LABOUR BRIEFING
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40p

DEFEAT ALTON!

SMASH THE BACKLASH!

Thousands of people will converge on London on Saturday March 19th in a massive rejection of David Alton's attempt to reduce the time limit for abortions from 28 to 18 weeks.

The Labour Party and the TUC are sponsoring the event — a major step forward for all those fighting the new moral backlash.

A small but powerful minority is out to destroy gains made in the past by cutting the health service, scapegoating lesbians and gay men, and denying women choice on abortion. Only the mass mobilisation of the working class and oppressed people can defeat this offensive — March 19th is a good start.

Behind the attack on abortion rights lies the notion that women are incapable of deciding what to do with their own bodies, that women should be reduced simply to their reproductive functions, that having children is the sum total of women's existence.

Black people have long been scapegoated for the problems of Tory Britain: bad housing, unemployment, and crime. Now women and lesbians and gay men are in the firing line.

By GILL LEE
Labour Briefing Women

The AIDS crisis is being exploited by those who insist that lifelong heterosexual monogamy is the only acceptable way of life. The old family ideal, reinforced by the attack on abortion rights, is also touted by the Tories in defence of so-called "parental choice" in education — while the actual choices available to working people are reduced through cuts in housing, education, local government, and the health service.

The bigots who support Clause 28 would like to stop us choosing which books to read and which plays to see, and of course they'd like to decide who we should sleep with — and who we shouldn't sleep with!

Alton would like to stop *all* women from having a choice on abortion, but, for the moment, he'll settle for those in the hardest circumstances, with the most difficult choices to make.

In the face of this moral backlash, much of the Labour leadership has capitulated. In the run up to the general election, Kinnock and his gang joined in the attacks on local Authorities which were defending and extending the rights of Black people, lesbians and gays, and women.

Recently, Roy Hattersley told Birmingham pro-choice activists that he was against all abortions, and insisted that the hundreds of women who died of back-street abortions before the '67 Act "had a choice".

Even the Campaign Group has refused to back the call for a three-line whip against Alton, with leading members arguing that the question of abortion should be left to the individual consciences of male MPs. As socialists we must reply: on the question of abortion, only the individual woman should have the right to choose.

In 1986, 6,000 women had abortions after 18 weeks. These include young women who because of poor sex education did not realise they were pregnant, women who had applied for abortions but due to cuts could not get them earlier, women who found through pre-natal testing that their foetus had Down's Syndrome or Spina Bifida, older women who did not realise they were pregnant because they were going through the menopause.

If women are to have real control over their own lives, they must be able to decide if and when to have children. The bigots of the right think women cannot be trusted with that decision. Alton's Bill, which is founded on that anti-women premise, must be defeated at the third reading; and only mass pressure from women and the labour movement can force our elected representatives to make a stand. *Together we can prove the immoral minority wrong!*

National March
AGAINST THE ALTON BILL
March 19th
Assemble: 11.30am on the Embankment, London;
March to Hyde Park for a rally at 3pm

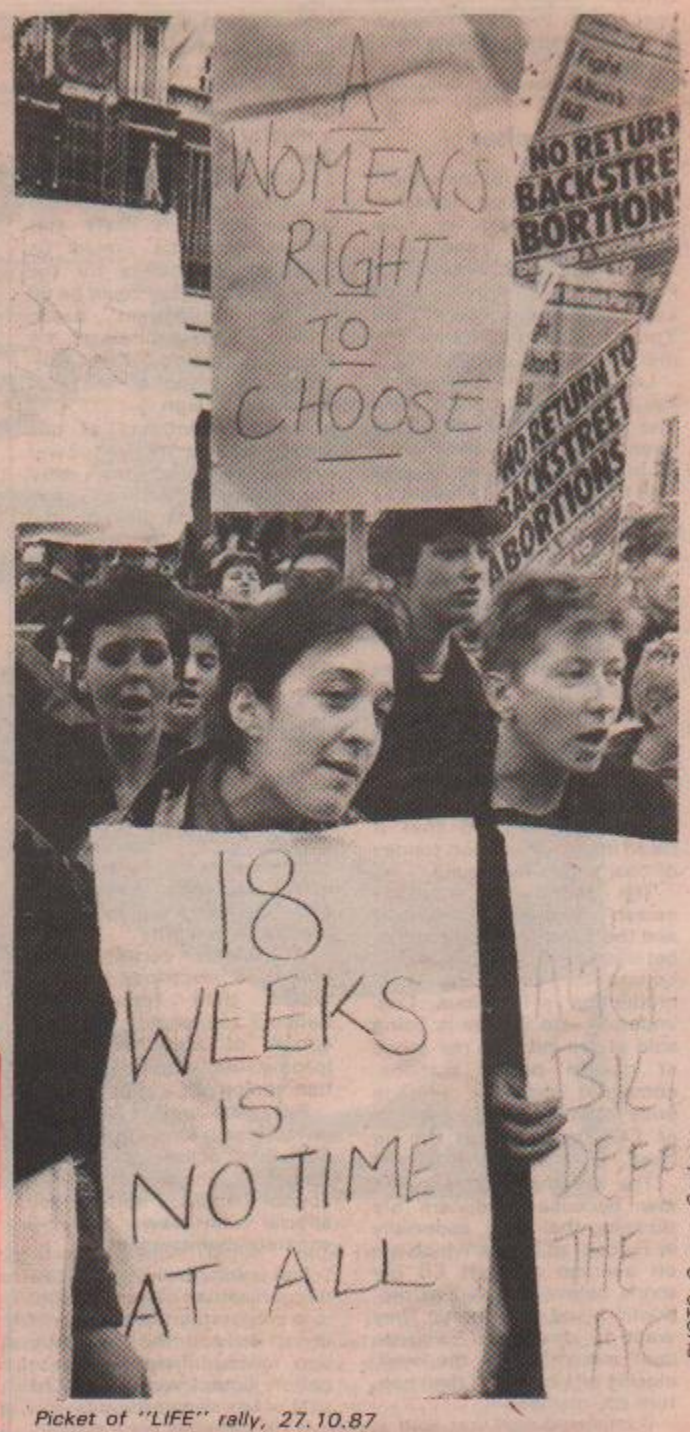


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Picket of "LIFE" rally, 27.10.87

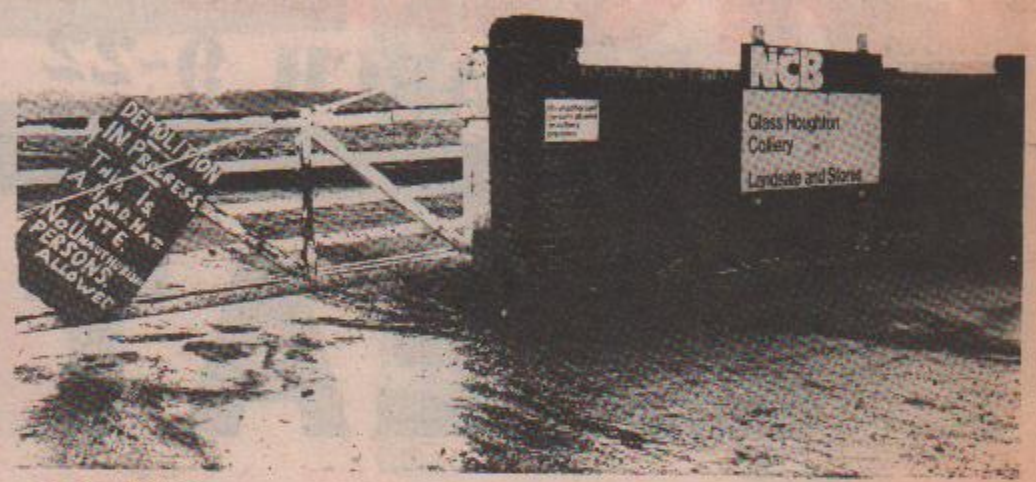
LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Campaign Round-up

Privatising Power

The Sale of the Century





PHOTOS: Wayne Edginton

going... gone

The government claims a mandate for further privatisation of public enterprises — they say their re-election proves this.

Yet they were re-elected by only 43.3% of the voters.

A NOP opinion poll carried out for the TUC showed that 71% of the population are opposed to the sale of essential services like electricity and water.

The reason they want to sell off the electricity industry is clear. Chancellor Nigel Lawson requires £5bn per year to run the government's financial strategy. Selling electricity will bring Lawson in £15-£18 billion.

Thatcher

The timescale for the sell-off is being speeded up. Thatcher called a meeting in mid-September 1987 to encourage the process. With Cecil Parkinson (Energy), Nigel Lawson (Chancellor), Lord Young and Lord Whitelaw she met and agreed guidelines.

Legislation will be put in Parliament in Autumn 1988. The government's underlying intention is to use the money to buy a fourth term around 1991-92. Such huge revenues would enable them to make pre-election tax cuts.

The sell-off will have a huge impact on jobs. The coal industry would be affected disastrously by electricity privatisation.

The *Financial Times* estimates that 48.6 million tonnes of UK coal capacity could be replaced by imported coal. The CEGB itself claimed in its Submission ot the House of Commons Energy Select Committee in 1986 that it could import 30 million tonnes of coal within five years.

The world is presently awash with power station coal and the cut-throat competition between the multi-national companies controlling coal production is ferocious. Coal imported into Europe is being sold at around £25 per tonne at coastal power stations, compared with an average price for British deep mine coal of £42 per tonne at the pit head.

The international price is low because producers are *dumping* their coal, especially in Europe, at prices which are on average at least £6 per tonne below the cost of production and transport. They want to drive the European coal industries to the wall, closing pits here and then capture the market.

If imported coal was sold at its true price then after transport costs to inland coal-fired power stations, it would cost more than UK coal, and much more than the £29.50 per tonne British Coal charges the CEGB for coal delivered to coastal power stations.

Imports would hit many deep mines. All deep mines in Scotland would close by the early 1990s, all North East deep mines by the mid 1990s, all North Derbyshire and Kent mines by the late 1990s.

Annual coal output would be cut by seven million tonnes in Nottinghamshire and over four million tonnes in the Western Area (Lancashire and Staffordshire) by the mid 1990s.

In Yorkshire and South Wales many jobs would be lost and pits closed, as British Coal slashed production costs still further and concentrated output at the Yorkshire super-pits.

The CEGB has announced plans to build three new coal-fired power stations — two on coastal sites on the Thames and at Fawley, Southampton, a third at West Burton on the Trent in Nottinghamshire. Even if the CEGB were sold off en bloc, instead of being broken up, it is likely that private consortia would be given the contracts for the new stations. This could be on a "turnkey contract" basis, where all the capital, all the power station equipment (turbines, etc.) and all the coal would be foreign.

Turnkey contracts of this kind would hit the UK power engineering industry very hard. Lord Marshall has already made it plain to the TUC Energy Committee that he does not want two British suppliers of power station equipment. In so many words he said that NEI-Parsons was superfluous; he preferred GEC-Babcock.

Closure

The closure of NEI-Parsons would devastate the North East and result in a loss of 15,000 jobs. This loss of orders would have a knock-on effect on other engineering and special steel industries around the country.

It is almost certain that a privatised electricity industry would then force GEC-Babcock to compete with Mitsubishi of Japan and other leading suppliers of power station equipment.

Rail jobs would also be devastated. Coal makes up over 70% of rail freight. Coal freight is now carried by special trains, driven by special train crews, under a separate management.

Rail unions believe that this reorganisation of coal freight is in preparation for the sale of British Rail and that power station rail/coal freight lines — colliery complexes — could be sold off as separate units.

If UK collieries were displaced by imports many rail lines would also be torn up. The construction of new private coal stations on the coast would eliminate the need for rail freight altogether. So hundreds of rail jobs are also at risk.

The same is true for the seafarers. Most of the output from the North East collieries is transported by sea to coal stations on the Thames. If this coal were displaced by imports the seafarers operating the collier fleet would lose their jobs.

Electricity jobs are threatened too. There are presently 130,000 people employed in power stations and by Area Electricity Boards. The privatisation of the industry threatens thousands of electricity workers' jobs, especially those of manual workers.

In his special report on selling the electricity industry for the Tory Centre for Policy Studies, Alex Henney, an engineer and former member of the London Electricity Board, argues strongly for the cutback of the workforce of the industry.

Henney argues that the Japanese electricity industry is twice as efficient in labour productivity terms as the UK industry and by implication half of the existing 130,000 jobs could be shed.

Maintenance

He does admit that contracting out of maintenance is more common in other countries and that this should also be taken into account in assessing the requirement for workers. However, sub-contracting is spreading rapidly throughout all British industries and in many cases these workers are "lost" to the unions organising the core groups of workers.

The West German electricity industry is closest to the UK industry in productivity terms, according to Henney. But if employment was reduced to similar levels to those in West German power stations that would still mean a 25% job loss.

A minimum of 30,000 jobs would be lost in the electricity industry and perhaps as many as 65,000 of those directly employed.

The privatisation of the electricity industry would kill off a minimum of 100,000 jobs in electricity, coal, rail, sea and power engineering. This will be added to by the knock-on effect and would produce an additional 70,000-100,000 job losses.

A minimum of 170,000 jobs are at stake. The lesson can be learnt from what has already happened to the mining communities.

Unemployment rates for adult men are commonly over 20% and for young people over 60%. In the area surrounding Cadeby Colliery which was closed by British Coal only 17% of school leavers find work. The rest are unemployed or on YTS schemes.

Power station communities are often also mining communities, as in Yorkshire, while others are in isolated communities where unemployment is already high and no other employment is available.

The electricity unions have formed the FUSE Camapign against the sell-off. The eight unions in the Campaign have welcomed the support of other unions directly affected in coal, rail, sea and power engineering.

Effective campaigns need to be built at all levels of the trade union movement and the effect on consumers and the environment need to be campaigned on as well.

Taken from the NUM fact-sheet: The Sale of the Century — Privatising Power.

Clause 29

Lining up the first victims

If the far right has its way, North London's *Reading Matters* bookshop could be one of the first victims of the bigots' charter — currently going under the name of Clause 29.

The national press has discovered the small community bookshop in Haringey — with a vengeance.

By Mike Marqusee
Haringey Labour Briefing

A story alleging that the bookshop, which receives a grant from the local Council, was selling "Scum" (an anarchist cartoon book which celebrates the death of PC Blakelock) to children was carried in the *Sunday Telegraph, Sun, Mail, Express* and the London *Standard*.

Denouncing

Even Thatcher got in on the act, denouncing *Reading Matters* in Parliament and warning that *"new laws being discussed by Parliament could be used against Councils giving cash to such shops. Many people will be utterly revolted that the book was on sale."*

Workers at *Reading Matters*, including *Labour Briefing* supporter Dave Palmer, deny the charge.

Commercial

"Unlike commercial outlets like W.H. Smiths, we do not and have never sold books to children which promote violence," said Dave.

Since the publication of the articles, and Thatcher's rant in Parliament, workers at the shop have received numerous bomb and death threats.

Behind the carefully orchestrated attack lies a right wing manoeuvre to single out the first victims of Clause 29. Haringey Tories have requisitioned a special Council meeting for April 25th. They will propose a motion calling on the Council to reverse its "positive images" policy, disband the Curriculum Working Party looking into its implementation, abolish the Council's Lesbian and Gay Unit, and cancel the Council's grant to *Reading Matters*.

In recent years, Haringey, as *Labour Briefing* readers will know, has been a flashpoint in the struggle for lesbian and gay rights. On April 25th the Tories plan to bring Clause 29 home to Haringey — and make the Council, *Reading Matters* bookshop and the local lesbian and gay community the first targets of the new law.

In 1986, at the height of the reactionary campaign against the Council's equal opportunity initiative, the local Parents' Rights Group announced its intention to burn books available at *Reading Matters* and close the shop down.

The pattern is obvious. In an attempt to bolster popular support for Clause 29, and prepare the ground for their April 25th assault on lesbian and gay rights in Haringey, the bigots have used their friends in high places to circulate inaccurate and hysterical press stories. They are now mounting a legal challenge to *Reading Matters'* charitable status as well as its Council grant — on the grounds that "anti-government", Marxist, and anti-Christian literature is available there.

Standing not far behind the local bigots is the rich and extremely right wing Committee for a Free Britain and their friends in the Freedom Association and Aims for Industry.

Each day brings the Clause closer to the statute book. The campaign against it must enter a new phase. Civil disobedience by Local Authorities must be placed on the agenda — starting in Haringey.

Please send messages of support to *Reading Matters* Bookshop, Lymington Avenue, London N22.

Join the lobby of Haringey Council at 6pm on April 25th at Wood Green Civic Centre (organised by Haringey Stop the Clause Campaign).

Stop the Clause Calendar

April 8th. National and International Day of Action
April 25th. Lobby of Haringey Civic Centre
April 30th. Mass demonstration in London. Meet at noon on the Embankment, rally and festival at Kennington Park.
Stop the Clause Campaign Meetings. All lesbians and gay men welcome to the weekly meetings Wednesdays, 6.30pm, Islington Town Hall, London.

Huddersfield

Two hundred people demonstrated against Clause 29 in Huddersfield on Saturday February 13th.

The demo was called by the Anti-Clause 29 group at Huddersfield Polytechnic, and was supported by many lesbian and gay activists, Huddersfield Trades Council and Kirkless NUT.

The protest was unofficial, as no permission had been received from the Police Authority.

The march was spirited and received a sympathetic response from the public as we distributed leaflets along the route.

By Graham Hellawell
Huddersfield

The demonstrators chanted enthusiastically: Maggie, Maggie, Maggie — Out, Out, Out! — thus demonstrating to local people that lesbians and gay people are defending themselves and going on the onslaught against the repressive Tory legislation.

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

TGWU — moving left

The TGWU ballot result can only be welcomed by socialists in the Labour Party. The defeat of a number of hard right bureaucrats (and in particular the demise of Brian Nicholson in the South East) is good news for TGWU militants who have found their actions regularly blocked or undermined.

The TGWU is not only Britain's largest union, with its diverse membership it is virtually a cross-section of the British working class. Because of its cumbersome bureaucracy, the movement of opinion among its members is often difficult to read. For the moment, at least, members have seen off the attempt by right wingers to take the union into an alliance with the EETPU and AEU.

But, as Alan Thornett makes clear in this issue of *Labour Briefing* (see p. 5), the effect of the vote is mainly to secure the influence of Ron Todd over the union, rather than to turn it against Kinnock. Nonetheless, Kinnock's uneasiness over the departure of some of his closest allies has been apparent.

The recent upsurge of rank and file militancy has caught the New Realists unprepared; they fear it will wreck their schemes to turn the Labour Party into a toothless lion. This militancy needs a political direction. It needs to be harnessed to a national campaign to challenge the Labour Leadership.

The Waiting Game

The huge turnout for the March 5th TUC demonstration in support of the NHS was only the tip of the iceberg. Working class fury over Tory health cuts is growing daily and offers socialists a historic opportunity.

What TUC and Labour leaders make of this opportunity was clear on the afternoon of March 5th, when not a single health worker, not a single health service trade unionist, was called to the official platform.

Having registered their demand on the Chancellor to spread his budget jam in the NHS's direction, TUC and Labour leaders are now at a loss what to do next: ask NHS workers and patients to wait for next year's budget — for another Saturday afternoon protest? Or wait a few years more — for a general election? Or wait even longer — for a Labour government?

