LABOUR
40p FORTNIGHTLY
BRIEFING
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40p

NO "XMAS CHEER" FOR COUNCIL TENANTS:

TORIES TURN ON TENANTS!

Recent months have seen the slow but steady development of a new movement.

It is made up of Council tenants who want to protect their right to decent public housing at a price they can afford. They have crowded into meetings all over the country to organise against the Housing Act.

Now the Tories have launched a counter-offensive.



Dora Boatemah, holding the banner which anti-HATS protestors made specially for a recent protest

By Greg Tucker
Lambeth Councillor

The Queen's Speech brought fresh proposals to push public housing into the private sector and new legislation to force up Council rents from April 1990. And Nicholas Ridley has now indicated that tenants will soon be able to ask for their estates to be turned into Housing Action Trusts.

The Tories have savagely cut housing subsidies to Local Authorities. Because of this, at least 130 Councils now subsidise housing revenue accounts from the rates to keep rents down. When the Tories stop this subsidy — as they plan to do — many areas will see rent rises of over 20%. In some areas, they will be even higher.

Currently, the government subsidises 90% of Council rent rebates. With the end of this subsidy, rebates will have to be paid out of *other tenants' rent*. Rents will be forced up as the 30% of "better off" tenants are forced to fund the benefits for the other 70%.

These changes have nothing to do with "better financial management", as the Tories claim. Their real purpose is to further undermine public housing.

The recent housing legislation has not been the big success the Tories hope for. It is now clear that tenants, even when balloted under the Tories' loaded voting system, want to stay with their Council rather than be handed over to a private landlord.

The Tories hope to make Council ownership less attractive to tenants by forcing rents up. The knock-on market effects will be a nice bonus for private landlords, too.

Tenants on estates ear-marked for Housing Action Trusts have fought for and won the right to vote on the government plans. Now Ridley is offering a HAT to any estate that requests it, in an attempt to embarrass Labour Authorities. Councillors across London report that Tenants Associations even halfway sympathetic to the Tories are being approached and offered advice on "opting out" of Council control.

Unfortunately, the Labour Party is not so efficient. Whilst many CLPs spend time building relationships with tenants' organisations, Labour Councils are too often busy putting up rents. And cuts in repair services and interminable transfer delays hardly build tenant confidence in Council ownership.

At a national level, Labour is urging Councils to hand over estates to tenant management co-operatives. Though this might be appropriate in some cases, the national rationale — that "giving control of the budget to tenants will, if nothing else, make tenants appreciate the difficult decisions which have to be taken," is merely an attempt to dump responsibility for meeting housing needs.

Tenants are concerned. Many remember having to deal with "Rachman"-type private landlords before they were able to get Council accommodation. Whatever its faults, they know Council housing is still safe, secure accommodation at a price they can afford.

The HATs tenants have shown that we can win victories. We must follow up their work. With unity between Councils, Council workers, tenants, and the labour movement as a whole we can mount a strong campaign that can defeat the government's housing plans.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

What's in line for '89?

Ireland

Put Thatcher, not Ryan, in the dock!

Europe has given its verdict on Thatcher's regime in Ireland.

First, the Belgian government rejected the demand to extradite Patrick Ryan. The open-ended "conspiracy charges" were, in their view, "too vague".

By Geoff Bell
Hackney North CLP

Then, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Britain breaks the Human Rights Convention by holding Irish prisoners for up to seven days without a hearing.

Finally, the southern Irish government refused to obey Thatcher's order to arrest Ryan on his arrival in Dublin.

While each of these decisions was made on strictly legal grounds, taken together, they demonstrate a growing recognition of the repressive nature of British rule in Ireland and of the treatment of Irish people in Britain itself.

Typically, Thatcher went on the offensive, attacking the Belgians and the Irish. A series of new measures (outlined in the Queen's Speech and elsewhere) have made it clear she intends to step up the repression:

•The censorship of Sinn Fein and "sympathisers";

•The ending of the right to silence of accused persons;

•Bank accounts of anyone alleged to be connected with Irish republicanism are now liable to seizure and examination;

•Election candidates in the North of Ireland will have formally to disavow political violence. It this rule were applied universally, it would unseat every existing government.

The aim of these measures is to defeat Irish republicanism, one of the few enemies Thatcher has not been able to neutralise.

Meanwhile, the "official" opposition, the Parliamentary Labour Party, is so passive that even *The Wall Street Journal* complained that the broadcasting ban "passed through the Mother of Parliaments with hardly a squeak of protest." Ten Campaign Group MPs tabled an early day motion attacking the ban.

Responding to Thatcher's attack on the Dublin government, Labour's spokesperson on Ireland, Kevin McNamara, said she should have attacked the Belgians for "chickening out".

Then, he called on the southern Irish to use legislation which allows people in Ireland to be tried for crimes in Britain and to put Ryan in the dock.

Finally, John Morris, Labour's legal spokesperson, complained of government "incompetence" in preparing extradition documents.

The legal details of the extradition are not the issue. The issue is 15 years of the PTA, the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four, and Thatcher's new wave of repression.

Pensioners

For dignity, not despair

This is an extract from a letter written to some of her constituents by MILDRED GORDON MP; highlighting the new Tory attacks on pensioners and why we need a Labour response.

So Chancellor Lawson has denied telling journalists he wants to end the £10 Christmas Bonus and to means test pensions.

But it is clear that this government intends to end all universal benefits and put us through humiliating means tests for every penny that is ours by right.

Their constant cry is most pensioners are well off and what the country needs is a return to Victorian values. They have big eyes on Reagan's reactionary regime, where new legislation will gradually raise pension age from 64 to 67.

I asked the Tory Leader of the House of Commons to arrange an early debate on the need for increased heating allowances to pensioners; the national disgrace of deaths from hypothermia each winter; and about stopping cut offs of gas and electricity. *The idea was dismissed out of hand.*

Tony Benn passed a regulation preventing gas and electricity being cut off in the winter when he was a Labour Minister of State: so it can be done.

A return to Victorian values is just another way of saying "back to the workhouse", back to depending on charity and a shorter life expectancy. Here are some examples of how the Tories have made our lives harder:

•People on Income Support now have to pay 20% of their rates. The Poll Tax will be worse.

Water charges are an extra burden. Government promises that no one will be more than £2.50 a week worse off for the time being are totally untrue.

Rents have also gone up. Maggie couldn't care less: she lives rent free!

•Urgent needs payments have been abolished and replaced by a cash limited Social Fund. Most of the grants for urgent needs will be in the form of a repayable loan.

•The Death Grant is abolished as a universal right. Bereaved people in need will have to apply for means tested Social Fund money.

•Pensioners have been cheated of £18,000 million by the government's abolition of the link between pensions and earnings.

We must abolish standing charges on utilities to pensioners. The standing charge is often more than the units consumed.

Electricity price rises are a preparation for the fortunes to be made out of privatisation. Utilities have gone up by 6-9% since April. And we shall have to fight to keep our free travel passes too once the GLC agreements run out.

Private landlords will charge market rents and possibly impose service charges. It is virtually impossible to get housing transfers even when the need is urgent.

If pensioners are to live in dignity and not despair we must have a Labour government backed by Labour Councils.

Sinn Fein Ban

Broadcasters comply

By Jim Thain
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Following Hurd's ban on the access of "supporters and sympathisers" of the legal political organisation Sinn Fein to the British media, broadcasters have been tripping over themselves to comply.

Just a few examples:

•Hours *before* the ban was announced, Birmingham-based BBC local radio WM blocked a telephone interview with Sinn Fein General Secretary Tom Hartley.

•Channel 4 has banned the Derry video *Mother Ireland*, which explores the personification of Ireland as female and examines the tensions between feminism and republicanism.

C4 statements make it clear that no risks are to be taken with government restrictions.

•Internal BBC memos conclude that the government will dissuade the BBC from showing footage of Ken Livingstone and Senator Edward Kennedy if they express support for the IRA (not that they have).

•Guildford-based County Sound radio station have cancelled an interview with Errol Smalley, uncle of Guildford Four political hostage Paul Hill, though Errol is neither a member nor an open supporter of Sinn Fein.

•London radio LBC has even barred the Dubliners' song *Kelly, the Boy from Killanne* because it commemorates the 1798 uprising.

Important new facts about the Gibraltar inquest have been suppressed.

Perhaps it's not surprising that broadcasters are giving such a very wide interpretation to the ban. Given the poor coverage of Irish affairs before the ban, it must have been hard for them to find stuff to cut to prove the ban was working.

FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS' ASSOCIATION

Reclaim the Game!

Football supporters are under attack from hooligans, politicians, property speculators and even some Clubs, who appear to care little for the fans who provide them with their living.

We are pushed around and exploited but rarely listened to.

Over the past three years, the FSA has worked to challenge this. We have had some success, but the government seems hellbent on destroying football as a "spectator sport". We need to grow.

Membership is just £2 (under 16s, £1). You will receive our regular newsletter and the chance to get involved in monthly branch meetings and local campaigns.

The FSA is currently pressing for increased ticket allocations for Cup Finalists; better facilities at grounds for everyone (but especially women and the disabled); effective measures to eradicate racism and racist chanting; and fighting against the compulsory membership scheme.

Above all, we want supporters to be *involved* and *represented* at every level of the game. We pay our £60 million a year into the game — far more than any commercial "sponsors" or even television.

Complete this form and send it to FSA, 59 Oakwood Road, Liverpool L26 1XD with £2. You'll be taking part in the fight to Reclaim the Game for the fans to whom it really belongs.

Surname ..... Forenames .....

Address.....

.....Tel.....

Age: Under 16 .... 16-21 .... over 21 ....
Are you disabled: No/Yes (physical/sight/hearing)
Signed ..... Date .....
Team supported .....

Electricity Privatisation

Who's got the power?

By Pat Waylett
Electricity Worker

Electricity privatisation brings increased fuel poverty, environmental damage, the cementing of the dangerous link with nuclear power and weapons, and will be a major blow to the workers employed in the industry.

Power workers have more muscle than any other group of workers: we can switch off the country, not after months of bitter struggle, but at a moment's notice.

But by refusing to support any form of industrial action, the power unions' leadership has ensured that, so far, there has been no effective opposition.

It was left to unions outside the industry (NUM, ASLEF, NUR) to launch a campaign that expressly included the possibility of industrial action.

An alliance between mine, transport and power workers has the strength and ability to force the government to scrap privatisation, but the leaders of the four manual unions in the electricity industry chose to ignore the only tactic that offered hope of victory.

Instead, the EETPU, GMB, AEU, and TGWU jointly agreed to oppose privatisation by trying to "influence the opinion makers".

They called their campaign FUSE. Don't be surprised if you've never heard of it; one of the first things its founders did was cut its publicity budget. The EETPU now seems mainly concerned to negotiate a "Trust Fund" to administer workers' shares.

Privatisation could still be stopped if the alliance mentioned above was built and the Labour Party stated clearly that it would renationalise the industry *without compensation.*

Electricity workers have been going through the usual "softening up" process. Wholesale changes in working practices are being introduced, especially in London, usually with the support of EETPU officials.

Increasing use of contractors and temporary labour, speed-ups, and the breaking of national and local agreements are now commonplace. In response, pressure from the rank and file for a fightback is growing.

Some workers in London are not co-operating with even minor changes, forcing management into lengthy procedures to force through changes that a few months ago would have been agreed at local level.

Industrial action is certain, though whether it will be widespread or sporadic, take place before or after privatisation, how the EETPU (and other unions) will try to head it off are uncertain.

The privatisation proposals will break up the industry, creating two different generating companies and turning Area Boards into separate private companies.

The potential national power of electricity workers must worry the Tories! But none of the unions is likely to fight to retain the national structure which is essential to avoid being picked off one area at a time.

We have to build a national rank and file organisation in the electricity industry, including activists from all the unions involved, and trade union support networks like the Solidarity Network.

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

New Times? Hard Times!

Last month's record trade deficit of £2.4 billion starkly reveals the true state of the British economy and makes nonsense of Thatcher's boast that Britain now has the "most successful economy in the world".

The pre-election surge in economic growth was based largely on the City and financial sector, which benefited as more and more money raced around the world to finance the US budget deficit.

This financial boom intersected with an explosion of private credit, as the middle class and better off workers financed private buying through Access, Barclaycard or bank loans.

In contrast, Britain's manufacturing industry is only now beginning to catch up with pre-1979 levels. As a result, foreign imports were sucked in to meet consumer demand. A balance of payments crisis inevitably followed.

As interest rates are pushed up to dampen demand and defend the pound, we are witnessing the beginning of savage deflation — harbinger of a new economic slump.

The immediate consequences for most workers will be a cut in their spending power, as mortgages rise and all forms of borrowing become more expensive. As company borrowing gets dearer, prices will rise.

Inflation will continue to go up. At the same time, the government will put pressure on companies to keep wage rises down.

Sharp battles over wages, in both the public and private sectors, seem inevitable.

What all this shows is that a modern industrial economy cannot sustain economic growth for long on the basis of financial speculation and borrowing. The debt, sooner or later, has to be paid.

Tragically, it looks like it will now be paid — in the short term, at least — by austerity, bankruptcies, lower wages, and job losses.

The yuppie boom, Next stores, Bodyshops, and Filofaxes will soon be seen as "yesterday's dream". Before you can say "capitalist crisis", what *Marxism Today* calls the "new times" of unfettered consumerism and individual choice are going to look very much like the bad old days.

For the working class, new times will be "hard times" — with a vengeance.

Labour Briefing: on the move!

It's the end of a hard year for the left, but one which saw *Labour Briefing* extend its influence. Both as a paper and as a current of labour movement activists, we've grown. And our growth has come as part of our involvement in a wide range of struggles.

We've fought against local government cuts, the Alton Bill, and Clause 28. We've helped build the Socialist Conference and the Benn-Heffer challenge, and supported every effort to develop a united, democratic left.

We've worked in solidarity with liberation struggles in Ireland, Palestine, South Africa, and Central America. We've kept close watch on turbulent developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

We've worked to forge united movements to defend the NHS and defeat the Poll Tax.

All of this has been done on a shoe-string. Next year, we hope to continue and deepen our grass roots work, expand our coverage and improve our appearance.

We will soon be moving to better, brighter premises. Sorry to disappoint you, LCC, but they're not in Siberia! We are moving within London in hopes of producing a better paper more efficiently. But as is the way of the (capitalist) world, this move will cost money.

We also want to seize this chance to upgrade our meagre office facilities with handy items like bottles of tipp-ex, paste-up equipment, shelves and files, and an answer-phone to lower the blood pressure of all of you who call in with vital information or urgent queries.

At its last meeting,the *Briefing* National Steering Committee agreed to launch a fund-raising drive to meet these costs. Local *Briefing* groups and individual readers and supporters: please, take time out, as you head for your (thoroughly secular) Xmas hols, to consider ways and means of contributing to the new fund.

We've set ourselves the modest target of £1,000. The sooner we can raise that money, the quicker our paper and presence will be organised more efficiently.

Send donations — large or small — to *Labour Briefing*, PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ.

Have a good break (if your job allows) and come back refreshed for the class struggle, vintage 1989.

Economic Notebook

Boom goes Blip!

Lawson's three big headaches

New Realists like to claim that in presiding over rising wages for a majority of the middle class and part of the manual working class, Thatcher has "changed the ground of the economic debate."

By Jamie Gough
Holborn and St Pancras CLP

Thatcher has indeed achieved considerable benefits for British capital, but she has not resolved any of its fundamental problems.

Last month, Britain's balance of payments with the rest of the world hit an all-time record deficit of £2.4 billion.

Lawson reacted by raising interest rates for the seventh time since June.

This had two purposes: first, to attempt to reduce the take-up of credit by consumers and companies, and thus reduce the demand that is sucking in imports; and second, to defend the value of the pound, which is made more attractive for investors by the higher interest rate.

Backbenchers

The new basic rate of 13% was too much for the CBI and Tory backbenchers concerned about the mortgage holders who had been "doing so well out of Thatcherism".

Lawson has three big problems.

•The first is the balance of payments crisis. This is more than a mere "blip". It has been deteriorating continuously *since 1981*.

The reason is simply that investment in manufacturing in Britain has been too low. Over 1979-85 there was actually a net *disinvestment* in industrial capacity.

A number of manufacturing sectors present in 1979 no longer exist in Britain. It is therefore not only consumer spending that draws in imports; manufacturers themselves import more and more of their components, so that even an upturn in exports sucks in more imports.

