LABOUR
BRIEFING
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40p

FACE REALITY... TURN TO SOCIALISM!

GO LEFT INTO THE 1990s!

By TONY BENN MP

The leaderships of all the political parties in Britain seem to be moving ever closer together.

An informal coalition is developing around many policies evolved by the Conservatives over the last decade.

Indeed, some of the most articulate advocates of the values of Thatcherism are to be found in the upper echelons of the Labour Party; and some of Thatcher's most important collaborators are to be found amongst the trade union leadership, all justifying their stance on the grounds of "realism".

As a result, serious political discussion about other alternatives is being eliminated. Instead, we are treated to high levels of personal abuse amongst political opponents and hyped-up public relations competitions which often conceal an unspoken agreement about fundamentals.

Parliamentary democracy is in danger of being converted into a spectator sport, in which the voter is only allowed to observe the goings-on of the mighty, and listen to the predictions of the pollsters.

Those who stand up for what they believe in, if it differs from this restricted consensus, are dubbed as extremist, subversive or seditious, and are virtually excommunicated by the political establishment, which has the power to distort their message so as to make it virtually unintelligible to the public.

In one sense, we are moving towards a one-party state in which all the top people are huddled together, whilst the illusion of political choice is preserved by leaving open the question of which team of politicians is to be allowed to administer a virtually unchanged status quo.

This phenomenon is now characteristic of many capitalist societies, especially those in which the labour movement has been prepared to work entirely within the existing political institutions. These institutions were devised to suit the needs of an earlier century.

In Britain the collapse of the Labour leadership towards the right is justified in the name of "modernisation". However, it is plain to every thinking person that in endorsing market forces, embracing capitalism inside the EEC, tying ourselves even closer to an American-dominated NATO, and supporting the war in Ireland, Labour's much-vaunted re-think is actually a throw-back to the distant past.

Successive Labour leaders have followed this bipartisan prescription for a decade or more, with disastrous electoral results. Labour's present policy reviews are meeting with resistance inside the Party partly because we know that the "modernisers" are making little impact on the public, who seem to sense what is really going on.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Tony Benn addresses the London Benn-Heffer rally, September 23rd

If we are to recover the political initiative, we must begin putting across the case for socialism with clarity, sincerity and commitment.

That is exactly what we have been doing in the 1988 Leadership campaign — for the first time in many years — and the warmth of the response is an indication of the support for our ideas among millions of working people.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Campaign round-up

Big brother is...

Collecting the Poll Tax

Administering the Poll Tax will require draconian attacks on civil liberties.

The "Community Charge Registration Officer" (CCRO) is virtually outside any Local Authority control.

In compiling the Poll Tax register, the CCRO has access to data of all kinds, electoral register, DHSS, IRS, vehicle licences, library membership...

Of those identified as residing in a particular dwelling one (normally male) is designated as the "Responsible Person" and must supply the CCRO with the names of others in the dwelling and details about them including dates of birth.

Failure to respond "adequately" (in the eyes of the CCRO) will result in a £50 fine for a first offence, and £200 a month thereafter.

The fines are issued directly by the CCRO but the Local Authority is liable for collection and Councillors may be liable for surcharge if they refuse to take reasonable steps to recover debts, including arrestment of wages and seizure of property.

Denis Canavan is the first MP to be fined for non-registration and is challenging the penalty in the courts. Tens of thousands of others throughout Scotland are about to be fined for non-registration, which seems to have disrupted the publication of a complete register.

Once on a register, each individual must inform the CCRO of any changes of address. In effect, a national identity number system is being created to administer the Tax.

Overall administration costs of the Poll Tax are likely to be four times as high as rates.

If individuals refuse to pay, or simply don't have the funds they are liable to a 10% penalty and to pursuit by arrestment of wages, seizure and sale of property, and ultimately imprisonment. A Local Authority which fails to collect the Tax is also liable to surcharge.



PHOTO: Terry Conway

Scottish Labour Party Recall Conference on the Poll Tax. See report p. 6.

By Gordon Morgan Scottish Labour Briefing

A non-payment campaign must be waged in full knowledge of these penalties.

Effective action by local Authorities should start early. The CCRO should *not* be appointed; computers and other equipment should *not* be bought; staff and resources should *not* be allocated.

Unfortunately, all Scottish Authorities and many English Authorities have already set up Poll Tax collection machinery. NALGO should refuse to co-operate; job adverts should not be placed; posts should be boycotted.

A mass campaign of non-co-operation will make the Tax even more politically hazardous and hasten its repeal.

Labour, The Assembly, and the Poll Tax

Pamphlet from Labour Briefing Scotland, 60pp, available from: 39 Regent Park Square, Glasgow G41, 80p.

This new pamphlet from Labour Briefing Scotland is required reading for socialists both sides of the border.

It provides a gripping account of the development of politics in Scotland during the Thatcher years, focussing on the national question and the crises in both Labour and Tory camps in Scotland.

The case for a mass campaign of resistance to the Poll Tax is argued with power and clarity. The cost to Labour of acquiescense to the Tax is painted vividly.

Special bonuses: Craig Binns' wide-ranging account of previous attempts to levy poll taxes and resistance to them and James D. Young's considerations on Labour and the national question in Scotland.

London Against the Poll Tax

Day-school on civil disobedience and wrecking the register, Sunday October 16th, 10-5, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. October 24-28: Week of Action to welcome MPs back to the Commons and to remind them that they may have been able to bulldoze the Poll Tax through Parliament but that does not mean it has been accepted by the majority of people who will have to pay it. London Against the Poll Tax: 60b St George's Road, London SE1 6ET, 01-219 6566 (day) (also for information about the National Action Campaign).

Platform for the National Action Conference Against the Poll Tax

This platform has been adopted by the Socialist Conference Organising Committee and will provide the basis for the National Action Conference to be held in Newcastle on December 10th.

"We believe that the Poll Tax is aggressively regressive, a major threat to our civil liberties and the franchise, and further undermines the independence of local government. We recognise the need to examine alternatives to both the rates and the Poll Tax.

We believe that defeating the Poll Tax is essential for the defence of our liberties and we call for the broadest possible protest.

To this end we call on all those groups — local broad-based anti-Poll Tax groups and unions, tenants, labour movement bodies and trade unions at every level, churches, political parties and groups, voluntary organisations — and all individuals opposed to the Poll Tax to join together and support the National Action Conference on the Poll Tax in Newcastle.

We aim to gather together all these groups and individuals into a national network of resistance — to support each other, to exchange information and materials, to organise local and national demonstrations and lobbies.

We aim to unify and co-ordinate the various tactics of resistance and civil disobedience, from disruption of the register and payment, including mass non-payment, to public, trade union and civic non-co-operation."

CRC, Police seek ban on anti-racist march

Fightback in Dewsbury

According to police figures, racial "incidents" have increased 40% in Dewsbury since the start of the schools row.

The police answer to this escalation in violence is a call for the banning of the October 29th anti-racist march.

This march has been organised in an attempt to salvage Kirklees Council's anti-racist policy, after its disasterous capitulation to the white parents who refused to send their children to a mainly asian school.

The initial police justification for the ban was that the march was organised by "outsiders" — by which they meant Kirklees Black Workers Group. This would probably not be sufficient grounds for a ban, but the police have found new and unexpected allies.

North Kirklees Community Relations Council and its chair, Labour councillor George Speight, have joined in the call for the ban on the grounds that the march would disprupt shopping(!) and "do no good for race relations."

Nonetheless, the organisers are determined that the march will go ahead. It already has the backing of the NUT nationally and Huddersfield Labour Party, and a number of local anti-racist groups.

By Tim Riley Huddersfield

"No to racial segregation, Yes to anti-racist education"

March in Dewsbury, October 29th, 1.00pm

Assemble South Street, Savile Town, to Town Hall

Speakers: Bernie Grant MP, Ian Mark (NUT exec), Dewsbury and Batley Asian Parents Assn., Cllr. John Harman (invited)

West Yorkshire Campaign Against Plastic Bullets

March and Rally

Saturday October 8th
Assemble 11am, Standard Fireworks, Crossland Moor, Huddersfield
March to Mandela Corner in the town
Rally at 12.30pm
Contact: WYAPB, PO Box B20, Huddersfield, HD1 1XS

Labour Party Black Section

The Black Agenda
Published by Hansib, £3.00
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.....

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Enclosed with this form is the affiliation fee for 1988 (£12 for organisations; £6 for individuals, £3 unwaged).

In conformity with the requirements of the Data Protection Act, I hereby agree to the Socialist Conference keeping the above information on file.

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Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Their Conference and ours

This year's Labour Party Conference promises to be a distressing event for many Party members, attached as they are to the quaint notion that they should exercise some influence over the affairs of their own Party.

For a moment, perhaps, we should console ourselves with a vision of what Labour Party Conference *ought* to be...

•An annual democratic parliament of the whole labour movement, uniting its trade union and political wings, and recognised by all as its ultimate political authority.

•An assembly encompassing all the movement's organisations and all its strands of thought, in which issues are openly and honestly debated, and to which elected representatives and officials would have to account for all that they had done (or not done) in the previous year.

•An opportunity for women, black people and lesbians and gays and all those in struggle in Britain or abroad to place their experiences and demands before the whole movement.

•A beacon of solidarity with working and oppressed people everywhere, offering collective leadership for the struggle ahead.

We may seem further away from this vision than ever, but the Benn-Heffer challenge has ensured that it remains firmly on the agenda. The leadership contest has given us a hint of the size and strength of the socialist constituency — and the arguing and organising we need to do to mobilise it.

When our leaders turn up on telly to boast of the success of *their* conference, we should remember the struggle for *our* conference. As socialists, we have our work cut out, but (unlike others) we're building something to last.

Will the Real "Europeans" please stand up?

Is some kind of role reversal going on? Jacques Delors gets cheered at the TUC, while Thatcher lashes out at the very idea of united Europe. Suddenly, Labour looks more European than the Tories.

Thatcher's stridency masks a real quandry for the British ruling class, as they try to juggle "Great Britain", capitalist Europe, and the "special relationship" with the US.

No such problems for Labour's leaders, who are now gung-ho for capitalist Europe and 1992. To them, the EC represents not only a palliative to Britain's economic woes, but a way out of their own political impasse.

The EC, however, remains utterly hostile to workers' interests and profoundly unreformable. Of course, as socialists, we are all for breaking down national boundaries. We are all for the unification of Europe — *East and West* — which can never be achieved via the EC, a board-room in which West European capitalists hammer out their deals.

If Kinnock is a serious "European", why doesn't propose a Europe-wide campaign for a 35-hour week? Why doesn't Willis work to build ties between workers in multi-national corporations? What about a campaign against the continent-wide erosion of democratic rights? Or an international defence of immigrant workers? What about disarmament, ecology, workers' sanctions against apartheid? Why have our born-again "European" shown so little interest in campaigns of this type, which workers throughout Europe could wage together?

The labour movement should have no truck with Thatcher's chauvinist posturing. but adoration at the altar of the EC, even a reformed EC, is no alternative. We should advocate, without apology, the unification of *all* Europe on a socialist basis — *a united socialist states of Europe.*

This is no utopian fantasy, but the only practical means of solving the myriad problems facing millions of European workers.

Ireland Unfree - and British labour

The release of Kevin Macnamara's policy paper on Ireland, accompanied by Kinnock's attack on the "Pontius Pilates" who advocate British withdrawal, at least broke Labour's silence on the subject. With the Gibraltar inquest making daily headlines, and Ireland a topic of conversation across the land, the failure of the Policy Reviews even to mention Ireland was becoming an acute embarrassment. However, the cure may once again be worse than the disease.

Macnamara claims his paper is based on Conference policy ("unity by consent") but his proposal to reform the Diplock courts by having three judges sitting instead of one is a poor substitute for Conference's call for a return to trial by jury. Conference also called for the banning of plastic bullets — a subject not mentioned by Macnamara.

Contrary to Kinnock's claims, this new initiative does not represent an alternative to current British policy in Ireland. It is simply another stab at a *British* solution to "the Irish problem". It is not a step towards withdrawal, as some have claimed, but another lengthy excuse for maintaining the Unionist veto over Irish unity. Kinnock's attack on the partisans of withdrawal made it clear what the real object of the policy paper is: to place the Labour Party safely within the establishment consensus on Ireland.

Many of us within the labour movement will nonetheless stubbornly persist in raising the arguments for British withdrawal. Kinnock and others may conjure up Biblical analogues to dismiss us as "irresponsible" but the hard facts of history let him down. British rule in Ireland was imposed and sustained by force over many centuries. Partition — and the gerrymandered, sectarian statelet it created — was also imposed by force, and is sustained to this day by force. Discrimination, tyranny, and bloodshed inevitably accompany it, and equally inevitably give rise to resistance — including resistance by force.

The new policy paper argues that "without political, legal, social, and economic reform union would itself be unattainable". On the contrary, union is an essential precondition for such reform, and a precondition for union is the withdrawal of British troops.

The Economy

Who's got answers to Capital's big headache?

Britain's yawning trade deficit has exposed Thatcher's "economic miracle" as a myth.

In the last *Briefing* Paula Watson described how the government's medicine will only make the underlying illness worse.

British based manufacturing, starved of investment during the Thatcher years, has not had either the capacity, or good enough products and machinery to meet expanding demand created by the consumer boom. As a result, imports have flooded in.

The government's solution, a rise in interest rates, will hit consumer spending a little, but will hit industrial investment much more. The fundamental problem will get *worse*.

The government's apparent lack of interest in productive investment has led many people on the left to imagine that Thatcher represents the interests of the City against those of industrial capital. In this, she is seen as continuing the policy of most British governments of the last 100 years.

In the past, the Labour Party has sometimes presented itself as the supporter of industrial capital, "production", and "modernisation", against this "reactionary" City bias.

Now even this rhetoric is vanishing. The Labour leadership no longer offers even an alternative *capitalist* policy.

The reason for this capitulation is that in reality Thatcher's policy represents a perfectly reasonable one for British capital *as a whole*. It is painful for capital in some ways, and some sections of capital suffer more than others; but this would be so under *any* capitalist policy.

By Jamie Gough
Holborn & St Pancras CLP

Any capitalist strategy has to square many circles. One dilemma is that money in a capitalist economy serves several different functions, which often conflict with one another.