Fed up with waiting

The working class is fed up with waiting — in some cases *waiting for years* for necessary operations.

A programme of *action* is needed *now*. This programme has to be built from the bottom up, and will depend on solidarity action from non-health service workers — starting on March 14th. Its keynote will be — no time to lose, no time to waste in the fight to save the NHS.

Cars, Steel and Power

When the Tories tried to sell off Rover to General Motors some time ago there was a howl of public protest, not least from the depths of the xenophobic Tory backbenches.

This time the response is different. British Aerospace is, after all, a British company. The new corporate giant which will emerge from the sell-off will dominate heavy manufacturing industry in this country.

At the same time, electricity supply is to be privatised, along with the remnants of British Steel.

Thus the long-term Tory plans for the restructuring of the core sectors of British manufacturing near completion. Transformation of working conditions, staffing levels, union strength, market position, and now ownership has been achieved. Only one piece of the puzzle remains out of place — coalmining.

Plans for privatisation of the mines have been mooted for some time. That battle looms large on the horizon.

In the meantime the current wave of privatisation in electricity, auto and steel, if it passes through unopposed, will represent a critical success for British capital. After all, the development of these industries is what puts a country in the first division of advanced industrial economies; the battle over their structure and ownership is at the heart of the class struggle in modern Britain.

A Budget Preview

Watch out for the small print

How times change!

Was it only three or four weeks ago that Nigel Lawson was being hailed as the luckiest chancellor this century, with some £10 billion in the kitty for handouts?

Cuts in the standard rate of income tax to 25p and reductions for the rich from 60% to 40% without compensatory rises in indirect taxation were being confidently predicted by the Tory press.

Warning

Now, as the grim realities underlying Britain's present "boom" become clear the position looks very different. Already warning voices are being raised by Lawson's own allies.

The governor of the Bank of England has given a rather muffled warning of the dangers ahead. Phillips and Drew are more forthright, saying:

"The macro-economic case for tax cuts could hardly be weaker."

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research have indicated that the gravity of the balance of payments situation should rule out tax cuts altogether.

Terrible

So much for Thatcher's claims to have set the economy on the path to steady non-inflationary growth. It is true that there has been some growth in the last six years, but that was growth from the trough of 1981. Output has only just returned to 1979 levels and is still below the peak of 1973 — and all this at the most terrible cost in unemployment and cuts in social services.

So far from the Tories following any consistent polices, they have zigzagged all over the place.

By Paula Watson
Westminster South CLP

The '81 slump, itself the product of monetarism (remember how we were told that tight control of the money supply was the cure for all our ills?) has been followed by an old fashioned, pre-election reflation, fuelled by a consumer-led boom.

It has also led to all the old-fashioned results — bottlenecks in industry caused by a shortage of skilled labour, inflation expected to rise by the end of the year, and, most important, our old friend a balance of payments crisis is back.

Higher consumption has sucked in imports at such a rate that the trade gap is set to rise to an uncontrollable four billion.

Destruction

But the situation is much worse now than in the past. The destruction of a whole swathe of industry by the high interest and high exchange rate policies of the early eighties has left the economy heavily dependent on four sectors: services industries, tourism, re-exports and financial services.

All are vulnerable.

- The service sector does not produce much in the way of exports and foreign earnings.

- Tourism is notoriously sensitive to fluctuations in exchange rates and international events (remember the sudden dearth of American tourists after the Libyan bombing) and anyway much of the money generated flows out of the country into the international conglomerates which control many of the hotel and catering chains.

- Re-exporting will become increasingly more difficult and less profitable if, as seems likely, the world moves into economic recession following the stock market crash.



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

waiting in trepidation for the Budget...

- Finance, banking, and insurance, hitherto large earners of foreign exchange, are now threatened, as the pre-eminence of the City of London is challenged by the rise of rival centres in New York, Frankfurt, and, most of all, Tokyo.

Production of North Sea oil has started to decline, world trade will slow down as the US tries to cut its trade and budget deficits and the third world debt crisis rumbles threateningly along.

All the four clearing banks have taken a beating over this, with Lloyds and Midland being especially hard hit. Midland has declared losses of £500 million after setting aside £2 billion worth of assets to cover non repayment of loans — although in fact Midland's outstanding loans were in the region of £6 or £7 million.

Country Nat. West. (a subsidiary of Nat. West.) has had a series of high level resignations following the revelation of losses of £116 million.

The effect of the stock market crash is beginning to show. The City finance houses are starting to shed their expensive yuppie labour. It began with the American institutions, but has now spread to the British.

A sure indiciation is the state of the property market. In London prices have stopped rising and in some areas have started to fall.

As the true situation becomes apparent the likely scenario seems to be a balance of trade crisis followed by a further collapse in the stock market and a run on sterling.

This is the background against which Lawson's budget must be judged. What will he do?

I do not have a crystal ball, but I think he is too heavily committed to tax cuts to back down now, so I suspect there will be reductions, but for most of us these will be offset by rises elsewhere, either in indirect taxation or by changing the insurance contributions.

He will find some way of taking out the extra purchasing power from all but the rich: they will benefit heavily from reductions in the top rates of tax. So — watch out for the small print!

Trade Union Briefing

SENIOR COLMAN:
One year and still on strike!

The Senior Colman strikers have been on strike for 12 months. They travel 2,000 mile per week to address meetings. "We will continue to do that until we have got our jobs back," says TONY LOWE. FINN JENSEN interviewed Tony for *Briefing*.

How does it feel to be on strike for more than a year?
Five years older! But you also learn more during one year of strike than five years on the factory floor, or ten years being a union official! It's a real education.

But it must have affected your economy and family life too?
Of course. Judith (my wife) has become radicalised by the strike. She has now joined the Labour Party and has given 100% support to the strike.

Financially it has not been easy. The first four weeks of the strike were the hardest — to realise you don't have a wage, making cuts in our spending. Because we no longer live on a big estate we don't get the support from the neighbours we used to. But our families are behind us.

The union has stopped paying you strike money after a year, because that is the rules of the AEU?
That's right. We are now wholly dependent on the support of the trade union movement.

Judith works 12 hours a week, so that is a help, for we have two children.

The Senior Colman strikers have done all kinds of fundraising in the labour movement. The miners were quick to come with financial support and are continuing to do so. Their support has been superb.

Could you briefly explain how the strike started and what the situation is today?
The company was taken over in July 1986 by a very big multinational company with interests in Europe, America, Australia, etc., called Senior Engineering Group Ltd, whose chair is professor Roland Smith.

He was a former chair of Silentnight, and he ran the 18 month dispute there.

Within two weeks he forced redundancies on non-unionised staff. He tried to impose compulsory redundancies on the shop floor, which we successfully fought.

The company then tried to introduce a whole series of changes in working practices: new contracts of employment, which they refused to negotiate. They tried to force us to take holidays when it suited the company, four weeks in the winter and no weeks in the summer.

They wanted to time people at work in order to make cost cuttings and at the end of the day redundancies.

We refused to accept any of the things the company put in our way, until the union and the full-time officials had negotiated.

We managed to get a meeting arranged for January 20th 1987. We headed off for Christmas but noticed the company was stockpiling our work. There was overtime when we felt it was unnecessary. People worked seven days and 12 hours per day. And we suspected that there was something in the air. We tried to explain to the workforce that it was not right to stockpile that amount of work — and we could smell a rat.

After Christmas the company issued time sheets which hadn't been agreed and instructed four people to follow them. The company then sacked the four people, who refused to use the new time sheets.

We decided to have a secret ballot for industrial action. The feelings were very high; out of the 112 workers 110 voted for industrial action. The company was notified of the result and asked to re-employ the four sacked.

They told us to get out of the room and not to waste their time. As could be appreciated the feelings went even higher.

We walked out and withdrew our labour. We elected a strike committee, we organised a 24-hour picket rota and visited factories throughout Manchester and Stockport.

The company then told us quite clearly that if we didn't return to work the next day we would all be dismissed.

We received confirmation about dismissal on the Thursday morning. The company had advertised our jobs the day before we were sacked!

The company had recruited a new workforce of scabs into the factory to replace the old workforce. Just like at Wapping the company had planned the dispute. You don't have a strike, sack the whole workforce and recruit a new one without a lot of preparation.

And today there are 29 out of the 99 still on strike?
Yes. 30% still on strike after a year is still impressive. The 29 are committed to stay and fight. But the vast majority of people stuck it out until August-September last year, when the company made their third financial offer: a cash inducement and an assurance that should any vacancies occur the former employed would be favourably considered. Unfortunately 66 people took the financial settlement from the company.

At that time we wanted to thank these 66 for being with us for nine months but in hindsight my feelings have certainly changed. I now think they let us down. They took the easy way out, using excuses like family pressure — which we all know very well — and took the money. The rest of us just had to carry on.

How would you describe the response from you union, the AEU, to your strike?
Absolutely disgusting — without any reservations at all. But the rank and file have been absolutely supreme.

Certain officials have been supreme. But we have been a great embarrassment to the union and the labour movement, especially during the election campaign and at the TUC Conference.

I have no faith in the full-time officials in the AEU. I make a few exceptions, but they have done absolutely nothing for us at top level.

We called for a one day strike during the election campaign, which we wanted through the Confed. We had the support of the rank and file, convenors, etc. And the full-time officials and the standing Labour candidate campaigned viciously against this.

At the TUC Conference, for example, we were unable to have a stall. They insisted on us paying £1,500 for the stall. I have got no faith in the leadership of the AEU.

But you have got a lot of support from other unions, the NUM, for example.
The miners have been absolutely superb. When you have been in a dispute you find that the vast majority of the support you get is from people who have experienced some of this themselves. The miners have been the main.. I can't find the words to describe it, it's very emotional actually.

At Christmas, for example, they turned up with toys, etc., for the kids. And that support has been throughout the year, from Durham, South Wales, and Nottingham — where the NUM has its own problems. They are 100% behind us. They are a credit to the trade union movement.

How would you describe the political importance of your strike? You mentioned earlier the similarities with the Wapping dispute.

The tactics employed by the company are exactly the same. They sought legal advice before they engineered the strike to find out how they could dismiss the entire workforce.

It's the same with the police — on a smaller scale here. They have never been slow to flex their muscles on the picket line, to victimise people on the picket line.

The company has used the trade union legislation to take out writs against the AEU and pickets for alleged offences which would not have stood up in a court of law.

A political lesson I have learned is that the problems facing the trade union movement are not going to be solved by burying the heads in the sand. We have to meet the trade union legislation head on. This can only be done by breaking the law of the land.

This is not said lightly. If trade unions do not challenge the laws of the land they are finished in this country. Strikes like Silentnight, Hangers, etc., were all lost because of lack of willingness from the TUC and union leaders to fight.

So your strike has proved that "new realism" will lead us nowhere?
New realism is not a new thing. It has been going on for a long time. What new realism means is accepting three million people on the dole, accepting the NHS in disarray, trade unionists being put out of work, funds being sequestrated. So what is realistic about new realism? Compliance!

You have had hundreds of solidarity meetings across the country, demonstrations, a big rally in Manchester Town Hall, a support committee in Manchester, etc. How did this solidarity work develop?
For the last 12 months we have spoken on average at five meetings per week. There have been about 40 people at each meeting — that is more than 200 people a week.

We have probably travelled 2,000 miles a week. We have spoken at TUC and Labour Party conferences, the North West Labour Party Conference and various campaign and political meetings up and down the country.

I would imagine that hundreds of thousands of people know about the strike now, by the direct representation of a striker. It is very important that it is not just an article in a paper but a striker who puts the case over.

The support group has done an excellent job. The vast majority of the people in the support group are victims themselves of Thatcher's Britain.

We have had a variety of people on our platforms: from Kaufman to Dennis Skinner and Mike Hicks. We have letters from just about every trade union across the country, assuring us of their continuing support.

What is the way forward now for you to win the strike?
We have got a factory in Scotland that is producing 60% of the material the Senior Colman factory requires to manufacture their goods.

Without secondary action or secondary picketing, without breaking the trade union legislation, this struggle will continue to be defeated. At the beginning of the strike we had mass pickets in front of the factory until the police removed us. We have to get all trade union members to block the products of Senior Colman.

Does your 24 hour picket have any effect on the production inside the factory?
The biggest effect on the production is that people working there are unskilled, untrained and unable to come to grips with the production. But I would be a liar if I said the picket was successful because it is not.

We saw at Wapping, T&G members drive across the picket line. We have union workers as well as non-union workers crossing the picket line.

It can never be 100% effective unless people are prepared to take secondary action. It all goes back to the trade union legislation.

Do you have any estimate of how much the company has lost because of your strike?
A combination of factors — the untrained workforce, the picket line, the Labour controlled Councils taking the company off their contract lists have resulted in heavy losses for the company.

At one point there was a Wives Support Group, modelled after Women Against Pit Closures and Women Against Murdoch. But the group does not exist any longer?
That is right. But it is important to stress that the women themselves have been on strike — they have given full support throughout the strike.

The women are just as important as the husbands to assure a victory of the strike. We saw in the miners' strike a revolution among the women. And this changed miners' attitudes to women. A woman's place is not in the kitchen, but out in the community. Women have a role to play in society.

In the first couple of weeks the women were involved in food collection in front of one of the big food stores in Sale (Tesco). We used to collect hundreds of pounds of food and money. 10-15% of the wives were involved. And for the 3-4 months there was a food parcel every week for every striker.

The women's group then started to speak at meetings, going to factories and the picket line. It also generated a lot of support from women in general, not only in Manchester. So there was a great disappointment when the group collapsed.

With the formation of the support group, which has been successful, both women and strikers were involved.

What can people do to help your strike?
When Dennis Skinner was in Manchester to speak at our rally he assured us that he would get us down to speak at a Campaign Group of Labour MPs meeting in the House of Commons. He was quick to add that he was not going to stop with that. He will push for a debate through parliament.

But the AEU have now stopped the main source of income — the £18 strike pay per week. We have got to look at different ways of improving the amount of money coming to the strike.

I think it would be helpful if strikers were invited to different meetings across the country to address workforces, such as we are beginning to do in Yorkshire and Manchester, to put the case over; to explain to these people that it could happen to them and not to get complacent or apathetic. We would like to come and discuss with people and answer any questions. We might not know everything but we have learned a lot in these 12 months.



Dennis Skinner; pushing for support for the Senior Colman strikers.

If you want to get in contact with the Senior Colman stikers contact:
Tony Lowe
48 Dumber Lane
Ashton Village
Sale
Manchester
061 969 9486

Debate

Yes, the working class still wants to fight!

John Kelly has taken exception to one of the points I make in my review of his pamphlet *Labour and the Unions* (*Briefing* no. 53).

It relates to my view that on the one hand the Tory offensive, aided by the new realists in the union, has inflicted serious damage on the structures of the trade unions; whilst on the other the working class remains basically strong and willing and able to fight back.

He argues that these points are contradictory.

I can only repeat that both these factors seem to me to be firmly a part of the situation today.

In Austin Rover in Cowley, where I worked until I was victimised in 1982, the number of shop stewards in the Assembly Plant was reduced during the first half of the 1980s by 60%, and this remains the situation.

Many sections no longer have shop stewards since repeated victimisations have reduced the number of people prepared to do the job.

At the same time, shop stewards facilities have been almost abolished other than the operation of the discipline procedure and dozens of workers are sacked every week for minor offences or inadequate work effort. Seven or eight years ago 90% of those sackings would have been unthinkable. The work effort has been increased massively over this period, and working conditions worsened.

By ALAN THORNETT

This situation can be generalised throughout manufacturing industry to one degree or another. The shop stewards movement, the most important component of the trade union movement in Britain, is a mere shadow of what it was ten years ago. Many of the combine committees have ceased to exist or have become empty shells of organisations.

It is true that this has not happened to the same degree with the white collar unions. Some have had serious setbacks, like the teachers, but others have even made organisational gains.

But the millions of workers in manufacturing and related industries are the traditional power base of the trade union movement, they cannot be left out of the calculation.

But trade union structures and the mass of the working class are not the same thing.

Although all this has happened, the working class have not suffered a definitive defeat such as they did after the 1926 General Strike. Even the defeat of the Miners' Strike — the most serious blow the trade union movement has taken — did not produce that.

The rank and file in the unions therefore have not reduced to the state where they feel it is impossible to challenge the employers. Conditions have been more difficult, particularly because the traditional counterweight to sell-outs from the top — the shop- stewards movement — has been much weaker, but the capacity to struggle has remained.

Militancy

Militancy has been rising for some time but has been held back both by the objective situation and by the rightward shift at the top of most of the trade unions. This militancy has broken through in a number of sectors, in particular in the NHS and in the car factories where it has come very much as a movement from the rank and file, in spite of all the problems.

All the signs are that this rise in industrial struggle will develop further, perhaps creating the conditions where some of the damage done can be repaired.

P&O DISPUTE: NUS: *Striking for safety!*

Tired people make mistakes. The National Union of Seamen know this better than anyone. But employers P&O want us to work a new system of seven days on and seven days off — that means *24 hours a day for seven days in a row.*

Out of each 24 hours we will be required to work *at least 16 hours* with an eight hour rest period.

In our eight hours off we will be put off pay, but we will be required to stand by for busy periods, emergency drills, lifeboat drills, liferaft drills, and general emergencies.

- Fact: P&O are putting profit before safety.
- Fact: P&O want at least 500 redundancies.
- Fact: We don't want any more money, we don't want any more time off, we don't want any more crew. All we want is our present agreements. Most of all, we want our present safety standards respected.

If P&O succeed in implementing these cuts in standards we will be inviting another "Herald of Free Enterprise" tragedy.

Send messages of support to NUS, c/o Magness House, Mill Hill, Deal, Kent.

For a speaker contact us on 582 8433.

Make a donation. Money is crucial to maintain the dispute. Please make cheques payable to "Women's Support Group, Deal" and send them to Magness House, Mill Hill, Deal, Kent.

Taken from NUS leaflet



Herald of Free Enterprise: a warning to the bosses who want to cut safety standards.

GEORGE PRATT, Chairman of the Deal Women's Support Group, told *Briefing* the latest news about the strike.

Our Port Committee has just met P&O. Management are just sticking their heels in — it's just deadlock, after five weeks on strike.

We're starting to get some support from the labour movement, though.

We had a silent march on Sunday March 6th — the anniversary of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster; but we had no press coverage pointing out we were on strike to keep our safety standards.

John Prescott spoke at our last march. Michael Meacher's supported us in the media. Beyond that we've not heard from any Labour MPs.

We're expecting the company to sack us soon.

We're not getting strike pay; yet the DHSS is knocking £17 off strikers' benefit.

We need labour movement support to get our case across — and we urgently need donations to feed the strikers and their families.

NUCPS

Broad Left challenges for union leadership

MIKE McGRATH, Broad-Left candidate for NUCPS President, spoke to a *Briefing* reporter.

What do you expect to achieve by standing for President of NUCPS?

Almost certainly not the Presidency! I'm standing as a result of a collective decision at the Broad Left Conference last November. Our union leadership, which is left wing in the broadest sense of that word, has failed to grasp the virulence of the attack on civil servants.