The rate of profit in Britain is still far too low for investment to pick up. Kinnock's solution to the current crisis — more government incentives to investment — is pathetically inadequate. Nothing short of a planned economy can substantially increase the rate of productive investment in Britain.

Lawson's second problem is that most British capital does not want a fall in the value of sterling, even though this might evenutally improve the balance of payments.

This is because British capital keeps most of its monetary assets in sterling. Most *large* British companies are net *holders* of money. This is why the rise in interest rates has not caused more protest from industrial companies.



Lawson: reaching for his paracetemol.

The only way of keeping money in sterling without raising the interest rate is exchange controls. But that flies against the liberalisation of money markets in Britain and worldwide. Interestingly, Kinnock has not even mentioned them as part of his "solution".

Lawson's third problem is how to regulate credit-based demand. The expansion of the world economy since 1981, and particularly the Reagan and Thatcher "booms", have been built on the huge expansion of credit.

Capital

This has given capital in the form of idle money something to do. Cutting it back would not only harm money capital, but would threaten a sharp recession.

Kinnock's response has been to plead for credit controls, so as to reduce living standards, *but slowly*. He wants a "soft landing" rather than a "hard landing". Some of us didn't know we were flying in the first place.

"Incompetence"

Kinnock accuses Lawson of "incompetence", but in fact, Lawson is caught in the inherent contradictions of capitalist economies. His three problems — the balance of payments, value of sterling, and control of credit — reflect *three different roles* which money plays in a capitalist economy.

Each of these problems exerts different pressures and requires different "solutions", which are often not compatible with each other.

•In relation to the balance of payments, sterling is a *measure of the value* of British exports and imports from abroad. The pressures come from the productivity of British industry relative to international rivals.

•In relation to money capital, sterling is a store of value, where capitalists keep their money. The pressures are relative interest rates and relative rates of inflation.

•In relation to credit, money is a means of payment for goods and services. The pressures are keeping up consumer and industrial demand for British products, and keeping the cost of credit to industrial companies down.

Neither Lawson or Kinnock can square all these circles.

Far from the government having "changed the ground of economic debate", it is now caught in contradictions which were analysed over a hundred years ago by Karl Marx.

The decrepit state of the British economy makes these contradictions particularly acute. *But their origin is capitalism full stop.* That is what Kinnock should now be attacking.

Trade Union Briefing

Mick Gosling:

Victimised!

Mick Gosling, Chair of TGWU Ford Dagenham 1/1107 branch, has been sacked after ten years' employment.

By MARK METCALF

He was summoned without warning to a meeting with the plant manager and his immediate supervisor on November 18th.

They alleged:

•that the had left work early to chair a joint Branch/T&G meeting on Ireland, at which Bernadette McAliskey spoke;

•that he had issued unauthorised leaflets;

•and that he "incited unconstitutional stoppages".

Twenty witnesses gave evidence to disprove the first charge.

This didn't prevent *The Sun* from running an "IRA sympathiser sacked at Ford's" article!

Management was unable to prove the other charges. They then dug up his original application form and threatened to sack him for not disclosing that he had a university degree!

His degree had, in any case, long been common knowledge; and it is bizarre in the extreme to dismiss someone for having a qualification.

Management eventually said Mick Gosling could keep his job if he signed a statement debarring him from supporting any unofficial industrial action — an intolerable situation for any trade unionist.

Mick's Shop Stewards Committee is publishing a document calling for his unconditional reinstatement and urges the following solidarity action:

•Send letters of protest at Mick's victimisation and demanding his reinstatement to John Hougham, Director of Personnel, Ford Motor Co., Brentwood, Essex CM13 3BW.

•Pass resolutions of support through trade union branches. Send copies of these and any correspondence with Ford's to Mick Gosling, 137 Brooke Road, London N16.

•Send donations to the T&G Defence Campaign to Steve Riley, 27 Courtland Grove, Thamesmead, London SE28.

Model resolution:

This branch condemns the victimisation of Mick Gosling, Chair of TGWU 1/1107 branch, who has been suspended by the Ford Motor Company on basic pay pending an appeal. All the alleged disciplinary breaches have subsequently been disproved. This is a clear case of victimisation of a trade union activist.

We are particularly concerned that the major false allegation was that Mick was absent from the plant during working time chairing a branch meeting on Ireland with Bernadette McAliskey. This is a clear attempt by Ford management to exploit the anti-Irish hysteria created by the Tory government's censoring of debate on Ireland in order to undercut support for him.

We further support his union's rejection of the special conditions of employment which Ford tried to impose on him. These amounted to a denial of his rights to free speech and assembly and trade union activity. We fully support his union's call for his unconditional reinstatement.

After the postal strike

The phony war

The postal dispute is over: but the problems which caused it remain.

Pay supplements to new staff in difficult recruitment areas (DRAS) are now being discussed.

By a UCW *Briefing* supporter

It is difficult to see how the UCW Leadership will come up with a formula which can be sold to members.

Management seem unable or unwilling to accept the union's demand that London weighting should simply be increased — to help recruitment but also help with the retention of existing staff.

The latest PO trick is to tell applicants an average postperson's pay, including overtime and shift allowances. It is quite attractive compared to the basic rate!

The ballot of clerical and counter staff voted for industrial action in protest at plans to close a large number of Sub Post Offices. So far the UCW EC has sanctioned regional one day stoppages which have been well supported.

But these token protests are designed to force the Post Office to the negotiating table so a deal proposing fewer closures can be stitched up.

Management locally and nationally are running the Post Office as a business with disregard for the union, its members — or the public.

The shorter working week, introduced for uniform staff in November and December, has been implemented on some duties and not others.

The PO is regularly using executive action to impose local changes in working conditions; and is then criticising the UCW national Leadership for failing to control its local branches after the past year's record number of disputes.

The UCW leadership are facing criticism from PO management and from the members. At the recent Rules Revision Conference the Executive's attempts to move form annual to biennial conferences and EC elections were defeated.

Members

The Conference also voted to allow members to use only the number of votes they wish in future EC elections. At present we have to use all 15 for the 15 places.

Some of us will now only be using one or two votes maximum in next year's elections!

The Conference decision showed the anger amongst rank and file members and their lack of confidence in the UCW leaders. The UCW Broad Left must start to channel those feelings and push the New Realist Leaders into leading a fightback.

Local Government

BRADFORD UPDATE

We need a positive, united campaign!

In October the Bradford Tory cuts and privatisation burst upon the national political scene.

After the heightened feelings and rhetoric which surrounded the major Council meeting which voted through the package, delirious unreality is becoming the prevalent sensation.

By DAVE MILES

On the one hand, alarming rumours continue to circulate about actual and potential developments. On the other, many in the labour movement appear to believe that business can continue much as usual.

On October 25th, thousands of NALGO members took action and demonstrated ("lobbied") outside City Hall. However, after talks with Council leader Eric Pickles, NALGO officials obtained assurances of no compulsory redundancies.

The "on-off" ballot for all-out strike action is now off; and NALGO members are to co-operate with the cuts package. National solidarity action is also off.

Assurances from Pickles must be set against the fact that the Tories always said, even in their secret plans, that compulsory redundancies would be a last resort.

Voluntary

Instead, they would seek to lose some staff through natural waste and voluntary redundancies, and to redeploy others. Very real cuts and job losses among people who are not NALGO members are already taking place.

One of the Council's first acts was to raise the price of school meals to 80 pence per day. This had two predictable effects: thousands of children stopped taking meals; and redundancies and cuts in hours have begun for school meals staff.

Temporary

The first 40 out of 341 have now lost their jobs. Many part-time and temporary workers have also lost work, less visible to the public than thousands of NALGO members.

There has been a campaign to prevent the sell-off of old people's homes, and actions against other specific cuts and closures.

However, there has been no overall opposition to the whole cuts package since the Council meeting of October 25th.

The District Labour Party has agreed to call a delegate conference against the cuts, and a co-ordinating committee exists to bring together labour movement bodies and campaigns.

For many, a political response to the Tory cuts consists only of a campaign to win the local elections in May 1990, and a defence of the status quo.

Unfairness

Rather than offering a positive alternative for Bradford, this approach merely challenges the unfairness of Tory policies and the morality of the use of the Lord Mayor's casting vote to carry them.

Two General Elections have shown the futility of anti-Tory campaigns which rest on vacuous generalities and negative rhetoric.

The campaign against the Bradford Tories must seek to make links between different struggles, preventing them from being taken on one by one, while stronger unions are "bought off" with settlements which simply postpone the evil day.

Leeds Leader resigns

A legacy of short-term fixes

George Mudie, Labour Leader of Leeds City Council, has suddenly resigned, after eight years of running the Council.

In 1980, Leeds was the lowest rated large city in England, with some of the worst Social Services and education provision.

By Garth Frankland Leeds Councillor

The former Tory Council Leader was rewarded with a place in the House of Lords, and as Lord Bellwin, helped spearhead Thatcher's attacks on local government.

Meanwhile, in Leeds, starting from the low level of existing provision, Cllr Mudie was able to expand services by clever budget manipulation, rate increases, and huge loans.

One year, for instance, Mudie had the whole of the Council's fixed asserts revalued in order to obtain maximum grant from central government.

But his main instrument of expansion was a regular rate increase. It met little opposition. The rates had been very low; and services did improve.

He managed to convince the Tory group leadership to go along with many of his policies, drawing them into private briefings and small committees.

Nursery places in Leeds have trebled in the last eight years. Six new libraries have opened, along with new sports centres and parks.

A massive school building programme was started. Progressive policies on equal opportunities and peace were initiated.

The highpoint of Mudie's reign was the Miners' Strike, when every legal loophole was exploited to support the thousands of miners in the Leeds District.

The Leeds left, especially those associated with West Yorkshire Labour Briefing (a forerunner of the Leeds Campaign Group) did point out the political problems underlying Mudie's utopia.

He sought consensus not only with the right wing of his own Group, but also with the Tories and the powerful Chamber of Commerce. This left many people confused about how to take up the fight against the Tory attacks on local government.

As these attacks intensified, Mudie's only strategy was to hold on till the next Labour government. The 1987 General Election result put paid to this perspective.

Mudie expanded his Policy Unit (through which he exercised central control of the Council) and filled it with yes-people. He moved office three times in eighteen months.

His clique became obsessed with security. It became harder and harder to hold conversations with him.

As his Council workload mounted, so did the pressures on his home life, health, and job as an unclected NUPE official.

In order to force through Employment Training, Mudie became a political hostage to TGWU and GMB officials.

Increasingly, his time was devoted to making property deals between the Council and big companies.

Leeds Council is now involved with over £1,000 million worth of property developments, at the expense of planning guidelines, small businesses, and co-ops.

For nearly 20 years, Mudie has played Crown Prince to local MP Denis Healey, who is now retreating from active politics. 1989 is Parliamentary selection year, and Mudie will be poised.

George Mudie was far more able than David Blunkett and has nearly as much charm as Ken Livingstone, but never found an equivalent national role.

Nor did he rise to the challenge of Thatcherism, even though the financial situation in Leeds could have been used to mount a sustained political fight.

He leaves behind a legacy of short-term fixes and fixers. The Leeds District Party will meet on December 21st to vote on its nomination for the vacant post. The Labour Group will elect Mudie's successor on January 9th.

*As *Briefing* goes to press, four contenders for the Leadership have announced themselves. They are: Cllr Trickett (ex-Briefing, now of the right; Cllr Kilgallon (of the centre), Cllr Burnley (who, it seems to me, has yet to make his mind up), and myself, Garth Frankland, the candidate of the Campaign Group.

North West Report

Nurses on the move

After four weeks on strike, 300 nurses at the Springfield psychiatric unit of North Manchester General Hospital returned to work on November 28th.

By Geoff Ryan NUPE, Central Manchester Hospitals Branch

This was by no means a defeat.

The Springfield strikers simply decided that their level of struggle was still way in advance of that in the rest of Britain.

Only Prestwich Hospital in nearby Salford had followed their lead in going out on indefinite strike and the main union at Prestwich, COHSE, had called off the action the previous week.

Both hospitals are now working-to-grade.

Throughout the North West action against the gradings continues. In Cumbria, nurses (supported by ancillary workers) are still on strike against the suspension of 11 nurses for working-to-grade.

All hospitals in Stockport are continuing to work-to-grade and Stepping Hill nurses are took strike action on December 6th.

Nurses in Trafford hospitals have found a good way of strengthening their work-to-grade. If asked by management to work outside the scope of their grade, they initially refuse.

If management persist, the nurses then ask them to *write down* exactly what they are being asked to do and sign it. If management refuse to do so, the nurses refuse to carry out the request.

If they do sign, then the nurses carry out the work but use the written requests as evidence that they are being asked to do work beyond the limits of their grade.

In Central Manchester Hospitals, psychiatric nurses in COHSE and NUPE (as well as a few in the RCN) are working-to-grade. Each "grade" has met to decide on the parameters of their grade.

Sisters and Charge nurses (virtually all of whom have been given "F grade") have refused to "act up" as "Senior Nurse" (which involves taking responsibility for *every* unit in a geographically spread Department of Psychiatry!).

Managers are having to provide cover by giving up their own days off.

A number of general nurses, angry with the failure of the unions, are circulating a petition for a mass meeting of all nurses in Central Manchester Health Authority to discuss action on regrading. About 80% of the signatures collected so far are RCN members.

South Manchester hospitals (Wythenshawe, Withington, and Christies), working-to-grade, forced representatives from South Manchester Health Authority to speak to a mass meeting of over 300 nurses taking part in a six hour strike.

On November 22nd, local MPs Tony Lloyd and Keith Bradley spoke at a NUPE-sponsored lobby of the Regional Health Authority which mobilised over 500 nurses.

However, the NUPE bureaucracy refused to allow a speaker from either Springfield or Prestwich hospitals, where nurses were taking indefinite strike action at the time.

Stretford CLP and Withington Ward LP have passed resolutions calling on Labour Party members on Health Authorities to reject the grading exercise and fight for all nurses to be paid at the highest possible grade commensurate with their experience and duties.

Withington's resolution also instructs them to turn up to Health Authority meetings. Some Labour Party members avoid voting against Party policy simply by failing to attend.

Party members should keep a close eye on the voting and attendance records of Party representatives on Health Authorities.

Leeds

Nurses work-to-grade

Nurses at Newton Green and Chapel Allerton hospitals have voted overwhelmingly in favour of working-to-grade.

This was their response to management proposals which would actually keep nurses' pay down.

The vote was 55 for the work-to-grade, with only two against, representing backing from nearly all the COHSE nurses, who are appealing to RCN nurses for support.

If the work-to-grade fails, there will be a ballot for strike action.

Meanwhile, the Leeds Western District Community Health Council has voted by 11 votes to six to reverse its policy in favour of the closure of Chapel Allerton Hospital.

Louise White, Secretary of the COHSE branch at Chapel Allerton, told *Briefing* that the vote had strengthened campaigners' resolve to keep the hospital open. "Victory is now possible," she said.

NHS: Clinical re-grading

Fight for funds for fair regrading!

While Ministers and sections of the gutter press denounce nurses for taking work-to-grade action over their pay dispute, management are rigging the appeals procedure to ensure that few, if any, nurses win regrading the "official" way.

By HARRY SLOAN

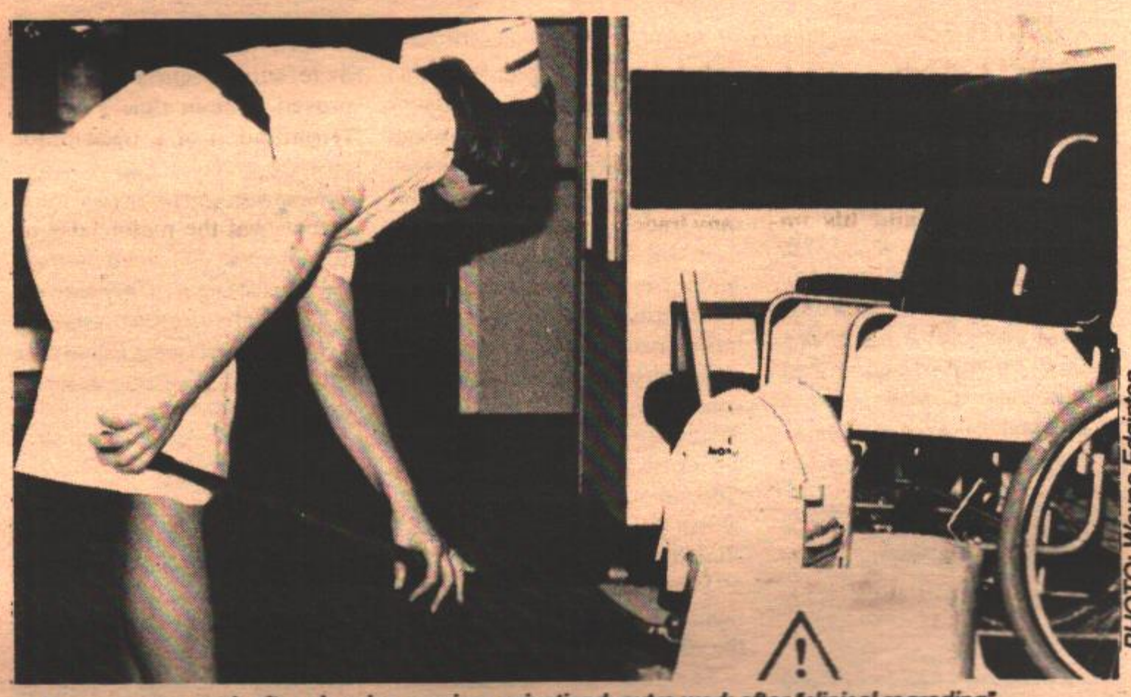


PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Nurses: extra work after cleaning services privatised; extra work after "clinical regrading".

