate.

The Clause smelt of fascism, it was offensive, it would create an open season for bigots and vindictive queer bashers, it was a monument to ignorance and intolerance, and it contravened the European Convention on Human Rights... just some of the points made by Opposition peers.

Books *would* be removed from libraries, lesbian and gay teachers *would* be sacked, and young children with lesbian or gay parents *would* be prevented from being told that theirs were happy, normal families, if the Clause became law.

Tory Lords plumbed the depths of ignorance, intolerance, and offensiveness before this had even happened. Homosexuals were variously held responsible for the origins and conduct of the Nazis, wholesale corruption of youth, making normal families look queer, and the denigration of heterosexuality. What was really at issue was the sanctity of the heterosexual, white, nuclear family.

By SARAH ROELOFS

The government self-amended the Clause to introduce "intentionally" before the word "promote". Local Authorities are thus banned from intentionally promoting homosexuality.

For their pains they were accused of making a mockery of the English language and playing at being Humpty Dumpty. "Words mean what I want them to mean," said Humpty. All other amendments were overwhelmingly defeated.

The Stop the Clause Campaign has also taken the Labour Party by storm, seeming to lead to an abrupt shift in position.

- Neil Kinnock has publicly condemned the Clause as "crude, slanderous and vicious.
- Chris Smith MP has confirmed that the Party is now opposed to the Clause in its entirity.

While welcoming this development individual members of the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights have commented that if the Labour Party had abided by Party policy in December, General Secretaries of national trade unions would by now be providing much more support to the opposition campaign than is the case. As it is only NALGO have taken a national, public, unambiguous position of opposing the Clause.

However, anti-Clause resolutions are now sprouting all over union conference agendas — the rank and file lack the diffidence of their leaders!

The national ad hoc Stop the Clause campaign Co-Ordinating Committee continues to meet weekly in London with attendances of up to 100 lesbians and gay men from across the political spectrum.

This unity has been maintained despite accusations that lesbians meeting separately is divisive, that lesbians are being too political, and assertions that "respectability" is of the essence! The last meeting cheered the lesbians who had invaded their lordships' chamber!

The campaign is now to give more priority and prominence to fight on the Clause's reference to "pretended family relationships".

Lesbian mothers, who have been battling for decades for custody of their children and to be recognised as normal families, have argued forcefully that this invidious phrase is at the heart of the matter.

The Campaign will be producing briefing material and is encouraging the setting up of "Parents/Families Against the Clause" groups.

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.

Campaign Information

National Office: c/o ULU, Malet St, London WC1E 7HY. Tel: 01 580 9551 ext. 227

Volunteers, affiliations, donations are very welcome! Posters, leaflets, badges, briefing packs, affiliation forms all available! **Co-ordinating meetings every Wednesday, 6pm (phone office for details).**

Future Activities:

February 18th
Report debate in Lords. 12noon-2pm, Meeting in House of Commons, room booked by Alan Roberts.

Saturday February 20th
National demonstration in Manchester. Assemble All Saints, Oxford Road, 1pm. Festival & Rally at Free Trade Hall, 3pm. Transport details from office.

Friday April 8th
National and international day of action

Saturday April 23rd
National Civil Liberties Demonstration, London

Saturday April 30th
Major demonstration, London

Mid-June
Lesbian Strength Demonstration and Festival

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

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

Transport details:
Contact National Office 01 580 9551 ext. 227

AIDS Summit report

Failure to act against discrimination

The World Health Minister's Summit on AIDS ended in London in late January with a generalised statement of support for the human rights of people with AIDS and HIV infection.

However, the final Ministerial Declaration notably failed to back up this commitment with any concrete proposals for action such as legislation to outlaw discrimination against people with AIDS or HIV.

By PETER TATCHELL

Most regrettably of all, the Ministerial Declaration failed to call on governments to repeal laws to allow for compulsory testing, employment bans, travel restrictions, deportation orders and quarantine measures which many of them have already enacted.

- The Cuban authorities have imprisoned 140 people with AIDS in a special "sanatorium" which they claim is being administered with "human dignity".
- The Bavarian state government has introduced the compulsory testing of all "suspected carriers" of HIV and one Bavarian Minister has called for the "thinning out" of the homosexual population to stop the spread of AIDS.
- Nearly 200 foreign workers and students with AIDS have been deported from the Soviet Union and all long-stay foreign visitors must submit to a mandatory HIV test.
- In South Africa, the Chamber of Mines has forced miners to be tested for HIV, and all migrant workers found to be HIV positive are being repatriated.
- South Korea has passed laws to allow the compulsory quarantining of "high risk" people with HIV infection in a new £500,000 detention centre.
- The Brazilian authorities are ignoring the assassination of homosexuals by right wing Death Squads who blame the gay community for the AIDS epidemic.
- Third World students in Belgium who are studying on Belgian government scholarships are liable to have their grants cut off if they refuse to submit to a HIV test, and those who test positive face the possibility of deportation.

These abuses against people with AIDS/HIV are a frightening omen of what may happen in Britain and throughout the world in years to come. The warning signs are clear: AIDS is a human rights issue and we ignore it at our peril.

Minister admits AIDS travel ban

The British government has admitted for the first time that it has imposed travel restrictions on the entry into Britain of foreign visitors with AIDS and HIV infection.

The Health Minister, Tony Newton, made the surprise admission at the World Summit on AIDS in London last month.

By Peter Tatchell

It came just minutes after he had proclaimed the importance of acknowledging *"the rights and dignity of people infected with HIV and with AIDS"* and the need to *"avoid infected people being excluded from society, stigmatised and discriminated against."*

Mr Newton was asked to comment on the case of two American tourists who were detained, interrogated and deported from Heathrow Airport three weeks ago.

The two men were apparently stopped by immigration officers on suspicion that they were gay and quizzed about their sexual orientation and health status.

Under pressure, they admitted they were HIV antibody positive. Immigration officers reacted by refusing them entry and they were put on the next available plane back to the United States.

Mr Newton responded to these allegations by confirming, for the first time, that it was British government policy to refuse entry to foreign visitors with HIV infection when their medical condition may result in them requiring extensive medical treatment for which they cannot pay.

Blanket

He denied that there was a blanket ban against all people with HIV and specifically refuted claims that healthy people with HIV were being deported.

However, the two American tourists who were turned back at Heathrow were both in good health and extremely unlikely to have required any form of medical treatment during their planned brief holiday in Britain.

Their exclusion adds weight to accusations that the government's ban is being applied to all foreign visitors with HIV without distinction.

Admission

The Health Minister's admission of a partial travel ban follows renewed reports that harassment of gay tourists at Britain's airports is on the increase.

Last September, an American citizen with residence rights in the UK was held for four hours at Stansted Airport when immigration officers discovered he was gay and had taken a HIV antibody test.

After going through the contents of letters and a diary found in his luggage, they informed him that he was being considered for deportation on the grounds that he was "medically undesirable".

It was only when it was confirmed that his HIV test result was negative that he was allowed into the country.

Holiday

A month ago, the same American was detained for 4½ hours at Gatwick Airport after returning from a holiday in Switzerland. Immigration officers implied that since he was gay, he was at high risk from AIDS and therefore "medically unsuitable to enter the country."

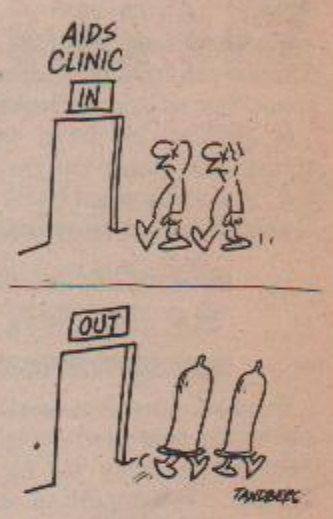
Evidence has also recently come to light that immigration officers are being trained to look for signs of AIDS and HIV infection amongst incoming travellers from overseas.

In mid-1987, two British residents returning from a short holiday abroad were stopped at Gatwick Airport after immigration officials spotted small Kaposi Sarcoma lesions.

It seems inconceivable that these lesions would have been recognised as AIDS unless the immigration officers had received special training in identifying the symptoms of AIDS.

Equally alarming, both men were detained even though they had residence rights in the UK, and despite the fact that they were registered out-patients receiving treatment at a London hospital.

Indeed, it was only after doctors confirmed that the two men were patients at St Stephen's hospital that immigration officers allowed them to re-enter the country. These and similar horror stories from more than twenty countries around the world look certain to make the travel rights of people wih AIDS and HIV a major human rights issue in 1988.



Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Socialism = Capitalism says Kinnock

The Party Leadership's policy statement on "democratic socialist aims and values" shows graphically the direction in which Kinnock and Hattersley are going.

Apparently, the allocation of goods and services by the market is "generally satisfactory" — only public utilities need to be nationalised.

So there you have it; democratic socialism is actually capitalism!

The statement's position on the relative merits of the market and economic planning could easily be agreed by most Social Democrats and Liberals, and even Tory wets. Coming at the end of a week in which Neil Kinnock refused to join nurses' picket lines, it provides yet another reason why the Left should mount a Leadership challenge.

The Policy Statement is clearly incompatible with Clause IV, and represents an attempt to make a decisive break with any kind of socialist economic policy. The adoption of this document, which even Brian Gould finds slightly embarrassing, should be fought every inch of the way.

Own Goal Anne

Princess Anne's remark about AIDS being an "own goal" for the human race was only one instance of a dangerous homophobic backlash gathering pace in recent weeks.

The tabloid coverage of the Stuart Gough murder focused on the alleged sexuality of the killer — a fact not emphasised in the Yorkshire Ripper case or the Hungerford massacre.

The AIDS pandemic has been used as an excuse for increased harassment of gay men at all levels — immigration, police, education, employment, housing, and so on.

Clause 28 reinforces and legitimises this bigotry — and the statements of its supporters are often nothing less than incitements to violence against lesbians and gay men.

In this context, the royal rhetoric is ominous. After all, if AIDS is somehow the "fault" of gay men (and what else can the "own goal" phrase imply?) then "society" is justified in persecuting them.

And who more fitting to deliver this pronouncement (and confirm what millions have already been led to believe) than a member of the royal family — a potent symbol not only of the British state, but of the nuclear family itself.

Anne's remark may have been inane, but it was certainly scripted in advance and carefully considered. Its intention was to align the royal family with the rising tide of homophobic bigotry.

No concessions to the witch-hunt

The news that *Haringey Labour Briefing* supporter Mandy Mudd is to be charged with "bringing the Party into disrepute" — because of her consistent opposition to cuts in Council jobs and services — came as no shock to the *Labour Briefing* Editorial Board.

With the witch-hunters on the rampage in London, it was only a matter of time before they set their beady little eyes on *Labour Briefing*, which (as the *Telegraph* remarked) has played a major role in the London left, and has been associated with all those struggles — against cuts in jobs and services, against racism, for lesbian and gay rights, for British withdrawal from Ireland — which so embarrass our leaders in Parliament.

As we have pointed out all along, the witch-hunt of *Militant* would inevitably spill over into a witch-hunt of other socialists in the Party. Those who failed to defend the *Militant* comrades simply allowed the witch-hunters to get up steam. The Star Chamber of the NCC now tours the country expelling socialists with little more than token opposition.

There is only one way to fight witch-hunts. They must be rejected, lock, stock and barrel. Concessions of any kind — constitutional or political — only strengthen and legitimise the witch-hunters. We must tear down the closed doors of the NEC and NCC and shed the glare of publicity on their anti-democratic machinations.

We must expose their real purpose — to drive socialist opposition out of the Party once and for all — to the whole labour movement.

The working class stirs itself

Healthworkers, Ford workers, seamen, local government workers, teachers, NACODS members... the battle with the employers and the government seems to have opened up suddenly on new and unexpected fronts. For the first time since the end of the miners' strike, the Tories are faced with widespread militant opposition.

This small but promising upsurge is a reflection, in many cases, of the sheer desperation felt by workers who waited in vain for a Labour victory at the general election. Now, confronted with a renewed Tory assault on their jobs, conditions, and standards of living, they see no alternative but to take action.

They cannot afford to wait for another election. They know that there will be nothing left to defend — in the NHS, the schools, the coalfields, the car plants — if they do not do something now.

Of course, trade union leaders are moving in fast to prevent action from getting out of hand. The last thing the increasingly lethargic bureaucrats want is an outbreak of mass militancy which could ditch their plans to tame the Labour Party and break the left.

Kinnock's attack on striking nurses was only what we have come to expect from him. But for the nurses themselves, as for others in struggle with the government, the stab in the back is a fresh and painful wound.

The Tories look vulnerable. The crash undermined the ideological appeal of "popular capitalism". There is a growing disgust with Tory authoritarianism (exposed more by splits in the Tory ranks than by any initiatives from Labour's front bench).

Now is the time for Labour to turn the screws on the Tories. This it can only do by placing itself at the head of the new upsurge, not ducking and weaving to avoid getting caught in the crossfire.

British State

Birmingham Six verdict and Stalker cover-up:
British justice unmasked

"After hundreds of years experience, we should have known better than to expect anything else from the Brits."

Thus spoke Peter Barry, former Irish Foreign Minister, right-wing politician, and one of the architects of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

His statement was provoked by the British government's effectual cover-up of the results of the Stalker Inquiry. The Birmingham Six verdict, which followed the Stalker decision, only confirmed its truth.

That the Birmingham Six are innocent is beyond doubt — and both the judge who refused their appeal and the Tory governemnt know that as well as anyone.

Similarly the government admits that those who murdered Irish Republicans, as revealed by the Stalker Inquiry, are guilty, and that those higher up the ranks are guilty of "perverting the course of justice".

But for the British administration such considerations are minor in comparison to the needs of maintaining their occuaption of the six counties of north-east Ireland. After all, for hundreds of years they have rigged trials and murdered and imprisoned without trial, so why should they stop now?

By Geoff Bell
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Kevin McNamara, Labour's spokesperson, said the shoot-to-kill cover-up was "unbelievable". It is not. Both it and the Birmingham Six verdict were entirely predictable. Such miscarriages of justice are all too characteristic of British imperialism in Ireland.

The verdict and the cover-up should be a lesson to all those who admit that yes, Britain might have done some nasty things in Ireland a long time ago, but all that's changed; or those who say Britain is "impartial" in the North of Ireland, doing no more than keeping the mad paddies apart; or those who like to peddle "peaceful" solutions to the British presence in Ireland, like the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

They should all shut up until the Birmingham Six are freed and all the RUC killers are jailed.

"I wanted a division in the House of Commons and an uproar sufficient to draw attention to the fact that in Britain you can commit murder and get away with it providing you are employed by the State."
Ken Livingstone
See page 14

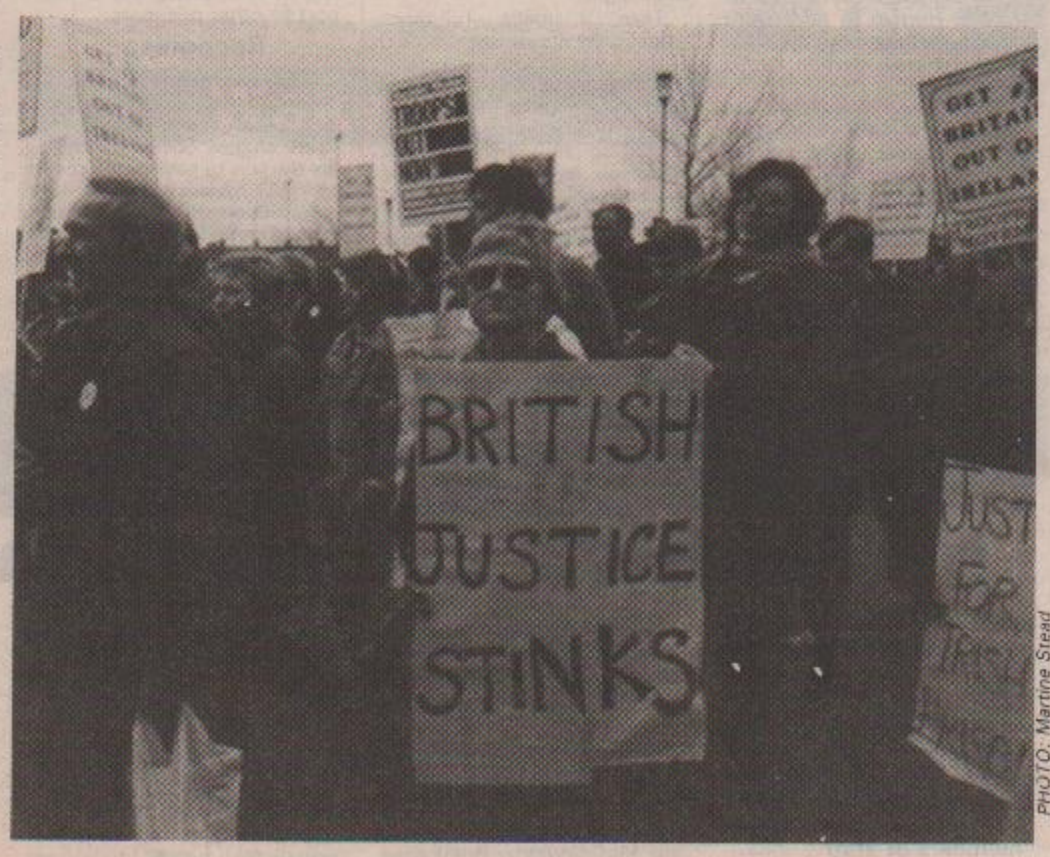


PHOTO: Martine Stead

Bloody Sunday demo, January 1988

Trade Union Briefing

Ford workers reject union sellout

The pickets were out in force on day one of the Ford manual workers national strike as *Briefing* goes to press.