They signed a pay deal which suggested that we all have a common interest in working for the government, that accepted job losses through new technology and much greater flexibility in working practices.

Our aim in the campaign is to bring together isolated militants, to build where we are strong and to criticise the leadership's inadequate response to the offensive against us.

The 1988 pay claim must be central to any presidential candidate. How are the polices of the Broad Left different from the present NUCPS leadership?

I'm not sure that pay 1988 *is* central. Whilst pay is potentially a great uniting issue, I tend to think that jobs will be more important.

Having said that our approach could hardly be more different. The leadership has submitted a claim for 15% and is now sitting on its collective hands. They have also prepared a conference paper on long-term pay which would enmesh us in a comparisons exercise. Such agreements are a bureaucrats' paradise.

We want to see a claim democratically agreed at a special pay conference based on a flat rate increase and in unity with CPSA. Ideally we should have unity in the public sector but we won't get that on pay in 1988.

How would you characterise the present NUCPS leadership and how would the Broad Left operate if it won the elections?

The present leadership is a hotch potch of vaguely and not so vaguely left wing individuals. The principal group within it are what is colloquially called "tankies" Stalinists who think that everything went wrong in the USSR when Joe died.

The rest are along for the ride — the tankies provide the organisational support for voting, the rest provide a veneer of respectability. It's a fragile coalition.

As to what we would do if we won — well even if every candidate won we wouldn't have a majority, so it's fairly limited what we could do! Full support for members on the frontline, whether it be DHSS members fighting staffing cuts or others fighting privatisation. Open up the union — less sweet and reasonable propaganda — more hard-hitting material spelling out the need for a fightback; unity with other civil servants, with or without their leaders.

What strategy should the union have to the attacks on the Civil Service?

Industrial action *is* the only option left in a wide range of situations. The Ibbs review provides for the break up of Civil Servants' central pay and conditions package. The conditions part isn't bad — fairly good sick leave, pensions, etc. A defeat for us means a defeat for all organised workers. So negotiations are simpy irrelevant — there is no compromise that could protect our conditions of service. Organised industrial action is the only effective response — to win that we need systematic campaigning across the Civil service.

How should the union relate to social questions like FAB, the Health Service and Clause 28?

Clearly, by spelling out the *class* nature of the attack on us. The attacks are all linked. Authoritarian populism of the Education Bill, the Poll Tax and especially the Clause 28 attack.

Systematic attacks on living standards through cutting public service — to drive up profits. No rational capitalist government would cut taxes in a balance of payments crisis — but these people are real class warriors. By spelling out and analysing this offensive we prepare members for a fightback which it should then be our task to lead and support. So far we have seen little evidence beyond a circular giving support to the TUC March 5th demonstration — they see that as OK because it's on a Saturday!

TGWU

After Broad Left ballot victory: Where now for the T&G?

The TGWU Executive election result is not so much a victory for the left as a defeat for the right, who have been organising strongly in the union for some time.

The key left gains were in three trade groups — Power and Engineering, Textiles, and Agriculture.

A further key gain came in in the South East London territorial division where Ford worker Steve Riley defeated right wing national TGWU Chair Brian Nicholson.

By ALAN THORNETT

In the Automotive trade group, the left candidate, Dave Osbourn, was defeated by just over three hundred votes after a number of ballot boxes had been disqualified in a highly controversial contest in the Midlands Region.

The election, which put ten new members on the 39-strong Executive, has produced a "broad left" majority of about 22-17, although it is a difficult calculation given the extreme diversity of the TGWU "Broad Left", which ranges from hard left activists to Communist Party (CP) members and Kinnock supporters.

The media caused great confusion in the run-up to the ballot by presenting the whole thing as a contest between "soft left" and "hard left", when in reality it was a contest between the "broad left" and the old right wing majority led by Nicholson.

They have been a major factor in the union for some time, systematically using their power on the executive to challenge Ron Todd from the right.

Posi.'

Nicholson has used his position on the appointments committee to install the hard right personnel into key non-elected positions — something which has led to bitter blow-ups in at least two Regions — London and the Midlands.

In the Midlands (Region 5) Todd was even refused permission to speak at the Regional Committee. Nicholson knows very well that regional secretaries are extremely influential in the union, not least because they administer elections.

Nicholson hoped that the regional secretaries would help consolidate the right wing majority on the executive. Although the T&G has in many respects supported the "new realists", it has not done so consistently — at least not consistently enough for Nicholson. A further shift to the right would have lined the union up alongside the AEU or even the EETPU. Ron Todd would have been destroyed in the process.

These plans of the right wing fell flat — in itself, a major victory for the left and for the labour movement in general. The effects of the TGWU consistently casting their 1.3 million block vote alongside the AEU and the EETPU at Labour Party Conference and at the TUC do not need to be spelt out.

Result

But it is not yet clear how much the union will actually move to the left in the wake of this result — which is essentially a victory for Ron Todd, now released from right wing pressure and able to impose his own direction on the union.

He has already said that the TGWU will give full support to Neil Kinnock, and there is every reason to believe he means what he says.

As for the Executive itself, unless there is a strong force fighting within it to make it influence the union (as Nicholson was from the right) it is likely to return to its usual rather marginal position, with real direction being decided by full-time officials at national and regional level.

Militants

There are now some important militants on the Executive, but they may well find themselves very much in a minority. Kinnock is clearly confident that the election will not change the relationship betweeen the TGWU and his plans for the Labour Party — and he is probably right.

One major problem which needs to be tackled now is the TGWU Broad Left. It has long been a farce, comprised of closed cabals devoted to lining people up for elections. The development of a *democratic* Broad Left would be a major development for the union and there are signs that opportunities here are opening up.

Another problem which these elections leave unresolved is the general question of democracy in the TGWU, in particular democratic election procedures immune to ballot rigging.

Successive leaderships of the TGWU have refused to take elementary steps to change the situation. They have refused to change the loose union rules on voting procedures — a virtual charter for ballot rigging, which has been rife for decades.

Refused

They have also refused, for the most part, to discipline those caught red-handed fiddling ballots, chosing instead simply to organise re-run elections.

Of course, many of the allegations made in the recent elections are unsubstantiated inventions by individuals or the media. But the union's record gives credibility to these allegations, and a field day to the media.

However, some of the complaints raised were substantiated. In the Midlands Region 5 a decision was taken by the scrutineers *not* to record any individual branch votes — which makes it impossible for democratic checks to take place.

In the same area, ballot boxes were disqualified under contentious circumstances, which almost certainly cost the left one key seat. Other serious complaints have still not been sorted out.

Seriously

All this needs to be taken very seriously by TGWU members. There is a real danger that the scandal of TGWU balloting will be used by the Tories to legitimise the next round of anti-union legislation, which includes postal balloting for executive committees.



PHOTO: Laurie Sparham/Network

T&G members on the march in defence of public transport

Labour Party

Northwest Campaign Group Conference

Ignoring the lessons of Chesterfield

The Conference had been in the making for more than a year before it finally took place.

It was not a response to Chesterfield but, rather, pre-empted it, proving that, as Benn says on occasion, we don't have to wait for the Campaign Group leadership to organise it for us, we just have to get on and do it ourselves!

By Will McMahon Preston Campaign Group (personal capacity)

The original suggestion for the conference came from the Leigh Campaign Group. Their central idea was to build a conference of the Left in the northwest which was not to be exclusive; but, like Chesterfield, open to all socialists and those in struggle against the Thatcher government.

What eventually transpired bore little resemblance to this original initiative — but not for lack of effort on the part of the Leigh Campaign Group or other people outside the leadership of the Manchester Campaign Group.

This was a great pity since the Chesterfield Socialist Conference had been an enormous talking-shop, rather than an organising or policy-making conference, and the idea of local Chesterfields was key to building the left in a united, democratic and organised fashion throughout the country.

It became obvious by early November (a few weeks after Chesterfield) that any conference not based on the principle of the national Socialist Conference would be swimming against the tide of a new left that was beginning to form both within and outside the Labour Party. One example of this is the Green and Socialist Conference being held in April on an open and non-sectarian basis.

Yet this is what occurred. Despite the efforts of many comrades from different parts of the northwest, the control of the organising committee fell into the hands of a few members of the Manchester Campaign Group.

Failed

They failed to build the Conference on the basis of the struggles that were, and are, taking place in the region and restricted its agenda to a rally and a limited series of workshops. These were, for the most part, uninspiring and organised entirely within the remit of a few left organisations in the Labour Party.

The opening plenum was addressed by:

- Livingstone (15 mins), who repeated a part of his Chesterfield speech (but without the flourish!),
- Heffer (15 mins), who did much the same, while paying regards to Rosa Luxemburg and calling for the Campaign Group to stand candidates against the Kinnock leadership,
- and Ann Pettifor (15 mins), a member of the Women's Action Committee, who appealed for more women to join WAC after its national AGM to which only 30 women came!

In addition, a speaker from the Health Service was given five minutes.

This allocation of time clearly summed up the priorities of the organisers of the conference, and it left only half an hour for debate from the floor.

Following the workshops, the final hour was taken up by yet more speakers, when a discussion from the floor would have been more useful.

Useful reportbacks from the workshops were cut short because of the amount of time given to Audrey Wise (who opposed the idea of standing against Kinnock), Les Huckfield (who was in favour) and Anni Marjoram (WAC).

The most positive report was from the local government workshop which requested two things from the conference:

- that it vote on the proposal to send a letter to the Campaign Group calling for it to challenge the Kinnock leadership;
- that a broad-based Northwest Campaign Group Organising Committee be set up to co-ordinate the left in the area in a united and democratic way and build networks of support for those in struggle.

Nicholson

John Nicholson, in the chair of Conference at that point, failed to respect either of these requests. He did not call a vote because he claimed "we had run out of time". He had made it clear at past meetings of the organising committee that he was against such a wide-ranging committee because of the danger of witch-hunts.

Nicholson has taken it upon himself to organise this committee, so it is up to all of us to make sure it is as broad-based as possible — Campaign Groups, left caucuses, left campaigns in and outside the Labour Party, as well as open access to all those in struggle — and that it meets all over the northwest rather than in Manchester alone.

Supporters

Labour Briefing supporters locally will be producing a conference report based on all the workshops and the progress that is being made on organising a Chesterfield left.

The next step is to open the committee out in a non-sectarian way and to begin to build for a real northwest Chesterfield-type conference which draws in all possible forces in the region, whether or not certain members of the Manchester Campaign Group regard them as genuine. Only in this way will a real left be built.

Research Project Update

Labour Listens to a Whole Travel Agent Shock

***Briefing* continues its quest to discover the true nature (and worth) of the *Labour Listens* exercise with this rush report from the latest sighting of *LL* in SWINDON.**

By Swindon *Labour Briefing* readers

It was billed as *Labour Listens to Industry*, what with Swindon being the "fastest growing town in Europe".

Industry? Was that shop stewards, factory workers?

Strange. Not many would be able to turn up at two thirty on a weekday afternoon.

Headlined in the local paper as "Campaign to listen meets with silence", this latest in the round of hugely unsuccessful events organised by the Labour leaders attracted upwards of twenty people.

One or two of them weren't even Labour Party members. Alas, the local business folk did not seem interested enough to take the afternoon off and neglect earning their fortunes. Only one local business tycoon appears to have turned up... a self-employed travel agent.

Another startling success for the Kinnersley and Hattnock team. You too can adopt their formula. Organise a meeting when nobody can get there. Don't advertise it. Invite local businessmen — the real makers of the nation's wealth.

We did consider sending a spy dressed up in a pin striped suit, clutching a *Financial Times*, to facilitate entry. But we couldn't find anybody who could get the time off work, or who had the stomach to spend an afternoon listening to Barry Shearman and the Leader and Deptuy Leader of the Labour Council (who later that evening would vote to put our rents up).

Mind you, it was a great pity that *Labour Listens* didn't hold court in the jumble sale on our Council estate, a couple of days later. Perhaps our great leaders would have felt out of place in the real world of the working class.

They could have seen groups of young children collecting old clothes for their brothers and sisters. They could have seen the effect of Thatcher's government and of their own refusal to accept the need to fight to bring down a government in their beloved "mother of parliaments".

No doubt £400 a week dockers — if you can find any — don't have to go to jumble sales to clothe themselves. *Labour Listens to Industry*. But not to the working class, the unemployed, the poor. Walworth Road plods on, from one success to another.

Swindon Fightback

Help us organise against the cuts!

***Swindon Fightback* was set up a a public meeting organised by Swindon Labour Party on the question of rate-capping.**

Councillors from Haringey spoke about the crisis in London and the resistance to huge cuts in jobs and services implemented by Labour Councils.

Jumble

The Labour Council has decided it is impossible to fight the government. Instead they have decided to attempt to "survive" for five years, in the hope that a Labour government will be elected (that was what we were told last time, when they gave up the struggle against ratecapping).

Survival

But "survival" means:

- continuing to push up rents, selling more Council houses (increasing the waiting list);
- putting more services out to private tender, with the risk to jobs if a contract is lost;
- accepting the Poll Tax;
- selling land, allowing the developers to make a fortune, continuing the destruction of the town centre;
- cutting grants to jobs partly funded by it, thus placing them at risk.

It hopes by this means to bridge the gap between income and expenditure.

Swindon Fightback aims to bring together all those faced with cuts in their living standards, their jobs or services.

If you want to help us organise a fightback, if you are prepared to give out leaflets, if you would like us to talk to your organisation, please contact us on 481446 or 46816.

Taken from a Swindon Fightback leaflet

Regional Conferences

London

Left must sustain a challenge to this right inertia

Labour in London has a bad case of the "London effect".

The symptoms of this wasting disease were apparent at this year's GLLP Annual Conference.

The customary platitudes about equal opportunities carried even less conviction than before. Great hopes are being placed in "Labour Listens" and in a housing campaign that has yet to materialise.

The entire Saturday session was called off in deference to the NHS demonstration. It was an admirable gesture, but not matched by any determination to follow the nurses' lead and take the battle to the enemy.

Sitting Chair Glenys Thornton retained office by defeating left candidate Jeremy Corbyn — 545,000 to 138,000. *Briefing's* Joan Twelves was defeated for vice-chair by Roger Goulborn — 582,000 to 98,000. The elections for the Regional Executive Committee left the right in firm command.

Sixty people crowded into a small committee room in Hammersmith Town Hall to attend the *Briefing* fringe meeting on Sunday. Jeremy Corbyn stressed the neccesity of solidarity action in support of NHS workers and urged the Party not to isolate health from housing, education, immigration and other issues.

"I'm fed up with just defending existing services," Corbyn said. "We have to start making demands — for the abolition of private medicine and for the nationalisation of the pharmaceutical companies."

"We have to link up different struggles or go down to defeat," he warned.

Mandy Mudd explained that "people get witch hunted for being effective. The witch hunt is always political but is never conducted politically."

Peter Tatchell summarised the dangers of Clause 29, which he said was already being implemented by Local Authorities clamping down on lesbian and gay related activities.

By MARK SEATON

Back in the conference hall, the left lost the vote — but not the debate — on local government cuts. Will thousands of Local Authority workers in London approve of their trade union representatives block voting away their jobs and conditions?

Support for the MacBride principles and for the Birmingham Six was overwhelming, but it is unlikely the GLLP apparatus will put these policy statements into effect.

A resolution calling for Local Authorities to refuse to implement Clause 29 was carried without opposition. But Labour Council leaders in London have not so far shown any inclination to defy government edict. Mass pressure will be necessary to keep Labour councillors from surrendering to the siren song of "legality".

An emergency resolution from Tottenham CLP condemning the sexist press treatment of Mandy Mudd and the leaking of her name to the media by Larry Whitty was passed following a clear and passionate speech by Mandy herself. Strong support from a COHSE speaker was a welcome indication of growing discontent with the witch hunt.

If the London Party is to be cured of the "London effect", the left will have to increase its co-ordination and its campaigning profile across the capital. The right's grip can be broken, but only if the left maintains a year-round challenge to the right's inertia, ineptitude, and political pussilanimity.

W. Midlands

West Midlands Regional Labour Party Conference

Campaign Group of MPs/LLL

Fringe Meeting

Royal Malvern Hotel, Malvern

Sunday March 20th, 1pm

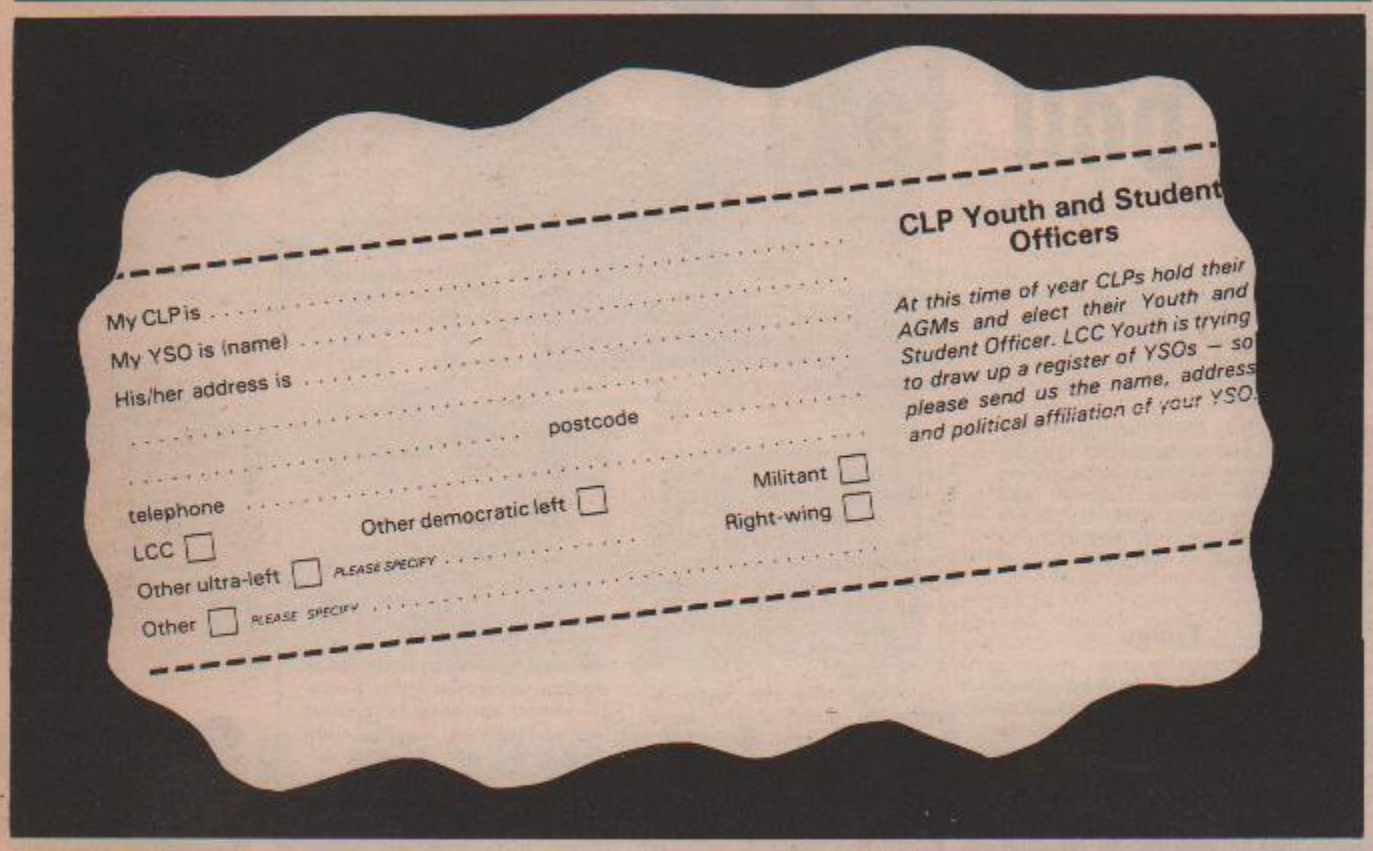
Speakers from:

Campaign Group of MPs, LWAC/FAB, LCI

Meeting sponsored by:

Birmingham Campaign Briefing, Coventry Briefing, Sandwell Briefing, Walsall Tribune Group, Dudley Campaign Group, Women for Socialism, LWAC, LCI, Black Sections.

