LABOUR
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40p

JOIN THE PICKET LINES!

FIGHT FOR THE NHS!



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Nurses in their thousands back on picket lines or taking work-to-grading action; NUPE and COHSE claiming local concessions, which hospital managers promptly deny; Ministers torn between proclaiming their own generosity and putting the boot into the health unions: what the hell is going on?

That is the question on the lips of millions watching television coverage of the growing battle over nurses' pay.

Like many nurses, they would have been under the impression that all this was sorted out last Spring, when Thatcher's cabinet announced an average 15% pay increase, linked to a new careers structure — "Clinical Grading".

The unions had been demanding clinical grading for years, so that nurses would be paid for their experience and for the work they actually do, as well as their formal qualifications.

The grading definitions were agreed before April. What has still not been settled is the interpretation of these definitions and how to implement and pay for the new structure.

From early on, unions and Health Authorities warned that the Tories had given too little cash to cover the full costs of clinical grading. They said it would cost nearer to 20% than 15% of the pay bill (over £1 billion compared to the £803 million set aside).

In mid-October, Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke partly conceded this, announcing an extra £138 million to top up the kitty; but he insisted that this was the "full and final funding", based on Regional Health Authority cost estimates.

The new £941 million total is therefore an effective cash limit — forcing Health Authorities to restrict numbers they put on higher, better paid grades, for fear of overspending. However, the Regions had got it wrong — in a big way!

By John Lister
London Health Emergency

Their estimates were based on downgrading tens of thousands of nurses, and left no cash margin to cover the costs if these nurses later won appeals and secured increases of £1,000-2,000 each.

The proposed new gradings have now sparked angry walkouts, resignations, and protests all over the country, with thousands of appeals already lodged.

Not only are the regradings insulting — they are often unworkable. Hertfordshire's Leavesden Hospital was the first to be left paralysed when hundreds of downgraded nursing staff refused to work for lack of properly graded supervision. Management were forced to scrap their grading plans and start again.

So unworkable are the proposals that the RCN, which opposes any form of collective action to challenge the gradings, has warned its members that to "work to grading" (i.e. do just what you're paid for!) is tantamount to industrial action!

Now, bully boys Clarke and Mellor have taken up the same line, telling management to take disciplinary action against nurses who work to their new management-assigned gradings. They have told managers not to alter gradings where any form of action is taken.

Even before the gradings were announced, Districts which stepped out of line by making more generous proposals were heavily pressurised by Regional Health Chiefs. In Wales, every single Health Authority had its gradings referred back.

Behind management's hard line is the fear that if they make concessions they will run into a financial shortfall and face more closures and cuts.

They think it is easier to cheat the nurses than to fight for proper funding. They must be persuaded otherwise.

NUPE and COHSE have been balloting members, staging protests and all-out strikes, with emergency cover, and taking work-to-grading action, which has already forced concessions in several Districts.

Work-to-grading exposes the stupidity of management's proposals and also helps unite nurses: those happy with their grades can help colleagues who have lost out to fight back — whilst also safeguarding the interests of patients. Nurses are in the front line of this fight; but everyone can help them win.

Contact your local hospital unions to show your support and find out what action they're taking. Join the many local demonstrations, pickets, and protest lobbies, and raise the matter in your own trade union branch, community organisations, or Labour Party — and invite a speaker to come along.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Campaign round-up

VIRAJ MENDIS

No to death in Sri Lanka!

With the House of Lords expected to decide any day now whether Viraj Mendis will be allowed to appeal against deportation, the evidence of the danger he would face in Sri Lanka is mounting.

By Evan Pritchard Manchester Withington CLP

An independent public inquiry has reported that Viraj has a "well founded fear of persecution" if he is returned to Sri Lanka; and supports Viraj's claim to be treated as a political refugee.

In October, Amnesty International placed the Sri Lankan regime's human rights record among the world's ten worst.

Minister Timothy Renton made it clear on November 1st that the Home Office intends to deport Viraj immediately if the Lords uphold the deportation order. Perhaps they are afraid that the new evidence, inadmissible to the Lords, would be heard in the European Court and accepted.

The Tory government is acting in clear breach of the UN Convention and Protocol on the Status of Refugees. Viraj has commented:

"It is interesting to see Margaret Thatcher urging the Polish government to 'set your people free' and then to hear that the Home Office, having kept me prisoner for nearly two years in sanctuary, remains more intent than ever on sending me to my death."

The Report of the independent public inquiry, vital reading for all socialists, can be obtained from VMDC, c/o North Hulme Centre, Jackson Crescent, Manchester M15 5AL for £2.

Harassment of the Defence Campaign continues. VMDC activists Sonia Hughes and Adrian Levy were violently arrested by 15 police officers while out shopping in Manchester City Centre.

They were held in custody for 43 hours. They are pleading not guilty to charges of police assault and obstruction.

The Campaign is stepping up activity in the face of the increasing provocation as the Tories inch closer to their goal. Please contact the Campaign to find out how you can help — especially if you live in Manchester — on 061 234 3168 or 061 226 7592.

Future events are:

•Immediate, seven day, 24-hour vigil outside the church as soon as the House of Lords rejects Viraj's appeal.

•December 1st: mass picket of the Home Office.

•December 1st-19th: national speaking tour with speakers from the US sanctuary movement.

•December 20th: mass rally in Church of Ascension to commemorate two years in sanctuary.

•Additional information from VMDC

Dewsbury Rally



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Standing up against racism in Dewsbury, October 29th

Standing up to racism

On October 29th, action against racism in Dewsbury started with a rally on the theme *"No to Racial Segregation; Yes to Education Against Racism!"*

The Kirklees Black Workers Group, which called the rally, expected universal support, especially from the labour movement.

However, we were given a hostile reception by Kirklees Council Labour Group and local Labour MP Ann Taylor.

Only one Councillor, Jamil Akhtar, the first black Councillor in Kirklees, argued that Kirklees should continue the fight. Not one member of the Labour Group seconded him.

After this complete surrender the Kirklees Black Workers Group started to challenge Kirklees Council's sell-out to racism. We organised a picket of the Council and also decided to organise a march in Dewsbury on October 29th.

We were shocked by the tactics of Kirklees Labour Group, which unleashed a torrent of abuse at us and started to line up people to oppose our march and to call on the police to ban it.

By Atma Singh Chair, Kirklees Black Workers Group

They threatened Kirklees employees and organisations with withdrawal of funding if they backed the march.

Labour Councillor George Speight, Chair of North Kirklees Community Relations Council, organised a white group to call for the march to be banned. Jack Brookes, Chair of the Kirklees Labour Group, said we were "inciting racial hatred".

However, our march received support from NUT, Labour Party Black Sections, Huddersfield Labour Party, many NUT branches including Kirklees, Bradford, and Leeds, as well as NAS/UWT, NATFHE, NALGO, Pakistan Association, many left groups, and the four black MPs.

In the end, the Home Secretary banned the march a few days before it was to be held. Instead, we held the rally.

We wanted to use Kirklees Council premises but we were offered one small room which could hold not more than ten people, whose names and addresses had to be given to Kirklees in advance and who would have to produce identification cards. We declined.

Our outdoor rally was attended by about 500 people, including Councillors and teachers from all over the country, and the Derek Buchanan Defence Campaign, Kirklees Asian Women's Welfare Association, Batley Asian Parents Association, Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign, and the Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign.

When Bernie Grant said that racism should be fought wherever it raises its ugly head, he received strong applause.

Dewsbury Labour Party had urged the Tottenham MP to stay away, but he refused. To fight against racism, he said, did not need approval from anybody — but we should expect support from everybody.

Where next for the campaign?

•We *will* march. We intend to apply for a march to be held in the Spring.

•We need national political support, especially from the NUT and the Labour Party.

•The NUT should encourage other teaching unions to make this a key campaign, and should organise a conference: *No to Racial Segregation; Yes to Education Against Racism.*

•Every Labour MP should support this campaign, every CLP should discuss the issue and build unity between the Labour Party and black people.

SWINDON HATS

Talk to every tenant!

Over 200 people have attended public meetings held on the north and south of Parks Estate in Swindon.

By Martin Wicks Parks Labour Party

These were the first of a series of meetings organised by the Council against the Housing Bill.

The meeting was an eye-opener for anyone who doubts that people are prepared to fight. There was a great deal of anger and a determination to defend the roofs over our heads from the profiteers.

A Tenants Federation representative said that a recent meeting on another Council estate, Pinehurst, had been packed to overflowing.

The Federation has produced window stickers: "I'm voting to stay with the Council — Developers Out!" On Pinehurst, 90% of houses so far approached have put them up in their windows.

Given the rigged voting system in ballots on estate privatisation, it is crucial to reach every household. At the Parks meeting, there was a proposal to hold street meetings, in which all the tenants in a particular street would be invited to the house of a well-known tenant, where in a more informal setting they could talk in detail about the Bill.

The only way to ensure a ballot success is to organise on a street by street basis so that votes are not wasted. This is especially crucial given the fact that there is no limit to the number of ballots!

Only an understanding amongst all tenants of what the Bill means will ensure that we are not worn down by profiteers' repeated sallies.

Disability Alliance

Poverty and Disability — Double Discrimination

Thousands of people with disabilities are forced to live in poverty because of the shamefully low level of social security benefits, according to a report published last week by the Disability Alliance.

Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) is aimed at people who are unable to work and cannot meet the harsh national insurance contributions test for invalidity benefit.

SDA is paid at just £24.75 per week for a single person, even though, as an "income maintenance" benefit, it is meant to replace lost earnings.

As the report shows, someone claiming SDA from the age of 18 is entitled to £68,736 less over her or his working life than someone getting invalidity benefit. Over half of all SDA claimants are forced to claim means-tested benefits to make up their basic income.

Disabled women face a double discrimination: many are excluded from invalidity benefit because they have paid the married women's reduced rate contributions.

Others lose out as their wages from part-time work are too low for them to pay any contributions, or because they have not been working recently due to childcare responsibilities.

The report shows that SDA is extremely difficult to claim. People claiming after the age of 20 have not only to prove that they are incapable of work, but also that they are "80% disabled".

This "80% test" was introduced in 1984 because an EEC directive forced the government to abolish the discriminatory "Household Duties Test" for married women.

But the Disablility Alliance Report shows that the vast majority of the 240,000 women who were denied benefit by the "Household Duties Test" are also excluded by the "80% test".

The "80% test" involves medical examinations which are often degrading and humiliating, and the resulting assessments are incomprehensible both to claimants and advisers.

There are also intolerable delays caused by the '80% test', leaving claimants waiting months for a benefit to meet basic living costs.

In the report, the Disability Alliance calls for the abolition of the '80% test' and the introduction of a single unified benefit for all people with disabilities who are unable to work, regardless of their contributions record.

A spokesperson said:

"The cost of such a benefit would be just £700m per year, compared to tax cuts of over £6,000m given out in the 1988 budget alone. It is clear that the resources are there — what is needed is the political will."

Severe Disablement Allowance: Hard to Claim, Impossible to live on, is published by the Disablility Alliance, price £3.00 post free. 48 A5 pages. ISBN 0-946336-34-2. Available from the Disablility Alliance, 25 Denmark St, London WC2H 8NJ (please allow 28 days for delivery).

*Taken from a Disability Alliance Press Release

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Govan: no confidence in Kinnock

The working class voters of Govan have sent a powerful message to Westminster — a message for Thatcher (and her proconsul in Scotland, Malcolm Rifkind), but equally a message for Neil Kinnock (and his proconsul, Donald Dewar).

The Tory anti-working class blitzkrieg has had a peculiar ferocity north of the border. As a result, Tory support has shrivelled and Scotland is now ruled from Whitehall like a foreign colony.

But Labour is now paying the price for its electoral success — and its failure to act on the mandate granted by that success.

Feeble excuses for the Govan debacle have been the order of the day. Feeblest of all has been the scapegoating of the Labour candidate, who was surrounded throughout the campaign by minders from the Parliamentary Labour Party and Walworth Road: an unsubtle spectacle hardly likely to inspire confidence in candidate or Party.

Nor should the swingometer-busting SNP victory be dismissed as a by-election freak or passive protest vote.

On paper, at least,the SNP now stands to the left of Labour on a host of issues, including nuclear weapons, the environment, employment, and of course the Poll Tax.

Jim Sillars was listed on the ballot paper as "SNP — No Poll Tax" and his election re-enforces all the arguments for a mass campaign of resistance to the Tax, preferably led by the Labour Party.

In Govan, the urgent necessity to *do something* about the reactionary (and massively unpopular) Tax was complemented by a profound sense of national grievance. The SNP responded to both issues — and linked them, happily. Labour responded to neither — and insisted on keeping them separate.

In Scotland, even more than elsewhere, passive law-abiding parliamentarism is an irrelevance. Labour's supporters will judge our future as a government by our record as an opposition. Front Bench inertia is simply unacceptable — and the Govan voters have now said so, loud and clear.

Govan will have been salutary if it galvanises at least some elements in the Party into action, and if it reveals to doubters in the Party's centre the political abyss opening up under Kinnock's feet.

Mean Lawson and the Means Test

Nigel Lawson's infamous on/off the record briefing of lobby correspondents exposed once again the determination of the Tory government to dismantle the welfare state.

Those with long memories will remember that it was the struggle against the defeated means-tested benefits of the 1930s which led to the universal "as of right" benefits of the 1940s and beyond.

Hypocritical to the last, Lawson claims he is directing resources to the most needy. Yet he knows that the take-up on means-tested benefits is low. He also knows that reliance on means-tested benefits carries the stigma of pauperism — and that many people are thereby deterred from claiming them.

A previous generation won the struggle for universal benefits as of right. Now the labour movement must defend that gain. To do so, it must argue unashamedly for the egalitarian, socialist principles underlying it.

King's Cross: capitalist management in action

A year after the lethal King's Cross fire, London Underground bosses Bright and Ridley resigned with joint payments totalling £300,000. They will be able to wash the blood off their hands in comfort.

Filthy, overcrowded, overpriced, chaotic, dangerous, London's public transport is a monument to "efficient capitalist management".

The removal of London's transport from democratic GLC control opened the door to management's "modernisation" and "efficiency" drive. Loss of staff, steadily rising fares (twice the rate of inflation), declining quality of service, and a terrifying collapse in safety standards followed.

What the capitalists mean by "efficient management" can be seen in King's Cross, the nurses' grading dispute, and the general breakdown in public services — all precipitated by loss of funding, accompanied inevitably by managerial dictatorship.

For socialists, efficiency has an entirely different meaning. It has to do with planning to meet social needs, with allocating resources according to that plan, with democratic control.

Services people need can only be provided in the end by the much-maligned (and grotesquely exploited) *producers*. Under socialism, the producers will be collectively in charge of their work and committed to it. And they will have access to all the resources needed to meet needs democratically identified with consumers — who are, after all, producers in their own right.

Economic Notebook

Kohl in Moscow
Doing "Business" with Gorbachev

As usual, the British media picked up the sensation that wasn't: West German Chancellor Kohl's press conference "revelation" that his Soviet hosts would release all remaining political prisoners by the end of 1988.

By Günter Minnerup

On closer inspection, it transpired that Foreign Minister Shevardnadze had said as much four weeks earlier.

The US State Department — never slow to play down the importance of West German contacts with Moscow — formally confirmed this.

So was the Chancellor's visit to Gorbachev a failure? Certainly, Kohl and his huge party (which included Foreign and Defence Ministers as well as scores of heavyweight industrialists and bankers) returned with few tangible results.

The sale of a West German nuclear reactor to the Soviet Union, a remarkable first, had been well advertised beforehand, as had the other agreements on economic and technological co-operation.