Not one production worker turned up for work, the company admitted.

A massive majority of 62% had rejected an agreement between Ford management and the trade union side of the national joint negotiating committee.

The rejected deal included:

- a 3 year deal
- 7% on basic rates in the first year
- 2½% in each of the second and third years
- work teams involving both skilled and unskilled grades led by "group leaders". These groups leaders would replace foremen — 75% of whom stand to lose their jobs.

75% majorities were recorded against the deal at the key Bridgend engine plant and at Dagenham Assembly plant.

Talk in the media about Fords flooding the UK market with imports from its other European plants is wide of the mark. Production at these plants is already being hit because Ford UK is the sole source of many key components for Ford's European production and the company operates tight stock controls.

2,500 workers at the Transit plant at Genk in Belgium are already being laid off and production of Fiesta, Orion, and Escort models at Cologne, W. Germany, and Valencia, Spain will be hit within days.

Bridgend is the sole source of 1.4 and 1.6 petrol engines, and the Dagenham engine plant is the sole source of 1.4 diesel engines.

Ford has a dominant 28.8% of the UK new car market and 440,000 of these 580,000 cars are currently produced in the UK. So Ford simply does not have the capacity to replace its UK production from its other European plants. However, there is no room for complacency, and support from dockworkers in refusing to handle Ford imports is important.

Even now after the strike has got off to such a solid start, Jimmy Airlie, Eurocommunist Secretary of the NJNC, is still signalling his reluctance to fight.

In a BBC interview he pleaded for talks with management with or without a new offer, claiming that Ford has simply demanded "to much, too soon" from its workers, as he has found out to his cost.

In other words, there is agreement between Fords management and the NJNC on the need to introduce Nissan style intensive work methods, and to sell for a pittance hard won conditions.

Support is welcome at Fords, both in terms of messages of support and on the picket lines, despite reports in the media.

£6bn was wiped off the Stock Market on Monday February 8th, largely in response to the strike. The ruling class recognises the importance of this strike and its outcome. So must we.

Messages of support to: TGWU, Rainham Office, 76 Rainham Road, Essex RM13 7RL.

Speakers can be contacted through *Briefing*, 01-733 7016.



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Workers against apartheid

Take action against BTR!

Mick Murphy, a worker for NUMSA (Moses Mayekiso's union) spoke at the Reading Anti-Apartheid AGM on the struggle of the sacked SARMCOL workers against the British based multinational BTR.

By Dave Turgoose
Secretary, Reading A-A

He explained that since BTR has more than 400 subsidiaries and a work force of more than 50,000 the campaign offers most localities the possibility of doing some work in support of BTR workers.

Many workers in subsidiaries are not even aware that they are part of the BTR group. So far there is a list of over 180.

The campaign exposes the myth of British capitalism's "liberal" attitude towards their workforce in South Africa and their ruthlessness when it comes to their profits. BTR has condemned 1,000 workers and many thousands of their dependents to a struggle against starvation in an area where there is no alternative work, and no social security for the unemployed.

There are a number of BTR firms in Reading and the surrounding area. We agreed to campaign to win the support of their workers for the sacked strikers. We also agreed to organise a public showing of the video of the SARMCOL play *The Long March* which will be available this month.

There is a possibility of a speaking tour in April or May, which would include shop stewards from SARMCOL, who so far have not been allowed to leave the country.

To find out if there are any BTR companies in your area, ring Mike on 0533 712041, or write to 12 Manor Road Extension, Leicester.

Railways

BR threaten to scrap procedures

Thames Valley District Council of the NUR has called for a Special General Meeting of the union to discuss BR's proposal to scrap the current "machinery of negotiations".

By Martin Wicks
Delegate, Thames Valley NUR DC

It also passed an emergency resolution for the union AGM which would tie union officials to complete opposition to BR's proposals.

Under the current system, representation is through the Local Departmental Committee (LDC), elected by the whole work force (not only by union members) in an election run by management.

The great advantage to management is that LDCs split the work force up on a grade basis. So you have one for guards, one for clerical workers, the drivers, etc. They all meet management separately, making united action difficult.

The only real power the LDCs have is to clog up the machinery, through reaching a "failure to agree" on issues (such as changes in shifts) subject to the "negotiation" procedure. It then has to go on to the next level, Sectional Council.

The new proposals would greatly speed up the machinery for management. Instead of an LDC, each station or depot would meet management *alone*. If there was no agreement it would go on to Area Council level, where again, one rep per grade would have one-to-one discussions.

Then a union full-timer would meet management *alone*. If there was still no agreement, then management would simply give 14 days notice of introduction of its proposal. Nothing related to an individual Area could go any further up the machinery.

It seems clear from the new draft machinery that BR have decided to go for a national confrontation with the unions. They feel they have the measure of the union leaderships and have concluded that they will retreat.

The biggest battle for decades is looming before us.

Miners in prison:

Keep up the support!

Now is the time to remember two miners and their families still paying a heavy price exacted for their role in the 84/85 strike.

By HELEN PETERS

Dean Hancock and Russell Shankland have just spent their fourth Christmas as guests of Her Majesty a prison in Gartree, Leicestershire.

The last two miners to remain in prison, these two young men from South Wales have accepted their sentences with courage, working hard at their jobs inside, and making friends and giving moral support to other prisoners.

Recognise

They recognise they are different in that they are political prisoners. Dean and Russell were singled out as examples by the law to pay for the revolt of all miners against the destruction of their livelihood by the government.

The massive amount of mail they receive, especially at Christmas and on their birthdays, bears witness to this fact. Letters, cards, and donations arrive from France, Australia, the USA and the people of the Spanish State as well as from all over Britain, as members of the working class remember their imprisonment.

This moral and financial support is vital for Dean and Russell and for their two young children, as they count the weeks and months towards their release.

Friends

It is also vital for the close friends who make the fortnightly visit to Leicestershire from the Rhymney Valley in minibuses provided by the local NUM lodge.

They need to know that they are not, and can never be, forgotten and that working class solidarity does exist, that when their ordeal is over they can come out with their heads high.

Solidarity

If you want to show solidarity, write, send a donation or make a collection in your workplace and send it to: Dean Hancock, Russell Shankland, HM Prison Gartree, Market Harborough, Leics. or contact Helen Peters c/o Haringey Labour Briefing.

The Weaver Case

McGoldrick decision ignored

The Chair of Governors at a Birmingham College has claimed that it was not the responsibility of the Board of Governors to deal with a complaint of racial harassment and related complaints brought by a Black lecturer against three members of staff.

Despite the College's Articles of Government and grievance procedures, the Chair claims that on legal advice from the City Education Department he did not formally inform the Board of Governors of the serious complaints.

Contrary to the decision in the **McGoldrick v. Brent** case, he handed the matter over to the City Education Department.

Negotiations

These negotiations and the changes in procedures, which denied this lecturer her contractual rights to have her grievance heard were not made known to her.

The City Education Department has refused to provide the lecturer with any written details of the hearing, in October 1986. All now disclaim responsibility.

For further informtion contact: Gordon Weaver, (Representative for Bis Weaver) at 34 Christopher Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29

Our choice — not the bosses'!

The re-election of Arthur Scargill marks an upturn within the NUM.

Re-building the vanguard must now be top priority for activists working in the coalfields.

By Robert Sleigh
Yorks NUM rank & file

British Coal must not be allowed to regain the initiative.

Since the return to work in March 1985 activists have been looking for an issue over which to fight the Board. But issues have come and gone without a major confrontation taking place.

With the exception of the Frickley dispute, when 16,000 miners were picketed out, and the Bentley victimisations dispute leading to the picketing out of 19 pits, nothing has happened.

Both the Frickley and Bentley disputes weren't defeated by British Coal, but were demobilised by the Yorkshire NUM bureaucracy.

Walsh-style back door deals leading to sell-outs must now be crushed. 69% of Yorkshire miners voted for Scargill: this can only be interpreted as a mandate for action from the rank and file.

Walsh was the negotiator behind the Ted Scott "out of court" settlement which typified his method of dealing with the Board.

As Area Agent for North Yorkshire he promised to get back Ted Scott's job at Stillingfleet as Branch Secretary. Months later Ted is condemned to years of 'hard labour' on the blunt end of a shovel.

If, as has been proved, the Board were willing to settle out of court, they must have been in the wrong. The case should therefore have gone the whole way, until Ted won full re-instatment.

Ted's isolation and abandonment by the Yorkshire NUM leadership left him no alternative but to accept the Board's offer. Ted believes he has had his "pound of flesh" from the board, but in reality he is at Kellingly and not at Stillingfleet, where he should be.

If these are the victories that Walsh has to offer, then a call for his resignation is in order.

The crisis of leadership at national level in the NUM has not been resolved. Scargill's re-election has only bought time. In approximately 18 months Peter Heathfield will retire and the leadership battle will be fought once again. The media are already lining up Walsh for the job.

The Scargill left must also organise and build a viable alternative candidate to Walsh. No one in mining should sit back with a warm glow thinking Scargill can carry the day on his own. He has had the stewardship of the NUM through the most difficult period in the union's history. The next 12 months will be worse if we allow British Coal to regain the initiative.

Re-electing Scargill has not resolved the Code of Conduct, the six day week, or won the mineworkers a wage rise. If miners are opposed to flexible working, want dignity at work, and a rate of pay reflecting the increase in production, then the time has come once again to stand and fight.

Developments within NACODS must be supported even though NACODS members were paid throughout the 84/85 strike. Some deputies have had to learn the hard way that they made a mistake in 1984 when they didn't stand by their fellow mineworkers.

British Coal's disregard for the Independent Review Body should have brought it home, even to the most cynical mine officials, that the employers can't be trusted.

The Tories' plans to privatise the Electricity Supply Industry and the vicious cuts within the health service should be seen as a common attack upon our class. Miners in the past have stood with the healthworkers and must be prepared to do it again.

Let's take the bastards on! If workers in energy and health join together the Tories can be defeated!

"We were out on February 3rd!"

Oxfordshire

Some 50 Nurses went on strike for the whole day at four Oxford hospitals: the John Radcliffe, the Radcliffe Infirmary, and the Churchill (where predominantly NUPE members were on strike) and the Littlemore and Warneford where COHSE members formed the picket lines.

The action was strongest where a lead for strike action had been given in advance of February 3rd by the Branch Secretary of COHSE.

A coachload of nurses from COHSE and their supporters joined the demonstration in London. Meanwhile, in Oxford nurses and supporters leafletted the public and health staff in other unions.

Campaign activists from Oxon Health Emergency produced their own leaflet supporting the strike, and together with health staff collected over 1,000 signatures on the Oxfordshire Health Petition against further cuts in the NHS in Oxfordshire, which is being sent to the Secretary of State John Moore.

Nurses due to go on the night shift in all the hospitals formed a vigil from 8pm until midnight at the John Radcliffe Hospital where again RCN members who were in the majority at this hospital were leafletted.

Despite hostility from the RCN steward on site, many RCN members expressed sympathy and some joined individuals on their off-duty hours.

Very importantly, individual members of NUPE and the RCN have decided to approach all nurses in the Oxford District to form a nurses' Action Group to keep the momentum of the Day of Action going, and to keep up the campaign of pressure on the government. Meetings are due to take place in the John Radcliffe hospital as we go to press.

Steve Akers,
Secretary Oxon Health Emergency

Scotland

In Scotland, as elsewhere, the anger of the nurses over shortages, cuts, low pay and attacks on special duty payments is building up.

There is a similar tendency of convergence from local to regional and national action.

There is the additional factor here of the attack on ancillary workers through privatisation. Nurses are fully aware that privatisation has added 20%-30% to the workload of their English counterparts and are anxious to prevent it happening in Scotland.

There is also the fact that the Tories were decimated in the General Election in Scotland!

The Scottish TUC's Health and Social Services Committee met on January 19th and agreed to call a day of action in February. Already sporadic actions are taking place like the walkout at Cowglen Hopsital in Glasgow.

Scottish health workers must build for the Day of Action, and in particular try and link up with Local Authority workers also facing threats from "privatisation".

David Fowler, Assistant Secretary COHSE 929, personal capacity

London



PHOTO: Martine Stead

A packed rally, organised by London Health Emergency, rounds off the Day in London

Charing Cross

"The nurses strike at Charing Cross hospital was the largest and liveliest in London," said a National Newspaper reporter.

Which is probably why the press chose to ignore a most magnificent display of action in defence of the Health Service!

Over 300 nurses went on strike at Charing Cross and received the support of the entire community. At times the blare of horns down the Fulham Palace Road combined with the chanting and singing by a long line of nurses.

Some sections of Labour chose to listen — but the most enthusiastic reception was given to Tony Benn (a former patient).

Pickets were enlivened by visits from four of the 38 Manchester nurses who sparked off the whole strike wave. Strikers from Hill End Hospital also got a rousing reception

The only person who didn't enjoy himself was the poor *Daily Express* photographer who was hounded away by dozens of nurses furious at his paper's claim that the strike was engineered by "extremists"

By lunch 1,000 people had assembled. 700 manual workers from the Town Hall gave nurses a rousing reception as they called for support, and 200 promptly walked out to march on the hospital.

The day was a milestone for Labour in West London. Examples set by NUPE and COHSE acting as one in Charing Cross have inspired the entire movement, and there are now plans for a committee of all public sector stewards in the area to discuss plans for a general strike!



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Nurses picket at Castleford & Normanton District Hospital, Yorkshire

Yorkshire round-up

Leeds

Leeds was hit by a massive wave of support among health workers for the Day of Action.

St James, where over 100 nurses have left the RCN to join NUPE and COHSE, is the biggest Hospital in Europe. Park Hospital, Leeds General Infirmary, Killingbeck, Sencroft, St Georges's and Chapel Allerton, all voted by an average of 80% to take strike action.

This was achieved by NUPE and COHSE campaigning together for strike action and holding joint ballots.

Joanne Cook, Staff Nurse in COHSE at Chapel Allerton, said:

"Practically everyone voted to strike. We are very short staffed here with usually only 3 nurses to look after a ward of 28 geriatric patients."

As well as suffering from low pay and underfunding by the Tories, Leeds hospitals face other problems. Chapel Allerton is facing closure over the next two years. St George's, a geriatric hospital, staffed with agency nurses, also faces closure. 600 ancillary workers at St James face privatisation.

Maureen Idle, a staff nurse in COHSE, arguing against privatisation, said:

"Privatisation does not save money. It just gives huge profits to big business — 55% of cleaning contracts are given to multinationals. The same contractors are big contributors to Tory funds. Over 70,000 ancillary workers have been removed from the NHS and many are still unemployed."

On the day itself all the hospitals had picket lines and nurses leafletted a meeting of the NUM at Frickley Colliery, bringing the NUM branch out to support the nurses.

Miners and nurses joined other supporters at a major rally at St James' hospital. The message from the rally was clear: this action was only the beginning!

Louise White Secretary COHSE Chapel Allerton:
"The TUC and the Labour Party must now act together nationally to defend the Health Service."

Iris Walters, COHSE Leeds General Infirmary
"The response to the strike has been absolutely magnificent, particularly among the youth. Next time we have to be better organised. More time will be needed. Nurses find it extremely difficult to strike; there's still quite large amounts of apathy among them. Running at emergency cover in the LGI has quite often meant an increase of staff on the wards during the dispute."

Bryn Globver, Nati Exec ASTMS Health Service worker at LGI
"I spent the majority of the day on the picket line and the public response was enormous. It represented a massive turnround from disputes in the 1970s. There was only one in 30 refused to sign the petition in defence of the health service. There was a continuous sounding of horns past the picket lines."

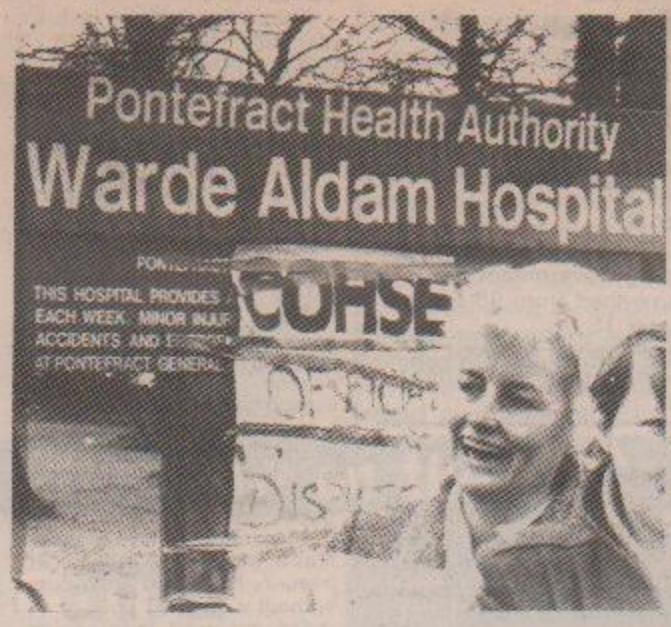


PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Picket line at Warde Aldham Hospital, Yorkshire

Wakefield

Nurses throughout Yorkshire came out on February 3rd to defend the NHS. The rally at St James hospital in Leeds was the main focus, in addition to the picket lines.