Money is the store of value for capitalists, but also the means by which the capitalists exchange the goods they produce. So capital can have a contradictory attitude to the exchange rate (the international valuation of the national money).

A high exchange rate puts a high valuation on the store of money held by capital, whereas a low exchange rate improves international competitiveness.

Dilemmas

Many British *industrial* companies, like ICI and GEC, not only produce in Britain but also have enormous assets, including money, valued in sterling. Hence the debate *within* the government, between Thatcher and Lawson, over the exchange rate.

Other dilemmas arise from capitalism's need, in a period of long term stagnation, to destroy parts of capital in order to increase the rate of profit obtained by the rest. This also raises the rate of unemployment and thus helps discipline labour.

Thatcher has been quite successful in doing this. But there are penalties: many employers (not necessarily only the least productive) must suffer, and unemployment benefit bills rocket. Moreover, other countries with less stringent policies will have the capacity to move in on your markets, as is now happening so dramatically.

Another dilemma for capital is that it wants to sell its products at high prices while paying low prices for the products it uses and for the goods which its workers buy (which determine the level of wages). Protectionism favours the former; free trade, the latter. Thatcher plumps for free trade — but many British capitalists need protection.

These and many other dilemmas face *all* capitalist governments. The policies Thatcher has come up with have certainly been coloured by the particular nature of *British* capital: its strong overseas interests, its large military spending, and the relative strength of the British labour movement.

But this does not mean that the government's solutions serve only the interests of the most distinctive sectors of British capital. They are an attempt at a rational response to the problems of British capital as a whole. Any alternative response to these problems will also be marked by capital's contradictions, and will carry some penalties for capital.

At the moment, British capital as a whole judges that Thatcher's policies are the least unpleasant on offer. This is why, by remaining within the confines of capital, the Labour leadership cannot now muster a coherent defence of "production" against Lawson's destruction.



Lawson: "And in my briefcase I have... a thermos flask, a cuddly toy, and a programme for the destruction of the British working class..."

Trade Union

NURSES PAY

Maudsley action shows the way!



This article, written by a Maudsley striker, was taken from the London Health Worker — a rank and file healthworkers' bulletin. Copies may be obtained from Andrew Phillips, Union Office, Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, London NW3.

Nurses at the Maudsley Hospital in South London have just concluded 12 days of strike action.
It came in protest at the government's refusal to guarantee full-funding of this year's pay award, and at the way the clinical grading structure is being implemented.

The nurses, all members of COHSE (the major union at the hospital), suspended the action on Friday September 16 – but stressed that they will be out again before long unless their demands are met.

The strike began on September 5th after a two to one vote in favour of the action by the branch's 240 nurse members.

After a nervous and hesitant start, the action became a huge success, with a spirited picket being maintained from 7am to 9pm each day at the front of the hospital.

Passers-by on Denmark Hill in cars, buses, and on foot showed their support by giving over half the £6,000 raised for the strike fund, and a constant beeping of car horns was heard throughout the 12 days.

Speakers from the branch visited hospitals all over London to urge support for the action and solidarity action elsewhere. Though it became apparent that other hospitals were not yet ready to attempt such action, the experience gained at the Maudsley must be put to practical use in other branches.

The many visitors to the picket line from other hospitals have taken back the message that it is possible for nurses to organise effective strike action for periods longer than 24 hours.

The Maudsley embarked on the strike in the belief that it is better to take action *before* individual nurses are given their grades.

Once that process has been completed, a minority of nurses may be satisfied with their individual grading and be more reluctant to join a united campaign of opposition – and especially on the question of funding, which is not even on the agenda of the Whitley Council negotiations on the implementation of the structure.

The funding issue is seen as being central. It is the factor motivating Regional and District Health Authorities to push nurses onto lower grades in order to avoid having to make massive cuts in services if, as expected, the government refuses to cover the full cost of the exercise.

Management's own estimates of a 3-6% underfunding could mean over 4,000 bed losses in London alone.

In a prevailing atmosphere of "waiting and seeing" by nurses, however, Maudsley activists believe it is essential that the enormous discontent among nurses who are not properly graded must be mobilised.

The unions must organise action at every level, and not allowed discontent to dissipate into the frustration and delay of mass appeals that could last months or even years.

The government's own timetable of completing the grading exercise by October 31st, and Kenneth Clarke's much-publicised promise to have the money in nurses' pay packets before Christmas look increasingly unattainable as the entire process degenerates into chaos.

It is of utmost importance that the chaos is not met passively by nurses and their unions, and that COHSE and NUPE do not allow their preoccupation with maintaining "unity" with the RCN at the negotiating table to interfere with mounting an effective campaign of industrial action.

In the meantime, COHSE stewards at the Maudsley are busy writing up an account of the organisation involved in starting and maintaining the strike, to enable others to learn from the strategies employed and the errors made during the action.

Copies of the *Practical Guide to Extended Strike Action by Nurses* can be obtained from COHSE Maudsley 898 Branch, c/o Felix Post Unit, Maudsley Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 8AZ.

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No "HATS" in Hackney!

NALGO PAY BALLOT

No time for excuses!

NALGO is now balloting its local government members with a recommendation for a programme of strike action in support of this year's pay claim.

The actions proposed include a one day national strike on October 5th, a rolling programme of regional two day strikes in October, followed by more two day strikes in November.

The union has rejected the employers' latest offer of 5.4%, which not only falls short of the 10% claim but, with inflation likely to rise to over 6%, represents a cut in real wages.

Wage settlements average 8% so far this year and many other public sector workers (police, teachers, manual workers) have already received increases above that figure.

The employers' offer also requires talks over pay scale flexibility in what is seen as a move away from a national pay structure.

Many activists, particularly those in London branches faced with massive cuts in jobs and services, do not see pay as a priority. This is a mistake. It is not a matter of fighting over pay *or* cuts but *both*.

In order to resist the attacks of the employers and central government, NALGO will need to overcome its traditional federalism and act for once as a national union. In this respect,a successful vote for national strike action over pay will be a great step forward.

The employers' offer was so derisory that NALGO's Local Government Group had no choice but to reject it. However, the leadership's campaign for the strike vote has been minimal. If the ballot is lost, the National Committee will use this to argue against a national strategy of strike action in the future — over pay or anything else.

By Doug Thorpe
Islington NALGO

Even the proposals for limited action are now in jeopardy. The deadline for the ballot has been extended (due to the postal dispute) and the result will only be known two days before the scheduled one day strike.

Some branches are arguing that, whatever the result, they cannot pull off a strike with two days' notice. This is a smokescreen.

The date (October 5th) is already set — there is no need to wait for the result. Branches should assume the strike is going ahead and organise *now* on that basis.

In themselves one and two day strikes will not win the pay claim. But they would be a giant step forward for NALGO. Activists must go all out to secure a "yes" vote and then build on that success by arguing for the all-out strike action necessary to win the full claim.

Solidarity Network Conference
Supported by
the Chesterfield Socialist Conference
Saturday 5th November, 9.00-6.00
Leeds Trades Council Club, Saville Mount, Leeds

The Solidarity Network, set up at a Conference in Leeds last year, seeks to build on the support network organised for the miners and for the printworkers at Wapping. The Network meets regularly and has organised support and publicity for a number of disputes including, this year, the Dover seafarers.
Previously strikers have been left to fight alone and have been defeated. This must not happen to the seafarers. The Network has worked with the Chesterfield Socialist Conference, holding a joint rally in London in support of those in struggle. This conference has been called to extend and develop this work.

Credentials: 2 (waged), 1 (unwaged), strikers free. Creche facilities and overnight accommodation for Friday/Saturday night can be arranged if requested at least a week in advance.
Contact: Janet Seymour, 3 Hill Street, Barnoldswick, Colne, Lancs, tel. 0282-812864.

Seafarers' Dispute

A message from Dover strikers to the Labour Party

After seven months in dispute — the most bitter strike in our union's history — 1,000 sacked seafarers continue to take a stand against profiteering shipping company P&O.

Our fight is not over pay. It is about cuts in crewing leves, long hours spent on board, and the effects such changes would have on safety standards at sea.

We have faced many hurdles — lack of media coverage, court action to prevent the counting of union ballot papers that would have endorsed national solidarity action, sequestration of our union funds and offices, reduction of the Dover Eastern Docks picket line to six legal pickets while hundreds of other sacked seafarers arrive every morning and evening for mass pickets deemed illegal.

By Susan Haynes
Sacked Dover Seafarer

Recently we've encountered the heavy-handed tactics of local magistrates who have imposed stringent bail conditions restricting movement of active fund-raisers and forbidding strikers from the picket line. Deliberate attempts are being made, as in the miners' and printers' disputes, to break our strike.

Dilemma

Our dilemma has not been helped by a half-hearted union leadership and Executive who have bent over backwards to stay within the law. They have not given any clear guidance to take us forward.

Their decision to call off secondary action at the height of the dispute — when victory was almost ours — and to disassociate themselves from the mass picket has only served to further isolate the Dover seafarers.

Thousands of rank-and-file workers have supported us. But we need the real muscle of the Labour Party and TUC. The meaningless rhetoric of our leaders has proved once again that workers in struggle will get only limited support from them.

Their conscience is eased by setting up hardship funds when we all know that in reality solidarity action is needed to ensure that yet another group of workers is not broken. If the labour movement is to survive the onslaught of Thatcherism we must all be prepared to fight as a united body.

Meanwhile, P&O, with the aid of the Conservative government, have their entire Dover fleet sailing with mostly untrained crews using the busiest shipping lanes in the world.

We never dreamt in the cold days of February — when Dover seafarers voted to take industrial action against an avaricious company who regard extra profit as paramount and the safety of the public as secondary — that our cause would be so hard to win.

Negotiations

We now find ourselves in limbo. Recent attempts to reopen negotiations with P&O have not yet born fruit. We've made it clear to both P&O and our union Executive that we will not go away.

Our first Dover branch meeting since the start of the strike was held on August 20th. We passed motions calling on the General Secretary and the Executive to implement a voluntary levy on all working NUS members, to give strike pay to all registered striking seafarers, and to ballot the whole membership for all-out stoppage on the issue of safety at sea and the protection of the National Maritime Board agreements.

Morale is still high. The heretofore notoriously moderate Dover rank-and-file have taken the initiative from day one of the strike. Our goal was and still is to win — and to have the option of returning to our livelihoods with decent working conditions.

We formed our Support Groups — a legacy from the miners' strike — and have been given invaluable assistance from our local mining communities. Strikers travel all around the country to speak, telling the truth about our dispute and raising funds for our kitchens.

Because we feel so strongly we shall continue to fight and to voice our opinions — from the picket line and any other platforms. We ask comrades to use every avenue open to them to help us step up our campaign against P&O. We ask trades councils, Labour Party and trade union branches, schools, travel agents, etc, to boycott P&O and tell P&O (at 79 Pall Mall, London) of their reasons for doing so.

We also need you to help keep open our kitchens, where we offer hot meals and company for strikers and their families and where we build the dispute together.

We are grateful for the generosity shown by fellow workers, but if we are to stay solvent and sustain our struggle, like Oliver, we need more.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Seafarers have travelled all over the country collecting funds; to sustain the struggle, more is needed.

Report from the Super-pits



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Yorks miners demonstrate during the Strike; Coal Board economics are as weird now as then.

Daydreams to nightmares

The super-pits of the Selby complex in North Yorkshire, promoted as "the dream pits" of the future, are becoming British Coals nightmare of the present.

Instead of yielding millions of tonnes of cheap coal, they are producing millions of tonnes of expensive dirt.

The CEGB has repeatedly rejected this "coal" because of a 30% ash content (its maximum limit is 15%).

The North Yorkshire area of 19 collieries, which includes the six Selby pits, lost £12.9 million this financial year. After capital charges the losses soared to a staggering £130 million.

Albert W. Tuke, Area Director, in his annual report, says, "Once again, the dismal record of industrial disputes bedevilled us, and completely overshadowed the excellent productivity advances. Stoppages of work at individual pits, the NUM overtime ban and the NACODS wages dispute cost this Area 1.2 million tonnes of coal representing over £40 million of lost sales."

By DANIEL PARKES

Between June 87 and March 88, the following collieries closed: Nostell, Wheldale, Wooley/Rodbrook, and South Kirkby/Ferrymore Riddings, with a loss of 4,604 jobs. Only three of the Selby pits began to produce coal, Stillingfleet (Stalingrad), Whitemoor (Strikemoor), and Riccall. Stillingfleet is the pit which sacked Ted Scott, NUM Branch official.

The North Yorkshire area employs only 13,154. Despite the loss of 1.2 million tonnes, it still produced within a bucket-full of the same tonnage as the previous year. Overall output per manshift has risen since 85/86 from 3.04 tonnes to a disgraceful record of 4.45 tonnes.

A further investment of £154.4 million was "sunk" into the Selby complex this year. But why keep such "loss makers" open?

My train of thought, knowing British Coal from within, and knowing the bastards for what they are, leads me to conclude that they are investing taxpayers money for the day when the Tories sell off the Selby complex to their fat-cat friends, privatise the industry, and make a quick killing.

Accidents are tragically running at 31.7% per 100,000 shifts worked. Health and safety at work should be a major campaigning factor for the NUM leadership in challenging the Board's "right to manage" hard line stance.

AUSTIN ROVER CLOSURES

Anti-cuts campaign targets Party Conference

Austin Rover's plans to close the car plants at Cowley and Llanelli will have a devastating effect not only on both those towns and the supporting components industry but they also sound the death knell for the automotive industry in this country.

In Oxford the Trades Council has launched a local campaign to oppose the closures and Oxford East CLP has passed the following resolution which it is sending to Annual Conference as an emergency.

We would urge all delegates to support the resolution being taken and passed by Conference. The Labour Party nationally must make a commitment to fight to save such a loss of thousands of jobs.

By Andy Mar
Oxford East CLP

Emergency Resolution for Labour Party Annual Conference

"Conference believes the closure of the Cowley Oxford South Works and the Llanelli plant and the huge job losses in Austin Rovers' five year plan will be a disaster for both these towns, and is a forerunner of similar closures affecting the whole long term future of Austin Rover in Britain as a volume car manufacturer, together with the automotive component industry in Britain.