These admittedly significant developments have not lifted West German-Soviet relations onto a qualitatively new stage: the FRG has been Moscow's most important Western trade partner for a long time.

On military matters, Defence Secretary Rupert Scholz was careful not to commit himself to anything beyond Bonn's well-known NATO positions, and Gorbachev went to some lengths to scupper any speculation concerning possible deals over the "German Questions".

But then these visits rarely produce unexpected results. Little cold be expected from a setpiece encounter between the leaders of two states whose mutual relations are so fraught with difficulty and viewed with so much suspicion both East and West.

The real significance of the visit was symbolic. After all, Kohl had hardly been Gorbachev's favourite Western politician, especially after Kohl's well-publicised comparison of the Soviet General Secretary with Josef Goebbels.

The famous handshake mainly symbolised an end to a period of frosty relations and the beginning of, in Thatcherite parlance, serious "business" between the Christian Democrats in Bonn and the Gorbachev leadership.

It was agreed that by May 1989, when the General Secretary makes his return visit to Bonn, a comprehensive treaty on long-term co-operation between the FRG and the USSR would be ready.

Kohl's visit also has to be seen against the background of an amazing sea-change in West German public attitudes towards the Soviet Union.

In this culturally most Americanised and, until recently, most uncritically pro-American of West European countries, both Gorbachev personally and "the Russians" in general are today more popular than President Reagan and "the Americans".

Interest in the Soviet reforms is huge: Gorbachev's book on *Perestroika* topped the bestsellers' list for months. Most newsagents do good business with a *daily* German edition of *Pravda*.

This interest is by no means confined to the left. Earlier this year, returning from his own visit to Moscow,the recently deceased leader of the right wing CSU, Franz-Josef Strauss, declared that the Soviet Union could no longer be considered an aggressive or hostile power.

Rapprochement and long-term co-operation with Moscow is in the air. This will become highly significant as public differences with Washington over economic and military issues deepen and the unfolding of *perestroika* increases economic opportunities for a stagnant West German economy.

Already, Foreign Minister Genscher has been flying kites about a West European "Marshall Plan" for the Soviet economy, and the Bonn Government has made no bones about its desire to scrap COCOM restrictions on high technology exports to the Soviet bloc.



The Soviet market: has Kohl's visit increased FRG access?

The real "business" between Bonn and Moscow is yet to be done, and on both sides there remain serious obstacles, not least bitter resistance from Kohl's NATO allies.

As in Britain, however, it is the right which appears to have taken the initiative in responding to Gorbachev's new interest in Western Europe, with the Labour Party and SPD leadership trailing behind, spouting abstract generalities about detente and disarmament.

Foreign policy has never been the left's strong suit, but it should dawn upon even the Kinnocks and Vogels of this world that the familiar frontiers of the post-war settlement in Europe are beginning to shift.

Unless it is happy to leave the restructuring of Europe's relations with the "superpowers" to Kohl, Thatcher, and their travelling companions from the worlds of banking, industry, and warfare, the left had better start talking about its own response to Gorbachev's overtures.

Trade Union Briefing

Why NALGO leaders won't fight



PHOTO: John Arthur

NALGO rank and file show willingness to fight — but where are the leaders?

With 750,000 members, NALGO, the white collar public service union, has a reputation for radical social policies and for militancy in inner-city areas.

But the political complexion of its leadership, and their behaviour on the crunch issues of privatisation and local jobs and services, is too little known.

Behind a smokescreen of anti-Tory rhetoric, NALGO's Executive is dominated by right wingers and a small group of semi-Kinnockite centrists.

By BRIAN STATHAM

Leading full time officers, General Secretary John Daly and his deputy Alan Jinkinson, overwhelmingly agree with the Executive majority that on the central issues it is impossible to fight Thatcher.

With the Tories on the offensive, the NALGO leadership is playing dead — delivering members in Brent, Westminster, and Bradford up to redundancy and giving up on electricity and water privatisation.

But instead of openly supporting New Realism, key officals meticulously avoid triggering the "industrial action strategy" which the union adopted in 1982.

Unorganised

The leadership's strategy is to keep up the numbers by attracting previously unorganised workers with cheap holidays, mortagages, car insurance, and other fringe benefits. Particular targets are retired members and police civilians.

NALGO is the key union in the two industries now facing privatisation — water and electricity. In neither is it preparing for serious resistance, and indeed it is probably too late to do so.

In water, a publicity campaign is being combined with legal action which cannot be successful in the long term.

In electricity, national officer Mike Jeram is concentrating on share ownership schemes for employees — or compensating members for privatisation with a few bobs' gambling on the Stock exchange.

Decline

NALGO has some 70,000 health workers, down 20,000 over the past five years. The decline is a consequence of the union's abysmal failure during the 1982 health strike, and its failure to launch any serious action in that sector since.

National health officer Ada Maddocks was even awarded an OBE soon after the NHS dispute — for services rendered!

During the 83 and 87 elections the union ran huge million-pound publicity campaigns (Put People First; Make People Matter). NALGO spends over £2m each year on publicity, which time and again is a substitute for real organisation, rather than a complement to it.

Given the large number of left wing NALGO members, why is there so little challenge to this strategy of inaction?

Inactive

Successive bitter struggles in local government have "used up" layer after layer of branch activists, many of whom have now become inactive.

Many of the young, inexperienced, new leaderships in big metropolitan branches are prey to the leadership's strategy of letting them go into battle alone.

The virtual autonomy of big city branches has often led the left to retreat into local bastions, paying scant attention to organising at District and national level.

The sectarian attitude of the SWP and Militant has also contributed to the failure to construct a viable national Broad Left.

Appendage

A key trend on the NALGO left has been the *Morning Star*, which currently has three NEC members — Ivan Beavis, John McFadden, and Judy Cotter. The *Morning Star* acts as a left appendage to the bureaucracy, keeping its places by doing little jobs for the right wing.

John McFadden has, by general obedience to the right, maintained a seat on the influential General Purposes Committee. He is also on NALGO's international committee, where the *Morning Star* tends to get its way — hence NALGO's scandalous attacks on the Moses Mayekiso campaign.

The Black Members Group and the Lesbian and Gay Members group, both with semi-official status within the union, have often made up for the lack of left organisation in NALGO.

Retreat

But the Executive and Conference have recently rejected a report which would have given them full status. If the drift to the right continues, the self-organised groups will soon face further attack.

It would be naive to attribute NALGO's retreat simply to right wing domination. There has been a retreat in the consciousness of many former militant activists after the many defeats — particularly over ratecapping and the abolition of the metropolitan counties.

Thus, while the NALGO leadership may be planning nothing but protest action over the Poll Tax; NALGO Conference, let alone amongst the mass of the membership, would show scant support for industrial action on this issue.

By engineering defeat after defeat, NALGO's leadership has created scepticism about militant action and a widespread "heads down" attitude.

There is a positive side to this gloomy picture. This year's ballot on creating a political fund was overwhelmingly carried, after a huge "yes" campaign by the Executive.

Over the past three years, ballots on industrial action over pay among 500,000 local government workers have been defeated by only small margins, reflecting growing discontent among the low-paid — a third of NALGO's membership.

Many local members will fight back — on cuts, redundancies, and on questions like sexual harassment. These are the reserves of militancy which the left has to tap to fight the move to the right.

The crucial battleground in NALGO is the mass membership in local government, where the union must find an answer to the Tories' plans for a municipal "year zero".

One even bigger question looms. Following the trend towards mega-unions, NALGO and NUPE leaders have decided to merge in three or four years' time.

Will NALGO enter this merger as a force pulling to the right, or a force for radical change? The left must get its act together if it is to be the latter.

Employment Training

ET begins to bite

Don't worry, this isn't a recruitment drive for tankies.

But it is perhaps even more surprising to find in *Briefing* a defence of a Manpower Services Commission scheme — the Community Programme, which is being phased out with the introduction of Employment Training.

By Toni Cardinali Coventry SW CLP

John Prescott (remember him?) used to tell us that government schemes exist to massage the unemployment figures. This is clearly a feeble and nonsensical analysis.

It is feeble because it ignores all the other reasons; it is nonsensical, because Norman Fowler can think of lots of cheaper and easier ways of fiddling the figures (such as not including all those unemployed people who haven't got a job).

Government schemes are not about electoralism. We all know the Tories are quite capable of winning elections despite ridiculously high unemployment figures, and the amount of government spending involved is far higher than that required for other dead-cert vote-winners, such as funding the nurses' pay award.

No, these schemes are about rescuing British capitalism. They exist to produce a more flexible, lower-paid, non-unionised workforce.

The replacement of the Community Programme with Employment Training is another huge leap towards turning Britain into a Third World economy (was it Napoleon who said, "Britain is a nation of sweatshop-keepers?).

Contrasts

The CP was "work that pays the going rate" (although in practice this meant what the Tories hoped the rate was going to become). ET is based firmly on the concept of "work-for-your-dole".

ET "trainees" (if that's the right word) receive their benefits plus £10, which in most cases will not even cover lunch and travelling expenses. They are even paid by Giro.

The CP was mainly part-time; ET is entirely full-time, excluding many women, and making it very difficult for trainees to look for a decent job.

CP wages could be "topped up". Under ET, any top-up would simply be removed from your benefits.

The CP provided work that was socially useful, usually in the voluntary sector, and therefore generally enjoyable and fulfilling. Indeed, a side-effect of ending the CP has been a severe staffing crisis in the voluntary sector.

ET, however, is aimed specifically at the private sector, with companies taking on trainees not because they want *trainees* but for profit on a so-much-per-trainee basis.

The CP was voluntary. ET, despite government claims to the contrary, is not. A friend of mine went for a Restart interview recently. After being kept waiting for over an hour, they said they didn't have time to see him and that he should attend an ET interview instead.

Compulsory

The woman behind the desk went out of her way to stress that it was not compulsory, but when he asked what would happen if he didn't go,she said he would have his dole stopped!

"If the only thing stopping you getting a job is training," the ads say, "the only thing stopping you training is you."

The truth is that the only thing stopping people getting jobs is mass unemployment,and the only thing stopping people getting training is stingy bosses. Whatever happened to apprenticeships?

NORTH-WEST ROUND-UP

We are angry!

Nurses in the North West are giving the lie to Kenneth Clarke's claim that the majority of nurses are satisfied with their pay grades.

Three hundred staff at **Springfield** psychiatric hospital in North Manchester, members of NUPE and COHSE, have been on unofficial indefinite strike since November 1st.

At **Prestwich** psychiatric hospital in **Salford** over 800 members of NUPE and COHSE are now on official indefinite strike — whilst maintaining emergency cover, worked out by the nurses themselves.

These are the most advanced actions; but nurses throughout the region are also involved in various forms of industrial action.

Psychiatric nurses at the **Manchester Royal Infirmary** staged a two hour stoppage on November 11th, whilst nurses at **Trafford General, Stretford Memorial** and **Altrincham General** have organised a 24 hour strike.

The strike at Trafford clearly shows the nurses' willingness to fight: it is the first protest action in the area.

In **South Manchester** nurses are working to grade and have threatened an all-out strike if anyone is disciplined by management. They are organising a ballot on possible strike action to follow up the work-to-grade.

Stockport nurses are working to grade. Nurses from **Birch Hill Hospital** in **Rochdale** organised a protest demonstration on November 12th.

Striking **North Manchester** nurses organised a demonstration in Manchester on November 17th. NUPE has also called a march and rally (with NUPE Deputy General Secretary Tom Sawyer) on November 22nd in Manchester.

In a ballot of over 400 COHSE nurses at **Warrington General Hospital** only four nurses failed to support a motion to strike. Nurses at the other Warrington hospitals — **Winwick** (the largest psychiatric hospital in England) and **Newchurch** — are likely to follow suit.

By Geoff Ryan
Central Manchester Hospitals branch NUPE

At **West Cumbria Hospital** in **Workington**, eight nurses were sent home for working to grade on November 15th. The following day NUPE and COHSE nurses struck for 24 hours.

However, in many of these disputes, the nurses have been left to organise action for themselves. Contrary to Kenneth Clarke's assertions, NUPE and COHSE officials — including shop stewards — have often opposed and tried to hold back nurses wanting to fight.

For example, neither NUPE nor COHSE have given official backing to the Springfield hospital strike. At Prestwich hospital, 600 COHSE members voted (by 57% to 42%) to join NUPE members on strike despite the opposition of COHSE stewards.

At Manchester Royal Infirmary COHSE members voted to support a two hour strike by psychiatric nurses. But COHSE stewards changed their mind and refused to give support.

They attacked the strike as "illegal"; refused to support the picket line, even during their lunch break; and made it much easier for management to victimise individuals.

Agreement

The NUPE Branch Secretary also refused to support the strike, though he did agree to *tolerate* it — as long as there was no attempt to spread the strike beyond psychiatric nurses!

Some 30 nurses, including COHSE members, joined the two hour stoppage, supported on the picket line by another 20 or so on lunch breaks or days off. That makes twice the number out supporting the strike as voted for it — despite the sabotage of COHSE and NUPE officials and stewards.

This situation is mirrored throughout the country. New Realist leaderships are scared of organising the slightest opposition; whereas the membership wants to fight, believes it can win, and is supporting industrial action when balloted.

Thousands of nurses who have never been involved in industrial action before are today demanding and joining action against their Grading.

The task now is to begin organising that anger inside the hospitals to pressure the NUPE and COHSE leaderships to call a ballot for a national strike. Without national action the militancy and willingness to fight of nurses will once again be squandered by the union leaderships.

Nurses' action

Boiling up and bubbling over!

By JOHN LISTER

It takes a special talent to hand out a sizeable £940m in pay increases yet still rekindle angry and militant opposition from a normally docile workforce.

Kenneth Clarke and his merry band of NHS chiefs have managed it.



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Thousands of nurses across the country are taking forms of action varying from threatened mass resignations to indefinite strikes.

Many nurses are simply causing chaos and making their point by working to grade. This means sticking strictly to the tasks laid down for the new grades to which they have just been assigned.

Duties which used to be covered, but for which they are not being paid under the new grading structures, are refused.

Management bleat that this is "industrial action", but in most cases they set the grades, hoping that nursing staff would simply swallow their pride and do the extra work without pay.

Instead, there has been a revival of the nurse militancy from February and March this year.

Indefinite strikes have been relatively few — principally at the Springfield and Prestwich hospitals in Manchester, and NUPE members staged a three-day strike at Wandsworth's St George's Hospital. Each of these actions left emergency cover.

Token strikes of from two to 24 hours have been widespread, including Birmingham's All Saints' Hospital, where 89% voted for a 24-hour strike, and several large psychiatric hospitals—Claybury, Maudsley, and Normansfield.

Action has also been seen in London: including at Hackney, Charing Cross, the London, the West Middlesex, and by 650 NUPE nurses in Haringey.

Elsewhere, work-to-grading, sometimes coupled with an overtime ban, has spread like wildfire. NUPE estimated that 50 Midlands hospitals were involved in action.

Work-to-grading has affected three hospitals in Warwickshire, three in Coventry and two in Rugby as well as Leicester, where management were among the first to threaten disciplinary action against 140 NUPE members.

In Yorkshire, a 95% vote by Wakefield COHSE members backed work-to-grading action at Pinderfields, Clayton, Fieldhead, and Stanley Royd hospitals; nurses in Bradford, Hull and Rotherham were also taking action.

All 19 Health Districts in the North West have been hit by industrial action, and in Burnley it produced quick results when management agreed to reconsider 800 gradings after the Health Authority was beseiged by 1,000 angry nurses.