Frickley miners came out to support the nurses. Other miners supplied fuel for the brazier on the picket line at Castleford.

This picket line was also visited by doctors, the Mayor of Wakefield, a nun, and lecturers from the Technical College.

Huddersfield

COHSE held two meetings in the Storthes Hall Psychiatric Hospital to ballot members on strike action.

70% of members voted to take industrial action on February 3rd.

The majority of nurses in our hospital are in COHSE, with a small number in NUPE, and 126 in the RCN.

On February 3rd, only 53 nurses reported for work; so with the emergency cover we provided 71 nurses were working — a higher level of staffing than we are sometimes accustomed to in non-strike situations!

Defending

Contrary to the Tory image of our action "harming patients", we can now show that not only did we provide reasonable cover during the strike, we can also demonstrate to the public the appalling staffing levels which exist normally — two staff per 20 patients in some cases.

120 nurses joined a successful picket during the course of the day. A militant and positive mood now exists amongst the members — I'm certain further action is on the cards!

Graham Hellawell, Storthes Hall, COHSE

York

Workers at three hospitals in York were on strike on February 3rd.

At the York District Hospital 100 nurses formed the picket line. In the evening a candelit procession marched through the city. Over 2,000 nurses and their supporters were joined by a delegation of 30 from Hull.

Birmingham

The best action was at the All Saints psychiatric hospital where 250 COHSE nurses went on 24 hour strike. The NUPE branch at the hospital refused to support the action, but individual NUPE members did respect the picket line.

The picket line was large — 60-70 for much of the day, reaching a high point of 150, and high spirited — with the occasional swig of whisky to keep out the cold!

Gerry Duffy, a COHSE shop steward, said that the "support was overwhelming, with a ballot result of 207 for and 16 against strike action." He was pleased that other trade unionists had joined the picket, especially those with banners like the Birmingham Trades Council and NATFHE Handsworth branch.

Another COHSE member, Mark Power, reported that the picket had turned away a Group 4 Security van, other delivery vans and individuals in cars.

The laundry workers, mainly COHSE members, at the adjacent **Dudley Road** hospital were out on strike.

At the **Queen Elizabeth**, one of Birmingham's biggest hospitals, auxilliary staff and a few nurses from NUPE organised a lunchtime protest at a nearby roundabout. It was well received by passing motorists and bus travellers.

Peggy Gilbert, NUPE branch secretary Central Birmingham Health Authority said "healthworkers were on the verge of rebellion and this action was only the tip of the iceburg." She also reported that 24 RCN members had applied to join NUPE in the previous two days.

Karen Burgess, a NUPE nurses steward said that nurses would consider further action after the February 11th Central Birmingham Health Authority meeting if it continued to make cuts.

Stuart Richardson

There was a big rally at Highcroft Hospital, Erdington chaired by Bob Arnott, NUPE area officer, addressed by local Labour MP Robin Corbett.

John Dempsey, NUPE divisional officer, told the rally that more than 2,000 nurses had joined the strike across the region.

John Robinson, MSS shop steward, GKN Hardy Spicers

Labour Party

True Meaning of *Labour Listens* discovered Shock

Past issues of *Labour Briefing* have included many contributions wondering what the True Meaning of *Labour Listens* is. We have tended to criticise the campaign for being a bad attempt to get the whole of Labour to listen to the working class.

These extracts from the Labour Party Conference Procedures Committee, reveal that this is *not* the intention of the campaign.

In fact, under the new campaign, *Labour* becomes the Leadership alone, and everyone else *Listens* to them.

This is how the campaign will affect Labour Party Conferences from now on.

Conference Procedures Committee held on December 7th 1987 in the House of Commons
Present: Jo Richardson MP, John Evans MP, Eddie Haigh, Derek Gladwin, Peter Mandelson, Richard Taylor, Joyce Gould.
(...) **2. Amendments**
It was felt that amendments were often used to provide the "weighting" required to get a debate at Conference. It was agreed that if amendments were to be eliminated, the closing date for resolutions could be brought forward, making resolutions more relevant. (...)
3. Compositing Procedure
The proposal to bring forward the timing of the compositing procedure was considered. (...)
4. Agenda
Concern was expressed at the number of subjects that were scheduled for the daily agenda, resulting in rushed and consequential debates. The level of debate was also lowered by the time allowed for speakers, and the ad-hoc way in which speakers are determined.
Agreed: That the NEC recommends to the CAC:
i. that the number of subjects scheduled for debate be reduced;
ii. that the time given to speakers be extended to allow for a case to be made from the rostrum;
iii. that consideration be given to adopting a system of speaker's cards.

North West Campaign Group CONFERENCE

Saturday, February 13th 1988
Council Chamber
Manchester Town Hall
10.30am-4.30pm

Speakers:
Ken Livingstone MP
Ann Pettifor, Labour WAC
Audrey Wise MP
Eric Heffer MP

Plus workshops on: Racism, Trade Unions, Women, Peace, Ireland, and Local Government
Registration £3/£1 waged/unwaged from 93 Ewan St, Manchester 18
Creche available — please apply if required
Access: no information given on publicity leaflet

Exeter Fights Fascist Celebrations

The campaign against Exeter City Council-sponsored William of Orange celebrations was stepped up on February 2nd. Thirty members of Exeter Anti-Fascist Action stopped a Council meeting for 20 minutes by lowering a protest banner from the public gallery.

Local government conference
On the Road to Edinburgh

If you were sitting in the front carriage of the train when it pulled out of London on the Friday morning, you found yourself sitting in the last carriage by the time it arrived in Edinburgh.

If you'd seen it on television you would have assumed that it was some sort of optical illusion. But it wasn't. And neither for that matter was the conference, although it might as well have been for all the difference it made.

Neil Kinnock opened and chaired the Conference in the manner of a supermarket manager who not only determines the goods that are placed on the shelves, but also decides which goods are actually purchased by the consumer.

The supermarket was non-unionised, and in a thirty minute address to the Conference the manager spent most of the time talking about the health service.

Perhaps he assumed that people were going to become sick after consuming his goods. It was certainly a fact that his speech had only a tenuous link with either local government, or the future of local government under Labour administrations. This was a criticism that could be levelled at the entire weekend.

By Steven Taylor
Camden Local Government Committee (personal capacity)

There were working groups on the Saturday.

- The Poll Tax working group were told that the Poll Tax was a Bad Thing.
- The Education working group were told that the Education Bill was a Bad Thing.
- The Community Care After Griffiths working group were that CCAG was a Bad Thing.
- The Competitive Tendering Working Group were told that Competitive Tendering was a Bad Thing.
- The Housing Working Group were told that the Housing Bill was a Bad Thing.

If there had been a Tory Government Working Group they would probably have been told that a Tory Government was a Bad Thing; but perhaps I was a bit naive in assuming that we were all sort of agreed on these bad things.

Good Things were women's equality, getting closer to the public, the arts and media, new developments in political structures, and race equality initiatives.

It wasn't explained how Local Authorities were meant to implement these Good Things in the light of Bad Things, but maybe it was enough just to *know* that they were Good.

However, the goodest thing of all was legality. Staying legal. I learned, was what the Labour Party in local government was all about. Almost everyone said this. Neil Kinnock said it. Roy Hattersley said it. Nuclear Jack Cunningham said it. Donald Dewar said it. David Blunkett said it. But it was a curious form of legality.

It was all right for the Labour Party to break the law when it came to not repairing Council housing, or not dealing with over-crowded housing, or damp and delapidated housing. It was even all right for Labour not to provide any housing at all for some people.

It was also all right for Labour not to implement the law when it came to health and safety legislation, women's rights or race equality. Apparently there is nothing whatsoever that is wrong when Labour breaks laws which can be applied in defence of working class interests.

However, there is everything wrong with breaking laws which can only be applied in support of the ruling class. Under no circumstances, we were told, should Labour controlled Local Authorities break Tory laws. Indeed, it was our duty as democratic socialists to implement such laws.

And there you have it: Edinburgh 1988 — Right and wrong, good and bad, legal and illegal. You picks your leader and you do what you're told. And if this was Labour listening, then I'm a tree frog.

On the journey back to London the process was reversed. If you left Edinburgh in the last carriage, you arrived in London sitting in the first carriage. It was very biblical. Neil Kinnock is God. OK!

Tears before Doncaster

I got the flavour of the Labour Local Government Conference on the chartered train up to Edinburgh.

Across the gangway were sitting several Councillors from Brighton. (I'm not going to name names, we journalists have to protect our sources).

By Christine Shawcroft
Leader, Tower Hamlets Labour Group

These councillors were discussing their cuts budget. They were quite clear that they didn't want to do it, but after the '85 defeats, it's apparently too late to fight.

So, more in sorrow than in anger, they set about deciding what was for the chop.

This went well at first. Facilities were closed down, posts were frozen, rents were put up, more posts were deleted from the establishment.

Then one of them proposed axeing the Women's Committee... and all hell broke loose.

One woman in particular threatened to resign from the Council, feeling her integrity was at stake, even though her integrity had faced other cuts without a qualm.

The argument then passed into the buffet car, so I can't report the outcome. Women of Brighton, wait with baited breath. But I could have predicted from the word "cut" that there'd be tears before Doncaster.

The Conference consisted of workshops and full sessions on a whole range of issues, but the shadow of the cuts budgets loomed over them all, breaking out in bursts of sniping, and occasionally hand-to-hand combat.

At the full sessions, the big guns were trained firmly on the enemy. The Tories? Well, yes, one or two shells lobbed in their direction. The SDPLD-NPSLD? From time to time, a short salvo.

But the *real* enemy are those Fifth Columnists who keep attacking Labour Councils who are slashing services and sacking workers.

Now, tsk, tsk comrades, this really will not do. These sensitive souls just can't concentrate on doing the Tories' work for them if you keep making so much *noise*.

It happened again with the Poll Tax. Some refugees from Cloud Cookoo Land, reincarnated Wat Tylers, are urging non-payment campaigns. But this is just the sort of thing which would help the Tories! The realistic way to defeat the Poll Tax, is for Labour Authorities to *collect it* for the Tories... That'll really show 'em!



The *Briefing* Clapometer registered just over 5% in favour of all this statesperson-like reasonableness. But given the self-selecting nature of the audience (mostly Council leaderships! maybe the burst of applause for pleas for lower membership subscriptions, the return of *Labour Weekly*, and for Labour to listen to the working class not Tory voters can be considered more hopeful.

Rodney Bickerstaffe brought the house down in a powerful speech on behalf of the health service. The Clapometer registered 99% — all the delegates, few of the platform. Perhaps it was the jokes about Brian Gould that did the damage.

We then stood and sang "The Red Flag", which I felt entirely appropriate in the circumstances.

It's a long time since I saw so much flinching and sneering.

Brighton
Brighton Fightback

No compulsory redundancies; maximum effective public services; full consultations with tenants regarding levels of rents.

By Brighton *Briefing* supporters

These are the "commitments" that the Brighton Labour Group leaders brought to and narrowly won at the Manifesto GC of Brighton Labour Party. And you don't need to be an expert in *Captial* to realise that these are no commitments at all.

In their efforts to avoid ratecapping at all costs, the Group Leaders have adopted the strategy of ratecapping themselves — attacking the workforce and Labour supporters instead of the Tories — and taking the blame for the cuts.

Their guiding "principles" effectively give Brighton Labour Group a blank cheque to act as they wish in the coming period. The extent of this blank cheque will depend on the level of opposition mobilised.

NUPE Council workers recently lobbied the Labour Group over the forthcoming cuts. It is these manual workers who are first in line. The town's voluntary sector is also threatened, as grants are cut.

The last few weeks have also seen the launch of the Brighton Fightback Campaign which is holding a Conference Against the Cuts on Sunday February 14th at the Brighthelm Centre. Bringing together Labour Party activists, trade unionists, tenants' association and consumers of Council services, the Campaign represents a broad base on which to build oppostion to the "self-destruction" of Brighton Council's jobs and services.

Women's Action Committee
As dead as a parrott

If the health of any campaign can be judged by the attendance and level of political debate at its AGM, then the Women's Action Committee is as dead as Monty Python's parrot.

By Gill Lee
Labour Briefing Women

Thirty-two women trapsed to Manchester to listen to the demented rantings of the WAC leadership as they tried to explain why we should still loyally support an organisation which in the course of two years has managed to sell out even the narrow constitutional aims it set itself.

In an attempt to rewrite history, Ann Pettifor explained how she had always been aware of the dangers of the review of the women's organisation launched by the NEC.

She had pointed these out to the WAC leadership at every stage but had been "overruled" by her sisters on the Executive. News of Ann's two year long struggle to overturn the WAC Executive's position in support of the review appeared to come as a shock not only to the *Briefing* women present who had previously been denounced as "divisive" for their opposition to the review, but to the other members of the WAC Executive too.

The pinnacle of political discussion, however, was the debate on "is WAC a democratic centralist organisation?" The answer seemed to be yes — and no.

Yes, in that its members are bound to fight for the positions adopted by the WAC Executive on bodies such as the National Labour Women's Committee. Do the women who elected Ann Pettifor on to the National Labour Women's Committee know she is accountable not to them, but to that much broader labour movement body, the Labour Women's Action Committee?

No, in that there is no democracy. The AGM was informed that it was considered perfectly correct to use the National Organiser's Report in the WAC mailings to denounce currents such as *Briefing*, and even the NLWC, but of course no one had the right to reply to any of the allegations made, or to have a minority opinion published.

Is WAC well? Can Neil Kinnock tango with a rhinoceros?

Leeds Euro-Constituency
Reselection
Closing dates for nominations: March 9th
Shortlisting: March 12th
Selection: March 26th

Stop Press

As we go to press we hear that Cllr Phil Murphy has been reinstated into Birmingham Labour Group — Black Sections chalks up another victory!

Witch-hunt spreads
The purge plague

Many socialists in the Labour Party still think the witch-hunt is confined to *Militant* and don't believe it could happen to them.

That's what our leaders want you to think.

Recent events have proved otherwise. The left, and particularly the London left, are about to feel the brunt of the NCC's Stalinist-inspired trial-without-defence tactics.

By DAN CARTER

"Action prejudicial to the Party" is the catch-all charge. The Labour Council leaders now slashing services and raising rents ought to be brought to order under that heading.

Now Mandy Mudd, Chair of Tottenham Labour Party, faces expulsion for her activities in *Haringey Fights Back!*, and other *Labour Briefing* supporters in Haringey could soon face the axe.

If defending working class living standards and fighting the cuts becomes a crime in the eyes of the Party, the NEC may find a lot more people proudly pleading "guilty" than they bargained for.

***Briefing* supporters are socialists and proud of it. We won't give up without a fight. This time the Party Leaders have bitten off more than they can chew.**

Despite a 23% swing to Labour in the General Election, a witch-hunt in the South London **Southwark-Bermondsey CLP** has been brewing for some time, stirred up by the local rag *South London Press*. Claims of 40 local *Militant* members, secret dossiers and rentaquotes from GLLP General Secretary Terry Ashton have led to suspension of the Constituency Party.

Now that the Greater London Labour Party has taken over the local Party, we look forward to more local demonstrations against the Alton Bill, similar to the one recently organised by Bermondsey Women's Section.

The 40 members have, of course, not even been notified that there are charges against them, let alone had sight of the charges against them. Even the intervention of ex-Labour Party General Secretary Jim Mortimer couldn't save them. When you open the floodgates, Jim, you get wet. Just four NEC members voted against the suspension.

Eight members of **Bradford North CLP** also face expulsion for alleged *Militant* membership. The "evidence" is so sketchy that trade union powerbroker Sam McCluskie moved "next business" at the NEC to ensure no one could speak in Bradford North's defence. Just five NEC members voted against the investigations.

In **Leeds West** another member is under investigation for alleged membership of *Militant*. Indeed, local investigations of alleged *Militant* activity are now underway in **almost *thirty* other constituencies.**

Party Leaders must surely realise you can't legislate against socialism. The proposed challenge to the leadership at this year's Conference must go ahead in order to give Party members a chance to say "no" to the purges.

To stop the tide of the witch-hunt, we should all:

- **Encourage a left challenge of those opposed to purges for the Party leadership; in CLPs and trade unions.**
- **Pass resolutions against the suspensions and expulsions.**
- **Raise the issue at all Party meetings and with Party members in Fightback and anti-cuts committees.**
- **Pass resolutions and amendments to Regional Conferences calling for full Party democracy.**
- **Question Regional Officials who have stepped in to run local Parties and demand written reports at every opportunity.**

Stop the Bermondsey witch-hunt !

The witch-hunt against Bermondsey Labour Party and its membership represents a violation of the most elementary principles of natural justice.