Even the docile Royal College of Nursing (RCN), which has viciously denounced *all* forms of trade union action, urging its members simply to lodge appeals, and insisting (despite all the evidence) that the appeals process could produce quick results, has felt obliged to protest at management's latest goal post-shifting exercise.

The RCN clearly recognise that their already tattered credibility could be further damaged when their members see how they have been led into a dead end of futile appeals.

Only collective action involving confrontation with management can force the regrading of some 100,000 agrieved nursing staff.

Management's latest fiddle is to insist upon a definition of "supervision" which says that more junior grades of staff are "supervised" if a more senior nurse is somewhere at the end of a telephone or bleep, or may possibly drop in to a ward at some point during a shift.

This is being used as the argument for leaving many thousands of nursing auxilliaries to work without supervision or direction, while being paid only on the bottom grade A (according to which they must be supervised at all times).

The rigid government cash limit on the nurses' pay award — providing only £941 million, some £100m short of the cost of fairly implementing the new grading structure — has put the screws on to local management, and done more to decide gradings than the largely tokenistic efforts at assessing the work nurses do.

Managers have been convinced that if they concede on regrading appeals and overspend the funds available they will be forced to cut other NHS services to make ends meet.

This is why some Health Authorities put their District Treasurers onto the Clinical Grading Panels supposedly monitoring the work of nursing staff, but in reality the living voice of the cash limits.

Hence also the vicious tactics of management who have stepped up their intimidation of nurses in dispute and victimised many taking militant action.

This victimisation included the wholesale lock-out of over 40 night nurses at Church Hill House Hospital in Bracknell, where carpenters and cleaners were urged by management to scab on nurses by taking charge of wards!

The unfortunate, if predictable, isolation of the indefinite strikes at Manchester's Springfield and Prestwich Hospitals, and the uneven spread of the work-to-grade action across the country underlines the difficulty of co-ordinating a national level fightback.

This is more difficult still because some key sections of nurses have been successfully bought off with relatively large pay increases — though many who are satisfied with their own grades have still been supporting colleagues who have lost out.

Unionisation of nurses is also patchy, and no strong lead has yet been given by national officials of COHSE or NUPE to unify the action. However, working-to-grade — refusing to do work for which nurses are not paid — backed by a policy of strike action where necessary to fight any victimisations or management dirty tricks, is still the best unifying tactic allowing the nurses most affected to take the strongest action.

Nurses have emerged only recently as an industrial force: they have yet to convince management, ministers, or even themselves that they can hold firm under fire and withstand press attacks as well as basking in easy public sympathy, as was the case earlier in the year.

However, it is not so far a lack of popular support, but a lack of concerted trade union action that is the biggest problem. A national drive by the health unions to spread and tighten up the work-to-grade action in every District and focus the demands on the key issue of adequate government funding to cover the full pay award is the vital next step to increase the momentum, raise morale, and win wider labour movement support.

Nurses Conference

Problems of national organising

On November 26th, over 100 nurses met in Manchester to discuss how to build the campaign against the government-imposed "degrading" exercise.

Called at short notice by the COHSE Strike Committee at Springfield Hospital, and with no official support from either NUPE or COHSE, the numbers attending represented a major success.

In the useful first session, nurses reported on their struggles up and down the country. We were able to see the different levels of struggle in different areas (or even within different groups in the same hospital) and build up a picture of what is happening nationally.

By GEOFF RYAN

The second session was less productive. The Springfield Strike Committee, influenced by the SWP, made debate difficult by an inflexible approach to amendments and resolutions.

Much of the session was taken up with various groups of the far left staking out their positions.

Workers Power proposed a National Strike Committee (a grandiose notion which took no account of the real nature of the meeting, which had attracted the most radicalised nurses, most attending as individuals).

The RCP argued that the fight around regrading was a diversion from a united fight of all health workers for a common claim.

The SWP's main weakness was its refusal to support *any* national structure at present, because, they claim, it would let the union bureaucracy off the hook.

But the power of the bureaucracy lies not in its local control but in its *national* domination.

Briefing and *Socialist Organiser* supporters did get agreement with the SWP on the need for a national bulletin. This will be produced by the Springfield Strike Committee, with co-ordinators in each area elected at the end of the meeting.

The meeting was a useful first step. A further meeting, called sufficiently in advance to win the maximum number of delegates from strike committees, union branches, section meetings, nurses' action committees, etc., should now be organised.

A Modern History of the Labour Party: The Labour Government 1964-70

"Let's Go with Labour"

Labour won the 1964 General Election in the midst of a growing realisation that despite the unprecedented prosperity of the 1950s, British capitalism was stagnating.

Labour's new Leader Harold Wilson fought the election on the promise that Labour would unleash the "white heat of the technological revolution".

By Phil Hearse
Islington North CLP

The image of Labour as a *modernising* party, against the Tories' party of decline, was summed up in Labour's election slogan: "Let's Go with Labour — and we'll get things done."

Ruling class house journals like the *Economist* and *Financial Times* backed a Labour government.

Wilson's reputation as an old Bevanite with unilateralist sympathies excited expectations of a "left" Labour government. But just 18 months of Wilson disabused naive expectations.

Labour did repeal the hated Rent Act, giving tenants more security. A mild Race Relations Act was passed.

But on Polaris and NATO Wilson showed no signs of his supposed unilateralism: following the 1963 Test Ban Treaty, the threat of nuclear war was perceived to have retreated; and CND was in decline.

In 1965, the white settler government of Rhodesia, still a British colony, made a declaration of independence — "UDI". Wilson's government took no effective action.

Labour's parliamentary majority was just four. The attempt to renationalise steel was defeated by the defection of two right wing Labour MPs.

Majority

So Wilson went for a second election in 1966, winning a majority of 97, seen as a mandate to push through economic and social change.

Wilson and his Minister of Economic Affairs, George Brown, now presented their "National Plan", which, like the "planning agreements" of the 1970s, proposed an investment pact with capitalism.

Formal agreement of leading industrialists did not, however, produce the needed investment. And the national plan was based on the idea of a rapidly expanding economy, which did not exist.

In fact, the economy was in a massive balance of payments crisis, worsened by the international bankrolling of the Vietnam war. The National Plan was stillborn.

Instead, in return for International Monetary Fund (IMF) support, Wilson introduced a Prices and Incomes Bill with powers to limit and delay wage increases, and lurched towards devaluation of the pound, carried out by Chancellor Roy Jenkins in 1967.

The prices and incomes legislation caused the first major clash with the Labour left, and resulted in the resignation of Technology Minister Frank Cousins, former TGWU General Secretary.

But the real face of Wilson's austerity policy was revealed in 1966 when the government launched a witch-hunt against the striking seafarers.

The NUS called a national strike for a living wage. Wilson witch-hunted the NUS Strike Committee, which included Communist Party members and sympathisers, as "a small, tightly-knit group of politically motivated men." The red-scare witch-hunt broke the strike.

Austerity

Apart from austerity measures, the political price paid for IMF's support for the British economy was Labour's shameful support for the Vietnam war.

Following the first bombing of North Vietnam in 1964, Wilson came under left pressure to disassociate Britain from US actions. He refused. Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart lamely repeated all the propaganda of Lyndon Johnson's government about "Communist aggression".

The Parliamentary Labour left complained, but they were at a low ebb. The Tribunite left had still not recovered from the capitulation to the right by Nye Bevan a decade earlier.

Decline

Disillusionment with Wilsonism at this time led to a drastic decline of local Labour Parties, compounded by the lack of fight by the parliamentary left.

But the growing mobilisation of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, and the rising student movement, were producing a new left, outside, and hostile to, the Labour Party.

The ultra-leftism of much of this movement, and its complete evacuation of the Labour Party, resulted in the almost unnoticed takeover of the Labour Party Young Socialists (LPYS) by the tiny *Militant* tendency in 1968.

The consequences of complete abandonment of Labour by the hard left were to allow *Militant* to play a disproportionate role in the late 1970s and beyond.

Three issues emerged at the end of Labour's period in office which highlighted the cycle of economic decline and social crisis in which British capitalism was locked.

•In 1968, Enoch Powell made his infamous "rivers of blood" speech, the first time a senior figure had openly raised the right wing racist flag in post-war mainstream politics.

•The growing civil rights movement in Northern Ireland was met in August 1969 with an RUC-Loyalist Belfast pogrom, in which dozens were killed and hundreds of Catholic houses burnt.

Failure

The failure of the old Cathal Goulding IRA to defend the nationalist areas led directly to the formation of the Provisional IRA. Home Secretary James Callaghan dispatched British troops, allegedly to "defend the Catholic areas".

•In 1968 came *In Place of Strife*, the first post-war attempt at anti-union legislation, devised by Wilson and his Bevanite chum Employment Secretary Barbara Castle.

Eventually, in face of trade union opposition and a hopelessly split cabinet, Wilson was forced to withdraw the legislation. But the affair was highly instructive about the future trend of British politics.

Wilson's government was defeated at the polls in June 1970, a failure not only in socialist terms but from the viewpoint of making any significant modernising change.



Wilson and US President Lyndon B. Johnson: common policy on Vietnam

Govan by-election

Labour Leaders turn ostrich

What explains the SNP's dramatic victory in the Govan by-election?

While the Labour Leadership adopt the "ostrich" approach, the debate continues in the Scottish Labour Party.

By Jim Niblock
Glasgow Central CLP

On every major issue, no *key* divide emerged between the candidates.

Both Sillars and Gillespie supported non-payment of the Poll Tax, and both favoured a Scottish Parliament.

But from the moment Gillespie was chosen as the candidate he was bound and gagged by his media-conscious minders, Donald Dewar and Brian Wilson. They determined how the campaign would be run.

The Govan punters had no time for cosmetic politics: they were looking for a candidate who, in Sillars' words, "would get stuck right into Thatcher".

In the late 70s, Labour portrayed the SNP as "Tartan Tories". During the Govan by-election, the SNP depicted Kinnock as a "watered down Tory".

If Gillespie had dumped his minders and run his own style of campaign, profiling his support for non-payment instead of apologising for it, Govan would still be a Labour seat.

But this would have meant attacking the direction the "watered down Tory" was taking. Gillespie chose loyalty to Kinnock and Labour lost the seat.

Initial attempts by the right wing to scapegoat Gillespie for the New Realist disaster at Govan won't wash — even with sections of the labour bureaucracy. Speaking at the STUC Women's Conference in Perth, Campbell Christie, Secretary of STUC, made clear his balance sheet:

"Govan was not an accident, a freak, or a protest. It was a declaration of intent which I believe is mirrored throughout Scotland.

"The priority is to get the Thatcher government off our backs and if that means voting Nationalist, then working class voters will do just that. We ignore that declaration at our peril.

"The first priority of the people of Govan and, I believe, the people of Scotland, is to get some form of Scottish Parliament."

In an amazing attack on Unionism, Christie said of the Act of Union:

"It was cobbled up between an English monarch and a gang of corrupt Scottish lairds on the make about 300 years ago, and does not meet the needs of modern industrial Scotland.

"When we have won an Assembly we can go on to examine the option of independence."

Meanwhile, Labour's Shadow Cabinet were assembling in Brighton for a two day conference on tactics and policies. Top of the agenda was a post mortem on Govan.

Roy Hattersley, in predictable ostrich fashion, explained:

"We came to the conclusion that our policies are right. Labour was on the right track in Scotland. The idea we might respond to the extremists of the Scottish National Party and adopt their tactics is not on anyone's mind down here."

After Govan, the whole Scottish Labour Party, not just the left, is seriously discussing the "quality of Labour's Leadership".

Building a United Labour Left

January 14th: a second chance

The decision of the Campaign Group to convene national co-ordinating meetings involving regional left representatives is a major step forward.

Labour Briefing **has repeatedly called on the Campaign Group to take just such a step.**

By Mike Marqusee Haringey Labour Briefing

We have always been strongly in favour of building left unity and have backed every initiative which offered any hope of making progress in this direction. We will now be doing our best to ensure that the Campaign Group initiative bears fruit.

The first meeting, held in London on November 12th, was fraught with problems, many of which were recounted in the last *Briefing*. The next meeting, to be held in Manchester on Saturday January 14th, offers everyone another chance.

If we are to build a strong, united left that can challenge Kinnock and offer working class people a socialist alternative to the Tories, we need to work together, share information, and co-ordinate activity.

Of course, everyone is in favour of left unity. It's like being against sin. What we need now is to turn this shibboleth into something concrete. We need to build a whole which really is greater than the sum of the parts.

The painful fact is that the left is weakened by its divisions — factional and regional.

We duplicate or squander precious resources, dissipate our impact, and appear an unattractive proposition to the many people looking for a lead in the fight against the Tories and deeply dissatisfied with Kinnock.

But, for unity to become reality rather than rhetoric, it has to be based on democracy. We need to develop our structures in the regions, so that they are open to all local left Labour activists.

We need to ensure that representatives at national meetings report back to the regions and discuss with grass roots socialists the national debates and decisions.

Our aim should be to *include* not to exclude.

Long-term, we should be working towards establishing a national left forum in which questions such as Leadership challenges, NEC Slates, model resolutions, and larger strategic issues can be debated and democratically resolved.

Decisions made in this way would carry real weight in the movement. They would be seen as expressions of rank and file feeling, not just the manoeuvrings of a clique, parliamentary or otherwise.

Equally important, we need to turn the Labour left outwards so that it draws strength (and numbers) from the struggles going on outside the Party. Kinnock is leaving a vacuum (dramatically illustrated in Govan) and we have both an opportunity and a responsibility to fill it.

Labour is now in the midst of a deep crisis. Dramatic falls in activity and membership are reported across the country.

From its current base, the left simply cannot defeat the right — and, for the same reasons, the labour movement cannot mount a successful challenge to the Tories.

The defeats we have suffered are not just ideological; they are also material and organisational. To win back lost ground, we need to begin to reverse those defeats.

We cannot do this by focussing all our energies on internal Labour politics, concentrating only on winning votes at ever-diminishing branch or GC meetings.

On the other hand, a united Labour left which threw its weight behind the anti-Poll Tax campaign, for example, would bolster that campaign and win new recruits to the left's banner.

Similarly, on the NHS, housing, transport, and unilateral disarmament, the Labour left has a chance to offer leadership, resources, organisation.

By acting now, we expose Kinnock's inertia, strengthen links with working class people (not least, affiliated trade unionists), and help rebuild an ailing Party machinery at local and regional levels.

There are a host of positive ideas for common action which can and should be considered by any nationwide united Labour left. We should not be shy in putting them on the agenda.

If you want to help build a united, democratic left vigorous in challenging both the Kinnock leadership and the Tories themselves, make sure you are properly represented on January 14th. Contact Jon Lansman, c/o Jeremy Corbyn, House of Commons, London SW1 0AA.