In Blackburn the DHA was lobbied by over 150 nurses. In Liverpool, management at Sefton General Hospital agreed to review grades, while nurses at Alderhey hospital began work-to-grading.

Hospitals in North and South Tyneside districts and North Tees have been affected by work-to-grading, and militancy has also boiled over in the leafy south east, with working-to-grade in Hampshire, Suffolk and East Surrey.

At Churchill House, Bracknell, COHSE action forced management to agree to review grades.

The Leavesden Hospital work-to-grading, along with the headline-grabbing action at Birmingham Children's Hospital, came in for the first blast of witch-hunting, but also set the pace for much of this latest round of action.

However, early management concessions were apparently withdrawn, possibly under regional pressure. In the same region, management of the Horton psychiatric hospital in Epsom confronted by a COHSE work-to-grade and an overtime ban conceded increased grades for staff, whilst attempting to deny any concessions took place.

The action is still boiling up and bubbling over as *Briefing* goes to press. In the absence of a spectacular collapse by union leaders or an (unlikely) swift capital action by Kenneth Clarke, the battle seems set to rumble on for weeks.

Time to get out, make those links, and build support!

Stop press: We have just heard that NUPE London Division has called a London Day of Action for November 28th; and COHSE has called a national Day of Action with a lobby of Parliament for December 6th.

London Health Emergency has produced a leaflet on the regrading issue, arguing for a trade union response. Copies can be obtained for minimal cost from London Health Emergency, 335 Grays Inn Road, London WC1, 01-833 3020.

Among those worst affected:

•Auxilliary nurses, often with many years' experience, who frequently work unsupervised, but have mostly been dumped into the lowest grade "A";

•Enrolled nurses, often left in charge of wards, yet denied the appropriate grade;

•Midwives, who find themselves actually penalised for their additional training;

•Ward sisters, arbitrarily excluded from higher grades;

•Night staff, systematically downgraded compared to equivalents on days.

Most nurses see that the grading must be put right now, or they will be wrong for years to come. It's no use just rushing to the appeals procedure, which could drag on for years, and deliver nothing.

By opposing collective work-to-grading policies, the RCN is effectively arguing (like management!) that nurses should do extra work for nothing. No wonder they are losing members hand over fist to the unions!

SOLIDARITY NETWORK CONFERENCE

How can workers take on the Tories?

By ALAN THORNETT

The Solidarity Network held a successful second Annual Conference in Leeds on November 5th.

The 130 present included delegates from labour movement organisations, and activists in Support Groups, solidarity campaigns, and trade unions.

There were delegates from eight Support Groups, eight Trades Councils, and from four local Labour Parties. Women from Women Against Pit Closures were also present.

Tony Richardson, TGWU shop steward from Austin Rover in Cowley, reported on the work of the Solidarity Network over the past year in consistently organising to support disputes.

The Network had also held meetings with strikers: for example in Deal, with rank and file seafarers, and in Leeds with a delegation from the Vickers strikers. Also noted was the development of joint work with the Chestfield Socialist Conference, for example the joint rally held in London.

The lastest round of Tory anti-union legislation proposes, amongst many other things, an almost impossibly high 70% vote for a strike vote in a postal ballot.

The major problem has been that the TUC and almost all of the trade union leaders refuse to break the law. The government uses that refusal as an invitation to bring more laws in. The seafarers' leaders had briefly looked to break the law and spread the strike — but had stopped short of providing a lead for the movement.

Joyce Bently, representing the striking Dover seafarers, talked of the difficulties and isolation now facing the strikers, despite the support which had been organised, and how difficult it was to see a way forward.

Dave Chappel, a UCW branch officer from Bridgewater, reported on the postal workers strike and developments since. He was, he said, more optimistic than Joyce. The postal workers had been sold out, but they had shown their strength and were ready for more.

A speaker from the Bradford Labour Group gave an account of the situation on Bradford City Council. Mike Grindley, leader of the victimised GCHQ trade unionists, preparing for the GCHQ day of action, sent a message of support.

Two striking COHSE nurses from Manchester, Angela Clarkin and Caren Reissmann, reported on the escalating struggle against regrading imposed on the nurses by the government.

Terry French sent a message on behalf of the Justice for Mineworkers Campaign — now hamstrung after the Campaign's last quarterly meeting voted overwhelmingly that the Secretary should resign. The Secretary was refusing.

The Conference elected a new, expanded Steering Committee, with Janet Seymour (from the Silentnight dispute) as chair; John Lang, a rank and file leader from the Wapping dispute, as convenor; and a team to produce an improved, printed, Solidarity Network Bulletin.

The Conference agreed to continue developing the joint work between the Solidarity Network and the Chesterfield Socialist Conference, particularly with Chesterfield's Trade Union Policy Group.

The conference also decided to call on Chesterfield to call for a Chesterfield Trade Union Conference in a year's time to organise a discussion on the way forward for socialists in the unions.

Labour Party

A modern history of the Labour Party

The fight against "revisionism"

Hugh Gaitskell was elected Labour Leader in 1955 by the right-wing majority of Labour MPs.

The left of the Labour Party was then organised around *Tribune*, edited by Michael Foot, led by Aneurin Bevan.

In 1957, Bevan surrendered, making his infamous "naked into the conference chamber"

By PAUL LAWSON

speech defending British nuclear weapons.

Labour went into the 1959 General Election with a united leadership (Gaitskell and Bevan). Only occasionally would Bevan signal any differences with the dominant right wing.

Despite Labour's unity, the Conservatives won. Tory Prime Minister Harold MacMillan cleverly exploited growing working class prosperity with his claim, "you've never had it so good".

Labour had now been out of power since 1951 and had lost three general elections in a row.

Gaitskell and his "revisionist" co-thinkers like Crosland and Douglas Jay began to wonder — like Kinnock and his co-thinkers today — whether socialism was inherently unpopular and whether mas affluence necessitated a move to the right.

Anthony Crosland, in his book *The Future of Socialism* argued that the mixed economy and welfare state had "civilised" capitalism, which was here to stay.

At the 1959 Labour Conference, Gaitskell argued that Labour was being kept out of power by "fundamental social forces" — growing working class affluence — to which it must adapt.

He proposed ditching Clause Four, which committed the Party to common ownership of the means of production. The response in the Party was immediate, and particularly in the unions — with the TGWU being adamant against any revision of Clause Four.

Throughout 1960 the battle over Clause Four raged. Gradually, bitterly, Gaitskell came to see that he could not win, or rather that if he pressed the issue and lost, his position as Leader would become untenable.

Eventually, the Gaitskellite right compromised, leaving the consitution intact, but drawing up a statement of "Aims and Values" which "clarified" the modern meaning of Clause Four. Sound familiar?

Now another challenge from the left confronted Gaitskell. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, founded in 1957, grew rapidly in the Labour Party and trade unions.

In February 1960 the Tory government decided to abandon the Blue Streak rocket which was becoming too expensive — leaving Britain without a credible independent nuclear delivery system.

The US promised to supply its Skybolt missile, but did Britain really need an *independent* deterrent? Gaitskell hesitated; then came down firmly in favour.

At that year's Scarborough Conference, the unilateralist tide was too strong. Gaitskell, in his leaders' speech, refused to accept the motion carried by Conference, and vowed to "fight, fight and fight again".

The Gaitskellite revisionists organised the "Campaign for Democratic Socialism" — the LCC of its day — to work in the constituencies and the unions against CND and the left and thus ensure that Gaitskell would defeat unilateralism at the 1961 Conference.

Many CDS leaders later became leading figures in the SDP (Bill Rogers, for example). In the absence of effective left wing organisation, CDS succeeded. In 1961, unilateralism was rejected.

A new issue now divided the Party — the Common Market. Gaitskell at first was unsure because of his loyalty to the Commonwealth. Finally, he and the revisionist right championed British entry, and a decades-long fight with the left was set in train.

Gaitskell died in 1963. Wilson became Labour Leader, and against the background of a declining economy and Tory scandals like the "Profumo affair" a Labour government was elected in 1964.

Although it included Gaitskellites such as Roy Jenkins and George Brown, it was dominated by ex-Bevanites — like Wilson himself, Barbara Castle and Richard Crossman.

But as we shall see, this wing of the leadership were in practice no more committed to basic socialist change than the Gaitskellites they replaced.

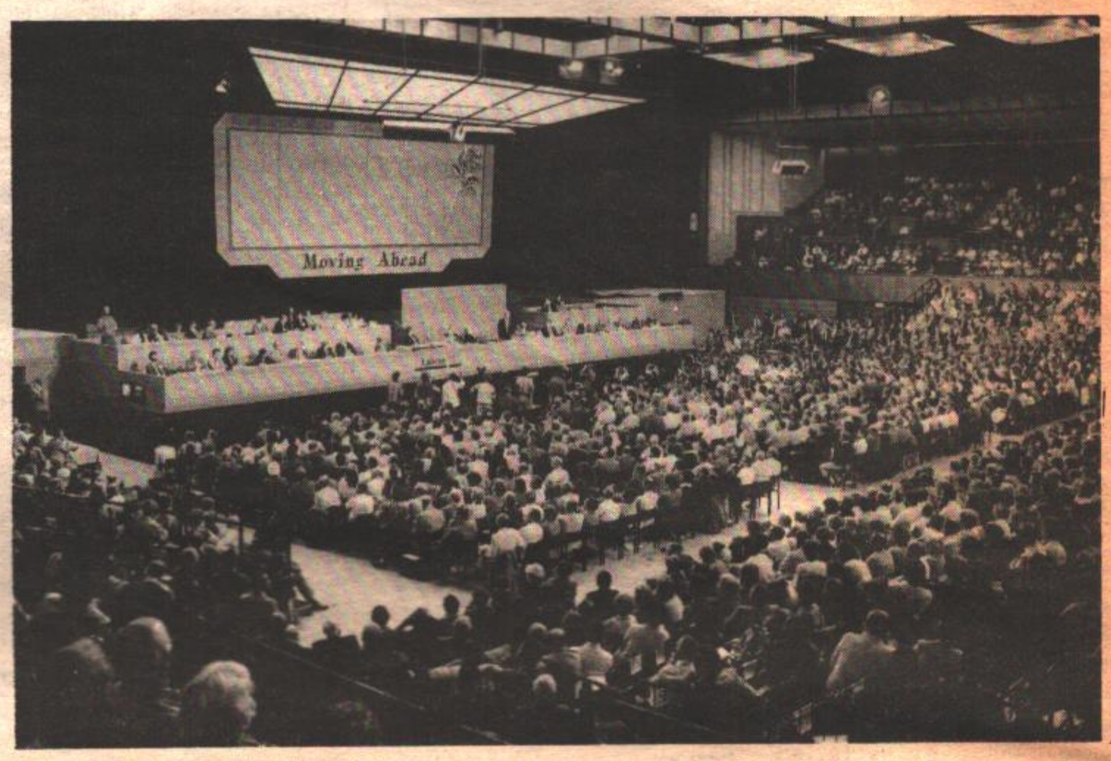


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Labour Party Conference: still the scene of left victories — and a right wing backlash



PHOTO:Andrew Wiard (Report)

CND: although it was at its largest in the early 60s, the Campaign still motivated mass actions in the 70s and 80s.

Govan verdict

Still time for Labour to lead

Jim Sillars, newly-elected SNP MP for Govan, drew the right lessons from his by-election victory.

"Above all," he said, "it was a crushing defeat for the Tory government and its imposition on Scotland of policies for which it has no mandate."

He went on to list the Poll Tax, privatisation of medicine, testing in primary schools, the nuclearisation of a soon-to-be privatised electricity industry — all overwhelmingly rejected by the voters of Govan.

Nobody should be misled into seeing Sillar's victory as a manifestation of reactionary chauvinist nationalism. On the contrary, there was agreement between Sillars and Labour's Bob Gillespie on a wide range of social issues.

By Tony Southall
Glasgow Pollok CLP

Long gone are the days when the SNP could be dismissed as Tartan Tories. Only this change in SNP politics can explain how thousands of lifetime Labour voters found it so easy to crossover to the SNP, a crossover they saw as the only way of expressing their anti-Tory position. They have lost faith in Labour's ability to fight back.

Sillars was also right to claim that the result was a comment on the performance to date of Scotland's Labour MPs in defending their people against Tory assaults.

The impotence of the feeble fifty had been rumbled, Sillars said, and people were turning to a party whose solely Scottish allegiance promised a real fight against the Tories.

Asserted

In this Sillars agreed with Ian Smart, a member of Labour's Scottish Executive and a leader of Scottish Labour Action, who asserted on a post-Govan television programme that the election had been lost at the Special Scottish Party Conference, coincidentally held in Govan Town Hall in September.

There, proposals for organising a mass campaign for non-payment of the Poll Tax, supported by a majority of CLPs, were defeated.

It is only necessary to imagine a different Labour campaign, one that prioritised non-payment of the Poll Tax and immediate moves towards setting up a Scottish Constitutional Convention, led by the 50 Labour MPs, to see that Labour could have won in Govan.

Unfortunately, that option was foreclosed in advance by September's Govan decision and by the Scottish Party's continual pussyfooting around a commitment even to the modest calls issued by the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly.

On the Saturday after Govan, the Scottish Executive set up an inquiry into the defeat and made a commitment to a constitutional convention, but too late.

Neil Kinnock has also set up an inquiry into Govan. It is likely that this inquiry will avoid difficult issues by laying responsibility for the Govan defeat on the candidate.

If it does this, it will be burying its head in the sand. If the swing in Govan were repeated nation-wide, the SNP would capture every one of Scotland's 72 seats.

Tide

The only way in which local CLPs can begin to reverse this tide is by immediate steps to take the leadership of a campaign for non-payment of Poll Tax. This should be accompanied by an insistance on Labour Councils' complete non-cooperation with Poll Tax and refusal to prosecute non-payers.

Every Scottish CLP must also make known its unequivocal support for the forthcoming constitutional convention. In both cases this must be done in collaboration with any other forces prepared to join in — yes, including the SNP.

Only in this way can Scottish Labour begin to repair the damage so graphically revealed in Govan but underway since June 1987. Only in this way can Labour reassert its leadership of the working-class and its allies in the fight against the Tories.

National Campaign Group Meeting

Left in the dark

No work with anyone outside the Labour Party, no internal democracy, no organisation, and definitely no campaigning — this was the appalling upshot of the first national co-ordinating meeting called by the Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

When Tony Benn suggested that though model resolutions and Conference votes were important, we still had to get out and campaign to win public support, he was denounced.

Apparently, circulation of CLPD model resolutions is the sole order of the day.

For those regional delegates who had hoped to see the fragile gains of the Benn-Heffer challenge turned into something durable, the affair was deeply frustrating.

Hopes raised by the gathering were dashed by sectarian wreckers.

The 30-odd people who fidgeted through the five hour session in central London on November 12th could hardly be called a fair representation of the Labour left or of the forces which backed the leadership challenge.

By Mike Marqusee
Haringey Labour Briefing

Obviously, cobbling together a democratic structure for the Labour left will be a difficult process.

But any suggestion that we might at least embark on such a process — or that a number of groups excluded from the initial meeting ought to be included in the next — was dismissed out of hand. What a shame!

Mobilising support for NEC slates, leadership contests, model resolutions would be so much easier if the people being mobilised had some say in what they were being mobilised for!

Alas, many of those present clearly felt that their current influence would be undermined by a democratised and reinvigorated left.

To name names: Socialist Action, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, and the Women's Action Committee leadership.

The Greenham Common women and the FAB campaign, we were told, had achieved nothing. Any collaboration with people outside the Party was ruled out.