"This Conference condemns these closures following the sale of Austin Rover to British Aerospace. The Labour Party will organise both in Parliament and outside it together with the trade unions a massive campaign to reverse these plans of closure and fully support Austin Rover workers in a fight against redundancies including strike action and occupations if these actions are taken or any other actions taken.

"As an urgent priority we call the next Labour government to place the industry under democratic and locally accountable control."

Labour Party

A modern history of the Labour Party

1945: Labour's Great Triumph?



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

The 40s saw the popular nationalisation of the coal industry. Stopping short of workers' control, the "nationalised" industry is bulldozed away in the 80s by the capitalist recession.

With this article on the Attlee government, *Labour Briefing* begins a new series on Labour Party history. Future topics include Bevanism, Gaitskell's war on Clause Four, the first Wilson government, the Heath years, the Social Contract and the rise of Bennism.

Socialists opposed to the "new revisionism" of Kinnock and Gould often hearken back to the 1945-51 Labour government as if it was the embodiment of the socialist ideal.

But a closer look at history reveals a different picture.

A process of radicalisation had swept through the working class as a result of the 1930s depression and the experiences of the War. Attlee's government therefore came to power not only with a sizeable majority but with a mandate for radical socialist change.

Civil aviation, coal, electricity, gas and the Bank of England were nationalised.

It was widely noted at the time that Tory opposition to these measures was more muted than expected: in some cases they did not even force a Commons division.

Establishment opinion clearly accepted that following the War the reconstruction of British capitalism required that certain public utilities be placed under state direction. In any case, phenomenal amounts of compensation (especially to the coal owners) were awarded — saddling the nascent nationalised industries with a mountain of debt.

These new public sector companies quickly took on the form of huge, monolithic, bureaucratic institutions, completely outside popular control. Indeed, the government explicitly rejected workers' control in industry.

Controversy only broke out when the ruling class thought nationalisation had gone too far. In 1947 there was a bitter battle over road haulage and later over iron and steel and sugar.

By Phil Hearse (Islington North CLP)

The National Health Service, inaugurated in 1948, was a major gain for the working class. It met opposition from the consultant doctors, but from hardly anyone else.

Social security also received a major boost, as did state education. Most of these reforms had been advocated in the Beveridge Report, published during the War, which reflected a broad consensus that economic reconstruction needed a healthy and educated working class.

Attlee's foreign policy, guided by Ernest Bevin, was a model of Cold War Atlanticism. Britain became a founder member of NATO, developed its own nuclear bomb, used its troops on the side of reaction in Greece and Malaya, and sent them into the US war in Korea. De-colonisation was begun (notably the granting of Indian independence) but only hesitantly.

By 1948 the bulk of Labour's reforms had been implemented. Morrison then declared the need for "consolidation", after which the government began to run out of steam.

Labour won the 1950 election but its majority slumped from 148 to six. Labour's social welfare reforms were popular, but it had no further socialist vision of major transformation.

The left's standard bearer, Aneurin Bevan, was a leading member of the first Attlee government, which had generally enjoyed the support of the left in the Party. A real left opposition emerged only after 1950, in response to two issues — the introduction of health service charges and German rearmament.

Even then, only a handful of left MPs (not including Bevan or Michael Foot) opposed the US war in Korea. In 1951 the Tories led by Churchill were returned to power.

Attlee's government has retained its place in Labour's mythology because, unlike the subsequent Wilson and Callaghan governments, it was able to carry through important reforms — many of which are now under threat from Thatcherism.

But the Attlee government's key failing was that it was a government of reforming *capitalism*. For this reason, the nationalisation of industry which it carried out conformed with the bureaucratic logic of the capitalist system, and not with the needs and priorities of the workers.

While we defend the remaining gains of 1945-51 against Thatcher, we should be under no illusions that a return to 1945 is possible or desirable. Today, a much more radical programme is needed to take the working class forward.

Scottish Labour Briefing

Scottish Labour Party Re-call Conference

Resistance rejected!

By a margin of two to one, the Scottish Labour Party Conference rejected the option of a mass campaign of non-payment.

It voted instead for compliance with the Poll Tax laws, due for implementation in Scotland in April 1989.

The Party's special re-call Conference, held in Glasgow on September 17th, had been preceeded by a "Week of Action" against the Tax organised by the Scottish TUC (STUC).

Unfortunately, its activities, including a token work stoppage on Tuesday, September 13th, did little either to reflect or channel the strong and widespread opposition to the Tax.

By Ian Gault Pollok CLP

Bureaucratic inertia and the absence of any clear political focus enabled the Scottish Tories to ridicule the "Week of Action" as a "damp squib".

Though sparsely attended, demonstrations were seized upon by the Scottish media as a ready-made excuse for those in the labour movement seeking to undermine effective resistance.

At the re-call Conference itself, the Scottish Executive's statement, ruling out any form of illegality or civil disobedience, was defended by Shadow Secretary of State Donald Dewar. He argued that rather than resisting the Tax, Labour Councils should concentrate on explaining the rebate system to as many people as possible.

Local Authorities, he suggested, should try and adopt an "understanding" attitude to those unable to pay — presumably at the same time as they are arresting these same people's wages and benefits, as they are required to do by the law.

A number of speakers, including Charles Gray, Labour Leader of Strathclyde Regional Council, argued that a non-payment campaign would create a financial crisis which would jeopardise Council services.

Disruption

However, as one delegate put it, the real choice facing the Conference was not between payment and non-payment, but between "temporary disruption or total destruction" in the face of a Tory offensive against local government as a whole.

The argument for a mass campaign of non-payment was clearly supported by a majority of constituency delegates and also by a number of trade unions, including the TGWU.

The predictable outcome of the Conference is a serious setback for activists campaigning against the Tax, and will lead to demoralisation at local level.

Nonetheless, the struggle against the Poll Tax is far from over. Already a number of leading Party members have stated their intention to form a "Committee of 100" prominent individuals who will publicly declare their refusal to pay.

The political differences that split the Conference will deepen over the coming months.

GOVAN BY-ELECTION

SNP vs. Labour

The forthcoming Parliamentary by-election in Glasgow Govan may well determine the future of Labour in Scotland.

Over and over in recent years, Scotland has been used as Thatcher's laboratory.

Increasingly, the response to this is a nationalist one. In a recent poll, 75% were in favour of an Assembly; 30% for independence.

The SNP is confident of denting Labour's 19,500 majority and some SNPers even expect to win the seat.

Outside the Scottish Labour Party's Special Conference, held in Govan Town Hall, (see report) the (mostly local) demonstrators sang *The Internationale* and chanted "You've sold us out again."

In Govan, which is festooned with "No Poll Tax Here" posters, feelings are running high over Labour's opposition to a non-payment campaign.

The recent SNP Conference voted unanimously to campaign for 100,000 Scots to refuse to pay. Their candidate in the by-election will be Jim Sillars, a well-known former left Labour MP.

By Jean Mackenzie Scottish Labour Briefing

Labour has not yet chosen its candidate, but has already removed from the panel two *Militant* supporters active in local anti-Poll Tax campaigns. A Labour candidate committed to non-payment would retain popular support and defuse the SNP.

However, the candidate chosen will probably espouse the official line of acquiescence. The election will therefore become a confrontation between Labour and the SNP, between payment and non-payment.

As well as being anti-Poll Tax, the SNP is strongly opposed to NATO, US Bases, and nuclear weapons. Their platform is likely to be far to the left of Labour's.

If Labour won't defend and organise the people of Govan, they will inevitably look to a party that can and will. An SNP victory would transform the anti-Poll Tax campaign in Scotland and shake Scottish Labour to the roots.

Waiting passively for the next Labour government is more of a farce than ever.

Birmingham

Knowles raises condom scare

Birmingham Council's Labour Leader Dick Knowles is getting himself into all kinds of trouble.

By MARK SEATON

First, he tried to remove the whip from 20 Labour Councillors who refused to back closure of a children's holiday home. Even the Labour Party's National Constitutional Committee (never known for lenience to the left) refused to uphold the disciplinary move, and the whip was restored.

Then, he launched an attack on the Council NALGO branch, which is putting up resistance to the cuts and was planning a one-day strike on September 20th.

Knowles sent a letter to all employees attacking NALGO as being "more concerned with the provision of condoms for people in Winson Green Prison than about the conditions of their members" and dominated by "Politically motivated cadres".

This was accompanied by a letter from the Council's Director of Personnel advising employees that "a strike is in breach of an employment contract" and that "you will not be allowed to resume work until you sign the declaration overleaf."

This declaration read as follows:

"To all employees who take strike action or fail to attend through refusal to cross a picket line on 20 September 1988

"Before resuming work you must sign the declaration below and hand it to your Supervisor. You will not be allowed to commence work until you do so.

"Following my strike action on 20 September, I hereby give an undertaking that I intend to work normally, (including cover for vacant posts) in accordance with the terms and conditions of my contract, and to support the use of proper procedures for the settlement of disputes."

NALGO held a mass meeting in the West Bromwich Albion Football ground on Monday September 19th, where a resolution to proceed with the one-day strike was lost by about 800-700.

However, this climbdown followed the withdrawal of the no-strike declarations and was partly offset by a decision to hold a ballot on a programme of industrial action against the cuts.

Finally, Knowles ran into problems at the District Labour Party meeting (lobbied by NALGO) where he tried to argue that *there were no cuts*. This assertion met with derision, even from fellow right wingers. A high vacancy factor has resulted in the near collapse of social services and in children being sent home from school because of teacher shortages.

The District Labour Party passed a resolution opposing future cuts and calling for the reversal of cuts made since May, the reinstatement of any victimised Council workers, a public campaign by the Party against the cuts, and a one-day conference on budget "priorities" bringing together the DLP and the Labour Group.

Birmingham Labour Briefing has produced a leaflet on the issues involved and is calling on the 20 reinstated Councillors to mount a major public campaign against the cuts.

WALLASEY INITIATIVE

Left CLPs begin to organise

About 100 people, including 70 delegates from CLPs, attended a Conference in Manchester on Saturday September 17th.

Despite lack of advertising and the postal strike, the Conference, called by Wallasey CLP, hit on a real need felt by left Labour Parties in the run-up to the Blackpool Conference.

Les Huckfield brought greetings from the Campaign Group and Eric Heffer gave a stirring speech on the need to organise the fight in the Labour Party.

Useful information emerged in the discussions around the machinations of the Conference Arrangements Committee. For instance, the CAC has ruled out of order all 15 amendments to the leadership's *Aims and Values* document, and the Campaign Group and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy are organising a fight to refer back the CAC report.

At the end of one conference session a staggering 37 votes will be taken, clearly in the hope that befuddled delegates will drift off.

The heavy emphasis on Labour Party Conference procedure meant there was little discussion of the content of resolutions and little form the platform on prospects for the left beyond Conference itself.

It did not help that the introductions to the main sessions were given by speakers from CLPD, renowned for their single-minded concentration on procedural minutiae.

By Pete Firmin
Brent East CLP

Despite this, some general discussion did surface.

The relationship between Labour Party initiatives, such as this Conference and the Chesterfield Conference, was taken up in a contribution from *Briefing* supporter Mandy Mudd, who argued that the two shouldn't be counterposed and that the Manchester Conference should be seen as one aspect of left organisation.

In response, most of the platform speakers said that they didn't see the two initiatives as counterposed but that the Conference met a particular need that the Socialist Conference couldn't.

It was also accepted that in building future initiatives avenues such as the Socialist Conference mailing should be used.

However, Vladimir Derer of CLPD insisted that the class struggle will only be decided within the Labour Party. He also put forward the now well-known CLPD argument that the left should proceed according to what the present membership of the Labour Party will accept, which sparked off the beginnings of a discussion which unfortunately didn't have time to develop.

There was also disagreement about what attitude the left should now take to the National Constitution Committee, and it is clear this issue needs a lot of thought by the left.

Different views were also expressed on how to revive the campaign against the witch-hunt, although it seemed to be generally agreed that a Conference called by suspended CLPs, witch-hunted individuals, and supporting CLPs would be the best initial step.

At the end of the day a series of proposals were agreed:

- to request a regular column in *Campaign Group News* for CLPs;
- to request a regular observer at Campaign Group meetings;
- to produce a newsletter for CLPs;
- a "Bill of Rights for Labour Party Democracy" was passed.

It was agreed to set up an organising committee open to all delegating CLPs (one of whose first tasks will be to discuss work around the witch-hunt).

A meeting will be held at lunch time on the Thursday of Labour Party Conference at the Clifton Hotel, Blackpool. It is important that as many delegates from left CLPs as possible attend.

Further information is available from Richard Alpin, Wallasey CLP Secretary, 8 Agnes Grove, Wallasey, Merseyside L44 1DH.

Women in Black Sections

Conference draws on new strengths

Conferences about women, and black women in particular, too often concentrate on "gender oppression" to the exclusion of women's broader political role.

Their long (her)story of fighting both class and state oppression is forgotten.

The first conference organised by women in Black Sections, held on September 10th in Birmingham, showed that black women are playing a part in struggles against all kinds of oppression in British society.

The Conference (chaired by Martha Osamor) concentrated on several major threats to the black community: the Poll Tax, Housing Hill, Education Act, immigration legislation.

Much discussion focused on the difficult questions raised by the Education Act. Women recognised that black children are still not getting quality education on a par with children from mainly white and suburban schools.

But Tory plans would inevitably "ghettoise" black children and discourage black parents from participating fully in local schools. The simple demand, for separate black schools, put by many nationalists, was also rejected.

By Kaushika Amin
Tottenham
Women's Section

In the afternoon, workshops were held on sexuality, older women, young women, and women and work. It was recognised that specificity of experience was not enough. The important point was to project specific experiences into collective political debates.

The workshops were also used to discuss practical ways of organising in local communities and building solidarity with wider campaigns.

Although the conference went some way forward in acknowledging the central role of black women in Black Sections, it was weakened by the absence of well known activists like Diane Abbott, Sharon Atkin, and Linda Bellos.

On the other hand, their absence allowed the emergence of new, young black women activists. The strength of the Conference lay in the fact that most of these women were active not only in local Labour Parties but also in local communities.

The input from SWP members was heartening, although too often their ideas have still not moved beyond the mechanistic and reductionist formula: "black and white people face the same class enemy and therefore must unite and fight."