Management by misinformation



It was good to hear Michael Meacher denouncing the Economic League, which keeps files on activists for the benefit of employers.

The League, which Meacher describes as "McCarthyite", vets 200,000 people each year, with a little help, no doubt, from mates in Peter Wright's old outfit.

By Geoffrey Sheridan
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

Unfortunately for Meacher, his own Labour Co-Ordinating Committee is avidly collecting just the kind of information sought by the Economic League.

In a circular to supporters it requests that they supply the name, address and phone number of their CLP's Youth and Student Officer, along with his or her political allegiance (see left).

"Information" in this line of work is, of course, anything but. Like all political vetters, the LCC can be depended on for a steady stream of misinformation. LCCers in Bermondsey, for example, have furnished a profile of all members of the local GC, in which former Labour Party General Secretary Jim Mortimer is classified as a fellow traveller of *Militant*!

Under the Data Protection Act, we can obtain copies of personal information about ourselves kept on almost any computer database (police files are among those excluded!. The Economic League has avoided the rigours of the Act by holding all their files on **card indexes**. (Meacher has demanded a broadening of the Act to cover these).

YSOs and others should contact the LCC office — at 9 Poland St, London W1V 3DG — with a request to be supplied with a copy of any information held on themselves. And ask LCCers why they have left off a box for the category which would best describe the LCC — ***Stalinist***.

LAW 86 says Fightback Now!

LAW 86 is calling on all supporters to step up the fight against the witch-hunt.

The threat to Sharon Atkin, to *Labour Briefing* supporter Mandy Mudd, and the suspension of Bradford North and Bermondsey Constituency Labour Parties all make it clear that no socialist in the Party can feel "safe" in the future.

The National Constitution Committee has had its work cut out over the last year. The Party Leadership has seen the purge of socialists as the way to make Labour respectable again by steering the CLPs back to the centre.

By Linda Blane
LAW 86

But the political situation in the country shows how blinkered this perspective is. The newly merged Liberal/SDP Alliance has much more chance of appealing to the middle ground than the Labour Party. Labour's standing with the working class goes up when key sectors of the labour movement start to do battle with Thatcher, as the miners' strike and now the action in defence of the NHS show.

By moving towards the centre, the Labour Party leaders only give credibility to the Alliance and this ultimately strengthens Thatcher. The Tories are able to claim that there is no real opposition because all the "opposition" parties are simply adopting their agenda.

The rise of struggles — despite the obstacles workers face — show that there is an opposition to Thatcher developing. But is not led by the Labour Party leaders.

They don't want to use these struggles to give new inspiration to those who wish to remove Thatcher from office.

Vital to the creation of an alternative to Thatcher is the right of all socialists to argue for, and organise around, their views in the labour movement.

A limited victory was achieved by the left when charges against Amir Khan and Kevin Scally of Sparkhill CLP had to be dropped. But many other militants have been expelled over the two years since and a wide range of socialists are threatened.

Neil Kinnock feels confident to turn the screw because the left has been disunited on this question so far.

It is therefore very important that a united, national campaign is built to defend every socialist threatened with expulsion. This can only be achieved if the whole left decides to make it a priority.

Sharon Atkin, Mandy Mudd and many other socialists would not be in the firing line now if the left had built such a campaign over the last couple of years. There is not widespread support for Kinnock's witch-hunting among CLP activists.

By taking up individual cases and building a national campaign, the left can begin to turn the tide on this issue.

We urge all labour movement bodies to support the fight to defend all socialists in the Party and to affiliate or reaffiliate to LAW '86.

LAW '86
c/o 1, Gorefield House, Canterbury Road, London NW6 5TA

Witch-hunt in Wales

Right tries to suspend away the left threat

Plasnewydd ward Labour Party (Cardiff Central CLP) has been closed down following an accusation that Chris Peace, an expelled *Militant* supporter had attended its AGM.

The support for Plasnewydd from other branches may result in the Constituency Party's suspension.

By our Wales correspondent

Chris Peace was finally expelled at the end of last year, action against him having been initiated by the Regional Executive Committee in 1985. At no time during this period were the ward or constituency consulted, nor ever permitted to submit evidence on his behalf.

The ward has never been informed officially of his expulsion. This is deemed irrelevant by Labour Party Wales, who apparently consider it enough to hear of such a crucial decision by word of mouth or from the local press!

The move against Plasnewydd came at an unusually well attended meeting of the Constituency Executive on February 12th, a week before Cardiff Central's AGM. Plasnewydd's delegates and officers had no prior warning of the situation.

The action followed a letter of complaint written to Labour Party Wales by City Councillor and former parliamentary candidate Jon Jones and signed by five other Councillors.

Party officials informed Constituency officers that Plasnewydd should be suspended. This was ratified by the executive. It has subsequently emerged that some of those present and voting at that meeting were not bona fide delegates — including Jon Jones himself.

The intention behind this was to weaken the left at the AGM by excluding Plasnewydd delegates. Jon Jones was himself standing for the position of secretary against a candidate from Plasnewydd.

Support

At the AGM on the 19th, support for Plasnewydd came not only from all shades of opinion on the left, but also from the more constitutionally minded on the right. Regional Organiser Anita Gale was present at the meeting, but refused to state under which rule Plasnewydd had been suspended, what form the enquiry would take or how it would be constituted.

She assured the meeting, however, that the process would take only a few weeks and that as soon as it was completed Plasnewydd's AGM would be reconvened. A resolution to adjourn the CLP AGM until this had happened was ruled out of order by the Chair and the opposition to his ruling fell just short of the two thirds majority needed to overturn it.

The meeting went ahead, but the sustained opposition of the majority of those present ensured that only three and a half items from a 16-item agenda were completed and no new officers elected. The AGM was adjourned until the following week.

Compromise

In the meantime constituency officers met to agree a compromise solution prompted by the realisation that the executive meeting which had ratified the suspension of Plasnewydd had been improperly constituted. It was agreed to put the following course of action to Labour Party Wales:

- reconvene the EC on a proper basis;
- hold a new Plasnewydd AGM;
- adjourn the GMC AGM in the meantime.

Anita Gale refused to agree to this proposal and insisted that the constituency AGM go ahead. If it did not, the NEC would appoint officers. The fact that the EC meeting was improperly constituted was immaterial since it was inadvertant (?) while Plasnewydd did what they did in full knowledge of the consequences (and are therefore, presumably, guilty without having had the chance to present a defence).

The reconvened AGM went ahead on February 26th. Anita Gale still refused to say under what rule Plasnewydd was suspended, or how the enquiry into it would be conducted. She reiterated that the unconstitutionality of the EC meeting did not matter since it had "taken the right decision"!

Opposition

Once again, however, opposition to this ensured that the meeting was unable to make much progress and once again it failed to elect officers. What happens now is not entirely clear, but it is likely that the constituency itself will face suspension and the enquiry will take place under the auspices of officers appointed by the NEC.

It is still possible, however, that a third attempt will be made to hold the AGM. The next, and most important, item on the agenda is the election of officers and there is little that could be done to prevent a "walkover" by rightwingers for key positions.

Motives

The motives behind all this are political. The right's claim to be upholding the rules of the Party is ludicrous since no such rules are being followed in the action against Plasnewydd.

What is happening is an attempt to weaken the left in a constituency which has consistently fought the Labour County Council's imposition of cuts, in particular their plans to close a local secondary school. Plasnewydd represents a threat to the right's dominance in local Labour politics as well as to the political career aspirations of certain individuals.

HARINGEY

Haringey Against the Witch-hunt
Defend Mandy Mudd

The Haringey Against the Witch-hunt; Defend Mandy Mudd campaign has been established to fight the spreading witch-hunt in the Party and defend Mandy.

Petitions and a fact sheet are now available; order them from the Campaign to help seek affiliations and donations.

Contact HAWHDMM c/o Ian Lund, Secretary, 23 Earlsmead Road, London N15. 01 885 3286.

Exeter

***Briefing* supporters are urged to put the following model resolution on the Exeter witch-hunt to their labour movement organisations.**

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 community 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.

Feature on Scotland

Poll Tax

Don't pay the poll tax!

In the next year demands for payment of the poll tax will be issued.

Tens of thousands of Scots will refuse or be unable to pay.

Will Labour back the non-payment campaign or denounce it? Will Labour Councils prosecute non-payers? Will Labour magistrates fine and jail them?

These questions ought to be the focus of the debate at Scottish Conference. No fewer than 31 motions (a fifth of the total) are on the poll tax.

Indication

Every indication is that the Scottish Executive wants to avoid this debate and will strive for a classic fudge. The poll tax will be roundly denounced, but specific commitments to action will be vague. Labour will not mount a non-payment campaign but the option may be left open to individuals.

This represents some progress. Until last month, the smart money was on a Labour commitment to denounce, fine, and jail.

For the last six months, Wilson, Dewar and Kinnock have denounced non-payment campaigns and reiterated their commitment to Tory law. Labour Councils have anticipated legislation and rushed to set up the poll tax collection machinery.

On the face of it Labour seems committed to mass suicide.

By Gordon Morgan
Central CLP

The Tories produce legislation which Brian Wilson MP describes as *"morally wicked... utterly unworkable and politically suicidal... mass evasion is inevitable, attempts to thwart evasion will involve draconian infringements of civil liberties."*

This same Brian Wilson then spends much of his energies denouncing non-payment campaigns. Kinock and Dewar do likewise, most recently at Labour's Local Government Conference.

Complain

Labour Councils complain about the extra administrative burdens and costs which could be incurred if "irresponsible persons" launch a "don't register" campaign.

As Denis Canavan puts it: *"Six centuries ago Wat Tyler led the Peasants' Revolt which defeated the poll tax. Now we are lumbered with a leadership who are in effect telling the people that at the end of the day they will just have to touch the forelock and stump up."*

Kinnock's approach seems to be based on the notion that the poll tax will be a vote-winner for Labour. Only if people are forced to pay it will they reject Thatcher and swing behind Labour.

But in Scotland the people are already behind Labour and looking for a lead. If Labour doesn't supply it, they will look elsewhere — probably to the SNP.

Fudge

The fudge likely to be offered to Conference will leave options open. Non-payment won't be encouraged, but won't be vehemently condemned. Councils will be encouraged to delay. Non-co-operation in registering may be encouraged. Modification of the law may be sought.

This position seems to have emerged through the trade unions to the STUC to the Scottish Executive. In a distorted way it reflects the strength of feeling in the localities and a recognition that the existing campaign is too low-key.

However, it is not the only option on offer. At least seven resolutions, mainly from Edinburgh, lay down specific proposals for opposing the poll tax. These include non-co-operation by local Councils and the "option of a non-payment strategy".

They call for more democratic organisation of the Stop It campaign and some ask *"all Scottish MPs to declare en masse their intention not to pay the poll tax."*

These measures must be supported even if the resolutions as a whole are voted down in favour of the fudge.

The sad fact is the poll tax *is* law in Scotland and can only be stopped through a mass refusal to pay. Unfortunately, very few in the Party accept this. Even fewer are willing to campaign on the issue.

It's said that this tactic is premature. True, in the sense that there's a year before payment is due; but all too little time remains for a mass campaign.

Illegality

Concentration on illegality, it is said, removes credence from other propaganda. If this were the sole tactic, rather than a final stance, it might be true. However, the main argument rests on the unstated delusion that other actions can be effective.

Labour was late in mounting a campaign and Strathclyde Regional Labour Group had already voted to implement the legislation before it was discussed by the Scottish Executive. This ended any chance of Councils refusing to implement. Faced with Labour's line, NALGO voted to implement — after all, more jobs were being created.

Thus before a campaign was even considered, the poll tax was law, and the Councils and unions had effectively complied.

Options

The options to non-payment now being considered will have little effect:

- Non-registration may delay matters, as would some Councils not co-operating in registration. However, registration mechanisms don't require co-operation. Arrangements have been made with Health Authorities and others to obtain patient lists. A 98% complete register will thus be easily obtained (although difficult to maintain).
- District Councils can refuse to collect. But Regional Councils can easily meet this gap.
- Councils could refuse to prosecute, but the Registration Officer will act for the government and institute proceedings without Councils' consent.
- A mass non-payment campaign is, as Brian Wilson said, *"inevitable"*. Will Mr Wilson and other Labour MPs place themselves at its head?



Photo: Paul D. Viola — Scottish Assemb

Set up a

Before the June election, t Doomsday Scenario".

If Scotland voted Labour an ed at Westminster, a constitutio Labour denying the Tories Scotland.

Needless to say the "Doom nothing (as yet) has happened cautious is an understatement. *commitment* to discussing its members and Labour won't fo own.

No wonder the MPs are lab This is no accident. Labour

NHS

70,000 march in support of NHS

As thousands assembled throughout Scotland for the STUC Day of Action in support of NHS, a Thatcherite counter-demo was held by "Public and Local Service Efficiency Campaign" (PULSE) outside STUC headquarters in Glasgow — drawing as many as *nine* supporters at its height.

Bemused camera crews and reporters found they outnumbered PULSE by two to one.

Back in the real world 20,000 joined the Edinburgh Demo — by far the biggest march for years in the city. The scene was repeated across Scotland: 11,000 in Aberdeen, 7,500 in Dundee, 5,000 in Inverness, Dumfries, Fife, Orkney, and Lochgilphead.

The depth of anger at — and potential resistance to — Tory policy on the NHS was clear. This was obvious in Glasgow, where 25,000 took part in the demo. City centre traffic ground to a halt as the march wound its way from Royal Infirmary to a rally in George's Square.

Contingent

At 11.45am the first group reached the square; but not until 1.20pm did the last contingent arrive. There was no hostility from drivers held up by the demo. Horns kept tooting in solidarity with the marchers. Bus passengers likewise were clearly in support.

Firefighters, local government manual and white collar staff, and other public sector workers joined with workers from all the main factories to make the Day of Action, as STUC General Secretary Campbell Christie said, a "stunning success".

Tory placemen on the Greater Glasgow Health Board directed the media to Duke St hospital where all 85 ancillary staff promptly walked out.

Of course, the cameras failed to capture the solidarity of patients with NHS workers, and the whole spirit of the Day of Action.

Duke St nursing officer Moira Shanks said, "A lot of old folk in here remember the 1926 strike. They wanted to go out and join the picket line, but we told them it was far too cold."

Meeting "Red Clydesiders" from the geriatric wards wasn't quite what the Greater Glasgow Health Board had in mind when they sent the media to Duke St Hospital.

Jim Niblock, Glasgow

The Scottish agenda

In Scotland on February 24th we witnessed what the capitalist media were forced to admit were some of the largest demonstrations for decades.

Preparations are now being made to follow up the demos with more actions on March 14th and 15th.

On the 24th sympathy action was taken by what remains of Scottish industry in mining, shipbuilding, the motor industry, and public service groups such as firefighters, social workers, and Local Authority workers. This demonstrates both the depth of feeling on the issue and general preparedness to act upon it.

So far the Scottish health service has largely escaped the effect of privatisation. The original instructions for tendering called for three specimen areas in each Health Board (equivalent to the District Health Authority in England) to go out to tender.

This allowed for a certain amount of connivance between trade unions and health boards. In Forth Valley, for example, tender documents went out for three health centres to be cleaned at exactly the same times.

Before June 1987 the Scottish Office overlooked this. The pay-off from the unions was the introduction of work studies and bonus schemes. Nonetheless it is true to say that union membership was maintained along with standards of service.

Developments since then have changed the face of Scottish politics. George Younger moved from the post of Secretary of State for Scotland to be replaced by Malcolm Rifkind. The decimation of Scottish Tory MPs led to the rise to prominence of Michael Forsyth, MP for Stirling.

In his new post, Forsyth decided to make privatisation easier and called on Health Boards to put domestic and catering services out to tender by February 24th.

By DAVE FOWLER

His timing could not have been better — for us. There was no attempt to stagger the process from department to department or from ward to ward. Nurses were becoming more and more anxious about the fate of Special Duty Payments and the pay award and its funding. Militant action by the blood transfusion service by Edinburgh and Manchester nurses provided a further filip.

Forsyth has chosen the areas in the NHS where unions like COHSE and NUPE are strongest. He knows that if he can defeat the unions here, then the rest of the NHS in Scotland can be looted freely. Administration, clerical, laboratory services, X-Ray, pharmacy, and eventually nursing and medical services will be opened up to private contractors. Recently a large contractor said it was not interested in tendering for domestic services in Lothian unless it could tender for nursing and auxilliaries' jobs as well.

The question of democracy cannot be separated from the crisis in the health service. Local Health Councils lack any power, though they may be able to influence public opinion. Health Boards are appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland — a Tory in a country that voted Labour. A Scottish Assembly with powers to protect the health service and fund it would be a bastion of defence against Tory attacks. Labour politicians must take immediate steps to set one up.

Labour in Scotland cannot allow a repeat of the 1982 dispute or the "Winter of Discontent" when action was unco-ordinated and eventually dissipated. Workers in and out of the health service are prepared for action. They must be given the leadership they deserve.

Scottish Labour MPs who voted for Alton:
Jeremy Bray, Dennis Canavan, Tom Clarke, David Lambie, Thomas McAvoy, Callum MacDonald, John McFall, Michael Martin, John Reid, George Robertson, Tony Worthington.

Scottish Labour MPs who abstained or did not vote:
Tam Dalyell, Donald Dewar, George Galloway, James Wray, David Marshall, Norman Hogg, Dick Douglas.

There are numerous resolutions and amendments before Conference on the Alton Bill. Opposition will be forcefully expressed. This reflects in particular the excellent work done over the years by the STUC and Labour Party Womens' Committee.

However, we now face a situation where nineteen of our MPs failed to vote against the Second Reading. Twelve of them were in favour of Alton. It's critical that Conference gives full support to the Stirling resolution which calls for an end to the obscenity of the conscience clause which gives men control over womens' bodies, and for a three line whip against Alton on the third reading.

In the meantime, activists in the 19 constituencies where MPs have so far not supported Party policy must redouble efforts to ensure they do so next time round. Don't let them forget that our consciences will be operating when reselection comes around.

Our ho

The proposals in the Housing (Scotland) Bill (now in committee) will radically reduce the powers of the Scottish Labour-controlled Authorities and could mark the beginning of the end for public sector housing in Scotland.