This dogmatic hostility led the aforementioned forces (abundant at such meetings; weak on the ground) to veto future participation by Women for Socialism, to denounce the Socialist Conference, and even to refuse to work with the NUR Broad Left!

Most deplorable of all, they rejected every positive proposal for campaigning. No steps were taken (or even discussed) on the Poll Tax (though everyone agreed there were powerful lessons for Labour in Govan).

How, then, are we to win support for socialist policies in the Party? How are we to get people to Party and union meetings to actually vote for the precious model resolutions?

Those of us who are active at the Party base know just how tough the political terrain is at the moment. We know that the loss of membership, the despair of activists, the collapse of Party machinery brought about by right wing rule is deeply damaging to the left.

We know that the Party must reach out to new forces, forces currently outside its ranks — above all those forces struggling *now* against the Tories.

What is true of the Party as a whole is doubly true of the left, which will perish if it confines itself to Party parliamentarism.

Is this what the thousands of Party members who voted for Benn and Heffer want from us? Surely that vote was above all a protest against the inertia, the irrelevance, the impotence of Kinnockism.

Surely it was a call to *do something now* — not after the next General Election, win or lose.

Kinnock won't heed that call, but we must.

Because the light switch in the meeting room was inaccessible, the meeting ended in darkness — an apt metaphor.

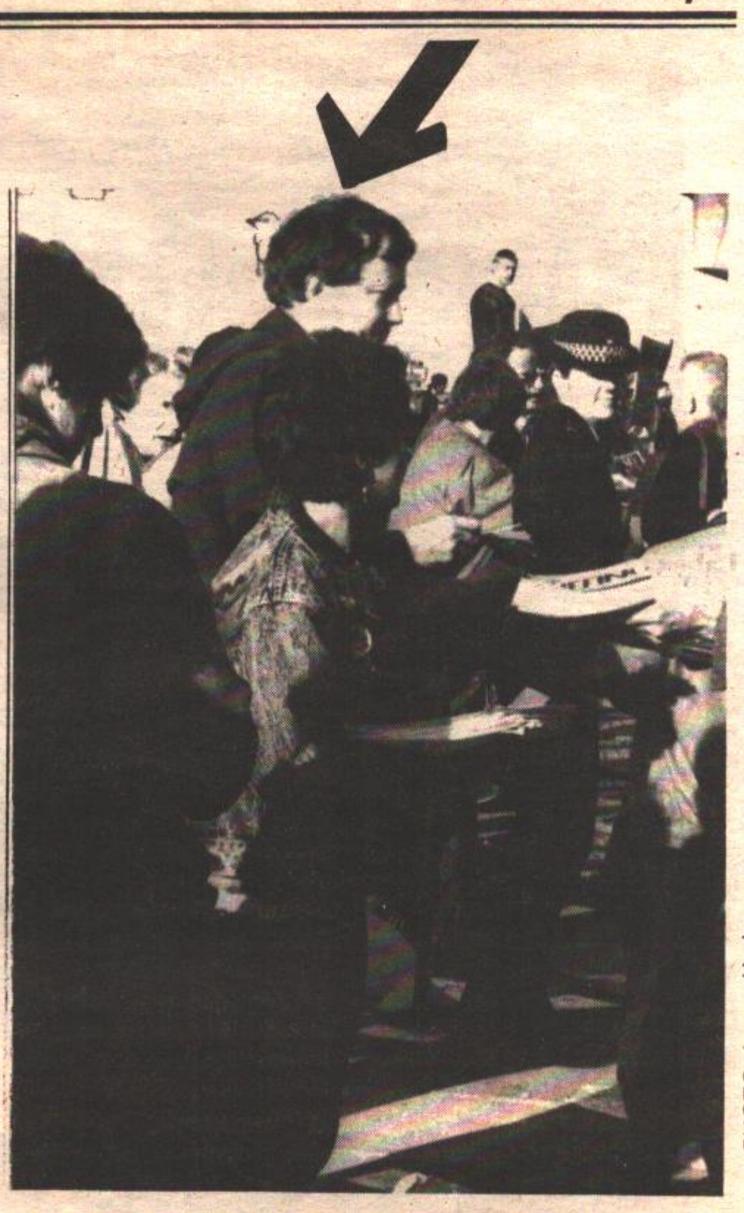


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

John Ross: snapped on a rare outing at Labour Party Conference, 1987. Not many photos exist of this man in daylight.

The next meeting of the national co-ordinating meeting will be held on January 14th. If you worked for Benn and Heffer, if you want to see an active Labour left, make sure you're represented.

Policy Review "consultation"

Early birds will get Conference worms

It may seem a bit early to start talking about next year's Party Conference (especially for comrades who had to endure this year's) but one of the left's perennial failings is being late.

With the completion of the Policy Review, the 1989 Conference is going to be more important than ever; there are a number of things comrades should do, even at this early stage.

First, we must ensure that the Policy Review Group reports to Conference are subject to amendment and that the resolutions passed at 1988 Conference are treated as mandates by the Groups.

The basic democratic right of amendment was denied to comrades this year, and it appears likely that in 1989 the Policy Review documents will be submitted to Conference as NEC documents, which normally cannot be amended.

Try to get the following resolution through GCs and off to the NEC as soon as possible:

"This CLP demands that the Policy Review Groups treat the resolutions passed at the 1988 Annual Conference as mandates. Furthermore, this CLP notes that the 1989 Labour Party Conference will, by endorsing the Policy Review documents, decide the Party's programme for the next General Election.

By John Wilton
Birmingham Edgbaston CLP

"We therefore stress the urgent need to ensure that the final Policy Review documents are made available in sufficient time before 1989 Conference for consultation and amendment by CLP members. Consequently, this CLP demands:

"a) that the Policy Review documents be circulated throughout the Party by the beginning of July 1989 at the very latest;

"b) that the 1989 Policy Review statements are subject to amendment by the 1989 Annual Conference, and that adequate arrangements be made to receive, publish, circulate and put before Party Conference any and all amendments."

Secondly, comrades should ensure that their CLPs discuss and contribute to the Policy Review.

One deadline being quoted for submissions is January 31st 1989. If this is correct, there is very little time.

A political education pack on the Policy Review Groups has been sent out to all CLPs. Comrades should demand debate on each of the Policy Group areas.

There are to be eight national policy "forums" organised by Head Office. These will cover the seven Policy Review Groups, plus "how to build the women's perspective into every aspect of our policies."

Representation at the forums is to be limited to three delegates per CLP, five from each affiliated trade union, two from each Socialist Society, one from Regional Councils, one from Labour Groups.

Labour MPs, Euro MPs, and Euro-candidates are also invited.

Despite obvious reservations about this dubious "consultation exercise" it is vital that the left is represented at these meetings and that we argue for socialist policies at them.

Finally, comrades should start to organise now to get *Briefing* supporters elected as CLP delegates to Annual Conference.

Many CLPs elect delegates at their AGMs in March and require branches to nominate in February. If we are to have an effective input into Conference we need as many *Briefing* supporters as possible on the Conference floor.

Organise the left in your constituency, form *Briefing* groups — act now! By next September it may be too late!



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Tony Benn pauses for thought

Policy forums

1. London/South: Feb. 11th
Women and Labour's policies for the future

2. Wales: Jan. 28th
People at Work

3. North West: Jan. 28th
Britain in the World

4. Yorkshire/Northern: Feb. 25th
Consumers and the Community

5. Scotland: Jan. 14th
Economic Equality

6. East/West Midlands: Jan. 14th or 21st (to be confirmed)
Productive and Competitive Economy

7. Eastern: Jan. 28th
Physical and Social Environment

8. South West: Jan. 21st
Democracy for the Individual and the Community

North East Regional Socialist Conference

For socialism in our lifetimes!

Remember, remember, the 5th of November, 1988: the first North Eastern Region Socialist Conference in Durham.

Nearly 200 comrades were there, including a large proportion of young people.

Criticisms of the Labour Party came thick and fast from Party members on the platform and in workshops, as the left responded to the Leadership's move rightwards.

By Julie Jeavons
Newcastie University Labour Club

Derek Cattel of the Steering Committee started it off by condemning the Party for serving up "the warmed up leftovers of Callaghan and Wilson".

Audrey Wise continued the theme, saying how easily the Tories could be defeated, and that the Labour Party was going the wrong way.

Audrey was then attacked by the RCP for seeing the Labour Party as the only force for socialism; but defended by the SWP for taking a stand against the Party Leadership.

Criticism of the Leadership was very unpopular just two years ago: this Conference showed how much things have changed. The left is united in its frustration. There is a will to fight — sat on by the Labour and trade union leaderships.

One of the major points to come out of the Conference was the real need to forget ideological differences and work on the common ground shared by different groupings. The Socialist Conference was encouraged to continue its work; perhaps by moving outwards now, from Regions to Districts.

Brian Gibson, of the Steering Committee and Spennymore TUC, appealed for this to be done patiently and slowly, to avoid sectarianism and achieve solidarity.

Pat Buckley of the Steering Committee and USDAW summed it all up, saying "Although I will probably never see socialism in my lifetime, the young people here today might." I hope we can prove her right!

Feature: The Local Government Debate



D. Sinclair/Militant

Backing the "old stay in and fight position"

WHERE IN LOCA GOVERN

Much has changed in local government sin as a Labour Briefing-inspired left took control rate-capping has tightened the financial scre to the inner cities, Labour Councillors are hav education, housing, Poll Tax and compulsory

In this feature Hilda Keane, a former Leade from the immediate tactical concerns of toda nature of local government.

Greg Tucker and John Turkie take up the in attitude to forthcoming local elections should

John Turkie surveys Labour's record in loca conclusion that Labour Councillors should res takes the view that the Council Chamber sti struggle.

So this is the beginning of the debate. Plea your agreements and disagreements with the letters on individual points, or articles up to 6 to PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ as soon as follow-up feature for the New Year. In particu the local government view from outside Lond part, please give us a ring on 01-733 7016.

Resignation

The only way forward

"Mass resignation ultimately is the same as allowing our opponents to run the Councils. Remaining in power may mean having to make unpleasant choices but at least we can ensure that priority is given to maintaining services for those most in need."

So says Margaret Hodge, one of Labour's leading local government New Realists.

Of course, no one associated with *Briefing* goes along with the fantasy that Labour Councils can stay legal *and* protect "those most in need". But, like the New Realists, most *Briefing* supporters are against resignation, albeit for different reasons.

Our "stay in and fight" position is no longer viable. It is based on the untenable idea that we can still gain political control and force Labour Councils to take on the Tories.

Instead, we should advocate resignation as a strategy for taking us forward and dealing with the political crisis facing the Labour Party.

Overall, the Tories plan to change local government from a direct provider to a supervisory service, and their strategy for taking on Labour Councils is clear:

- first, the financial squeeze, forcing capitulation to the threat of surcharge;
- then, the battery of legislation which the New Realist strategy cannot stop;
- finally, the Poll Tax, which Labour Councils will collect and police for the Tories — because none will run the risk of surcharge.

Already, Labour Councils facing financial deficits are attacking their own workforces, cutting back services, and doing deals with property developers which help push out local communities.

By John Turkie
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Labour Councils, locked in battle with their own workforces, tenants and communities, will be in no shape to resist privatisation and the Housing and Education Bills.

The slide into real chaos for some Labour Councils may well not take place until after the 1990 elections. It's always possible that enough people will believe in whatever platform Labour adopts to vote us in.

But as sure as night follows day, we will get dumped in the 1994 elections, the tories assuming office once the back of resistance has been completely broken — by Labour.

In any event, as far as *we* are concerned, it will be well nigh impossible to defend Labour Councils at the next elections. The New Realist strategy, adopted by all Labour Councils, will only delay Labour implementation of the Tory programme — allowing it in piecemeal instead.

And this is exactly the "strategy" the Tories want them to adopt. It has the practical effect of undermining resistance at the same time as discrediting the Labour Party.

The Labour Party should resign and leave the tasks of trying to privatise services, administer the Poll Tax, and "negotiate" with trade unions over redundancies and cuts to the Tories. *Our* job is to liaise with the unions about opposition.



Margaret Hodge: Leading New Realist

Freed of responsibility for the cuts, Labour could give a political lead locally and organise resistance amongst tenants, local government workers, and the wider community.

We would then have an opportunity to build a base from which to launch a credible *socialist* bid for power in future elections, one committed to taking on the Tories.

At this eleventh hour, we're talking about damage-limitation. Of course, if we were to win this position in local Parties, many right wingers would simply refuse to resign. And in areas with large Labour majorities we may not be able to engineer a situation where Labour lost overall control.

But where Labour's majority on the Council is slim, the resignation of all Councillors opposed to cuts would force the Tories into the front line of trying to implement what is, after all, their own programme.

Those who argue against this position must present a credible alternative strategy. Already, many anti-cuts Councillors are becoming demoralised and individual resignations are bound to proliferate.

Adequate

Our demand for setting a needs budget and our slogan of "no cuts in jobs and services" are no longer adequate responses to Labour's political crisis.

Our "stay in and fight" position only continues to make sense if there's at least a *possibility* that Labour Councils will take on the Tories instead of their own workforces, tenants, and communities. The reality is that *all* are too far down the road of collaboration to turn back.

No doubt some will see this strategy of resignation as abandoning the working class. If we're honest with ourselves, we know Labour Councils have *already* abandoned the working class.

Unpalatable though it may seem to some, we must argue nationally for pulling out of local government *now*. Staying in office (without power) and doing the Tories' dirty work for them will mean paying a far higher price, in the longer term, than any associated with resignation.

The state o

What's loc local gove

The debates about the role of socialists within the local state need to be understood in the context of the changing role of the central state in recent years and the degree to which this is a response to the actions of socialist Councillors.

First, we need to acknowledge the many positive achievements of socialist activity on local Councils in the early 80s and recognise the diverse nature of the political currents promoting them.

Many Councillors, in London at least, were keen to advocate accountability of the Labour Group to the local Party, reflecting the then national mood for increased Party democracy.

The same Councillors were likely vigorously to oppose freemasonry and corruption amongst Councillors and officers alike.

They also believed that they could run the local state better than their right wing predecessors — or existing fellow Councillors — often on the assumption that the right were lazy or inefficient.

For others, the local state was a provider of resources

By Hilda Kean
Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP, former Leader of Hackney Council

which could be used by community and campaigning organisations outside its employ or direct control.

Some saw the presence of socialist Councillors as a focus for campaigning politics in the local community and as a political base for challenging the politics of the Labour leadership.

There *were* successes. Liverpool City Council did build thousands of new homes, Lambeth and other London Boroughs did make concerted efforts to improve services.

However, in general, successes were not based on the crucial financial issues, which became increasingly dependent upon government control of the Rate Support Grant or borrowing levels for capital expenditure.

The main scope for exercising relative autonomy within the local state came about on political and ideological issues: the establishment of nuclear free zones, animal rights, calls for a united Ireland, equal

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ign. Greg Tucker, an anti-cuts Councillor,
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opportunities, and lesbian and gay rights.

The changes instituted by the central state have sought to undermine this relative political and ideological autonomy as much as to restrict financial growth.

The rate-capping legislation introduced in 1984 marked not only a new stage in revenue cuts but also laid the basis for *centralised* political control. This was consolidated by the re-election of the Conservative government for a third term in 1987.

This emphasis has continued, for example, in recent Local Government and Education Acts. Such legislation purports to divorce the financial undertakings of local Councils from political and ideological considerations.

This is also sharply reflected in the Widdicombe report which attempts to deny Council officers' political rights: barring them from standing for election to other Councils, from holding office in any political part, from even canvassing in any elections.