PHOTO: Jane Connor

Diane Abbott: absent

However, they did inject a much-needed political dimension which is sometimes lacking in discussions of racial or gender oppression. A healthy dialogue between women in Black Sections and black women in the SWP would be welcome.

This was one of the first major conferences to be organised by black women for black women since the demise of the GLC. It is interesting that it focused on political change within the Labour Party.

This is a far cry from days when black women were pushed to the margins of debate. Women in Black Sections have undoubtedly taken an important step forward.

Bermondsey witch-hunt

The real conspiracy

Jim Mortimer, a Labour Party member for over 50 years and a former General Secretary, has presented hard evidence of efforts by "soft left" Party full-timers to gather secret information on left-wingers in Bermondsey.

Mortimer is a member of Bermondsey CLP, which has been suspended since January 1988, following allegations of "intimidation" and "abuse" by *Militant* supporters.

Labour's Organisation Directorate, headed by Joyce Gould, is currently running an inquiry into the matter.

Following the suspension, Mortimer came into possession of a document headed *Southwark Bermondsey - Notes to Action, 25 January 1987.*

It appears to be the minutes of some sort of caucus and records a decision to compile a computerised list of Bermondsey CLP members, with the stated intention of "building a political profile of all wards, their membership, attendance, present personnel, etc... to build a political profile of the General Committee including the political associations of the membership" and "to build a politically aware Constituency Labour Party strong enough to withstand *Militant's* influence."

If the document's date is correct, the implication is that the Bermondsey witch-hunt was a full year in the making and was initially undertaken without official sanction from the Party.

Various lists are appended consisting of handwritten comments on typewritten pages. One breaks down wards as "Mili," "anti-Mili", "split" or "OK".Another classifies trade union delegates as "MT" (Militant Tendency), "FT" (fellow traveller), "NA" (non-attender) or "OK" (in agreement, presumably, with the compilers' politics).

By David Osler
NUJ (personal capacity)

It is ironic that Mortimer should be deemed to merit the "FT" tag. At the 1983 Conference, he moved the report which recommended the expulsion of the *Militant* Editorial Board.

In true south-of-the-river style, each ward was allocated a named "minder", *many of whom are full-time employees of the London Labour Party.*

The wards and their watchers were: Chaucer, Margaret McDonagh; Burgess, David Wilkinson; Dockyard, Stephen Morgan; Riverside, John Braggins; Albany, Paul Wheeler; Browning, Phil Cole; Bricklayers, Mike Hobday and Ted Hall; Rotherhithe, undecided; Cathedral, Dave Evans.

McDonagh, Wilkinson, Morgan, and Cole are all Assistant Regional Organisers for the London Labour Party (Wilkinson was assigned to work on the Bermondsey inquiry). Braggins is a former Deputy General Secretary of London Labour Party who currently works on the national Party's Organisation Directorate.

When questioned about these allegations, Cole, a NOLS activist in the early 80s, once strongly identified with the soft left, refused to say anything. Ex-EETPU full-timer McDonagh, instrumental in stopping Mandy Mudd's candidacy in a Haringey Council by-election, said "the procedure of the Labour Party is that you talk to our press officer."

The press office commented: "During the course of an inquiry a whole lot of things are thrown out. The NEC knows how this document came about." Appropriate steps, we were assured, would be taken.

But it took some effort on the part of the left to get the matter raised within the Party. Louise Christian, a lawyer representing the suspended members of the Bermondsey Party, wrote to Larry Whitty citing the report as evidence of bias. As a result, Wilkinson was taken off the inquiry.

Tony Benn, who raised the matter at the NEC's Organisation Committee, said, "There was no attempt to deny it. There's no doubt it's true. They either exceeded their brief or they got caught out — one of the two."

Activists in Bermondsey fear a purge is imminent. They claim to have received information from sources with good Walworth Road links that up to six members have already been singled out for expulsion.

Joyce Gould refutes the suggestion: "There is absolutely not one iota of truth in it." For the record, the names mentioned are: Margaret Crear, Laurence Hemming, Bob Lee, Bob McKee, Carol Shakespeare, and Alan Woods. All are *Militant* supporters.

The last word is with Laurence Hemming, who in addition to his Labour Party work is Hackney NALGO Housing Convenor, Chair of Metropolitan District NALGO Broad Left, and joint chair of London Bridge. "It's disgraceful that Bermondsey Labour Party should be shut down for nine months at a time when it should be campaigning against the poll tax, the Housing Bill, the abolition of ILEA and the Council cuts."

Widdicombe

A Sledgehammer to crack a broken nut?

In July, the Tories published a White Paper which was ignored by much of the left, but could have far-reaching implications.

The Paper contained Thatcher's response to the Widdicombe Enquiry into "The conduct of Local Authority Business."

What with Poll Tax, Clause 28, and at least two attempts to ban "political publicity", it's easy to see why its importance has been underestimated!

But the effects of some of the clauses on the left, especially the hard left, could be devastating. Widdicombe recommends banning Local Authority employees of principal officer status or above from holding any political office. The present proposals are limited, with one exception, to Chief and Deputy Chief Officers.

The one exception is for "those who advise or act on behalf of Local Authorities". This is further extended to a ban on "holding office in a political Party, writing or speaking publicly on matters of party political controversy... and canvassing at elections."

Now I have no intention of defending those highly-paid Chief Executives who "twin-track" by holding office in one Authority while implementing cuts in another. However, the present proposals scare me stiff. They include an element of discretion which could affect thousands of people who work in local government.

By Tony McShea
Birmingham
Labour Briefing

They provide for "local nomination" which means that Local Authorities will be able to decide, within very vague guidelines laid down by the Tories, which of their staff can be politically active. This could affect not just those of us in the Labour Party but also people active in the women's movement, gay groups, CND, etc.

It will not just hit those who stand for elected office, but GC delegates, people who write for and sell *Briefing* and other left papers, and a range of other activists. Unless we struggle against it now, a range of Councils (both Labour and Tory controlled) will cynically write clauses banning political activity into contracts.

Other recommendations in the Paper include a ban on the appointment of "political advisers" and the ending of co-option of non-elected persons onto decision-taking committees.

The government will have power to determine the Standing Orders by which Local Authorities operate, even down to the circulation of agendas. Councillors' expenses will be reduced,restricting still further those who can afford to stand for elected office.

So what can we do, given the Tory majority and the pathetic performance by Kinnock plc?

Local Authority unions must be ready to take mass action against the discretionary clauses. Labour Party branches must pass resolutions to commit the Party at national and local level, especially where Labour is in control, to not implementing what few discretionary clauses exist.

The Left in general, through Chesterfield or whatever, must tighten up its concept of the local state and meetings must be held. This is even more urgent in the light of the likely retreat on Poll Tax, and the disgraceful document produced on alternatives to Rates.

This fightback is every bit as important as other campaigns. If we fail, many comrades will be disenfranchised from political activity.

Haringey Labour Briefing

"Socialism — or the market?"

— an open discussion, October 17th, 8pm, West Indian Centre, Clarendon Road, London N8.

No cuts! No witch-hunts!

Quinton Briefing supporters say:

Stop Kinnock! Back Benn and Heffer in the fight for socialism!

Hackney Labour Briefing:

Fighting for Our Libraries!

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Support Benn and Heffer; and fight for socialism!

Lea Bridge Branch (Hackney North CLP) says:

"We're backing Benn and Heffer!"

Erdington & Sutton Coldfield CLP Labour Briefing supporters send greetings to the Conference delegates

Reject Fowler's Employment Training Scheme!
No to Workfare!

"Democratic Socialis

Labour Lea to Market

"Democratic socialists believe in market allocation — but market allocation guided by agreement that the competitive system should pursue the objective of greater freedom, greater equality and greater choice".

There in a nutshell you have the philosophy of Kinnock's *Democratic Socialist Aims and Values.*

Its stress on the market is reinforced with repeated reference to creating conditions in which individuals can make maximum use of their own resources and abilities to do well in a competitive society.

All this adds up to a new departure for Labour's leaders, well to the right of traditional mainstream Labourism, and a flagrant attempt to accommodate to Thatcher's championing of individualism over collectivism.

This philosophy has uncanny resemblances to has been called the "possessive individualism" of Hobbes and Locke in the 17th century.

By Paul Lawson

These theorists of the rising capitalist class regarded the development of individual potential as intimately linked with private property and the market society. But of course, unlike the authors of the Policy Review, Hobbes and Locke admitted that only a minority could enjoy the benefits of market capitalism.

In contrast, Kinnock and Hattersley commit a classic utopian error — when they imagine some sort of "agreement" that will guide market allocation towards freedom, equality and choice.

Market capitalism is about inequality. Equality, freedom and

Greetings to the Labour Party from

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Fight the witch-hunt!
No Cuts!
Vote Benn and Heffer!

Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign Fringe Meeting
Wednesday October 5th, 8.15pm
Suite 2, New Clifton Hotel, Talbot Square
Speakers invited: Ken Livingstone, Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Grant, Narendra Makanji (Chair, Black Sections), Tony Benn, Tottenham 3 Families

Jeremy Corbyn
(MP, Islington North)
and his agent Keith Veness
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Vote Tony Benn and Eric Heffer

Haringey Against the Witch-hunt
Defend Mandy Mudd
Sends greetings to Labour Party Conference

No more expulsions! Stop the witch-hunt! Support Benn-Heffer for an open, democratic, campaigning Labour Party!

st Aims and Values"

nders go

choice presuppose allocation on the basis of social priorities and needs, which the market by its nature must ignore.

The document fails even to mention a key word for understanding modern Britain: "capitalism". There is no recognition of the underlying logic of the market: that of private profit. *Democratic socialist aims and values* apparently no longer entails any break with this logic.

The policy proposals in the Review mark a sharp break with Labour's guiding thread since 1945 and before — a strong public sector in a "mixed" economy and a powerful welfare state. In essence, the document accepts that basic changes made by Thatcher are here to stay, and that Labour's previous collectivist notions have had their day.

This conclusion is partly right. The Wilson and Callaghan governments failed precisely because they couldn't go beyond managing capitalism. Kinnock and Hattersley propose to start anew not by making a socialist critique of past failings, but by a sharp move towards a more openly pro-capitalist philosophy.

By definition, socialism is collectivist in spirit and practice. Pro-capitalist political theory has always falsely counterposed the rights and needs of individuals — including their rights to material well-being and freedom of choice — to social solidarity and collectivism.

Kinnock and Hattersley accept the false choice posed by all such theories: East European totalitarianism versus "freedom" of the market. If this were the real choice facing advanced societies we would be in a hopeless historical dilemma — dictatorship of the market or of the faceless bureaucracy.

Such a view is deeply pessimistic about human potential; its premise is the supposed inability of the mass of ordinary people to run their own society according to their own democratically determined social priorities.

What about the notion of an "agreement" to make the market function in favour of fairness and freedom? Agreement with whom? The big corporations which dominate the market?

When Norman Willis flew off to the US to appeal to Ford's better nature over the Dundee debacle, his scornful predecessor Len Murray commented: "The problem is that Fords don't have a better nature". Neither do their competitors.

In the Putney debates Oliver Cromwell championed the rights of "men of property" against those "who have no interest (i.e. property) other than in breathing". Cromwell, at least, was a good deal more honest about the realities of market capitalism than Kinnock or Hattersley.



A Message to Trade Unionists

Real Policies for "People at Work"

Tony Benn and I are standing to put forward a political alternative to the present Labour leadership.

By Eric Heffer MP

Our objecitve is the creation of a genuinely democratic, classless, socialist society, based on Clause IV of Labour's constitution.

We want all nuclear weapons and bases removed from British soil. Arms expenditure must be cut and the money saved used to re-build the economy, the NHS and the Welfare State.

We want all anti-trade union legislation repealed. When that has been achieved, we want new legislation introduced to ensure that workers — through their unions — have greater rights than ever before.

The Labour Party was formed by the trade unions in association with the ILP, Fabians, and the Social Democratic Federation.

The basis of the Labour Party is the movement of the organised working class. It must remain so. The links between the unions and the Party must be strengthened.

All struggles of trade unionists against their employers for better wages and conditions, or in defence of jobs and employment conditions, or against privatisation must be fully supported by the Labour Party.

Unfortunately, wholehearted support from the leadership has not been forthcoming in the past.

If it had, the outcome of the miners' strike, the printers' struggle, and other disputes might have been different.

Tony Benn and I have given our unqualified support to unions and workers in struggle and will continue to do so.

Every trade union and trade unionist who has been fined, sacked, or wrongly imprisoned as a result of anti-trade union laws must be reimbursed, released, or compensated as soon as a Labour government is returned to office.

Unemployment has been used as a weapon to undermine the wages and conditions of employed workers. It has badly affected the low paid, especially women workers who are too often used as cheap labour.

There must be genuine equality of employment for women. We believe a new Labour government must introduce legislation quickly which will strengthen and improve existing equal rights legislation.

Inside the Labour Party, women must have the right to elect their own representatives onto the NEC.

Labour must introduce new rights for the low-paid, for women workers, must oppose racial discrimination of any kind, and must repeal all discriminatory legislation, such as Section 28.

We oppose the government's so-called training schemes for youth and adults.

A Labour government must introduce real training schemes in co-operation with the trade unions. These must offer trainees trade union rates of pay and working conditions, and a real prospect of long-term employment.

Unemployment must be tackled. As a first step, we should develop public works schemes including a massive house building and renovation programme through Local Authorities and other public agencies.

We must bring in legislation which will deal with issues like the "lump" and self-employment.

Health and safety legislation must be strengthened and must cover oil rigs.

There must be an increase in the number of inspectors. Health and safety at work, in all industries and offices must be a priority.

Labour must also carry out a massive public investment programme to rebuild manufacturing industries, ensure proper regional development, and extend public ownership.

It must take back into public ownership all those industries and services privatised by the Tories. with the minimum of compensation, and in some cases, such as Giro Bank, no compensation at all.

We believe that policies such as these are the only way to get rid of this awful Tory government. This is our objective.

Let us go forward to defeat the government at the next election on the basis of bold, coherent, socialist policies, with the trade unions and the Party membership united and fighting as one.