We do not know what the charges are, nor whom they have been levelled against. The Party and its accused members have not been given the opportunity to speak in their own defence.

At the very least, the NEC must rescind the suspension of Bermondsey Labour Party pending an open and independent inquiry at which members are informed in full of the charges against them, and at which they have a chance to answer those charges.

A Labour Party which cannot extend these basic tenets of justice to its own members cannot expect the electorate to have confidence that it will pursue the cause of justice unswervingly when it is in government.

Peter Tatchell

Exeter witch-hunt

It's January, so it must be expulsion time in Exeter... Peter Bowing, one of the founders of *Devon Labour Briefing* faces the third attempt in five years to expel him — this time after he made a public call for the Labour Party to mount a real resistance to the Tories.

Model Resolution

We note that disciplinary proceedings are being initiated against Peter Bowing by Exeter CLP principally in response to an article written by him in the *Flying Post*, a local commuity newspaper.

We believe that if such proceedings go ahead it would put at risk any individual who sought to advance opinions critical of local or national leaderships. These proceedings therefore threaten the right to dissent and to promote alternatives. As such, they constitute a serious threat to the democracy of the Labour Party.

We support the right of Peter Bowing and other individuals to put their views on how to advance the cause of Labour. We therefore call on Exeter CLP immediately to stop all disciplinary proceedings.

Please send copies to P. Bowing, 19 Culverland Road, Exeter and to The Secretary, Exeter CLP, 26 Clifton Hill, Exeter.

HARINGEY

If you can't beat 'em — *throw them out!*

On January 27th Labour's NEC received a report from London Regional Officers charging local *Briefing* supporter Mandy Mudd with "a sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the Party" and recommending expulsion.

It's only a matter of time before the NCC's kangaroo court will meet to deal out Kinnockite injustice to Mandy, and possibly to others organising opposition to the cuts in Haringey.

By MARK SEATON

There can be no doubt that Mandy has been singled out because of her anti-cuts activity — and her association with *Labour Briefing*.

"I am singled out because of my activity in opposition to the savage cuts in jobs and services now being made by Haringey Council. The right wing clique who have forced these cuts through the Party and the Council seem terrified of all democratic opposition. I make no apologies for behaving as all socialists should — and working to build a united movement against cuts in jobs and services, whether in the NHS or local government."

Mandy Mudd

As our regular readers will know, support for *Briefing* is strong on the ground in Haringey. We've been a major force in local campaigning around rate-capping, Broadwater Farm, Positive Images for lesbians and gay men, and numerous other struggles on which Labour leaders have turned their backs.

We have played a leading role in building Haringey Fights Back! as a broad-based anti-cuts campaign with a high profile and we have maintained constant pressure inside the Labour Party to reverse the cuts policy.

For the LCC-led cutters, it has all been too much. Their witch-hunting of Mandy is the latest and most desperate in a series of attacks on the local left.

The report on Mandy (who is Chair of Tottenham CLP) was filed by London Regional Officers at the instigation of local right wingers — but without the knowledge or approval of either GC or LGC. Mandy has yet to see a copy of this report. She has received no formal communication of any kind from GLLP, the NEC, or Larry Whitty. Yet Whitty feels free to tell the national press that he has a "clear report" and that Mandy's behaviour "is unacceptable".

Who is he trying to kid? The GLLP Officers who cooked up this nonsensical distortion of the truth are nothing but paid agents of the right wing cabal who are destroying Labour in London. The fact that they are paid with our subscriptions for their dirty work only adds insult to injury.

The local press has been fed smear stories about us. The police have been brought in to assault and arrest us. Anti-cuts activists in the unions have been threatened with disciplinary action. Anti-cuts groups in the community fear their grants will be slashed.

The Party's procedures have been abused and meetings of the Hornsey and Wood Green GC and the Haringey LGC are now farcically undemocratic, with the right wing resorting to all kinds of base procedural manoeuvres to prevent honest political debate.

Minutes of the December 10th LGC (at which police were set on Party members, Councillors, and Council workers) have been cynically falsified.

At the last Hornsey & Wood Green GC, attempts to debate this question and other related matters were obstructed by a blatant filibuster, orchestrated by the CLP Chair.

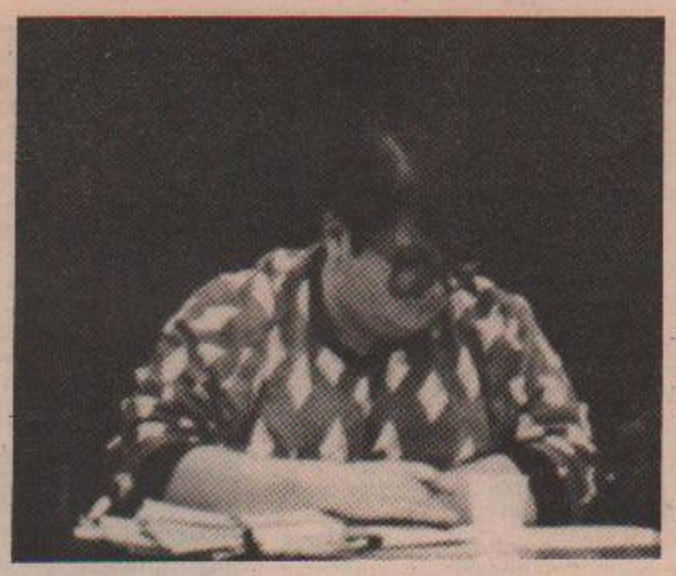


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Mandy Mudd, waiting to speak at Hornsey Vale Ward's public meeting against the cuts

Mandy's alleged "unacceptable" behaviour consists of acting as a socialist should act — campaigning by all democratic means possible to defend jobs and services, and working day and night for months to build a united movement of Council workers and service users against the cuts.

The witch-hunt against Mandy Mudd is yet another sign of the fear with which the local right wing greets any democratic opposition to their indefensible cuts policies. As for "sustained conduct prejudicial to the Party's interests" we can think of no more apt charge to level at Haringey Council Leader Toby Harris and his right wing acolytes.

Their butchering of Haringey's schools, social services, housing, libraries, community centres, playgroups, etc., has left them isolated from workforce and community, and increasingly desperate to smash left wing opposition by hook or crook.

Model resolution

***Briefing* supporters! Please move this at your branch, section, trade union, etc.**

We condemn the decision of the NEC to refer the "case" of Mandy Mudd to the National Constitutional Committee. This is clearly part of a widespread and growing witch-hunt against socialists in the Party, and their right to hold views contrary to those of the leadership and to organise and campaign around those views.

Mandy Mudd has consistently spoken out against the cuts, job losses, and privatisation of local government services. In doing so she defends the interests of trade unionists and working people. We call for the immediate dropping of these charges and for the Labour Party nationally to get on with the job of fighting the Tories instead of witch-hunting its own members.

The view on the NEC

Gossip and tittle-tattle

KEN LIVINGSTONE spoke to *Briefing's* GRAHAM BASH after the January 27th NEC which voted to spread the witch-hunt into new areas.

What was a particular shock for me attending my first meeting of the NEC where there was a serious discussion about the witch-hunt was the scale of tittle-tattle and gossip that now passes for evidence and policy-making inside the Labour Party.

So many Labour Party officials up and down the country who seem completely incapable of winning an election always manage to have time and energy to assemble any bit of gossip or tittle-tattle into what passes for a report.

Meetings of the National Executive Committee are absolutely horrendous. You sit there and perhaps a 50 or 100 page document, consisting of who said what to whom, who shouted at whom, and assumptions about people's motives, is tabled and then referred to the National Constitutional Committee so that the individuals concerned can be expelled.

Usually at some point after a perfunctory debate in the NEC one of the extreme right move that the issue now be put. Today we did manage to have a major debate because Tom Sawyer and David Blunkett made lengthy contributions in which they spelt out where they personally stood.

Witch-hunt

David Blunkett began to express doubts that the witch-hunt was going too far after he heard Ken Cure say that he was in favour of about another 200 expulsions to complete the process.

That sent quite a shiver of alarm through everyone. You could see perhaps the next 30 or 40 meetings of the NEC totally dominated by huge tomes of tittle-tattle that have been lovingly assembled by all the gossips that hang around in the murky corners of the Labour Party.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Ken Livingstone at 1987 Annual Conference, where he was elected to the NEC

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that that's exactly what will happen, unless there is now a major revolt by the rank and file in the Constituencies to bring this process to an end.

The point I specifically put to the Leader of the Party was that he might get good press coverage every time he closes down a Constituency Labour Party and that might add two or three per cent to our standing in the polls for four or five weeks.

But a few weeks later all that is completely forgotten and the public is left with an indelible image that there is some cancer at the heart of the Labour Party. And at the next election that subliminal fear, built up by our own efforts, is then exploited by the Tory Party to devastating effect.

Today's work has probably done more to ensure the election of another Conservative government than anything the Militant Tendency could do even if they all went bananas collectively.

The Bill and Council Tenants

You're an endangered species!

The Housing Bill provides two mechanisms for the removal of housing stock from Local Authority control.

Housing Action Trusts are government-appointed bodies which will compulsorily acquire from Local Authorities estates or groups of estates, improve the housing, and sell it off to owner-occupiers, private sector landlords, and Housing Associations.

Finance for HATs will be taken from the national housing investment programme allocation, and will therefore result in a reduced allocation to Local Authorities.

The "Tenants' Choice Proposal" will allow landlords approved by the Housing Corporation the right to approach any group of Council tenants with a view to acquiring ownership of the property from the Council. A majority of the tenants will need to vote against the proposal to prevent its going ahead.

Given high property prices, especially in London and the South East, it is certain that developers will try to take over a large number of Council-owned properties. Property in central London will be particularly attractive, as will small properties such as mansion blocks.

Properties with a large number of unoccupied units, or where there are a large number of elderly tenants, are also likely to be favoured targets.

It would obviously be in a developer's interest to empty such properties as quickly as possible in order to maximise the profit. This would almost certainly lead to the short-term neglect of housing stock, financial inducements to get tenants to move out, an increase in harassment and the escalation of rents and other charges.

As more desirable property moves into private ownership, the overall quality of Local Authority housing stock will deteriorate.

The Housing Bill also threatens to remove the "cost floor provision" in right to buy sales. What this means is that a Local Authority would actually make a *loss* on the sale of recently constructed property where disruption costs exceed current market valuations.

The next Housing Bill will make it illegal for Local Authorities to subsidise Council housing from the Rates. This would mean a massive increase in rents across the country, a corresponding increase in right to buy applications, and a similar increase in proposals from alternative landlords. In other words, if Council tenants can't afford to buy, they will be forced into the private rented sector.



PHOTO: Islington Campaign Press Publicity Unit

Conditions for Council tenants will deteriorate under the new Bill — until Council provision becomes just a last desperate resort, with the rest of us piling profits into rich landlords' pockets.

The Bill and Private Tenants

Opening the way for the landlords

The new forms of tenancy (assured tenancies and shortholds) proposed in the Housing Bill will have an immediate and direct impact on new private and Housing Association tenancies.

Assured tenancies are given a fixed lifetime, for example three years. They can also run from week to week or month to month.

The tenancy conditions and the rent are agreed between landlord and tenant. If they cannot reach an agreement, a **Rent Assessment Committee** will suggest a "market" rent.

This rent will be set to make sure that the landlord makes a sufficient profit on the dwelling. However, this Committee will not be able to set a ceiling on the rent, so the landlord can legally charge more than the suggested amount.

A **shorthold tenancy** is much the same, except that the landlord has a right to take back the home at the end of an agreed period.

These proposals mean that most new tenancies in the private sector will not have a "fair rent". Housing Association tenants will also be affected, as they will be given assured tenancies in the future.

The Bill also proposes that only one person will be able to inherit the tenancy if the present tenant dies. (At the moment, the tenancy can be passed on in this way twice.) The grounds for eviction are also being changed so that a landlord can get a tenant out of the property more easily and quickly.

The government has realised that all this will lead to more harassment of private tenants, and has suggested ways of punishing landlords who engage in it. But their suggestions rely on the tenant sueing the landlord, which is difficult, time-consuming and expensive.

The government has not given any protection to victims of racial harassment or people being victimised by other tenants. There are no proposals in the Bill whatsoever for the homeless.

People who are private tenants at the moment will not be immediately affected by the Bill, except by changes in the inheritance rules, or unless their rent is unregistered or unregulated. However, if they move house they will be forced to have either an assured or shorthold tenancy.

Given that landlords will not get the benefit of the new legislation unless existing tenants move from their properties, there is almost certain to be a massive increase in harassment.

If tenants transfer from a Local Authority to a private landlord or a Housing Association, they are likely to become an assured tenant immediately. Although it may be in the interests of developers to charge a relatively low rent at the first stage of an assured tenancy, it will certainly rise dramatically once the tenants are in the private sector.

Needless to say, once Council tentants opt for the private sector they will not be allowed to return to public provision.



PHOTO: RLPC

As housing stock moves into the private sector, the pressure of speculation will move prices upwards.

Third term To
housing:
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The government's Housing Bill does not exist in isolation. Housing provision is inextricably linked to every other area of private or collective provision, and the new housing legislation is linked to the overall Tory legislative programme.

At the heart of this programme is nothing less than the dismantling of the welfare state, and through this, the destruction of collectivism, not only as an idea, but as a practical means of organising society.

The Tories have been engaged in this process since 1979.

The creation of mass unemployment (with a corresponding reduction in unemployment benefits and rights), the introduction of anti-trade union laws, the destruction of manufacturing industries, especially those industries in which the trade union movement was strongest (including construction), and the creation of a massive pool of cheap labour have all undermined not only the organised strength of the labour movement, but also undermined the very concept of trade unionism as a means of defending and extending the rights of working class people.

In conjunction with these attacks on the trade unions and their members, there has also been an attack on public sector provision in general, and Labour-led local provision in particular.

Privatisation

The privatisation programme and the give-away share issues have helped fracture the link between public sector industries and consumers. The privatisation of British Telecom, British Petroleum, and British Gas has had a profound and debilitating effect on the entire labour movement — not because those industries were accountable or democratically controlled, but because as long as they remained part of the public sector there was the *prospect* of democracy and accountability.

The abolition of the GLC and the Labour-controlled Metropolitan Authorities, the reductions in Rate Support Grants and Housing Investment Programmes, and the introduction of the rate-capping legislation have all led to a financial crisis of historic proportions.

Labour-controlled Local Authorities no longer have the resources necessary to provide local services. Throughout the country, Labour Councils are making staff redundant, cutting social and community provision, and actually attacking the working class communitites which made their existence possible in the first instance.

Conservatives

The Conservatives are now moving in to privatise Local Authority service in exactly the same way in which they have privatised public sector industries. The Housing and Planning Act, which is already law, requires Local Authorities to put out to tender six specific services:

- refuse collection;
- street cleansing;
- cleaning of buildings;
- catering;
- ground maintenance;
- vehicle maintenance.

This is the first stage of the Tory plan. Housing services will soon be swallowed up in the tender trap.

The Right to Buy is, of course, privatisation by another name. Cuts that have already taken place in the house building programme, rent rises, and subsidies made available to owner-occupiers, have already made private ownership a more attractive proposition than ever. The proposed Housing Bill will accelerate the process.

The tactics employed by the Tories are dramatically simple. Where a profit can be made on a service, it must be maximised so that the service can be privatised.

Amendment

Where a profit cannot be made on a service, then the financial outlay on that service must be minimised. The political objective is clear: the destruction of collectivism.

The Labour leadership's response to these attacks has been appalling. There has been a failure to grasp either their scale or their nature at both national and local level.

Local Authorities have become baby-Kinnocks, falling over themselves in an at-

Housing Feature compiled by Steve Taylor Camden Labour Briefing

ries turn on

VANT RICKS ORTAR!

empt to win what they erceive as the "middle round", not even realising nat the ground is crumbling nder their feet.

The Party's housing olicy offers as much pro- ection to the working class s bunting on the Titanic.

Aggression

The Housing Bill is not an olated act of aggression. It part and parcel of a sus- ined and co-ordinated ssault on the working class nd its organisations.

A campaign against the lousing Bill must be rganised from the grass ots upwards, but it is ssential that the Labour Party and our represen- atives at local and national evel actually align hemselves with such a ampaign.

Prospects

The prospects for this em, at the moment, emote. Local Authority aders seem to believe that oing a certain part of the ory way will cause the ories to soft pedal, and decide to either amend forthcoming legislation or not to implement the measures in full.

At both local and national level, we need both a change of leadership and a change of perspective, to one of uniting private tenants, Council tenants, the homeless, town hall workers, women's groups, and black and ethnic minority organisations, lesbians and gay men.

Coherent

These class forces can be united into a coherent and mutually supportive campaign. This should not be a campaign which is built on the basis of a mass lobby of the House of Lords, but a campaign which is actually aimed at securing the control of resources for the working class and their communities, and then defending those resources against attack from the ruling class.

We either stand together against these attacks or we fall. To coin a phrase, *there is no alternative.*

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The Timetable

The Housing Bill was issued on November 20th 1987 and had its second reading on November 30th. It is now in the Committee stage which is expected to last until the end of March. The Bill will then have its third reading in the Commons before referral to the Lords. The government anticipates that it will become law by October 1988.