There has been a failure to deal adequately with the financial issues underpinning the operation of the local state. It is almost irrelevant for London Councils to issue statements on Ireland or police accountability — areas historically outside their control — when they are unable or unwilling to defend and improve "finance-based" services for which they have a historic responsibility.

Any discussion of the action of socialists in and against the local state needs to analyse the different aspects of the local state and also its relationship with the centre. We need to consider both what positive measures have been achieved as well as what is now being eroded or dismantled.

Patently, the Labour right has no viable strategy to defend working class communities. The ALA's line of providing quality service through cuts in working conditions and jobs has proved not to work — even on their own terms.

Cuts in jobs and services have resulted in exactly that: cuts in jobs and services! This fact is increasingly recognised and resisted by locally organised community groups and unions.

Whatever our view about the current role of socialist Councillors we must all surely welcome the local campaigns against cuts, typified at present by Brent. Here community groups and unions have won significant gains and remain an inspiration to all those seeking to defend working class communities.



PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

"Demands made by local people"

Staying in office

Part of a wider struggle for power

In the London Borough elections of 1986 it was already hard to find decent comrades willing to stand as candidates.

In some Boroughs the election panel was barely larger than the number of seats vacant. That situation is now getting much worse.

By Greg Tucker
Lambeth
Councillor

Faced with Thatcher's re-election and an acquiescent Labour leadership, some people are beginning to argue that it is no longer worth staying in local government.

Rate-capping had already limited Labour's ability to deliver on manifesto promises. The combined effect of third-term Tory legislation now makes it possible for the government to force Labour Authorities to do things which make Bradford Tories look tame.

Labour's new local government leadership, personified by Blunkett and Hodge, argue that the point of local government is to deliver "decent services efficiently".

Closing down services and sacking workers becomes OK as long as it can masquerade as improving efficiency. The government's attack becomes not so much a threat as a challenge.

Only a few years ago in "Fortress Islington", Margaret Hodge was able to stand with Briefing supporters on a programme of expansion, for an ambitious drive to deliver new services to working people. Here was the possibility of making a change — or so it seemed.

That dream soon faded, but it is too simple to merely place the blame on sellouts from the top. Those who now feel like dropping out of local government often overestimated the ability to change society by Council action in the first place.

Local government Councils are not and cannot be islands of socialism. Change was never going to be possible simply by using control of Council budgets.

Over 60 years ago the Poplar Councillors had to contend not only with the Tory government, but also with official Labour policy, which did not "associate itself with demands ... which cannot be regarded as practicable in existing circumstances."

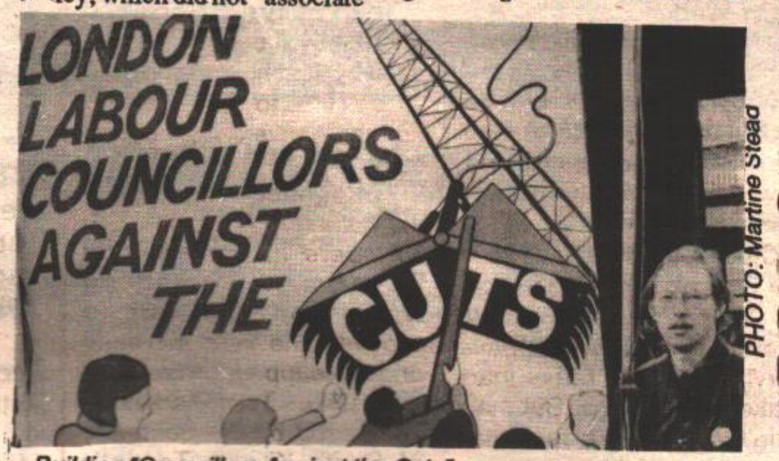


PHOTO: Martine Stead

Building "Councillors Against the Cuts"

Like many on the left today, they tried to answer a simple question: "You now have the power — what are you going to do with it?"

But their ability to win even limited victories was based on the realisation (conscious at least to the Communists within their ranks) that their battles had to be fought as part of an overall working class struggle for emancipation.

For that reason, they built up a strong local Party; as a Group, they allowed themselves to be subject to local Party discipline in order to unite the Party behind them; and they took their campaign out into the country, organising support for their strategy. Above all, they saw themselves as part of a much wider struggle for power.

It is not possible to build a council strategy which does not recognise its place in this wider struggle. Those who wanted to use the Council Chamber for social change and now see it for the charade it always was feel disillusioned.

We have to find a way to organise so that we can bring them with us, to make concrete our view that only through the global fight for socialism will we be able to make real changes, and thereby to map out the role that Councillors can play in that process.

Despite the new terrain mapped out by the Tories, local Councils remain a political arena which we cannot avoid.

In writing the election manifesto in Lambeth we tried to address these points. Using the heightened awareness of local services built up by the ratecapping campaign, we brought forward concrete demands being expressed by the local community.

But we did not leave it there, as a shopping list, we put the demands into a context of political struggle, starting from where we already were — with 31 Councillors being surcharged. This saw us though the election with a better result than anywhere else in London.

Subsequently, we were not able to hold onto the layer of Councillors who had come forward in agreement with our shopping list, but who had not yet been won to the broader strategy.

Faced with government pressure and the inability to make progress on even the basics of the shopping list, they capitulated.

Briefing has always tried to organise the left in the Council Chambers. It can be argued that at times it merely voiced aspirations rather than providing a clear national line of march.

Too often, the organisation we built up to get comrades selected faded away after we had got them elected.

Over the last year we have tried to build Councillors Against the Cuts, which attempts to hold a line of resistance. We have been able to organise sizeable minorities in many London Boroughs, and start to make contacts elsewhere.

Whether we like it or not, Labour will be staying in local government. Of course, there will be areas where the left is not strong enough to put comrades forward, and nearly everywhere else we must draw up strategies knowing that we are starting from a position of weakness.

But rather than handing over the terrain to the right, and sniping at them when they inevitably fail, we have to use the contradiction between the demands made by local people on Councils, and the role being forced on Councils by the Tory government.

The government seems strong, but the pressure of the working class and their needs and demands will not go away.

1992: a snare and a delusion for Labour

The recent change in Labour's EEC policy is one of the most astonishing and rapid reversals the Party has ever experienced.

No sooner had the dust settled on the 1983 election than the official Party line on the Common Market (i.e. complete withdrawal) sank without trace and with hardly a whisper of protest.

Now it seems Labour is set to go one step further and actually embrace the EEC beacon of socialist hope.

Witness the effusive welcome given to Jacques Delors at the TUC and Neil Kinnock's enthusiasm for the "Social Europe" concept.

1992, we are told, is not only an opportunity for big business; it also represents "a challenge for the left". As the trade barriers come down, the argument goes, so too will disparities in income and social welfare within the Community.

Closer scrutiny, however, should inject some healthy caution into this new-found "Europhoria".

•In spite of M. Delors' fine words, the 17-member EEC Commission — like the EEC Council of Ministers — has a Centre-Right majority, for whom the internal Market is primarily a matter for the business world with a few "social" measures thrown in to keep the voters happy.

By Walter Cairns
Press Officer,
Labour Common Market Safeguards Committee

This is why Delors emphasised that his TUC speech was delivered in a personal capacity. This political balance is unlikely to change with the appointment of new Commissioners from January 1989.

•The Single European Act, the legal framework for the Internal Market, is almost exclusively concerned with the removal of trade barriers, with only the odd isolated Article dealing with such vague areas as "safety at work".

Nowhere does it make provision for a comprehensive programme of social welfare at the European level, or even for the harmonisation of benefit levels. (Even if such harmonisation was agreed, EEC precedent suggests it would result in a reduction of all national levels to the lowest common denominator.)

The "Social" Europe outlined by Delors would require the comprehensive revision of the Treaty of Rome and the Single European Act, which in turn requires the consent of *all twelve* member states.

It defies belief that socialist governments will accede to power in every member state within the next decade.

•Whilst close co-operation with our sister parties in the Socialist International is praiseworthy, it remains a hard fact that its EEC members, with the exception of the Labour Party, have all endorsed the Single European Act and its business-orientation.

Thus, even a convergence of socialist governments throughout the Common Market would not necessarily result in any agreement on the shape of a future Socialist Europe.

Does this mean that there is no scope for European socialist co-operation under a Labour government? Certainly not, but joint action must be based on a bedrock of consensus among those taking part.

The next Labour government should therefore make clear to other EEC member states that it intends to be selective about those areas of Community decision-making with which it wishes to be associated.

To this end, it must repeal, or at least amend, Section 2(1) of the European Communities Act, which gives effect to EEC legislation in Britain. This would mean that no provisions of the Treaty of Rome, or any Common Market legislation will be applicable in this country without prior assent by Parliament.

The government would then be able to adopt those European measures (for example, environmental or consumer protection statutes) which suited this country's interests, whilst rejecting those of which it did not approve (such as the free movement of goods or the Common Agricultural Policy).

The other member states might not dance with joy at such a decision, but would have little option but to accept it. Any attempt to expel Britain would destroy the EEC's political credibility.



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Neil Kinnock: sinking the Party's EC policy without trace

Socialist Conference

European Working Group formed

By Jim Thain
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

As 1992 looms, the question of how socialists should approach a unified European market is assuming considerable importance.

A step towards developing a coherent answer was taken on November 4th, when a European Working Group, was formed, largely under the auspices of the Socialist Society.

Present were Jeremy Beale, Penny Camp, Steve Cowan, Ron Huzzard, John Lambert, John Palmer, Peter Tatchell, Hilary Wainwright, John Williams, Peter Wragge and myself.

The group's findings will be published and will become part of the Socialist Conference policy-making process.

Hilary Wainwright proposed that we compile a European-wide directory of labour movement links. Any contributions should be sent to Jeremy Beale, c/o the Socialist Conference, 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG.

Many points of controversy were raised. I would like to respond to John Palmer's contention that the left should raise bourgeois democratic demands in relation to EC institutions.

It is true that in certain, special circumstances, Marxists should form principled alliances with bourgeois democracy. It was, after all, the failure of Stalinism to come to terms with German Social Democracy that permitted the rise of Nazism.

But this is a question of the relationship of Marxists to existing state institutions. No one seriously believes that a fully-formed European Superstate will emerge after 1992.

Marxists do not seek to impose bourgeois democratic structures on transnational capitalist systems. We would not argue that ICI, a much more coherent transnational organisation than the EC, should have a bourgeois democratic character. We argue that it should be under workers' control.

A key issue for socialists is: what will 1992 mean for the weakest sections of the European working class? In a future issue, I shall examine John Palmer's argument that the people who will really lose out will be the strongest sections of the European working class and that there will be corresponding benefits for the weakest.

Why not accept we're in the EC?

Both Finn Jensen and Jim Thain (in *Briefing* no. 70) berate Peter Tatchell for "reformism" because he advocates working within EEC institutions.

By Dave Spencer
Coventry Labour Briefing



Similarity in the lives of working people across Europe: French nurses take industrial action. (above), as British nurses contemplate similar action

Indeed, Jim goes as far as to say, "You can't reform capitalism."

Where he gets this idea from, I don't know. Of course you can reform capitalism!

Their attack on Peter is particularly surprising since both Finn and Jim support *British* withdrawal from the EEC (and stopping Turkey joining it).

What are these but precisely *reformist* demands within capitalism? They are certainly not revolutionary or transitional demands to socialism.

It's true that Peter's article in the *Briefing Summer Special* showed illusions in state institutions, but his proposals do have the merit of starting from where we are — in the capitalist EEC — and advocating self-activity across national boundaries to gain solidarity and strength.

We should also call for the wiping out of state lines between the EEC and Eastern Europe.

What is striking about travelling in Europe is not "the uneven development of European states," as Jim claims, but the tremendous *similarity* between the lives and the consciousness of working people in the different countries and how much there is to learn from shared experiences.

Finn mentions the betrayals of Social Democracy and the New Realism of the Euro-Stalinists in Western Europe. But these are common to us all, with lessons for us all, easily understood by comrades in the Eastern bloc.

Surely, from all the 1968 nostalgia we must have learned one thing: how quickly a breakthrough of struggle in one nation can spread and affect consciousness elsewhere.

This is at least 20 times more true today, 20 years later.

In these circumstances, after 15 years of British EEC membership, the tired slogan of withdrawal behind state lines can only have a reactionary appeal to nationalism and a "lager lout" arrogance, in spite of the intentions of the proposers.

It also must have the effect of dampening down the kind of initiatives which both Finn and Jim propose at the end of their articles.

Why can't we get on with the sort of programme they suggest without the millstone of "withdrawal from the EEC" hanging round our necks?

Finn claims that British withdrawal would weaken capitalism. But since when has socialists' main concern been the weakening of capitalism? Our main aim is the *strengthening* of the working class.

The two things do not necessarily go together. Indeed, if withdrawal from the EEC meant a weakening of capitalism which brought with it more unemployment and lower wage rates, the working class would surely curse rather than revere the socialists who proposed it.

The reactionary nature of international capitalism is shown by the antics of leaders like Mrs Thatcher — who can't even get a European super-state together when national boundaries are becoming so obviously obsolete and a barrier to competition with Japan and the USA.

Our concern is not with their problems but with the self-activity and empowerment of the working class and the socialist movement.

Water Privatisation

Full steam ahead!

The Tory Government is now steaming ahead with its commitment to privatise the water industry in the next session of Parliament.

Environment Secretary Nicholas Ridley had suddenly announced the shelving of this contentious legislation in June 1986, on the pretext of shortage of time.

By JOHN HAYBALL

Thatcher and her Cabinet knew that this issue would have provided the Labour opposition with an opportunity to ambush the government in the run-up to polling day.

Now, with another huge majority in the bag, the way is clear to raise another £5 billion plus at the expense of the family silver.

Assets valued at £27 billion will be stripped. The value of water industry activity reaches £2.5bn annually, giving it a significant place in the UK economy.

Of its ten Regional Authorities (set up under Heath in 1974), the Thames Board achieves the highest profitability (£212m last year) — just as Network South-East forms the profitable kernel of the rail system in the country's most densely populated area.

The Tories have rushed to reassure the public of their intention to make proper provision for sewage, rivers, coastal protection, land drainage, fishing, etc.

These environmental responsibilities act as a brake on the profitability of Water Authorities. Ridley is proposing a National Rivers Authority with an inspectorate.

But the Tories, with their lust for profits, cannot be trusted for one minute to safeguard our water.

They are also silent on national wage agreements. These will clearly be jeopardised, as they have in other privatised services, such as local government and transport.

So far the main unions involved in water — GMB, NUPE, TGWU, and NALGO — have countered the government with a wishy-washy public profile emphasising accountability, adequate investment, and the health factor.

This challenge demands more of the labour movement. Thatcher already has many outspoken advocates of privatisation in key positions. Roy Watts, Chair of the Thames Authority, is a former No. 2 at British Airways.

Over 10,000 job losses (one in six) in the water industry since 1981 will be added to by private sector cuts and pay deals.

With continuing job cuts comes increasing danger of accidental disaster, as earlier this year, when toxic liquid was poured into the main water supply in North Cornwall with calamitous consequences.

Only a Labour Party with its current calibre of leadership could fail to make maximum capital out of these disastrous proposals.

Yet Neil Kinnock's magnificent 1987 General Election Campaign failed to highlight the issue and its implications, e.g. compulsory water meters, or its links (after Chernobyl) to the question of nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

We could even link job losses to the Third World's water problems by calling for the option of sabbatical secondment of water workers to those countries stricken by drought and to the 1,200 million people still living without a clean water supply.