Women's Organisation Review

Big Backward Steps

Neil Kinnock and the Labour NEC have decisively rejected women's demands for more power in the Labour Party.

by Gill Lee Briefing Women

The outcome of the much-hailed "Review" of Labour's women's organisation is now clear.

The trade union block vote will be imposed for a year, and if that doesn't keep women quiet, worse measures will follow.

Briefing Women **opposed the Review from the start. We said that its real aim was to weaken the Women's Organisation and shift it rightward.**

As a minority within the Labour Women's Action Committee we argued against handing the Review over to the NEC and predicted that they would use this opportunity to smash Women's Organisation.

1988 Labour Women's Conference voted on the Review.

•It demanded that five of its resolutions go straight to Annual Conference.

•It wanted a National Labour Women's Committee wholly elected by women.

•It agreed that trade unions should have a 50% say in Women's Conference, with more weight given to those unions with more women members.

Proposals

Kinnock & Co. have rejected the Women Conference proposals, which would at least have given some power to a re-organised conference.

They will recommend to Annual Conference a trade union block vote with no weighting given according to women membership.

Resolutions

The NEC will oppose taking five resolutions from Women's Conference at Annual Conference. It will recommend a continuation of the National Labour Women's Committee, which is only partially elected.

At a time when Labour should be reaching out to women, welcoming a strong, autonomous women's organisation which could lead the struggle against Thatcher's attacks on women, the NEC chose instead to launch an all-out attack on women's organisation in the Party.

Features

Football ID Card Scheme

A menace to civil liberties

Sometime towards the end of next year, over one million people will be compelled by law to carry identity cards with individual photographs.

They will be forced to do this simply because at some time during the next football season, they may wish to watch a Football League match.

Identity cards have been touted in recent years as a panacea to all kinds of social ills: underage drinking, rural violence, AIDS, Poll Tax evasion...

In the end, football has been chosen as the guinea pig.

A working party made up of Tory Sports Minister Colin Moynihan and representatives of the League,the FA, and the Department of the Environment has proposed a system in which a central computer will hold details of all registered football supporters.

Each supporter will be issued a card with a photo and an electronic code. At each turnstile at every ground in the country there will be a computer terminal connected to the central data base which will check the code, while a steward checks the photo against the face of the cardholder. A police officer will, of course, be standing by.

By Craig Brewin
Football Supporters Association (personal capacity)

Not only is this system cumbersome and expensive, it will also fail to prevent trouble on the terraces.

The overwhelming majority of the 2,000 League matches played each season pass off with no trouble at all. Where it does occur it is usually *outside* the grounds and often involves people who aren't even attending the game.

Closed circuit television and crowd segregation have already made grounds safer. Mass arrests inside grounds are increasingly rare even when there is mass disorder (as at Chelsea and Scarborough last year).

The police have had to resort to evidence tampering in efforts to convict people they regard as hooligan ringleaders.

So just who is meant to be screened out by the identity card system? Will it be at the discretion of the clubs — or the police?

The courts already have powers to ban people from football grounds, and these have been used repeatedly but with little effect on the level of violence. How will the card system improve this record?

The truth is that the government is less concerned to do something about football-related violence than it is to be *seen* to be doing something.

Only a few months ago, Moynihan said he had no intention of introducing an identity card scheme. Then came the European Championships in West Germany and the media overkill.

Three hundred English fans were arrested (in comparison with 800 German fans) but only 29 were charged.

The official UEFA report said that the level of violence was "normal" for football matches in Germany and that most arrests occurred in general mopping-up exercises.

Clearly, identity cards are not a logical or honest response to what happened in Germany, nor a means of preventing future trouble.

Moynihan estimates that it will take three seconds to check each cardholder at a turnstile. If that (conservative) estimate is right, it will take an extra 150,000 seconds to get 50,000 people into the ground.

With 30 turnstiles operating, it will therefore require a total of *90 minutes* to get everyone in — a recipe for a crowd-control disaster, and a likely deterrent to many potential fans.

These proposals will be disastrous for football — for ordinary supporters and for club finances. They are also the thin end of a totalitarian wedge threatening the whole of society.

A national identity card system for *all* adults would be a short step from the football scheme, and would delight the Tories and their Poll Tax collectors.

We must not only defeat the proposals, but counter them with positive policies for dealing with racist and macho behaviour on the terraces, for a statutory right of people in existing club membership schemes to participate in the management of their club, and for a general democratisation of the sport at all levels.



T. Bailey Foreman

A typical family atmosphere for last season's League Centenary tournament. The introduction of ID cards will only deter even more potential fans.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE COMMON MARKET — STILL THE ONLY SOCIALIST POLICY

Leslie Huckfield MEP

(Merseyside East) PO Box 200, Wigan, Lancs WN5 0LU

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Euro MEP

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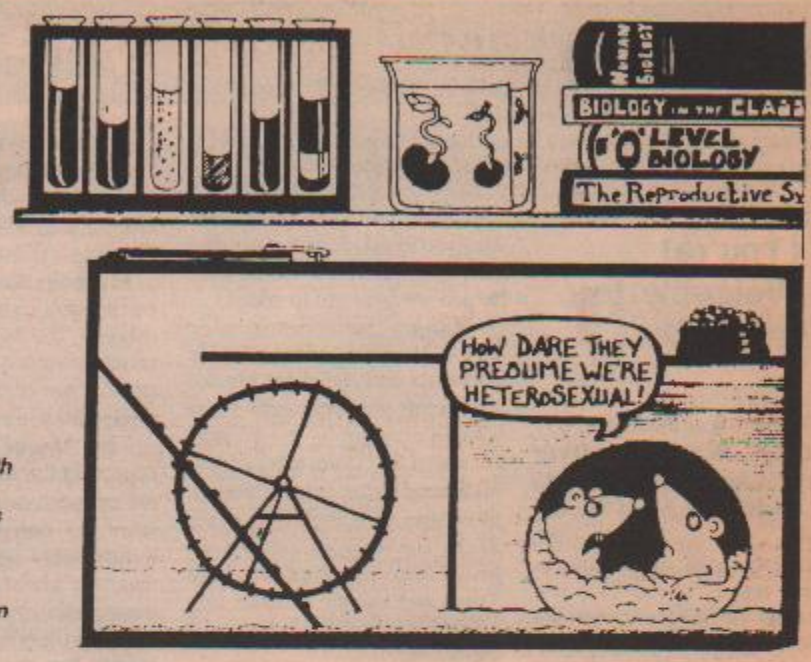
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Belgrano latest!
Why wait until 2012 to find out more about the sinking of the Argentine cruiser? *Read all about it: The Unnecessary War*, Edited by the Belgrano Action Group, £5.95, paperback, January 1988 available from *Spokesman*, Bertrand Russell House, Gamble Street, Nottingham NGT 4ET.
and in the *Report of the* Assessors on the Belgrano Enquiry, November 1986, published by B.A.G., £5.75, paperback, available from B.A.G., 1 Queen Elizabeth Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 1DH.

ITALY
Lesbians and Gays look left



Postcard by Cath Tate. Set of postcards on Section 28 available from Cath Tate, PO Box 647, London SW2 4JX.

"In Italy, homosexuality simply does not exist so far as the law is concerned," according to 33 year-old Franco Grillini, national secretary of the federation of Italian lesbian and gay organisations known as ARCI-Gay.

In Grillini's view, this absence of legal repression has "historically contributed to the relative invisibility of gay people in Italy and the weakness of the Italian lesbian and gay movement.

"The state policy of *repressive tolerance* towards homosexuals means that anyone can behave however they want, so long as it is hidden away from the public eye.

"This clandestinity has been accepted by many gays... but the future of gay and lesbian rights depends on breaking this *social compromise* between homosexuals and the state."

Today, ARCI-Gay is in the forefront of creating a higher public profile and greater political influence for the Italian lesbian and gay community.

Established in 1979, it is part of the left wing ARCI cultural movement — the Italian Association for Recreation and Culture — which has over a million members.

ARCI-Gay has become the main national lesbian and gay movement in Italy, with 25 branches all over the country.

By PETER TATCHELL

Despite opposition from the Catholic Church, in 1982 Communist-led Bologna Council gave ARCI-Gay a local office, which Grillini describes as "the first gay centre in Italy." It is now ARCI-Gay's national headquarters.

"We are very concerned with questions of civil rights, AIDS, military service and sex education in schools," says Grillini. "We also organise cultural initiatives such as film seasons and summer festivals."

In recent years, ARCI-Gay's legislative proposals to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and to recognise cohabitation by homosexual partners have been accepted by most of the left parties.

In the 1987 general election, Grillini was one of seven openly gay candidates. He stood unsuccessfully in Bologna on a civil liberties and lesbian and gay rights platform on the Italian Communist party's list of candidates.

In recent years, the Communists have been trying to break with their doctrinaire past and link up with new social movements involving greens, feminists and lesbians and gays.

According to Grillini, ARCI-Gay has a "good relationship" with the Communist Party and its daily newspaper, *Unita*, which gives "favourable coverage" to lesbian and gay issues.

He adds, however, that "although the Communist Party unanimously approved a policy in support of homosexual rights at its last Congress, this policy was not included in the Party's election manifesto. Gay issues were really only raised by gay candidates."

How did the Italian media respond to Grillini and the other gay candidates? "The national press gave us a lot of coverage and most of it was quite fair," says Grillini. "There was no particular anti-gay campaign against me, apart form some telephone threats and insults.

"However, there was a vicious smear campaign against another gay Communist candidate, Nikki Vendola, who was falsely branded a paedophile by his Christian Democrat opponents."

Commenting on the election result, Grillini reflects: "I never expected to win. Standing for election gave me a public platform to raise lesbian and gay issues with a nationwide audience of millions. The question of homosexual rights has rarely achieved such prominence in Italy."

Grillini feels that one of ARCI-Gay's most concrete and significant achievements has been to overturn the homophobic attitudes of the national press: "Today, almost all the newspapers talk about lesbians and gays and ARCI-Gay in a sensitive way which is rarely derogatory. Even the conservative papers avoid perjorative language most of the time."

•Peter Tatchell is the author of *AIDS: A Guide to Survival*, published by *Gay Men's Press*, £3.95.

Communists for capitalism
Facing the future?

If you thought Kinnock's Policy Review was bad, you ain't seen nothing yet.

Last year the *Marxism Today* Communist Party remnant sent away a team of eight to redraft its 1977 programme *The British Road to Socialism*.

The team, which included such luminaries as Beatrix Campbell, *Marxism Today* editor Martin Jacques, and *Financial Times* journalist Charlie Leadbeater, were given a "completely free hand". The result, *Facing up to the Future*, has now been released to considerable fanfare — from the right.

Cautious souls (present author included) might argue that letting the characters listed above loose on any document remotely connected with socialism was asking for trouble. Monty Johnstone, a long-standing CP theoretician, may now agree, having used the press launch to express his dissent on the central question of class.

Bryan Gould did not share Monty's reservations. In a *Guardian* article Bryan noted wistfully that unlike his Labour Party parliamentary comrades, the CP does not have to contend with any organised link with the labour movement. Freed from such fetters, the CP can lead a charge to the right that outpaces even Labour's Policy Review.

Bryan may whinge, but there is a serious point here. Labour's Policy Reviewers have to face Party Conference. Today, with the trade union Leaders delivering the block votes to a grateful Shadow Cabinet, it may seem that the working class has no influence over the Party.

But this may not always be the case. The Bryan Goulds of this world live in fear of any attempt by ordinary Labour and trade union activists to win control of their Conference. Bryan is painfully aware of this, having been shouted down at last year's Conference.

One of the most notable themes of the document is the virtual abandonment of class as a tool for understanding society.The document points out that "central to the realignment on the left is the recomposition of the working class."

What those of us who have failed to realign have not understood is that "class in modern capitalism is not the product of a single polarisation between a ruling class, which owns the means of production, and a working class of wage labourers."

This type of language is less than honest. *Labour Briefing*, for one, has long recognised that the working class is diverse — which is why we support demands for greater representation for women in the Labour Party and trades unions, the fight for black Sections, the Positive Images Campaign in Haringey, and the anti-Clause 28 campaigns nationally.

It is precisely because we recognise the diversity of the working class that we give such priority to the fight for autonomous organisation within the labour movement.

But where we see diversity and therefore set the building of class unity high on the agenda in a fight against "a ruling class, which owns the means of production", the CP sees only "contradictory class locations". The CP narrows class politics to "action at work". Before you can say "Popular Front", class is no longer the major division in society and the CP is off in search of new social forces.

By Bryn Griffiths Tottenham CLP

With class out of the way, the CP advocates the creation of "popular alliances" of Black people, women, the green movement, public sector professionals, the voluntary sector, dissident nationalism, and the old CP standby, the Churches.

Prince Charles isn't mentioned but he does appear on the front page of *Marxism Today*. No doubt he's waiting for the call.

One of the CP's favourite historical examples include "popular fronts against fascism in the 30s". The latest issue of *Revolutionary History* (produced by Socialist Platform) catalogues the slaughter of Trotskyists and Anarchists by the Spanish CP during the Civil War — an atrocity sponsored and justified by the Popular Front, surely a concept in need of at least some critical appraisal!

More contemporary examples include Live Aid and the Mandela concerts — positive developments, certainly, but are they permanent substitutes for the organised working class? I doubt it.

The conduct of the miners' strike in South Wales is another CP example, apparently more useful, but actually a coded attack on Scargillism. No acknowledgment is given to the role played by Scargill and Heathfield on the NUM Executive in fighting for Women Against Pit Closures to have constitutional status within the NUM.

Having abandoned class politics, the CP no longer has to explain how the working class can seize control of the means of production from the capitalist class.

The CP rejects "statist notions of social ownership" and suggests "legislation could be passed forcing the top 200 companies to make over 10-15% of the shares to workers' trusts, or wage-earner investment boards, or the state could take strategic stakes devolved to regulatory bodies."

Here the CP rejects Clause IV and lines up squarely behind the Labour right. It reads like a parody of a Bryan Gould speech and would be funny if it wasn't such a gross distortion of the word "communist".

The document ends with the Fabian declaration that socialists "must gradually extend their influence throughout the society." For, if anyone still hasn't got the message,the writer explains: "Socialism will not be made in Britain in the 1990s or the first decade of the next century by this strategy."