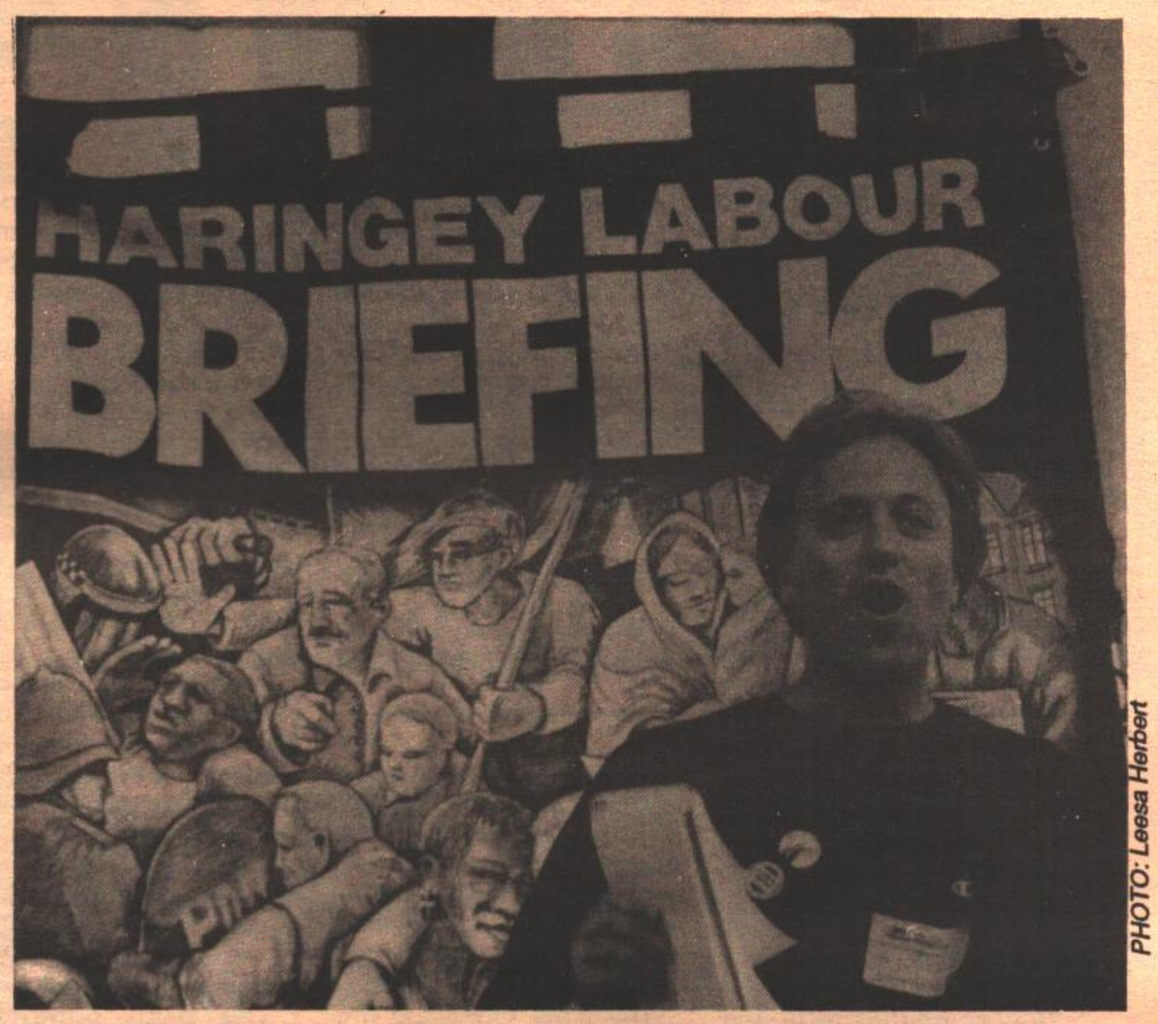


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Mike Marqusee on a Labour Briefing platform: "always strongly in favour of building left unity."

Hornchurch Campaign Group

By Cyril Whitelock

The Hornchurch Campaign Group was inaugurated on November 11th at Hornchurch Labour Hall. It was entirely successful.

Hilary Wainwright opened the discussion on "Socialism and its relation to the Labour Party". Joan Twelves — for this occasion — acted as the meeting organiser.

Twenty-one joined the Branch, four of whom came from the adjoining constituency of Upminster.

During 1989 we intend to hold at least four quarterly meetings, to which are invited not only socialists but anyone who may be interested.

For further details, contact Cyril Whitelock, 143 Laburnum Avenue, Hornchurch, Essex RM12 4EX.

Socialist Conference

East Anglia joins in!

On Saturday November 26th East Anglia had its first ever regional Socialist Conference meeting.

Despite fears of fog, and the geographical problems of holding such an event in Harlow, 65 people attended.

By Andrew Coates Ipswich CLP

They included many Councillors, left groups (such as the SWP), and single issue campaigns like Friends of the Earth.

Richard Kuper opened the Conference by outlining the Chesterfield perspective on building a movement for "socialism in our times".

Workshops covered issues such as Socialism and the Environment, Democracy and the Left, and Fighting the Poll Tax.

Johnathen Timbers from the National Poll Tax Campaign spoke at this last, very popular workshop. He outlined the difficulties the Tax will pose for Labour Councils, and advocated the setting up of broad based capaigns combined with smaller bodies which would undertake illegal action.

Regional organisation, it was felt, was a problem when it comes to co-ordinating socialists spread Ipswich, Norwich, and Basildon. But in a comradely atmosphere, the Conference agreed to set up a long-term committee to help co-ordinate the activities of East Anglian socialists.

A priority task will be to mobilise support for the anti-Poll Tax demonstration in Ipswich on March 4th 1989, called by the Region's Labour Party Women's Committee.

A collection for the P&O strikers raised £75.

Further information is available from Hugh Kerr, 67 Bishopsfield, Harlow, Essex CM18 6UL, tel. 0279-414464.

WEST MIDLANDS SOCIALIST CONFERENCE

Building for Socialism

A working conference for socialists in the West Midlands

Saturday February 4th 10-4

Coventry Polytechnic, Priory St, Coventry

Speakers include:
Betty Heathfield, Jeremy Corbyn MP
Workshops include:
MORNING
Internationalism
•What is a Socialist Foreign Policy? •Ireland •Eastern Europe •Europe & the EC •Unilateralism
The Economy
•The Market & the Plan: which way does the future lie? •Trade Unionism & New Realism •Trade Unionism & Competitive Tendering
Democracy
•The Socialist Alternative to the Poll Tax •Oppression, Rights, and Class •Racism •Local Government
AFTERNOON
Forging local links in the West Midlands & campaigns on:
•Education •NHS •Poll Tax •Trade Unionism •The Employment Training Scheme •The Labour Party •Housing •Green Socialism •Peace, Disarmament & Internationalism

REGISTRATION

Please send your name, organisation (if applicable), address, telephone number, and workshop preferences to Pauline Purnell/John Wilton, 25 Worlds End Avenue, Quinton, Birmingham B32 1JF; or Colin Lindsay, Trades Council, Unit 15, The Arches, Spon End, Coventry CV1 3JQ.
Please sign and date your letter, and indicate whether or not you require a creche (state number and age of children), a signer, disabled access.
Please enclose the registration fee: £2 waged; £1 unwaged

Witch-hunt

MANDY MUDD

Lobby on January 12th!.

The charges made against Tottenham CLP member Mandy Mudd will be heard on January 12th 1989.
Please join the lobby of Walworth Road from 12.30pm till 2pm.

Exeter

Witch-hunt fails again

By Devon Labour Briefing

Since 1984 Exeter CLP's right wing leadership has been attempting to expel Briefing supporters.

The first attempt failed in 1984, when Tony Benn told Party officers that the NEC "would disallow expulsion and reinstate." In 1986 they tried again, only to end up in the High Court for breaching the rules of natural justice. Chester Long, Labour Leader of Exeter City Council, told a GC last year: "I'd sell my house to get Bowing (a Briefing supporter) out of this Party."

The latest charge was that Bowing had "through his actions in writing articles and letters over a long period of time which have purported to describe meetings of Exeter CLP and comment on the conduct of Party officers has engaged in a sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the Party." Exeter CLP demanded expulsion.

On November 24th the NCC rejected the demand,ruling "that (while) individual Labour Party members (have) the right to express and write personal opinions publicly, Peter Bowing should not have made individual and personal attacks on other members of the Party which can be used against and to the detriment of the Labour Party."

Bowing received a "severe reprimand", but no expulsion. Once again, Exeter CLP's leaders have fallen flat on their faces.

Reviews Special

FILM REVIEW

Bird Lives!

I need a deep breath before I say it but, yes, Clint Eastwood has produced a marvellous film!

"Bird" is the story of one of the century's great musical geniuses, the alto saxophonist Charlie Parker.

Parker was the great improvisor, and Eastwood clearly has a huge love for his music. Deciding no imitators would do, with the aid of a battery of technology, he sliced away the backing from original recordings to leave just Parker's flights of imagination on the alto.

He then gave some of today's best jazz musicians the chance to "play with Bird", some 33 years after he died. The results are fascinating — especially if you're familiar with the originals recorded before the days of stereo.

Off-stage Parker's life was strife-torn. Addicted to heroin from roughly the age of 15 (only staying off it by soaking himself in alcohol); his genius circumscribed by American racism from the pre-Civil Rights days; scraping together enough money to just about keep going; a series of nervous breakdowns... the film shows it all.

By John Tuite
Norwood CLP

In the film Bird rings at the gate of Stravinsky's obviously comfortable home. A door opens and the great musician peers out from the warmth to see a black man staring in. The door closes again.

The white musicians win recognition: the black are left outside the door. No one suggests white people create their best music under conditions of squalor; but it seems black musicians are supposed to.

Forrest Whittacker impressively conveys both the shattered personality of Bird and his humour and generosity. All the other performances are overshadowed, but Diana Verona's performance as his last common law wife is marvellously complex. Wait for the Oscar nominations.

There are, however, some problems with the film. It contrasts Bird with the sober, drug-free, successful Dizzy Gillespie, but never attempts to explain this contrast.

While Dizzy's father was paying for him to study music, Bird was grafting away in all-night clubs to earn a few measly dollars.

The graft continued throughout his life. Thousands may have imitated him, but he found work only intermittantly.

They named a night club after him, but as someone in the film says "How much of that club do you actually own?" The answer was none. In fact he was even banned from playing there for a time!

But thousands of black youth saw in Bird's music and life style a reply to the crushing racism of white America. When he died the words "Bird lives" were graffitied on walls all over Greenwich Village.

Go see this film; and stay right to the end for the moving fade in of Bird over King Pleasure's song "Kansas City".

Be prepared for tears, be angry, but not defeated; because in the end, as the film witnesses, the graffiti was right. The music is with us still, and, whilst it is, then Bird lives.

BOOK REVIEW

An unlikely romance

***Love in the Days of Rage*, by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Bodley Head*, £8.95**

Paris 1968: The beautiful city of lovers in spring.

Add the political excitement of student demonstrations, riot police charges, and the sharp smell of tear-gas.

This is the backdrop to a rather unlikely romance.

Annie, an American, "a supposedly 'dissident' artist, the daughter of old Lefties", falls in love with Julian.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

He is a "rich official of the French banking system who claimed to be some kind of anarchist yet seemed to do nothing but go to his bank, eat well, live well, talk revolution, and make love."

Improbably, Julian decides to put his florid, radical rhetoric into action as the May events reach their climax.

But plot here is secondary to mood, and Ferlinghetti does suceed in evoking the flavour of May '68.

The story is high on metaphor, with the names of modern artists invoked by the dozen.

Julian uses words the way Annie uses paint, "to say anything, to construct every kind of illusion, true or false."

In fact, both in turn use the other as a passive audience for lengthy monologues on life, art and politics.

This stylistic device, however, conceals the novel's chief weakness: the lack of any real dynamism in the relationship between the two main characters.

On its twentieth anniversary, May 68 has been massively misrepresented in the media. For Ferlinghetti, the slogan that best summarises the events is "Power to the Imagination".

His idealist viewpoint flaws Love in the Days of Rage as a political novel, but it remains a sensitive and lyrical sketch of the Paris at a moment of irrevocable change.

BOOK REVIEW

I thought it couldn't be done!

***Critique of Cynical Reason*, by Peter Sloterdijk, *Verso*, 1988, £14.95**

A recent growth area in book publishing has been what are known as "shopping and fucking" novels.

The stories inter-twine a fascination with people's sexual lives and monied consumerism.

Until I opened *Critique of Cynical Reason* I never thought that a philosopher could break new barriers by writing a "shopping and fucking" work of philosophy.

It has been done: without any saving graces.

Sloterdick's book is not an easy read. It combines the barbarisms of bad translation and pompous academic prose.

By Andrew Coates

You will be less than enchanted, dear reader, to know that you have to plough through pages of sentences like:

"For a long time; the 'public sphere' was one of the strongest themes of renewed enlightenment, especially in connection with the word 'experience' and even more so with the 'life context' (Lebenszusammenhang), which was so pleasant to write because you got the feeling that somehow or other life forms contexts, and context is like a promise of meaning".

The message behind *Critique of Cynical Reason* is of little interest.

Sloterdijk argues that what he calls "kynicism" — a kind of synthesis between rationalism and post-Hegalian "critical philosophy" — should be widely adopted.

He goes all out to attract an audience (hence the "shopping and fucking" aspect).

His observations of "Fart" and "shit, refuse" will no doubt figure in any decent collection of the "psychopathy of professional philosophers".

In the Foreword Andreas Huyssen tries to link this work with the recent debate on "post-modernism", claiming that Skloterdijk is responding to French controversies.

A search of *Critique of Cynical Reason's* ramblings reveals virtually no connection with any other literature on this topic and complete ignorance of non-German philosophy.

Nobody can really take Huyssen's efforts to sell the book by making it trendy seriously. Sloterdick is unlikely to have any real knowledge of French Marxism, post-modernism, and so on (apart from perhaps German onanism).

Huyssen does make the interesting point that the West German Left reacted to *Critique of Cynical Reason* by calling it "...simplistic, faddish, and pretentious, anti-theoretical, regressively irrational, and politically reactionary". They were right.

BOOK R

Red on Gr

***Ecology and Socialism*, by Martin Ryle, *Radius*, £5.95**

The Labour Left seems stuck in a dreadful pit dug first by Thatcher and now by Kinnock.

Being a socialist in today's Labour Party is increasingly a contradiction in terms.

For revolutionary socialists, membership has always been a question of strategy rather than principle.

As our energies are expended in making largely unsuccessful interventions in an organisation dominated by a right-wing social democratic leadership it may be time for a rethink. Martin Ryle's book is a good place to start.

Martin Ryle is a socialist member of the Green Party. His book will probably be as unpopular with mainstream greens as with mainstream socialists.

Ryle takes the position that neither socialist nor ecological politics are in themselves adequate to today's realities.

Capitalism presents inbuilt inequality and oppression on the one hand and inbuilt disregard of the environment on the other. Socialists have focused on the former problem, ecologists on the latter.

Mainstream British politics identifies socialism with the social democratic strategy of managing capitalist production and growth in a progressive way so as to provide "wealth for all" — a strategy discredited by history, and by Thatcherism.

The "wealth for all" consensus of the '60s politicians has been replaced by Thatchers' "wealth for some". It is hardly surprising that sections of the working class trust Thatchers' "success" when Labour only offers something that has already failed.

By Andy Porter
Brighton SERA

Ryle takes this critique one stage further. He claims that Labour's commitment to undifferentiated capitalist growth implicitly supports continued damage and destruction of the environment — no matter what "environmental policies" Labour might also seek to adopt.

The politics of ecology — often proclaiming itself to be an entirely new phenomenon "neither of the left or the right" — is equally inadequate, but for different reasons.

Ryle argues that there can be no "ecological" politics that doesn't engage with social realities and priorities.

Ecological solutions can not simply be "natural" in some asocial sense. Politically they must be of the left, or the centre, or the right.

I hoped this book would

BOOK R

Do you wan

***Poisoners of the Seas*, by K A Gourlay, *Zed Books*, £7.95 (paper), £25.95 (hard).**

Most things we toss away come back to exact some sort of price.

Current disposal of waste (industrial and domestic) into the "planetary ocean" around us comes under stern review in this useful book.

Disasters, such as the Torrey Canyon and the poisoning of the Baltic, are sadly mere overtures to what lies in store if we do not change our disposal methods

We have a lot to learn about the interdpendence of human society and the rest of life on our planet. There are separate chapters on heavy metal pollution, atomic waste, sewage and oil slicks — all with their own different nightmare scenarios attached.

Japanese fisherfolk are poisoned by mercury dumping; holiday-makers swim in their own (or other people's!) sewage, and catch viral infections; seabirds are poisoned by oil; radio-activity has invaded the Irish sea.

These examples all show the gross fecklessness of capitalism: putting profit before safety, cost cutting before health, and greed before public good.