Security of tenure will go; the threat of eviction will hang over the head of every tenant who changes his or her landlord; the traditional weapon of the tenants movement, withholding rent to demand repairs, will be rendered useless.

Ignoring the real problems in Scottish housing, dampness, disrepair, overcrowding, and homelessness, the Bill presumes that increasing tenants' choice of landlord (albeit in a single direction, i.e. out of the public sector) will attract the huge investment required to solve Scotland's housing crisis.

The government expects investment to come from the private sector. Ownership of large peripheral estates will be diversified. Scotland will become a nation of happy houseowners. Those misguided tenants who choose not to buy will be happy, too, because they at least will be able to choose their own landlord.

But what evidence is there that private investment will be forthcoming?

A Royal Commission in 1917 led to a massive programme of Local Authority housebuilding which continued until the mid-1970s and was supported by almost every government. Councils built more houses than private builders every single year for over fifty years; only since 1978 has this trend been reversed.

Cuts in rate support grant and increases in mortgage tax relief brought private developers into Scotland. In 1987 less than a quarter of houses built in Scotland were built by the public sector.

The national question



Rooms

Scottish Assembly!

e press was full of "The

a Tory government remain-al crisis could develop with ad a mandate to govern

day Scenario" arrived, but To say Labour's tactics are cotland no longer has even a fairs. The Tories can't find e the issue by meeting on its

led the "feeble 50". terrified of disturbing the status quo. To demand a voice for Scotland would be to "pander to nationalism". Worse, the Tories may grant devolution and cut Labour's numbers at Westminster.

This decrepitude can't go on. The poll tax, the closure of Scottish Coal, Ravenscraig, the destruction of local government and education. These must be fought with the voice of a Scottish mandate against Westminster Tory rule.

At the very least a Scottish Convention must be established as an authoritative forum from which to challenge Tory rule.

A number of Conference resolutions address this, in particular, the resolution from ASLEF which would commit the Scottish Council of the Labour Party to establish a Scottish Assembly before the end of the present parliament.

Gordon Morgan, Glasgow Central CLP

mes in danger

Despite government policies cotland's 830,000 Council ouses still house over 40% of e population.

House ownership has now in-eased to 42%, with 100,000 les to tenants since 1979.

Initially, money will be made private investors providing nted housing, catering for nants in work who can afford higher rent and an area they ew as more desirable.

An example is "Quality treet", founded late last year Nationwide and Mr lugnaioni (formerly of lasgow District Council's lousing Department). This ould seem to be a finite arket.

By Judith Parsons
Glasgow Maryhill

Housing Benefit, which has ways risen to meet increasing ublic sector rents (on average p from £4.92 in 1979/80 to 14.65 in 1987/88), will not rise meet rents set by individual, ften unscrupulous, private ndlords or struggling housing o-operatives.

The poverty trap will open ide, ready to swallow up nants who choose to move in-the privately-rented sector, or ho are evicted for non-ayment of three months rent.

New tenancies in the private ctor will be "assured tenan-ies" where a "fair" (or market"!) rent must be agreed etween tenant and landlord. A ent Assessment Committee ill decide the rent where the arties cannot agree.

This will mean new tenants aying more than sitting nants. Assured tenancies will ave security of tenure but evic-on grounds will be changed, udges powers to block eviction rders will be reduced.

Cheap "Short Assured enancies" will be secure only r six months. Regulated nancies for sitting tenants will e unchanged.

Tenants will want to stay put, en if their accommodation is o large or too small for their eeds. Transfer of tenancy is ore difficult once a tenant oves. A dependent may only ecome a tenant if he or she has een resident in the house for a minimum of five years. Only an immediate spouse would be allowed to succeed to an assured tenancy.

Tenants have been quick to recognise the deep dangers of the proposed changes, as shown by the upsurge of activity by Tenants Associations throughout Scotland. Tenants in areas that were built by Scottish Special Housing Association (ironically now celebrating its 50th anniversary) were first off the mark.

But District Council tenants have joined with them at many, many public meetings, rallies, and demonstrations.

In Erskine, built entirely by the SSHA, tenants campaigned vigorously against the so-called "consultation" document and are now fighting the Bill. The February 27th rally in the Usher Hall drew 2,500. The November Glasgow rally filled the City Halls.

Public pressure has changed the emphasis of the Bill, which now includes more detail on tenancies, some assurance of job security, and provides for a strengthening of tenants' rights against harassment.

There's still time to campaign to change the prosposed legislation. Mass support and mass impact is there. But with notable exceptions the existing campaign has been devoid of any leadership from the labour movement, and in particular from the Labour Party in Scotland.

It seems to be slowly filtering through that if passed this Bill will affect every single public sector tenant, every single person ever likely to become homeless, the 31,000 families officially homeless in Scotland, every single child in a damp house, every single person who might in the future lose his or her job, split up from his or her spouse or partner, or go into hospital for an extended stay.

Labour Party activists must join in one of the biggest campaigns in Scotland.

Support the resolutions, impress on your local District Councillor and Councils their accountability to their local tenants, and put pressure on your MPs and the Committee to amend and oppose the Bill.

For futher information on the Campaign Against Scottish Homes contact Iris MacDonald, Chairperson, Scottish Tenants Organisation, c/o 28/24 St Andrews St, Glasgow.

LCC no more?

***Briefing* readers will be well aware of the LCC's role in London over the last few months.**

In conjunction with right-wingers and sometimes with Tory backing they have rationalised the implementation of massive cuts in local government expenditure.

By Jim Niblock
Glasgow

Any residue of the alliance between the soft and hard left evaporated as the LCC aligned itself with the right-wing to impose Tory cuts.

The stampede of the London LCC to the right has led to a split. In Scotland, where the LCC still has a strong position within the Party apparatus, it's quite impossible to raise the white flag, given the outcome of the general election.

The rapid decline in the LCC's Scottish base reflects the failure to provide a lead against Tory attacks. This is apparent in the 30-plus resolutions against the Poll Tax at this year's Scottish Conference; they represent not only a challenge to Donald Dewar's leadership, but also to the effectiveness of the soft left as an alternative.

Scottish LCC is an accident waiting to happen. It's only held together by what it's against — the "Trots". A clear space is now emerging for a broad democratic left in the Scottish Labour Party. If Benn challenges for the Leadership, an ideal focus will be offered around which it can be built.

Anti-Apartheid

Demo planned

Glasgow is set for an anti-apartheid demonstration on Sunday June 12th.

Its main slogans are: *Free Nelson Mandela! Hands off COSATU and the NUNW!* and *Sanctions Now!*

This will follow the Scottish Trade Union conference to launch the *Hands Off COSATU!* campaign.

These events were called by the Scottish Committee of the A-AM, after months of pressure from local groups and activists. The A-AM in Scotland is now poised to take important steps forward in its activity in solidarity with the liberation struggle and has a genuine opportunity to become a mass campaigning body.

Until its meeting on December 5th, the Scottish Committee had been hesitant about calling the demonstration. Following some disappointing turnouts for events in the past, some on the committee viewed a Scottish demo as too ambitious a project.

However, Glasgow Northwest Anti-Apartheid Group cited the expansion of A-AM groups to 23 in Scotland and the increasing interest of the trade union movement. Over 500 people attended the meetings with Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO, in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

By Allan Green
Maryhill CLP

Several local A-AM groups came to the position that the potential for a successful demo was there, if it was systematically built. The positive role played by SNP members in supporting this initiative has to be recognised and commended.

Timed

The Scottish demo is timed to coincide with the start of the Glasgow to London march, part of the national events celebrating Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday. It is envisaged that Oliver Tambo, the ANC President, and possibly Jesse Jackson, will speak at the Scottish demo.

The launch conference of the *Hands off COSATU* campaign on May 21st will be important in building trade union support for the June demo.

Responded

Already many trade unionists have responded to the call from NUMSA on behalf of their General Secretary Moses Mayekiso. Support for Mayekiso, currently facing trial in South Africa, should be part of the *Hands Off COSATU* campaign.

Given the significance of his trial for the trade union movement, efforts must be made to highlight it in the preparation for the demo, including at the Trade Union Conference, and during the demo itself.

The demo provides the A-AM in Scotland with a great opportunity to build a stronger and wider base for solidarity with the liberation movement in Southern Africa. It deserves the support of all trade union branches, Labour, SNP, and other political parties, women's groups, student unions, youth organisations and Asian groups.

Scottish A-AM demo
Sunday June 12th
Assembles 12.30, Kelvin Way, Glasgow

Hands Off COSATU!
Trade Union Conference
T&G Halls, Bath St, Glasgow

Disarmament

For a nuclear-free Scotland!

Following the massive anti-Tory General Election vote, Scottish CND launched a campaign around the slogan *For a Nuclear-Free Scotland*.

February 13th saw an initial conference held in Glasgow City Chambers addressed by Sam Galbraith (Labour MP for Strathkelvin and Bearsden) and Doug Harrison (STUC Assistant Secretary).

More than 200 delegates attended, of whom a majority represented Labour Parties and trade unions. This reflected widespread anxiety about the forthcoming Party defence review and its failure to campaign around "welfare not warfare".

Sam Galbraith issued a passionate call for health not arms spending. Unfortunately, when Sam was questioned about the contradiction between this and the Party's policy of spending money saved on nuclear weapons on conventional arms, he sidestepped the issue by talking about the non-party nature of the peace movement.

Doug Harrison said that redundancies at Yarrows could be avoided by scrapping Trident and ordering more frigates. Later he claimed a high speed rail-link to the Chunnel could be built. Which is it to be? This contradiction reflects the failure of the unions to pursue any serious work on alternative uses for and employment at weapons facilities.

By Tony Southall
Secretary Scottish Labour CND
Glasgow Pollock CLP

May 29th is the day fixed for a follow-up Nuclear Free Scotland demonstration in Glasgow. An organising committee was appointed by the Conference to mobilise for the event and invitations will be sent out to all major labour movement bodies to join.

The peace movement is also rapidly escalating work in preparation for delivery of the first Trident in 1992. The Coulport base on Loch Long has undergone massive expansion with associated environmental destruction. A demonstration is planned at Coulport in October.

Key tasks facing labour movement activists are:

- Building support to ensure the labour movement is to the fore in both these demonstrations. Resolutions should be passed in every Party and union branch to get people out.
- Defending unilateralism against the revision threatened by the defence review. Branches should send resolutions to Annual Conference reaffirming our policy for a non-nuclear Britain.
- Insisting that a non-nuclear Scotland doesn't just mean no Polaris or Trident; it means opposing Chapelcross nuclear enrichment plant which plays a central part in making bombs, and opposing all the communications, reconnaissance, naval and air bases that support NATO.
- Raising Sam Galbraith's theme seriously in resolutions around welfare not warfare, jobs not bombs, etc., and insisting that disarmament means the diversion of resources to useful ends.
- Developing trade union work on alternative employment so that our movement can convince workers at Rosyth, Yarrows, Ferranti, Coulport, etc., that disarmament means development not dole.

With Scottish Regional Conference in the offing, *Briefing* readers in Scotland bring you this special feature on Scottish issues — many of which will be covered at the Conference. Feature compiled by Tony Southall; all writers in a personal capacity.

Features: race and class debate

A reply to *Marxism Today*

"New social forces" can't be hived off

In an article entitled "When the Hardline is Right", published in February's *Marxism Today*, playwright David Edgar pleaded with the Labour leadership (national and local) not to reject the "new social forces" just because they had been associated with the "gross excesses" of the London left.

He warned against a reaction which has led to the consolidation of the right wing old guard in areas such as Birmingham, where race and women's units have been disbanded.

He wanted political currents such as the Chartists, Fabians, and Labour Co-ordinating Committee (the "sensible left") to spare the politics of race, sexuality, gender, and ecology from the ravages of the cuts which the "sensible" left is now making in its retreat from the politics of "posturing".

But which areas does Edgar think *should* be cut? Housing, refuse collection, nurseries, social workers, home helps, libraries? He doesn't say.

He simply insists we prioritise the "new social forces" (or "sacred cows" as they are known amongst the ratepayers and the gutter press) in light of the failure of Labour's traditional economic and electoral politics.

There has been a flowering, we are told, of a new politics based on race, culture, sexuality, and gender, with a better track record in gaining support and mobilising it.

He concludes that though these policies may not be immediately popular, Labour in its rethink should not throw the baby (new movements) out with the bathwater (hardline, posturing, unreconstructed, sectarian politics). The former is tainted by its association with the latter — "for understandable reasons".

Leaving aside his many inaccuracies and dishonest linkages (e.g. comparing the tactics of Kings Cross Women's Centre/Yellow Gate" with the socialist left), Edgar's article is objectionable mainly because it reproduces in its most desperate form *Marxism Today's* retreat from class. It ignores the political and economic content of the social forces on which it lavishes praise.

The saving of the race relations unit will *not* make life easier for black families, many already on or below the poverty line, who find their rent increased by 40% in a single year, or who can't go to work because mothers and toddlers groups have been closed, or can't get information on policing, immigration, and social security because advice and law centre funding has been cut.

Black struggles are now and have always been about something more than just a narcissistic appreciation of one's colour or identity. The healthiest elements have always come to the fore when they have organised independently to challenge at a political and economic level the injustices of racism.

To prioritise politics of *identity* and cultural separateness, as *Marxism Today* suggests, implies that black (female, lesbian, gay?) people are mainly in need of some psychic uplift or support.

For the majority of black people, the problem cannot be solved by someone on the state payroll telling them how wonderful they are. Like many "traditional" Labour voters, they want basic, efficient, democratic services (housing maintenance, social services, education, leisure, etc.).

For a journal that prides itself on "the politics of *difference*" *Marxism Today* shows amazing ignorance of recent critiques of identity/cultural politics (e.g. *Race and Class's* articles on

By Shahid Tilley
Haringey Labour Briefing

Race Awareness Training and Jewish Feminism and Identity Policies) and the attacks by the Pakistani Workers Association and *Emergency* magazine on the destructive effects of extensive state involvement in fighting racism.

David Edgar ignores the link between social movements and democratic socialist politics. Disputes at Imperial Typewriters and Grunwicks were about black workers fighting for equality and union recognition; the rebellions of 1981 and subsequently were about the fight against racism and the call for democratic rights in face of police and economic brutality; the growth of autonomous women's and community organisations was about an urgent need to support and supplement the actual struggles of black people in the courts or in the schools.

Marxism Today has provided intellectual succour to the former soft left in an attempt to shift Labour's politics away from traditional socialism and undermine what it perceived as the hard, unreconstructed left. But the hard left has for some time been in the forefront of initiatives around Edgar's new agenda.

Though he is willing to admit that in this regard the "hardline" is *right*, will he and *Marxism Today* come out in an intellectually honest manner and say that the right wing are *wrong* in making cuts in basic services which will have such a traumatic impact upon people's lives?

Marxism Today's shortsightedness is further illustrated in failing to note the debate that has arisen among local Labour leaderships over whether to continue with the "dented shield" in face of local opposition and further Tory attacks

While Edgar talks about saving the new agenda a debate has arisen in the *New Statesman* and *New Society* over how the New Realists should extricate themselves from this double bind. Discussion of majority opposition and other ways of avoiding the increasingly unpleasant choices forced upon Local Authorities has surfaced.

Unfortunately, the priority seems not so much fighting the Tories as beating the left and trying desperately to hold onto some mystical power of local electoral office.

If we draw up a balance sheet of *Marxism Today's* euro-communist project of building a broad and popular left alliance that marginalised the "hard left" we come to two conclusions. One, the left has lost a lot of fellow travellers; and two, the attempts to stop Thatcherism or even weaken the old corporatist right wing Labour politics have failed completely. It is with these people David Edgar now pleads to save this "new agenda".

The forces which *Marxism Today* wants to embrace are beginning to shrivel as their dynamism and cutting edge is submerged in a celebration of "identity" and retreat into culture. This fragmentation of economics, culture, politics, and personal life into discrete entities has been one of the consequences of *both* Thatcherism and euro-communism.

As Sivanandan remarked in 1985, "The working class as a consequence was stripped of its richest political seams — black, feminist, gay, green, etc. — and left, in the name of anti-economism, a prey to economism. Conversely, the new social forces, freed from the ballast of economic determinism (and class reductionism), have been floated as the political and ideological 'classes' of the new radicalism.

"But the flight from class has served only to turn ideological priorities into idealistic preoccupations, and political autonomy into personalised politics and palliatives — which for all that, has passed into common left currrency and found habitation and a name in Labour Local Authorities."

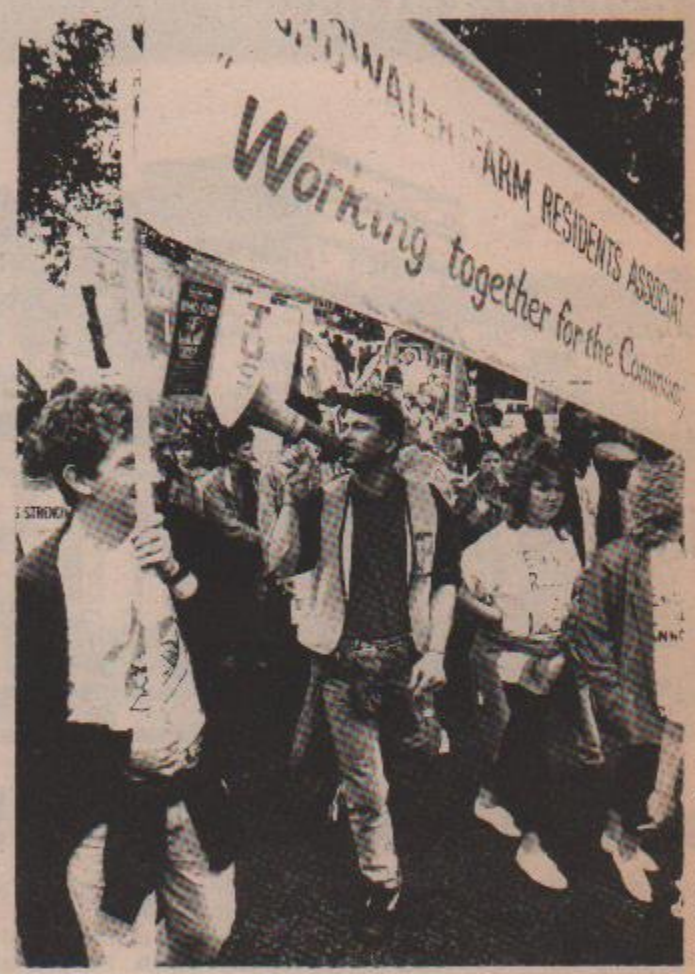


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Broadwater Farm Residents Association has been visible fighting racism and cuts in essential services.

Secularism vs. multi-culturalism

In *Briefing* (9.12.87), Shahid Tilly argued that socialists need to "reassess the state's relationship to religion, culture and ethnicity".

He went on to advocate that the left clearly commit itself to secular education.

For socialists, the public domain ought to be a place where different cultures meet and where they can be critically and mutually examined. But translating this "ought" into a reality isn't easy.

Religion is an increasingly important issue in the politics of race and culture. The New Right understands this.