We have the arguments. Given the will Labour can still turn this issue to its advantage.

Broadcasting White Paper





Channel 4's "A Very British Coup", shown earlier this year, presented a stimulating, different view of how government can work. Will such productions be financially viable if the White Paper becomes law? Will they even be tolerated?

Tabloid TV?

The recent White Paper on broadcasting (*Broadcasting in the 90s — Competition, Choice and Quality*) will warm the hearts of Murdoch, Maxwell, and friends.

But it offers no comfort to those who would like their TV channels to broadcast facts and debate, or any kind of material that stimulates, excites, or challenges.

By Felicity Harvest
Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP

In the name of choice, the White Paper proposes a Channel 5 (from 1993), the sale of two extra satellite channels, and the auctioning of ITV ("Channel 3") franchises to the highest bidder, subject to "quality thresholds".

A quality threshold, apparently, is an undertaking that "nothing to be broadcast should offend against taste and decency, encourage crime or disorder, or be offensive to public feeling."

The paper does not of course attempt to define *whose* taste and feelings we are talking about here, but I'm sure we can guess.

The Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA), the recently created guardian of the nation's morality, is to become a statutory body. Coupled with the proposed abolition of the Independent Broadcasting Authority this is a clear indication of the priority given the maintenance of a purient, establishment view over any concept of "fairness".

The IBA recently received a flood of complaints about a blatantly anti-semitic advert for the Midland Bank. It was able to use its teeth (i.e. the threat of being able to remove the franchise from the regional companies once every eight years) to insist that the advert was not shown.

The new Independent Television Commission will have no such teeth.

Once the Channel 3 franchises are sold, the only way they will change hands again is by a financial takeover, inevitably by other media conglomerates. With the Thames franchise valued at £250 million, the people of London will hardly be able to take major broadcast media into their own hands.

The White Paper claims that there will be limits on "media cross ownership", but there is no reason to think they will be effective.

After all, who's been first into the field of satellite TV broadcasts? The ubiquitous Murdoch, and WH Smith, whose retail enterprise has for years been dedicated to the homogenising of culture and stifling of political debate.

Beyond that, the White Paper strays into wonderland, with an unspecified process of "nudging" BBC towards a subscription system, and the idea of microwave broadcasting for the 90s.

The latter is supposed to allow more local programming. But, as with community radio, the government is likely to veto any system which gives a voice to oppressed people.

The failure of cable TV to be the anticipated money-spinner, and the financial collapse (in the week of the White Paper) of the much-vaunted "Superchannel" demonstrate that broadcasting is an area in which the government, in its rush to serve its friends, can easily miscalculate.

Campaigning against this White Paper is therefore well worthwhile. What we have is far from perfect, but what we will get will be a lot worse.

If we do not fight these plans, we condemn ourselves to a future of tabloid TV so circumscribed by the vision of the moguls and the moralists that it will make some of the rubbish currently shown look like the purest art.

PESTICIDES

Pesticides in wood preservatives, residues in food, and poisonous crop and garden spray are at last becoming a cause for public concern.

Why should the labour movement be concerned?

By Geoff Birch
Hackney North CLP

One of the speakers at the first National Conference on Pesticides and Human Health, held in Cirencester in October, was the Tory MP Sir Richard Body.

He has long argued that the Official Secrets Act is used by vested interests to keep the public in ignorance of the harmful health effects of these insidious and ubiquitous chemicals, which the National Poisons Unit estimate cause over 5,000 serious health problems a year.

The Conference was organised by the growing Environmental Medicine Foundation. Leading supporters of the EMF include clinical ecologist Dr Jean Monro, dietician and authoress Stephanie Lashford (whose excellent book *The Residue Report* is just out) and several Lords and Ladies.

Amongst the speakers were representatives of more powerful vested interests. Alan Mole is employed by Restec (Residue Technology). His and other similar companies employ technicians to monitor pesticide residue levels in food for the major supermarkets.

This work is expanding constantly and yet is not policed in any way by any public body. He argued that some of his rivals were not employing good laboratory practice and were not accountable. This contrasts with the Canadian system where there are three publicly policed laboratories in Montreal alone to test for residue levels.

Dr Andrew Cockburn and David Foulkes are employed by Schering Agrochemicals' research centre. They argued that pesticides are relatively harmless and should be treated like any other threat to public health like smoking and peanuts!

A similar line is pushed by the *Farmers Weekly* which is heavily funded by the chemical companies, according to Sir Richard Body.

In opposition to this, Richard Young of the Farmers and Growers Association insisted that chemical spraying has been responsible for Dutch Elm disease and the demise of wildlife such as birds of prey and the bat and barn owl.

The reason for this, it is argued, is that the offending toxins weaken the immune system and can lead to ill health, causing cancers, etc.

Dr Monro emphasised possible dangers to humans. Unfortunately apart from the ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) campaigner Labour MP Jimmy Hood, there were few critical voices.

There were no contributions either from Friends of the Earth or the Pesticide Trust. And why didn't we have a speaker from the London Food Commission? Set up by the GLC, they have been in the vanguard of the fight against dangerous pesticide residue levels in food.

Clearly, the voice of the Socialist Environmental Resources Association and the trade union movement must be heard at conferences such as these if these conferences are to have any credibility — and at £16.00 a ticket I think those in attendance deserve at least this!

The issue of pesticide poisoning must be placed prominently within the leading issues of our Green politics. Foremost amongst our demands should be that blood level testing facilities be made available through the NHS. Otherwise, Environmental Medicine could be privatised by default.

Only when these facilities are available to all on demand will the real dangerers posed by pesticides be understood. Until then we need a labour movement sponsored conference on these issues. They are too important to be left to the vested interests (however well-meaning) represented at this Conference.

For further information see *Pesticide Residues and Food, the Case for Real Control*, by Pete Snell of the London Commission, 88 Old Street, London EC1, £5.00
Also read *The Residue Report*, by Stephanie Lashford, published by Thorsons, £4.95.

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).

Fight Hammond — from the inside

Dear *Briefing*,

I should like to comment on Alan Thornett's article arguing that electricians should leave the EETPU.

First, to compare the EETPU with the UDM is misleading. The UDM was set up in the middle of a national miners' strike to assist the defeat of that strike.

By contrast, many EETPU branches have a history of struggle, both in support of their own demands and in solidarity with other workers.

Secondly, as Alan well knows, the history of left-wing breakaway unions is a disastrous one, with the militants isolated from the mass of the membership. John Aitken of Flashlight estimates that between 5,000 and 10,000 of the EETPU's third of a million members will leave; this breakaway, then, appears to be no exception.

Lastly, with Hammond outside the TUC, we are now in the best position for years to argue against his brand of unionism. The London Contracting branch, a thorn in Hammond's side for many years, succeeded last year in getting the branch reopened.

They recently voted to stay in the EETPU and fight, and sponsored a conference on November 5th in Manchester for all EETPU members who want to do the same. Let's hear more about initiatives like this in the pages of *Briefing*.

In 1961, the left made the mistake of seeing winning union positions as more important than winning the support of the rank and file, and rigged the ballot. Let's not make a mistake like that again in arguing for a breakaway.

Clive Hopkins
North Lambeth SWP

Who's "slapdash" now?

Dear *Briefing*,

I have just read Mike Phipps' review of my book *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics* in which he informs his readers of my theoretical superficiality and "slapdash" approach to classical Marxism.

Phipps was obviously too busy bashing my book to notice its positive endorsement of Luxemburg's idea of the "mass strike" which is central to the book's argument. Indeed, he didn't even mention Luxemburg at all: very slapdash.

He complains that I didn't really consider evidence on the conservative character of the trade union bureaucracy. An entire chapter is devoted exactly to that job, and if Phipps thinks I have omitted or misinterpreted evidence he should say what the evidence is, and give examples instead of misleading readers with false claims.

Yours sincerely,
Dr John Kelly,
Lecturer in Industrial Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science

OBITUARY

We deeply regret to announce the death of Islington Briefing supporter Craig Robertson, who committed suicide on November 12th.

Craig will be deeply missed and long remembered by those who knew and worked with him.

Though the movement may have failed to provide him with the support he needed, he was a tireless fighter in every battle of the working class and the oppressed.

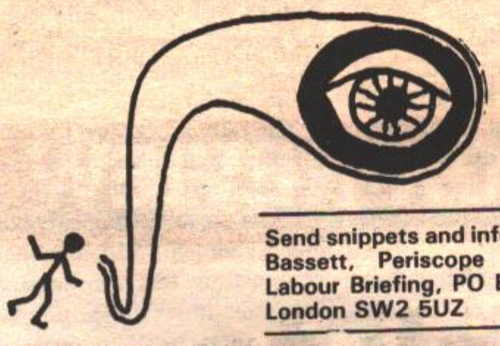
Thanks to Briefing

Dear Briefing,

May I take this opportunity to thank everyone at Labour Briefing for your hard work and the excellent coverage you gave the leadership campaign.

With best wishes,
Tony Benn

Periscope



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

The Other Side?

A letter from **Jim Kennedy**, Secretary of the **"Labour Life Group"** turned up in our PO Box the other day.

Kennedy writes personally to Greg Bassett:

"As your paper has no letters page (I wonder why) may I ask that you inform your readers of the **Labour Life Group, Protect the Unborn Child**, so that the other side of the abortion debate can be presented for them to consider."

As for our letters page, Jim, see above.

We are also happy to print your address (43 Seely Road, London SW17 9QP, tel. 01-672 6013) as requested, in case any *Briefing* readers wish to pass on their views.

Of course, the cause of the Labour Life Group has the benefit of right wing media support. Since *Briefing* really does believe in presenting the "other side" may we remind readers of the excellent work done by the National Abortion Campaign, which can be contacted at:

Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU; tel. 405 4801

Buddy, can you spare about £120,000...

Next time you get another of those special appeal letters from **Neil Kinnock** along with your *Labour Party News*, pause for thought.

Which national political party recently wasted £60,000 on a financial assessment from consultants Peat-Marwick McLintock (fresh from their previous project — an alternative financial strategy for Guernsey)?

Surely it wasn't the same one that lost £65,000 on an NHS day in July at Ally Pally?

Surely this "loadsalosses" party can't be the one that thinks it can convince the electorate it can run the country?

And surely, surely, it can't be the one where all *our* money's going?

New Women's Champion at Walworth Road

Those who must be obeyed at Walworth Road have appointed a new Labour Party **National Women's Officer.**

It is **Vicky Phillips**, former NUS President, NOLS apparatchik, currently taking up space on the right wing benches in acrimonious Hornsey & Wood Green GC in the friendly North London Borough of Haringey.

Ms Phillips' qualifications for the Walworth Road post almost certainly include a visceral (and quite visible) hatred of the left. They could not possibly include dedication to the interests of rank and file women.

In over two years as a CLP member she has attended *one* meeting of the local Women's Section: the 1988 AGM, which right wing cuts supporters attempted to pack.

Once it became apparent that they had failed to round up enough stooges to win GC seats, officers' posts, etc., they left — and have not since then been seen at a Women's Section (or any other local women's meeting).

Obviously, the perfect candidate for the job.

Haringey Frolics

Following defeat in two Haringey Council by-elections on October 6th, the local election agent (LCC witch-finder general **Jo Moore**) submitted a report to the CLP Campaign Committee.

It was loaded with analytical ore, of which a few samples must suffice:

"Holding the election in the week of Labour Party Conference was also a gamble which didn't pay off *thanks to Ron Todd*. Opinion polls since show that the results are unlikely to have been significantly different if they had been held on any other Thursday in October".

(Surely some contradiction here? — Ed.)

"*We have the Labour voters but for some reason they chose not to vote*... the most worrying factor is the collapse of the Alliance vote, in past we have only be able to win this two wards when there has been a strong alliance vote. Some how *we need to win over some of that Alliance vote.*" (sic!)

Proof of the Pudding

Michael Meacher, at a GCHQ rally in Newcastle, denounced Thatcher's hypocrisy in Poland. And quite right too. But what about Meacher's own hypocrisy? He expressed full support for British trade unionists; but where was he during the Miners', Seafarers and Postal Strikes? We can't remember the ex-NEC member appearing on the picket lines.

Meacher also pledged that the next Labour government would reinstate and fully compensate the sacked GCHQ trade unionists. A murmur of cynicism arose from the crowd. Wonder why?

Building Briefing

CONTACT BRIEFING

The *Briefing* Editorial Board, Trade Union Briefing, Briefing Women, the Briefing Economics Commission, and International Briefing can be contacted at PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ, 01 733 7016:

Deadline for articles:

Issue no. 74 (out Dec. 7th): notify EB as soon as possible, all articles in by Tuesday November 29th.

After issue 74, *Briefing* will be taking a Xmas break. We'll be back early in the New Year: watch this space for details of 1989 publication dates!

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BOOK REVIEW

Are they after you?

Blacklisting: The Inside Story of Political Vetting, by Mark Hollingsworth and Richard Norton-Taylor, *Hogarth Press*, £7.95 (paperback).

"Just because you think they're out to get you, it doesn't mean you're paranoid."

This maxim, dear to the hearts of all *Briefing* supporters, would make a fitting subtitle for this book.

The evidence piled up by the authors demonstrates overwhelmingly that we are all on The List, from raving revolutionary to simple trade union member.

I read this book thinking nothing would surprise me and with a rather patronising feeling that here were the naive, old liberals kicking up a fuss.

The depth of the research, however, and the power of the case the authors make has convinced me of the need for the widest possible dissemination of *Blacklisting* and the information it contains.

The authors cover case histories in the nuclear industry, the Ministry of Defence (and those companies working for it), British Telecom, the BBC, the engineering and construction industries, and the car industry.

In the eyes of the establishment, to be a Communist, a trade unionist, a Trotskyist, indeed anywhere to the left of Thatcher, is to be a subversive. Connections with CND, NCCL, Amnesty, or Anti-Apartheid, will all get you noticed.

By Steve King
Haringey Councillor

A South Australian Police Commissioner explained his criteria for political vetting:

"Obviously anyone who shares any affinity towards Communism — that's common sense.

"The IRA, the PLO, and I would say anyone who's decrying marriage, family life, and trying to break that up, pushing drugs, advocating the acceptance of certain drugs, homosexuality, indiscipline in schools, weak penalties for anti-social crimes, pushing that sort of thing.

"Oh, a whole gamut of things like that that could be pecking away at the foundations of our society and weakening it."

This man was formerly a Chief Constable in Yorkshire.

There are excellent chapters on the Special Branch and the Economic League. The former spends disproportionate amounts of time snooping into people's political lives as opposed to preventing crime (they are, after all, police officers).

Although accountable to the local Chief Constable, they do most of their work for MI5, who are accountable to nobody, so even a relatively "liberal" chief of police, like John Alderson, is powerless to do anything about them.

The scale of the Economic League's operations is enormous. They keep lists of all sorts of people deemed subversive and supply them to their subscribers. They keep advertisements and petitions.

Catherine Cookson, who once signed up for a nuclear freeze, is on their file, along with signatures on nomination forms for Council candidates.

Economic League Director-General Michael Noar explained: "There is no suggestion that these... are used for employment vetting at all. They are merely for our own internal information."

MI5, the SB, and the Economic League are all supported by an army of private investigators, made up largely of ex-policemen. They break the law with impunity — as their constant use of the Police National Computer shows. They are also used to infiltrate trade unions, protest organisations, and political groups.

One case study should make all attenders of *Briefing* meetings sit up. An accountant was refused a job at a subsidiary of Phillips Electronic and associated industries.