By Keith Veness
Islington North CLP

However, the book does not really mention some of the root causes. A socialist critique of pollution starts with planning and control.

Private ownership of energy, water, sewage and engineering causes much of the devastation.

Planning requires control, control requires ownership. Until both are taken out of the hands of the few it will be impossible either to plan disposal or maximise use.

Equally, there has to be a fundamental change in what is actually produced. Agri-farming, with factory farms and chemical fertilisers, bears much of the blame for phosphates, nitrites and DDT in the ocean sediments.

The only solution is to cease production of meat and its by-products. The future is indeed "veggie" — if you want a future, that is!

REVIEW

een



Grangemouth refinery: one of many dangers to workers, the surrounding human community, and the environment

provide some idea of how a green socialist society might become a reality — and what we might do to help realise that possibility.

To his credit Ryle doesn't duck the question. He almost adopts the familiar approach of radical socialist reformers in seeing social change as coming through a popular socialist movement linked to an electoral party.

It follows, says Ryle, that, given the Right's domination of the Labour Party it may be necessary for a new green socialist grouping to challenge Labour electorally.

This is only a useful strategy under a different electoral system, so the book ends up emphasising campaigning for PR.

I'm neither against PR nor horrified at the prospect of a socialist challenge to Labour, but it does seem a bit of a long shot.

For me, the possibilities for socialist action lie less in electoral strategies and more in the recognition that our very enviroment is increasingly hazardous to our health.

In Brighton we've mounted effective socialist campaigns about everything from sewage pollution to superstores. It's a pity Ryle doesn't have more to say about the extension of such activities.

Martin Ryle's book is an excellent introduction to the dialogue between socialists and greens, and left me wondering why I'm in the Labour Party and why he's in the Green Party. I suppose the answer is that for the moment there's nowhere else for us to go.

REVIEW

t a future?

Wasting oil and coal as fuels, when they have far greater value as sources of organic chemicals, is another example of short-term profit before long-term need.

Finally, to create plutonium (an element not found anywhere in the universe except in supernovae and at the "big bang") and to dump it in the seas and atmosphere is the ultimate folly.

In case this review is seen as some sort of "luddite" anti-technology diatribe, it may be worth saying that I personally believe we must start using space and microwave technology.

Cheap and pollution-free power can be taken from a solar source, a safe 93,000,000 miles away.

Until then, Gourlay's book sharply reminds us of the consequences of poisoning the seas, fouling our own backyards, and despoiling Gaia.

SPECIAL OFFER!

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BOOKS/TV



In the heart of the "Red" Revolution recounted so vividly by Reed

Reds' Red Reed Re-Read

Most comrades seem to have heard of or read *Ten Days That Shook the World*, John Reed's eye-witness account of the 1917 revolution.

By Linda Clarke, Haringey Labour Briefing

But to get to know John Reed himself and his amazing life you should read *Romantic Revolutionary* by Robert Rosenstone (which I've just done for the second time!)

It will leave you inspired, uplifted and breathless; for in 32 years he travelled much of the world, befriended and actively struggled alongside the Wobblies, Pancho Villa, Lenin and Trotsky (all at a time when there were no airlines!).

He also wrote hundreds of articles for radical American publications, as many poems, as well as launching *The Masses*.

I first saw the film *Reds* with a whole row of comrades from *Briefing* who seemed not to like it. I loved it, and I'm grateful to Warren Beatty for making the film and introducing me to this amazing person (John Reed that is, not Graham Bash).

So before *Reds* is on TV again, read this book and you won't help but treasure the film. I'm certain that if John Reed had lived he would not have supported Stalin and would have remained on our side.

TELEVISION REVIEW

Fantastic Neighbours

Monday to Friday, 1.30 and 5.30, for twenty minutes, millions of TVs are switched on to that cultural anthem: "Neighbours, everybody needs good neighbours ..."

It's time for people to come clean and admit to being addicted to this Antipodean drama, maybe even to the extent of watching the 1.30 episode, and then the 5.30 repeat.

But is this really something to be ashamed about? I believe that *Neighbours* is cultural, more cultural than, say, Shakespeare, becuase it is far more influential, far more popular.

Maybe it's so popular because it is set in a different country, literally on the other side of the world, so that the problems are there seem to have nothing to do with us.

By William West Haringey Labour Briefing

Yet there's also a sense in which there are no problems; at least, the problems which do arise last only an episode or two.

Recently, "friendly capitalist" Paul Daniel wanted to convert a disused lake into a swimming pool on his large hotel complex.

Unfortunately for him, the lake was discovered to be an ancient Aboriginal burial ground.

He has the legal right to develop his own land and ignore the Aboriginal request to leave the area intact. What should he do?

This would be a great chance to explore the colonialist tensions in Australia, but instead the whole issue is resolved in five minutes: Paul decides to build the pool elsewhere. Ho hum, end of conflict.

Neighbours gives the distinct impression that things only happen to keep the plot going. There is no inner dynamism, and things only change when they have to, such as when an actress leaves the series.

Maybe this is where the fantasy element comes in. Although trying to stick with the classic realist tradition, the soap is forced to dive into the realm of the absurd to keep itself going.

As Brecht, the German Marxist playwright, noted, "classic realism" is a crucial ideological weapon of bourgeois society.

"Classic realism" presents society as "natural" and, therefore, unchangeable. Society is, always has been, and always will be, as it is: capitalist. There is no point in struggling.

I'm not saying that *Neighbours* is anti-capitalist just because it contains elements of the fantastic or unrealistic.

But a soap is forced to reflect the ideological contradictions of the society which produced it.

Soaps show that society, and the power relations they portray, are not natural but fictional, fantastic; and, therefore, open to struggle and to being re-written.

Features

THE MARCH

By Daniel Doveton
Manchester Labour Briefing

The NUS leadership originally wanted a low-key lobby of Parliament but were compelled at a late stage to call a march.
Instead of attending a rally, most of the marchers departed from the planned route to stage a large and militant demonstration near Westminster Bridge.
This was largely spontaneous, and reflected students' impatience with the ineffective methods advocated by the NUS leadership.
The lobby itself was torpedoed by the refusal of police to let students in to Parliament to see their MPS. The police further sought forcibly to disperse the demonstration.
While left MPs raised the matter in the Commons, Kinnock bemoaned the influence of extremists and let the police off the hook.
This day of action should be followed by regional actions (prepared by open local Campaign Committees) early next term, complemented by a national demonstration which should aim at getting 100,000 students on the streets of London.

Lecturer victimised

By Paul Montero Secretary, Hull University Labour Club (personal capacity)

On November 10th, the day after the Tory loan scheme was announced, Hull University SU organised a demonstration of 1,000 students and staff in support of Edgar Page, the first tenured lecturer ever to be sacked by a British University for economic reasons.
His dismissal sets a dangerous precedent in the present climate.
NUS supported the march but didn't mobilise for it seriously.
There was poor turnout from other colleges and a token presence from the national executive.
The organisers headed the march off to a rally, away from the University Council meeting, losing a good opportunity to make our feelings known to the decision-makers.

Students Protest

Education is a right!

The "Battle of Westminster Bridge" on November 24th brought student anger against the abolition of grants to everyone's attention.

Students are increasingly determined to defend their education in the face of Kenneth Baker's promise to Tory Party Conference that he would "smash NUS... the last bastion of socialism".

By Alistair Chisholm SOAS Societies Officer (personal capacity)

The NUS leadership, in a predictably bureaucratic and elitist approach to the defence campaign, have not called on ordinary students to fight for the student movement. Instead, they have participated in Baker's "Review" of NUS and are lobbying MPs.

The effects of the "Great Education Reform Bill" are being felt. From March 31st every Polytechnic gets "corporate status". The "needs of industry" are beginning to dominate: in Polys throughout Britain Arts and Social Sciences are losing buildings and being drastically cut.

The Tories also plan to reduce students' living standards even further. From 1990, all students will have to pay the full Poll Tax. British undergraduates will be refunded 80% of the national average Poll Tax — up to two years later.

Grants will be frozen, never to rise again. They have fallen in value by nearly a quarter between 1979-1988.

No student will get Housing Benefit or be allowed to sign on in the summer. Instead, students will be able to borrow £420 p.a. from a bank.

The loans scheme was tried out amongst medical students with disastrous consequences. The proportion of entrants from public school rose from 40% to 90%.

Single parents simply won't be able to afford to go to college — some will have to give up before 1990. Only people with rich parents or sponsored by a private company will be able to afford education.

The Tories are engaged in an assault on the principle of free state education as a right, using loans, privatisation and a "review" of NUS drastically to alter the character of higher education.

To do this he is threatening voluntary membership of NUS. He hopes that by forcing students to pay £70 to "opt into" student unions, they will leave in droves. Student unions would thus be unable to provide decent welfare and recreational services or organise any campaigns.

Right wing students are helpfully orchestrating a disruption campaign within the student movement. The Freedom Association has encouraged the Union of Jewish Students to challenge quoracy at *every* Union General Meeting.

Tory students (who stand for the death of Mandela and abortions for lesbian mothers) have failed in almost every ballot on disaffiliating individual unions from the national union, and are now attempting to wreck national Conferences instead.

By the militancy of 30,000 students, and thanks to appalling police brutality, those questions are now being raised outside the confines of the student movement.

VICTIMISED!

By Julie Jeavons, Newcastle University Labour Club

On November 16th NUS called for a national shutdown of education.

Lectures were boycotted and picketed and marches and rallies organised successfully all over the country.

In Sheffield a number of students were arrested when police stopped their march through the city centre.

Onlookers have testified that the police used unnecessary violence.

On the same day students from the Polytechnic of North London (PNL) demonstrated when Norman Tebbit spoke at the college. Eight individuals from PNL were victimised at random as a warning to others. Six have been suspended and two indefinitely banned from college premises.

At Newcastle Poly an injunction has been served against the Executive. They are not allowed to stage or take part in any occupation for the term of their office.

This will be seen as a test case and could be used against any student union executive in the country.

Labour Briefing and
Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine
Public Meeting
"One year of the Intifada: report from inside the Uprising"
Guest Speaker:
Bashir al-Khairi
First deportee from the Intifada;
participant in last PNC
Plus: Speaker from the Israeli Protest Movement
Friday December 16th. 7.30-9.30pm
Admission £1 (50p unwaged)
Haringey Civic Centre,
Wood Green High Road
Wood Green tube

CND CONFERENCE

Defend unilateralism; out of NATO!

The CND Conference took place at Salford University on November 19th and 20th.

The year of the INF agreement was also marked by NATO and American efforts to sabotage the disarmament process by substituting new and more nuclear devices in place of those that are to go.

Clearly in this period unilateral nuclear disarmament is more relevant than ever.

If it were strongly advocated by the Labour Party, the commitment could strengthen the disarmament forces even before Labour attained power.

Yet this was also a year when an attempt was made to ditch Labour's unilateral nuclear disarmament commitment and take us back to the barren America-fellow-travelling policies of the 50s.

By WALTER WOLFGANG

The attempt was defeated by the Labour Party Conference, yet it is clear that the Policy Review process will be misused to do just this. Labour Party members must see that this second attempt is defeated next year.

In view of this situation and with NATO's 40th anniversary coming on April 4th 1989, the CND Executive proposed a spring campaign on NATO.

Opponents of campaigning on unilateral withdrawal from NATO strongly entrenched in CND's campaign committee, wanted to water down the campaign. They wanted an educational campaign, with a demonstration on April 2nd linking the Ministry of Defence with spending ministries.

In September, CND's National Council, which did not want to campaign on NATO withdrawal, agreed to this.

Conference was faced with a well supported resolution demanding campaigning on NATO withdrawal and a national demonstration on it.

In the debate, CND's Vice Chair Marjorie Thompson made a passionate plea for campaigning for the closure of all foreign bases — nuclear and conventional — and British withdrawal from NATO.

In the end, the resolution was taken in two parts.

The demand for a withdrawal campaign was passed, but the demand for a national demonstration was defeated. But at the same time a reference to withdrawal in the "Strategic Resolution" was amended out.

Clearly withdrawal and the closure of all bases will have to feature prominently in the linking demonstration of April 2nd and the new National Council which takes place in January will have to make sure this is done.

A proposal from CND Cymru (Wales) demanded pressure on all opposition parties,with the aim that "CND should publish, well before the next General Election, the best joint opposition statement on defence policy which can be achieved."

It was pointed out in the debate by several speakers (including your reporter) that such an approach was foolish.

This tactic would result in a bland statement, excluding unilateral nuclear disarmament, and would hinder the campaign in the Labour Party to retain and deepen Labour's unilateral nuclear disarmament commitment.

This resolution was also taken in two parts. The reference to the joint statement was decisively defeated and CND's traditional policy of pressing on all political parties was reaffirmed.

Conference also drew attention to the need for campaigning on sea-based missiles, including Trident.

All these decisions were taken on the Sunday.The Saturday was spent in a large variety of workshops, including a well attended one on campaigning in the Labour Party, organised by Labour CND.

Three hundred people attended a fringe meeting addressed by Tony Benn on Saturday evening, organised by the Campaign for Non-Alignment.

The meeting was looking at a peace policy for Britain which put British unilateral nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from NATO into global perspective.

Bruce Kent was re-elected Chair. Vice Chairs are Marjorie Thompson, Mary Brennan, Bob Cole, and Alistair Mackie.

The 20 elected members of the National Council include some newcomers. The Conference was attended by about 750 people.

POLL TAX

Start the Year with a bang!

In five months Poll Tax Registration begins in England and Wales

At last the "second front" is in sight!

By John Tuite Lambeth Against the Poll Tax

The Tory strategy of dividing the Scottish working class from the English and Welsh has weakened our resistance so far. But now we have five months to get organised.

Campaigns of non-payment in Scotland and non-registration in England and Wales can boost each other, and reinforce each other's effect on the Tories.

Govan has shown the Poll Tax is not just unpopular. It is an issue around which masses of people can be moved.

The Government's extraordinary proposals to arm Poll Tax Officers with hugely increased powers are clearly a response to the prospect of a mass non-payment campaign.

Now, after an initial referral to magistrates to obtain an all-purpose liability order, these unelected bureaucrats can send in bailiffs to seize goods, order employers or the DHSS to deduct the tax from wages or benefits and start bankruptcy proceedings without any further referal to magistrates.

They will have the power to make us fill in a "personal information form" and even recommend imprisonment of up to three months.

This proposal massively accelerates the process of turning local Councils into openly repressive elements of the state. Previously administrative and financial jobs will gain huge powers to police.

The civil liberties aspect of the Poll Tax cannot be underplayed.

Council snoopers tracking down the local population; "privatised" surveillance of population movements(by British Telecom); and a national identity card system based on the Register are developments the left must win the labour movement to resisting before they are established.

Not only will Poll Tax be a crushing economic attack on the working class, but it will squeeze the last vestiges of social provision by local government.

Services

Put crudely, those who need the services will not be able to afford the Poll Tax required to pay for them. Those who don't need them will resent paying that same Poll Tax.

The Boroughs with the highest levels of poverty will probably have the highest taxes.

The long term defence of job and services will be sacrificed by Councillors in favour of a tax acceptable to their short-term electoral opportunities. It's all part of creating the "society of *individuals*" that Thatcher is intent on.

The Poll Tax fits in with the Government's overall attack on social provision, forcing the family, and women in particular, to bear an increased burden.

When a local Tory Councillor asked whether people would vote for a party with a Poll Tax of £700, or for them with £200, the ex-leader of the council shouted "They'll vote for the party with nurseries!" This is highly debateable!

Faced with impossibly huge Poll Tax bills it is more likely people will vote for reduced Taxes, and women will bear the burden of looking after children and older dependents even more than they do at present.

At the same time the "cost" of extended families will rise by the number of individuals included.

The labour movement response has so far not measured up to the attack. The leadership of the Labour Party has actively sabotaged meaningful resistance wherever it has had an opportunity to.

But even so, in England and Wales only a minority of the left has woken up to what will begin hitting them in five months time.

The labour movement needs to meet this attack using methods that are collective. Poll Tax hits people in their homes where they can be isolated. We should be discussing now how to overcome this.

Campaign

If there is a Return to Sender or non-Registration Campaign, why not get the wards or Tenant's Associations to organise the collection of forms? Maybe the local Campaign's stall or Councillor's surgery can act as a collecting point.

Stewards can offer a similar service to their members. Why not have Return to Sender Days where people go en masse to the Tax office?