Socialists looking for alternatives to Kinnock's Policy Review will receive little help from *Marxism Today*. Our time will be spent more productively participating in the policy debates taking place in the Socialist Conference.

"Travelling light seems to have freed them (the CP) to look to the future with an open-mindedness and intelligence which the Labour Party, imprisoned by its past achievements, hostage to its aspirations, has not always found easy to demonstrate."
Bryan Gould MP



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Letters

WRITEBACK!

We welcome your letters! Write to Labour Briefing, PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ.
(Letters over 300 words may be cut for space reasons, unless you state your letter may be published in full or not at all).

(You're) Welcome to the SLD

Dear *Briefing*,

I recently read through a copy of the SLD's introductory brochure entitled "Welcome to the Social & Liberal Democrats".

As expected,the contents were a ragbag of nebulous notions and cosmetic concessions — strikingly similar, in fact, to the "Aims and Values" and Policy Review documents currently being foisted upon us by the Labour leadership.

Whilst "Democratic socialists believe in market allocation" and that "the operation of the market ... is a generally satisfactory means of determining provision and consumption", the SLD says that it "will recognise the role and power of the market — But we cannot rely on market forces alone..."

Will the electorate spot the difference? Would they bother to vote at all?

In fact the only major differences between the SLD's vague vision of future freedom and fairness and the Labour Policy Review's puny proposals for a "talent-based economy" with "user-friendly services" are the old Liberal ideas about Proportional Representation and Regional Devolution — which we have yet to adopt.

With no common ownership commitments, democratic socialists and social (or liberal) democrats will obviously share a lot in common — capitalism, for a start. Refusing to recognise all around us the evidence of exploitation, and thus failing to address the key questions of ownership and control, these "aims and values" amount to a complete capitulation to capitalism.

When what's urgently required is a straight Socialist challenge to capitalist control, Kinnock is instead preparing the ground for a merger with the SLD — or some such alliance arrangement — to pose as a potential substitute for "Thatcherism".

Its high time to realise — as Thatcher did year ago — that the Capitalist System has outgrown the Welfare State. Any return to the cosy Butskellite Keynesian consensus politics would be hopelessly inadequate.

This is no time to haul down the Red Flag of Socialism and hoist the white flag of surrender. Defend Clause IV and defeat the Policy Review — or Labour will become Liberal.

Yours fraternally,
Richard Hanford
Secretary, Mid Sussex CLP

Major Unrest misses the beat

Dear *Briefing*,

I must disagree with some points made in Major Unrest's article on music in *Briefing's* Summer Special.

My main objection is to the paragraph in which s/he dismisses "the synthetic froth of most western pop and the grim angst of much of the 'independent' alternatives."

The Major's reason for rejecting the last ten years or so of post-punk pop stems from its being synthetic of synthesiser-based. This may seem a trivial issue, but the bourgeois myths behind the Major's dismissive comment inform the rest of the article, and are too common amongst socialist views on art/music.

Community

Socialists' suspicions of anything new or technological are understandable, given how modern science has been used to enslave, rather than liberate, the working class. But scientific inventions do not have to be used in this way.

The Major rejects synthesiser-pop because "the machine" apparently comes between the musician and the "deeper sounds" of the community. In other words, that it is "alienated" from like.

But since when has expressing alienation been a bad thing? Marx realised that one of the features of capitalist society is alienation — from work, the community, life itself.

What the Major ignores is that this so-called "synthetic" or "alienated" music is, if anything, more vital, more natural, than the "deeper sounds" s/he praises so highly. To go further: *the only sound possible in an alienated society is the music of alienation.*

But, you may say, what's more natural than, say, Roxanne Shante singing? It's precisely through technology that we can hear her singing at all. Could we hear her without a recording studio, a record deck, a radio?

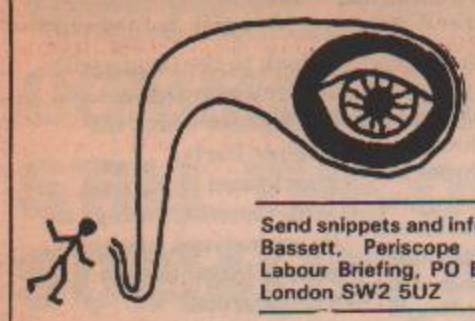
All the "synthetic froth" bands do is foreground technology to show how the means through which music is produced is integral to the music itself.

That sound is not possible without technological "interference". Yes, we're a long way form the time when musician and music were unalienated, united as one. But is that necessarily bad? And how could we regress to such a time anyway? Indeed, did such a time ever exist?

No, it's far better to press on with the means of production at our disposal. As many "Hip Hop" musicians have demonstrated, the synthesiser and the record deck can be used to unite the oppressed peoples of the world.

William West
Haringey Labour Briefing

Periscope



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

Unintelligence Service

Another shock revelation in the *Guardian*!

Apparently MI5 and the Special Branch are labouring under the misapprehension that Harriet Harman MP and her TGWU-bureaucrat husband Jack Dromey are a threat to the state.

%%%???

Labour's Leaders tell us withdrawal from the EEC is not an option, but a new opinion poll commissioned by the Euro-bureaucrats themselves suggests the Great British Public thinks otherwise.

Less than 40% of people in the UK feel they have benefited from Common Market membership. When asked "What comes to mind if you hear EC?" only 17% had what the pollsters call a positive evaluation. Of those who had heard of the European Parliament, 27% were generally favourable; 46% unfavourable.

The news for revolutionaries is, however, less than encouraging. The percentage favouring revolutionary action in Britain is down to 4% (from a 1981 high of 9%).

We'll have to move the *Briefing* office to Greece, who lead the EC table on 11%. The Luxembourgeois live up to their name with the lowest on 2%. It could be a long, hard, winter.

With solidarity like this...

One *Briefing* supporter — a London postal worker — returned home from the picket line one morning during the strike to find on his doormat... a delivery of post.

Well, not to worry, other offices were joining the strike day by day.

Our London postie sat down to open his letters; only to find every single item of mail which had got through the near-total blockade came from labour movement organisations!

Alton Bill boosts abortions

Don't blink, it's true.

New figures show that at the height of Alton's campaign to reduce abortion time limits to 18 weeks, the total number of abortions on women resident in Britain rose by a massive 15.1%.

Significantly, the number of abortions performed *after* 18 weeks rose from 1,384 in the same 1987 quarter to 1,942 in 1988.

Clearly, Alton's claim that his campaign was "saving lives" is true — his cynical, dishonest propaganda must have helped draw attention to the existence (however perilous) of safe, legal abortion in Britain.

History goes full circle

You may have thought that after discovering the new panacea of "federalism", *Socialist Organiser's* contribution to the further development of theory would just be to continue applying it to every area in the world (Ireland, Palestine, Quebec, the Malvinas... what's next? Islington?).

In fact, they have decided to turn their attention to another old chestnut: the workers' states. A recent issue of *Socialist Organiser* announces the Editorial Board's intention to drop the term "workers' states", and its extensions: "deformed" and "degenerated workers' states".

What more useful term replaces it? They're not sure, and will be starting a debate in the paper on whether to go for "bureaucratic collectivist" or "state capitalist".

One seasoned *Briefing* contributor, arriving in the *Briefing* office shortly after this amazing piece of news, was aghast. "But I haven't argued the 'state cap' line with them for 15 years!" he gasped; before going off to exhume memories of that distant time.

Meanwhile, a member of the *Socialist Organiser* Editorial Board was to be heard at the recent CLPs Conference in Manchester, claiming that the debate reflected longstanding concerns held within *SO*.

But how have these *Socialist Organiser* supporters managed to keep their concerns so quiet for so long, a nearby *Briefing* supporter wanted to know.

"The programme's not written on tablets of stone," came the answer.

It would seem that *Socialist Organiser's* programme is written on tablets of soap. We wait for the ultimate terminological reassessment: when the EB decide that the term "socialist" is no longer useful, and start a debate on whether to rename their paper *The Organiser* or simply *The*.

Building Briefing

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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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Briefing goes to Labour Party Conference!

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If you are reading *Briefing* for the first time (or the umpteenth), and you want to contact us, call into the office any time between 11am and 7am (yes, the office is shut from 7am to 11am!).
If you want to keep in touch, make sure you fill in the subscription form above for your copy of the paper each fortnight.
Briefing sellers: please note that we are rushing out an issue of *Briefing* immediately after Party Conference, so we keep up with our normal fortnightly schedule. However, having been away at Conference while we would normally have been producing the paper, we shall probably be printing a day or so late. Ring 01-733 7016 after Party Conference for the latest details of when you'll be receiving your paper. Apologies for late arrival of the last two papers: we're having problems mastering the new technology. We hope to have cracked it soon; and hope that in the meantime you appreciate the new clearer type, which should make reading the articles easier.

BOOK REVIEW

A Health Campaigner's Handbook

Cutting the Lifeline: the fight for the NHS, edited by John Lister, *Journeyman Press*, £3.50.

By MARK SEATON

Don't wait for Labour's answer to Thatcher's "NHS Review" — go out and buy this new paperback now!

***Cutting the Lifeline*, edited by London Health Emergency Information Officer John Lister, is a campaigner's handbook, an asset for anyone engaged in the daily battle to save the NHS from Tory depredation.**

Its first half provides a clear overview of the origins and development of the NHS, an assessment of its achievements and failures, the roots of its present crisis, and the growth of the fight to defend it.

The second half consists of some 20 articles from activists in COHSE, NUPE, NALGO, MSF, SHA, MIND, and numerous campaigns, covering topics as diverse as private medicine, migrant workers, dental services, AIDS, and ambulances.



"This book speaks out for the silenced majority," says John Lister, "the 92% of the population who depend totally on the NHS for their health care and reject all of the arguments trotted out by the Thatcherite think tanks."

It's also a good book to sell through your local CLP or trade union branch. Copies can be obtained from *LHE, 335 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.*

BOOK REVIEW

John Maclean battles on!

John Maclean: Educator of the Working Class, a pamphlet by James D. Young, *Clydeside Press*, 37 High Street, Glasgow, 36pp.

"Working people, like everyone else, have a way of forgetting the struggles and sacrifices that made possible the improved conditions they enjoy today."

Occasional *Briefing* contributor James D. Young kicks off his new pamphlet with this fitting quote from the American Wobbly, Ralph Chaplin.

Young's re-examination of the distinctive contribution to working class education made by socialist revolutionary John Maclean (1879-1923) is part of his general counter-offensive to the establishment-induced *forgetfulness* which besets not only the working masses, but many left activists as well.

Young knows that history is a powerful weapon in the class struggle, and he rages effectively in these pages against the use made of it by right wing historians who belittle the militant traditions of the Clydeside working class.

In its brief span, the pamphlet touches on a wide range of fascinating topics: from the early pioneers of the Scottish Socialist Teachers' Society to Thatcher's attack on Newbattle Abbey College and the Scottish universities.

Its focus on Maclean's achievements as a teacher shows how his internationalism was rooted in the everyday realities of Scottish working class culture.

By Mike Marqusee
Haringey Labour Briefing

The pamphlet concludes with an homage to the late Harry McShane: "...a new era full of promise and potential is opening up before us. By putting socialism back onto the agenda of contemporary politics, the Scottish left can help to inspire and encourage our bretheren in Chile, South Africa, America, and England.

With the example of John Maclean, Harry McShane and an army of socialist forebears before us, we can now begin to prove that the 'forward march of Labour' has not been halted."

FILM REVIEW

A World Apart, directed by Chris Menges from Shawn Slovo's script, is based on Slovo's own experiences growing up as the daughter of Communist and anti-apartheid activist Ruth First, who was murdered by the South African regime in 1981. The film focusses on the personal cost of fighting racism and tyranny, is admirably non-sectarian, and has the honesty to acknowledge that, in the end, it's the justice of the struggle itself which holds us together.



BOOK REVIEW

The Isthmus of Revolution

Power in the Isthmus, by James Dunkerley, *Verso*, £29.95.

By Phil Hearse, Islington North CLP

Historical and materialist in method, stunning in its sweep and erudition, this new book is without doubt the single most important work on recent Central American politics in the English language.

Subtitled *A Political History of Modern Central America* it charts economic, social, and political developments from the end of the Spanish Captaincy General in 1821 to the Arias plan in 1987.

Dunkerley provides a detailed account of changes in the region during the 1950-80 period — the backdrop to the modern rebellion.

He shows that during this period, the epoch of the long economic boom, major changes in the economy and structure of society created the preconditions for an explosion.

Agribusiness

The development of agribusiness and limited, dependent industrialisation meant the the development of urbanisation on a new scale.

While not every nation in the region shared the grotesque features of "Somoza Family Ltd." in Nicaragua, imperialism and the oligarchy nonetheless combined to keep the masses impoverished.

The result — growing population, increasingly urban and youthful, the development of mass popular organisations, and continued mass impoverishment — was an explosive mixture.

Revolutionary

Dunkerley shows how these conditions led to the development of revolutionary movements in the guise of *national liberation movements* (e.g. the names FMLN/FSLN).

The "states" of Central America, he notes, are of relatively recent creation. The people of the region share important elements of a common culture and of course a common language.

The general domination of the region by imperialism, the need to defeat dictatorial local oligarchies, and the ever-present land question lend a decisive weight in the revolutionary process to national and democratic tasks.

While never hectoring or sectarian, Dunkerley attempts to weigh critically the successive policies of the various mass popular organisations. This is never done without paying tribute to the extraordinary courage and creativity of revolutionary movements which are everywhere staffed by young — often very young — militants.

No one will agree with all Dunkerley's views, but it is surely right that critical socialist scholarship should attempt to understand popular revolutionary movements — sympathetically and without sectarianism — but also without the simplistic illusions of cheerleaders.

Victory

The victory of the FSLN in Nicaragua and the ongoing war in El Salvador have tended to overshadow the Guatemalan struggle. But Guatemala is the largest, most populous country of the isthmus, and is also the primary focus for imperialist economic investment.

Dunkerley's view is that the final outcome of the regional struggle may well be decided by the battle in the forests and mountains of Guatemala. The defeat suffered by the popular forces in that country in the early 1980s thus weigh heavily on the balance of forces in the whole region.