Roger Scruton in *The Times* praised the efforts of Haringey parents and Christian and Moslem organisations who had challenged the left's sexual politics. He denounced the threat posed by the:

"increasing secularisation of schools by the left-wing authorities who regard all forms of religious worship and assembly as inappropriate to our multi-cultural society."

In another article, Scruton explicitly enlists religious sentiment against radical sexual politics. The leftist, he claimed,

"cares not one jot if, in order to enjoy his position as champion of the minorities against British culture, he must trample on every decency which the minorities hold dear."

Scruton has raised two thorny problems. First, the British state is *not* a secular institution. Nor is its education system. What is often thought of as its nominally Christian character turns out to be

By Andrew Coates
Ipswich CLP

anything but nominal when it is challenged.

This institutionalised unity of Christianity and "Britishness" has become a *mobilising* point for racialists (as in Dewsbury).

Secondly, the cultural relativism favoured by many on the British Left cannot provide an answer to the New Right. This relativism treats each oppressed group as autonomous, with the right to define its own values.

But what happens when sexual freedom conflicts with ideas of "decency" held by many religions? Do we mute our criticisms of every obscurantist absurdity in order that multi-cultural harmony is preserved?

How can we begin to escape from these dilemmas? Shahid's answer is to reassert the old demand for secularism. Some people might consider that this is secondary to the immediate defence of minorities. Others may say that when the state is itself racialist such a demand is both reformist and utopian.

The fact is that the British state's link to religion is part of the cement which holds it together. It *excludes* both non-believers and religious minorities. Institutionalising religious multiculturalism merely reinforces the cement by integrating into the state a host of *competing intolerances*.

Secularism does not mean forcing atheism down people's throats. It does not require a commitment to *any* metaphysical doctrine. It implies that public institutions should be, as far as possible, *neutral* on religious subjects.

It means that the old link between Christianity and the State should be broken, and *not* replaced with *any* state sponsorship of *any* religion. The rights of the non-religious, often forgotten by multi-culturalists, should also be affirmed.

While not in itself a solution to racism, secularism is part of the fight against it, and offers the left a clear and coherent *mobilising* principle.

The word "secular" tends to evoke the *Thinker's Library*, Charles Bradlaugh, and the South Place Ethical Society. Yet recent debates on education show that the issue is far from dead.

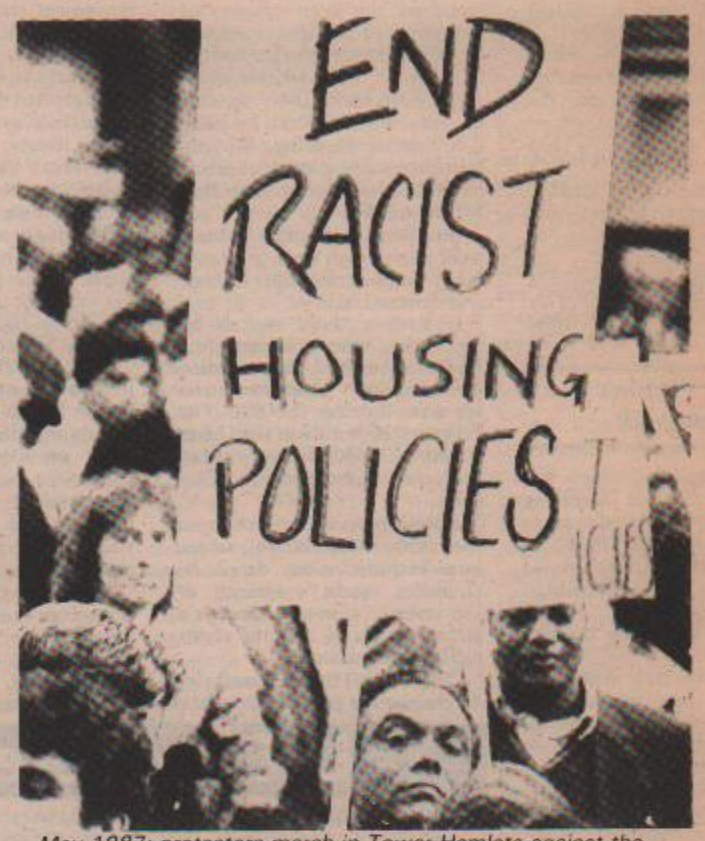
In France and Belgium, the secular state principle is a basic value which unites the Left. In France, the main teachers' union, the FEN, is the bastion of secularism against clerical power.

The time has come for the British left to consider initiating a campaign for the complete secularisation of the state.



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

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



May 1987: protestors march in Tower Hamlets against the Liberal Council's evictions of Bengali families. The "Christian" state turns racist as soon as it is challenged.

ABORTION RIGHTS IN CANADA
Women's struggle increases pro-choice support

Briefing **spoke to BARRY WEISLEDER of the Canadian Alliance for Socialist Action about the renewed struggle for abortion rights in Canada.**

What is the medical and legal situation in Canada? How easy is it to obtain an abortion?
Existing legislation at the federal government level requires that any woman seeking an abortion receive the approval of a Therapeutic Abortion Committee (TAC) consisting of three doctors attached to a hospital.

Danger to the health of the woman constitutes the basis for approval, not a woman's right to choose.

But the biggest problem arises from the fact that the majority of public hospitals do not have TACs (no religiously affiliated hospitals do), and whole regions of the country, even one or two entire provinces, lack any hospital with a TAC.

Cutbacks in healthcare expenditure by both federal and provincial governments have made worse what was already inadequate access, forcing women who want an abortion (and who can afford it) to travel to the United States, and risk further delay because of the backlog of applicants there.

The compromise made by the federal government with the anti-choice forces when it amended the Criminal Code in the early 1970s and established the existing procedures just isn't working. Over the last four years women have been fighting back by challenging the existing law and demanding its removal.

How has the movement challenged the law, and what have anti-abortion forces done to attack the pro-choice movement?
Doctor Henry Morgentaler has played a leading role in challenging the unjust law. He established clinics for women needing abortions in the 70s in Quebec. He was prosecuted and even jailed by the authorities for performing "illegal abortions" despite the fact that he was acquitted three times in jury trials.

The nationalist Parti Quebecois provincial government in the late 70s and early 80s decided to prosecute no further, but with the return of the rightist Liberals in recent years abortion clinics are again in jeopardy in Quebec.

Meanwhile, a little over four years ago, Morgentaler decided to step up his challenge to the anti-woman law by establishing a clinic in Toronto. The clinic was picketted nearly constantly by religious and ultra-right "pro-life" fanatics.

The Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics responded with massive pro-choice demonstrations, educational activities that reached out to the labour movement as well as feminist and community organisations, and the setting up of an escort service to protect patients at the clinic from harassment by pickets and police.

Morgentaler also established an abortion clinic in Winnipeg, Manitoba, hoping that the government in that province — run by the New Democratic Party (a labour-based, social democratic party) — would honour its abortion rights policy and leave the clinic alone.

Alas, the NDP put bourgeois law above women's needs, and sent the police to raid the clinic, confiscate valuable equipment, and lay charges against the staff. The clinic was shut down.

Back in Toronto, the Ontario government ordered the police to carry out a raid too, and although Morgentaler went to trial again, the clinic reopened with massive public support, including funds donated to replace confiscated equipment.

Again, Morgentaler was acquitted by jury on the basis of the Common Law "defence of necessity" (i.e. it is permissable to break a law if in so doing one is protecting the life or health of another). But the Ontario government sought and was granted the right to a new trial by a higher court.

Morgentaler's lawyer has gone to the Supreme Court of Canada to overturn the new trial order. We are now awaiting the Court's decision.

There are now two abortion clinics in Toronto, along with several in Quebec province. An abortion rights coalition in Vancouver is also planning to open a clinic.

But every working day the anti-choice forces are picketing clinics, petitioning to outlaw all abortions, and conducting their patriarchal propaganda in churches, religious schools, and the media.

These well-funded religious fanatics (supported particularly by Catholic, Baptist, and Evangelical churches) hold anti-choice marches on Mothers' Day and have established supposedly-independent "advice centres" to trap distressed women seeking information and pressure them to proceed with pregnancies they do not want or cannot cope with.

The fanatics also campaign against public sex education and access for youth to contraceptive devices.

Where there are public hospitals with TACs that approve and perform abortions, the anti-choice forces try to contest hospital board elections by signing up as community members and fielding slates of candidates.

Such hotly contested hospital board elections have drawn thousands of pro- and anti-choice supporters to packed arenas and meeting halls, where the result can go in either direction. Recent elections and city-wide referenda on this issue have generally gone in favour of a woman's right to choose.

What is the composition of the abortion rights movement? How easy has it been to get labour movement support?
There are two wings to the movement. The mass action wing is by far the most dynamic. It is working to broaden and co-ordinate the movement across the country, and not surprisingly it is led by socialist feminists and attracting young feminist activists to the cause.

The bourgeois feminist component prefers more bureaucratic channels, like lobbying members of Parliament, presenting briefs to Parliamentary committees, and holding celebrity fund-raising activities.

There is some co-operation between these wings of the movement, but the socialist feminists played the decisive role in building the simultaneous actions held on October 18th 1987 in Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Quebec City, and Newfoundland demanding repeal of the federal abortion code, the legalisation of freestanding abortion clinics, and the dropping of all charges against clinic doctors and staff.

Slogans at the Quebec action included: *Maternity is a choice, Abortion a right; Neither judge, nor pope, nor doctor — it is for women to decide; For a network of day care centres, everywhere and free.*

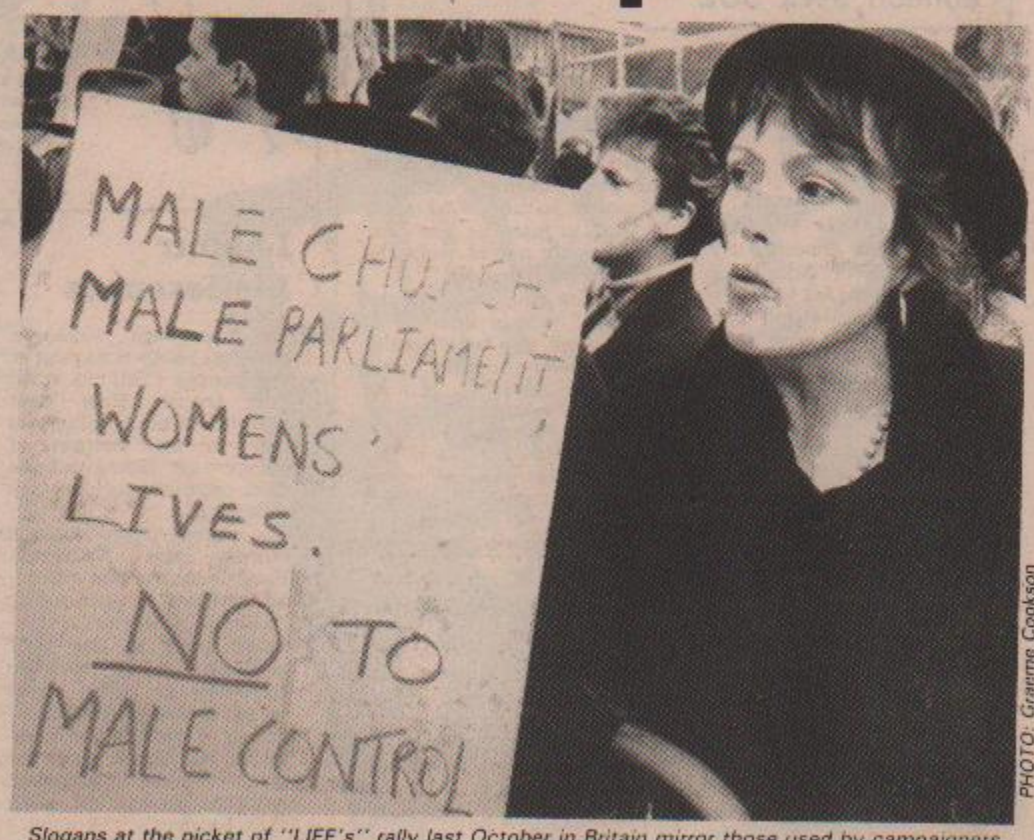


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Slogans at the picket of "LIFE's" rally last October in Britain mirror those used by campaigners in Canada.

There is very broad support in the labour movement for women's right to choose abortion following some hard fought battles over the past two decades at labour conventions.

Prominent union figures often speak out at abortion rights rallies and conferences. Unions contribute funds to pay for publicity, badges and the like.

Sometimes they mail out movement literature to members and publish articles and interviews with activists in union publications, usually prompted by women's rights committees inside individual national unions and union federation structures.

Unfortunately, however, neither the union nor the NDP leaderships mobilise their members to participate in the main events of the movement, much less to strengthen its structures and organisations.

But as the abortion rights struggle across the Canadian state approaches a turning point, stimulated by the challenge posed by the clinics to the unjust law, the opportunity to mobilise the pro-choice majority of Canadians and Quebecois against an unpopular Tory federal government will be greater than ever.

USA

'Gag Rule' on abortion

In his annual State of the Union address delivered to Congress in January, Ronald Reagan declared: "*Let us unite as a nation and protect the unborn.*"

By Mike Marqusee
Haringey Labour Briefing

Harking back to one of his favourite themes, and paying a debt to one of the richest and best-organised of the right wing lobbies which sent him on his way to the White House in 1980, the increasingly isolated President has introduced new regulations that will prohibit government-funded family planning clinics from even *mentioning* abortion.

The restrictions will hit 4,000 clinics and 4.3 million patients a year.

Under the new rules, which went into effect on March 3, a pregnant woman visiting a clinic in receipt of federal government funds can be counselled *only* on "*the prenatal care and social services she needs for a healthy pregnancy*". Even where a woman suffers from a medical condition that makes pregnancy hazardous or potentially lethal, the clinic cannot advise about abortion.

The American Civil Liberties Union has condemned the new rule, which it says will "*turn a public health programme into an ideological arm of the present administration*".

Women across the country are organising protests. But which of the Presidential candidates will have the nerve to come out for a woman's right to choose?

Speculum: a Midwife's Musings

If the cap fits, who's going to wear it?

Help! I've been rumbled by Sister Plume!

As a junior student nurse, I remember quaking in my duty shoes when her footfall was heard outside the Ward doors.

Were the beds straight? Were the patients arranged symmetrically on their pillows? Were the sheets turned down exactly one foot over the counterpanes?

Were the lockers placed at exactly the same position by each of the beds? Were the bedwheels kicked inwards?

It didn't matter if anyone was in pain, or needed nursing attention. As long as everything was in apple-pie order, Sister was happy.

Still, she didn't give me too bad a report: "Nurse Kewley can, on occasions, work well, but is inclined to be over-familiar with the patients."

Okay, Sister Plume (I still can't bring myself to call her Angela): let's venture into the delights of Family Planning, as you suggest.

Since we recently had a look at the cervix, the diaphragm, or cap, as it's commonly described, is a good method to start with.

I use a cap myself. I'm dead against the pill, the IUCD, Depo-Provera, and daft things like C-Film, and strongly in favour of barrier methods of contraception.

I'll go more deeply into my reasons for this next time; suffice it to say that apart from natural Family Planning (Billings, Breastfeeding, and the Rhythm Method) I regard the cap as quite a good friend.

In some ways I prefer the sheath (less messy afterwards, right, sisters?) but sometimes I don't mind bunging the cap in.

Last August I went on a Midwifery Refresher Course, a statutory requirement for midwives, in Liverpool. I drove up with Joanna and Jimmy in the back seat and a pregnant midwifery friend, Akwele, next to me.

Akwele spent the journey swallowing Marzine for her

By Tess Kewley
SRN, SCM

morning (all day) sickness, and Joanna and Jimmy spent the journey escaping from their safety car seats, and making remarks like "I need to do *bigs*" (while I was doing 80mph on the M6) and "Oh, poor Jimmy. He's done some sick" (while I was doing 80mph on the M62).

Somehow we arrived in one piece, and I began my refresher course. I soon made friends with the other rebellious radicals, including a Black midwife aged about 60, whose speciality was Family Planning. Sylvia gave me a lot of good tips about the cap. Here they are:

- Change your cap every year, or more often if it looks worn out.
- Get re-fitted if your weight alters 5lb or more.
- Spermicide *isn't* essential. Lots of women are allergic to spermicide, and I read only last month that there may be a link between cervical cancer and spermicides.
- Leaving the cap in place for six hours after making love *is* essential.
- Use the cap *every time* you make love. This is, or should be, obvious!
- *Inserting the cap:* Squat like you're going to put a tampon in; grab the device firmly, squeezing it in the middle. Put it in (dome-side up) with the aid of a little KY Jelly, if necessary. Gunge some KY round the entrance to your vagina, wash your hands, dry them, then insert the cap. It usually slips in easily once half of it's inside.
- Checking it's in the right place is only necessary the first few times you use it. In fact, it's nigh-on impossible to put it in the wrong place. You can't "lose" the cap inside yourself.

PS: My friend Maureen and her partner had used Durex for ten years. Finally, he rebelled. Maureen was forced to get a cap fitted.

After ten years of mess-free sex, Maureen was *not* enamoured of the cap, which has to be the messiest of contraceptives, particularly when used with spermicide.

She was telling me that she found the whole business rather distasteful: "Christ, you don't know whether you're going to do it or not, and you have to put three lines of cream on the inside, and all round the circumference, and then the stupid thing slips out of your hand and flies across the bathroom."

I replied: "Well, you don't have to use cream — use pessaries instead, they're not so messy — or don't use anything with it. And put it in every night when you're going to bed, just *in case* you have intercourse."

Maureen retorted: "Listen mate, if I go to all the trouble of putting that bloody thing in, I make fucking *sure* I have intercourse."

PPS: *Briefing* won't publish my article about bingo. I've already collected seven thousand signatures in protest. Don't let the patrician bastards get away with it. Get the following resolution passed at your trade union branch, Women's Section, etc:

"This ..... deplores the attitude of the *Briefing* Editoral Board in refusing to publish Tess Kewley's important article about bingo and calls upon them to publish it in full without delay."

Letters

WRITEBACK!

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

Some readers just have no sense of humour - Ed.

Dear *Briefing*,

We invited Mike M. round for a vegetarian mince pie and cream the other day. Sarah remarked that she felt as dead as a parrott after Mandy's New Year's Eve party. Just then, Tess rushed in with a month's supply of yoghurt and a *Guardian*-style editorial.

We asked ourselves: has *Briefing* finally cracked up? Has counting all those used stamps driven Jenny round the bend? Has the shock of using up the office's supply of exclamation marks become too much for Chris and Graham?

No, we decided, *Briefing* has cracked under the strain of having to fit so many articles on each page (roughly seven times as many as *Socialist Worker* and 15 times as many as *The Next Step*) — it's moved from the raving to the ridiculous.

Come on comrades, put the "Boring" back in *Briefing*! If things don't get better, we're going on holiday to Cuba with a tree frog.

Yours in struggle,
Brighton Hyperactivists
Anonymous

PS: Where was issue 56's report on traffic congestion in Haringey? Has the centre of the world moved north?

Get the sums right *Briefing*!

Dear *Briefing*,

I know you are rushed but when people write articles and choose their own headlines they do it for a purpose.