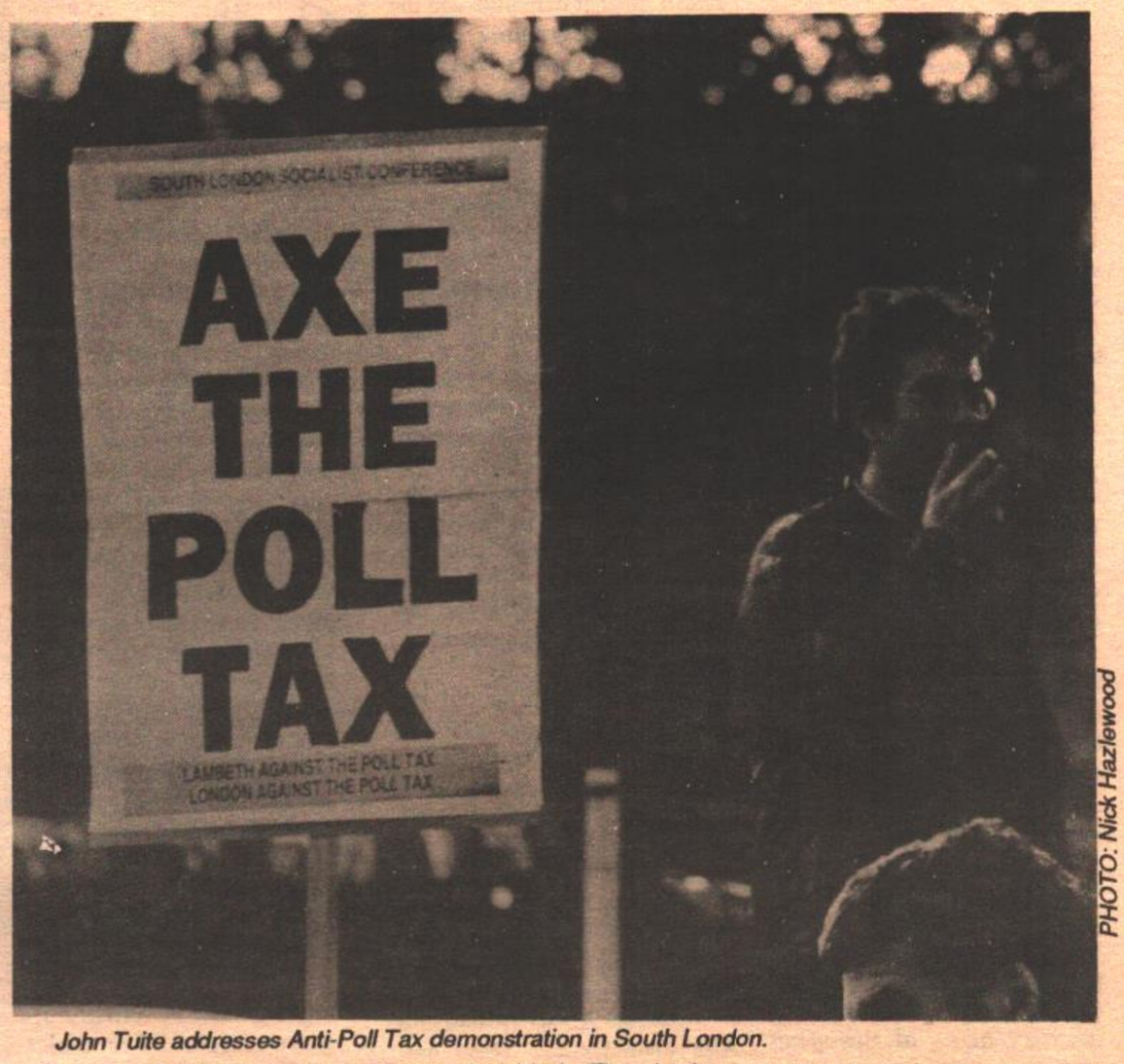


PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

John Tuite addresses Anti-Poll Tax demonstration in South London.

The general principle is clear. Local circumstances will affect how it is concretely applied, but it is up to the left to start the discussion now so that the elements needed for an effective campaign are in place by April.

Of course the trade unions whose members will be employed to canvass, register, post, collect, and administer the Poll Tax must be brought into the local campaigns.

At present three NALGO branches are refusing to cooperate with the Tax. As the reality of the Tax approaches the campaign must ensure that more join them.

In the end an alliance across the working class of trade unions and community is needed to defeat the Tax.

But in all this we mustn't let the labour movement leadership off the hook, not least because they will only sabotage our gains if we ignore them.

We can make 1989 the Year of Resistance — to payment in Scotland, to registration in England and Wales.

The TUC are entering into the spirit of things with some vague plans to hold a rally on April 8th. We should put massive pressure on them to hold a demonstration on that day.

A demonstration can give local campaigns a focus for their activity and propaganda. After all, if this is to be the crunch year, let's start with a bang, not a whimper!

HIV TESTS

A misguided, malevolent hidden agenda

Millions of people attending hospitals and clinics across the country will soon be tested for HIV without their knowledge or consent.

The government has agreed to HIV tests being conducted on leftover blood samples from which the patient's identification will be removed.

By PETER TATCHELL

Mass testing for HIV is a profoundly misguided, and potentially malevolent, policy.

•It is unnecessary. Epidemologists have successfully predicted the spread of HIV over the last few years using voluntary testing and the model of the United States.

•Anonymous testing for HIV will be based on an unrepresentative cross-section of the population — those who are sick and receiving medical treatment. The very ill are likely to be tested several times unless there is a coding system to identify those who've been tested.

•Because the test data is not linked to personal case histories, it will not show us how HIV is being transmitted and will therefore be of little use in planning AIDS prevention campaigns.

The only thing that will stop the spread of the virus is public health education which informs people explicitly about safe methods of sex and drug use.

•Mass HIV testing is a gross waste of scarce NHS resources. It could cost £30 million over three years, money better spent on AIDS awareness advertising, research and AIDS support organisations.

Regardless of the goverment's claim of innocent intent, anonymous in-



"Dynamic" government publicity

voluntary testing for HIV is the thin end of a very dangerous wedge which is being driven into the heart of our civil liberties.

For some time, right-wing ideologues such as Christopher Monckton, a former member of Mrs. Thatcher's Policy Unit at 10 Downing Street, have been arguing for the forcible screening of the entire adult population.

Monckton proposes that "everyone ages 13-65 should be compulsorily blood-tested at least once a year" and that the "quarantine of AIDS carriers might be necessary."

This is the hidden agenda of state repression which motivates some of those behind the government's recent authorisation of large-scale HIV testing.

They welcome the government's latest move as a first step towards a more generalised mandatory screening of the population.

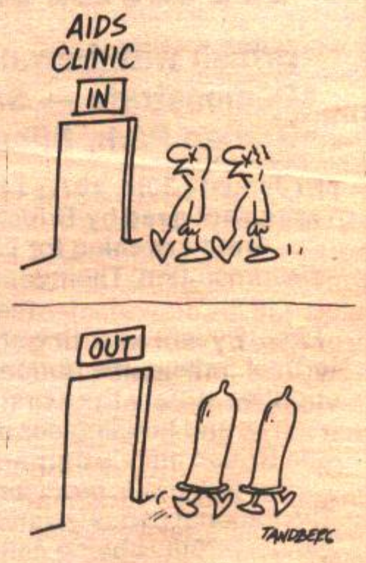
They know anonymity cannot be totally guaranteed given the need to prevent multiple registration of blood samples from the same person.

This indirect identification could be used, in a more repressive political climate, to enforce compulsory isolation of people with HIV and even those merely suspected of being infected with HIV.

This is already beginning in the West German state of Bavaria; in much the same way as 50 years ago the Nazis siezed medical records to assist their round up and mass extermination of homosexuals.

Involuntary

The goverment's drift towards mass involuntary HIV testing undermines the fundamental ethic of medical practice — that doctors should always act with the informed consent of their patients.



This is not just an issue for people with HIV. Ultimately, it is an issue which threatens the human rights of all of us.

Peter Tatchell is the coordinator of the UK AIDS Vigil Organisation and the author of *AIDS: A Guide to Survival*, published by *GMP* (1987), £3.95

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).

A Thain Riposte

Dear *Briefing*

The objective differences between Dave Spencer's position on Europe and my own have been distorted by misreadings.

Dave's mystification as to how I could arrive at the statement, "You can't reform capitalism," may perhaps be dispelled if I explain that what I *actually* wrote, before editorial intervention, was: "You *don't* reform capitalism, you overthrow it."

Comrade Spencer will doubtless recognise the allusion: "The task [of revolutionary Marxists] is not to reform capitalism, but to overthrow it" — L. Trotsky, The Transitional Programme.

Yes, "of course you can reform capitalism" — indeed, it is constantly reforming itself — the point is that you cannot reform it into socialism.

There comes a point where, no matter how many reformist gains the working class has made, it has to break with capitalism.

The programme I set out precisely is one of transitional demands, aimed at undermining the very bases of European capitalism, not at cosmetic surgery.

I do not suggest that the Left should *actively* campaign for withdrawal, but it remains an objective fact that withdrawal would damage the interests of British capitalism.

To accuse me of an inadvertent "reactionary appeal to nationalism" is ill-considered, and akin to a centrist slur. I stand unequivocally for the sovereignty of the international proletariat.

The question implicit in Dave's article is, how do EC institutions help promote "the self-activity of the working class and the socialist movement"? (Spencer).

How do they "help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution" (Trotsky, *ibid*)?

Unfortunately, he provides no answer to this riddle.

Yours for socialism
Jim Thain
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Tribunes of the people

Dear *Briefing*,

I read the recent centrespread on local government with interest.

Many left Councillors are finding the going tough.

This is especially true for those Councillors who decided to take responsibility for the running of Labour Councils.

Today, the Tories have closed off many of the options which allowed Councils to help the oppressed and the poor.

To many, the options now seem to be "get out" or "cuts with a human face". However, this is a false set of alternatives.

Socialist Councillors should never expect to achieve socialism in a single country — never mind a single city!

Their role is one of leadership and mobilising. They are tribunes of the people in the people's struggles against capitalism and central government.

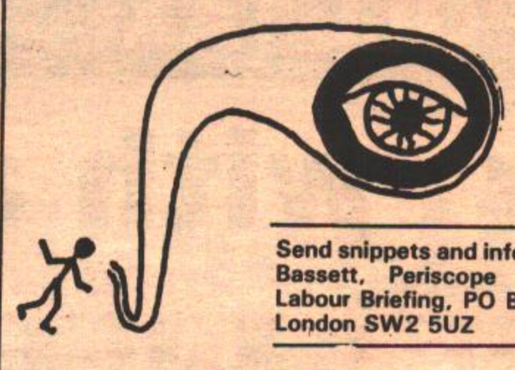
Once one sees the role of Councillors as tribunes and organisers of struggle, then it is clearly time for *more*, not fewer, *Briefing* supporters to stand as Councillors.

The fights against Employment Training, Housing Action Trusts and the Poll Tax show a new mood out there. So out of the Council Chamber and into the streets!

The job of the Councillor is to help turn general protest into a struggle to remove the Tories.

Yours,
Garth Frankland,
Leeds Councillor

Periscope



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

In Memoriam: *Outwrite*

Outwrite, the feminist, internationalist newspaper, is closing down, seven years after its launch on International Women's Day, 1982.

Outwrite has offered a much-needed platform for black and Third World women — and has shown in practice what the alliance between feminism, anti-imperialism, and socialism is all about.

The newspaper covered an astonishingly wide range of struggles and ideas. Its consistent internationalism was a welcome contribution to British feminism.

Now, it has been sunk by penury and the stresses and strains of maintaining a purely voluntary organisation in a cold political climate.

Briefing readers will be saddened by the loss of *Outwrite*. We'll have to do our best to help fill the gap: and are now making plans to extend coverage by and for anti-imperialist women.

Witch-hunters turn Asset-Strippers

Poor Bermondsey CLP. Suspended, then disbanded, by the moghuls of Walworth Road, the beleaguered constituency now finds its premises under threat.

Rumour has it that the Greater London Labour Party plans to sell off the Bermondsey office for £350,000 — to Tescos, who will no doubt use the old Party HQ to provide valuable services to the Bermondsey working class.

The reason for the sale? Allegedly, to enable to GLLP to deal with Bermondsey £15,000 or so of debts.

Wonder who'll pocket the balance?

So much for fighting the Poll Tax

Everywhere he goes, John Peck, Nottingham's lone Communist Party Councillor, is always keen to sell his pamphlet on "How to fight the Poll Tax".

Last month, he found himself holding the balance of power on Nottingham Council and in giving Labour support and control he was able to secure himself a seat on the key Policy & Resources Committee.

How unfortunate, then, that his first vote on the Committee should be to support Labour... in pushing through agreement to implement (not fight!) the Poll Tax.

A Voice from the Past

"The alternative is to rest content with what has been achieved and to give up trying to establish a Socialist society.

That I fear is what many who continue to call themselves socialists are really minded to do, sheltering from apostasy behind the assertion that the majority of the electorate would not be induced to vote for it.

But what is the use of winning an election except as a means to an end? To win an election without a policy is the surest way of losing the next and of spreading dismay among one's supporters.

If the end is no longer Socialism, but something else, what else?

If it is still Socialism, let us tell the electorate frankly how we propose to advance towards it".

From 'Is This Socialism' by G.D.H. Cole. (Quotation courtesy of Eric Heffer MP).

We are moving, and improving;
It isn't funny, we need some money;
So send the loot, a cheque will suit;
We need a grand, so make a stand:
And send the readies,
To Labour Briefing, PO Box 457,
London SW2 5UZies

(See Editorial for details)

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.

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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:

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Lesbian and Gay rights in East Germany

Autonomous organisations begin to make gains

The last six years have seen the striking re-emergence of an organised lesbian and gay movement in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Known as the Arbeitskreis Homosexuelle Selbsthilfe (Working Groups for Homosexual Self-Help), the movement consists of 12 semi-independent organisations.

By PETER TATCHELL

Based in all major GDR cities, including East Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, and Erfurt, the organisations meet annually to exchange ideas and experiences, and to discuss future activities and campaigns.

Paradoxically, because the GDR government disallows autonomous social movements, this gay movement operates under the protection of the Protestant Church.

With the sanction of sympathetic parish priests, the Working Groups meet on church premises, publish newsletters, campaign for changes in State policy, and host lectures and discussions.

But as with the peace, ecological, and women's groups which also shelter under the umbrella of the church, the lesbian and gay movement exists in a twilight world of semi-illegality and semi-acceptance.

The fine line dividing dissent tolerated by the government from dissent seen as subversive anti-State activity has occasionally been overstepped.

It happened during the campaign to lay wreaths in memory of the gay victims of Nazism at the site of the former concentration camps.

After three years, many arrests, and much police harassment, permission was finally granted by the Ministry of Home Affairs in October 1986.

A milestone had been reached: tacit official acknowledgment of Third Reich persecution of homosexuals and tacit official recognition of the self-organised lesbian and gay movement.

The first lesbian and gay movement in the GDR was inspired by the radical gay liberation politics of the 1970s. It was partially precipitated by the gay rights protests I staged in 1973 at the World Youth Festival in East Berlin.

Very much in the tradition of the early Gay Liberation Front in Britain, this movement emphasised both personal liberation (consciousness-raising, coming out, changes in lifestyle) and political liberation (the legislative and cultural reform of State institutions).

In the late 1970s, coinciding with a general State crackdown on dissidents, the movement was proscribed and its members threatened with long periods of imprisonment.

The second wave of the lesbian and gay movement came in 1982.

Fifteen lesbians met in an East Berlin private flat to discuss opposition to government plans to extend conscription to women. The meeting was broken up by the police.

A few weeks later, however, they secretly resumed their unofficial gatherings and reorientated their group around lesbian rights.

Out of these early meetings, the Working Groups for Homosexual Self-Help were formally established.

They are mostly "tolerated guests" of the Church; not granted access to the official parish newsletters, but allowed to distribute their own newsletters through the church network.

The East Berlin Working Groups meet fortnightly. The four sub-groups, for lesbians, christians, students, and youth, usually attract 50 to meetings.

They describe their general political perspective as being "pro-socialist and pro-GDR, as well as being pro-gay".



PHOTO: Peter Tatchell

The view into East Berlin, one of the major centres where the Arbeitskreise Homosexuelle Selbsthilfe operate.

There are many different currents of gay opinion from conservative christians to GLF-style radicals. What unites them is a commitment to "influence social attitudes and promote equality."

In the words of one group member: "We are seeking official acknowledgment and facilitation of the right to be gay."