The Main Proposals

There are three main proposals in the Housing Bill:

- **The Bill will allow "approved landlords" to approach groups of Council tenants with a view to taking over the ownership and management of their homes. This has been referred to by the government as the "tenants' choice" proposals.**
- **The Bill will enable the Secretary of State to set up Housing Action Trusts (HATs) to take over the entire administration of housing in a single area in order to "diversify tenure".**
- **The Bill will introduce new forms of tenancy (assured tenancies and shortholds) with reduced security and higher rents for new private and Housing Association tenancies, including those leaving the Council sector.**

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Housing Action Trusts

A flagship for the Tory task force

Housing Action Trusts (HATs) are a critical element in the Tories' all-out assault on public sector housing.

Within designated areas, they intend to hand ownership of all Council housing to a quango with access to large central government and private sector finance for renovation.

Ultimately, the properties will be offered for owner-occupation or for private sector renting under private landlords or housing associations, within a deregulated market. *They will never return to Local Authority control.*

As with Urban Development Corporations, HATs will be run by a Board appointed by — and accountable only to — the Environment Secretary. They will have similarly wide powers of land acquisition, planning and development control, highways, sewerage and health powers, thereby stripping Local Authorities of any powers they could use to obstruct the Tory plan of selling off the "desirable" bits of our inner cities.

By John Turkie
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Councils

Whilst Councils will lose total control of housing within the HAT area, they will nevertheless be faced with huge expenditure on housing. They will retain their legal duty to house the homeless — HATs will have no responsibilities, even for those they make homeless. Therefore the Councils will still be left to pick up the tab for "housing" the homeless in bed and breakfast.

Under the HAT regime and the "pick-a-landlord" — or PAL — system, Councils will be forced to sell off properties at ludicriously low prices compared with the historic debt on them. The balance on the outstanding loan debt will remain with the Council, and in the end will be paid by tenants living outside the HAT area.

HATs do not make sense if they are simply to incur public expenditure that is at present denied Councils to keep existing tenants there. They will target areas ripe for speculation and "yuppiefication"; move tenants out and sell off the housing stock on the open market.

Undemocratic

To accomplish this, they are deliberately undemocratic organisations. To be otherwise would undermine their pinciple function of moving tenants outs, pending both private and public money on renovation, and then selling the housing on to the private sector.

The Tories will make sure there's at least one "showpiece HAT" (for party political broadcasts!) where much of the housing will not be sold for owner-occupation but for renting (mainly back to the original tenants, but at market prices) under housing associations, tenants co-ops and private landlords.

Expertise

Much public money and public sector expertise will be lavished on HATs, before housing assets are passed into the private sector, for them to reap the profits. But as the improved stock will be in private hands, the Tories will claim it is the private sector which has brought the benefit.



When did you last see a Council estate looking as plush as this private estate? We're heading for a two-tier system of housing.

Labour's policy

A "real choice" — of nothing at all

There were 350 words in Labour's last manifesto under the banner headline *Real Choice in Housing*.

There were two policy initiatives:

- A commitment to major housebuilding and renovation drive.

This was neither costed nor quantified, and it was unclear whether it referred to the public or private sector, because the statement included both.

Along with this came a commitment to maintain mortgage tax relief, which raised the real practical dilemma of exactly how such a "major drive" was to be financed.

- A commitment to maintain the right to buy.

This bitter pill was sweetened with a promise that money raised from selling public housing would be used to finance further house building. Unfortunately, it was unclear whether this referred to public or private sector building. In other words, it would have allowed Local Authorities to sell Council houses and use the money to finance even more sales.

The Manifesto also stated that Council tenants would be "consulted" over rent increases and rehabilitation work, that they would be given the right to set up management co-operatives, that they would be given the right to buy freeholds and appoint managing agents, and that private tenants would retain security and have a legal right to get repairs done.

That was Labour's *Real Choice in Housing*. There was nothing about the right of everyone, irrespective of their income, to have a decent place to live.

- There was nothing about the collective provision and control of housing.
- There was nothing about the quality or cost of public housing.
- There was nothing about the quality or cost of privately rented housing.
- There was nothing about overcrowding, unfit housing, special housing needs, or specific housing requirements.

There wasn't even anything about the homeless!

Real Choice in Housing was aimed directly at those who have benefitted most from Tory policies. It was nothing more than an attempt to reassure them that a Labour government would do nothing adversely to affect their newly acquired privileges.

By refusing to point out the contradictions and iniquities of existing housing provision, by refusing to point out the inherent conflict between private and collective provision, Labour's housing policy is little more than a defence of the status quo.

It was an attempt to buy votes at the expense of those who are in desperate housing need. As such, it actually prepared the ground for the Tories' current Housing Bill.

Housing Benefits

Four changes in the Housing Benefits system come into effect in April:

- **The "sliding scale" which applies to Housing Benefit will get much steeper, removing Benefit altogether for some people, and reducing it enormously for many others. A person on a low income will find that a £1 wage increase may actually only be worth 13p because of the removal of Housing Benefit.**
- ***Everyone*, including claimants, will have to pay part of their rates bill — 20%, or more for most people.**
- **If claimants have over £3,000 savings, their Housing Benefit will be reduced; if they have over £6,000 they will not receive any Housing Benefit. This will obviously have a major impact on the elderly and those approaching retirement.**
- **There will be a ceiling, a maximum amount, on the amount of Housing Benefit that a private tenant can claim. This will certainly lead to an increase in homelessness, an increase in overcrowding and an increase in poverty.**

Features

Socialist Conference "Aims and Objectives":
Let debate commence!

The Socialist Conference organisers have issued a statement of *Aims and Objectives* as a basis for discussion for developing the Chesterfield initiative.

The four-page document begins by asserting the need: *"To establish a strong, independent initiative to renew the idea of socialism in Britain."*

"To bring socialist ideas up to date in order to meet the needs of the 21st century."

Document

The document emphasises the inextricable link between socialism and democracy, and gives a central place to democratisation of the economy and the state.

It advocates policies for *"securing control by the community of the banks and finance houses, the land, and the major companies"* and follows this with a list of demands for full employment, a shorter working week, trade union rights, decent housing, healthcare, education, and so forth.

All this, the documents says, can only be achieved by the *"radical democratisation and overhaul of the secretive and bureaucratic State* and it makes proposals accordingly.

Commitment

"Socialism is international in character," it says, and includes commitment to a non-aligned, non-nuclear foreign policy, support for struggles against colonialism, and the *"ending, after a fixed period, of British jurisdiction in Northern Ireland."*

It concludes: *"We will provide links between those who are struggling for a better society; and we will encourage wide-ranging discussion and openness on the left..."*

By Mike Marqusee
Haringey Labour Briefing

It's not hard to imagine how most far left groups will respond. Those who don't just dismiss the document as reformist twaddle will offer detailed amendments or alternative statements in tiresome attempts to get their own programmes adopted in full by the Socialist Conference. Comrades, this is not the way forward.

Befuddled

However, the statement is befuddled by a number of crucial ommissions and confusions, which must be addressed.

There is nothing in the document about the specific oppressions faced by black people, women, lesbians and gay men, and others. Nor any discussion of how we build socialist struggles against these oppressions.

Whisper

There is not a whisper of the family, of reproductive (including abortion) rights, of childcare, of sexuality. In the current climate, this is a major error which must be rectified — and not simply by a tokenistic recitation of the dreaded left-wing formula "women, black people, lesbians and gays..." Serious thought is needed here.

Local government isn't mentioned at all — another strange ommission given the temper of the times. The document correctly highlights devolution and decentralisation but never utters the good old socialist word "planning".

Central

Housing, health and education — areas central to the daily lives of the whole working class — are mentioned dutifully, but there is nothing about what socialist provision in these areas would actually entail.

Crucial organisational questions are not dealt with. The document does not address the need to build mass, democratic, militant trade unions in building any movement for socialism. On the question of the current trade union and Labour Party leadership the document is discreetly silent.

Shopping

I am not saying that the left should simply table a shopping list of sectional demands and get on with business as usual. On the contrary, I am asking that the Socialist Conference take on board the points above (and many others) and integrate them through collective discussion, into a socialist manifesto that will carry real clout in the working class (a term, by the way, from which the document fights shy).

Inevitably, the document tiptoes uneasily over the distinction between revolution and reform — a fact of life for the left which, for the moment, we simply have to accept.

More disturbing is the level of abstraction at which the whole thing is pitched. It conflates demands, policies, structures, and principles, and meanders from one topic to another. The result is a document without a beginning, middle or an end. Because of this, it is unlikely to be read with much enthusiasm by anyone anywhere.

Explanation

We need some coherent explanation of the evils of our society and of their origins in the capitalist system.

We need to flesh out how the undemocratic power to which the document refers manifests itself in the workplace, in education, the courts, the media, etc., and how working people can tame it. The document enumerates many "rights" that people should enjoy, but does not say how they can acquire them.

Movement

We need to outline the nature of the mass movement we are trying to build. Which forces will make it up? What forms of organisation will it assume? What short-term demands will it take up? What long-term strategies should guide it?

Towards this end, a major preoccupation of the Socialist Conference should be organising practical solidarity (and a nationwide platform) for those in struggle.

The document is in danger of trying to be too many things to too many people. Perhaps the most damning comment I've heard about it is that it's the sort of thing even the LCC would vote for, because it wouldn't commit them to actually doing anything.

For all its faults, this is a welcome initiative and should be seized on by all socialists who want to see our ideas come out of the closet narrow confines of smoke-free rooms and on to the streets. Get copies as soon as you can, and take part in the debate.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

After 2,000 listen to the policy debates at Chesterfield, where will the debates go now?

Black Sections

A voice for the Black community

When Black Sections first burst on to the national stage at the Blackpool Conference in 1984, we encountered widespread opposition.

Today our politics enjoy broad acceptance and our arguments have been vindicated.

In the early days, selection processes far outweighed activity in other areas. Since then, some of the criticism and cynicism — that the campaign consisted only of careerists — has been shaken off and there has been much greater involvement in Black community campaigns and the formulation of anti-racist socialist policies.

Defeats

Despite this progress, repeated defeats at Labour Party Conference at the hands of the block vote have taken their toll on morale. Some supporters said last year that they were against going back to Conference in 1988 with the same demand for constitutional recognition; others suggested that "affiliation" be sought.

In this context, we need to assess very soberly how the votes will be won at Conference. After all, the Labour Party won the arguments in the General Election — but did not win the vote! The focus in 1988 must be in the trade unions which wield 90% of Conference votes.

By Narendra Makanji
Vice Chair, Labour Party Black Sections

Our strength has been the support we have received from the Black community. The Hansib/Harris poll at the General Election showed that the majority of Black Party members back our demand. But this support cannot be taken for granted. A great deal of campaigning, arguing, and protesting will be needed and our supporters everywhere will have to widen their horizons.

In regard to Black Sections winning rights similar to those already enjoyed by Women's sections, we are faced with these options:

- To become a non-Party pressure group — such as the National Council for Civil Liberties or West Indian Standing Conference.
- To be a Labour Party and labour movement-orientated pressure group.
- To seek registration as a non-affiliated organisation such as the Anglo-Hellenic Labour Association, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Nottingham Labour Party Action on Race, etc.
- To seek affiliation like Poale Zion, the National Union of Labour Clubs, the Socialist Education Association, etc.
- To seek recognition like the National Labour Women's Committee.

In January, Bill Morris, the Deputy General Secretary of TGWU, proposed the setting up of a Black Socialist Society, saying that the case for some form of independent Black representation within the Party was unanswerable.

He added: *"Anti-racism begins from a commitment to social and institutional change, and in that process institutions of the labour movement cannot and will not escape examination... Black self-organisation, **formally recognised or not**, will play a central part."*

The Morris option would require support from the NEC in order to succeed. The Black Section has given a guarded welcome to the new initiative, saying *"Over the last five years the Labour Party has tried to get rid of us but hasn't succeeded. The critical point is who the organisation is answerable to, the Black grassroots or the leadership."*

It is dishonest to suggest that the choice facing us is between anti-racist Labour policies or organisational change within the Party. Our objective has been to achieve both together.

Liberation

Nobody advocates that liberation movements give up their struggle for political representation in exchange for mere policy discussions. The Black Section has already developed policies on employment, education, race attacks, immigration and nationality, Azania, Ireland, Palestine and sexual equality.

Some people believe that our major achievement of electing four Black MPs means there is no longer any need for Black Sections. It has been suggested that this view is most popular among Black Labour members in public office — though there are many notable exceptions. One of the new Black parliamentarians said *"Four black MPs means there is now a greater need for Black Sections then ever before."*

Many more people must be recruited to the cause, people with the commitment and drive capable of taking the campaign to its ultimate goal of racial justice.

We have to deepen our roots in Black communities and strengthen our alliances on the left. If we are to build a united, national Black movement then we must remember that mass campaigns need mass support. Local Black Sections have to be at the forefront of working with Black community gorups and defence campaigns to build that support.

We must think ahead to pre-empt and outmanoeuvre our opponents. This means an innovative approach to involving Black groups in discussions about the best way forward in the fight against racism. It also means imaginative and non-sectarian tactics.

We must help build non-party umbrella organisations like Black Action for the Liberation of Southern Africa, the Black Caucus network among voluntary groups, and Black caucuses in unions like NALGO.

Black Sections must provide a voice for the Black communities and reflect the aspirations and wishes of Black people generally.



Narendra Makanji

FIGHT THE ALTON BILL!

Why there should be no time limits

Women no longer see motherhood as either their inevitable fate, or their main identity, although a majority of women expect to have children at some time.

Nowadays women expect their children to survive childhood (in the west at least) and to have access to contraception and legal abortion — in other words, to be able to choose if and when to have children.

When motherhood is thrust upon them, because of unplanned pregnancy, they still expect to exercise



PHOTO: Jane Connor

CPSA women lobbying Parliament on January 21st against Alton's attempt to reduce the time limit for abortions.

By Leonora Lloyd
National Abortion Campaign
(personal capacity)

choice. If they decide they do not wish to continue with the pregnancy, that is their reason for seeking abortion.

It is only our restrictive laws which compel them to seek out two doctors, who in turn have to find "grounds" for granting an abortion. It is this, compounded by lack of facilities, particularly affecting poorer women, which restricts choice.

Women have many reasons for choosing not to continue with a pregnancy which cannot be neatly categorised by man-made legal "grounds". Whilst some women know, even before they get pregnant, that they would choose abortion — perhaps because they never want children, or have completed their family — for others the decision may not come until some way into their pregnancy.

The response to the Alton Bill shows that many people do not understand that if a choice cannot be made at any stage in a pregancy, then *the concept of choice cannot be said to exist at all.*

Some of the situations which lead to late abortions could easily be changed, if the political will was there — delays in the health service, lack of facilities, obstructive doctors. Some could probably be improved with more research, such as tests for fetal abormality.

Other, more profound changes in society affecting the totality of women's lives, would mean that some abortions would not even be considered. These changes would include free 24 hour a day childcare, improvements in social security, better facilities for those with disabilities.

But even under the best possible circumstances, some late abortions will still be sought by women, including at a time when the fetus is likely to be viable, especially using modern technology. Those who, whilst generally supportive, seek to reduce time limits, do so on the grounds of viability.

Given the possibility, women would always choose to have an early rather than a late abortion. Those who, at a late stage, are still seeking an abortion, are therefore likely to be the most determined, with the strongest reasons for having an abortion.

Whatever a woman's reasons, she should not be denied a choice on abortion simply because the fetus is at a stage where it could possibly be viable. The reality is that it is still totally dependent on her, inside her, affecting her life here and now and for the forseeable future.

"Viability" is a moveable concept, not because the rate of development of the fetus has changed, but according to technology, or even to geography — many areas do not have the necessary facilities to save very early babies. To argue that abortion is allowable only until "viability" is reached is to concede there are certain acceptable grounds for abortion and limits on women's choice — that women cannot be trusted to make their own decision.

To accept the viability argument does not merely open the door to continuing restrictions, as viability gets earlier through the use of technology, but it also, and more importantly, accepts that some women's decisions are inherently less valid than others.

The whole concept of the '67 Act was based on the idea that women are unable to make valid decisions for themselves, and anti-abortionists carry this idea further by arguing that women cannot make decisions for the "unborn child".

To accept restrictions is to accept that argument in some degree. In fact, given the greater dangers of late abortions and the increasing unpleasantness of the operation itself, women seeking late abortions are likely to have the most valid reasons of all.

Is this to argue for "abortion to term"? In fact, termination of pregnancy *after* 28 weeks already occurs where the fetus is diagnosed as dead or totally unviable.

For the vast majority of women, once they feel the baby move, they begin to establish a relationship with it, to think of it as a baby, and this is why only the most desperate would still seek an abortion at this stage.

At the present time, when many women having late abortions have sought them at an earlier stage in their pregnancy, they have never allowed themselves to develop this relationship. For other women, whose situation changes during the pregnancy, the decision is that much harder.

The anti-abortionists' argument seems to suggest that once there was no time limit, women would gladly seek late abortions. This is of course not true at all. A woman's reasons and needs for an abortion do not become less important as the weeks go by — they are as valid after 20 weeks as they were before. To deny a woman choice on abortion is to deny her autonomy and control over her own life.