Anyone involved in FAB or even alive to the Parliamentary debates would know that 55 MPs were not *absent* for the Alton Bill as your "55 Labour absentees" headline (*Briefing* no. 57) implied! Thirty Labour MPs voted for David Alton's Bill. The rest abstained or were absent.

I would like you to print an apology as your headline makes both *Briefing* and me look idiotic.

Valerie Coultas
London SW8

Briefing apologises for the error Valerie describes.

FAB reports

SWINDON

Swindon FAB organised a day's activity recently in the town centre. Thirty-five people handed out leaflets and collected 1,250 signatures to a petition directed at the local Tory MP.

The MP has stated that unless the Bill is amended to a time limit of 24 weeks he will vote against the Third Reading.

The leaflet handed out called on people to deluge Walworth Road with the demand that they impose a three line whip on Labour MPs, and called upon trade unionists to pressure their particular union into imposing discipline on sponsored MPs. A resolution in favour of the whip was pased at the Labour Party GC.

FAB will be organising a lobby of the MP's surgery before the March 19th demonstration. Details can be obtained from Swindon 46816.

Birmingham

In Birmingham, the mobilisation against Alton has been very big. A well-organised campaign was launched last year, when the inaugural meeting of Birmingham FAB was attended by at least 100 people full of enthusiasm and determination to defeat the Bill.

We took our ideas out onto the streets of the city centre, where we have petitioned shoppers every Saturday finding an overwhelming response in our favour on the issue of abortion.

As its first major event the FAB group organised a picket of Dame Jill Knight's (rabid right wing moralist) surgery. The turnout was so big that the event developed into a spontaneous march, where FAB supporters took over the main roads, and the startled police just stood by!

We are now planning pickets of the surgeries of Labour MPs Roy Hattersley and Denis Howell — prominent members of the Party who were "absent" on the day of the Second Reading of Alton's Bill.

When Alton came to Birmingham, FAB picketed WH Smiths where he was signing copies of his new book, and argued our case with great force with the man himself inside the shop.

The same evening, when we picketed his rally at the Town Hall, some 400 people turned out to demonstrate their opposition to the Bill — and another, even bigger, spontaneous march through the city centre took place.

Some women from Birmingham FAB managed to get inside the rally and unfurl our banner across the Town Hall balcony — a brilliant photo opportunity that certainly enraged the bigots in the audience!

Our local demonstration on January 16th was a major event — especially because groups from all over the West Midlands region journeyed into Birmingham in large numbers to make the day a huge success.

The demo brought women's groups, trade union branches, Constituency Labour Parties, local Councillors and MPs, student groups and many others together, showing how widespread the opposition to Alton really is.

FAB groups across the West Midlands organised people to get down to the national lobby of Parliament, and we're getting ready in Birmingham for the *big one* on March 19th by fundraising like mad — holding socials and speaking to as many groups as possible, spreading FAB's message and begging for financial help, so that we can take loads of subsidised coaches down to London for the demo.

See you there! *Katrina Holyoak, Birmingham FAB*

Leamington FAB:
Public meeting, March 17th, 8pm, Oddfellows Hall, Warwick St, Leamington. Speaker: Leonora LLoyd (NAC).
Coaches to March 19th demo: 9.30am, Coventry Poly; 10am, Leamington Pump Rooms.

Periscope



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

Labour Listlessness

"For the first time, a political party is saying to the people 'Tell us what *you* think. How best should Labour play its role in the Britain of tomorrow?' Now you have that opportunity; we are listening."

With these portentious words, the Walworth Road machine has rumbled into action, sending its "Labour Listens" campaign pack to the poor souls in the CLPs who are expected to make some sense of this garbage.

"These are some of the questions we think are the ones we need to answer" says the broadsheet, with that economy and clarity of phrasing customary to Peter Mandelson's productions.

Briefing supporters will be pleased to know that, contrary to rumour, there is no hidden agenda behind "Labour Listens" and the policy review. For example, under the heading "A Productive Economy", we are asked "how can we ensure that our companies and industries are fully competitive with those overseas?" "How do we create the best partnership of managers and workers in industry?" "Should some be owned by a partnership of public and private?"

And when did you stop beating your wife, sir?

In Other Words...

"As a caring Council we are prepared to listen to the views of our community and to use them in the process of refining options available for consideration before final decisions are taken."

Haringey Council Deputy Leader Philip Jones explaining how public pressure prevented the right-wing dominated Labour Group from carrying out its plans to close four libraries.

Gutter-Press Guardian

No, the ever-respectable *Guardian* did not join in the nauseating Fleet Street scramble to have a go at witch-hunted *Briefing* supporter Mandy Mudd — at first.

But when Norman Tebbit sent a Yorkshire critic of his anti-ILEA stance the notorious clipping from the *Sun*, the self-regarding *Guardian* saw fit to publish on its front page extensive quotations from News International's prose poetry on the subject of Mandy's body.

A clever way to sneak a bit of sexist drivel — and have a go at the left at the same time!

The *Guardian's* recent facelift has done little to disguise its steady march to the right. Its use of the *Sun* story was another example of how easily it drops its high moral tone whenever the left is under discussion.

Great Out-takes from the Typing Pool

An inadvertant transposition of letters — weeded out by our intrepid proof-reader — only just saved *Briefing* from discussing an article written by David Edgar in *Marxism "Toady"*

It was a mistake... honest...

Will TGWU left get right on yet?

The swing to the left in the TGWU will undoubtedly provide some progressive results.

Perhaps they could start with the *Record*, the union's paper.

February's edition reports on a member playing American Football — a tough sport, you will agree.

"It's certainly not a game for poofs," he comments.





Coming down firmly on both sides of the fence

Briefing readers who know about the Independent Labour Party (yes, it does still exist) and who remember its fervent welcoming of the formation of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC) and then its rapid disenchantment and final withdrawal; its support for one member, one vote; and its habit of not so much sitting on the fence as jumping frenetically from side to side like a demented hurdler, will not be surprised by the moves of its lone MP, Harry Barnes.

After seven months as the only member of the ILP Group in Parliament, he was faced with the dilemma of joining either the Tribune or Campaign Groups. In a letter to all members of the Groups, in which he heaped criticism on both, he announces his decision... you've guessed it, to join both groups.

At least, unlike two members of the Campaign Group, he did not vote against the Alton Bill

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Building Briefing

CONTACT BRIEFING

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Briefing Editorial Board:
Next meetings: Friday March 11th.
Deadline for articles:
Issue no. 59 (out March 23rd): notify EB as soon as possible, all articles in by Tuesday March 15th.
Issue no. 60 (out April 13th): notify EB as soon as possible, all articles in by Tuesday April 5th.

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It is very expensive to produce a socialist newspaper — despite our high sales up and down the country, we still need a subsidy to keep the paper fortnightly and keep up with all the activities we want to be part of. We have no rich backers, no hidden sources of income.
The *Briefing* 500 Club exists to offer our supporters the opportunity of making a small regular donation and enter a fortnightly draw for a £25 prize — this for just £1 per week, or £4 per month. Will you spare the cost of a pint of beer of less than a packet of cigarettes each week? We can't guarantee you'll win the prize — but we will guarantee that unless you enter, you won't!
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This week's winner

Back to the low number for this week's winner — congratulations to no. 15, Tracey Doyle of... yes, you've guessed... Haringey!

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.



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US Imperialism in the 1990s

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Labour Briefing

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Yes, the event you've all been waiting for. Never mind the Socialist Conference, the NHS, or even the Labour Party Annual Conference in Blackpool. The Labour Briefing AGM will be held on Saturday July 2nd, in London.

Workshops, reports, debates, a rally and a social are planned — so mark your diaries now and start organising to ensure that *Briefing* supporters from every part of the country attend.

Details of planned events — and arrangements for transport and accommodation — will be announced soon.

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BOOK REVIEW

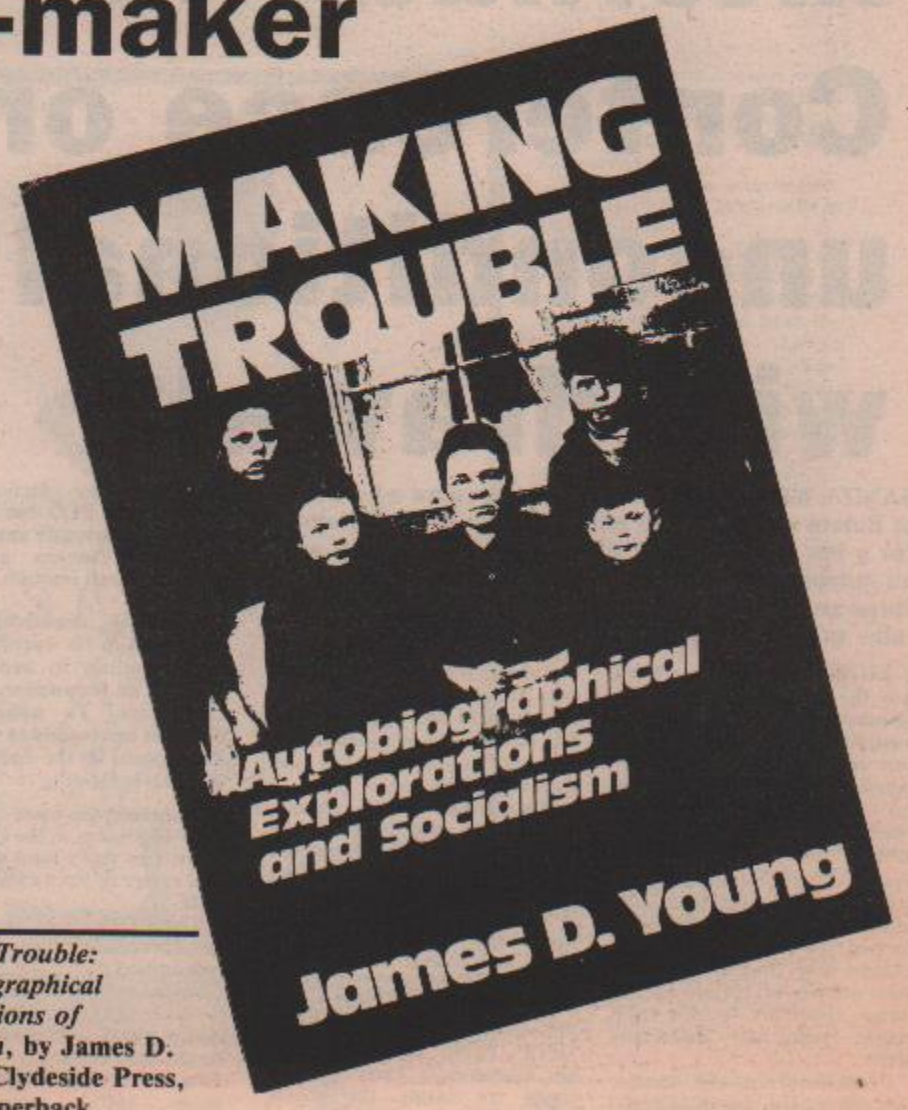
Confessions of a trouble-maker

***Making Trouble* is a refreshing exercise in socialist heterodoxy.**

James D. Young, historian, academic, socialist, "an internationalist who speaks in a Scottish idiom" has mixed autobiography, essay, political polemic, and history to provocative effect.

His ruminations range far and wide: his childhood in Grangemouth, his education at Dalkeith and Ruskin College under Edwin Muir and G.D.H. Cole, involvement with Tony Cliff and the *Socialist Review* crowd in London in the '50s, the contradictions of contemporary Poland, Palestine, the USA, and, above all, Scotland, which he describes as "the unknown country" — unknown to itself as well as to the world at large.

By M. Marqusee
Haringey Labour Briefing



***Making Trouble: Autobiographical Explorations of Socialism*, by James D. Young, Clydeside Press, £4.20 paperback.**

As a long-time student of working-class struggle, and a champion of oral history, he has come to identify himself with the libertarian socialism of C.L.R. James — the "Promethean socialism-from-below" which he counterposes to the sterile and often repressive "socialism from above" with which, he believes, not only Stalinists but the British left as a whole are besotted.

In particular, he hammers away at the left's historic failure to come to grips with questions of national, ethnic, and sexual identity. His observations on the contradiction between the economic radicalism of the Scottish working-class and its social conservatism are particularly acute. He offers no ready-made solutions, but at the same time he refuses to drift into fashionable despair or eurocommunist jargon.

Not all Young's political conclusions will be shared by *Briefing* readers, but the seriousness and personal honesty with which he tackles thorny problems is admirable. His strictures on puritanical Leninists "in love with a humanity as yet unborn" will enrage some *Briefing* supporters, but the characterisation is just too close to the bone to be dismissed.

Much of the book is about Young himself, but his modesty and sheer undimmable fascination with other people of all shapes and sizes leads him into numerous fascinating byways, recounting "experiences and enounters" in which "the dialectic of pessimism and optimism are inseparable."

In contrast to the lugubrious Jeremy Seabrook, Young insists on finding signs of hope in the daily class struggles of the working-class to survive in an era of "sloth and reaction". This account of his personal odyssey, convoluted, stubborn, eccentric as it will seem to many, shows that it is more than possible to advance through life with both an open mind and a commitment to socialist principles.

Television review

Yes, it did *really* happen!

***Conspirary — the trial of the Chicago Eight*, directed by Jeremy Kagon, Channel 4.**

A black man is bound and gagged for demanding the right to defend himself. A defendant's daughter is slapped by a policeman in open court.

A defence lawyer is sentenced to four years for contempt. It would take a tragicomic genius to make up the bizarre proceedings of the trial of the Chicago Eight for an alleged conspiracy to cause riots at the 1968 Democratic Party Convention.

By A.K. DUCK

Director Jeremy Kagan had a rich source — the trial transcripts and interviews with the participants recorded twenty years later — and has turned it into an entertaining and useful exercise in televised historical reconstruction.

For both the prosecution and defence, this was a "show trial" in every sense. Day in, day out, a symbolic as well as legal battle was being fought out in the Chicago courtroom, in which Judge Julius Hoffman: "Julie baby" to the defendents) played the irascible, bigotted, perpetually outraged defender of a corrupt *status quo* with matchless conviction.

The antic posturing of the defendants — by turns infantile, provocative, moralistic, self-defeating, courageous, bold, imaginative, and hilarious — could not be recommended as a strategy to all political prisoners, but, looking back, it might well have been the only way to respond to such a ludicrous charge sheet.

Make no mistake. Underlying the surreal theatricality of the courtroom proceedings was a profound political conflict. The US state, for its part, certainly understood the gravity of the threat posed by the opposition. Prison sentences of over five years were handed out to many of the defendants (later reversed on appeal), murderous attacks were being mounted by police against Black Panthers, and a massive FBI programme of surveillance and harassment (COINTELPRO) was underway.

The televised reconstruction of the trial failed to indicate the savagery of this repression, and glossed over some of the splits amongst the defendants. But what dialogue! And what a cast of characters!

- Abbie Hoffman, a master of one-line-put-downs and put-ons (still crazy, and still fighting, twenty years on);
- Bobby Seale, intransigent in asserting his constitutional rights (now a sad shadow of his former revolutionary self);
- Attorney Bill Kunster, perpetually astonished that justice could be so perverted in an American courtroom (still taking up apparently hopeless cases, and sometimes winning);
- Dave Dellinger, radical pacifist, the oldest and most politically committed of the Eight (still doing today what he was doing in '68 — making the links between social injustice and militarism);
- The moralistic all-American boys Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis (now gone their separate ways, one into mainstream, opportunist politics, the other into religious charlatancy);
- and the preposterous Jerry Rubin (now an investment counsellor).

Many comrades who watched "Conspiracy" on Channel 4 asked, was it all really true? Did *that* actually happen?

For all its faults, Kagan's film reminds us that it *did* happen — and that at times of intense social crisis (as in the USA in 1968/69) the real can turn surreal without help from writers or directors.

□□□□□□□□□□□

INTERVIEW: Eyewitness account from Palestine:

International Conference or unconditional withdrawal?



In the camps: defiant!

SAMIA KHALIL is a Palestinian woman who lives in Balata refugee camp and recently visited Britain for a few weeks. Politically she describes herself as an independent who supports those factions trying to forge an alternative leadership to Arafat. Here she talks to *Labour Briefing* about the uprising.

It has been widely recognised that the uprising started as a spontaneous explosion of the frustration and anger built up over the past 20 years of occupation. To what extent has any political organisation emerged to provide it with a lead?

Yes, it started spontaneously; but we soon developed a local leadership. Local groups were formed to represent camps, villages and towns — though they are based mainly in the camps. They are formed from people who are politically active.

Particularly in the camps, they played the role of organising the uprising day by day. For instance, they would tell the youth where to go and what to do; set the agenda for what we were going to do today or tommorrow — maybe strikes, maybe demonstrations... these sorts of things.

They also organised food, material support and medical aid to come to the camps, and they were very successful.

The local committees were comprised of people from different factions, both those within the PLO at the moment and those outside it. This is very important, because these people were suffering the same conditions in the camps from the Israeli troops — and that is why they united in such a strong way against the Israelis.

Medical

Then we have the Medical Relief Committees, which have also been playing a very important role. They have been arranging visits to the camps — even under curfew — and tending to people reluctant to face the harassment being meted out by the military in the hospitals. They have also been handing out first aid kits in the camps and teaching people how to use them.

I think they have been very succcessful in their work because many medical professionals gathered round these Medical Relief Committees and were working from early morning till late at night.

Our Women's Committees have also been a central part of the uprising. Organised along factional lines (like our trade unions, student committees and youth committees), they have worked in unity, collecting food and money to be distributed through the local committees in the villages and camps.

They were also having a very important role in the uprising as women, organising demonstrations and strikes and this sort of thing.

The trade unions have also, of course, been very active during the uprising. In fact all our institutions and organisations within the Occupied Territories have been playing a very good role within the mass movement.

I mean, it really is a mass movement. It is the longest uprising since 1936, and you can feel that everybody is participating. We have reached the stage where we can say that everybody is a politician — not only those who are politically organised in the uprising. The fact is the uprising started from the mass movement and the leadership followed.

Apart from the local committees and the co-ordinated work carried out by the Women's Groups, etc., there has also been formed what is called the United Leadership of the Uprising, which I think you have heard about here. This consists basically of the four "mainstream" Palestinian organisations: the PFLP, DFLP, Fatah mainstream and the Communist Party. All of them are inside the PLO, though some of them co-ordinate and work with factions outside the PLO.

Of course this United Leadership was connected to the United Leadership outside, in the sort of dialectical relationship that has always operated between the political leadership inside and outside the Occupied Territories.

Leadership

The United Leadership has put out leaflets which basically gave co-ordination to the strikes and demonstrations and so on. Everybody followed what the leaflets said, because they had reached the point at which they would sacrifice anything for the uprising to continue.

At first there were some problems, however, because certain factions in the United Leadership put out leaflets without consulting the others. The result was that sometimes you had a leaflet that asked you to have a strike for three days, and then on the third or fourth day another leaflet would ask you to strike for another three days.

That weakened the uprising in some way, because you have to give people one or two days — not days off, but you have to let people do other things because the uprising is always there.

So, for example, the first leaflet everybody followed. But the second one, some of the people did, some not. The drivers, for example, did not. They went to work. So it was on and off. Sometimes it used to work, sometimes not.