The loss of Central America to imperialist control — with Mexico to the north and a desperately unstable Colombia to the south — would be a massive blow in favour of socialism in the Americas.

Dunkerley insists that, despite the apparent stalemate in the region, the surge for popular power is far from over. In that sense, despite its detail, Dunkerley's own book is just the story so far.

Mistake

Verso have made a mistake in publishing this indispensable source-book in a lavish £30 edition, which should be remedied by a paperback edition as soon as possible.

Bourgeois and literary journals have mostly ignored Dunkerley's book, but the left should not — even if it means undertaking a heroic fight to force your local library to get hold of it. No socialist can really be aware of the central issues involved in the isthmus of revolution without it.

BOOK REVIEW

El Salvador: Behind the lines

The People's Remedy: Health Care in El Salvador's War of Liberation, Monthly Review Press, New York City, USA.

Francisco Metzi, whose book *The People's Remedy* will be published in America next month, is a European health worker who spent three years behind the guerrilla lines in the liberated zones controlled by the FMLN (Farabundo Marti Front of National Liberation) in war-torn El Salvador.

Metzi's book is the story of medical work in the most appalling conditions. Makeshift hospitals in the battle zones were frequently evacuated, with patients moved on stretchers or hammocks minutes after major surgery.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

Yet despite the air-raids, poverty and disease, and the absence of proper equipment, medical supplies or skilled personnel, the determination and courage of a people who have no choice but to struggle emerges strongly.

Humour

There are even passages of grim humour. On one occasion, Metzi, unable to make his medical jargon understood by local health volunteers, demonstrates the powers of various antibiotics by making use of military analogy. He sets up a mock battle between bacteria, drugs and viruses in the body using shrapnel, pebbles and red and green chillis as props.

The most stirring sections of the book describe the people's resilience, the fighters who are stitched up and return to the front to die, the villagers who rebuild their lives after a government air-raid has flattened their homes, the six-hour battle over a primitive "operating table" to save the life of a *companero*.

Theorist

Metzi is no political theorist - his tale is fast-moving and emotive - but his conclusion is unassailable: "When the objective of a struggle is the liberation of the people, it is uncontainable. There will be more difficult moments, setbacks and even momentary defeats.

"But history is on the side of the oppressed, and that is a powerful weapon. Revolutionary activity in El Salvador has persisted for too many years for the truly popular and just nature of this struggle not to be recognised."

Keep up to date with left books and cinema; subscribe to Briefing (see page 12 for form)

Eastern Europe and the USSR

Nationalism and Internationalism

At a meeting of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party on July 29th, Mikhail Gorbachev, faced by rising nationalist protests in the Caucasus and the Baltic Republics, talked of the need for tougher penalties for those who stir up national enmity.

Meanwhile, in the Western Ukrainian city of Lviv, nationalist activists from six non-Russian nationalities appealed to President Reagan not to abandon their cause.

On the face of it, choosing sides between Reagan and Gorbachev ought to be easy. But, as usual, things are not as they seem.

Official "internationalism" turns out to be a cover for nationalist discrimination; appeals for class unity a cover for repression.

By Colin Meade
Surbiton CLP

The Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu now plans to destroy 2,000 villages, many with predominantly non-Romanian populations. In the winter of 84-85, Turks living in Bulgaria were required to adopt Bulgarian names.

When, in 1981, Albanians in the Kosovo region of Yugoslavia tried to exercise their right of self-determination they were met with systematic repression, followed now by an attempt to mobilise Serbs in an anti-Albanian crusade led by Serbian Communist Party head Slobodan Milosevic.

In the Soviet Union it was standard practice to condemn the chauvinism of Georgians or Ukrainians, but excuse the chauvinism of the dominant Russian nation by references to the "scale of the assistance given by the Russian working class and the Russian people to all the peoples of the USSR."

In the Ukraine, 70% of books and pamphlets published are in Russian, although Russian is the first language for only 20% of the population.

In the 30s, savage repression was meted out to so-called bourgeois nationalists in the non-Russian parts of the Soviet Union. 80% of Ukrainian writers and artists perished.

According to one writer, "The desire to stamp out the agents of the Ukrainian national idea was so extreme that several hundred blind *bandurysty* — itinerant folk singers — were executed."

Mass deportations of minority groups took place during and after the "Great Patriotic War" and the ruling caste has never hesitated to strike the anti-semitic chord in the hope of diverting attention from its own failures.

It should be remembered that at one time, under the Hapsburgs, Romanians were oppressed by Hungarians. Today's victims can be tomorrow's tyrants, and national enmity can exist without either side being altogether the oppressor or the oppressed.

Nationalism

Socialists should therefore support not nationalism, but a programme for *the democratic solution of the national question*, based on the end of all discrimination and a state system which guarantees national rights to all.

This approach does not come out of the blue. The proposal for a Balkan Federation, for example, has a long pedigree. In 1947, Yugoslavia's leader Tito and the Bulgarian Dmitrov met to discuss a possible union of the two states. Stalin, however, was dead against the idea.

Vision

The old vision of a *United Socialist States of Europe* needs to be revived and developed. In the meantime, we must lend support to all those who dare to challenge the fake official "working class unity", who tell the truth about what these slogans conceal, or who suffer persecution for protesting against national oppression.

Among democratic opposition circles, an internationalist approach to the national question appears to be gaining ground. A small group of Romanian exiles living in the Hungarian capital of Budapest has recently approached the Hungarian Democratic Union to express support for Hungarians and other minorities in Romania.

Supporters of the Czechoslovak democratic front, Charter 77, have also offered support to the people of Romania. A Bulgarian dissident, Tzeko Tsekov, protested against the anti-Turkish campaign, and the very same people who appealed to Reagan also put out a statement opposing:

"Any attempt by reactionary forces to preserve the status quo and divide us,setting Azerbaijanis against Armenians, Russians and Ukrainians against Crimean Tartars, Christians against Muslims, Orthodox against Catholics, and inciting everyone against the Jews."

Their mistake is not to reject the national policies of the bureaucracy, but to believe that Reagan supports genuine self-determination of the peoples of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

POLAND

A socialist alternative for Polish workers

The following article was written for *Labour Briefing* by JAN SYLWESTROWICZ of the International Department of the Polish Socialist Party.

After a break of 40 years, an independent socialist party is again functioning in Eastern Europe.

The Polish Socialist Party (PPS) was set up in November 1987 by socialist activists from Solidarnosc, the independent peace movement, and other Polish opposition groups.

The old PPS ceased to exist in 1948, when it was forcibly merged with the Stalinist Polish Workers' Party, whose name then changed to the Polish United Workers' Party.

The PPS had been moving sharply leftwards since the 1930s. The programme adopted at its Radom Congress in 1937 was based on the international crisis of capitalism, prioritised involvement in the ongoing class struggle, emphasised the fight for women's rights, and reasserted the Party's traditional anti-clericalism.

The PPS organised workers' brigades to defend Warsaw from the Nazis in 1939, and conducted activity throughout the occupation.

Towards the end of the War it stressed the necessity of constructing an independent Poland, on the basis of a revolutionary social transformation, with the nationalisation of large-scale industries and the development of democratic workers' co-operatives in smaller ones.

This political tradition has inspired left-wing militants in Poland to re-establish the PPS. Unfortunately, its founding conference was broken up by security police.

The Polish Stalinists like to play up their "liberal" reforms and boast that dissidents are now free to walk the streets - but they draw the line at the PPS; four of whose leading members were jailed in May for attending a workers' protest meeting at the Dolmel metallurgical plant in Wroclaw.

Released on surety after a month, three of them were rearrested during the August strikes and still remain in prison, untried.

Despite the repression, the PPS continues to publicise its representatives' names and insists on its right to function openly.

An application for registration as a legal organisation was rejected by the courts.

A propaganda victory was won, however, when the Ombudsman for Civil Rights (who has no decision making powers) declared that the courts had committed a "procedural" error in denying the PPS registration — it turned out there was no statutory basis for doing so, as the Stalinists had never bothered to pass any legislation regulating the creation of political parties.

The Ombudsman's opinion was rejected by government spokesperson Jerzy Urban, who merely noted that the government "took a different view of the matter."

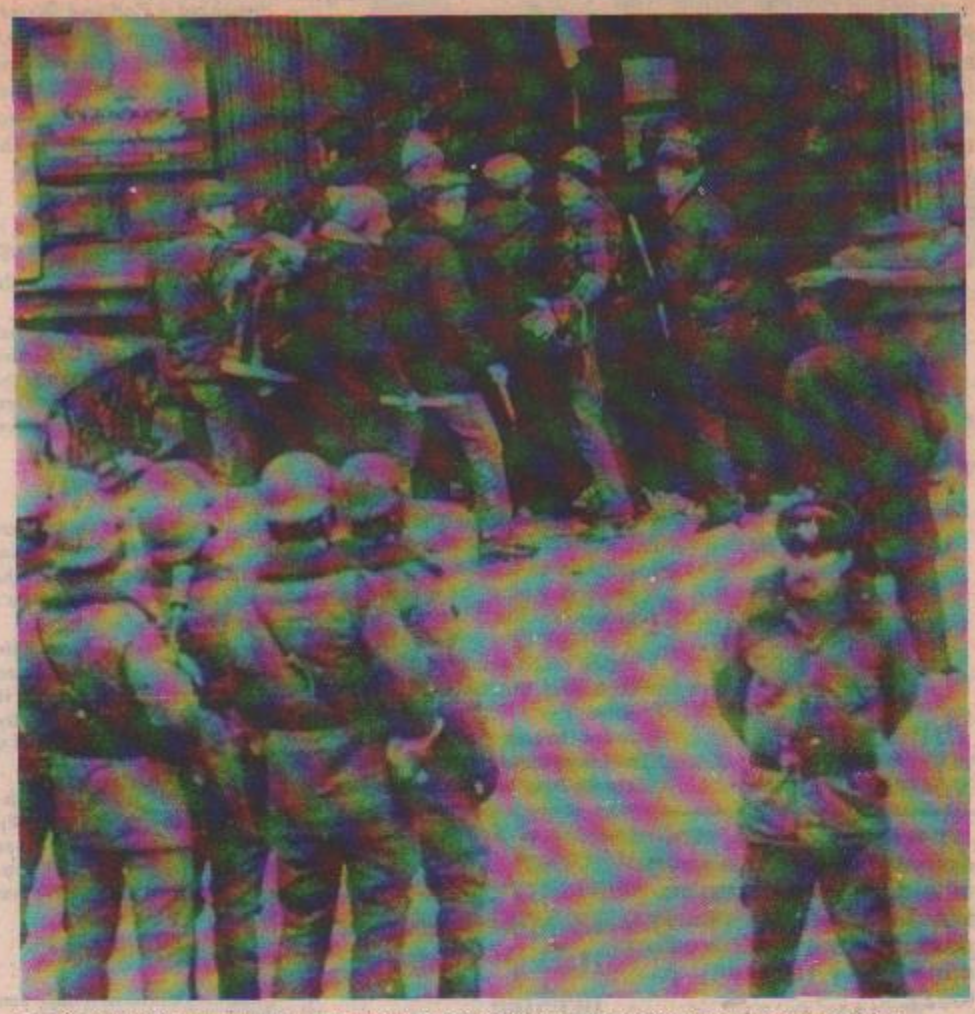
The Party's difficulties have not prevented it from making remarkable strides forward, thanks to a consistent class approach.

Before this year's first wave of strikes (April/May), many leading figures in Solidarnosc began to argue for a move away from the movement's traditional bases in the factories (where they claimed effective work was now impossible) towards a rainbow coalition of independent initiatives, from ecology groups and clandestine publishing ventures to the creation of small private businesses ("breaking the state's economic monopoly").

Against this, the PPS argued for a return to the factories, for strengthening the underground workers' commissions, developing the factory bulletins, and focusing Solidarnosc's efforts on its basic task: the defence of working people's interests.

In response to the government's economic reforms, involving a bizarre marriage of bureaucratic planning and market mechanisms that add up to an unprecedented attack on working class living standards, the PPS proposed a democratic socialist approach — the "socialisation" of both the factories and the planning system by handing them over to the workers.

At the beginning of the year, many of Solidarnosc's intellectual "advisors" began to warn of the danger of "uncontrolled", "spontaneous" protests. These, they said, could frighten Gorbachev and his Polish supporters into abandoning their reforms.



Despite the military repression which Jaruzelski started, Polish workers continue to organise resistance to the regime.

The PPS argued that all efforts had to be made to prepare a new wave of workers' struggles to beat off the attacks involved in these very reforms.

Events since then have proved the PPS correct. The workers' struggles of April/May and August were the most widespread, determined, and politically conscious since martial law.

The legalisation of Solidarnosc was the central demand and the strikes were organised in a democratic and open way. All this demonstrates that for Polish workers self-organisation and direct workers' democracy remain central to their struggle against Stalinism.

Of course, the PPS's forces are still relatively weak. Its financial situation — of enormous importance given the costs of operating "illegally" — is dire.

It is coming under pressure from other sections of Solidarnosc to adopt a more "reasonable" line (which resulted in a small split in February, with four members of the national leadership leaving).

The future will be difficult. Yet the fact that the PPS exists, and is presenting Polish workers with a genuinely socialist solution to the crisis caused by 40 years of Stalinist misrule, should please the entire anti-Stalinist left, East and West.

Messages of support — in particular, condemning the repression of the PPS and calling for its immediate legalisation — should be sent to: Tadeusz Rachowski, Chair, PPS Central Executive Committee), UL. Meissnera 2m54, Warsaw.

LABOUR AND PALESTINE

Stop leadership support for Israeli cut-throats!

ANDREW HORNUNG, on behalf of the Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine, looks at the division between Labour Party Conference policy and the public positions of Labour's leadership over a period of intense struggle by the Palestinian people. What difference does this year's Party Conference make?

At last! The possibility of a debate on the central issue of Middle East politics: the Palestinian question.

In the past, the complexity of the Lebanese civil war, the Iran-Iaq war, internecine fighting within the Palestinian camp all obscured the fundamental question of Palestinian statehood.

Now the uprising in the "Occupied Territories" has focused the world's attention on the brutality of Israeli colonialism and the national rights of the Palestinian people.

Uprising

It is a measure of the power of that Uprising that not even its opponents within our ranks dare reveal their true hostility to it. Thus the resolution submitted by Poale Zion (the British protegees of Israel's Labour Party) can conceal its real intent.