Choice for women is not divisible. No one can judge on another woman's behalf. To restrict abortion at any stage for any woman is to restrict choice for all women.

Taken from *Fight the Alton Bill, Abortion and Women's Liberation*, by Leonora Lloyd, Valerie Coultas, Gill Lee. *Socialist Outlook*, 50p from PO Box 705, London SW19 1HA.

Why we need to shift the arguments

With the likelihood of Alton changing the time limits in his Bill, the FAB campaign needs to shift its political emphasis.

We cannot argue against 22 or even 24 weeks in the same way as against 18.

Only 29 women had abortions after 24 weeks in 1986.

● Of course, Alton's bill would really mean 20 weeks

By Gill Lee
Labour Briefing Women

where it said 24 as doctors always allow themselves a margin of safety.

● Of course, the women affected by a reduction to 22 or 24 weeks would be the most vulnerable, for example, very young women who did not realise they were pregnant.

● Of course, the anti-abortionists will not stop their attacks on women's rights until they have criminalised abortion itself.

But the fundamental argument against 24 weeks has to be that it is women who should decide if and when to have an abortion. If the law is to be changed it should be changed to eradicate the conditions that force women to have late abortions.

There should be an expansion in the health service to avoid delays, free pregnancy testing in every doctors surgery, hospital, and clinic, a statutory duty for every Health Authority to provide abortions as and when required.

Women should be able to refer themselves for abortion, without a doctor's approval. Abortion should be safe, free, legal and available to all who want it. There should be better sex education in schools, not the restrictions proposed by the Tories.

Above all, women need the creation of a society which would alow them real "choice" on abortion. This means free childcare 24 hours a day, proper resources and facilities for those with disabilities, and a widespread understanding of the principle that the physical and intellectual wellbeing of all children must be borne by the whole of society.

Women should be able to choose to work and to have children without any penalties. Women need a society geared to their needs — a socialist society.

The women's health department

Solving your child's sleep problems

This is the issue you've all been waiting for!

It is a vital one for women's health, because women still provide 89% of child care in this country.

You know what's it's like: you stagger out of bed in the morning, exhausted, head thumping, make

By Tess Kewley
SRN

straight for the medicine cabinet, and try to decide whether you should take aspirin and give yourself a stomach ulcer, or paracetamol, and fuck your liver up!

However, there is a solution. There's a good book (*Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems*, by Richard Ferber); I've read it, and I think I can give you the gist of it without you having to fork out for the book.

Most of the problems he deals with concern children who refuse to go to bed when you want them to, and then, when you've finally got them to sleep, the buggers wake up six times a night. I've been through this with a vengeance, but by applying Ferber's techniques, I solved my daughter's sleep problem in *eight days!*

Both breast and bottle-fed babies suffer (and their parents, too, of course). You have to accept some of the blame yourself — often the problem comes from parents being too tired to argue or by being too lax with the child.

All you need is the will to carry out the techniques, a watch with a second hand, and a notebook.

First of all, the essence of the "treatment' is firmness and the establishment of a routine. Set a bedtime which suits *you* and *stick to it*.

Never let the child fall asleep on the sofa and take them up to bed once they're asleep. You have to teach the child that bed exists to sleep in, and that you intend to put him/her to bed at roughly the same time each night.

Choose your bedtime (I decided that 6pm was suitable — especially since I go out to a lot of meetings at night). Remember that babies do *not* need milk for nutritional purposes after four months of age. Whether you are breast or bottle feeding the child, no milk is needed at night after this age. Toddlers certainly need no drinks or breast feeds during the night.

Having chosen your ideal bedtime, get the child ready for bed and follow the same routine each night, e.g. supper, play for ten minutes, bath, pyjamas on, say goodnight to everyone, then take the child up to her room.

Your routine could continue with the reading of a set number of stories (one or two — and don't give in and read "just one more"), or singing a couple of songs. Then you say, "Goodnight, Clare/Charlie, mummy's going now, so have a good sleep."

Then leave. Firmly.

Now this is where you need your watch and a good deal of patience. Naturally enough, Clare/Charlie will be outraged and frightened and will either race for the door (if able to walk and get out of bed) or will stand in her/his cot crying.

Wait for one minute. During this time, if necessary, hold the door shut so the child can't get out. Talk reassuringly throughout the minute, saying things like, "it's all right, mum's here, but it's bedtime now, so you should really go off to sleep," etc.

Never use threats or become annoyed. The aim of the "treatment" is to teach the child *to fall asleep* in their own bed. (This is why you shouldn't carry a sleeping child up to bed night after night; when the child wakes in the night, they will be confused because they didn't start off their sleep in the bed where they now finds themselves!.)

After the minute is up, go back in and cuddle the child, speak reassuringly, and return them to bed/cot. Leave immediately and this time wait **two minutes.**

Follow the same technique, making the gaps longer and longer before you go in to reassure the child (five minutes, ten minutes, 15, etc). until the child "gives up".

Let me stress that you don't want the child to cry themself to sleep. You will find that the child will eventually be put back to bed without a fuss and will stay there and fall asleep.

Be warned: it may take two or more hours on the first nights that you try this! If the child wakes during the night, employ the same techniques. Keep a diary of how things are going (that's what the notebook's for) so that you can see that things are improving.

The first two or three nights are the worst, then things do start to improve — I give you my *personal guarantee.* Remember: create a bedtime routine and stick to it; show the child that you mean business without being threatening or cross.

There are other sleep disturbances which Dr Ferber deals with very fully in his book. One of them involves the child drinking six or more bottles or cups of juice/milk overnight. Here, you gradually cut down on the amount of liquid in the bottles until it's negligible: the child then doesn't bother to wake up for such a small amount of fluid.

I know countless women who've tried these techniques and every one has succeeded. Getting children out of your bed and into their own is dealt with by simply returning the child to their own bed *every* time they appear in yours, and, if necessary, doing the "door closing" technique to persuade the child to fall asleep in her own bed.

It can be done.

Any of you still having problems after ten days of rigidly applying the techniques (no cheating — if you give in just *once*, you'll have to start all over again) are welcome to phone me to slag me off, but I'm willing to bet that no one will find it necessary. Here's my phone number as a proof of my confidence: 01 340 0470. Good luck!

*Next time: contraception and finding your cervix.

Letters

WRITEBACK!

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

Cloth-ears Kinnock

Dear *Briefing*,

I want to get a resolution on a specific subject debated at this year's Labour Party Conference.

I was thinking of announcing that I may challenge for the Deputy Leadership of the Party. However, as I am not a Member of the Labour Party Shadow Cabinet I suppose I will have to go through the proper constitutional channels like everyone else in the Party.

I suppose I will have to try to get the resolution through my ward branch and then get my Constituency Party to adopt it, in the face of competition from other resolutions, as our Conference resolution. Finally, I suppose our delegate will have to battle to get it debated at the Conference.

At the 1987 Labour Party Conference, despite a tremendous amount of lobbying and support from a large number of women delegates and MPs, a resolution from a number of Constituency Labour Parties concerning the constitutional amendment to include at least one woman on every shortist for the selection of Labour Parliamentary candidates was denied debate. Obviously one of the women should have stated their intention to contest the Deputy Leadership of the Party, then they could have got the resolution debated!

Still, it is gratifying to know that the Party has just launched its *Labour Listens* campaign. I presume this will include listening about equality of opportunity.

The biggest joke of all is that the people involved in the deal between the Leader's office and the Shadow Energy spokesperson claim they are part of an open, democratic, "listening" party.

Deals such as this make me wonder if they think they are in the Tory Party. Deals in smoke-filled rooms are, of course, a thing of the past.

Yours faithfully,
John Wilton
Birmingham

PS: I would have sent this letter to *Labour Weekly*, but the leadership is so busy listening to people they've closed it.

Haringey FAB: Put the record straight

Dear *Briefing*,

Is Jane Connor in the same FAB group as me? (*Labour Briefing* no. 55).

Her report describes the Group's work, then claims that the group has agreed a longer term strategy for fighting for abortion rights and women's liberation. The latter may be Jane's view, but there is no group consensus.

Haringey FAB is attended by some very committed women (and a few men), but to put the record straight, the SWP has been the main organising force behind a successful picket of Hugh Rossi's surgery and the FAB public meeting, as well as SWP members (men and women) petitioning on the streets.

What this indicates is not just the SWP's commitment, but the lack of a large *active* movement against Alton. It is generally the experience of FAB that there is tremendous passive support for FAB (shown by the ease of petitioning), but the question is how do we translate this into activity?

There are a number of problems, including the failure of the Labour Party to take a stand against Alton, even Haringey Labour Party Women's Committee does not participate in FAB.

There are individual Labour Party members, and thousands of others who were mobilised on the local day of action, and we now have less than two months to build for March 19th.

The SWP in Haringey FAB suggested bi-weekly meetings instead of weekly (which have been shrinking in numbers) and to concentrate on activity to build for March. The FAB group decided to continue to meet weekly, but the SWP has not pulled out, and continue the argument that abortion is a class issue and we have to get both male and female trade unionists out in their thousands on March 19th to stop the Alton Bill.

Yours fraternally,
Denise Bell
Hornsey SWP

Tatchell's one-sided Europe

Dear *Briefing*,

There is something missing from Peter Tatchell's Euro-programme, which appears in *Briefing* no. 54.

Where is the vitally important expression of support for "movements for social, economic, national and democratic rights in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union"?

Is there some political reason for this omission or has he just forgotten 300 million people living in these countries, most of whom consider themselves to be in Europe?

We should be told,
Comradely greetings,
Colin Meade,
Surbiton CLP

A name taken in vain

Dear Ms Kewley,

I was recently gadding about bonny Scotland visiting my good friend Senya McClart. She has newly been appointed as a senior Nurse Manager at one of those *dreadful* new hospitals with all those *dreadful* little side-wards and single rooms: bring back the Nightingale ward, one centrally placed machine-gun post was sufficient for total control.

Anyway, she had the kindness to show me round this unhygienically carpetted glass menagerie and during our tour of the wards we opened a sluice door to discover a student nurse with a mohican hair cut puffing a B&H and reading a subversive journal entitled *Labour Briefing*.

Imagine Senya's embarrassment at such a breach of professionalism in front of such a renowned disciplinarian as myself. However, she quickly recovered her poise, confiscated both journal and the B&H, and gave the girl a good stiff talking to in the office.

Justice done, we set to examining the incendiary material (newspaper, not cigs of course). I was, needless to say, horrified to see your name associated with this communistic rag.

I remember you well from your period as a learner nurse on my ward and I remember your imperfections. But your burning ambition to become a Little Sister of Mercy and work with Mother Theresa touched us so deeply that we were prepared to overlook other minor transgressions. What fools we were, what a viper we nurtured in our bosom! Wretch! Ingrate!

Not only have you desecrated this worthy ambition but you have also dishonoured the good name of midwifery by having two children (which I see from your potted Curriculum Vitae). It is beyond me how anybody can fulfill the time-honoured role of assuring women in labour that a routine episiotomy is painless, if she's had one herself. No, all midwives (radical or otherwise) should be virgin spinsters and I advise you to move into an area such as family planning as soon as possible.

Both Senya and I were disturbed, moreover, by your disparaging remarks about *Nursing Times* and *Women's Own*, journals which fulfill a vital educative role and are recommended by us to junior nurses on all occasions. Senya and I are not above learning from them and we were the two of us recently disturbed to realise that we had not been performing a simple preventative procedure known as TSE.

Indeed, we lack some of the basic skills and equipment necessary for it and will be taking immediate steps to remedy this. As for *Spare Rib* neither Senya nor I have heard of it. Is it one of these week by week Chinese cookery magazines?

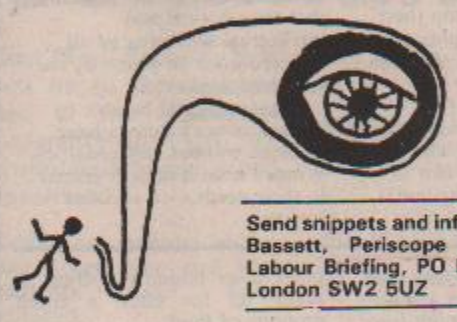
Finally, your tendency to self-gratification seems to have grown stronger over the years. You weakness for mincepies and cream will only lead to billiousness as years go by and hardly accords with the image of abstemious frugality that nurses have attempted to promote. Not that I agree with all this cholesterol nonsense. I have always found a buttered scone about 4.30pm very sustaining on late shift.

Your alarming extravagance even extends to your leisure activities when you indulge in that degraded version of Housey Housey known as "Bingo". Gambling is a vice and Housey Housey should be used in moderation for the entertainment of lower-class prisoners on rainy afternoons.

The idea of playing it for money is vulgar beyond belief. You would be far better spending your time visiting the elderly poor or knitting socks for our brave boys in the Falklands. Far from sending my regards, I am outraged that you should use my name so lightly and I advise you to pull your socks up smartly.

Yours, etc.,
Angela Plume
or *David Fowler* RMN RGN
Falkirk

Periscope



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

Hattersley not a woman shock!

In a *Guardian* article on veteran pro-choice campaigner Vera Houghton, journalist Melanie McFadyean reported an interesting exchange with our Deputy Leader, only just secured from threatened assault by the wild man from Hull East: *"Roy Hattersley ... said to me that he would have voted for the Alton Bill but won't be in the country. 'All this nonsense about a woman's right to choose,' he said. I commented that were he a woman, he might feel differently. 'Well, I'm not, and never will be, so that's that!' "*

It is Periscope's understanding that Hattersley is about to give birth to a six-course dinner, 17 volumes of vacuous prose, and a record fourth successive general election defeat.

Fact

The anti-abortion adverts in recent issues of *The Times* and *Independent* were headlined "We've abolished the death penalty for murderers and terrorists" — and went on to make the predictable points.

Of the 52 MPs who signed the advert, 36 voted last spring for the restoration of capital punishment.

So much for the sanctity of human life.

Guardian Diary: not so fearless

Periscope addicts who enjoyed the note on the two Toby Harrises in *Briefing* 54 will want to know that Stephen Cook, the recently departed editor of the *Guardian's* back page Diary column, refused to print the very same item.

The story is a simple one, with a natural appeal to any self-styled crusader against politicians' double-talk. The Toby Harris who, in his capacity as Director of the National Association of Community Health Councils, fervently denounces NHS cuts is the same Toby Harris who, as Leader of Haringey Council, is butchering jobs and services, including Local Authority support for the health service.

"But he has no alternative," whined Cook. *"I don't see the story in it."*

Our informant patiently explained that the arguments used by Harris to defend himself — government cash limits, the need for efficient management of reduced resources, etc. — were the same as those advanced by the DHA managements lambasted by Harris wearing his Community Health Councils hat.

Cook revealed himself to be utterly unaware of the scale and nature of the cuts currently being made by Labour-controlled Local Authorities and of the growing resistance to them.

"Don't you think the object of a Diary should be to expose hypocrisy and double-talk from any corner, even if you happen to agree with the politics of the person?" Cook was asked.

Cook — the man who thinks spotting Eric Heffer in a first class carriage is a big news item — made no reply.

Firmly rooted in the old ways

Ken Barton, Deputy Leader of Labour-controlled Birmingham City Council, on being asked whether a District Labour Party meeting in the Council Chamber could continue past 9.30pm, or whether the security staff would want to close the building to enable them to go home, said:

"I admire them tremendously, although they have got manual jobs."

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 202 — we're back to South London. Congratulations to Jude Arkwright.

Students on the move

Throughout the coming month there will be student demonstrations and occupations on a larger scale than has been seen for several years.

This is the students' reply to the latest attack on education.

It aims to radically restructure the whole education system.

In higher education this means the privatisaton of Polytechnics, forcing colleges to tender to government in order to provide a course and an attack on Student Accommodation provided by colleges.

By Carl Taylor
Coventry Poly Labour Club

On top of this colleges will be encouraged to find big business sponsorship for courses — those courses not attracting sponsorship will in all likelihood be closed.

These changes are creating discontent and anger in many colleges. You would imagine the NUS would be planning a revival of its heyday of twenty years ago. Unfortunately, today the NUS is a standard bearer for the Grey Flag.

Their immediate response was to try and hide behind a shattered shield, so that they could point out "the better points of the Education Bill".

However, after strong pressure in the run up to NUS conference the strategy was changed to the Water Pistol attack. A week of action has been called for February 8-12th, where students are encouraged to use "new campaigning techniques" (hot air balloons, postcards to MPs and watching videos). We then have a fortnight's rest while things cool down and momentum is lost before our National Demonstration.

This strategy is doomed to failure!

Fortunately, the NUS leadership is going to have a hard time keeping to its plan. Many colleges are planning direct action. In Kent occupations have been taking place all year. At North Staffs Poly they have just won a rent strike. In London a Student Action Group has been formed.

These colleges and many others will be using the demo on February 27th as a focal point for further action in an effort to mobilise students.

In the student movement the campaign has to be based on two methods of campaigning: mobilising students and direct action. It is crucial that the demonstration is the biggest and most militant in the recent history of the student movement.