It transpired that during the miners' strike he had subscribed to a number of left papers to get an alternative view of the dispute, one of which was *The Next Step*. He had also attended one RCP meeting, where he had signed the attendance register — and that was that, MI5 had him on file!

Where does all this leave us? Hollingworth and Norton-Taylor make all the right noises about lack of accountability, lack of legal protection (blacklisting is not illegal), and the need for the right to employment to be seen as a basic right and legally enshrined as such.



This is what the well-dressed police officer will be wearing this year. So if you see one sitting at the back of the GC...

All this is clearly necessary, but change needs to go a lot deeper.

The link between blacklisting and national security goes back a long way and is based on the "Russian threat". The Economic League was founded in 1919 in response to the Bolshevik Revolution.

The Labour Party has never tackled this — for the same reason which makes a mess of our defence policy. Our Party, from the Leader down, has to break with the myth of the Russian threat, and show that without such a threat we do not need nuclear weapons, huge arsenals, or blacklisting.

Similarly, with all the other "subversives". As long as Labour appears to accept that Irish people, Palestinians, lesbians and gays, the decline of family life, and so on, pose some kind of threat, it legitimises vetting, blacklisting, and other measures allegedly designed to protect us from such "threats".

BOOK REVIEW

Caterpillar: Workers in control?

Track Record, Woolfson & Foster, *Verso*, £7.95 (paperback)

Shortly after Woolfson and Foster's first joint work, *Politics of the UCS Work-in* was published, another important occupation began at the Caterpillar tractor factory in Uddingston, Scotland.

Woolfson and Foster contacted the stewards, who agreed to tape all meetings throughout the occupation, which was to last 103 days.

The result of this research, *Track Record*, is a unique account of the problems that arose as the struggle itself unfolded.

In central Scotland, support for the occupation was massive; at last, someone had taken a stand against unemployment.

It made little difference that the workers had only a slim chance of victory. Indeed, the odds stacked against them helped to build popular support.

Above all, their decisive action in seizing control of the factory and kicking out the management popularised their struggle, and in the process immobilised the powerful forces lined up against them.

Neither the magnates of a huge multinational corporation, nor the right wing AEU leadership could lift a finger to end the "illegal" occupation, despite all the Tories' anti-union laws.

The workers produced a tractor painted pink (in contrast to the company yellow) and offered it to War on Want (Scotland) for shipment to Nicaragua!

By Jim Niblock
Glasgow Central CLP

Seizing control of a factory starkly posed all manner of questions, not least the contradiction between the advanced nature of this form of struggle and its containment within a single factory.

In the case of UCS, the adversary was clearly the government, which decreed that a nationalised industry, shipbuilding, should go to the wall. At Caterpillar, a multinational was restructuring its productive capacity in line with global corporate strategy.

UCS workers could argue the case for a change of government policy to save jobs, but what demands could be raised to save Caterpillar jobs? Here was the key weakness of the struggle: the workers' inability to give political direction to the massive and spontaneous groundswell of support.

It would be mistaken to criticise the factory leadership in this regard, when no one on the left advanced a coherent strategy capable of fusing popular support to a series of political demands against unemployment.

Without this lever, however, politicians from all parties could "support" the occupation in the manner of Lenin's famous hangman's rope. Both the strength and weakness of the campaign was demonstrated by the appearance of Thatcherite MP Allan Stewart on the platform of a rally in support of the occupation!

The book has good analysis of the political situation in Scotland, both before and after the occupation, so before you reach for Vol. 39 of Lenin's collected works, give this one a try — especially at the special reduced price available only to *Briefing* readers!

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Please send me ..... copy/copies of Track Record at the special Briefing readers' reduced price of £4.95.

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BOOK REVIEW

Back to Basics

Arguing for Socialism: theoretical considerations, by Andrew Levine, *Verso*, £9.95.

On the European Left there are many who have decided to throw in their lot with "actually existing democracy".

They prefer (in John Keane's recent words) the "indeterminacy, controversy and uncertainty" of capitalism to the possible terrors of revolution and totalitarianism.

By ANDREW COATES

They want to soften the distinction between liberalism and socialism.

It is therefore refreshing to read that Andrew Levine's *Arguing for Socialism* will weigh capitalism and socialism in the scales of "freedom, equality and justice".

The failings of capitalism's democratic promises are investigated: how there is still an enormous inequality of power, how property rights are unjust.

"Liberal democratic politics," Levine argues, are "a depoliticised politics of minimal participation by the many and professional public service by the few."

Arguing for Socialism is less specific about the problems of bureaucracy than Levine's later book *The End of the State*.

Difficulties

In that book Levine frankly investigates the difficulties faced by socialists who wish to finish with a "professional public service". Not least amongst them are inequalities of skills and differences in access to full-time decision-making.

Arguing for Socialism is clear and direct. However, it is difficult to know just who it is aimed at.

The book is too abstract for anyone who wants to hear the socialist case for the first time. It is also far too general for a specialist.

Stools

As it is, *Arguing for Socialism* falls between two stools: general socialist polemic and rigorous theoretical argument.

But given a choice between Levine and figures likes Hobsbawm, few socialists should hesitate: pick up the former and junk the latter.

International Briefing

SWEDISH ELECTIONS

Now for the confrontation!

The Swedish election held on September 18th showed a shift to the left among voters.

The two major right wing parties lost around 330,000 votes (some 5.5%) compared to 1985.

Discontented voters either abstained or cast their votes for Miljöpartiet (environment-party) which enabled the Greens to enter parliament — an historic event in a country where no new party has entered parliament for more than 50 years.

By Göran Kärrman Socialdemocratic Alternativ

The ruling Social Democratic Party (SAP) lost about 160,000 votes, but due to the low turnout this was limited to a loss of about 1% nationwide and three seats in parliament. With support from the Swedish Communist Party (which gained one seat), the SAP government will hang on for another three years.

Since 1982, when the SAP regained power as a result of growing resistance among Swedish workers to the austerity policy of the six-year old right wing government, SAP policy has been dramatically shifted to the right.

The SAP government was able to implement extraordinary austerity measures with the help of trade union leaders. Swedish real wages have dropped from first or second place on the OECD list to twelfth place, just above Portugal.

With the help of the economic upturn, the so-called "third road" economic policy of the Swedish SAP has made the Stockholm stock exchange into the world's fastest growing.

The stockbrokers gave their response to the election results when total trade jumped around 5%, or 30 billion crowns, in the following week.

The growing discontent among workers over the continuing pressure on real wages, cuts in public funds, etc., has lost the SAP almost a quarter of a million voters, compared to 1982.

But those votes have not gone to the right wing parties. While the Green Party could not be described as a "socialist" party — their economic policies are to some extent more conservative than the conservatives themselves — they have rejected austerity policies.

They have also benefited from the scandals among "leading circles", including the Bofors secret arms deal, and the continuing inability to solve the assassination of Olof Palme.

This year abstentions jumped to over 15%, unusually high by Swedish standards.

An economic package presented in mid-October by the Minister of Finance, Kjell-Olof Feldt, included a number of measures fought for by the right during the election campaign: tax cuts for the rich, cuts in government funds for housing, and a series of measures aimed at dragging Sweden as close as possible to the EC.

The right wing shift by SAP leaders has not gone unanswered by rank and file Social Democrats and trade unionists.

For the first time ever, an alternative slate for parliament was presented in one constituency (Jönköping county). It received only some 3,500 votes, short of the 10,000 needed to win a seat.

This is a reasonable showing compared to the 7,000 votes for the Communist Party (5.9% nationally) and the Greens' 6,000 votes (5.4% nationally) in the same constituency.

At the same time the alternative slate for the local Council in the town of Nässjö received 2,300 votes (down 600 from 1985 when it was sanctioned by the officials) and elected seven Councillors.

The "left" outside the Communist Party failed completely to answer in a positive way the development of the Social Democratic left.

The main "left of left" group, the Trotskyist Socialist Party, presented its own slates, receiving around 400 votes in the Jönköping constituency. Nationally they failed to profit from the discontent and received a total of 13,000, 3,000 down from 1985.

Among the trade unions, an emerging movement of independent unionists is organising in response to the attacks of the right wing leaders of the SAP in government.

Last September, 500 rank and file unionists met in the town of Falun in response to a call issued by local trade union leaders. This meeting condemned the pressure on real wages as well as "responsible behaviour" in relation to the capitalists from union leaders.

Despite the impressive turn-out in Falun, the real outcome of the meeting was not what was expected. The majority of Social Democratic-oriented workers saw no likely road forward when different "leftists" started to manoeuvre in order to use this independent movement of workers for their own ends.

In the aftermath of the elections, and with the clear statement from SAP officials that there will be further austerity measures and a continued "market-oriented" economic policy, a new call for a national conference of trade unionists has been made.

Things are rapidly moving towards a confrontation in Sweden.

Socialdemokratiskt ALTERNATIV

Medlemstidning för föreningen Socialdemokratiskt Alternativ Nr 6 - 1988 Pr

Valet en katastrof för boraarna

MILJÖPARTIET

Framgångarna för Mil tiet kan inte bara för

El Salvador

On the verge of victory?

In 1984, the US administration was optimistic about its prospects for defeating the revolutionary struggle led by the FMLN-FDR in El Salvador.

The US-sponsored reform programme had been crowned by Duarte's victory in the so-called democratic elections of 1984.

Having driven the urban-based unions underground and fostered the development of "moderate" Christian Democratic unions, it appeared to be on the verge of success.

ARENA, the ultra-right Party that organised the death squads in the early 80s, was on the defensive, and the military claimed that 80-90% of the countryside would be under its control by the end of 1985.

Four years later, the "low-intensity conflict" strategy, developed by the US, has failed.

At a recent meeting of trade unionists in London, Jaime Lopez, the FDR-FMLN representative in Britain, was able to declare "we are confident that we are on the verge of a popular victory."

This assessment is based on substantial evidence from El Salvador today.

On the military front, the FMLN is now operating in every single department of El Salvador; before 1984, it had operated and held ground only in the East.

Moreover, the FMLN urban guerrilla units have grown. On November 2nd, these units struck twice at the National Guard HQ in the Capital, San Salvador.

Despite the US billions poured into the military effort, the FMLN has defeated the counter-insurgency and is now on the offensive, even to the extent of breaking the "iron circle" which the military hoped would defend the capital.

Meanwhile, a growing level of workers' self-organisation in the urban areas led to the formation of the national Trade Union Federation, UNTS, in February 1986.

Although independent of the FDR-FMLN, this large and militant federation describes itself as having many programmatic points in common with the revolutionary forces.

By WILL MCMAHON

All of this means that in the next year a showdown with the military dictatorship is highly likely. In this context, the FDR has decided to participate in the March 1989 Presidential election.

Initially, this question had led to conflict between the FDR and the FMLN, but at present they describe their differences as more tactical than strategic.

For the FDR, the aim is not to win (since fraud is inevitable) but to campaign for a political solution to the country's crisis. The FDR-FMLN will also use this opportunity to stake its claim to the overall leadership of the opposition forces.

The next year is therefore going to be a crucial one in the history of El Salvador and the whole of Central America. Labour movement activists must prepare now for solidarity work with the El Salvadorean revolution.

•Trade union and Labour Party affiliation to the El Salvador Solidarity Campaign should be the first step. Contact them at 13-16 Borough Road, London SE1, tel. 01-928 3412. Trade unionists should also send representatives to the ElSoc Trade Union Commission.

Comrades who can attend the North London Socialist Conference Against Imperialism on November 26th will be able to hear the FDR-FMLN representative in Britain speak about recent developments.

Meanwhile, the country is wracked by a combined social and economic crisis. The failure of a half-hearted agrarian reform has come as no surprise, but it has been exacerbated by an increase in the number of landless peasants due to the war and the economic crisis.

60% of the peasantry are now without land. In the towns, 78% of the workforce are unemployed or under-employed. The country is also still feeling the repercussions of the 1986 earthquake (after which the poor saw little of the international aid sent to the country).

Capping all these developments is the political change that has occurred in the last few years. The political "centre" has collapsed. Neither the ruling class nor the oppressed are any longer willing or able to see the country carry on in its present manner.

Duarte's role as window-dressing for the military regime has become increasingly clear. At the same time, the right is coalescing around ARENA, rather than Duarte's wing of the Christian Democratic Party.

In the last local elections, ARENA took control in many important towns and cities. It has promised that if it wins the Presidential election in March 1989, 100,000 deaths will follow in the next six months.

This is not an idle threat. A recent ARENA defector has described how the death squads are being reactivated for the election period.

This polarisation on the right is mirrored by a movement towards the FDR-FMLN among the urban workers and poor and a deepening of the FMLN's implantation in the social struggles of the peasantry.

These developments were, in part, produced by the bombing strategy of the El Salvadorean military. The FMLN was forced to disperse into smaller units, which helped them work more closely with the people.

FMLN hits National Guard HQ

By Stuart Piper

Twice in November urban commandos of the FMLN showered mortar shells and machine gun fire into the barracks of the National Guard in San Salvador.

Ten soldiers and officers were killed and 37 were wounded.

These were the first attacks on a major military installation in the capital since the 1981 General Offensive.

A few weeks earlier, guerrilla forces had carried out three successive attacks on a key army communications centre on Aguacate Hill in the East, and had partly destroyed the 4th Brigade barracks at El Paraiso in the North.

This was the third attack on these barracks in recent years, and the third time the attack had started on the inside, with supporters amongst conscripted soldiers opening the gates to let the guerrillas in.

The FMLN claimed 450 army casualties. The US State Department admitted, for the first time, that US military "advisers" had been caught up in the action and "had to defend themselves".

Israeli Elections

No Answers to the Intifada

Below, ANNA WAGSTAFF examines the results in the Israeli General Elections held at the beginning of November.
In the next issue of *Briefing* we'll be looking at the implications — for Palestinians, Zionists, and anti-Zionists in Britain — of the major decisions made at the recent meeting in Algiers of the Palestine National Council.

Eleven months into the *intifada*, few among the Israeli electorate believed, as they went to the polls, that "carrying on as normal" was any longer an option in the Occupied Territories.

Western media commentators predicted that Israelis would make a clear choice between the "security through peace" offered by the Israeli Labour Party and the "peace through security" offered by Shamir's Likud.

But in the end, the most significant change was a sizeable increase in the vote for the ultra-orthodox religious parties.

Their success was based on the combination of a long-term trend in Israel towards racism and religious fundamentalism (inevitable in a state defining itself on a religious/racial basis) and an unprecedented turn-out of the orthodox vote, due mainly to intense competition between the religious parties themselves.

The only other observable trend in the voting was a slight polarisation away from both Labour and Likud toward, on the one hand, the more hardline Zionist parties (including the newly formed Modelit which won two seats on a platform of "transfer" of the Palestinian population from the Occupied Territories) and, on the other, the pro-democratic "non-Zionist" and "Arab" parties.

To an increasing number of Israelis, neither Labour nor Likud appear to have any new answers to the key questions. Both offered "more of the same".

The gap between Peres's opposition to giving back the West Bank and Gaza, dismantling the settlements, recognition of the PLO, and his professed commitment to a negotiated peace did not escape the electorate. Nor were they impressed by Shamir's notion of crushing the Palestinians first, and negotiating with them after.

The only point that really separated the hard-line Zionist parties from Likud was their insistence on annexation of the Occupied Territories, which would still leave unanswered the question of the rebelling population.

Only Modelit, with its policy of "transfer", really attempted to answer that question.

But there was one choice denied to the hard-line Zionists. Kach, which has long campaigned for the deportation of the Palestinian population from both the Occupied Territories and Israel, was debarred from standing, ostensibly on the grounds that it is racist.