It talks of "deep concern", but refuses to take sides openly. It talks of "peaceful coexistence", but doesn't mention Palestinian statehood.

It gives support to Israel's Labour Party, although that Party's leading representatives are in charge of trying to crush the uprising. It talks of the Peres initiative and the need to include Palestinians (note: not the *PLO*!) and Jordan in an international conference — although Jordan has finally given up its piratical claims on the West Bank...

There follow three paragraphs combining duplicity with diversion in roughly equal proportions.

We hear of "medical aid", of "agroforestry", and "natural deprivation" but when we get to the nub of the issue, to the question of the right of the Palestinian people to national statehood, we find the mealy mouthed phrase "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" set in inverted commas, as if the authors wanted to distance themselves from even such vagueness.

This resolution should be roundly rejected by Conference!

The remaining resolutions all clearly express their support for the Palestinian struggle and the unconditional opposition to Zionist colonialism. They recognise the Palestinians' right to statehood and the PLO's right to represent the Palestinian people.

All of them also seek to get the Party leadership to come out of hiding on this issue and boldly advocate Conference policy on this issue.

These motions may be divided into three groups:

•those from Lewisham East, Oxford East and Wolverhampton South West see the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as lying in the creation of a secular democratic state of Palestinians and Jews;

•the resolution from Epping Forest, Walthamstowe and Warley East, on the other hand, see the solution as lying in the creation of a Palestinian state in the Occupied Territories alongside a secure Israeli state within its pre-'67 borders;

•the third group (represented by the Dulwich, Southend, and Preston motions) do not explicitly come down on either side of this debate, confining themselves on this question now to an insistence on Israeli withdrawal and recognition of the PLO.

Conference

It is worth recalling that when these issues were last debated at Conference, in 1982, Conference rightly came down on the side of the secular democratic state solution.

Of course, it would be good to have a serious debate at Conference, between these alternatives. What is of primary importance, however, is that we tell our leaders loud and clear that it is time to stop supporting the colonialist cut-throats of the Israel Labour Party; it is time to support the struggle of the Palestinians; to recognise the PLO unconditionally and unequivocally, as the chosen representative of the Palestinian people; and to campaign on these positions publicly.

□□□□□□□□□□□□□



Frame-up of US socialist

Defend Mark Curtis!

By Pete Firmin Brent East CLP

American socialists are appealing for international support for a political activist framed by the police.

Mark Curtis worked at the Swift meat-packing plant in Des Moines, Iowa.

On March 1st police raided the Swift plant and arrested one Salvadoran and 16 Mexican workers on immigration charges using information obtained from supposedly confidential amnesty application forms.

Three days later, Curtis went to a meeting with co-workers to protest at the arrests.

On his way home, a woman pleaded with him for a lift, saying a man was after her. At her house, she asked him to wait on the porch while she looked inside.

He never saw the woman again, but moments later police ran onto the porch, arrested Curtis and charged him with attempted rape.

In gaol, Curtis was called a "Mexican-lover" and beaten up. His cheekbone was broken and his face was cut.

Curtis has been charged with rape, burglary, and assaulting the police. He faces a 25-year prison sentence if found guilty.

Curtis is a member of the Socialist Workers Party and his name is on FBI files because of his Central American Solidarity work. Such files are made available to local police departments.

Rumour also has it that Swift's owners are looking for a four-year wage freeze when the contract negotiations begin in August. It is not difficult to see why they want activists like Curtis out of the way.

Over 4,000 people have sent letters and petitions protesting at Curtis's treatment, including the Campaign Group of MPs. Rallies have been held in his defence at which the UN representatives of the African National Congress, amongst others, have spoken.

Briefing readers are asked to raise the issue in trade union and Labour Party bodies.

Send messages demanding the charges against Curtis be dropped to: James Smith, Polk County Attorney, 408 Polk County Courthouse, 5th and Mulberry, Des Moines, Iowa 50309, USA.

Copies of messages and any contributions should be sent to the Mark Curtis Defense Campaign, PO Box 1048, Des Moines, Iowa 50311, USA.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Labour and Ireland

Work for solidarity with the Irish struggle

Twenty years after the civil rights marches, does the 1988 Labour Party Conference mark a major advance in labour movement support for the position of British withdrawal? BILL HAMILTON, Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP, and Labour Committee on Ireland activist, looks at the issues.

The upsurge in CLP support for British withdrawal from Ireland is appropriate at a Party Conference which commemorates 20 years of struggle in the six counties.

On October 5th, 1968, civil rights marchers were batoned off the streets by the RUC and the notorious B Specials.

They were marching for an end to discrimination in employment and housing, and the electoral gerrymandering which still produces artificial Unionist majorities in cities like Derry.

Little has been achieved in the past 20 years by successive British governments, Labour or Tory. Now our leaders did not even deem the Irish question important enough for a single mention in any of the Policy Review statements.

However, only ten days before Party Conference, the front bench team released a 15,000 word policy document in a fanfare of publicity.

The bulk of the report is a lengthy justification of a version of the "harmonisation" policy first floated by Clive Soley when he was Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary. At best, this policy is aimed at reunification by stealth, based on a belief that, if the social, legal, and economic framework of the six and 26 counties is given an "all-Ireland" character, the border will melt away.

This is nonsense. It shows no understanding of the real political processes needed to establish a united Ireland — a new Ireland, not an amalgam of the six and 26 counties as they presently exist.

The loyalist veto remains at the core of this document, which states "only with the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland" will reunification take place. It's going to be up to the rank and file of the Party to expose this rotten core and stop this initiative in its tracks.

Resolutions on Ireland have been placed in the "democracy for the individual and community" section of the Conference agenda.

The LCI will be lobbying for two composite resolutions, one on British withdrawal and one on stringent legal action to end employment discrimination.

Simply achieving a debate on Ireland would be a small victory. If we get that far, surely those in the trade unions who shamefully scuppered the resolution on employment discrimination last year will not be able to do so again.

On this issue, the Party Conference is now well to the right of even the Tory cabinet. Our front bench spokespersons need a clear mandate to confront the new legislation proposed by the Tories.

Thirteen CLPs have resolutions and amendments supporting British withdrawal, supported by a probable majority of CLPs. Sadly, the union block vote will be wielded solidly against it.

But this is the beginning of a campaign to force the Party to hold a major policy debate next year on British withdrawal and self-determination for the Irish people.

Invite an LCI speaker to your Labour Party or trade union meeting and put a short resolution like this:

"This CLP believes that Britain has no progressive role to play in Ireland, that the Irish people as a whole have a right to determine their own future and that Britain should therefore withdraw military and politically from Ireland."

KURDS FACE CHEMICAL WARFARE

Stop Iraq attacking the Kurds!

A delegation led by Jeremy Corbyn MP is now seeking meetings with the British Embassies of all permanent members of the UN Security Council to urge action to stop the carnage in Kurdistan. The delegation, which includes Harry Cohen MP, Meg Beresford (CND), Lucy Beck (National Peace Council), and representatives of the Kurdish Cultural Centre, issued the following statement.

"We are deeply concerned about the plight of the Kurdish people in Iraq. Before the ceasefire in the Gulf War, over 2,500 Kurdish villages had been destroyed by the Iraqi Army, and many thousands of Kurdish people killed, including 4,000 by the use of chemical weapons. The tragedy in the town of Halabja earlier this year is just one example of this horror.

Since the ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war,the plight of the Kurdish people has become even more desperate. 120,000 have sought refuge in Turkey, and it appears that about 5,000 have been killed by the use of chemical and biological weapons.

We condemn totally and unreservedly the use of chemical and biological weapons, and fervently believe that the human rights of the Kurdish people must be respected. The world should act as one in condemning the Iraqi government and doing everything possible to save the lives of the millions of Kurdish people still in Iraq.

As a delegation, we have met the British government to express our deep concern about this. We also believe that the United Nations must act to protect the lives of Kurdish people. All member states should now express their preparedness to impose a total embargo on arms sales to Iraq and to use economic leverage to prevent the Iraqi regime from maintaining its armed forces."

LABOUR BRIEFING

Benn-Heffer Roundup

Giving a lead in the struggle for socialism



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Benn addresses the London rally

A London Campaign for Socialism meeting in Camden Town Hall on September 23rd was addressed by Tony Benn and Eric Heffer, Betty Heathfield, Haringey Cllr. Martha Osamor, Pete Marshall of COHSE, Lambeth Cllr. Joan Twelves, and Jeremy Corbyn.

Betty Heathfield summed up socialism in a nutshell: "Take the lot and share it between us all."

Eric Heffer reminded the meeting of when Dennis Skinner placed a Bill for the abolition of the House of Lords before the Commons in 1976 (when Labour had a majority and abolition was — as it is now — Party policy).

Eric and Tony Benn (and John Prescott) had voted for it. Kinnock and Hattersley had not.

Eric wondered if Hattersley's belated conversion to Party policy, like his amazing appearance on the nurses' picket line at Maudsley Hospital in London, was a result of pressure exerted by the leadership challenge.

Tony Benn said the campaign had been about "representation — providing a voice for millions who suffer under a system which puts profits before human need."

He described the scores of "serious meetings" which he and Eric Heffer had addressed as "politics without Robin Day."

He imagined Bryan Gould or *Marxism Today* telling Nelson Mandela to "be realistic, now, Nelson, you've been in goal 26 years and what has it got you ...?"

"It turns my stomach," Benn admitted, "that at Blackpool we will be asked to embrace Wapping electricians by the same people who expelled Liverpool Councillors."

Who's backing Benn and Heffer?

At a press conference in Camden Town Hall Tony Benn quoted a Harris/Gallup poll showing that he enjoyed the support of some 16% of the public — some 7 million people. The poll was taken at the beginning of the leadership campaign.

Benn noted that his support was now some three times as large as that enjoyed by David Owen. He said therefore he expected the BBC to give him three times as much coverage as it gave Owen.

The attendant media minions laughed nervously.

Comment: TGWU left debacle

There was never much chance of the TGWU backing Benn or Heffer in the leadership contest. But we all hoped for better than this.

The National Executive wound up endorsing Kinnock and Hattersley unanimously — after the walkout of the right-wing delegates.

Even a vote for Prescott or an abstention would have been better than this stitch-up.

What kind of message does it send to the TGWU rank-and-file? What support can they expect from the "left" executive when they find themselves in struggle?

The TGWU has democratically-decided policies against nuclear weapons, for the repeal of anti-trade union laws, for boycotting ET, and for isolating the EEPTU. What do these commitments amount to when the executive endorses a Labour leadership opposed to all of them?

Obviously, left executive members were under intense pressure, from various sources.

A premium was placed on unity — and support for Ron Todd.

But this time they got their priorities wrong. If they go on like this they will be more part of the problem than the solution.

Trade Union ballot results

The National Communications Union has ballotted its members on the Labour leadership, with each branch casting a single "block"vote, according to its size.

Kinnock 28,000 (72%); Benn 10,800 (28%); Heffer 6,400; Hattersley 11,000; Prescott 20,000.

This is a better result for the left than many expected.

The Fire Brigades Union also held a ballot but has yet to release the official figures as we go to press.

Reports indicate that Kinnock beat Benn by about four to one and that Prescott and Hattersley were neck and neck, with Heffer getting slightly less than Benn's vote. The union will be backing Kinnock and Prescott at Conference.

SOGAT, NUPE, COHSE, MSF and others have yet to announce ballot results.

The key question in all of them will be the size of the minority vote for Benn-Heffer.

The trade union vote in the electoral college will not even begin to reflect the support for Benn and Heffer amongst the trade union rank and file.

Next time, we need to organise a vigorous leadership campaign within all the affiliated unions, reaching into branch and regional meetings, forcussing on the workplace and on picket lines.

Stop Press: SHA backs Benn/Heffer

The Socialist Health Association will cast its (quite small) block vote in the trade union and Socialist Societies section of the electoral college for Benn and Heffer.

The realities of the struggle in the NHS are well-known to SHA members, and obviously contributed to a wise decision.

Labour Briefing Party Conference Fringe Meeting

Sunday October 2nd

8pm (or after Conference Session ends)

New Clifton Hotel, Talbot Square, Blackpool

Tony Benn MP
Eric Heffer MP
Martha Osamor
(Vice Chair Black Sections, NEC Candidate)
Mandy Mudd
(Haringey Against the Witch-hunt)
Pauline Purnell
Labour Briefing Women
Plus: Stella Mann-Cairns from the United Campaign Against Strip-Searching

After the smoke clears from the Leadership battle...
Where next for Labour's left?

NEC Slate

The slate printed below has been agreed by the Campaign Group, Labour Left Liaison, and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.

It has been presented to the left rank and file as a *fait accompli*.

After consulting local groups and supporters, the *Labour Briefing* Steering Committee has voted to support the slate in full – though with many reservations about the undemocratic way in which it was drawn up and the political records of some of the people on it.

The Campaign Group should open up the process of slate-making to the left in the CLPs and trade unions. Democracy in slate-making can only help to strengthen and unify us.

NEC Voting:
Leader: Tony Benn
Deputy Leader: Eric Heffer
Treasurer: Gavin Strang
Constituency Section: Diane Abbot, Tony Benn, Eric Heffer, Ken Livingstone, Jo Richardson, Dennis Skinner, Audrey Wise.
Women's Section: Margaret Beckett, Joan Maynard, Clare Short, Anni Marjoram, Martha Osamor.
Conference Arrangements Committee (CLP Section): Pete Wilsman

Democracy ... AEU-style!

Note the AEU executive's strong recommendation, printed on the ballot paper itself. Maybe Thatcher and her cabinet will follow suit ...

AEU

ELECTION OF LEADER OF THE LABOUR PARTY

(held under Rule 41 Clause 6)

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL STRONGLY RECOMMEND A VOTE FOR NEIL KINNOCK IN THIS ELECTION.

BALLOT PAPER

1 TONY BENN	Member Labour Party NEC	63	Chesterfield	1
2 NEIL KINNOCK	Leader of Labour Party	46	Ishaven	2

Greetings to Labour Party Conference delegates from

Tony Benn and Eric Heffer

"There are millions of people in Britain who need socialism — and look to Labour to give a lead."