That happened during the first few weeks of the uprising; but then the local committees and the United leadership started working together better. They started, for instance, to instruct the shopkeepers to strike for this period and then open up for 8-11am, and so on. That way there was united action taken, but the shopkeepers could still earn a little and the people knew at what time they could buy food, and so on. This has been working very effectively.

You talk about groups within the PLO and those outside it. What do you mean by groups outside the PLO?

I mean those factions that don't accept the present PLO stand and don't accept unity with Arafat's line which they consider a diversion from the real struggle. These factions are fighting for a PLO that takes as its basis the struggle against imperialism, Zionism and the forces of Arab reaction.

The PLO leadership has responded to the uprising more or less entirely by stepping up calls for an International Peace Conference. To what extent does this correspond to what the Palestinians in the uprising see themselves fighting for?

The uprising has made clear that the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories don't want any solution except to have a Palestinian state.

This means they are against the Jordanian-Palestinian confederation; against "autonomy"; against the "Village Leagues" (a stooge village-based leadership which Israel unsuccessfully tried to foist on the Palestinians a few years ago); against the American plan; against all these solutions that do not give the Palestinians anything.

What they want now is Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories.

The Palestinians in the Occupied Territories feel stronger than ever and we will go on asserting our rights to freedom and an independent state. Therefore, any solution that does not take into account the right of the Palestinians to return to their homeland, their right to freedom and the creation of their independent state on the Palestinians' soil will surely fail.

That is the general feeling of the mass movement behind the uprising.

As for what the PLO is asking for, the political groups differ in how they see this. Those factions within the PLO are asking for an International Peace Conference because they feel people are struggling, and this struggle is going to lead to something — and that something is the International Peace Conference that the PLO has been asking for.

This solution is accepted by the people who are followers of these political lines. I think in the main they accept it because it is the PLO demand; they do not know of other solutions. They feel they must accept it to achieve a Palestinian State.

Opposition

Those factions presently outside the PLO are in opposition to the main direction being taken by it, specifically to the International Peace Conference, because they feel that this would give the Palestinians nothing except the recognition of Israel by the PLO, by the rest of the Arab states, and by everybody.

They think there is no point for us to have a conference with Israel in the present world balance of forces. A conference should be between people who are on the same footing and equally strong in order to be fruitful. A conference between the oppressor and the oppressed can only benefit the oppressor.

The truth is that Israel is going more and more extreme. They even refuse to talk about the International Peace Conference because they will not accept the PLO as an independent body.

The Israeli Labour Party says that if they want to negotiate they will do so with those Palestinians in the Occupied Territories that support Jordan. That's the only way they envisage negotiations.

The factions opposed to the Peace Conference also say that if you ask for an International Peace Conference it means you have forgotten all about your ideology about the Zionist state, how Zionism was created, how the Israeli state was established, by whom, etc. — and you are going far away from the Palestinian charter that relates to the whole of Palestine.

What about Palestinians inside the Green Line? What solution will they have? Are they to be Israeli citizens? They don't accept this.

Those who favour an International Peace Conference do not go into these problems, nor that of the refugees who want to return.

The main issue is how we define Israel in terms of how we see Zionism. This is very important. These people, they have their followers.

On the one hand you have those in the PLO asking for an International Peace Conference where the PLO can sit as an independent body and talk with Israel, with the five members of the UN Security Council, including the Soviet Union and the US, present.

The others are asking for immediate withdrawal from the Occupied Territories with no preconditions. They see that as long as this uprising can go on, it can by itself exert pressure. In the end Israel will not have enough soldiers to stand on each door of the Palestinians who are revolting. So that is why they demand Israeli withdrawal with no preconditions.

Who are the main factions putting forward this demand?

They are the Fatah Uprising (the "rebels" who split from Arafat in 1983 following the invasion of Lebanon and Arafat's reunification with Egypt), the PFLP-General Command and the revolutionary Communist Party, which recently split from the traditional CP over support for armed struggle and rejection of a "two state solution".

In Britain, Neil Kinnock has just returned from a media-hyped visit to the Occupied Territories where he and his wife cried over children shot in the back and so on.

This done, he now comes out favouring the so-called Jordanian-Palestinian confederation "solution" — a position well to the right of the self-determination which David Mellor called for on his visit.

What sort of demands should Palestine supporters in Britain be campaigning around at that moment?

Maybe I can first thank him and his wife for the tears. But to be honest I was really shocked when I heard that after all this fuss there he is, asking for this Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, and for not giving the Golan Heights back to Syria.

This is really amazing; I really can't understand the mentality behind this thinking.

Maybe it's important to mention that the Israeli Labour Party take the same role as the Likud Party. They were the first to establish the settlements, and are harassing the Palestinians just as the Likud Party. I wonder how the British Labour Party copes with this.

The Israeli Labour Party are against the Palestians; they do not support them.

The role of the British Labour Party should be to talk about the Palestinian problem and to show what the Israeli Labour Party is really like — as racist as the Likud Party, so we don't see any difference between these two parties.

You obviously have a long way to go! We don't need anybody to cry, we don't want people to shed tears on us. This will not give us a solution!

If you feel bad about it, what is your answer to it? A Jordanian-Palestinian confederation? Is that a real answer to our problem? With all the present fighting, killing, Israeli brutality and so on, and all you propose is another occupation? That is not really accepted.

Moscow Trials

Clear Stalin's victims!

Last month the Soviet Supreme Court declared innocent all but one of the defendants in the 1938 Moscow Trial. The remaining defendant, Henry Yagoda, as the head of Stalin's secret police, had organised the earlier frame-ups of the leaders of the October Revolution.

We now have the situation that the "confessions" of Bukharin, Rykov, Rokovsky and others are admitted to have been faked, but men like Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek and Piatakov are still officially guilty of the most monstrous and fantastic crimes against the revolution they helped to lead.

Above all, there is no plan to clear the name of Leon Trotsky, the chief of those indicted at all of Stalin's Show Trials. (Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov were accused in their absence, and so are not classified as "defendants".)

The Soviet leaders, with all their talk of "glasnost", continue to avoid the issue of Trotsky's place in the history of the Revolution and of the USSR. Instead, in his seventieth anniversary speech last October, Mikhail Gorbachev repeated many of Stalin's old slanders against Trotsky — merely exchanging the lies of the 1930s for those of the 1920s.

The international labour movement must demand an end to this stance.

- Restore all these men to their rightful place in history!
- Republish their writings and make them available to the new generation of Soviet workers and intellectuals!
- Stop the destruction of the archives of the secret police and open them to public examination!

Public Meeting

Called by the

Moscow Trials Campaign

Clear the Names of Stalin's Victims!

Chair: Eric Heffer MP

Sunday, March 20th, 2.30pm

Kingsway Princeton College,
Sidmouth Street, London WC1

(Off Grays Inn Road, near Kings Cross)

Black Australians' one reason to celebrate:

We have survived!

White Australians are now celebrating the 200th anniversary of their settlement of that large and beautiful country.

But for one group of people in Australia, the original inhabitants themselves, there is nothing to celebrate.

They had lived in peace and prosperity, with a complex, rich civilisation, for over 60,000 years until white people from Britain arrived on their shores.

In fact, new evidence produced by sophisticated methods of genetic coding, presented in 1978 by two scientists attached to the Western Australia Museum, indicates that the Australian Aborigines lived there as long ago as 100,000 years or more.

The Aborigines had a highly developed culture based on a system of beliefs which white people called ***The Dreaming*** or ***Dreamtime***, although this is not an accurate translation.

This system of beliefs or religion was a world view which explained the creation of the land, rivers, mountains, forests, and all plant and animal life, including human beings.

To Aborigines the land is sacred. Unlike the European idea that land belongs to people, for Aborigines, people belong to the land. The idea of private property or land ownership in the British sense is alien to Aborigines.

Through the traditional stories passed from one generation to the next through story telling, art, dance and song, Aborigines learn how their spirit ancestors created the land and its people, animals and plants. They also learn how to live in harmony with nature and how to behave towards each other.

Aborigines conquered the harshest parts of the continent as well as the well-watered plains. They evolved complex and peaceful regional cultures through which they used the land without destroying it.

By using birth control, they maintained their population at a level that did not exceed the capacity of the land to supply their needs. They lived well and their health was good.

Before the British came there were some 500 Australian nations, many of which have now been wiped out, and an equivalent numbers of languages and dialects.

Each nation was made up of a number of clans. Each clan held their own land, and invited others to use their lands at the proper times.

Marriage interlocked the clans and set up links between nations, for marriage could not take place between men and women of the same clan. People lived within a vastly extended family.

A person could travel from one nation to another and immediately be assigned his or her proper place within the new community. The people traded along routes that stretched the length and breadth of the continent.

There were no families holding any hereditary rights of government or power over the rest of the population. There were no special castes or priests or centralised systems of authority. There was no social, political or economic inequality.

Since they believed that territorial boundaries had been laid down for all time by the Spirit Ancestors, there could be no wars or conquest.

In 1988 the government of Australia will be spending millions of dollars on "bicentennial" celebrations which ignored the fact that Aboriginal Australians have lived in the country for more than 1,000 centuries. The last two centuries have seen their massacre and murder, their land and people raped, and their traditional way of life destroyed.

When Aborigines dared to resist the invasion and occupation of their land they were shot "like dogs or kangaroos". Aboriginal women were raped, then speared. Aboriginal children were buried up to their necks in earth and competitions held by the British to see who could kick the heads furthest.

Aboriginal men were castrated and their scrotums made into tobacco pouches for the white "conquerors".



PHOTOS: Crispin Hughes/Photo Co-op

Whole clans and nations were killed by poisoned waterholes or strychnine-laced food that was left for starving Aborigines.

White Australia was founded on genocide, both official and unofficial.

So in 1988, while white Australians celebrate how in such short time they were able to arrive in Australia, take the land from the rightful "owners", kill many of them, and grow rich and prosperous, Aboriginal Australians do have one major reason for celebration. Despite all the cruelty and barbarism of the white invaders, they managed to survive. Not only did they survive in the physical sense, but also in the cultural and spiritual sense, as individuals and as people.

The Aboriginal Poster Exhibition We Have Survived! 200 years of Aboriginal Resistance in Australia 1788-1988 **was collected and researched by NATASHA SIVANANDAN, who also wrote the Exhibition Catalogue, to which this article is the introduction.**

Both the exhibition and the catalogue are available from Natasha at 14B Chardmore Road, London N16.

Botha's crackdown

Has fascism triumphed in South Africa?

The restrictions announced by the Botha regime on February 24th are certainly draconian.

Seventeen organisations including the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Azanian Peoples Organisation (AZAPO) are prohibited *"from carrying out or performing any activities or acts whatsoever."*

The giant Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is also prohibited from any political campaigning and restricted to a purely trade union role.

Since the February 24th measures, further repression has come from the enactment of laws to prohibit funding from abroad and large scale rallies and meetings.

What lies behind the new bans? Will they snuff out independent mass activity and consolidate a fascist regime?

The British government has tried to minimise the importance of the bans to try to deflect growing criticism of Thatcher's energetic campaign against international sanctions.

The bans were purely to do with electoral manoeuvres, their argument runs. Once the by-elections were over, the "reform" process would be resumed. However, this argument holds little water.

Certainly, the ruling National Party wanted to do well in the two by-elections. Continuing economic problems and the lack of success in the war in Angola were undermining government support.

But both seats are already held by the main right opposition Conservative Party, and only one is a marginal. Indeed, given the massive parliamentary majority enjoyed by the government, Botha has little to fear from such elections.

The municipal elections in October are the real concern. Over the past years the South African authorities and business world have been pumping funds into the townships to prepare the emergence of a new middle class black leadership without accountability to the masses. This is the cornerstone of the current reform phase.

The new restrictions are not contradictory with these

By Steve Potter
Norwood CLP

reforms. On the contrary, they are its precondition. The UDF has already organised a massively successful boycott of the tricameral parliament. The government feared they would do likewise with the local elections.

Discussions had also been taking place in UDF circles about possibly standing in the elections, under certain conditions. The new restrictions block either course of action.

However, the UDF was already critically weakened in most areas. In addition to the states of emergency of the past years, the terror unleashed by Inkatha vigilantes (particularly in Pietermaritzburg) has destroyed the street committees, people's courts, and other forms of popular organisation which emerged from the mass radicalisation of the townships.

The only mass organisation that has weathered the storm has been COSATU. In Petermaritzburg it has been COSATU patrols, armed only with warning flare pistols, which have taken on defence of the townships.

The UDF has learnt lessons from the democratic and accountable forms of organisation promoted by COSATU, trying to reorganise itself on similar lines.

But is has also resulted in a debate in COSATU. Some figures in the National Union of Mineworkers argue that the present situation resembles closely the emergence of fascism in Europe in the 1930s. Accordingly, they argue, COSATU should form "popular front" coalitions, allying itself to that section of the ruling class opposed to fascism.

Leaders of NUMSA, the metalworkers union, point on the other hand to the rise of industrial struggle against the government (nine million strike days in 1987 as opposed to one million in 1986, despite the cumulative effects of the state of emergency) as disproving the theory of fascist consolidation. Accordingly, the task of building a mass independent workers' movement remains central.

In relation to popular mobilisation, they argue that the basis of rebuilding resistance in the townships should be the workers' organisations. Alliances with other social classes should be subordinate to this worker leadership.

The government restrictions are obviously aimed at preventing COSATU assuming the mantle of the UDF. But its economic role is also being challenged.

Labour laws being introduced shortly will outlaw secondary industrial action and allow employers to recognise unions other than those recognised by the majority for negotiating purposes.

The laws, which owe more than a little to the British Tory government's industrial legislation, aim to open the way for Inkatha to spread their attacks on popular organisation from the townships onto the shopfloor.

However, COSATU has weathered the state of emergency. Its strong rank and file organisation has been able to function and throw up new layers of leaders to replace those detained or in hiding. It is tribute to this strength that the government has not felt able to outlaw the union movement as it has done before this century.

All the more reason, then, why we in this country must build the closest possible links between our labour movement and the black unions, demanding the lifting of the prohibitions on the popular organisations.

The Thatcher government has made it clear it will continue its intransigence against sanctions. For us, the demand that the workers' movement impose its own sanctions assumes even greater importance.

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS



'In South Africa BTR means *Blood, Tears, Repression*'

BTR plc (best known in Britain by its brand names like *Dunlop* and *Pretty Polly*) is presiding over the longest-running labour dispute in South African history, and has earned itself the title of *Worst Foreign Company in South Africa* from South Africa's trade union movement.

Over 900 black workers, sacked by BTR Sarmcol in May 1985 after a 2-day strike over BTR's refusal to grant basic trade union rights, continue to meet weekly to repeat their demand:

"BTR negotiate or get out of South Africa"

Despite two and a half years suffering, and despite many deaths by starvation and murderous vigilante attacks, *the dispute will continue indefinitely* for there is no other employment in the area. The sacked workers' union, NUMSA (a COSATU affiliate), is campaigning in Britain to build public pressure for a settlement.

We need your support!

For information, write to NUMSA campaign against BTR, 12 Manor Road Ext., Leicester LE2 4FF. Please enclose a donation, with cheques payable to Sarmcol Solidarity Fund.

LABOUR BRIEFING

Solidarity — the way to save the NHS!



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Health workers demonstrating on March 5th.

On March 14th, COHSE has called a national Day of Action against cuts in the health service.

Coming on the eve of Chancellor Nigel Lawson's new budget announcement, the 14th should be a chance to demonstrate the support for the NHS which exists right across the trade union and labour movement — and indeed throughout the whole working class.

Lawson is keen on a big round of tax cuts, intended to benefit the rich, and is certain to reject calls from Parliamentary committees for extra NHS expenditure. The class priorities of the Tory government could not be clearer — nor could the mass reaction against them.

But how do we transform that widespread anger into the political and industrial clout necessary to defeat the government?

By MARK SEATON

Periodic one-day action and Parliamentary stunts are not sufficient. They must be seen as a stepping stone toward all-out, prolonged strike action — led by health service workers, but backed by other workers in the public and private sectors expressing solidarity through organised industrial action.

An all-out strike in the NHS cannot mean simply shutting down the hospitals and hoping the Tories get the blame for the casualties. It means workers assuming real control over hospital and other health functions and establishing by grassroots democratic decisions the level of cover necessary to provide for emergencies.

It would require constant and ever escalating solidarity action by other workers — both symbolic and practical — to turn the funding crisis in the NHS into a political crisis for the Tories.

If we are to build that kind of radical, sustained mass movement in defence of the NHS, we must take on a number of immediate tasks now:

- **Vigorous local campaigns need to be organised to highlight specific cuts and closures and link them to our national demands for a fully-funded health service, free of charge and accessible to all.**
- **Use these campaigns to link Labour Party, community, and trade union activists with workers in the health service.**
- **Build united action by all NHS unions at local level, and foster contact and co-ordination between different trade union and occupational groups in the health service.**
- **Generate a constant flow of publicity, dramatising the effect of cuts and the actions taken against them, and demanding that DHAs, etc., tell the truth about the depth of the NHS crisis.**
- **Develop strategies of industrial action such as overtime bans, work to rules, boycotting work implementing cuts, closures, or transfers, and staging occupations and work-ins at facilities threatened with closure.**
- **Press the TUC to call a national Day of Action — a general strike — in defence of the NHS, and use this demand to raise the question of solidarity action in trade union branches, shops, executives, etc., up and down the country.**

To save the NHS will require a fullscale confrontation with the Tories — and mass defiance of Tory anti-union law which bans "secondary" strike action. Already shop stewards at Thorn-CMI in Manchester are threatened with legal action (and huge charges) for leading workers out on February 3rd.

This should not deter us. On the contrary, it is a clear sign that the Tories are threatened by resistance to NHS cuts. *They* know that the heart of that resistance is solidarity action by non-NHS workers.

***We* have to be guided by the same awareness — and foster it in practical activity from the bottom up.**

THE SOCIALIST CONFERENCE

SOLIDARITY RALLY

March 15th, 7.30pm

Finsbury Town Hall

(Rosebery Avenue, nearest tube Angel)

A small admission charge

Defend the Health Service
Support Workers in Struggle

Main Speaker:
Tony Benn

Chair:
Betty Heathfield

Other speakers include:

Pete Marshall, COHSE
Dover P&O striker
North London Advertiser striker
Jane Chalice (ILTA Chairperson)
Striking nurse
TV-AM striker
Solidarity Network (Janet Seymour)
Mandy Mudd, London Fights Back

Recent months have seen a rise in trade union struggle. Workers are resisting greater exploitation, victimisation and attacks on union organisation — health workers, Ford workers, Land Rover, and P&O Dover.

This is the third anniversary of the miners' strike — defeated through lack of support from the trade union and labour movement. Since then the print workers at Wapping, Silentnight, Hangers and other strikes have been isolated in the same way.

We have to ensure that these new struggles, with the health workers in the forefront, are not isolated. We must not allow Government or employers to pick us off one at a time. We must organise solidarity inside the Labour Party, the trade unions and in the community — in defence of the NHS and also in opposition to deportations and other attacks on democratic rights.

Organised by the **Chesterfield Socialist Conference** in conjunction with the **Solidarity Network.**