Had it stood, it might well have increased its number of seats from one to seven, making it the third largest single party in the Knesset.

At the other end of the spectrum, the electorate could choose between several "non-Zionist" parties:

- Hadash (the electoral front led by the pro-Moscow Israeli Communist Party, which has a two-state position and gets support mainly on the basis of its defence of "Israeli-Arab" rights);
- the Progressive List for Peace (fighting its third election with politics similar to Hadash, but without the communism);
- the Democratic Arab Party (recently launched by one of the few leading Palestinian figures formerly in the Israeli Labour Party);
- and the Citizens Rights Movement (an alliance based on defence of democratic rights, including women's and Arab rights, and separation of religion from state).

The first three are perceived as almost irrelevant by the vast majority of the Jewish Israeli electorate. They present themselves as vehicles for increasing "Arab" influence within the confines of the sectarian political consensus, rather than a political force for overcoming that sectarianism.

Their campaigns were aimed at securing the highest share of the "Arab" vote rather than making any inroads into the Jewish vote.

The two extra seats they gained result from the higher than normal turnout among Palestinians, plus a decline in voting on the basis of patronage — which traditionally has secured many Zionist parties, including Likud, a share of the "Arab" vote.

The Citizens' Rights Movement picked up votes from Jewish layers radicalised by the *intifada* or fearful of the growing power of the ultra-right orthodox. But as a single issue democratic rights lobby, it is unable to offer a coherent response to the crisis into which the *intifada* has plunged Israel.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Picketing the "Heart of Israel" exhibition, last month at Alexandra Palace, North London

The *intifada* has now created conditions in which the majority of Israelis may start questioning what it is they are defending and at what price. What is needed is a political leadership capable of taking the *intifada*'s call for Palestinian liberation into the heart of Israel.

The call needs taking not only into protests against the brutality of the occupation, or into groups promoting "Jewish-Arab" friendship, but also into the wave of strikes in the Israeli health service (provoked by a desperate shortage of funds directly attributable to the costs of putting down the *intifada*), into Sephadi ("oriental" Jewish) groups organising to fight the racism they face from Ashkenazim (white-western Jews), and indeed into those economically deprived "development towns", where the right wing Kach has built a base among Sephardi youth, virtually unchallenged.

In short, a leadership that could use the strength of the *intifada* to blow apart all the many contradictions in the Zionist state, which could convince many Israeli Jews that their future does not lie in continuing to oppress and exploit Palestinians.

Such leadership might have come from the Abra al Balad, the only Palestinian movement within Israel with a class-based, anti-Zionist programme, which has played a leading role in organising solidarity with the *intifada* among Palestinians within Israel.

In the election, the Abra al Balad argued, unsuccessfully, for abstention.

The newly-formed "Democratic Secular Movement" will now try to harness Jewish anti-Zionist forces along with the most radical section of the Palestinian movement, principally the Abra al Balad, and carry out the political campaigning work necessary (in combination, of course, with the *intifada*) to make inroads into mainstream Jewish opinion.

The current political line-up has little to offer the majority of Israelis — Jewish or Palestinian. The need to build a mass opposition movement — with withdrawal form the Occupied Territories as a key demand — has never been more urgent.

Troops Out

New-look mag

By Jim Thain
Hackney Irish Year of Action Committee

The trendy left activist may now buy *Troops Out* without compromising her/his aesthetic sensibilities.

Always informative, the magazine's new format ensures it looks good too.

Inside, the political direction remains as clear as ever.

A welcome innovation is the historical series "Roots of Irish Resistance". In Vol. 12, Issue 1, Peter Beresford Ellis's theme is imperialism's systematic denigration of conquered civilisations.

He describes the cultural excellence of early mediaeval Irish civilisation; gives the true story of Macbeth; and outlines the conflict between Celtic primitive communism and Anglo-Norman feudalism.

In Issue 2, Jan Davies details the subjugation of Ireland in the 16-17th centuries through the "plantation" of loyal settlers, the growth of religious sectarianism, and Cromwell's excesses.

Other excellent items include David Leadbetter on the Gibraltar inquest (Issue 2) and Geoff Bell's overview of the formation and character of the gerrymandered six county statelet.

This year, a subscription is essential.

TWENTY YEARS ON

March for withdrawal!

- **British withdrawal from Ireland!**
- **Demonstrate — Saturday January 28th**
- **Grange Park, Kilburn, London**

On January 30th, 1972, 14 unarmed demonstrators were shot dead by British soldiers in Derry. They were marching for justice and an end to discrimination. Their demands have still not been met.

Twenty years after British troops were sent to the North of Ireland, the Nationalist community in the six counties suffers the worst poverty, unemployment, and housing conditions in Europe.

The British state's only answer: shoot-to-kill, PTA, no-jury trials, innumerable imprisonments.

The national demonstration in Kilburn, London, on January 28th is being called by IBRG, Troops Out, LWI, Irish Sections, and Women and Ireland Network. *Labour Briefing* has decided to become a sponsor of the march. Why not help us defray the £25 cost? Please send us donations at PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ.

Any money we raise above the £25 will go straight to march funds.

NICARAGUAN HURRICANE



This is Bluefields, on Nicaragua's west coast, ravaged by Hurricane Joan.

The damage left in its wake, coming on top of eight years of Reagan-sponsored warfare, will take an estimated 30 years to repair — and millions of pounds.

The British government has sent a measly £10,000 to Nicaragua for hurricane relief. The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, in contrast, has already collected £90,000.

Much more is needed urgently. Send donations to NSC, 23 Bevenden Street, London N1 6BH or call 01-253 0246.

LABOUR BRIEFING

POLL TAX ROUND-UP

Labour Councils deliver Tory goods

The last *Briefing* article I wrote on Poll Tax was cited in the press by Gerald Hartup (of the right wing Freedom Association) to prove that the Poll Tax campaign is dead.

By Greg Tucker
Lambeth
Councillor

He praises the Labour Party for providing the corpse.

He may be right about the Labour leadership's intentions but there is a long way yet before the campaign can be written off.

Abstract campaigns against "a bad thing" now have the task of responding to reality: Councils are gearing themselves up for actual implementation south of the border.

Far from being over, our campaign is only just beginning.

Unfortunately, nearly all Labour Councils seem to agree with Hartup. Giving a lead in this is Margaret Hodge of Islington who has ordered the Local Government Information Unit to stop producing anti-Poll Tax material.

Flocked

Two weeks ago, Councillors flocked to a Poll Tax Trade Fair in Birmingham, where they could see computer systems in action and compare notes on the best ways of drawing up the register and collecting the Tax.

Whilst Dick Knowles, Birmingham Council leader, used the opportunity for a ritual denunciation of the Tax, but Jack Layden of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities gave the game away.

"The AMA is co-operating because there is no choice but to implement the Tax as efficiently, effectively, and humanely as possible," he said.

Bailiffs

How humanely was explained by the firms of bailiffs touting for work at the Trade Fair. They admitted, "We are going to have to take on a lot of extra people to cope with the extra work."

Even the minimal "humane implementation" strategy adopted by Labour Conference is too radical for most Councils. Brighton Labour Group have refused to discuss whether to write off debts caused by non-payment, despite the fact that such write-offs were the one concrete commitment given in the NEC statement to Conference.

Even requests to use separate offices and different notepaper have fallen on deaf ears. At least one Labour Council has gone on record that it wants to get the credit for being efficient in collecting the Tax, and therefore will make sure that its links are highlighted, not hidden.

Dogged

The dismal pattern of dogged implementation seen amongst Labour Councils in Scotland may be about to be repeated in England and Wales. But that is no reason to give up. We must continue to demand that Councils refuse to enforce the Tax.

Already, many local Labour Parties are supporting a non-implementation strategy. Council unions at local level can be won to non-co-operation, going much further than the feeble "opposition" coming from their Head Offices.

Here in Lambeth the Poll Tax Campaign has been able to convince two of the three CLPs that the Council should refuse to co-operate with the Tax. A lobby of the Council has been held to increase the pressure on Councillors.

The Council leadership is currently trying to recruit Poll Tax staff, though a full discussion on Council strategy has yet to take place in the Labour Group.

Welcomed

Initially Lambeth NALGO officers had welcomed the extra jobs on offer for Poll Tax implementation. Now a Branch meeting has overwhelmingly agreed a resolution (put jointly by Briefing and SWP supporters) to boycott any new posts and to call on existing staff to refuse to co-operate with the registration process.

NALGO activists in the Poll Tax Campaign have set themselves the task of ensuring that the boycott is enforced and that work is done throughout the Council to prevent any Council worker from unwittingly aiding the setting up of the register.

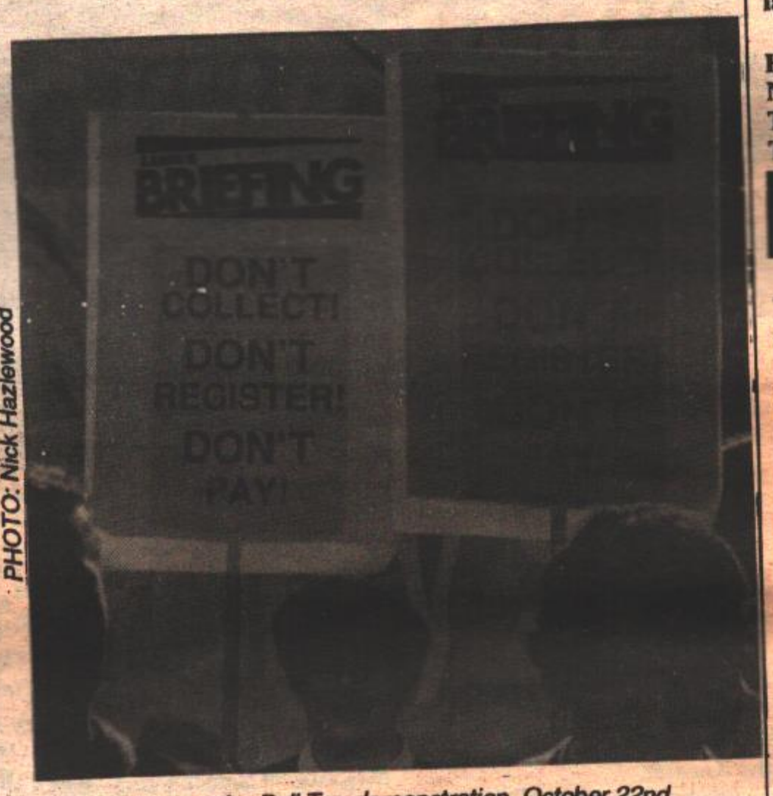


PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

Lambeth Against the Poll Tax demonstration, October 22nd

Stop Press: Lambeth Labour Group has now agreed not to implement the Poll Tax. By a majority of two to one the Group agreed "To cease implementing Poll Tax legislation and consider all actions that can be taken by the Council not to co-operate over the Poll Tax."

With the Council's LCC Leadership voting against this line the fight in the Group now will be to force them to put Group policy into position.

HACKNEY

The Poll Tax will hit hardest in the inner city — and ethnic minorities will suffer most.

That was the message heard by 400 people, including 100 Turkish workers, at a rally organised by Hackney Against the Poll Tax (HAPT) on November 9th.

By Sam Silverlock
Hackney North &
Stoke Newington
CLP

Olcay Aniker, from the Turkish community association (Halkevi) detailed how the "community charge" will be a devastating blow to large families and households, particularly to Hackney's Turkish and other ethnic minority communities.

There were Turkish translations of all speeches.

Diane Abbott, MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, situated the Poll Tax as part of a much broader Tory attack on democratic rights and the working class.

Hackney, one of Britain's poorest Boroughs, will be faced with one of the highest Poll Tax bills; £347 in 1980, rising to £578 by 1994 (based on 1988 spending figures).

Dudley Dryden, from the Hackney Council for Racial Equality, slammed Neil Kinnock and the Labour Leadership for failing to lead a fight against the Tax. The trade union dimension of the campaign was emphasised by Ian Charlton from Hackney NALGO.

Speaking for HAPT, Len Lucas said that the campaign aimed to unite all those wanting to fight the Poll Tax and did not have a policy of advocating any particular tactic of struggle. But he stressed that those who refused to pay should be supported.

HAPT meets on the third Tuesday of every month at 8pm at the Fire Station Community Centre, 61 Leswin Road, London N16 and can be contacted c/o P. Logan, 104 Amhurst Road, London E8 2AG.

The North-East

The Northern Region of the TUC has finally been goaded into action over the Poll Tax. They organised a Conference on November 12th in Gateshead.

By Julie Jeavons
Newcastle
University Labour
Club

From the start they made it clear that they did not want to organise a campaign — but since no one else was doing it, they felt obliged to start the ball rolling.

Obviously they haven't noticed the Anti-Poll Tax unions which have been starting up all over the area over the last few months.

Tony Christopher, President of the TUC, set the tone in his opening speech. He said "The only way to get rid of the Poll Tax is to vote it out," adding that non payment and non collection were not options. Still, what can you expect from a taxman?

Thankfully, many delegates disagreed with Christopher — and said so, both in the main session and in the workshops, against the efforts of some well briefed workshop chairs.

Alas, there was no time for discussion at the end (surprise, surprise) so workshop reports urging action were left up in the air.

Conferences in Oxford and Newcastle

Room for everyone!

All over England and Wales groups are springing up in opposition to the Poll Tax.

In Scotland, as fines for non-registration go out, and Labour's failure to take a stand results in defeat in Govan, the mass campaign continues.

That is why the Socialist Conference is hosting the Conference in Newcastle on December 10th, to bring together all those already involved in fighting this iniquity, as well as to convince sceptics that opposition to the Tax must be a centrepiece in the fight against Thatcher.

The movement against the Tax in England and Wales is still young. It would be wrong at this stage to impose rigid structures on it.

In this context it seems unfortunate that a conference has been called in Oxford on November 27th which proposes to do just that.

The Conference agenda consists more or less entirely of discussion about setting up a national co-ordinating committee with members elected from a national conference.

This opportunity would be better spent exchanging ideas and experiences about building campaigns against the Tax.

By Terry Conway
Islington North
CLP

The Conference will consist of one representative from each of the groups, or potential groups, that have been mailed, but will decide the future form into which other activists — not yet involved — will be expected to fit.

The proposals were only received by groups three weeks before the Conference — hardly time enough to consult. Finally, it appears that a conference which will not include any representation from Scotland will decide to exclude Scotland from its structures.

If those involved in setting up the Oxford Conference are worried about the Socialist Conference monopolising the movement against the Poll Tax, their fears are unfounded.

There has never been a suggestion by anyone involved in the Socialist Conference that we were trying to control or dominate such a movement. many forces are involved in campaigns against the Tax who do not define themselves as socialists, and this is one of the movement's strengths.

Obviously, there will be differences about tactics and strategy among socialists and between socialists and other forces, but this does not mean that people should be excluded or their participation met by sectarian hostility.

Briefing supporters will argue that part of what should come out of the Newcastle Conference is a call to all forces involved in fighting the Poll Tax for a national meeting in the Spring to discuss developing national co-ordination and ongoing exchange of ideas and information.

We need a united mass movement against the Poll Tax and appeal to everyone at the Oxford Conference to come to Newcastle and work together to sink Thatcher's flagship.

OXFORD AGAINST THE POLL TAX
National Gathering of Local Poll Tax Campaigns
Sunday November 27th
10am to 4pm
Oxford Town Hall
Registration fee £4
Details from Oxford Against the Poll Tax, 10 Chapel Street, Oxford OX4 1XL (phone Oxford 728647)