Anti-gay laws were repealed in the GDR in 1968, several years before similar changes were introduced in West Germany. However, some petty inequalities remain.

Any man over 18 who has sex with a man under 18 faces a mandatory prison sentence, even if there was consent. Heterosexuals only face gaol for acts involving people under 16, bribery, or sexual assault.

Gay men can be soldiers, but not officers! Reinforcing the mythology that homosexuals are invariably "sexual predators", the GDR armed forces claim gay officers could abuse their rank to seduce men under their command.

Women automatically win custody of children upon divorce (on the sexist assumption that child care befits a woman rather than a man), which helps lesbian mothers, although gay fathers lose out.

The State housing policy gives families priority. Gay couples, like childless heterosexual couples, find it difficult to secure flats, given the accommodation shortage (though individual housing officials may help).

Gay people are equal citizens and cannot be sacked from their workplace. In practice, however, they are often the butt of jokes and ridicule.

Prejudice is also expressed through occasional queer-bashings outside gay bars and the homophobic attitudes of the East Berlin police.

Gay venues are run by a government backed organisation which, activists allege, exist to "monitor and control gays". According to one radical:

"The State tolerates the gay scene to manipulate homosexuals by feeding selective information through the bar network. It's a mechanism of social control."

The Working Groups see the State's pro-family ideology as a major obstacle:

"GDR society and politics are overwhelmingly family-orientated. This implicitly excludes gays and overrides gay interests. It is difficult to enact policies for the benefit of gay people if they contradict the pro-family policy of the State."

Gay activists are also critical of the government's approach to homosexual equality. "It wants to assimilate gays into society, rather than tackle social homophobia. The State must acknowledge that heterosexual ignorance and bigotry is the crux of gay people's problems."

The immediate practical demands of the Working Groups are:

- official government recognition of gay organisations;
- authorisation openly to publish and distribute gay newsletters;
- establishment of gay advice centres and community meeting places;
- the legal acknowledgment of gay relationships.

The government is beginning to move. Over the last two years, articles in the State-run press have called for more enlightened attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

They have emphasised that AIDS is not a "gay plague" and is no excuse for scapegoating or discriminating against gay people.

Marriage and sexual guidance Councils have received a government-approved booklet with a fairly positive attitude towards gay sexuality and relationships.

The government is now sponsoring research at Humbolt University.

Largely set up in response to the growth and demands of the gay movement, the high-powered research team consists of progressive sexologists, philosophers, doctors, theologians, and sociologists.

But there are no gay community representatives — one negative element in an otherwise encouraging climate.

It is rumoured that the Humbolt report will endorse many of the Working Groups' demands, including the establishment of gay advice and community centres and official recognition for gay relationships.

Clearly, the struggle for lesbian and gay rights in the GDR still has a long way to go, particularly with regard to the government's approach of doing things on behalf of gay people rather than letting gay people do things for themselves.

Yet the GDR has still progressed much further on the gay issue than many of us in the West have hitherto acknowledged.

I think we owe it to the gay people who have fought, and to the State authorities who have conceded, to be a little more generous in acknowledging the achievements of our eastern comrades.

BOOK REVIEW

Liberation debates

***Searchlight South Africa No1*, September 1988, published quarterly, £3.50.**

As an independent review, *Searchlight South Africa* aims to publish different contributions on the political struggle of the working class against capital in southern Africa.

It is strongly anti-Stalinist in tone, emphasising that much of the clampdown on political debate within the liberation movement is due to the role of Stalinism and its undemocratic traditions.

Searchlight includes an informed article about Frank Glass, one of South Africa's first communists to support Trotsky in 1928.

By Mike Phipps Greenwich and Bexley Anti-Apartheid Group

Brian MacLellan contributes an analysis of the current Namibian peace settlement. Unlike most contemporary reports, this one highlights the problem of making Namibia viable as an independent state.

"With a population of less than one million, without its own port, with a poorly developed transport system, with a mainly subsistence rural economy, and without the capital to develop its mineral resources, the economic future of Namibia is bleak...

"In most respects it can be no more than a vast Bantustan, beholden to the South African government for its revenue and for its very existence."

These realities are often glossed over by those who see Namibian independence simply in terms of South Africa abiding by UN resolution 435.

Searchlight South Africa is a welcome publication, although two minor criticisms are in order. Despite its wide brief, five out of seven contributions in the first issue are devoted to mainly historical questions. Given the dynamism of contemporary developments in Southern Africa, this is clearly a weakness.

The flowering of political ideas in the Black working class is too little reflected today. In fact one contributor dismisses "the mental poverty of existing political tendencies in South Africa".

This could just about pass as a critique of rigid Stalinist doctrine, but as a blanket condemnation it is a mistake in an otherwise welcome venture.

Anti-Apartheid Movement AGM

Stitched up and Guillotined!

A boycott of South African gold and diamonds and a competition to find "Anti-Apartheid Greengrocer of the Year" will be two of the main campaigning themes of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in 1989.

A depressing, bureaucratic AGM decided to squander the potential of this year's trebling of national membership to 18,000 by resorting to the tired old 1970s consumer boycott routine.

By Mike Phipps
Chair, Greenwich & Bexley Anti-Apartheid Group

Not once was the Executive defeated, despite some lively interventions from the floor.

Greenwich Group came the closest. Our challenge to Standing Orders Committee's sectarian, factually inaccurate compositing was narrowly defeated (61-60).

Political pluralism in the South African resistance movement was a recurring theme throughout the AGM. Nationally, the A-AM exclusively supports the ANC and SWAPO of Namibia.

Attempts by the non-Stalinist minority at the Conference to point out that AZAPO, the Cape Action League, PAC, and SWANU of Namibia were also serious liberation currents worthy of solidarity were met by slurs, implying that any non-ANC force in South Africa was virtually in cahoots with apartheid!

The A-AM Executive's attitude to the 400,000-strong NACTU federation is particularly scandalous, since even the AGM's guest ANC speaker had referred to the fraternal discussions between the ANC and NACTU.

All motions saluting the joint activity of COSATU and NACTU were heavily opposed by the A-AM Executive and defeated.

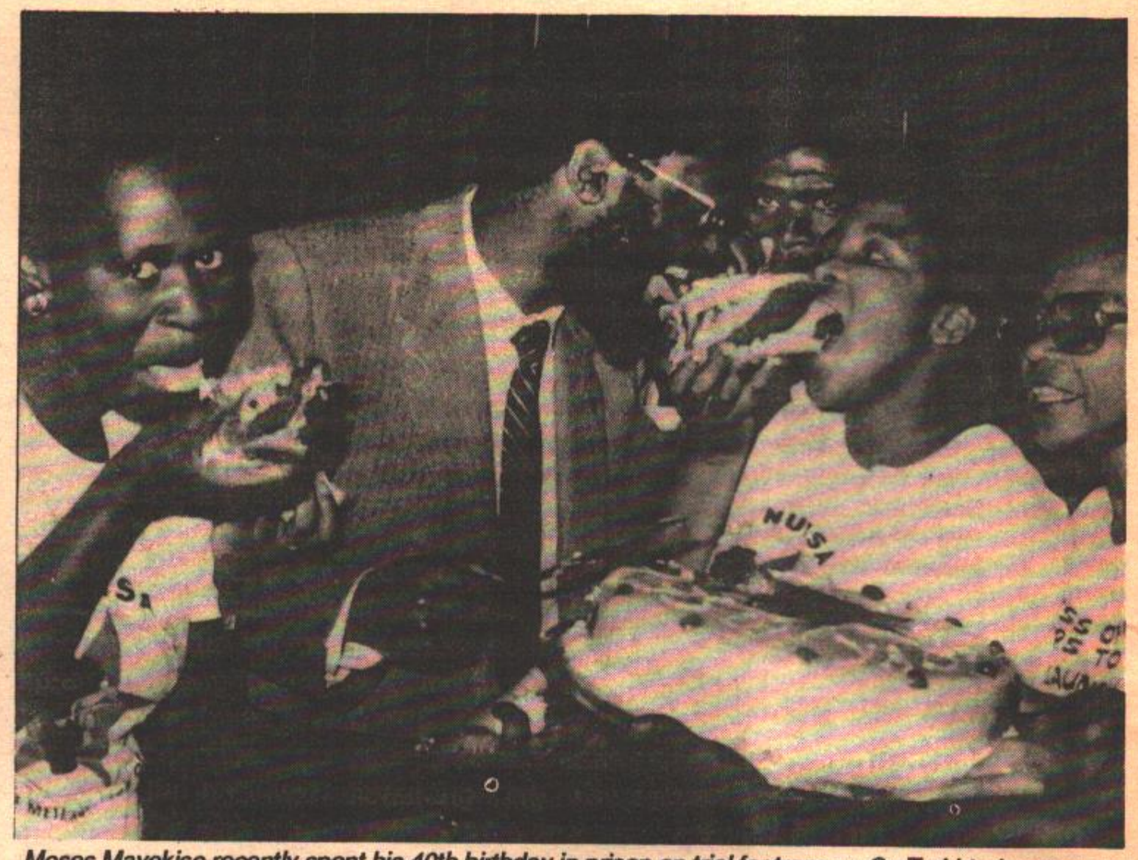
Two alternative strategies of solidarity were on offer at this year's AGM.

•The Executive favoured a continued sterile moral crusade against buying South African goods — with the added up-market dimension of focusing this year on jewellery.

•Many delegates, however, wanted to capitalise on the rapid growth of the South African trade union movement and its successful stayaway by building a campaign of solidarity, direct links and workers' sanctions in the British working class.

The A-AM leadership were so opposed to this class orientation that they rushed through the trade union section of the agenda in 40 minutes, despite angry objections from the floor.

Half of the motions on trade unions were therefore not even discussed. In particular, this leaves A-AM with no policy on Moses Mayekiso, leader of South Africa's largest trade union and currently on trial for treason.



Moses Mayekiso recently spent his 40th birthday in prison on trial for treason. So T-shirted protestors just took a cake into the courtroom! The Authorities baulked at intervening in the celebrations.

Guillotining the agenda allows A-AM to ignore for a further year the plight of Moses, whose political views happen to be out of step with the sectarians of the A-AM Executive, and to continue to equivocate on the powerful international campaign in his defence.

One symbolic victory was achieved on an amendment from Birmingham A-A calling for support for "any campaign by women of South Africa and Namibia fighting for the right to control their own bodies."

The A-AM Executive had been unable to agree a position on this, as some wanted only campaigns initiated by the ANC and SWAPO to be supported.

One woman delegate angrily asked the platform how long they thought a South African woman was pregnant for, if consultation had to take place with the ANC, SWAPO and the A-AM before anyone could support her right to abortion?

The amendment was carried to applause.

The most positive development of the weekend came at a lunchtime caucus, where some 40 oppositionist delegates resolved to keep in contact to fight for non-sectarian pluralism, a trade union orientation and democracy in the A-AM.

An AZAPO member whose request to attend the AGM had been rejected by the organisers, and a SWANU member gave greetings, and the caucus committed itself to giving these comrades a platform where possible.

DELMAS TREASON TRIAL

Nkoli acquitted: 11 face death

Pretoria's Supreme Court has acquitted Tseko Simon Nkoli, South Africa's leading black gay activist and anti-apartheid campaigner of all charges.

However, 11 of Nkoli's 18 co-defendants in the notorious Delmas Treason Trial were found guilty of treason and terrorism and may now face the death penalty.

By PETER TATCHELL

They include three senior leaders of the United Democratic Front — Pop Molefe, Patrick Lekota, and Moss Chikane.

The 19 defendants were charged after the mass uprisings in the black townships south west of Johannesburg in September 1984.

After the verdict, Nkoli said: "I am very, very relieved by the judgement. It's really wonderful for me to be free. But it's terrible when I think of the others who were not released.

"Winnie Mandela wished me good luck, and expressed her hope that I would be acquitted. Archbishop Tutu shook everyone's hand and said he wanted to see me a free man.

"They came to the court to show solidarity will all 19 of us because we have opposed apartheid. Both of them understand that I am gay, but they still support me.

"The judge said the state had failed to prove the case against me and I was therefore acquitted. As he said this, I couldn't feel excited because several of the others had just been convicted and lots of their friends and relatives were crying in the court.

"I just felt numbed. it was not until I read about my acquittal in the papers later in the day that it finally began to sink in that I was free. However, none of us were guilty of the charges. All of us should have been released.

"Two of those found guilty were my best friends, Johnny Mokoena and Gcina Malindi. In 1980, Gcina and I were regional leaders of the Congress of South Africa Students (COSAS, now banned by the government).

"We campaigned to improve the very poor standards of black education and to oppose apartheid. Both Gcina and Johnny have always been supportive of my gayness and always opposed discrimination.

"Now that my bail restrictions have been lifted I have visited my mother at home in Sebokeng for the first time in more than four years.

"She was glad to have me at home, but she is worried that I might be kidnapped or something like that. It has happened: people get acquitted and then suddenly disappear or are found murdered."

"It's wonderful news. We are really pleased for him," says Sheila Lapinsky of the Cape Town-based group, the Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists.

"This is the result we had hoped for. The prosecution case against Nkoli was shot through with holes."

Nkoli adds, "In some ways, the case has been a partial victory. Out of the original 22 defendants charged, only 11 were convicted and none of us were found guilty of subversion or murder."

The judgement has effectively widened the definition of treason to include peaceful and even hitherto lawful opposition against apartheid.

Mr Justice van Dijkhorst ruled that all South African citizens "owed allegiance" to the state: merely calling for the abolition of apartheid was tantamount to an "unequivocal declaration of war on the state."

"Lesbians and gays can never be free in a society where the smallest signs of self-assertion and self-defence are unlawful," says Sheila Lapinsky of OLGA.

"We appeal to lesbians and gays in Britain to send letters of protest to President Botha calling for the release of the 11 defendants convicted in the Delmas Treason Trial. We must save these men's lives."

Letters of congratulations to Nkoli and Christmas/birthday cards (his 29th birthday is on December 26th) can be sent to: Tseko Simon Nkoli, PO Box 23017, Joubert Park 2044, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Letters of protest can be sent to: President PW Botha, Union Buildings, Pretoria 0001, South Africa.

AIDS in South Africa

Black lesbians and gays fight back

Lesbian and gay activists in South Africa have praised the recent AIDS lecture tour by Renée Sabatier as "extremely valuable in raising AIDS awareness."

Sabatier, who heads the AIDS Unit at the London-based Panos Institute, visited South Africa at the invitation of the Townships AIDS Programme (TAP).

By PETER TATCHELL

This programme is sponsored by the Rand Gay Organisation (RGO) and co-ordinated by the black gay activist, Siphiwe Alfred Machela.

TAP works independently within the black communities to provide AIDS information, counselling and support to people with HIV.

During her two week visit, Sabatier met a wide range of organisations and individuals, including COSATU and the National Union of Mineworkers.

The Chamber of Mines has forced 30,000 miners to take an HIV test, and many of those found to be antibody-positive have been refused renewal of their employment contracts.

At a meeting attended by twenty organisations affiliated to the United Democratic Front, Sabatier had extensive discussions with representatives from the Progressive People's Health Care Network — a group of professional medical workers who have set up a voluntary health service.

Throughout her tour, Sabatier stressed that there were two epidemics: one of HIV and one of fear and prejudice. "Racism and homophobia are major problems in the fight against AIDS and South Africa has both these prejudices in particularly extreme forms."

"The government's campaigns are ignored in the townships because the government as a whole lacks credibility, especially with the black population."

AIDS information is "only produced in the English language" (excluding the two main African languages, Zulu and Xhosa) and "entirely angled to the white community."

Treatment with AZT is only available privately — costing £450 per month.

AIDS patients are frequently abused and shunned in hospital. "This scale of prejudice is resulting in increasing numbers of people with AIDS refusing hospitalisation and committing suicide," Sabatier says.

•The Panos Institute works to promote sustainable development in the Third World and has sought to encourage a global response to the AIDS epidemic.

Its monthly journal *World AIDS* is published in association with the Bureau of Hygiene and Tropical Diseases and is available from 8 Alfred Place, London WC1 (01-631 1590).

Time to go!

Open up the campaign!

The *Twenty Wasted Years* briefing conference organised by the Time To Go Charter Committee on November 19th was successful in attracting over 500 people.

But there were few women delegates and virtually no representation from the Irish community.

By Bill Hamilton
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

This was mirrored in the lack of women and Irish platform speakers, particularly from a Republican viewpoint.

Those on the platform didn't reflect the mood of anger and combativity on the Conference floor. It wasn't until the afternoon session, when a range of floor speakers contributed, that any sense of urgency and purpose was developed.