We will not, however, be able to defeat the government's bill on our own. In order to win we will need to make alliances. Firstly we need to fight alongside the cleaners, lecturers, canteen workers, clerical staff, etc., who stand to lose as much, if not more, than the students if the Bill is passed. The alliance must be built at all levels of the campaign inside colleges.

We must mobilise School Students, parents, teachers, cleaners, administrators, students and other education workers. This alliance needs to be built not just at the level of Norman Willis and Vicky Phillips but between every activist in every town and city.

This approach would provide us with a real basis to be able to extend the campaign out of the campus and staff room and into the rest of the labour movement. Only then will the Tories be forced to withdraw their Bill and admit defeat!

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

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BOOK REVIEW

Women's liberation and socialism

The central argument of this pamphlet published by the SWP is familiar and predictable — that there are no differences of interest between working class women and men, and no need for any autonomous women's movement since the "revolutionary party" has all the answers.

By Stevi Jackson
Cardiff



PHOTO: Novosti Press Agency

Alexandra Kollontai organised women in the Soviet Union

Its starting point is uncontentious: "women's liberation cannot be won without the victory of socialism and socialism is impossible without women's liberation."

Through a brief history of the Russian Revolution and of the women's movement in Germany and the USA in the early twentieth century, they show how women's interests can be advanced through participation in class struggle.

Challenged

It is true that sexism can be challenged and men won to women's demands in the course of such struggles. In arguing this case, however, Petty et al consistently underestimate how deeply rooted gender differences are in our culture and our consciousness, as well as in the material conditions of our existence.

Nor do they appreciate how fundamental the experience of male dominance is in the lives of many women. They are unable to understand why feminism attracts women and resort to the irritating practice of accounting for it in terms of the "bourgeois" or at least "middle class" origins of the movement.

Here, they are inconsistent in their use of the term "working class". At the beginning of the pamphlet they define it as "the vast majority of the population who must work in order to live". Feminists, apparently, are an exception.

The authors admit that the left bears some responsibility for alienating women from Marxism in failing to take the women's movement seriously in the late 60s and early 70s. This, however, is not seen as having anything to do with the male dominance of left groups. Instead they ascribe it to the "third worldism" of the New Left at the time.

Their own current they see as having been blameless — of course they were *never* sexist nor *ever* dismissed women's liberation as a diversionary issue! This certainly does not match my memories of the IS* at that time and I find it hard to believe that their US counterparts behaved any differently.

***Women's Liberation and Socialism*, Bookmarks, £1.95**



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Women, organising together to demonstrate for the right to choose

It is not just reformist and radical feminism which are seen as deviations from the true path of Marxism, but socialist feminism too. Each current is caricatured. The result is that some crucial differences are blurred. For example, support for autonomous women's organisation is equated with separatism.

Theoretical

The theoretical flaws in this pamphlet, both in its analysis of women's oppression and the broader politics within which this is located, are too numerous to be dealt with in a short review. One major difficulty which I would like to address is the authors' refusal to accept that men, as well as capital, benefit from women's oppression.

They dismiss evidence of working class men having colluded in the promotion of the idea that a woman's place is in the home, in marginalising women in the labour market, as having been true only of an unrepresentative minority. To thus deny the influence of sexism and the bourgeois ideology of the family among the working class is a serious error of political judgement.

Such views, however, are widespread among the left. They stem from a misplaced fear that recognising the material benefits that men gain from women's oppression means abandoning the goal of socialist revolution as a precondition for women's liberation.

Ultimate

But the fact that there is an ultimate unity of interests between working class women and men in the overthrow of capitalism does not mean that there are no differences of interest here and now. Such differences are likely to persist in the course of the struggle for socialism, hence the need for women to organise as women as part of that struggle.

Arguing

Petty et al deny this, arguing: *"It is true today that there are husbands, some of them working class, who dominate or oppress their wives; that there are men, some of them working class, who rape or batter women; and that today, most men believe a range of sexist ideas. It is also true today, however, that most women believe a range of sexist ideas, and that most women today are not fighting against their oppression."*

Justification

This is a spurious justification of their position. It tends also to individualise the problem of male dominance and to ignore the obvious fact that women and men do not hold "sexist ideas" from the same position in society with the same consequences. The whole notion that "sexism" is simply a matter of superficial "ideas" and "attitudes" is itself highly problematic.

writers miss is that their own ideas are products of debates which would not be happening had there not been an autonomous women's movement; that without it sexism on the left would remain unchallenged; and women's liberation would not have the place on the political agenda which it occupies today.

Evidence

**The IS was the forerunner of the SWP. The authors of this pamphlet are members of the International Socialist Organisation, the SWP's sister organisation in the USA.*

International Briefing

No justice for the Birmingham Six

The Birmingham Six are to stay in jail.

If British justice gets its way, they will remain there for the rest of their lives.

They were not involved in the bombings fourteen years ago. Anyone who has read Chris Mullen's book *Error of Judgement* can be in no doubt of that.

Anyone who read the daily and detailed reports of the appeal hearing as they appeared in the *Irish Times* will also know this undeniable fact.

Another Irish newspaper, the eminently respectable *Irish Press*, summed up the court case:

"Counsel for the Six have presented a brilliant case over the last three weeks, marshalling new evidence, reducing the Crown's rebuttal witnesses to helpless incoherence, and arguing powerfully that where any element of doubt has been created justice can only be served by ordering a retrial."

Evidence in addition to that previously uncovered by Chris Mullin emerged in the course of the appeal.

- There was a police station cleaner who testified to the blood-covered walls of the cell where one of the Six had been.
- There was a former policewoman who came back a second time to the witness box because her conscience wouldn't allow her to stay silent about how she had seen one of the Six kneed in the groin by a policeman and called "a fucking murdering Irish bastard".
- There was another former policeman who testified to the violence the prisoners received at the hands of his colleagues.
- There was the mysterious schedule — timetable of events — allegedly prepared at the time by Superintendent Reade, the officer in charge of the case, and crisscrossed with alterations which Reade was unable to explain in the witnessbox.

And add to all that the extraordinary performance of the forensic scientist, Dr Skuse, whose tests were crucial in securing the original convictions.

By Geoff Bell
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Substances

Faced with the fact that other scientists had got positive results for completely innocent substances from tests which Skuse claimed revealed traces of explosives, Skuse started shifting his decimal points until even Lord Chief Justice Lane was forced to admit that the doctor's evidence was "imprecise".

Skuse's evidence was crucial in securing the original convictions. It must also have been a factor in driving the police to beat the confessions out of prisoners who, they were told, had definitely handled explosives.

The appeal hearing proved "beyond reasonable doubt" that this violence did take place, just as it proved the worthlessness of the forensic evidence. These two judgements should in themselves have secured the immediate release of the Six.

But through their lawyers they were not even asking for that. All they wanted was a retrial, a chance to put the real evidence before a jury. Even that has now been denied.

The pages of legal mystification read out by Justice Lane as he and his co-conspirators sent the men back to their cells have nothing to do with his decision. Their case was thrown out because of who the men were and are and what they said had happened to them, and because of the requirements of British rule in Ireland.

The Six have never tried to hide that they are Irish Republicans. For the British legal and political system that makes them fair game for beatings, torture or imprisonment. Alas, this is an old, old story.

When the Six were beaten so severely that they "confessed" to the bombing, those who had assaulted them, as well as the judge who imprisoned them, probably did think at the time that the Six were guilty. After all, what value do such people place on protestations of innocence by six "paddies", compared to the evidence of a respectable forensic scientist and fervent denials by senior police officers?

And when, in the course of time, those officers were shown to have beaten up the Six and when that forensic scientist was exposed as an incompetent, the costs to the British political and judicial system of admitting the error became too great.

It would have meant admitting that thirty policemen conspired and lied. It would have meant admitting that forensic evidence can be worthless. And it would have meant admitting that the innocent can rot in jail year after year after year.

In short, if the Six had been freed the collective guilt of the British political, judicial and "law and order" establishment over 14 long years would have been clearly established.

In the words of Lord Denning, when he first turned down the appeal request, this was "such an appalling vista that every sensible person in the land would say: it cannot be right that these actions go any further."

So the Six will stay in prison. It will be little comfort to them that the outside world knows of their innocence, or that their case has once again confirmed the moral superiority of the Irish Republican cause over British tyranny and repression.

RUC cover-up

Stop Labour silence on Tory official murders

The amazing reaction of the Labour Party leadership to the Attorney General's decision not to prosecute those RUC Officers responsible for perverting the course of justice and covering up the murders of six unarmed Catholics six years ago shows how badly they have misread public opinion.

Over recent months several Labour MPs have been saying that we shouldn't continue to press on national security issues, on the Belgrano, on *Spycatcher*, and that the public isn't interested in this.

The reality is that the public follow these events with great interest, not least because they reveal the nature of the British state. Now Britain announces to the world that when six men are murdered by the state it will refuse even to have a public enquiry on the grounds of national security.

In similar circumstances, in West Germany or the United States, there would be a major constitutional crisis and the government would be brought down.

Nixon was driven out of public office because he bugged his opponent's campaign headquarters. But in Britain the government can oversee a policy of calculated murder and get away with it.

On the real gut issues of Thatcher's morality, the Labour leadership is reluctant to attack. No one is suggesting for one minute this attack should replace the formation of a coherent economic or defence policy. But nothing provides a better education for people in Britain than seeing the reality of the way Britain is governed and the scale of our secret society, and the scale of its viciousness and ruthlessness.

By KEN LIVINGSTONE MP

I was appalled that we didn't have a major turnout by the whole of the Front Bench and we didn't have Neil Kinnock leading the attack on this cover-up. Instead, many Labour MPs actually voted to support the Speaker's ruling to remove me after I had named the Attorney General as an accomplice to murder.

The RUC and the British Army have always realised that it is impossible to defeat the Republican Movement by lawful means. Brigadier Kitson, as he then was, set out the strategy that the British State should follow to defeat Republicanism in a book published over 15 years ago.

In explaining the tactics of "counter-terrorism", Kitson stated explicitly that one of the major weapons to be used against the Republican movement was the corruption of the judiciary. People should be interned without trial, juries should be done away with, and Judges should use their power arbitrarily to imprison anybody who disagreed with Britain's continued occupation of Northern Ireland.

What we are seeing now is the logical result of this strategy. We've had supergrass trials. We've had half the juries in Northern Ireland abolished so that judges just sit down in Court and hand out whatever sentence the Army and the RUC require.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Ken Livingstone on the LCI's platform at Labour Party Conference 1987

Even with all of that it still hasn't been possible to defeat the IRA; and so MI5, the British Army, and the RUC planned a whole series of measures, still going on to this day, in which leading Republicans are simply murdered.

The raid in which Captain Robert Nirac crossed the border to murder John Francis Green, a leading member of the Provisionals, was only one example of this. More recently, the Army and the RUC set up an IRA unit to launch an attack on a police station and then gunned all of the IRA volunteers down without giving any a chance to surrender.

Occasionally, the public become aware of what is happening through leaks or reasonable reporting by the odd journalist and there then has to be the sort of cover-up we have seen in this instance.

The six murders that are now the subject of the cover-up date back to 1982. When I first went to West Belfast to meet Adams and Morrison, back in early 1983, I was introduced to many of the relatives of the men who had been murdered.

I remember assuring them that it was not an issue that the Labour left would allow to sink without trace. I didn't believe then it would take six years before we finally got to this point, and that after all that time a parliamentary statement would be given with just two hours notice.

The government knew full well that Fergie's pregnancy was going to be announced and would dominate the popular press. They thought they could just slip in the statement without any great fuss or hassle.

I was absolutely determined that that wasn't going to be the case. I wanted a division in the House of Commons and an uproar sufficient to draw attention to the fact that in Britain you can commit murder and get away with it providing you are employed by the State.

Socialist Travellogue

Cuba revisited

Eighteen years ago I lived in Cuba for two years.

Since I left Cuba in 1971, I have returned twice — the last time in December. As well as renewing old friendships, I made my own comparison between Cuba "now" and "then".

Out walking in the familar streets of Havana, I came across a large public square, occupied by four groups, each made up of 25 elderly people, all engaged in gentle physical exercise.

They told me that about a year ago the government had introduced a physical fitness programme for the elderly. They met every day for these exercises and went frequently on various excursions and had regular social gatherings.

By Helga Gladbaum
Brent Councillor

All developments in Cuba are seen as part of a revolutionary process not yet complete. As in many other small countries this process has often been frustrated by political tensions between the superpowers.

There are still no direct diplomatic relations between Cuba and the USA. The commercial boycott of Cuba by the USA continues and Cuba's main commercial outlets are the Eastern European countries, although quantities of lobsters, shrimps and prawns are now exported to Canada, Italy, France, Spain and Japan.

Energy

Cuba's energy supply continues to be provided by the Soviet Union, but the first thermo-nuclear power station is now being built under the direction of Fidel Castro's son — not without fears and misgivings on the part of the people in the area concerned.

Cuba's agriculture has diversified to an amazing degree. Vast tracts of land have been cleared and irrigated. Citrus plantations are now competing with the traditional sugar cane fields. About 80% of the sugar cane harvest is now mechanised, thus easing the pressure on the national workforce, large sections of which used to be drafted in to help during the four to five months period of the annual sugar harvest.

But over all these developments hangs the shadow of a hostile United States, reinforced by the US invasion of Grenada and the Contra war against Nicaragua.

Revolution

In addition to the Civil Defence Force formed after the revolution, the Territorial Military Troops (MTT) was founded four years ago, with men and women participating on a voluntary basis in civil defence exercises.

My friends in Cuba assured me that every person in Cuba knew where to go and what to do in case of emergency, i.e. invasion or attack by US forces.

Recent changes in the Soviet Union have naturally been reflected in Cuba. "Perestroika" is a well-known word and concept, though "glasnost" is not.

Fidel Castro and his government have openly admitted that mistakes were made in the past and have asked the population to help find "new and original solutions for the rectification of old errors."

A period of self-assessment has begun in Cuba; undoubtedly also linked to the deep wounds inflicted on Cuban society by the losses suffered by Cubans in Angola.

In the past, much money and effort has gone into the development of Cuba's provinces. Now it would seem that Havana is to be given a long-overdue facelift.

The old town has been declared an area of great historical interest (backed by UNESCO) and an intensive programme of restoration is underway.

Government

At the beginning of 1987 the government initiated a programme of additional under-5s provision. Fifty centres will be built in Havana alone. Castro promised officially to open every single one of them. By last December the programme was well on target, and Fidel has kept his promise.

One of the most dramatic changes has taken place in tourism. Cuba had inherited some large and impressive hotels in Havana, built by and for Americans, and when I lived in Cuba these were mainly used as accommodation for technicians, engineers, and their families from all over the world. Very few westerners would have thought of going to Cuba for a holiday then.

Terrorism

The picture is now completely changed, with tourism quite clearly a lucrative money-spinner. Not only have new hotels been built throughout Cuba, but with its lucious sub-tropical vegetation, its combination of sun, sea and sand, its long and interesting history, Cuba has been discovered as an ideal holiday spot by Gemans, Canadians, Italians, French and Spanish.

You need not even change your money into Cuban pesos. Every bar, shop, restauarant, and taxi driver will accept the US dollar. A well-organised network of planes or buses will fly or drive you to any destination within Cuba and its surrounding islands.

With this system it is, of course, perfectly possible never to set foot into the "real" Cuba. The Canadians, for instance, can fly directly from Canada into Varadero, Cuba's most popular resort with over 20km of unbroken beach — and may never meet any Cubans except a chambermaid, barman and waiter.

***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.



Everyone's scrambling round to get a peace conference, but:

Palestinian masses still fight for their homes

At the time of writing, the newspapers are reporting that the Israeli army has ordered all schools in the West Bank to close; another death, three more Palestinians shot in the leg and widespread demonstrations.

The Palestinian uprising is now beginning its third month. Few people anticipated its outbreak on December 9th; fewer still expected it to last this long.

It is not just the case of more of the same, however, for with every day that passes, with every new act of Israeli brutality, more Palestinians are being drawn into active participation in the rebellion.

The relatively prosperous major towns are now frequently the scene of violent demonstrations — originally concentrated in the refugee camps.

The latest Israeli thug-policy of systematically breaking Palestinian limbs in order to keep them off the streets — 300 cases were documented over a period of two weeks — far from cowing the Palestinians has moved even the most conservative layers to action. Palestinian shopkeepers — traditionally not the most militant layer of the population — are observing a West Bank-wide, strictly-regulated strike despite the huge financial pressure many of them are facing.

As significant as the increase in sheer numbers involved in the uprising are the emerging increased politicisation and level of organisation. In what must be a first for this level of co-operation in the occupied terrorities, the left of Fatah, the PFLP, the DFLP and the Islamic movement are organising together to provide a lead for the uprising.

It is their leaflets, jointly produced under the name United National Leadership for the Escalation of the Uprising that, among their many other functions, have been regulating the hours during which the shops are open.

What are the full political implications of what is taking

By Anna Wagstaff
Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine

place amongst the Palestinians?