The speakers were united in calling for the widest possible alliance bsaed on the demand for Britain to withdraw from Ireland.

reasons.

These local groups, fledgling in nature, form the core of a reinvigorated movement for British withdrawal, stretching across the labour and trade union movement and into the Irish community in Britain, and all those — such as the black community and women — fighting the racism and oppression of the British state.

It is essential that the opportunity to take up the issue of British withdrawal is maximised at every level in the Labour Party and trade unions.

Meetings are being organised to co-ordinate activity at union conferences and every CLP in the country should be called upon to support British withdrawal in the twentieth year after the troops went in.

Activists

Trade union activists should raise the issue in Branches and on stewards committees. Resolutions and amendments supporting withdrawal should be submitted to union conferences.

Please let *Briefing* know if you have any success in your union or CLP.

LABOUR COMMITTEE ON IRELAND

Such an alliance, if it is not to degenerate into bureaucratic cliquism, must be one which enables every group and individual to take part, and for the Organising Committee to be open and accountable.

Uniting

Time To Go must initiate and support the setting up of local Action Committees with the aim of uniting activists around the basic principal of British withdrawal and must not exclude groups or individuals for secatarian

Most importantly, Labour Party and trade union activists must reach out through local action committees to the Irish community, taking up issues such as the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four, the ban on Sinn Fein, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Any Year of Action which boycotts the issues and the Irish community will take us nowhere on the road to developing a mass movement committed to British withdrawal from Ireland.

•For further information about Time To Go, etc., contact the LCI, BM Box 5355, London WC1N 3XX.

One year of the Palestinian Uprising

DEMONSTRATE!

Saturday December 10th

Assemble: 2pm, Embankment, London

(tubes Embankment or Charing Cross)

Rally in Hyde Park

Followed by evening tribute and celebration, with music, poetry and food

Sponsored by Joint Committee for Palestine

Too much emotion in the USSR?

The Soviet reform programme has its limits.

On November 16th the Parliament of the Baltic Republic of Estonia overstepped them, when it decided that it had the right to veto laws passed in Moscow.

By Colin Meade
Surbiton CLP

Urbane, cuddly Mikhail Gorbachev turned nasty and banged the table. He accused the Estonians of engaging in "fatal adventurism" and declared that the move was "totally unaceptable."

There were sweets, however, for those nations who had stayed within bounds. They were handed out at the session of the Supreme Soviet on November 29th which discussed proposals for a new Constitution.

There, Gorbachev admitted that the demands of the non-Russian Republics to extend their economic rights were "justified and legitimate". He spoke of corrections to the constitutional drafts.

Duly grateful, speakers from two Central Asian Republics directly attacked the "anti-*perestroika* forces behind the Estonian move. Thus isolated, the Estonians could be approached in a more conciliatory tone.

They had, Gorbachev explained, committed nothing more than a "mistake" based on "misunderstanding". The reason, according to chief ideologist Vadim Medvedev, was "the influence of emotions".

Emotions are continuing to run high in the Caucasus where clashes between Armenians, Azeris and now also Soviet troops have worsened. For the first time mass demonstrations of Azeris have taken place in the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

A number of people have died in these disturbances, although different sources are offering different figures for those killed and in what circumstances.

News from the Caucasus is still sparse, and it is said that workers in Baku refused to distribute *Izvestiya* because it failed to give serious reports on the Azerbaijan situation.

Gorbachev and Medvedev believe that nationalist emotions in the Soviet Union will wither away if they can get the economic reforms going. In the meantime, concessions can be made to the nationalist emotions — as long as there is no threat to the unity of the Soviet Union.

Estonia was guilty of seeking "economic isolationism and destroying the country's unitary economy."

The situation in the Caucasus on the other hand is being treated as the outcome of the incompetence and corruption of individual officials aggravated by wild elements stirring up passions.

A few sackings and arrests should suffice, it follows, to end the crisis — an analysis which readers of *Briefing* may find somewhat thin.



Gorbachev: a "thin analysis".

Gorbachev in Britain

Give Gorbachev an Appropriate Welcome

A Committee to Give Gorbachev an Appropriate Welcome, supported by a number of labour movement, socialist, and East European Solidarity organisations, is planning a public meeting and other events to greet Mikhail Gorbachev when he arrives in Britain on December 13th.

The Committe is demanding of the Soviet Leader that he recognises:

•the right of self-determination of nations;
•the right to free expression and association;
•the right to form free trade unions and other workers' organisations.

Watch out for further details!

Brazil

Workers' struggles win elections too!

On the back of widespread industrial militancy the Workers' Party (PT) swept to surprise victories in Brazil's local elections on November 15th.

Days before the vote, three workers were killed by soldiers trying to dislodge strikers from the vast steel mill at Volta Redonda.

By STUART PIPER

Public anger hardened the mood of striking oil workers. Come polling day, fuel supplies were drying up and the country was nearing a standstill.

All this, in the wake of strikes by civil servants, university staff and several other sectors, produced a massive swing to the left.

The main government party, the party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB) had once been the focus of opposition to the military dictatorship.

It had also been the major beneficiary of the 1985 transition to civilian rule; but this year it took a pasting.

In the 1986 Constituent Assembly elections the PMDB romped to victory in 22 states. In these local elections it won only one major state capital, Salvador.

In the third largest city, Belo Horizonte, the City Council was taken by the Brazilian Social Democratic Party, a party of left dissidents that split from the PMDB in June over government corruption.

In Rio de Janeiro victory went to the Democratic Labour Party (PDT), a self-styled "socialist" party led by the old populist Leonel Brizola.

But in São Paulo, the second largest city in the world, the PT's candidate, Luiza Erandina, was elected mayor. She stood on an independent, explicitly anti-capitalist platform, closely linked to the strike movements and their leadership, the militant Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT).

The PT also won the Councils in the industrial belt around São Paulo city, in many industrial towns in the interior of São Paulo state, and in southern Brazil.

It would be a mistake to see these PT victories as an electoralist diversion from the workers' own struggles, as the comrades of Socialist Worker do.

Obviously, without the fight put up by millions of workers, peasants and city poor, these results could not have been achieved.

1987 saw 12 million Brazilians take strike action. By November 1988 the number was already several million beyond that.

But one big problem has been the difficulty in focusing all this discontent. The PT's campaign for the local elections helped provide such a focus.

The campaign for next November's Presidential elections, in which the PT is running Lula, the historic metalworkers' leader, provides an opportunity to weld these struggles into a real, socialist alternative.

Victories

Of course, there are dangers. Unless the local government victories are used systematically to mobilise and organise the PT runs the risk of being held responsible for the bankruptcy of existing local government institutions.

There will probably be renewed pressure to present a "united left coalition" with the likes of Brizola's PDT. This option was firmly rejected by the PT's fifth Congress in December 1987, which decided to launch Lula's independent campaign.

The Congress wanted to see a "government of those social forces opposed to capitalism and the bourgeois order, and therefore a government headed by the proletariat, which will only be made possible by a revolutionary break."

There remains some wooliness about the content of such a governmental alternative: a reluctance to talk too openly about socialism, and a certain coyness about the kind of resistance to be met from Brazil's very powerful capitalist class, the Armed Forces or the US administration.

The PT's new position of strength may make a coalition with Brizola's pro-capitalist PDT more attractive in some quarters.

The responsibilities of the left in the PT are great over the coming months. It is time we too began to consider the need, and possibilities, for preparing the kind of international solidarity that may be needed.

LABOUR BRIEFING

POLL TAX ROUND-UP

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Lambeth takes a Stand?

Local Government Minister John Gummer has told Local Authority Chief Executives that the argument over Poll Tax is finished.

Trevor Grigson
Lambeth Briefing

He said, "It is now a matter of doing a job that is laid upon people by Parliament."

This view is undoubtedly shared by many Labour Councils who are now switching their attention to making sure they implement the Poll Tax as quickly as possible.

In Lambeth we don't think the political fight is over yet. Lambeth NALGO is committed to non-co-operation and the Labour Group has voted to consider all actions that can be taken by the Council not to co-operate over the Poll Tax.

Since the Group met, the LCC-dominated Leadership of the Council has been doing everything it can to get the decision overturned.

And now Gummer has instructed DoE officials to ensure that Lambeth officers are aware of their duties.

They need little prompting, for their first act after the Group meeting was to arrange with Council Leader Dick Sorabji the circulation to Labour Group members of threatening letters claiming that the Group could be liable to surcharge and even criminal conspiracy.

Members of the Finance, Management, and Policy and Resources Committees were told that if they did not immediately sign and return requisition forms (prepaid envelopes kindly provided) calling special meetings they could face surcharge.

In the event none of this was sufficient to frighten the majority of Group. A recall Group meeting censured Sorabji and called on him to come up with real fighting alternatives.

His response has been to have his cohorts immediately call a special Council meeting with the aim of agreeing to all the demands put forward by the officers. Together with the Tories they will have the majority.

At the same time the LCC have changed tack in the Labour Party and are supporting radical options on non-registration and non-payment which they were denouncing only days before.

This is a short-term ploy to try to defeat the worse idea of having to do something themselves as Councillors.

Even if the Council meeting decides to implement the Poll Tax, the anti-Poll Tax Councillors aim to use the Council to help build the campaign in the community.

Given the powers available to officers and the DoE to overturn Councillors' decisions, they know that the implementation process will still go ahead, whatever the action of Councillors.

But unlike the LCC, they do not believe that means they should go ahead willingly. The Council should be made to drag its heels at every opportunity.

Councillors must stand with the local campaign and not against it. Working with the Council unions will make it much easier to make the boycott and non-co-operation policies of NALGO into a reality.

John Gummer and Dick Sorabji may agree that the best thing is to forget politics and get on with implementing the Tax.

The Lambeth Campaign Against the Poll Tax, doesn't intend to make that easy, especially if a majority of the Labour Group is prepared to side with us.

It is up to individual campaigns to decide how they work with Councillors. Campaigns need to maintain a broad base and not cut themselves off from any one opposed to Poll Tax.

But Councillors have a duty too. The campaign nationally would be strengthened if Labour Groups in other Boroughs were to refuse to co-operate with the implementation process.

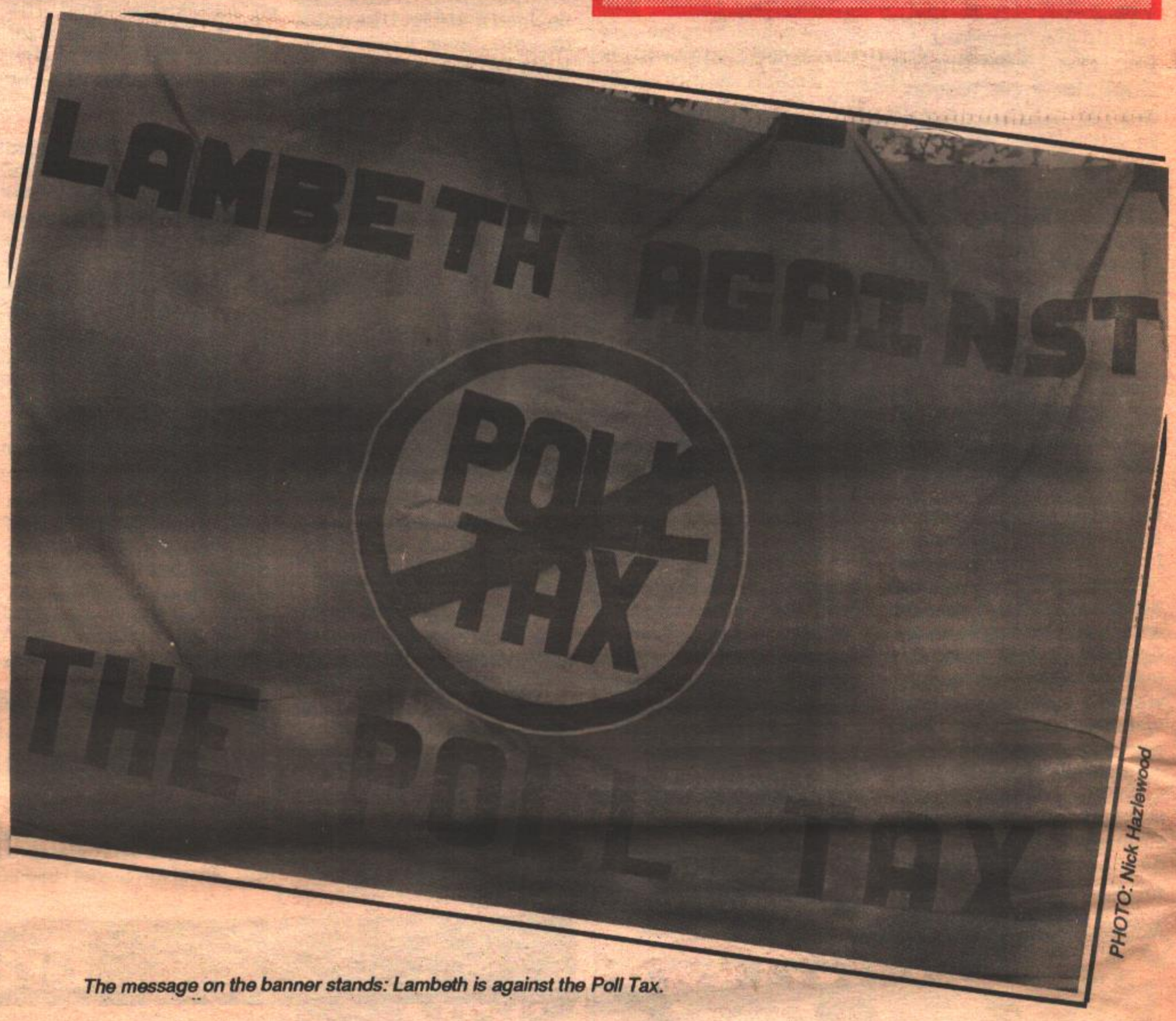


PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

The message on the banner stands: Lambeth is against the Poll Tax.

Local Contacts

Is your local anti-Poll Tax Campaign listed below? If not, send the details to us at PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ.

Cardiff. Amanda Pond, 9 Richards St, Cathays, Cardiff. 0222-373526.

Coventry. Neil Rider, 9 Barras Court, Heath Road, Stoke, Coventry. 0203-444008.

Greenwich. *Meetings: 3rd Monday of the month, Charlton House.*

Hastings. John Humphries, Flat 1, 10 Cloudesley Road, St Leonards-on-Sea.

Islington. Mark Hill, Freepost N7 9BR. Tel. 01-272 3586 (h). *Meetings: 1st Thursday of the month, Upper St Neighbourhood Office.*

Lambeth. C/o 2 Norfolk House, Rushcroft Road, SW2. 01-737 4513. *Next meeting: Dec. 12th, Town Hall.*

Oxford. John Beckley, 77 Temple Road, Cowley, Oxford. 0865 779373.

Peace News can publicise events, etc. Contact Indra Morris, Peace News, 8 Elm Avenue, Nottingham, Notts NG3 4GF. Tel. 0602 503587.

Oxford Conference

Co-ordination set up

November 27th saw the first move towards an effective national co-ordination in fighting the Poll Tax.

By Dave Scholes
Oxford Labour Briefing

The gathering was called by Oxford Against the Poll Tax and attracted delegates from over 20 other groups across the country, although concern about a North-South split in representation, with the forthcoming Newcastle initiative, appeared justified.

It was disappointing that there were no Scottish delegates.

One idea was that local Poll Tax groups could twin with a group in Scotland.

The need for a broad-based, non-sectarian campaign was repeatedly stressed, with all present agreeing that momentum needs to be built up and sustained over the coming months, to increase public awareness of the issues involved, and in building mass local movements.

Several constructive initiatives came out of the discussion. An interim national co-ordinating committee was established, consisting of ten members.

This would support local initiatives by keeping everyone informed of activities, and producing a contact list and newsletter.

Another conference will be called around February. Its location would be aimed to get greater participation from the North, and it will aim to link up with any initiatives coming out of the Newcastle Conference.

It was agreed to build for the TUC rally in April, although a demonstration would be more useful, allowing more people to be mobilised.

The day finished on a less consensual note, following discussion of a resolution supporting non-implementation/compliance by Lambeth, Islington and Nottingham NALGO members.

The Communist Party line was that taking a step such as this would alienate people who wanted to remain within the law.

But only by encouraging people to disrupt the Poll Tax as much as possible can a campaign develop.

However, good "*Briefing*" sense triumphed, with a 12-7-2 vote.