The groups that have united to give a political lead to the uprising are all — with the exception of the Islamic fundamentalists — major political groups within the PLO. Yet the PLO leadership is itself giving no lead in the struggle whatsoever, either to the Palestinians in the occupied territories or to the Arab masses that have been demonstrating in solidarity with the Palestinians all over the Middle East.

On the contrary, Arafat is simpy attempting to use the initially spontaneous uprising in order to strengthen his hand in diplomatic manoeuvres with Israel, imperialism and the pro-West Arab regimes from whom he hopes to get agreement for an international peace conference.

The current political co-operation represented by the National Committeee for the Escalation of the Insurrection has not had to face any serious political test. However, the possibility nonetheless exists for the first time for a major challenge to Arafat's dominant influence over the Palestinian Liberation movement — a dominance which has anyway for the past few years had little foundation in support for his policies but has survived nonetheless for lack of any credible alternative.

The effects of the continued uprising have not just been felt in the occupied territories. In the Lebanon, Amal's longstanding power struggle against the Palestinians has become such an acute embarrassment under conditions where the Palestinians are seen as heroes throughout the Arab world that Amal Leader Nabih Berri has finally been obliged to lift the military seige still operating on the Rashadaye, Shatilla and Bourj el Barajneh refugee camps.

Apart from being a huge relief to the inhabitants of the camps and a further boost to Palestinian morale, the lifting of the seige indicated Amal's de facto acceptance of the PLO bases in South Lebanon, which they had previously demanded be evacuated as the price for lifting the seiges.

The implication of this, in terms of the possibilities of rebuilding the historic PLO-Amal alliance and regrouping the nationalist and anti-imperialist forces along the lines of the old Lebanese National Movement, are profound — albeit with Islamic fundamentalism a new factor in the situation. With the present unstable and complex balance of forces in the country this move could well lead to the transformation of the political situation.

Nabih Berri is not alone in coming under pressure from the Palestinian rebellion.

● In **Morocco**, where the economic and military demands of the continuing war against Polissario have led King Hassan to vie with Egypt for US approval, a pro-Palestinian demonstration recently was met by live ammunition from troops, killing one of the protestors.

● In **Jordan**, King Hussein broke links with the PLO three years ago and concentrated on nurturing a pro-Jordanian leadership in the West Bank to create conditions to negotiate with Israel over control of that area. He has now been forced to restore relations and is again pursuing the policy favoured by Arafat of calling for an international peace conference.

As for Mubarak, he is coming under ever-increasing pressure from his own people to break Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. His main hope is that he can justify this treaty by being instrumental in achieving the much vaunted peace conference; but as a desperate measure to buy time he has been touting the idea of a "six month cooling off period" in which the Palestinians would promise to stop making trouble in return for a temporary moratorium on settlement building!

The deep concern felt by both leaders about their own future in the absence of some resolution to the Palestinian conflict can be measured by the speed at which they are currently scuttling around the capitals of the western world. They are lobbying Bonn, Paris, London, Rome, the Vatican, the US — with Morocco thrown in for good measure — for support for an international peace conference.

Mubarak and Hussein's efforts in this direction are helped by the interest the US itself has in seeing some measure of calm return to the region. Indeed, veteran "US man in the Middle East" Phillip Habib (who has spent little time on the issue of Palestine since the foundering of the last peace offensive) has returned to the area to resume his scuttling to and fro between Egypt, Jordan and Israel in yet another effort to stitch something together.

"The uprising could be the catalyst to speed up peace negotiations," is the official US line. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

What the uprising has done is to make the US and pro-western Arab regimes more desperate than ever to resolve the Palestinian struggle without seriously imperilling the region's stability. What it has not done is to go any way toward resolving any of the sticking points on which the last peace offensive foundered.

Israel still refuses to recognise the PLO until it recognises Israel's "right to exist" and renounces violence (offering in return, of course, no recognition of any Palestinian rights at all). Israel still refuses to accept the principle of Palestinian self-determination in an independent state — the only difference here between Labour and Likud is whether they should be subjugated to Israel or to Jordan.

Neither Labour nor Likud are prepared to relinquish all the land or to remove all Israeli settlement from the occupied territories.

Israel still refuses to negotiate over the future of the occupied territories within the context of an international peace conference, insisting instead on bilateral talks with Jordan and with Egypt. In fact Shimon Peres has always accepted such an international peace conference; but only as a *preparatory* conference, leading to bilateral negotiations. Under great pressure, not least from the threat of elections, Shamir has also agreed to a 24 hour international "opening" to bilateral talks.

But the fact that these sticking points have yet to be resolved is but a minor problem facing the proposed negotiations compared to that posed by the huge change in the mood of the Palestinians since the last attempted peace talks "failed".

For while the last peace offensive came hard on the heels of the Israeli invasion of the Lebanon and the defeat of the PLO, this latest attempt is following limply behind a huge war of Palestinian defiance.

The demoralisation that followed 1982 created the necessary conditions for Arafat to sign away, in the Amman agreement, the PLO's sole right to represent the Palestinians and their right to independent statehood.

It was this agreement that gave hope to the forces of imperialism at the time that an "acceptable" negotiated settlement was within reach.

Today the Amman agreement no longer stands: in the face of huge opposition from the Palestinian people Arafat had already been forced to rescind it a year before the uprising began.

The idea that the uprising will be the catalyst to make the Palestinians accept the principles of the agreement — the very least that would be required for reaching a settlement — is patently far-fetched. The reality is that the violent rebellion in the occupied territories has come precisely in response to the *failure* of Arafat's negotiation policy — and not as a demand for more of the same.

Having seen their own strength and cohesion grow day by day, having seen the international impact of their uprising, having witnessed the support they are getting from the Arab masses and the pressure being put on the Egyptian and Jordanian regimes, having seen the strengthening of their brothers and sisters in the Lebanon, the Palestinians are in no mood to concede on what they see as their fundamental rights.

Arafat may conceivably be able to persuade imperialism that an international peace conference is their only way out. He is unlikely, however, to be able to sell to the Palestinian people any solution deemed "acceptable" to Israel and imperialism.

But even were the most favoured "solution" to be agreed upon, whereby areas of the West Bank would be transferred to Jordanian control, the problem for Israel and imperialism would be far from over.

With a population that is already 60% Palestinian, seven failed assassination attempts to his name, and a memory of Black September (where only the collapse of the Palestinian leadership saved him from being overthrown), King Hussein of Jordan must be having second thoughts about how much he really wants these highly political, militant and organised people as part of his kingdom.



Palestinians: unbowed by the full might of imperialist oppression

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Contra Aid

Keeping the US at bay

The result of the US Congress vote on Contra aid was close, but unchallengeable.

Congress voted by 8 votes *against* Reagan's demand for more financial support for the Contra death squads.

This is a major victory for the Sandinistas and all those in the United States who have organised against US intervention in Central America.

Below we reprint a Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign briefing sheet on the significance of US aid to the Contras.

Last August the presidents of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica signed a historic peace agreement in Guatemala. Its aim was to bring a "firm and lasting peace" to the troubled region.

One of its key provision is that one state's territory should not be used to mount destabilising activities against another state. It also explicitly calls on "governments outside the region" to cease "overt or covert military, logistical, financial or propaganda aid, or weapons, personnel, ammunition and equipment to irregular forces or insurrectional movements."

Since then, the Reagan Administration has proposed three bills containing provisions for contra aid, and Congress has passed all three.

● In September, $3.5m in "humanitarian" aid, administered by the CIA, was agreed. In November a further $3.2m was added.

● In December, Congress passed $3.6m in "humanitarian" aid plus $4.5m for transportation (this could be used to transport lethal supplies). In addition, approximately $6m was earmarked for the provision of passive air defence (e.g. radar) and a $2.8m "indemnity" was set aside to replace aircraft damaged or lost in flying missions in support of the contras.

● Congress also at this time passed a provision for "intelligence sharing" between the CIA and the contras.

Compared to the £100m military and humanitarian package passed in June 1986, all these amounts are relatively small. Congress has still not taken a firm decision on whether or not to support the war against Nicaragua. So far the mood has been that no substantive aid will be passed while the Peace Accord is seen to have some chance of success.

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign: 23 Bevenden St, London N1 6BH.
Campaigning & admin: 01 253 2464
Sales & Fundraising: 01 253 0246

LABOUR BRIEFING

The way forward in FAB:

Bring the labour movement out for March 19th!



Following the mobilisations of January 16th and 21st — involving over thirty thousand people in marches, pickets, lobbies and petitions — the push is on for the March 19th national demonstration called jointly by FAB and the TUC to defeat Alton's attempt to restrict abortion time-limits to 18 weeks.

It is clear from the voting figures for the Bill's second reading that it would have been defeated if all Labour MPs had abided by Conference policy on a woman's right to choose.

By Gill Lee
Labour Briefing Women

Thirty-six Labour MPs voted for the Bill and nineteen did not vote.

Alton's recent statements indicate that the Bill may come back in amended form. Alton has muttered about introducing some possible exemptions to his attempt to ban what he considers "murder".

Spina Bifida, for example, might be considered grounds for a woman to seek termination, but hare lip is not, and Down's Syndrome is a marginal case.

Women who report a rape to the police before a certain stage may be allowed to commit "murder" — while those who do not report rape till later (out of justified fear of police and court treatment, or because they feel reluctant to admit it has happened to them, or because they are more concerned to get the help of medical personnel and sympathetic friends) are to be forced to carry the resulting fetus to term.

Alton is more than willing to make some amendments to get his Bill through. He knows that many MPs who voted against 18 weeks will vote for 22 or 24 weeks. The only thing that will stop them is the mass mobilisation of women and the labour movement, in defence of a woman's right to choose.

In the Labour Party we must demand a three-line whip against any restrictions on the '67 Act. It must be made clear to MPs that their attempt to dictate what women can and cannot do with our bodies will be taken into account when they come up for reselection.

Demand

The National Labour Women's Committee should call a lobby of the NEC to demand a three line whip. Local FAB groups should picket those Labour MPs who voted for the Bill and demand that those who were absent from the House of Commons turn up next time to vote against the Bill.

The Campaign Group should hold to account those of its members — such as Dennis Canavan and Ronnie Campbell — who voted against women's rights and party policy.

The Labour Party's response to the current attack on women's rights has been very slow, with few banners on the marches and few local Parties affiliated to FAB groups. This situation must be turned around. We need a huge Labour Party contingent on March 19th.

The trade unions must be mobilised. Resolutions should be passed in support of FAB, instructing officers to circulate FAB literature to all members, demanding transport to the March 19th demó, and pledging donations to FAB nationally and locally. Local FAB groups should be informed of any such resolutions so they can make sure they are followed up.

Regional

Trades Councils and regional TUCs should be pressed to mobilise for March 19th. Resolutions should be put demanding that MPs sponsored by trade unions opposed to Alton represent the policy of their union in parliament.

FAB has agreed a series of measures to build for March 19th:

- presentation of petitions in the week running up to March 19th;
- pickets of MPs' surgeries;
- picketing of meetings where Alton is speaking;
- producing a FAB paper with information on the activities of local groups (send in photos and reports *now*);
- *organising events coinciding with International Women's Day;*
- building the links — a contingent will be organised for the February 20th demonstration against Clause 28 in Manchester and for the NHS Day of Action on March 5th. Already many local groups are planning to leaflet NHS workers' picket lines and to get nurses speaking at FAB events.

PRESTON

Building for March 19th!

Preston FAB is building for March 19th. We have regular meetings of about 10 people and past activities have included lobbying Tory MP David Waddington, who voted for the Bill.

On March 11th Audrey Wise and a health worker will be speaking at a FAB public meeting in Preston to mobilise for March 19th. Together with FAB the local Trades Council is arranging to hire coaches to the demonstration.

We are linking up with students at Lancashire Poly, and are leafletting health workers' picket lines.

Contact: Karen Bradley, 0772 727720

BRIGHTON

Involving young women

Brighton FAB has decided to target young women, especially school students and health workers in the run-up to March 19th.

Women under 20 account for 50% of abortions after 20 weeks, and will be the largest group of women affected by the Alton Bill. Attacks like the Alton Bill, the Baker Bill, Clause 28, and the changes in benefit regulations combine to reduce the scope of information available to young women about sex, contraception and sexuality, and to force them into greater dependence on the family.

We will be producing a special leaflet aimed at young women, which we hope to use for leafletting schools, FE colleges, and youth clubs. We aim to involve more young women in the group and to attract them to our dayschool on Saturday February 13th, which will explore some of the issues behind the Alton Bill, including workshops on contraception, disability, and health service facilities.

Other activities we have planned include leafletting nurses' homes and approaching other health workers both directly and through their unions, a benefit gig on February 19th with local bands, a local demonstration on March 12th followed by a women-only benefit, a picket of local MP Andrew Bowden's surgery, and a weekly stall in the town centre. We hope to fill at least six coaches to the national demonstration on March 19th.

Dani Ahrens

CAMDEN

Making links in our campaigning

Camden FAB is growing all the time with new members joining after the January events and the Bill passing its second reading.

We are now concentrating on building for the March 19th demonstration and hope to be visiting local workplaces and colleges. We are also linking the health cuts with the Alton Bill, and have produced a leaflet explaining how NHS cuts mean late abortions.

Over the next few weeks we will be petitioning, producing different leaflets and writing to all the MPs on the committee discussing the Bill.

We hope to link up with other London FAB groups over some events, such as a major public meeting. We plan to to be on the February 20th anti-Clause 28 demo and the March Against NHS cuts.

Contact: Camden FAB, c/o Camden Labour Centre, 267 1676.

Gill Entwhistle

Fight the Alton Bill!
Contact FAB: PCL Students Union, 104-108 Bolsover Street, London WC1

Labour MPs and the Alton Bill

Name	Constituency	Sponsoring Trade Union(s)
For the Alton Bill		
BATTLE, John	Leeds West	
BELL, Stuart	Middlesborough	GMB
BRAY, Jeremy	Motherwell South	T&GWU
CAMPBELL, Ronald	Blyth Valley	
CAMPBELL-SAVOURS, Dale	Workington	COHSE
CANAVAN, Dennis	Falkirk West	COHSE
CLARKE, Thomas	Monklands West	
COOK, Francis	Stockton North	TASS
CROWTHER, Stanley	Rotherham	T&GWU
CUMMINGS, John	Easington	NUM
CUNLIFFE, Lawrence	Leigh	NUM
DIXON, Donald	Jarrow	GMB
FIELD, Frank	Birkenhead	CPSA consultant
GROCOTT, Bruce	The Wrekin	NUJ member
HARDY, Peter	Wentworth	NACODS
HUGHES, Sean	Knowsley South	
LAMBIE, David	Cunninghame South	USDAW
LAMOND, James	Oldham Central & Royton	TASS
LOFTHOUSE, Geoffrey	Pontefract & Castleford	BACM consultant
MACDONALD, Calum	Western Isles	
MARTIN, Michael	Glasgow Springburn	TASS
MCAVOY, Thomas	Glasgow Rutherglen	Co-op
MCFALL, John	Dumbarton	
MCNAMARA, Kevin	Hull North	T&GWU
MILLAN, Bruce	Glasgow Govan	APEX
MORRIS, Alfred	Manchester Wythenshawe	EMA advisor
O'BRIEN, William	Normanton	
OAKES, Gordon	Halton	T&GWU
PARRY, Robert	Liverpool Riverside	NUPE, organiser
PENDRY, Tom	Stalybridge & Hyde	NUPE
REID, John	Motherwell North	Full time organiser, Trade Unionists for Labour, Scotland
ROBERTSON, George	Hamilton	GMB
ROWLANDS, Edward	Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney	USDAW
SMITH, John	Monklands East	GMB
THOMPSON, John	Wansbeck	NUM
WORTHINGTON Tony	Clydebank & Milngavie	GMB
Did Not Vote		
DALYELL, Tam	Linlithgow	NUR
DEWAR, Donald	Glasgow Garcadden	NUR
DOUGLAS, Richard	Dunfermline West	Co-op
DUFFY, Patrick	Sheffield Attercliffe	GMB
GALLOWAY, George	Glasgow Hillhead	
GRAHAM, Thomas	Renfrew West & Inverclyde	
HATTERSLEY, Roy	Birmingham Sparkbrook	NUJ member
HENDERSON, David	Newcastle upon Tyne North	
HOGG, Norman	Cumbernauld & Kilsyth	NALGO
HOME ROBERTSON, John	East Lothian	
HOWELL, Denis	Birmingham Small Heath	APEX
JONES, Barry	Alyn & Deeside	NUT
KAUFMAN, Gerald	Manchester Gorton	GMB; NUJ member
MARSHALL, David	Glasgow Shettleston	T&GWU
MCKAY, Allen	Barnsley West & Penistone	BACM
MURPHY, Paul	Torfaen	
ROBERTS, Allan	Bootle	
WALKER, Harold	Doncaster Central	AEU
WRAY, James	Glasgow Provan	

Trade Union positions on Alton

Supports FAB
ACTT
Supports A Woman's Right to Choose
AEU, CPSA, UCW
Supports Abortion on Demand
ASTMS
Affiliated to NAC
APEX, NUPE, SOGAT
Sponsors FAB
NALGO, NCU, NATFHE, TASS, T&GWU, TUC, MPU, NAPO, GMB, NUM, NUJ.